

## ***Abundant Grace: ACK St Paul's Kiruri Turns 100 Years, 1906–2006*, by Njoroge et al.**

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The book, *Abundant Grace: ACK St Paul's Kiruri Turns 100 Years, 1906–2006*, was published in November 2007 as part of the centenary celebrations of St Paul's Kiruri Anglican church, which falls within the Diocese of Mount Kenya Central of the Anglican Church Kenya (ACK). It was jointly researched and authored by Janet Njoroge, Ven. John Karumwa, Revd Ben Kanina, Hellen Kamau, Mary Maina, Eliud Mbuchi Waithaka, and Amos Kimani Kirikiru. In their acknowledgements, they appreciate the assistance extended to them by Lucas Alube of the ACK Archives and Amos Kiri, among others.

St Paul's Kiruri is unique, and unlike other missions in central Kenya, such as Kabete (1900), Weithaga (1904), Kahuhia (1906), Mutira (1907–1908) (but which matured in 1912), Kabare (1910), and Kigari (1910)—St Paul's Kiruri lacks documented history—apart from some scattered church records and sources for oral research, there are no systematic records that can be reviewed. Second, St Paul's Kiruri, unlike other Church Missionary Societies (CMS) stations (as early Anglican mission initiatives were previously called), never had a resident missionary. As a matter of fact, even the researcher who has acted as one of the chroniclers of the Anglican mission in central Kenya heard about St Paul's Kiruri only after purchasing a copy of *Abundant Grace* from the Murang'a Anglican Arahuka bookshop in November 2017—10 years after the publication of this book! Third, the publication relies on unpublished records done by one of the pioneer church elders, John Gakobo, and some published materials found in selected libraries and archives, which give the oral historical approach in research its credibility and originality. In view of this, it gives concerned missiologists, researchers,



and Africanist scholars, both local and beyond, a starting point for discovery of the hitherto unknown ecclesiology of Kiruri.

The book is divided into 10 chapters. The first four follows the chronological development of the mission. Chapter one deals with the foundation of the mission, chapter two with pioneer missionary initiatives, the third chapter addresses the early years of the establishment of St Paul's Kiruri. Chapter four analyses the construction of the first permanent stone and the church building, replacing the mud buildings described in chapter three. In the fifth chapter, the book describes activities in evangelism and education—a phenomenon that saw formal education in the locality start in 1924. Here, we meet the first beneficiaries of the mission: among others, John Gakobo, who worked as a clerk in the survey department and was based in the so-called White Highlands in Naivasha; Revd Paul Mbatia, who was ordained priest on 25 January 1924; Ben Mbatia, who was trained in Britain as a mason; Naftalia Mbatia, who served as a clinical officer in Githumu mission hospital; Jeremiah Muchendu, who became a teacher at Kiruri; and Joseph Mwangi Gakobo, who became a teacher and an evangelist.

In its sixth chapter, *Abundant Grace* deals with the East African Revival Movement that reached the locality in 1947 with a big bang after getting underway with the establishment, 10 years before a revival fellowship in the neighbouring Kabete Mission. The revival, led by Revd. Elijah Gachanja and Revd. Samuel Muhoro, brought about a dramatic division of congregants into nominal and saved Christians (*ahonoki*). On the one hand, people were led into deeper knowledge of the Christian faith, but on the other, Kenya's darkest history is revisited when we see the emergence of the Murang'a Martyrs, brothers who were killed by Mau-Mau rebels for refusing to take the binding oath as commitment in support of the Kenya war of independence (1952–60). The martyrs include Andrew Kaguru, Joseph Mwangi, and Joseph Nyaga. Others suffered serious injuries as they were slashed by angry rebels with machetes—these include Wanjiku Kaguru (widow of Andrew Kaguru), Revd Samuel Muhoro and his wife Sarah Wanjiru, and Misheck Kamau and his wife Peninah Wanjiru.

Chapter 7 deals with the contribution of the various clergy who served at St Paul's Kiruri, compiling a list that dates back to 1906 and records the tenure of Revd. Arthur Wallace McGregor, who established St Paul's Kiruri as an outstation of Weithaga Mission (itself established by McGregor in 1903–1904). McGregor was assisted by other European missionaries, including Revd. E. W. Crawford, Revd. William C. Peel, Revd. A. R. Clarke, and Revd. W. J. Rampley, as well as African clergymen: Revd Shadrack Mliwa from Taita-Taveta county, and a local African clergyman, Revd. Paul Mbatia. It remained a sub-station of the larger Weithaga Mission for a record 40 years (1906–1946), after which it was placed under Muthiria Parish (1947–1952); and then reverted to the oversight of Weithaga Parish (1953–1970)! From 1970 to 1974, St. Paul's Kiruri was placed under Muguru Parish. At last, owing to "Abundant Grace," it became a fully-fledged independent parish in 1975. Such twisting from one parish to

the other, rather than being elevated into a parish on its own from the outset, did not stop the elders of St Paul's Kiruri from building on the vision and mission of their founder, A. W. McGregor—and did not stop the local community from nurturing some of the most educated and productive members in the larger central Kenya region.

The 8th chapter focuses on those who stood as pillars of the church over the years. They include Revd. Canon Paul Mbatia, one of the boys who was given by the paramount chief, Karuri wa Gakure, to Revd A. W. McGregor, when he visited Kiruri area. This “boy,” a son of Gakobo, a *mundu mugo* (“traditional medicine man”), was born in 1888 and began schooling at CMS Weithaga in 1903 with the advent of Christianity to the area. Hence, he stands out as a pioneer educated person in the locality. Other such “pillars” who demonstrate the “Abundant Grace” in Kiruri include Joseph Nyaga Matheri, who, though ambushed and killed by Mau-Mau rebels in 1954, made a vast contribution in promoting education locally; Cornelius Mbuchi Mbatia (1885–1975), who strongly urged society to embrace the new religion; and Andrew Kaguru, who migrated to the area from Kijabe in 1948, but ended as a Mau-Mau martyr in 1953.

The 9th chapter deals with the church projects and institutions. This includes Kiruri Primary School, the Vicarage, the porch, the church tea farm, the vestry, the rental house, the church boardroom, and the water tank. This, however, leaves the reader wondering: *are the church assets only found within the church compound? Are there company shares possessed by the church that began in 1906? Are there commercial buildings that the church owns in the local Murang'a Town, seeing that it has been there since 1906? Apart from the two leading clergy, Mbatia and Muhoro, are there other human resources that the church can boast of, especially among the youth?* This forms its main weakness—certainly, a church that is confined to the dictates of the past, and its first celebrities have to build its future celebrities through successful ministries of the youth, especially in the use of science and technology. While the tea plantation is a good venture, one wonders why the same farm cannot be used to promote other activities as youth enterprises. Nevertheless, the obstructions of the parish are clear, especially when we consider that she was only promoted to a parish after stints under other parishes, who must have given priorities to their own concerns rather than to St Paul's Kiruri itself.

The last chapter deals with the key theme of the centenary, celebrating the 100 years of the existence of St Paul's Kiruri (1906–2006). Ironically, the celebrations took place in 2007, rather than 2006, 101 years later! Does this signal that the many delays in St Paul's Kiruri are perennial challenges that may have prophetic insight? If delays in establishing a parish, delays in celebrating centenary, and delays in developing a modern youth ministry among others, is anything to be taken seriously, then a the theme of “Abundant Grace” across their 100 years of existence is manifest in their social, health, education, and evangelism commitments, among others. Their ability to record their history of the last 100 years is a big plus as it encourages proper recording and

documentation, lest we are all relegated to the dustbins of history. This is welcome reading for all researchers with special focus on the CMS mission in the central Kenya region and East Africa at large.

The book is professionally written, surpassing other centenary publications in the Mount Kenya region, and I recommend it strongly to modern researchers and all who have the interests of the church at heart. As one reads it, they discover that great historical events are achieved by the so-called lowly people. In this respect, the entire mission to central Kenya was pioneered by Arthur Wallace McGregor, who began his first mission at Kabete in 1900 as a layman, and then went on to establish Weithaga in 1903, and thereafter various other stations. By the time the then Bishop of Mombasa, Bishop William G. Peel (1854–1916), who held office from 1897 to 1916, redeployed him to pioneer mission in central Kenya; A. W. McGregor had been serving the CMS since 1892. He went to evangelise in the Taveta, in the coastal region of Kenya, in May 1892; and served there until 1900. As he opened several missions in central Kenya he was eventually ordained into priesthood by Bishop Peel around 1906. Certainly, the book offers delightful reading to all ecclesiastical scholars globally.

## References

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