Christian Missions in an Islamic, French Speaking Culture

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Christian Missions have been active throughout the world for centuries and will most likely be active for centuries to come. The devotion needed and the risk taken to accomplish such an undertaking as a mission in an emerging nation is often regarded by Westerners with the highest respect. The thought of uprooting oneself from a comfortable setting, family, and community is not the most appealing offer, but that is exactly what Christian missionaries must face. Starting a mission from scratch is a difficult process. Many fail to realize the distinct characteristics of culture and people, to understand what it means to be a missionary, and to reap the benefits of working with nationals to achieve common goals. Such an undertaking demands a long commitment and extended research. That is how a mission must begin in order to be successful.

I too, have the highest respect and admiration for mission and missionaries, having had the opportunity to study in Dakar, Senegal with six such people from the United Methodist Church. I wanted to obtain a better understanding of mission and also be able to go to a country where I would be able to use my French language skills. I contacted the local office of the General
Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church, and they were able to help me make contacts in Senegal where I decided to conduct my study.

The mission, which is entitled "The Senegal Initiative," is really quite new. In 1990 the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church chose to place a "caring presence" in urban Senegal at Dakar. This is the first time the Church decided to have an urban focus in Africa (Smith, R.). Previously, the United Methodist Church had some dealings in Senegal through UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief) with emergency relief efforts, but it had not established a direct presence within Senegal until 1995. The General Board decided it was going to require a team approach and assembled a group of six people (Smith, H.). They include Harold (Bill) and Roberta Smith, Glenn and Darla Rowley, and Al and Mavis Streyffeler.

Bill and Roberta Smith are from Northern Illinois. Bill has had 25 plus years of experience as a United Methodist minister in urban ministries (mostly in Chicago) and has had mission experience in Zimbabwe. Roberta is serving as the financial representative for the mission in Dakar and shared the missionary experience
with her husband in Zimbabwe. Roberta is an English teacher. She specialized in remedial reading instruction at Crane High School in Chicago from 1966-1980.

Glenn and Darla Rowley are from the state of Oklahoma and have two daughters, Chandra and Chayla. Glenn is an ordained minister of the United Methodist Church and has worked in missions in Mozambique. Darla is a registered medical technologist and has assisted with health care teaching and occasional medical projects while completing mission work in Mozambique.

Al and Mavis Streyffeler are from Northern Illinois as well. Al is also an ordained minister of the United Methodist Church, and Mavis is a math teacher. Both Al and Mavis have also had some mission experience in Zimbabwe.

This is the first time the missionaries have ever been to Senegal. The couples entered the country at different times over a one and a half year period in the same order as listed above. These missionaries have a tough road ahead of them; when starting a new mission, it is essential to first attain an understanding of the culture and the dynamics of a country. In doing this,
there will be an increased awareness of how a mission might affect the people of that country.

Part I: A Cultural Analysis.

Black Africans have historically lived in the area now called Senegal. Senegal was one of the first areas of West Africa inhabited by humans; there are remains dating from at least 13,000 BC. Great empires and independent kingdoms existed in the area from 300 AD to the nineteenth century. Among the more notable ones, the Ghana Empire, which flourished between the eighth and eleventh centuries and the Mali Empire, which existed between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. As the grip of the Ghana Empire weakened, Islamic merchants from North Africa began to introduce Islam to the peoples of that area in the tenth century (Newton 753).

In the fifteenth century, Portuguese explorers sailed just south of the Sahara Desert and began searching for gold along the Senegal and Gambia Rivers. Portuguese sailors first traded with these people in the mid-1400’s but were replaced by the French, English and Dutch in the 1500’s. Europeans did not find much gold
there, but they did find a wealth in human cargo. Victorious African tribes sold their captives to European traders and thus the slave trade was established. In fact, slavery had existed in Africa long before the Europeans arrived. The latter merely refined the trade and transformed it into a booming industry. Senegal became a transshipment point for slaves bound for the Americas for more than 200 years. During this time several million West Africans were shipped to the Americas as slaves between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Many were sold at a slave auction house that still stands on Gorée Island, just off the coast near Dakar. And so, many of today’s Black Americans have distant relatives in Senegal ("Senegal..." 6). In addition, peanuts were introduced by the Europeans as a new crop providing industry for Senegal through which European demands were satisfied.

By the 1800’s, France began to dominate the area, conquering various kingdoms and establishing Senegal as one of several colonies in its federation of French West Africa. Slavery was abolished in 1848, but French economic, educational, political, and judicial systems remained intact at the administrative level. After World
War II, the people of Senegal began to demand their independence. On April 4, 1960, the colony gained independence as a sovereign nation, beginning as a member of the Mali Federation. The federation consisted of old French colonies of Western Africa. It was quickly split up though. Some countries, like the Ivory Coast, felt that they were financially better off without the burden of supporting a much larger nation. Other nations were ethnically and culturally different and really didn't foresee a workable future as such a large entity. One of the differences among the different nations is religion. Some have stronger Christian backgrounds, and Senegal, for example, has a very strong Islam background.

Today, France and Senegal still maintain close political, economic, and social ties. Also noteworthy, Senegal is an active member of the United Nations (Culturgram 1).

Senegal lies in the most western part of Africa, and its capital, Dakar, is located on the peninsula which is the most western point of the entire African Continent. Gambia, which is a separate country, nearly splits Senegal into two halves. Senegal is bordered by Mauritania in the north, Mali in the east, Guinea and
Guinea-Bissau in the south, and the Atlantic Ocean to the west (see appendix A). Covering 76,000 square miles, Senegal is about the size of South Dakota. Most of the country north of Gambia is flat, with rolling plains and few trees. The southeast has plateaus more than 1,600 feet high and the southwest consists of wetlands and forests.

In terms of climate, Senegal has two distinct seasons: a sunny, dry season from November to June, with moderate temperatures, and the hot, humid, rainy season from July to October, with temperatures often above 90°F. Dakar and other coastal regions are generally cooler than the rest of the country (Culturgram 1).

Senegal is often ravaged by many harsh climate conditions. Terrible droughts hurt its agricultural production, ("Senegal..." 1) and desertification throughout the north of the country are ever-increasing problems. The new Arab-financed Manantalli Dam on the Senegal River is making the northern strip more productive, but the areas outside the water's reach remain vulnerable to the pressures of overgrazing and the cutting of trees for firewood (Newton 758). Along with
the desertification there is also an abundant migration of people to the south.

For the most part, the population of Senegal consists of six major tribes which include the Wolof at 36% of the population. The Wolof are the dominant tribe of Senegal. They are mostly located in western and central Senegal. There is also a large minority population of Wolof in Mauritania and a small minority group in France. About one third of the total Wolof population lives outside of Senegal ("Wolof" 1). Other tribes of Senegal include the Fulani or Peul at 17%, the Serer which constitutes 17%, the Toucouleuru, the Diola, and the Mandingo which each represent 9% of the total population. About one percent are European and Lebanese (Culturgram 2). The overall population of Senegal is approximately nine million people and is growing at 3.1% annually. More than 40% of the people are younger than age 15, and less than 3% are older than 65. More than 62% of the population live in rural areas; however, cities are growing, not at an alarming rate but at a more significant rate than in the past. Dakar is said to have 1.5 million inhabitants (2), but the general belief among its inhabitants is that the greater Dakar area has about
3 million people (Smith, H). There is a case for a pessimistic outlook for the city of Dakar. Some feel that it is being rendered largely unproductive by the rapid influx of the rural population and the lack of governmental policies to cope with them. Administrators are often far removed from the people for whom they are creating economic policies and programs (Gaye 11). This factor could be part of the reason Senegal has such a high poverty level.

Senegal boasts a national unemployment rate of 10.3%, but the state uses a methodology that does not accurately assess the true unemployment rate. It is believed that the national average is probably more than double such a figure, and in certain poverty stricken areas in and around Dakar, that figure is more than four times the official unemployment rate (Gaye 23). About 75% of the economically active population is employed in agriculture.

Senegal has long been dependent on the one crop (peanuts) which was introduced during the European colonial rule of the region. Peanuts provide about 80% of the total export earnings for the country and occupy
about 40 percent of all the cropland. Other agricultural products include millet, rice and cotton.

Senegal boasts the second largest manufacturing sector in French West Africa after the Ivory Coast. The most important industries include peanut oil extraction, tourism (Senegal has two of the three Club Meds located in the Southern Hemisphere), phosphate mining, and food processing. Fish processing is the key component in Senegal's food processing industry (Report... 11). Real per capita income is about 650 U.S. dollars and has not risen since Senegal's independence in 1960 (Newton 759). Senegal has an abundance of arid land and has few natural resources.

Poverty is seen as a global problem, but Senegal is forced to deal with it on a national level. Poverty has various symptoms which include unemployment, environmental degradation, low income, illiteracy, poor education, insufficient infrastructure and basic services, malnutrition, and the lack of information and means of communication. Only a minority of people have access to resources that allow them to pursue goals for personal development. The "structural adjustment" programs which the Senegalese government has adopted, are
examples of bad governance, and a direct result of "adjustment" is massive unemployment (Gaye 9). Directly correlating to bad economic policies is the instability of the government.

Senegal is a republic, with a president and has 120 members in a unicameral National Assembly. The members are elected every five years by universal adult suffrage. Senegal was the first multi-party democracy in West Africa. This being said, Senegal, in actuality, has been plagued by political problems.

In the early 1980's, Senegal halted a destabilizing coup attempt in Gambia. The two countries created a loose federation, known as Senegambia. Much to the distress of the Gambian people, Senegalese troops remained on Gambian soil after the coup was over, and hence the federation was formed. In 1989, this alliance was dissolved. The current president of Senegal is a man by the name of Diouf, who is a member of the Socialists Party. There is also a very strong opposition party headed by a man named Wade. In the 1988 elections Wade was accused of having the intent to subvert the government. Diouf was forced to station tanks in Dakar, and Wade was exiled from the country. Also in 1989, a
region in southern Senegal called the Casamance rallied for independence and tried to secede (Newton 756).

Another example of bad governance in Senegal is the many rules associated with forming a non-governmental organization (NGO). These organizations are generally formed to help improve the country of Senegal. When an NGO is formed, it is subject to certain tax breaks and other such benefits from the government. But Senegal is slow in changing rules, and it is sometimes hard to form an NGO if the government is not willing. For example, there is a set rule that an NGO can either be developmental or religious with its intents. It, however, cannot be both. This is because there was never a need or wanting for a combination in the past, and the government feels it is not necessary to change the application and granting process.

It is very apparent that the government of Senegal attempts to keep a tight control over the population of the country. In doing so, it hinders the ability of the local governments to improve their living conditions. At the rural level and even in small urban districts, a system of local chiefs and religious leaders provide local leadership and judicial services. Local authority
is often more important to the average person than that exercised by departments of the central government. The needed acknowledgment of these local figures as key components in the war to improve the social and economic situations is essential. Organized groups within a community provide the institutional backbone for collective action. These enterprising groups are the driving force of community development. They specialize in doing everything with nothing (Gaye 39). If the government chooses to ignore the importance of local government leaders, it will take a very long time to solve the many problems associated with poverty.

The government is also ineffective in helping its people in the area of education. Currently about half of the population complete a primary education, and about one-third go on to secondary schools. Still, Senegal has a literacy rate of only 10 percent ("Nations..." 817). Historically, the French did very little to educate their colonial subjects as compared to the British (Newton 755), and it seems the current government is permitting the same lack of focus. The mentality of most countries is that if you have an education, you will get a better job. This is not the case in Senegal. Jobs are very
scarce to begin with, let alone jobs that might require an education. Also, the textbooks which are used in education are from France and do not teach from a local perspective. Many see school as being irrelevant to their daily activities (Culturgram 4). Therefore the incentive to further one’s education is rather low.

It is a well known fact that lack of education and poverty go hand in hand, and it seems that the gap between the rich and the poor is growing more and more in Senegal. In the city of Dakar it is hard find the middle class. Housing in Dakar is very distinct. The rich live in lavish homes and in contrast, the poor either live in large communal housing or makeshift shacks. Something in-between is not easily found or accessible.

It is clear that the living conditions in Senegal are not the best and along with poor housing comes a poor health care system. This is a reality for most African nations. There is one doctor for every 16,000 persons in Senegal. While doctors in Dakar have access to modern equipment, rural health-care facilities are often lacking in up-to-date equipment and medical supplies. Seventy percent of all physicians practice in Dakar, but most of those cater to the rich (4).
Another issue that must be taken into account when conducting a cultural analysis of Senegal is the aspect of language. Although French is the official language of instruction, business, and government, it is generally not spoken in the home. Six major local languages are spoken as well. These include Wolof, Sérère, Alpuular, Mandingo, Diola, and Bassari. Wolof, the native language of the dominant ethnic group is considered the national language of Senegal. Most people are able to communicate in Wolof, but many, especially the elderly, are not able to communicate in French (Mané).

An interesting note, which also relates to Americans, is that most Senegalese people will assume that if you are white, you are French. If they find out that you are in fact American, they automatically have a greater respect for you. The reason for this is that typically the Senegalese people know Americans through the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps has been requiring its participants who work in Senegal to take language courses in Wolof for a number of years now. So the Peace Corps has set a rather nice precedent demonstrating that Americans have respect for the national language of the
culture, where it is typically believed that the French do not (Smith, H.).

French is still the official language of Senegal because the native languages are oral tongues as opposed to written ones. Some attempts have been made to make these oral tongues written languages, but the lifestyle of the rural population does not require much reading and writing. Therefore, it is difficult to find a pressing need to undertake such a large project. Although the language of Wolof is being used more and more as a written language, it is still a long way off from being perfected. Language is a part of the Senegalese culture which is very important to its people. The Senegalese make it a habit of holding on to their roots: this is evident by the number of people who do not speak the official language of the country and is also made abundantly clear in the way that they practice religion.

Nearly 90 percent of the population is Muslim, but many Senegalese combine the religion of Islam with indigenous beliefs, practices, and ceremonies. "Senegalese Islam is very different from traditional, orthodox Islam. It is an adaptation with a heavy dimension of African traditional religions" (Smith H.).
The Grand Marabout in the Senegalese city of Touba is held in much awe by his followers. If there were a western comparison, he would be much like the Pope is to Catholics. He has religious as well as political influence, and no one, high or low, would make a major decision without consulting him. This is at odds with orthodox Islam, which states that Allah is directly accessible to each believer without intermediary assistance. Senegalese Muslims hold that a disciple is linked to Allah through the Grand Marabout (Newton 761). Another difference in Senegalese Islam is that if a believer cannot make a pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia, then at least they have to make a pilgrimage to the holy city of Touba.

The constitution of Senegal guarantees a separation of church and state, but the religion is so imbedded in the culture that it is often hard to see the separation of Islam from anything. Many of the practices of the religion upset Westerners, especially when dealing with the rights of women. Some Muslims practice polygamy. Islamic law permits a man to have up to four wives, but he must have the consent of his current wife(or wives), and, according to the Qur’an, he must divide his
resources and time equally among each wife’s household. In traditional homes, the sexes and different age groups eat separately, and it is considered bad manners for a woman to smoke (Culturgram 2). Many women do not have the opportunity to hold public office or important business positions, but the women of Senegal are finding many other creative ways to hold leadership roles in their communities.

About six percent of the population is Christian. They are mostly Catholics with less than one percent being Protestant. Both Muslim and Catholic holy days are national holidays (2). The Catholic church has been present since the European Colonial days, and Dakar possesses a rather large Catholic Cathedral. The first permanent Protestant mission work was that of the WEC (Worldwide Evangelization Crusade) in 1936, who entered the Casamance region to evangelize the tribes in that region who were more distant from the religion of Islam (“Senegal...” 1). In a more practical sense, most Protestant missions have been present in Senegal only for the past 20 years (Diédhiou), and there are currently more than 90 Christian mission organizations in Dakar alone (Smith, H.).
Part II--Myths of Mission

The cultural analysis clearly paints a picture of a need for humanitarian aid in the country of Senegal, but in what form? The United Methodist Church decided that a team of missionaries with a long-term commitment to the country was the best form of entry at this stage of development. There are many advantages to this. As stated earlier, the Church did have some dealings with humanitarian efforts in Senegal in the past through UMCOR. "Serving people who are hungry is the major focus of UMCOR. Food and other emergency goods are provided in response to emergency or immediate needs around the world" (Carter 35). UMCOR is more of a short-term, quick fix solution to an emergency situation.

Benefits of having long-term missionaries working in Senegal include: a better assessment of the needs of the people, a hands-on approach that makes the work more personal instead of institutional, and providing better means of spreading the word of God and the message of the Gospel. The latter goal is one of the most important functions of the Church and is also listed as the first
goal of the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM). The GBGM provides four goals for missionaries to use as guidelines to help with their mission. The goals are to be interpreted by the missionaries to fit the specific needs of where the mission is located and to fit the specific needs of the missionary. The goals are as follows:

   Goal 1. Witness to the Gospel for initial decision to follow Jesus Christ--We will proclaim and live the Gospel of Jesus and similarly, challenge others to discipleship in and through Christian communities. Where direct proclamation is not permitted, a caring presence becomes the means of Christian witness.

   Goal 2. Strengthen, Develop and Renew Christian Congregations and Communities--We will work mutually with mission partners in common growth and development of spiritual life, worship, witness and service.

   Goal 3. Alleviate human suffering--We will help to initiate, strengthen and support ministries to the spiritual, physical, emotional and social needs of people.
Goal 4. Seek justice, freedom and peace--We will participate with people oppressed by unjust economic, political and social systems in programs that seek to build just, free and peaceful societies. ("The Four Goals...")

When looking at this last goal, there is a realization that what is justice to an American may not mean justice to a Senegalese person. One example in the discrepancies of perception is illustrated by the role of women in the religion of Islam. Many Americans may see these practices as unjust, but many Senegalese do not. Thai is why a cultural analysis and understanding is so important to make mission work.

One of the largest fears of United Methodist missionaries is that they will be perceived as flamboyant, loud, and obnoxious evangelists. The perception of an evangelist in American culture has a somewhat negative connotation to it. One thinks of a righteous and articulate speaker who is concrete in his convictions and is preaching to the multitudes while converting heathens to Christianity by the thousands. "Historically, it may have been necessary to proclaim the
Gospel aggressively" (Rowley, G.), but times have changed and so must mission.

The United Methodist mission in Senegal wants to be able to relate to the Senegalese people. They feel that conversion is not their top priority. They do have a priority of proclaiming the Gospel, but they are doing that by providing a "caring presence" in Senegal as stated in the guidelines of Goal 1.

What exactly does a "caring presence" mean? By providing a mission that relates to the people's developmental needs, this group of missionaries hope to teach the caring ways of Christian life by example. They do not wish to force conversion upon anyone. Conversion is a change of heart that leads to the transformation of life. They do not want to make conversions by demanding it of Muslims. That type of conversion separates people from their culture and family. It goes against centuries of practiced culture. The conversion process is a slow one. It has to be; otherwise it fails in the long-run: "besides, missionaries don't convert people; God acts in life to convert people" (Smith, H.). In fact, one of the six missionaries believes that one way to enter eternal life with God in heaven is to faithfully practice the
religion of Islam, but feels strongly that a better way to enter heaven is to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ and the religion of Christianity (Streyffeler A.). The mission will have very little effect with conversion as a goal. "The central element to a 'caring presence' is love--not conversion" (Smith, R.).

This type of evangelism that the six missionaries wish to conduct is called "relational evangelism". It is very different from the commonly used term of "passive evangelism." The latter term sounds weak and doesn't portray an accurate picture of the goals of the mission. Relational evangelism accepts people as they are and for who they are; it builds mutual respect and trust. It also provides an environment where one feels free to share experiences, teach, and provide health care (Rowley, D.). Relational evangelism, in order to work, must be done through developmental projects in the name of Jesus Christ. The Senegalese know that the missionaries are American, but they have to be reminded that they are Christian first (Streyffeler, M.).

The word "passive" sounds, in this sense, too much like "silence." That is not what the mission is looking to do. The Senegalese people enjoy discussing and even
debating about their convictions on religion and other topics. "The key is understanding the two religions, it makes the mission possible. I do not want to convert by pointing out what is wrong with Islam; I want to teach what is right [with Islam] and then bring in the ideas of Christianity to show the borders and limits of Islam" (Smith, H.). Although the missionaries are not looking for a debate, they do want to provide answers to questions and participate in intelligent discussions regarding Christianity and Islam.

This idea of relational evangelism also coincides with the Senegalese culture. Taking life slowly and talking to people is very much part of the culture. "In Senegalese culture, a lot of time is spent in greeting each other; it's important!" (Rowley, G.). Most Americans might find it to be a waste of time, but it is essential in creating working relationships with Senegalese people.

Taking life slowly and one day at a time is not only a way to assimilate to the culture, but it is a necessary healing tool for the missionaries too. Often the image of a missionary is something of, or relating to, superhuman. A missionary must often times submerge into
another culture, learn a new language (or even learn multiple languages), and live in harsh climates. This is all done for the betterment of humankind and for the glory of God. A false sainthood is placed upon their shoulders, but they are only human.

"Self-care and preservation is a must" (Streyffeler, A.). About 40 percent of the time spent in Senegal is needed for self-care to produce a positive mental attitude as opposed to the use of about 5 percent by most Americans. Some of the missionaries will admit they felt a little depressed when they first entered the country (Streyffeler, A.). It is very hard to adjust to such drastic social and habitat changes.

Family time is also very important to the Senegalese. The missionaries feel they can't "jump into things" because it might hurt the family unit. One of the missionary couples has two daughters, and they have to consider their feelings when making decisions about the mission. It is essential to take things slowly. The need for spending time reflecting, working on self preservation, and valuing family time are ways of interpreting Goal 2. This is accomplished by sharing a way of life with the Senegalese.
There are many other aspects of culture that the missionaries must be sensitive to as well. People, in general, tend to fall into a trap of believing that their way of life is the only way of life. The missionaries must avoid this frame of self-reference criterion. All six of the missionaries have had some experience working in missions in other parts of Africa. In each of those cases, they were all dealing with people from agricultural and rural backgrounds. When the missionaries came to Senegal, they thought they would be dealing with this same mentality. This was a poor assumption on their part. When Islam came to Senegal in the tenth century, it was brought by Islamic merchants from the north. Not only did they instill their religious beliefs upon the Senegalese, but with that came their merchant mentality. A rural, farmer mentality versus an urban, merchant mentality is a big step. One must realize that Africans have many differences among nations and tribes.

The missionaries decided to hire a national to help them develop an understanding of the culture, language and religion. This has proved most beneficial. Also, one of the missionaries, Darla Rowley, has taken it upon
herself to study the ways of traditional healers in Senegal. She hopes it will provide her with insight on how she can effectively help persons in medical need. The Senegalese people become very attentive to the missionary who is in tune with the people. "It is moving past the stage of feeling sorry for them to becoming a part of them" (Rowley, D.).

Along with changing their own mentalities, the missionaries in turn are dealing with a changing mentality of how Christian mission is funded by the individual churches in the United States. In the past, members of churches would just generically donate money to "missions." Now, they want to know what the mission is doing, where it is located, and what is the progress. United Methodist missionaries must now build relationships with local, home churches. This is done by providing videos, sending letters to various church organizations, and even flying back to the U.S. and visiting churches to communicate the progress and stages of the mission to generate funds.

Part III--Making Mission Work--A New Mission in Senegal
Mission needs time to evolve and does not always produce concrete results. Fast solutions and lots of progress is what the people who are funding the mission usually like to hear. This is why many missions seem to fail. They either set unrealistic goals and run out of money before they can meet the goals, or the goals are quickly and poorly attained. The end result of these two scenarios usually ends up doing more harm than good.

Historically, in other missions in Senegal, the net total of conversion rates has been negative. There are more converts to Islam from the existing Christian population in Senegal than there are converts from Islam to Christianity. Many new Christian believers suffered much pressure from Muslim relatives and returned to their Islamic roots. Also, many young men ended up returning to Islam because there were very few converted women (“Senegal…” 2). Christian missions have had very little success with most Wolof. The most effective presence seems to be when a mission brings education, medicine, and community development. Christianity is not actively opposed by the Wolof because it brings desired help, but it is neither looked at as an option which one might embrace in an act of conversion and commitment.
In general, the family is a source of strength and pride for the Senegalese. This makes it very difficult for the Senegalese to change their religious beliefs because they would feel that they are betraying their family and furthermore their country.

The six missionaries realize that their entry points in relating to the Senegalese are very limited. They are not looking to create Bible study groups. It is not a Senegalese route and therefore it is not an option in developing their mission. Such tactics used by other missions have not worked in the past. The six missionaries are looking for another entry point, but they first have to be able to speak Wolof to find this entry point (Streyffeler, A.).

Language is a very important aspect of making the mission work. Only a small percentage of the population speaks English, so it is imperative to learn the native language. But what is the native language? As stated earlier, the official language is French and the national language is considered to be Wolof. Although there are many other tribal languages spoken in Senegal, there is no commonly shared language among all the people.
There is a relationship between the people and the language and understanding that relationship makes the mission work. So which is it, French, Wolof or something altogether different? The three couples have decided to take three different approaches to learning the language. All the missionaries had initial training in French before entering Senegal, but how do they divide their time now?

The Smiths concentrate half their studies on French and half their studies on Wolof. They believe that understanding both languages is equally important. The Rowleys concentrate most of their studies in French. Darla Rowley will be working a great deal in the medical area because of her background as a medical technician. Since Wolof is not a written language, the entire medical field in Senegal uses French. Finally, the Streyffelers have decide to put French on the back burner and concentrate most of their studies on Wolof. They live in a purely Wolof neighborhood and really believe that it is the language of the people, and that most everyone in Senegal can speak it. All of the six missionaries do agree on one point though. The change in dynamics among
the Senegalese is great when they see a foreigner who can speak Wolof.

The language studies are very difficult, but it is hard to be a "caring presence" without the background of language and culture. They want to be able to break down as many barriers as possible, but one barrier that still stands in their way is the government.

The country of Senegal fails to recognize the United Methodist Mission as an organization. The mission has applied to become a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), but it has been denied. The government requires that an NGO be either a Religious Organization or a Developmental Organization. It fails to recognize the benefits of being both. The United Methodist mission believes it is essential to be both, but the government obviously doesn't agree with such a different approach. The government fears change and would like the mission to first prove itself as an association. As an association, the United Methodist Mission is unable to take advantage of certain tax breaks and channels of communication with the government that are available to NGOs. Without this recognition, it is very difficult to make progress quickly, but the chance to prove themselves as an
association may be just what the missionaries need. It gives the mission time to research the needs of the people, and it forces the mission to create well established relationships with important key figures in the communities that need the most help.

One must start at the grassroots level in order to assess the needs of the poor properly. Poverty cannot be studied from a distance. Reliable information can only be compiled and evaluated, but the support and ideas of the leaders in these underdeveloped areas will give an insight on the real problems. With these insights, development workers can begin to undertake effective action and collaboration (Gaye 14). The usefulness of having local populations assess their own greatest needs and develop plans to work with a mission, instead of along side a mission, is the sort of empowerment expressed in guidelines of Goal 4 of the four goals of the General Board of Global Ministries.

But the missionary must do much more than just consult the people in a certain community. In order to have positive change, it is critical to have constant dialogue between public, private and civil society actors (Gaye 11).
Partnerships between government, civil society, and NGO [future NGO in this case] support groups to allow local populations greater access to goods and services, have emphasized technological innovation, low cost management systems, job creation and intensive popular participation. Instead of supporting imported half-services, these partnerships aim to set up appropriate and replicable systems....they are down to earth, aiming to put particular, easily practiced, participative processes into operation. (Gaye 53)

Partnerships are essential to treat social and economic problems successfully. The people faced with these problems are given the necessary means to solve them with the help of the various actors. Communication in setting up such partnerships is the starting point for implementing programs that will work now and for the future to come. The local government will probably believe that they have the most to contribute as to solving a certain issue, but each actor must realize what its limitations are and create a balance of making a partnership that works (Gaye 89).
Relating to the local government is one thing, but establishing community involvement is even a greater challenge. Africans in general are not quick to give up the few resources they might have to improve their own community. The mentality is that Americans have money to spare, but they themselves cannot engage in mission work until they become rich like Americans. They do not realize that the people who support missionaries are not all rich people. Many of those supporters could very well use that money for their own expenses (Luhahi 4). Money is not the only factor involved in making mission happen. The poor must contribute to their own development; otherwise it is doomed to failure. It has been proven time and time again that the programs that work are the programs with the full support of the local community.

There are many ways the poor can contribute to the mission. The missionaries can use their creativity, their vision of the future, as well as their take on the current conditions of the community.

The poor can identify their priority needs much better than outsiders. If a mission is able to form a committee with key citizens and local government
officials, they will be able to generate the priority needs of their community. Also, these key citizens will act as leaders to organize the residents of the community when the time comes to implement a developmental project. They are much more suited for this job of recruitment as opposed to somebody from outside of the community. This is how the poor can pay for their own development, through hard work.

Giving the poor the empowerment to help themselves gives a developmental project the energy it needs to be successful. The management of these projects must eventually be handed over solely to the community. A mission will not last forever, but communities tend to stay around for long periods of time. The idea of making a project self-sustaining should be considered in the planning stages as the mission's ultimate goal. Missionaries cannot realistically support a mission forever.

The missionaries of the United Methodist Church in Senegal believe that their hybrid of development and relational evangelism is the mission of the future for the Christian community. Right now, the mission is still in its fact finding and relationship building stage.
They have found a quarter in the city of Dakar that is poorer than other quarters. They have established relationships with the non-elected leaders of the community through Diédhiou, the national they hired who happens to live in that particular quarter. With the help of those community leaders, the mission has decided to have a focus on creating social programs that help women. There are many, many ideas on the table, but the missionaries are nowhere close to establishing the true priority needs of this quarter. Through the help of the local authorities and citizens, they are confident that when they do choose a project it will be successful.

The challenges awaiting these missionaries in Senegal are great and many. The face of United Methodist Missions has been changing over the last twenty years. The old way of thinking was that the Church brought faith and God to the heathens of underdeveloped nations. Now, the focus as changed. A mission must work with the culture and the people. It has to create a sense of empowerment and self-sufficiency. It requires the full participation of the locals to have an effective mission outreach. Partnerships must be created to combat
poverty, and a well researched mission is a way to do just that.
- Senegal is located in Western Africa.
- As shown above, Senegal is bordered in the north by Mauritania, in the east by Mali, in the south by Guinea-Bissau and Guinea and in the west by the Atlantic Ocean.
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