

A History of Church Army Africa

Church Army was formed in 1870 by a London businessman by the name of Wilson Carlile. Carlile, as a tough businessperson, had his heart bent on making money. However, his business collapsed and during a period of misery, Carlile became aware of God's love for him. He responded to the forceful pull of that love by acknowledging Jesus Christ in His life. Through God's love, Wilson Carlile found peace and a deeper calling, and he resolved to share the love of Christ with both the rich and the poor.



Wilson Carlile attended seminary and began working as a curate at the parish of St. Mary Abbott, Kensington. During this time, Carlile was unable to attract visitors to his church services by normal means, so he decided to experiment with new methods to draw outsiders into the church.



St. Mary Abbott Church, Kensington

Carlile began a small open air service each week night opposite the crowded Kensington High Street Station. The service ran from 9 p.m. to 10 p.m. when large numbers of coachmen, valets, grooms, and others took their evening stroll, and when there were hundreds who passed by. Carlile employed tradesmen and working people to lead the outdoor services by sharing Scriptures and hymns and leading prayers. He found this approach to be unusually effective: "Both at the open air and at the indoor meetings, the timid exhortation and humble testimonies of working people attracted quite as

much as did my own preaching and [in fact] seemed to produce an even deeper effect on their own class." Carlile was convinced that the moral condition of the lowest classes called for new and aggressive action on the part of the Church, and he felt that this work was most effectively done by lay people of the same class.

As a result, Wilson Carlile felt called to give up his ordinary parochial work to train and lead working class members as evangelists. "I felt I ought to go forth and try to train working men as church evangelists and to band them together as duly authorized workers, some soldiers and some officers to assist in church evangelization." Carlile developed the vision to train and equip ordinary men and women to share their living experience of Christ in a relevant and caring way, to preach and practice the gospel. Two years after his ordination, Church Army was officially founded in 1882 as a subsidiary body of the Church Parochial Mission Society.

During this time, others were also experimenting with new forms of evangelism. Rev. Evan Hopkins, vicar of Holy Trinity, Richmond, where Carlile's parents lived, was organizing a "Church Gospel Army." Meanwhile, Rev. F.S. Webster at St. Aldates, Oxford, had begun a "Church Salvation Army", and Canon Atherton in Bristol was running a "Church Mission Army." Carlile suggested that their efforts should be coordinated and he became the leader of the combined "Church Army." During this same period, Rev. William Booth was involved in mission work in Wales and developed rules and doctrine for the Christian Mission. In 1878 his organization adopted the name "Salvation Army." Salvation Army shared many similarities with Church Army in its structure and in its efforts to evangelize and uplift the poor. Salvation Army, however, decided to leave and operate outside the official structure of the Church of England while Church Army remained within the Church of England despite early pressure and opposition.

After he left his parish, Carlile went to work in the slums of Westminster, which was then regarded by many as the darkest spot in London and one in which very little mission work was being carried out. Carlile says of the campaign, "Night after night it was our privilege to kneel beside poor fellows held down by the power of sin and yearning to be

delivered from its thralldom. In most cases, however, the dreadful surroundings were too strong for them.” Carlile was often criticized for his unorthodox work, but he explained, “We do not seek to drag the Church of England into the mud, but to bring some of the social mud into the church.”



In 1883 the first Church Army College was opened in Oxford with F.S. Webster as Principal. The first Church Army publication was also released in the same year, “Gazette of the Church Army Crusade and Mission Band Movement.” By 1885, Church Army had grown sufficiently strong and decided to leave its parent body and become a separate organization within the church. In the same year, the first Church Army conference was held with 45 Officers. Shortly thereafter the Convocation officially recognized Church Army and moved a resolution “Heartily welcoming the working men who have expressed a desire to serve Christ in His Church and to convert their fellows who have hitherto lived without God in the world.” This was a major step as the Church of England officially embraced and began to support Church Army’s work among the poor and needy.

In 1886 the Church Army training college moved to London and a headquarters was established on Bryanston Street. Two years later the Society began work with women and William Carlile’s sister was appointed Honorary Superintendent of the Women’s Training College. Marie Carlile would hold the post for the next fifty years. Her son described her as “a great soul aflame for God in a fragile body. . . Each time one met her, her little body seemed to be smaller still but the spirit within her shone and sparked radiating love and joy.”

Church Army’s reach and ministry continued to grow, and in 1897 the first Prison Mission was opened by Captain W.R. Davey in Wandsworth.

During 1898 missions were held in thirty four different prisons and in subsequent years the prison population diminished by nearly 85% in England. The decline was largely attributed to the efforts of Church Army’s ministry.

Church Army’s work also spread abroad as the Society sent out missionaries to establish new centres of evangelism and service. Church Army’s work in Canada began in the early 1890’s and many natives were led to faith by Church Army Captains. In 1926 four Church Army Officers began work with untouchables in Dornakal, India. Church Army was then established in Australia under the leadership of Captain Cowland in 1934. The following year an office was set up in New Zealand under Captain Banyard.

It was not until the early 1950’s that Wilson Carlile’s grandson, Edward Wilson Carlile, brought Church Army to Africa. Edward had worked with Church Missionary Society as early as 1930 in Tanganyika (now known as Tanzania) at the invitation of Bishop Alfred Chambers. After the initial work in Tanganyika, Edward Carlile visited Kenya and met the Rt. Rev Leonard Beecher who was then the Bishop of Mombasa. It was during that meeting that it was agreed to start the work of Church Army in Kenya. In September 1955, Captain John Ball, and his wife Dorothy arrived in Nairobi to lead Church Army. They joined Sister Rebecca Thrush and Sister Gertrude Cloudsdale, who had arrived in December 1954 and February 1955 respectively. Sr. Daisy Martin, Captain L. Straw, Captain, and Mrs. Stanley Dakin came soon after.



Church Army Africa in 1958

The work of Church Army in Kenya and later in East Africa began in the midst of acute social upheaval. There was unrest, bitterness, hate, distrust, poverty and unemployment as Kenya struggled for independence from British rule. The Christian Council of Kenya called a meeting for its members to find ways of alleviating the problems. With the help of the government and the Nairobi City Council, the Church Army in England, Church Missionary Society, the Methodists, the Presbyterians, the Society of Friends and the Salvation Army all agreed to partner in missionary work in residential estates around Nairobi.

Out of this, Church Mission Society (CMS) built a Centre in Pumwani, the Methodists and Presbyterians at Bahati, Salvation Army in Makadara, the Friends at Ofafa Jericho and Church Army at Donholm Road, now known as Jogoo road (all of this being the eastern suburbs of Nairobi). They were to be attached to St. Stephen's Parish.

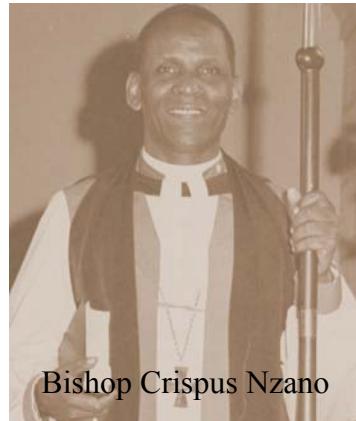
While Church Army was setting up a headquarters at Jogoo road, a Community Centre was being built at the same time. The women of Church Army began an informal school for children and taught other women how to sew. From these humble beginnings, the Community Centre grew. While the teams were working at the Centre, they started what was called 'fishing' as a way of outreach. They did this by standing outside the Centre and inviting people for an evangelistic service. Many gave their lives to Christ in such meetings. As the work of the officers increased, so did the need to have local people trained to assist in the missionary work.



Procession of Officers and Students

In 1957, the first interviews were conducted and out of the 20 interviewed, eight were selected. The first training of evangelists commenced at The Church

Army Training College (now the Carlile College) in January 1958. The students were drawn from six ethnic communities in Kenya, and one from Tanganyika.



Bishop Crispus Nzano

In 1962 Uganda sent their first officers and Church Army in Kenya began to develop as a regional training and missions centre. As a result, Church Army in East Africa was born. It was registered as Church Army Eastern

Africa by the Government of Kenya in 1963. Rev Crispus Nzano became the first African General Secretary of Church Army Eastern Africa in 1971. Later he became the Coadjutor Bishop of Mombasa.

Church Army began as both an evangelistic and community-based ministry. Some of the early community services had to close down because of social change, but Church Army has continued to adapt and serve its neighbors. One of the primary means of community outreach has been education. The Church Army Academy started in 1978 as a preschool for needy children in the Eastlands area. In 1985 a primary school was added and the school expanded its educational programs and outreach to children. Not only would the opening of an affordable private school address a serious need in the society, and especially the area immediately surrounding the Church Army compound, it would also give teachers a chance to tell children about the gospel while they were young. Church Army Academy expanded its facilities in 2006 and has now grown to a vibrant primary school with over 300 students, receiving excellent education in a nurturing and loving environment.

At Church Army Africa's Carlile College, nearly 500 evangelists and missionaries have been trained in theology or urban missions. Graduates are currently deployed in 10 countries in Eastern, Central, and Southern Africa serving in various ministries. Church Army Africa celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2004 and continues to pursue William Carlile's vision of innovative personal and social transformation through the gospel of Christ.