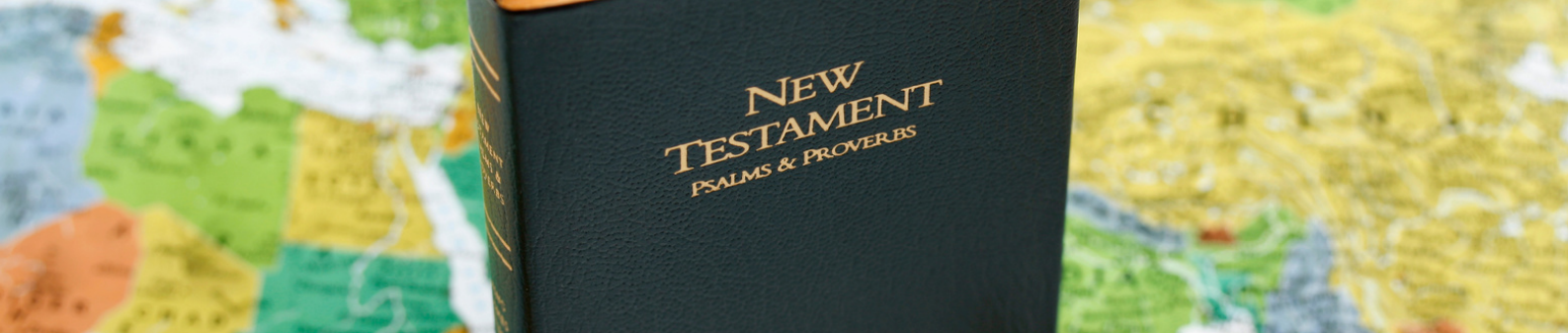




**Reflecting on the Five
Marks of Mission:
An Interview with
Bishop Tedroy Powell**

MISSION



This interview with Bishop Tedroy Powell was conducted by Missional Focus editor Chris Ducker in June 2022.

Bishop Tedroy, please can you introduce your church?

I'm very happy to discuss mission with you because mission is so important to Church of God of Prophecy, internationally, locally, and nationally. We're very much mission-oriented.

Church of God of Prophecy traces its roots back to the end of the 19th century and could be described as being birthed in a revival movement. It is in the classical Pentecostal stream, meaning that we focus on the work, the transformative power and experience of the Holy Spirit. Globally, the church has in the region of 1.5 million members, in 137 countries.

Are there any of the Five Marks of Mission that you are personally involved in more than others?

'To teach, baptise and nurture new believers' or what I call formation, and which includes discipleship and teaching. This is, for me, a primary area. In the Gospel, in the miracle of five loaves and two fish, it says 'place the food within their reach.' So those words are very instructive for me... that is, placing the 'food' of the Gospel within people's reach, having thought it through before, and presenting it in a manner that they will receive it.

When it comes to evangelism, are there any particular approaches you follow?

In my first pastorate in Coventry, we were intentional about where we would go, and why. We would do research and precede any tract distribution or street witnessing with a prayer walk. So we'd pray, map the territory, walk it and then go back and deliver tracts and share.

This would be done through the power and influence of music. For example, some of our congregations have very good worship bands and singers. So we would say, like in London, we would choose a bandstand and have some of our best groups there... You'd draw people in this way.

And other types of support or outreach? Those that have been called 'responding to human need by loving service'?

For example, we would go to 'cardboard city' in London and serve breakfast, and then through that have an opportunity to share faith. And at the local church, 'House of Bread' where I pastored for many years, we actually converted a room there, with a shower, so that the homeless could come in.

We could classify that as mission or describe it as bringing transformation to people. What did D.L. Moody say? It's like one beggar saying to another: this is the bread; I'm pointing you to where you can find it. We can categorise it as social action, or compassionate service.

Another example: some 20 years ago, our church leaders, Bishop Wilton Powell, Bishop T.A. McCalla and others felt that the older people were being taken advantage of, and put in conditions that were deplorable. And so the church leadership decided to put resources together and in partnership built an organisation called Nehemiah Housing. That would not necessarily be considered primarily missional, but the work that it does is about supporting, helping and restoring a sense of dignity to people in their later years.

We could also go on to education: the church saw an educational deficit among young Black men, who often fall well behind. A local church member, Dr Cheron Byfield, developed a programme called Black Boys Can and which progressed into Excell3 and then became King Solomon International Business School.

There are gaps, societal gaps, where people are missing out and the church steps in, whether we call it missional, or transformational through service. To me, that distinction hardly matters – it's that we are empowering people, raising aspirations through the agency of the church.

Another Mark of Mission relates to 'transforming unjust structures of society.' Is this something that your church would actively engage in?

I can give an example using Church of God of Prophecy and also New Testament Church of God, which are probably two of the largest Black-led churches in the UK. We have collaboratively engaged with institutions and organisations about the unjust situations that have arisen from colonisation and slavery over 500 years. In 2020-21, we set up a series of symposia where we discussed History, Heritage and Identity. We sought to engage the Anglican Church and other churches, and the University of the West Indies, and we engaged in online dialogue titled 'Education for Transformation,' looking where churches were complicit, where banks and businesses were also complicit, and to look at the history and present it in a kind and thoughtful way, not a condemning manner, engaging in dialogue, saying: let's look at our journey and, in this space of ecumenism, let us seek reconciliation; let us be reconciled. These may be tough and difficult conversations, but there are some unjust structures that still exist. And we must not be afraid to have those conversations and continue addressing these matters.

Other examples include in trade, in business, and the need for

fair trade. Church of God of Prophecy has set up an organisation called RAFFA (Renewal, Advancement, Financial Freedom, Autonomy International Development Agency) for people to be empowered. So as well as colonialism, racism and slavery, we also need to discuss the unjust balance of trade. But it's important to dialogue in the spirit of grace, not wrathfully or vengefully.

Do you think most Pentecostals in the UK would describe this as 'mission' or as something else?

I think most Pentecostals would not see it as 'mission' but it's generational. I think most older Pentecostals, aged 50+, would not see it as an integral part of our faith and praxis. But the younger ones, and certainly the millennials, would see it as all being integrated.

I know some church leaders would say they don't want to go into the public space, because you're going into politics here. But I see the prophetic word as overarching everything; the gospel has a universal appeal, that transcends all the cultural barriers and ceilings that are there. Dr Martin Luther King had the same difficulties in the American civil rights movement: some of his leaders felt no, don't get involved in that. Because, you know, it's politics.

How important is 'safeguarding the integrity of creation and sustaining and renewing the life of the earth' within your denomination?

Church of God of Prophecy understands the increasing importance of safeguarding creation, sustaining, and renewing life on earth within its biblical-theological

concept of good stewardship. Most pastors would cite God's command to Adam in Genesis 2:15 as being a clear command to take care of creation. As a church, we have participated in global programmes about climate justice, including at the recent COP26. To be truly missional means caring for spirit, soul, and body of all mankind – and this means things like clean, fresh drinking water in developing countries. Our church has developed an international social transformation agency (RAFFA) to bring vital support to developing countries.

Do all five Marks of Mission correspond to your church's theology and practice of mission?

Church of God of Prophecy has a well-developed practical theology regarding mission. Long before its leaders began to fully articulate their theology around missions, there was a clear corporate sense of the need for the church to be missional. The church's core values, vision and structure positioned it to reach the unsaved and unchurched world.

Our catchphrase was, 'Preach, Pray, Give and Go.' This meant each one had to share the good news of the gospel, pray for transformed lives, give generously of time, talent, and treasure, and finally go to where the Holy Spirit and the church required you to go, where possible. This meant that new missionaries were recruited, special prayers for mission teams and finances were raised specifically for the cause of mission.

Although the core values and praxis were not called the 5 Marks of Mission, most of those elements were evident in one way or another.

Further information about Church of God of Prophecy can be found on their website: <https://cogop.org.uk/>.

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