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Zumunta End of the Year Symposium and Dinner

By Emmanuel Ayiku & Ebenezer Amankwah, Toronto, ON

The Zumunta African Muslims in Canada have organized their annual end-of-year symposium and dinner event in Toronto, Canada.

The event also marked the inauguration of the newly elected President of the Association, Hajj Nurudeen.

It was a sight to behold as Zumunta African Muslims, both male and female, from across Canada convened to be part of this event.

Alhaji Mohammed Mubarak Muntaka, a Member of Parliament for Asawase in the Ashanti Region of Ghana, who was also the guest speaker, lauded the association for organizing such an event. He stated that it is through such

cont'd on pg. 7



From left is Bashiru Kabore Vice president of Yankasa Assoc. of NY, Abdul Salam ex President of Yankasa Assoc. of NY, Emmanuel Duodu, President of GCAO, Juliet Opoku, V.P. of GCAO, between Hon. Muntaka Mubarak Mp of Asawase Constituency in Kumasi, Alhaji Zubeiru out President of Zumunta, Ibrahim Masigan, President Yankasa Assoc. of NY, Sulley Damile North Ghana Association, Hajj Nurudeen Hussain current President of Zumunta Assoc. Shehu President of Bilal in Montreal.

Fruitful Communities celebrate its Food Bank Volunteers

By Ebenezer Amankwah, Toronto, ON



Group picture of volunteers and staff with Mrs Susan Akonnor (4th left) and Rev.Dr. Albert Akonnor (5th left)

See story on pg. 43

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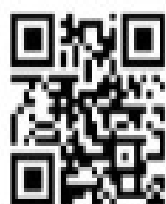
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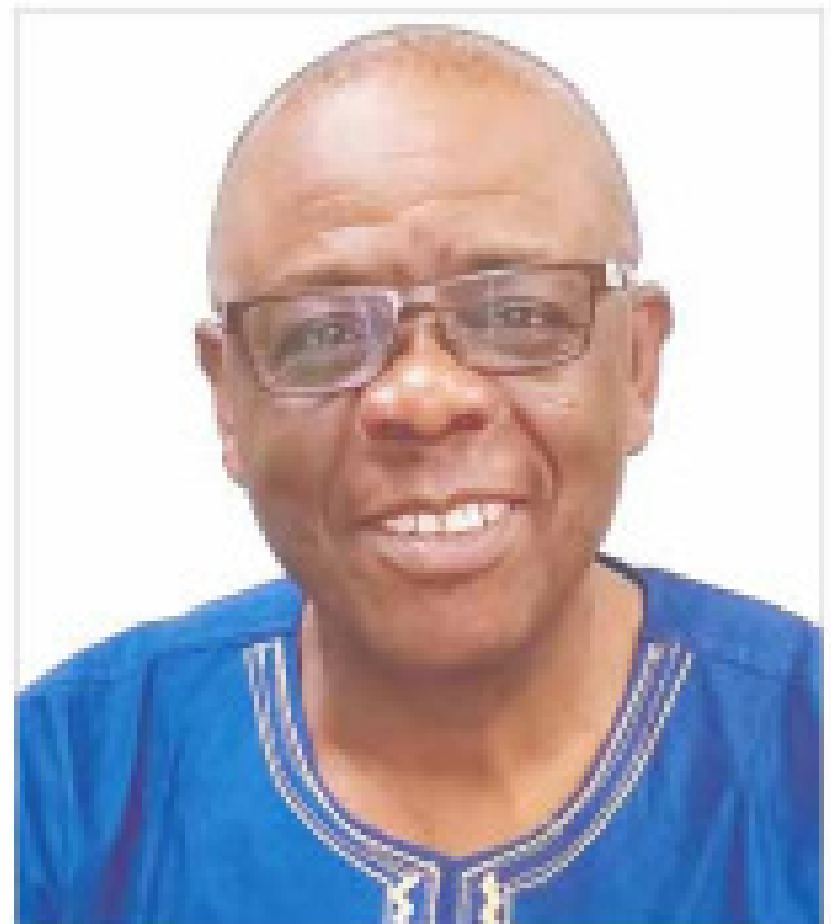
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Federal dental care program will exclude 4.4M uninsured Canadians: report

Millions of uninsured Canadians will be left out of the new federal dental program because their family income is too high, says a report released Wednesday by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Enrolment began last month for a new federal benefits program, which was developed as a condition of a political pact between the Liberal government and the NDP.

It will see the federal government offer dental benefits to uninsured families with a household income under \$90,000 per year, starting with seniors, children under the age of 18 and people with disabilities.

When the program is fully implemented in 2025, the government anticipates the coverage will be available to roughly nine million people. But another 4.4 million individuals who don't have dental benefits of their own will be excluded because of the income cap, the report says.

It would cost \$1.45 billion to extend the coverage to people whose income exceeds the cap in 2025, on top of the \$3.3 billion already budgeted for in the program that year. The report, authored by David Macdonald, a senior economist

for the think tank, argues that \$90,000 is not a particularly large income for a family with two parents and children.

"Earning \$45,000 for each parent isn't a tremendous salary in Canada. But making more than that precludes those families from receiving federal dental care coverage."

The report argues that a universal program wouldn't leave anyone out at all.

NDP health critic Don Davies, who has worked closely with the Liberals on the new dental care policy, said in a statement his party would ideally like to see the coverage expanded.

"This is a momentous step forward and it will be life-changing for many. However, we have always been clear that this is a first step - a down payment - on universal access and that more must be done," Davies said in the statement.

Davies is also collaborating with the government on the legislative framework for medical drug coverage for Canadians. In the case of pharmacare, the NDP has insisted the coverage must be single-payer and universal, unlike the dental care program.

Expanding dental care alongside the same principles will be a focus for the NDP in the next election, he said.

"New Democrats will not stop until every Canadian can access the dental care they need regardless of their ability to pay," he said.

Health Minister Mark Holland's office did not directly address Macdonald's concerns when contacted for a statement Wednesday, but said the new program is intended to ease the financial barrier to accessing dental health care.

"The Canadian Dental Care Plan is going to make life better for millions of Canadians, so they won't have to choose between paying their bills and getting oral health care," a spokesperson said in a statement.

Ottawa plans to gradually enrol eligible participants in the new program over the next 12 months.

The first program members are expected to be able to start claiming dental care expenses in May, though the exact coverage date will vary from person to person. **The Canadian Press**

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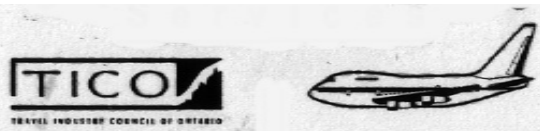
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Publisher / Editor
Emmanuel Ayiku

Contributing Editor
Joe Kingsley Eyiah

Director of Operations
Comfort Ayiku

Community Reporter
Jonathan Annobil

Online Editor
Ebenezer Amankwah

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EDITORIAL**Looking Back**

Looking ahead to 2024 and Beyond another year has passed. So many things happened to us as individuals, families, and as communities in the Diaspora and in the Land of Our Birth. Some of these events were tragic. Others brought our dear nation Ghana to almost breaking point, but cool heads prevailed and the nation is surviving at least for now. In our lives, homes, neighborhoods and communities abroad, so many eventful things also took place.

We lost quiet a number of our community members to the icy hands of death. Some of these deaths, especially those involving some of our youth were very sad indeed. We believe these and many more are the reasons why we take stock of our lives when a year ends and make resolutions when a new one begins. As a community here in Canada, we know very well that the community is aging and we need to take health issues very serious to prevent some of these timing death that is happening.

We salute those community members who actively chipped in and contributed their best: energy, resources, time and money to uplift the fortunes of our community. They should not rest on their oars but strive to do better. Sadly, there are still a number of community members, in fact the majority, who care less about the fortunes of our community. They participate very little or not at all in community events apart from the usual Outdoor parties and Funeral gatherings. We can certainly do better than that.

We therefore earnestly entreat all our community members to recognize the fact that there is always power in numbers. The other Diaspora communities who have succeeded in Canada did so out of, and through their collective efforts. They did not leave their communities' fortunes in the hands of a few individuals and groups. The youth in our community are trying to do their best but we need to harness their energies into fruitful collaboration with the adults to achieve something better for our communities across Canada.

In the GTA for example there seems to be developing a divide between the youth and the adults in the community where the youth will organize opposing national celebratory events. This division does not augur well for community development. The adults and the youth need to come together to explore common areas that they can work together and leave areas that the youth and adults can work separately. This is absolutely necessary if we are to move our community forward.

Finally, we need also to pay attention to events happening in our homeland...the Land of Our Birth. After years of turmoil and declining fortunes, things seem still to be looking on the downwards direction especially the economy. As this is the year of Election, we wish all the political parties to abide by the the Election rules for a peaceful Election coming December. We should continue to pray for the government and our people back home because whatever happens there, positive or negative, have impact on our lives here since they trigger chain reactions and demands on us from family and friends at home. We wish all community members, our friends and supporters the best in this New Year 2024 and beyond. May this year be a stepping stone to inspire to and enable even greater success in the future

Canada to stabilize growth and decrease number of new international student permits issued to approximately 360,000 for 2024

International students enrich our communities and are a critical part of Canada's social, cultural and economic fabric. In recent years, the integrity of the international student system has been threatened. Some institutions have significantly increased their intakes to drive revenues, and more students have been arriving in Canada without the proper supports they need to succeed. Rapid increases in the number of international students arriving in Canada also puts pressure on housing, health care and other services. As we work to better protect international students from bad actors and support sustainable population growth in Canada, the government is moving forward with measures to stabilize the number of international students in Canada.

The Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship announced today that the Government of Canada will set an intake cap on international student permit applications to stabilize new growth for a period of two years. For 2024, the cap is expected to result in approximately 360,000 approved study permits, a decrease of 35% from 2023. In the spirit of fairness, individual provincial and territorial caps have been established, weighted by population, which will result in much more significant decreases in provinces where the international student population has seen the most unsustainable growth. Study permit renewals will not be impacted. Those pursuing master's and doctoral degrees, and elementary and secondary education are not included in the cap. Current study permit holders will not be affected.

IRCC will allocate a portion of the cap to each province and territory, who will then distribute the allocation among their designated learning institutions. To implement the cap, as of January 22, 2024, every study permit application submitted to IRCC will also require an attestation letter from a province or territory. Provinces and territories are expected to establish a process for issuing attestation letters to students by no later than March 31, 2024.

These temporary measures will be in place for two years, and the number of new study permit applications that will be accepted in 2025 will be re-assessed at the end of this year. During this period, the Government of Canada will continue to work with

provinces and territories, designated learning institutions and national education stakeholders on developing a sustainable path forward for international students, including finalizing a recognized institution framework, determining long-term sustainable levels of international students and ensuring post-secondary institutions are able to provide adequate levels of student housing.

In order to better align the Post-Graduation Work Permit Program, we are changing the eligibility criteria.

Starting September 1, 2024, international students who begin a study program that is part of a curriculum licensing arrangement will no longer be eligible for a postgraduation work permit upon graduation. Under curriculum licensing agreements, students physically attend a private college that has been licensed to deliver the curriculum of an associated public college. These programs have seen significant growth in attracting international students in recent years, though they have less oversight than public colleges and they act as a loophole with regards to post-graduation work permit eligibility. Graduates of master's and other short graduate-level programs will soon be eligible to apply for a 3-year work permit. Under current criteria, the length of a postgraduation work permit is based solely on the length of an individual's study program, hindering master's graduates by limiting the amount of time they have to gain work experience and potentially transition to permanent residence.

In the weeks ahead, open work permits will only be available to spouses of international students in master's and doctoral programs. The spouses of international students in other levels of study, including undergraduate and college programs, will no longer be eligible.

The important measures announced today complement other recently announced reforms to the International Student Program. Taken together, they aim to ensure genuine students receive the support they require and have the resources they need for an enriching study experience in Canada, while at the same time stabilizing the overall number of students arriving and alleviating pressures on housing, health care and other services in Canada.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

What is Canada's international student program and why is it being capped?

Canada is capping the number of study permits it approves over the next two years to get a handle on a ballooning international student program.

Immigration Minister Marc Miller announced new limits to the program on Monday, including a temporary cap that will reduce the number of new student visas by 35 per cent this year.

Here's what you need to know about the program and the changes that are coming.

WHAT IS THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS PROGRAM?

Foreign nationals who want to study at a Canadian institution usually need to get a study permit from the federal government. To apply, prospective students must submit a letter of acceptance, personal documentation and proof of financial support.

Until now, there have not been any limits on the number of students who can enter the country. The government mostly approved visa requests as long as the student could show they were accepted at an accredited school.

Provinces and territories are responsible for choosing which institutions are eligible to enrol international students.

HOW MANY INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ARE THERE IN CANADA?

The federal government expected the number of people in Canada on a student visa to hit 900,000 in 2023, Miller said last fall.

There were more than 807,000 permit-holders in the country in 2022, according to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. That's nearly a 31 per cent increase over 2021.

More than half of those students were in Ontario in 2022.

HOW MUCH DO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS PAY?

International students pay considerably higher tuition fees than Canadian students, and the gap between the two groups has widened in recent years.

For the 2022-23 academic year, Statistics Canada reported that international undergraduate students paid an average of \$36,123. That's 429 per cent more than tuition fees for domestic students.

WHY IS THE PROGRAM BEING CAPPED?

The international student program has come under significant scrutiny in recent months as experts warn that strong population growth is putting pressure on an already-strained housing market.

The Liberal government has been under fire because a sharp rise in temporary residents — which include international students — is happening at a time when housing supply is failing to keep up with demand.

Policy experts and elected officials have also raised concerns that post-secondary institutions are relying on international student admissions to supplement their funding because their tuitions are so much higher.

Miller has even accused some institutions running the diploma equivalent of "puppy mills" rather than offering their students a quality education.

Ontario colleges have stood out in particular for large increases in international student enrolments.

According to Statistics Canada, the number of international college students increased by 154 per cent between 2014-15 and 2019-20. In comparison, the number of international university students increased by about 40 per cent over that same period.

WHAT IS CHANGING ABOUT THE PROGRAM?

The number of new visas handed out this year will be capped at 364,000, a 35 per cent decrease from the nearly 560,000 issued last year. The number for 2025 will be set after an assessment of the situation later this year, Miller said.

The cap will apply only to post-secondary undergraduate students, not those seeking visas for master's programs, doctoral degrees or elementary and high school students.

The government will also bar students in schools that follow a private-public model from accessing postgraduate work permits as of Sept. 1.

In a few weeks, open work permits will only be available for the spouses of students enrolled in masters and doctoral programs, as well as professional programs such as medicine and law.

The Canadian Press

Zumunta End of the Year Symposium and Dinner

cont'd from pg. 1

events that leaders can advise and encourage each other for their common good.

He expressed concern about the lack of synergy among the leaders in the Ghanaian communities across various provinces. He asserted that the Ghanaian-Canadian community can only develop when the leaders collaborate.

Alhaji Mubarak Muntaka pointed out that other communities in Canada, such as the Jewish, Pakistani, Indian, and Iranian communities, are all growing faster due to their zealous nature. He therefore advised leaders of the Ghanaian communities to work hard, map out strategies, and negotiate with neighbouring communities for shared knowledge.

Alhaji Mohammed Mubarak Muntaka advised Muslim parents to build assets by educating themselves and their children. He stated that the biggest risk for Ghanaians in the diaspora is raising their children according to their beliefs since these children are exposed to a different culture and beliefs. He also encouraged parents to allow their children to marry within the community in this regard.

Alhaji Mubarak Muntaka further urged all those gathered to pay particular attention to their health and not to be swayed away by the struggle for riches.

The Deputy Imam of Al Asuna, Sheik Lamin Husein Cissey, who was the special guest speaker for the event, thanked Allah for His protection throughout the year and also prayed for blessings in the coming year.

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“Help Us Get Atta-Mills’ Autopsy Report” - Former President’s Family Begg Akufo-Addo

The family was grateful to President Akufo-Addo, for restoring the dignity of the Asomdwee Park, where the former President is buried

ACCRA, Ghana, January 13, 2024/ -- The Odomna family of Ekumfi Otuam and Ekumfi Asaman, have launched yet another sharp inquest into the unclear circumstances that led to the mysterious death of the late former President, Professor John Evans Atta-Mills.

Speaking upon a visit to President Akufo-Addo at the Jubilee House today, Kyidomhemaa of Ekumfi Traditional Council and Queenmother of the Odomna Family of Ekumfi Otuam and Asaman, Nanahemaa Enyimfuaa III, in the company of the Head of the Odomna Family from which the late President hails, Abusuapanin Kobina Biney, said, it remains a key worry of the entire maternal family of the Late President that after 10years since the venerable Professor passed, no member of the family can mention what happened to him because none of them has sighted his autopsy report.

According to her, “it is a constant headache, that no member of the family can confidently answer the simple question of how and why the late President died and indeed, what actually killed him.”

“Till date we as family are not able to tell if the doctor had said, he broke an arm, his neck or what specific medical defect and circumstances caused his death. I therefore plead with you Mr. President, on behalf of my stool and on behalf of the entire family to assist us get the autopsy report of President Mills, so that we can amply explain to the family and to our generations born and unborn, what killed President Mills and lay to rest the hazy circumstances surrounding his death.”

The family was grateful to President Akufo-Addo, for restoring the dignity of the Asomdwee Park, where the former President is buried.

“The extent of neglect by those who took over from Prof Mills was so bad that Asomdwee Park became the prime location for petty drug peddlers and lunatics”, the Head of Clan, Abusuapanin Kobina Biney, said.

They appealed for jobs for the youth of the area and the readiness of the traditional authorities of the area to make land available for an edifice at Ekumfi Otuam in honour of their departed relative and former President of the Republic.

Distributed by APO Group on behalf of The Presidency, Republic of Ghana.

World Bank welcomes Ghana’s agreement with OCC over external debt restructuring

The World Bank Group has welcomed the agreement in principle on the key parameters of the proposed debt restructuring for Ghana reached by the Official Creditors’ Committee under the G20 Common Framework.

This agreement, which is consistent with the Joint WB-IMF Debt Sustainability Framework, represents a critical milestone toward restoring debt sustainability in this country.

“This agreement will help unlock financial support by international financial institutions, including a US\$300 million budget support operation supported by IDA, which will be considered by the World Bank’s Board of Executive Directors next week. This will help Ghana in its

recovery, attracting investments and restoring a sustainable growth path,” said Ousmane Diagana, World Bank Vice President for Western and Central Africa.

The Resilient Recovery Development Policy Operation is the first in a series of three operations totalling US\$900 million and part of a broad World Bank engagement in support of crisis response and resilience in Ghana.

The country implements US\$4.3 billion in commitments from the World Bank through national and regional projects focused on private sector development and jobs, inclusive service delivery and sustainable resilient development
Source: citinewsroom

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What enforcement power does the International Court of Justice have in South Africa’s genocide case against Israel?

South Africa says that Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza and has asked the International Court of Justice to intervene and stop Israeli military action in Gaza.

Israel issued its initial defense to South Africa’s charges on Jan. 12, 2024, at the International Court of Justice – the United Nations’ highest human rights court – based in The Hague, Netherlands. Israel argues that its military is trying to minimize civilian harm and that South Africa is trying to both weaponize the term genocide and interfere with Israel’s right of self-defense against Hamas.

But can the International Court of Justice enforce any decision it makes in the case? “The question of the International Court of Justice’s actual powers of enforcement is a key issue

on many people’s minds,” said Victor Peskin, a scholar of international relations and human rights.

We spoke with Peskin to better understand the potential impacts of South Africa’s genocide complaint against Israel and the scope of the court’s power.

What is the significance of South Africa bringing these charges?

South Africa is a former apartheid state that underwent a largely peaceful transition to democracy in the mid-1990s. Symbolically, the fact that South Africa is bringing the case may have particular resonance.

However, South Africa has itself been accused of thwarting the 1948

U.N. Genocide Convention. This happened after it hosted and failed to arrest Sudan’s then-President Omar al-Bashir in 2015. Al-Bashir was charged by the International Criminal Court with committing war crimes and genocide in the Darfur region of western Sudan in the 2000s.

South Africa’s case against Israel is the fourth genocide-related case at the International Court of Justice. The others pertained to the conflicts in Bosnia, Myanmar and Ukraine.

What precedent did the Gambia-Myanmar case set for the court?

There is some precedence for countries to bring a case regarding a conflict it is not directly involved in to the International Court of Justice. In 2019, Gambia filed a complaint at the court against Myanmar, regarding its alleged

genocide of the Rohingya people, an ethnic minority living in Myanmar.

The Genocide Convention obligates all ratifying states to comply with the treaty. So, countries without a direct connection to an alleged case of genocide can legally bring a genocide complaint forward.

What are provisional measures and why are they important?

The International Court of Justice judges are still reviewing and adjudicating the merits of Gambia’s genocide complaint. There isn’t a final decision on that yet. The court did, within a relatively short period of time after it held a hearing in the case, issue written orders called provisional measures, directing Myanmar to prevent genocide and to preserve evidence related to the case.

If the judges were convinced that the Israeli military’s attacks on Gaza were excessive, they could quickly call for a halt in Israel’s attacks and a cessation of hostilities.

In theory, this could put public pressure on Israel to curtail or halt its military campaign. But even if the International Court of Justice calls for this, it would not necessarily indicate that the court will eventually rule that genocide has occurred.

The International Court of Justice lacks enforcement power. So, is this case more than political theater?

The International Court of Justice does not prosecute individuals, but rather focuses on resolving legal disputes between countries. The Hague-based International Criminal Court, which has the legal authority to investigate and prosecute individuals for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, has opened up a separate investigation into Israeli forces’ and Hamas militants’ alleged violations of international humanitarian law.

It’s always an open question – will an International Court of Justice ruling even be enforced and have any tangible effect?

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FOCUS

Relevant Curriculum, Adequate Learning & Teaching Resources, and Well Motivated Teachers are Pivotal to Quality Education: *Let's make the School Curriculum Relevant to our Community Needs to curb Youth Unemployment!*

By Joe Kingsley Eyiah, OCT, Brookview Middle School, Toronto-Canada

“A curriculum is considered the ‘heart’ of any learning institution which means that schools or universities cannot exist without a curriculum. With its importance in formal education, curriculum has become a dynamic process due to the changes that occur in our society.”

In my over fifty years as a professional teacher, I have encountered the term curriculum in different ways. Curriculum could be described as lists of subjects, learning areas and courses of study. The syllabus outlines everything that the teacher needs to teach to his/her class. It must be argued here that this content-prescriptive approach limits the scope of teachers to really personalize the learning.

Although, there is no single definition that can be used to holistically explain this complex phenomenon known as curriculum, it can be simply referred to as a course of study or plan for what is to be taught in an educational institution (Wiles, “Bondi in Curriculum Development: A Guide to Practice”, 1998). According to Gatawa in the book “The Politics of the School Curriculum: An Introduction” (1990), the curriculum is general in nature, for it encompasses all societal speculations about knowledge and what constitutes it. Knowledge should have a basis as determined by society.

However, because knowledge is dynamic as it constantly changes with the coming on board of new truths in the ever changing universe, policymakers should always be privy to any shift in expectation, so that what is considered as knowledge remains relevant to societal needs

Relevance is our big challenge now:

The greatest challenge we face today is relevance. Our students require a curriculum that provides them with meaningful experiences, that engenders deep and significant learning. It has to be relevant and responsive to the age in which we live. In other words, it must educate for life.

Technology keeps on changing how we live. And that, the only possession we have that keeps us going is our potentials. Students therefore have to take opportunities of new learning initiatives and improve upon what they have already. The job market keeps on changing. What students learn at school should therefore be geared towards preparing them for needs of the community. This calls for dynamic and relevant curriculum.

As an educator, I am happy to hear of changes being made by the governments of both Ghana and Ontario in the school curriculum to



meet the needs of our students to prepare them adequately for national development. Those changes in their school curriculum could be described as humble beginnings of making the school curriculum more relevant to the needs of the changing world.

Ghana in September 2019, embarked upon a new standards-based curriculum for kindergarten to Class 6 in primary schools. This curriculum embodied the best practices from all over the world, and focuses on making Ghanaian children confident, innovative, creative-thinking, digitally-literate, well-rounded, patriotic citizens. Mathematics, Science, Reading, Writing and Creativity are, therefore, at the heart of this new curriculum.

In Ontario, it is reported that for the past six years college graduates have overtaken university graduates in securing better employment. This is partly due to the nature of courses offered at the college which are more hands-on and meets the present needs of the community.

Rising Graduate Unemployment in Ghana:

World Bank report on Ghana in 2016 laments the growing youth unemployment in Ghana. It says 48% of Ghanaian youth are jobless.

The report reveals, “In Ghana, youth are less likely than adults to be working: in 2012, about 52% of people aged 15-24 were employed (compared to about 90% for the 25-64 population), a third were in school, 14% were inactive and 4% were unemployed actively looking for job. Young women in the same age group are particularly disadvantaged and have much higher inactivity rates than men: 17% of young female are inactive as opposed to 11% of males,”

It recommended that “government must work towards equipping the youth with relevant skills through the

educational system.”

Obviously, policymakers are confused about what the real issues are and what, possibly could be done about them. It must be noted here that Ghana is not the only country battling with the rise in graduate unemployment.

Ghana now has free Senior High School education to help all her citizens of school-going age to access secondary education. This means there will be more High School graduates for our Universities and Colleges than before the free secondary education was introduced in the country. To curb the growing graduate unemployment in the country, the school curriculum ought to be reshaped to cater for the needs of the Ghanaian community. Numeracy and literacy, science and technology, visual arts and performing arts, social studies and vocational studies must all be given respectable emphasis in the

development of the school curriculum.

The other big factor that influences quality education is well trained and adequately motivated teacher. It is obvious that, well-motivated and remunerated teacher is at the centre of our quality education and comprehensive teacher policy in any country that seeks development and advancement in technology.

The fact is that, there is always the need to maintain the professionalism of teachers through adequate incentives and continuous professional development.

Our communities are undergoing radical changes as technology advances. Schools, colleges and universities ought to acknowledge such changes and make what students are taught in these formal institutions of learning more relevant to the needs of the community

Six coup plotters sentenced to death; ACP Agordzo, two others acquitted

The High Court has convicted six of the alleged coup plotters for counts of conspiracy to commit high treason and committing high treason.

The Court has, however, acquitted Assistant Commissioner of Police Benjamin Agordzo, Colonel Samuel Kodzo Gameli and one other junior military officer, Corporal Seidu Abubakar.

The six convicted for plotting a coup have been sentenced to death by hanging.

The Six persons including three soldiers are; Donya Kafui, aka Ezor (a blacksmith) and Bright Alan Debrah Ofose (a fleet manager), were found guilty of conspiracy to commit treason and treason, while Johannes Zikpi (a civilian employee of the Ghana Armed Forces) was found guilty of conspiracy to commit high treason.

The three soldiers – Warrant Officer II Esther Saan Dekuwine, Lance Corporal Ali Solomon, and Corporal Sylvester Akanpewon, were found guilty of conspiracy to commit high treason.

Wednesday’s judgment date was fixed on November 22, 2023, after the parties had all filed their

respective written submissions.

Dr. Frederick Yao Mac-Palm, the Chief Executive Officer of Citadel Hospital (now deceased) and ACP Dr. Agordzo together with eight others were charged variously on April 24, 2021, for conspiracy to high treason, abetment to high treason and high treason.

Dr Mac Palm (A1- now Deceased), Donya Kafui alias Ezor (A2), Bright Allan Debrah Ofose alias Bright Alan Yeboah (A3), Johannes Zikpi (A4), Warrant Officer Class Two Esther Saan Dekuwine (A6), Cpl Seidu Abubakar (A7), Lance Corporal Ali Solomon (A8) and Cpl Sylvester Akanpewon (A9) were charged for conspiracy to commit high and high treason.

Col. Samuel Kodzo Gameli (A5) and ACP Dr Benjamin Agordzo (A10) have each been charged for abetment.

All 10 accused (then) pleaded not guilty and have been granted bail while standing trial.

However, following the death of Dr Mac-Palm (A1) who was then in the witness box giving testimony, his evidence was deleted from the records after his passing away was confirmed to the Court. **CNR**

World Bank approves \$300m for Ghana to strengthen macroeconomic stability

The World Bank has approved a \$300 million Development Policy Operation for Ghana. The First Resilient Recovery Development Policy Financing is a critical contribution by the Bank's International Development Association (IDA) to help Ghana's economic recovery and support the country's resilient and inclusive growth.

"The Government of Ghana remains committed to restoring macroeconomic stability and to the implementation of lasting reforms to set the economy on a path of strong long-term sustainable growth and transformation. The disbursement of this \$300 million Development Policy Financing, the first in a series of three, will play a vital role in easing Ghana's fiscal constraints, sustaining the momentum of economic recovery while protecting the poor and vulnerable," said Ken Ofori-Atta, Minister of Finance for Ghana.

The approval of this financing package follows last week's agreement in principle by the Official Creditors' Committee under the G20 Common Framework on the key parameters of the proposed debt restructuring for Ghana.

The agreement, which is consistent with the Joint World Bank-International Monetary Fund Debt Sustainability Framework, represents a critical milestone toward restoring debt sustainability.

"Restoring fiscal and debt sustainability, bolstering growth prospects, curbing inflation, and protecting the most vulnerable – measures supported by this financing – are urgent priorities for Ghana. They are also essential steps to allow the country to attract more foreign investment, revitalize its domestic private sector, build resilience against climate change, and improve the quality

of life of its people," said Ousmane Diagana, World Bank Vice President for Western and Central Africa.

The Resilient Recovery Development Policy Operation is the first in a series of three operations of \$300 million each and part of a broad World Bank engagement for crisis response and resilience in Ghana. Its objectives are to: 1) restore fiscal sustainability; 2) support financial sector stability and private sector development; 3) improve energy sector financial discipline; and 4) strengthen social and climate resilience.

Specific reforms supported by this financing series include strengthening domestic revenue mobilization, controlling expenditures, safeguarding financial sector stability, removing barriers to private investment, setting the energy sector on a sounder financial and operational footing, strengthening the country's social protection system, and mainstreaming climate adaptation and mitigation across policies.

The World Bank's International Development Association (IDA), established in 1960, helps the world's poorest countries by providing grants and low to zero-interest loans for projects and programs that boost economic growth, reduce poverty, and improve poor people's lives. IDA is one of the largest sources of assistance for the world's 74 poorest countries, 39 of which are in Africa. Resources from IDA bring positive change to the 1.3 billion people who live in IDA countries. Since 1960, IDA has provided \$458 billion to 114 countries.

Annual commitments have averaged about \$29 billion over the last three years (FY19-FY21), with about 70 percent going to Africa. The World Bank

Ghana to end 2024 with 15.0% inflation rate, 8.0% in 2025

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is projecting a year-end inflation rate of 15% for 2024, and it anticipates an 8.0% inflation rate at the end of 2025, 2026, and 2027.

This suggests a deceleration in the rising prices of goods and services this year and a substantial reduction over the next three years.

These insights are detailed in the IMF's latest document titled "Ghana: Selected Economic and Financial Indicators, 2022-28."

In 2023, year-on-year inflation experienced a notable decline by 30.4 percentage points, reaching 23.2% in December.

In January 2023, Ghana's inflation rate was recorded at 53.6%.

The Ghana Statistical Service reported that food inflation played a

significant role in driving down overall inflation, registering a rate of 28.7% in December 2023, compared to 32.2% in November 2023. Non-food inflation also decreased to 18.7% in December 2023 from 21.7% in November 2023.

Breaking down inflation further, locally produced items saw an inflation rate of 23.8% in December 2023, while imported items recorded 21.9%.

Six divisions recorded inflation rates higher than the national average, including Alcoholic Beverages, Tobacco and Narcotics (38.2%); Personal Care, Social Protection, and Miscellaneous Goods and Services (31.1%); Food and Non-Alcoholic Beverages (28.7%); Restaurants and Accommodation Services (28.0%); Furnishings, Household Equipment, and Routine Household Maintenance (26.9%); and Recreation, Sports, and Culture (24.9%). classfmonline.com

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IMMIGRATION AND SOCIAL ISSUES

By: James A. Kwaateng, B.A. (Hons), LLB (Hons)

CANADIAN GOVERNMENT'S TOUGH STANCE ON SPONSORSHIP OF PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS

This topic is being revisited because of the confusion and frustration generated by the newly introduced process and rules regarding sponsorship of parents and grandparents. As indicated in the earlier article, it is permissible for a Canadian citizen, a permanent resident of Canada and a person registered in Canada as an Indian under the Canadian Indian Act to sponsor his or her own parents and grandparents related by blood or adoption.



The spouse or common-law partner of the parent or grandparent being sponsored can be included in the application as a dependent relative. Additionally, sponsors can include their brothers and sisters or half brothers and sisters or step-brothers and step-sisters in the application **if** they qualify as dependent children of the principal applicant.

Like all forms of immigration sponsorships, sponsors must meet certain conditions of eligibility, the first of which is being a permanent resident or citizen of Canada above the age of eighteen years. A sponsor

must provide a proof of income to demonstrate capability to support the persons being sponsored. And among other things, the sponsor must not be in jail, prison or penitentiary; must not have defaulted in payment of immigration loan, a performance bond or court-ordered support payments; must not have defaulted in any sponsorship agreement; must not be an undischarged bankrupt; must not be receiving social assistance for a reason other than disability; must not have

been convicted of a violent criminal offence or any offence against a relative or any sexual offence inside or outside Canada and must not be under a removal order.

The process of sponsoring parents and grandparents has changed. Under the current system, the first step to sponsor your parents or grandparents is to fill out **an interest to sponsor form**. This form is available at the beginning of the year for only a limited time after which submission of the form will be closed.

At the second stage, Immigration will **invite** potential sponsors to submit a complete application. It is at this time that you complete an application package, pay the necessary fees and submit the application. The complete application should get to Immigration within 60 days of receiving the invitation.

The current minimum necessary income for sponsoring parents and grandparents is the existing Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) amount plus 30 percent of it. The period for demonstrating the minimum necessary income has extended from one year to three years. Thus, sponsors will be required to demonstrate that they meet the new income threshold for the three consecutive tax years prior to submitting the sponsorship application. This, as opposed to 12 months that used to be the case, will assure the Government that sponsors have income stability and the financial means to provide for the basic needs of the sponsored parents and grandparents. This assurance is further enhanced by the fact that under the new plan, evidence of income for eligibility purposes is confined to Canada Revenue Agency notices of assessment.

The sponsorship undertaking period for parents and grandparents has been extended from 10 to 20 years. This means sponsors and co-signers (if applicable) will be responsible for

repaying any supplementary health care costs or provincial social assistance benefits paid to the parent and grandparent and their accompanying family members within sponsorship validity period of 20 years, and not 10 years.

While the foregoing measures do not benefit the sponsor and the sponsored relative, it is presumed the lengthened sponsorship undertaking will protect Canadian taxpayers by compelling the sponsors to shoulder financial responsibilities associated with the care and upkeep of their sponsored aged parents and grandparents and their accompanying dependent children.

Notwithstanding the increasingly tough process and measures being adopted in respect of such applications, the Government still places a cap on acceptance of new applications for sponsorships of parents and grandparents. The newly-adopted tough measures however do not seem to have had the dissuasive effect the policy makers might have anticipated. Children and grandchildren still struggle to sponsor their parents and grandparents in large numbers.

Sponsorships of parents and grandparents are becoming increasingly complex due to the ongoing changes to the process, laws and regulations. Contact immigration law professionals for advice and assistance whenever you deem it necessary.

James A. Kwaateng, is an Immigration Law practitioner with offices located at 168A Oakdale Road, Suite 4, Toronto, Ontario. For thorough discussion of your immigration and related social and legal issues, contact him at telephone number (416) 743-2758 for an appointment.

What enforcement power does the International Court of Justice have in South Africa's genocide case against Israel?

cont'd from pg. 9

Court of Justice moved at a glacial pace in reaching a final decision in the Bosnia-Serbia case, it has shown that it can move more quickly when addressing mass violence. The judges did issue provisional measures calling for the prevention of violence in the Myanmar and Russia cases.

However, there is little indication that the International Court of Justice's provisional measures eased Myanmar's crackdown on the Rohingya. Similarly, the ICJ's provisional measures calling on Russia to halt its invasion of Ukraine has had no apparent effect.

This International Court of Justice could call for the Israeli military to end or curtail its conduct in Gaza, or to ease the flow of much-needed humanitarian aid for Palestinians, for example. This could put considerable international pressure on Israel. It could also push Israel's strongest allies, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, to put more pressure on Israel.

What does the ICJ's track record on genocide tell us about this current case?

In the first case of this kind, in 1993, Bosnia instituted proceedings against Serbia, which was then part of the former republic of Yugoslavia, for alleged genocide.

The International Court of Justice's eventual ruling in 2007 in the Serbia

case was controversial. The court ruled that genocide was committed in the Bosnian war but that the government of Serbia was not directly responsible for it. Instead, the court ruled that the Serbian government failed to prevent genocide in Srebrenica.

Srebrenica was the eastern, Muslim enclave in Bosnia that Bosnian-Serb military forces overran in 1995, murdering around 8,000 Muslim boys and men.

The court also found the Serbian government violated the Genocide Convention by failing to arrest former Bosnian Serb Gen. Ratko Mladic, then wanted for genocide by the U.N. International Criminal Tribunal in the former Yugoslavia.

That judgment by the International Court of Justice was a big blow and disappointment to many Bosnian Muslims and global human rights activists.

How long could it take the ICJ to determine whether Israel committed genocide?

It could take a number of years. The Bosnia-Serbia case took 14 years. It is unclear if the South Africa-Israel case would have to wait for a final judgment to first be rendered in the Gambia-Myanmar and Ukraine-Russia cases, which have not concluded.

The Conversation

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How to stay hopeful in a world seemingly beyond saving

As world leaders embark upon yet another COP climate conference, it can be easy to be cynical, afraid or overwhelmed by the sheer scale of the impacts that climate change is having (and will continue to have), upon our world.

After all, the realities of rising sea levels and more frequent and severe storms are scary prospects.

However, along with the bad, it is also essential to recognize the good, such as the recent missive from the International Energy Agency indicating that we might still be able to limit global temperatures to 1.5 degrees Celsius due to record growth in green technologies.

Why should we care about good news in a world so clearly doomed? Do these not distract us from more pressing matters? Simply put, a lack of good news is bad for our health and causes many to assume all is lost, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy which hinders effective climate action.

A dark world?

Journalist David Wallace-Wells opens his book, *The Uninhabitable Earth* with the line “It’s worse, much worse than you think.” This sentiment typifies the constant diet of bad news which over the past decades has instilled fear and anxiety within a great proportion of society, especially the young. It is manifested as eco-anxiety and explains why in a recent survey of 10,000 youth and children across the globe, 75 per cent of the respondents thought the future was frightening with over half feeling helpless or powerless. One in four of these respondents are hesitant to have children for fear of bringing a child into a threatening or doomed world.

If we add to these sentiments research showing that trust in institutions globally has decreased over the past years then the picture seems even bleaker. However, a 2019 Pew poll in the United States suggested that 71 per cent of respondents even have a decline in interpersonal trust.

This reality echoes the symptom of distress that professor of communications George Gerbner coined in the 1970s as “mean world syndrome.” Such a state views violence and self-centredness as being imbedded in society which, not surprisingly, leads to increased fear and mistrust about the world and the future. This scenario is cause for concern for two important reasons.

First, while some level of fear can spur action it can also lead to eco-paralysis. Eco-paralysis is the hyper anxiety that can leave people feeling hopeless and without agency, sentiments likely felt above by the 10,000 youth.

Such fear can cause more than apathy, as Gerbner warned long ago. It can also leave individuals feeling, as he says, “more dependent, more easily

manipulated and controlled, more susceptible to deceptively simple, strong, tough measures and hard-line postures...[who]...may welcome repression if it promises to relieve their insecurities.”

An authoritarian world will not be the answer to our climate crisis, for it is precisely civil society that spurs healthy change.

The second reason for concern over this bleak representation of the world is that such a depiction is not accurate. Yes, it is true — to continue the example above — that worldwide democracy has eroded in many instances, which is not conducive to a just transition to a post-fossil-fuel world. But democracy has also shown some remarkable successes with regard to civil liberties and political participation in countries like South Africa, Indonesia and various other states such as Benin, Botswana, Ghana, Namibia, Mauritius, and Senegal.

These instances should remind us that our negative perceptions of a “mean world” are not always founded, which can foster hope, something we dearly need.

Negative preconceptions

Howard Frumkin, professor emeritus of Washington University School of Public Health, reminds us that hope is central to human flourishing. Hope, however, is not an easy notion to understand.

Frumkin conceives hope as a perception that we have agency or, more simply, the feeling that we are capable of taking action. Add to this psychological research showing that agency can be learned, even emboldened, from watching others, and we can see why environmental thinker David Orr defines hope as “a verb with its sleeves rolled up.”

What this tells us is that if we are to address climate change, we will need to hear and witness the myriad stories of individuals and groups who, with agency, are actively pursuing sustainable futures.

Take the work of Project Drawdown, a non-profit organization that uses science-based climate strategies to stop and even reverse climate change. Its findings are noteworthy: chief among the strategies to address climate change is ensuring that girls across the globe receive an education.

Project Drawdown’s research shows that with more education girls are more likely to manage their reproductive health, realize higher wages, have fewer incidences of disease and contribute positively to the nutrition of their families. All outcomes which have clear societal, individual and environmental benefits.

Looking at public perceptions of the state of girls’ education around

cont’d on pg. 18

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Part II

By: Eddie Twumasi-Smith, (P.Eng, PMP, CPA, MBA)

Last month's topic was on triggers of CRA tax audits and this month, the focus will be on how to deal and manage the process of CRA tax audit.

Dealing with the CRA Audit Process:

A CRA audit, or a tax audit as it is commonly known, is a review of an individual tax return. The purpose is to ensure all of the information provided is accurate and in compliance with current tax laws. This process involves reviewing all of the documents submitted with the tax return. As well as supplementary information such as bank statements and receipts.

Depending on the size and complexity of the tax return being audited, this can be a highly involved and time-consuming process. Ultimately, an audit serves to ensure that individuals are paying their fair share of taxes. While doing everything they can to follow government regulations.

If you have been selected for a CRA audit, it is important to cooperate fully with your tax agent. This will ensure the smoothest possible process for everyone involved. Generally speaking, communication is key when it comes to CRA audits. A big no-no is dodging calls and letters, this will only make matters worse for you!

The Income Tax Act grants to CRA a number of arbitrary powers. The Minister does not have to accept your return as filed. In fact, under Section 152(7) of the income tax act, CRA has the right to change your tax return if they don't agree with the way you've filed it.

They can change your income figures, your deductions or your credits prior to the expirations of a normal re-assessment period, which is three years.

Your tax-filing fate, therefore can rest with an auditor who perceives your tax and personal affairs quite differently than you do.

1. Do respond promptly to CRA phone calls and/or correspondence. Ignoring them will not make them go away. It will only make them more intolerant later when you try to negotiate with them.

2. Do cooperate by providing them with the information they request. Ask them why they are requesting the information?. The tax department does have the right to review your records on your tax return. However, they do not have the right to engage in a "fishing expedition".

3. Do offer to have the tax auditor review your records at your accountant's office. This will reduce your disruption and may make the audit go smoother.

4. Do attempt to negotiate on grey or interpretative matters. Where the rules are not "black" or "white", the auditor may be willing to give a little, depending on the circumstances.

5. Do seek professional tax help. Not all audits go smoothly and mistakes can be made. Misinterpretation of the facts is quite common. A tax professional can help you make sure the auditor



understands your business and your transactions in the best possible light.

6. Don't provide more information than requested unless it helps your case. As mentioned earlier, ask what the auditor needs and cooperate. There is no sense in making a career out of the audit of your business.

7. Don't accept the word of the auditor as gospel. The auditor's interpretation of certain legislation may be right, but then again, it may be wrong. Check with your tax accountant or ask to speak with the auditor's supervisor if you feel that there may be an error.

8. Don't delay in filing a notice of objection. You don't necessarily want to file a notice of objection if you have an open dialogue with the tax auditor on some contentious points. However, keep in mind your deadlines and make sure you file your objection before you run out of time.

Audit experience is rarely a pleasant one. However, it doesn't have to be painful. If you follow the rules and are not too aggressive, you can win this round with a little bit of luck.

Your Tax Audit Strategy:

Have a winning strategy and not a fighting strategy:

Section 152(8) of the income tax act makes the assumptions that CRA is correct in its assessments unless those assessments are challenged by the taxpayer.

While the burden of proof is on you to disprove CRA's assessment or reassessment of your tax return, it is also your duty to defend your right to pay only the correct amount of tax and no more.

It is important you know this and also that it is your right to arrange your affairs within the framework of the law so as to pay the least taxes allowed by the law.

- A winning strategy will be to provide or produce all tax documentation required in the audit letter, on time and in meticulous order or if it is impossible to complete within the timeline, a request for an extension.
- A review of precedents set in tax law regarding similar issues required in the audit letter.

- A review of your rights to appeal processes: Use the Form RC199 Voluntary Disclosures Program. CRA allows one time opportunity to make a full and complete voluntary disclosure and may grant interest and penalty relief.

- Right to Adjust prior filed returns. File Form T1-ADJ.

- Right to Taxpayer Relief Provisions- any unusual hardships, & beyond control, illness natural disaster etc.

- Right to object to the assessment or reassessment, adjust returns for errors or omissions, use the tax relief provisions or in cases where information was previously not disclosed, incomplete and inaccurate or use the voluntary disclosure program etc.

- Notice of Objection: This is a formal objection to the chief of appeals at the local tax services office. It must be filed within 1 year after the taxpayer filing due date or 90 days after the day of the mailing of the notice of assessment or reassessment. You may also appeal directly to the Tax Court of Canada if CRA has not responded to the Notice of Objection within 90 days.

I hope you don't have to go through this, but if and when it "rains", just make sure you have the coverage and understanding of your rights and responsibilities. All the best!

For any views or comments, I can be reached via email: eddiesmith77@gmail.com

Vice President Bawumia Commissions Ghana's 2nd Fire Service Academy and Training School in Wungu

The commissioning of this new Fire Academy and Training School at Wungu, marks an important milestone for the Ghana National Fire Service

The state-of-the-art facility, with a three-storey administration block, classrooms, male and female dormitories and a dining hall, and equipped with modern training equipment, is the first ever fire academy and training school in the north and the 2nd in Ghana, after the only one in James Town, Accra.

The school will undertake a wide-range and comprehensive training programs, including rescue, evacuation, decontamination, fire prevention, fire suppression, rescue operations, hazardous materials management, as well as training of bushfire volunteers with skills and knowledge in the area of bush fire management.

Speaking at the commissioning, Vice President Bawumia, who is also the flagbearer of the NPP for this year's elections, said, the opening of the training school, demonstrates the commitment of the NPP Government to expanding Ghana's fire training capacity from what has existed since independence.

"The commissioning of this new Fire Academy and Training School at Wungu, marks an important milestone for the Ghana National Fire Service, the Wungu community and for the nation as a whole," Dr. Bawumia said.

"When we assumed office in 2017, there was only one fire training school in Ghana at James Town. Given the importance of fire service in Ghana, it was important to increase the number of training School in Ghana. So we made the decision to increase it to 4."

The commissioning of the Wungu Fire Academy and Training School, Dr. Bawumia noted, is the first of three new training schools the NPP Government is building, with the second also set to be commissioned.

"This commissioning means that this will be the 2nd Fire Service Training School in Ghana. Very soon, we will Commission the 3rd in Duayaw Nkwanta and the 4th will be commissioned before the end of this year," he said.

While touting the NPP's remarkable efforts at adding three training schools to the nation's only training school since independence, he also highlighted the significant increase in fire service personnel, as well as the government's commitment to continuous re-tooling of the Fire Service.

"What this means is that in 60 years of independence, we had only 1 fire service training School. Now we are going to have 4 under our government," Dr. Bawumia said.

"When we came into office, officers were 7000. Under 7 years of the NPP, we have increased the staff strength of the fire service from 7000, to 15,000," he added.

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Association of Concerned Guyanese (ACG) honor Ned Blair and others during 50th Anniversary celebration

By Emmanuel Ayiku, Toronto, ON

Guyanese born Canadian Ned Blair has been awarded outstanding Community Service Award in the ACG 50th Anniversary celebration GALA held last year November 18th at the Panemonte Banquet & Convention Centre, Toronto.

Ned Blair a patriotic Guyanese who has contributed more than 50 years of service to the Guyanese community in Toronto. He has helped in the formation of more than 15 organizations, including the Alliance of Guyanese Canadian Organization. In 1993, as President of the AGCO, he and Wilfred McAlmont met with Danny Doobay and Carl Bassoo of the ACG and agreed on a program to co-host national events in the community, culminating in both Republic and Independence celebrations that year. Ned's leadership and determination for the AGCO to

work with the ACG was not without controversy, as some community members were not ready for such an undertaking. However, through Ned's astute leadership and with proactive networking and outreach by the ACG, a unified approach to the observance of Guyana Independence was established and continues to today. Ned has been a friend to the ACG for decades, and his friendship and support was recognized.

Ned Blair is also a Vice-president of the National Ethnic Media Council of Canada (NEPMCC). Blair still serves as president and vice-President of many organizations and to date, over 800 youth have benefited from the many programs that he established.

Some of his projects were later expanded to include other kinds of industrial training, especially tool and die, electrical and motor mechanics.

After successful treatment for prostate cancer, he formed the African Caribbean Cancer Forum in 1999 and organized an awareness session, annually, for minorities, with assistance from the Canadian Cancer Society, and speaking participation from experts at Princess Margaret and Sunnybrook Cancer Centers.

Blair is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Anthurium Foundation Award for Cancer Awareness, Harry Jerome Award for Community Service, the Lions Award for Lion of the Year, Father of the Year, and the President's Award and the Guyana Award for Community Service. Ned Blair is also a recipient of Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee Medal.

The Ned and Myrna Blair Scholarship Foundation offers \$1,000 every year to a student for African and Caribbean Studies at U of T.



Emmanuel Ayiku, Ghanaian News Publisher with Ned Blair



Ned Blair



From right Ned Blair, Myrna Blair and a friend



From left: Chris Campbell, Ned Blair, Comfort Ayiku & Emmanuel Ayiku



Ned Blair (4th from right) with Ghanaian News and Guyanese community



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Beauty Outshines Them All: 348 Hours and Still Cooking

By Ebenezer Amankwah, Brampton, ON

Beauty Obasuyi, the Nigerian-Canadian chef, is on the brink of shattering the current record by extending the longest individual cooking marathon by an additional 220 hours.

The entrepreneur, who is the mastermind behind “Naija Jollof”, a restaurant chain with five locations across Ontario, initially planned to undertake an eight-day cooking marathon. This feat would have surpassed the current record of 120 hours held by Alan Fisher.

However, a 226-hour cooking time set by Ghanaian Chef Faila prompted Beauty to reconsider her plan, leading to the extension.

As of press time, Beauty Obasuyi has already clocked in 328 hours.

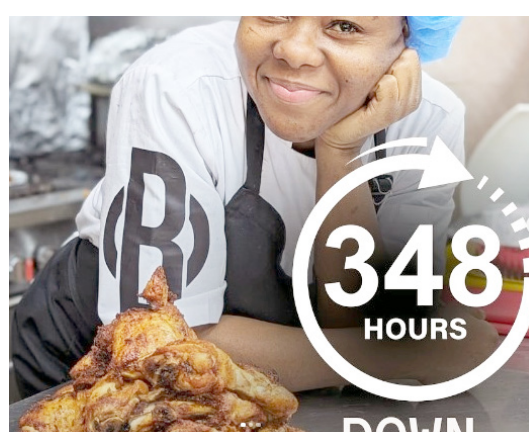
Stay tuned to Ghanaian News for updates.



Beauty with Ghanaian News Editor Emmanuel Ayiku



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Up Close with 2023 NATIONAL BEST FARMER

By Russell Quarcoo, Accra, Ghana

The agricultural sector provides a solid backbone to the economy. The achievement and sustenance of food security and food sufficiency in the country, it worthy or note that our gallant farmers are deservedly appreciated and recognized for their hard work.

The immense role women play in the agricultural value chain is also worthy of note, it therefore a great feat when we have a woman being adjudged the NATIONAL BEST FARMER.

57-year old MADAM CHARITY AKORTIA from the Agona West Municipality in the Central Region was crowned as the National Best Farmer for 2023. For her prize, Charity Akortia received a cash prize of GH¢1 million sponsored by the Agriculture Development Bank.

Theophilus Ezenrane Ackah from the Western Region was adjudged the first runner up. He took home a high horsepower tractor head, trailer, a set of implements, and a boom sprayer.

His prize was sponsored by the Ghana Exim Bank.

The second runner up award was taken by Kwaku Yeboah Asumah from the Bono East Region.

His prize was an MF tractor head, trailer, and set of implements. This was sponsored Stanbic Bank.

The awardees were honored at the 39th National Farmers Day Celebration Awards Night held at the University of Mines and Technology Auditorium at Tarkwa in the Western Region on Friday night (Dec 1).

It is remarkable that a woman has been recognized in this enviable feat. The Ghanaiannews Canada got the opportunity for an exclusive with Madam Charity Akortia. What follows is insightful conversation with Mr. Russell Quarcoo, of Ghanaiannews Canada

Ghanaiannews Canada: *Congratulations!*

Ghanaiannews Canada: *How does it feel being adjudged the NATIONAL BEST FARMER?*

Madam Charity Akortia: I was so delighted and grateful.

Ghanaiannews Canada: *Briefly tell us about your background and how you ventured into agriculture*

Madam Charity Akortia: I am from Peki in the Volta region, a child raised from a farming home. During secondary school, I was working at the then Peki settlement farm to get funds to support my education. In addition I was also engaging in small Okro farms on weekends during the season to support my education, so after training college I made a decision to enter into vegetable production, i.e. raising of local vegetables for sale until I met a PPR (plants protection Regulation) officer of the Ministry Food and of Agriculture, Mr. Ramson Cotto who introduced me into seed production, fortunately my husband Mr. John Amenu is also into Agriculture, and as result gave me a lot of technical advice. Due to the passion and financial returns I was earning that was far above what I was earning in terms of salary as a teacher, I finally decided to venture fully into agriculture as a business.

Ghanaiannews Canada: *What motivated you into farming?*

Madam Charity Akortia: Well primarily I would say it was basically because the financial returns was rewarding. And that made me decide to fully take it up as a business. Let me also add that, when I was a child I accompanied and assisted my parents to the farm. So I would say the desire the farm started early on when I was a child and it has not left me since. So growing up I realized that when I venture into farming full time, I can employ the youth who are unemployed to work on my farm or to support fellow women. Additionally, the common held perception was that farming was the preserve of men so I decided the challenge myself to venture into farming commercially as a woman.

Ghanaiannews Canada: *Before your significant transition as CEO of Greenworth farms, what were some the challenges that affected your farming experience from the onset?*

Madam Charity Akortia: Ah... Well, there were a lot of challenges, but I can only mention a few of them. The first is the issue of land acquisition. How to get land to start the work. Secondly, is the issue of not getting any form of financial support or access to funds in the form of loans as a peasant farmer. Then also is the non-availability of inputs, like seeds is another problem. In addition to these challenges, it was also difficult to get good human resource by way of trusted employees to work on the farm, as a result there were incidence of theft among other issues made it quite challenging.

Also was the issue of irrigation that we had to access to irrigate the crops.

How did I make a headway? First with the issue of land, I would say my farms are scattered at all places so to speak. To wit, wherever I get the land and it's suitable and the price is negotiable, I acquire it. Therefore to start with I had 15 acres of land, 10 acres, 2 acres of land until I had large acreage of land making overall enterprise quite difficult.

Issue of Access to Finance

Also regarding the financial challenge, what I did as I started the vegetable business was to reinvest the returns into the business because the financial institutions were not ready to support a peasant farmer.



Then again concerning the human resource challenge, sometime I had to go to as far as Burkina Faso to get laborers because they are somehow trusted than the local farm hands, I also get some few hands as leaders or foremen to supervise the work. This eventually made the work a bit easier as compared to how I started initially at which time they take money and no work is done, and I had to spend precious time chasing them all over. But with this strategy the whole operation became manageable.

Overcoming the problem of Theft

What my workers did was to organize themselves and watch overnight on the farms. You at Agona here in the central region, Thursdays are market days and those are the days the thieves go the farms to steal the farm produce to go and sell on the market, so we organize checkups at the farm gate and that significantly reduced the incidence of thievery to a very low level

Improvising to irrigate the crops

What we did was to have hand dug wells on the farms to irrigate the crops. Unfortunately we realized the water at some places were salty, thus we had to organize for water tankers to bring water from nearby water bodies the farms to water the crops and also be able to perform other tasks like spraying pesticides to protect the crops before harvest. This was how I managed those challenges at the onset.

Ghanaiannews Canada: *Your farm is diversified, tell us how you are able to coordinate affairs on all the various crops and animal husbandry that you do?*

*

Madam Charity Akortia: What I do is. I have employees in charge of the various farms who report on a daily basis to the General supervisor, who reports to me on a daily and weekly basis. I also have a financial secretary who is basically in charge of all finance matters, i.e. payment of salaries, statutory payments like SSNIT etc...

We have an excel spreadsheet for reporting, that makes it easier to track progress and also monitor and forecast management activities on the various farms. In fact members of my family are involved. My husband is a strong pillar. He assists in coordinating and monitoring affairs on the various farms.

My daughter is into processing, my son also handles book keeping, accounts and Finance. So without the support of my family. It would have been very difficult for me

Helping out in the Community through CSR

Ghanaiannews Canada: *You are obviously a pillar in your community, please tell us some of the CSR support activities you engage in to help the community.*

Madam Charity Akortia: Yes, eerm. I provide local vegetable seeds and seedlings that is pepper, garden eggs and maize to markets around my area and also beyond to other districts. I also engage women in training on best farming practices, and agro processing periodically. I also support schools with learning materials like books and pens and also eggs to augment their protein needs.

I also donate food items to the needy especially widows in the community. In addition to that I also support Osamkrom prison camp inmates with food items. Last year for instance I registered 72 inmates on the National Health Insurance scheme. That's not all I also donated Nsuamyem basic school with 600 exercise books. In the year 2020 I made hand dug wells for communities who experienced water crisis in Mensakrom where some of my farms were located.

Ghanaiannews Canada: *What will be your advice to anyone who wants to venture into farming?*

Madam Charity Akortia: First I would say that, they shouldn't see it as a punishment as is perceived especially by the youth. They should see it as a viable business venture. One in which if one is dedicated and prudent it will eventually yield benefits. One needs to identify the interest, consult the MOFA. (Ministry of Food & Agriculture) look for

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How to stay hopeful in a world seemingly beyond saving

cont'd from pg. 13

the globe reveals an important phenomenon: people doubt such a goal is feasible. A 2018 study consisting of thousands of surveys across the globe found that when asked "In all low-income countries across the world today, how many girls finish primary school?" most people responded only 20 per cent, when in actuality, 60 per cent do.

Simply put, our beliefs on the education of girls are not only negative but perilously wrong and this inability to conceive of the goal being possible presents another barrier to effective action on addressing global problems. From girls' education to climate change, negative perceptions of futility and impossibility have serious consequences.

Staying hopeful

Stating the good news does not mean we deny the bad. The trick in stating the good news is not in ignoring the darker realities of our time, for example, by pitching naïve or ideological optimism which some think tanks or populist leaders would prefer us to embrace. Such thinking only delays action and maintains a business-as-

An overview of Dialectical Behaviour Therapy produced by University of California San Francisco.

We need, instead, to think dialectically. Dialectical thinking has us hold on to seemingly opposite realities simultaneously, such as the truth of still-too-few girls receiving education and that already 60 per cent of girls in low-income countries today are completing primary school with many working to make that number much higher. Or that there can be positive climate news in a world on fire.

The hope we need today is dark, to be sure. It acknowledges the tragic realities of our time *and* also seeks out, learns from, and champions its successes. It is an active hope upheld by the conviction that reality can be paradoxical, both good and bad. Engaging in the act of hope can help us become less terrified about the future and more assured in our belief that it is possible to build a better, and more just, world. We would all do well to remember this if, or indeed when, our leaders disappoint us at COP28.

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Bank of Canada holds interest rate, says future talks could revolve around when to begin cuts

The Bank of Canada held its key interest rate at five per cent Wednesday and signalled it has begun discussing when it should start cutting rates.

“With overall demand in the economy no longer running ahead of supply, governing council’s discussion of monetary policy is shifting from whether our policy rate is restrictive enough to restore price stability, to how long it needs to stay at the current level,” governor Tiff Macklem said in prepared remarks.

The Bank of Canada’s decision to hold its key rate comes as no surprise. Weaker economic growth along with slowing inflation has allowed the central bank to hold its policy rate steady and monitor how the economy is responding to higher rates.

However, economists have been eagerly waiting for any sign from the bank on when it may pivot to rate cuts.

Despite the shift in messaging, Macklem maintained that the central bank is still open to more rate hikes if inflation doesn’t co-operate.

“That doesn’t mean we have ruled out further policy rate increases. If new developments push inflation higher, we may still need to raise rates,” Macklem said.

“But what it does mean is that if the economy evolves broadly in line with the projection we published today, I expect future discussions will be about how long we maintain the policy rate at five per cent.”

The Bank of Canada’s press release on the rate decision also noted that the governing council is still concerned about the stubbornness of elevated inflation.

Canada’s annual inflation rate ticked back up in December to 3.4 per cent as underlying price pressures remained high.

Ahead of Wednesday’s decision, forecasters were widely expecting weakness in the Canadian economy would prompt the central bank to begin cutting interest as early as this spring.

The Bank of Canada’s latest forecasts released today suggest the economy will continue to be weak before rebounding in the second half of the year, while inflation is still expected to return to two per cent in 2025.

Its forecasts are mostly unchanged from October

.The Canadian Press

Toronto could implement new speculation tax on foreign homebuyers starting next year

Foreign buyers who want to purchase a home in Toronto could soon face an even steeper price tag if city council approves a new municipal tax that aims to curb real estate speculation.

If approved, the Municipal Non-Resident Speculation Tax (MNRST), which is on the agenda at next week’s executive committee meeting, would force foreign buyers to pay an additional 10 per cent on the purchase price of a residential property starting in January 2025.

“The primary objective of the MNRST is to safeguard and enhance the availability of residential housing supply and to maintain a level of affordability in the residential real estate market by discouraging international buyers from purchasing property in the City of Toronto, particularly those buyers who do not intend to live in the property, or where the purchase is for purely speculative motives,” a new [staff report](#) read.

The report noted that the municipal tax will “mirror” the province’s Non-Resident Speculation Tax (NRST), which was implemented in 2017 and charges foreign buyers a tax of 25 per cent of the purchase price of certain properties throughout Ontario.

The same exemptions and refunds outlined in the provincial tax will apply to the municipal tax, including a rebate for foreign nationals who become permanent residents of Canada within four years of the purchase date.

The MNRST will not include multi-residential apartment buildings with more than six units, agricultural land, commercial land, or industrial land.

Exemptions will be considered for foreign nations who are nominated under the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program, as well as protected persons, including refugees. Properties jointly purchased by a foreign national and a spouse who is a Canadian citizen, permanent resident, nominee, or protected person will also be excluded from the tax.

The province previously offered specific rebates for international students and foreign nationals working in Ontario but those were phased out in 2022 and therefore will not be included in the municipal policy.

While the goal of the tool is to reduce real estate speculation and not “maximize revenue generation,” it is estimated that it could contribute as much as \$15 million to the city’s coffers in the first year of implementation.

Since the provincial non-resident speculation tax was introduced in 2017, Ontario has collected a total of more than \$1 billion, with about half of this revenue attributable to home purchases in the City of Toronto.

The staff report recommends implementing the tax on Jan. 1, 2025 after a two-year federal ban on the purchase of homes by foreign buyers has lifted.

City staff note that since the federal ban was put in place, provincial NRST revenue collected in 2023 for Toronto properties was down by more than 65 per cent compared to 2022.

Members of the city’s executive committee will discuss the report at the next meeting on Jan. 30. Cp24

Up Close with 2023 NATIONAL BEST FARMER

cont’d from pg. 18

market, and start operation and they will surely make it.

Ghanaiannews Canada: *With regards to policy and the role of women, what will you in your experience advice government to do to ease the drudgery and suffering of women in agriculture?*

Madam Charity Akortia: Women should have equal and quality agricultural training or education. There should be training programs on modern trends and technology in agriculture. Government should provide suitable access to resources to women. Government should connect women in agriculture to women leaders who can mentor, inspire them and also monitor their progress. Women should be recognized and celebrated just as it was done for me as an inspiration and motivation to other women. Women should have specific measures that are tailored to meet their peculiar needs and finally gender biases and stereotypes that limits women from engaging in agriculture must be eliminated.

Ghanaiannews Canada: *What message do you want to deliver to all stakeholders?*

Madam Charity Akortia: Well stakeholders must be engaged to contribute to the planning of efficient agricultural policies in the country to enhance the implementation of sustainable farming practices. Stakeholders in agriculture must work together to achieve common goals in agriculture by engaging with each other through dialogue, collaboration and education.

Final Comments and Appreciation

Madam Charity Akortia: I will like to use this platform to thank the government and MOFA, i.e. the ministry for recognizing my efforts all these years. I will also like to thank my family for their profound support and hard work throughout these years. Finally I would also like to thank my able farm workers without them I could not have achieved this remarkable feat. And all those who wish to go into agriculture especially women, I say with hard work, determination, dedication a lot can be achieved from farming.

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Bank of Ghana acquires over 432,000 oz of gold

The Bank of Ghana (BoG) had acquired a total 432,358 ounces (oz) of gold from Ghana Chamber of Mines (GCM) members as of mid-December 2023, under the Domestic Gold Purchase Programme (DGPP) and voluntary forex sales initiative.

This is equivalent to about 84 percent of the Bank's planned purchases in 2023, and nearly 15 percent of members' planned output in 2023, according to GCM.

BoG's gold purchases are primarily aimed at alleviating depreciation of the local currency and its knock-on effect on inflation.

The Chamber's president, Joshua Mortoti, noted that this is in line with the commitment of GCM's producing members to help government's efforts to speed-up the economy's recovery.

The Chamber, he added, is in the process of collating members' planned gold sales to BoG for 2024, and will facilitate the signing of bilateral agreements between the central bank and mining companies after targets are finalised.

Mr. Mortoti was speaking at a breakfast meeting with the Minister of Lands and Natural Resources – organised by the Chamber in Accra, and also stated that: "In the same vein, members continued to voluntarily give the Bank of Ghana first option to buy forex they intend to sell for the local currency".

The DGPP was announced in 2021 by government to enable BoG have the first right of refusal for all gold mined in the country. It is part of the central bank's plan to build gold reserves to stabilise the cedi.

The decision was also against a background that the central bank had only 8.7 tonnes of gold reserves at end-2021, despite the country being one of the world's leading gold producers.

Announcing the policy decision of the time, Vice President, Dr. Bawumia Mahamudu said: "The central bank will purchase the gold at world market prices and mining companies will export the portion that is not purchased by BoG. Ultimately, once we accumulate enough gold; future borrowing and our currency can be backed by gold. This will stabilise the cedi long-term.

"We must also deepen our industrialisation through value addition to gold; even though Ghana has two gold refineries, neither has London Bullion Market Association (LBMA) certification. This limits our full participation in the gold value chain. We will urgently work toward LBMA certification for our refineries over the next few years," he added.

Also speaking at the breakfast meeting, Minister of Lands and Natural Resources Samuel Abu Jinapor said he continues looking forward to support from the Chamber for various interventions being implemented by government – including value addition, local content and participation, as well as development of mining communities.

He said: "Together, we will achieve the President's vision to make Ghana the mining hub of Africa.

"The ministry remains fully committed to effective and efficient utilisation and management of our country's natural resources, anchored on transparency, integrity and utmost good faith for the Ghanaian people's benefit," he added. thebftonline.com

Canadians worry about quality of health care, have little faith it will improve: poll

Most Canadians don't think the quality of health care in their province is likely to improve, a new survey suggests, despite new federal health accords with several provinces designed to quell the health-care crisis unfolding across Canada.

The poll by Leger comes nearly a year after the federal government offered a \$196-billion health accord to the provinces to increase health funding and address a growing shortage of health-care workers.

Doctors, nurses and other health-care professionals have warned for years about a dangerous lack of health workers, leading to understaffed emergency rooms and a lack of primary care that is felt across the entire health system.

The survey found Canadians are feeling the impact, as 70 per cent of respondents say they worry they won't be able to get good quality medical care if they or a family member need it.

So far, Alberta, British Columbia, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and the Northwest Territories have signed one-on-one deals with the federal government to increase federal health funding and target weak points in their respective systems.

Even as governments show signs of working together to improve the situation, only 17 per cent of poll respondents said they felt the state of health care is likely to improve in the next two years.

Leger's web survey of 1,536 Canadian adults cannot be assigned a margin of error because online polls are not considered truly random samples.

A whopping 87 per cent of people surveyed in Atlantic Canada said they worry they won't be able to get the care they need.

People in Atlantic Canada and Quebec were also more likely to rate their health systems as poor or very poor, at 66 per cent and 51 per cent respectively.

Meanwhile, 46 per cent of people in Alberta and 40 per cent of people in B.C. said their health-care systems were good.

Leger asked people to choose words that come to mind when they think about Canada's health-care systems, 66 per cent chose "long waits," 42 per cent chose "stressed" and 40 per cent chose "failing."

When asked about the shortage of health-care workers, 67 per cent of respondents pointed to poor working conditions and long hours in hospitals.

Forty per cent said the problem was due to health funding cuts, and another 40 per cent blamed retirements during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Last year, provincial premiers clamoured for the prime minister to negotiate a new health funding deal to address the ailing state of their health-care systems.

All provinces except Quebec have signed onto Ottawa's deal in principle.

Provinces have until March to sign a tailored one-on-one deal with Ottawa to access the funding.

The Canadian Press

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Vice President Bawumia Commissions Ghana's 2nd Fire Service Academy and Training School in Wungu

cont'd from pg. 14

The Vice President underscored the importance of firefighting and the difficulties associated with it, hence the need to adequately equip them.

"Firefighting is a critical aspect of emergency response, and having a dedicated facility such as this away from Accra will greatly enhance the training of our firefighters and ensure the delivery of the services provided by the Ghana National Fire Service and ultimately save lives in the country."

"Fire and other incidents can be incredibly devastating, and it is our duty as leaders to ensure that we equip our firefighters with the necessary skills and tools to effectively manage any situation being it fire or other emergency situations," Dr. Bawumia said.

Also present at the ceremony, was the Minister of Interior, Ambrose Dery.

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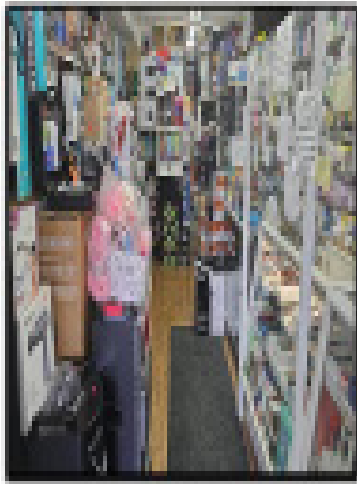
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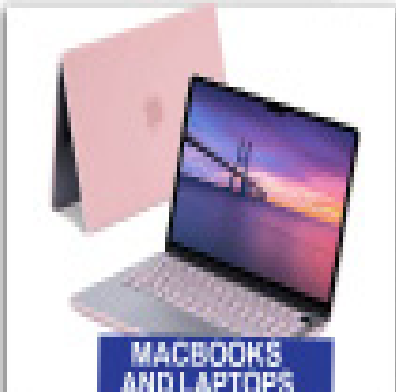


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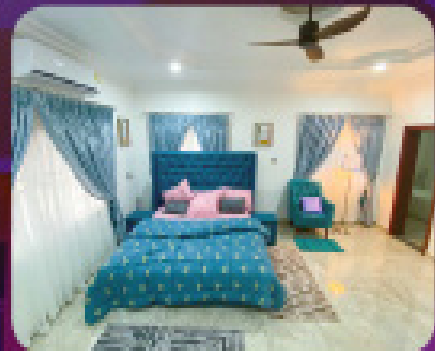
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'Live a Christ-like life in 2024' – Apostle Charles Anokye-Manu

By Ebenezer Amankwah, Toronto, ON

The Head Pastor of the Apostles Continuation Church International's Toronto branch, Pastor Charles Anokye-Manu, has urged church members to be exemplary in their community, allowing others to appreciate God through them.

Apostle Anokye-Manu noted that the lives of some Christians are not worth emulating, making it challenging for them to win souls for Christ. He made these remarks at the church's 31st Night service, which ushered in the New Year.

Citing Matthew 5:13 and Matthew 7:19, Apostle Anokye-Manu emphasized that all Christians must strive to retain their saltiness and bear good fruits to avoid being cut off, as stated in the Bible.



Apostle Charles Anokye-Manu and one of the Elders



Elder Ben (left) and other church Elder

cont'd on pg. 33



Chairman Clement Brakatu (front)



Women Leaders



Elder Kwame, Church Secretary



Cross section of the congregation



Congregation



Some of the Church Elders



Reverends and some church elders



Members and Elders

Community



y in pictures



Evangel Assembly of God hold Christmas Party

By Ebenezer Amankwah, Toronto, ON

The Evangel Assembly of God concluded the year with their annual end-of-year party, filled with music, food, and dance.

Church members, dressed for the occasion, were in high spirits throughout the event. They danced with joy, expressing their gratitude to the Lord for guiding them through the year.

The Head Pastor of the church, Reverend Milton Ofei, attended the event with his wife. He expressed his gratitude to God for protecting the congregation and blessing them with numerous testimonies.

Reverend Milton Ofei predicted that 2024 would bring even more happiness than the previous year and encouraged the members to maintain their faith in the Lord.

The event also included special acknowledgements of individuals who have significantly contributed to the development of the church.



Rev. Milton Ofei (center) and wife Mrs. Priscilla Ofei (2nd left) and some Elders



Rev. Milton Ofei and wife opens the dance floor



Receiving a token of appreciation



D.J.s



Members at dinner



Dancing time



Leaders of Children's Dept showing appreciation



Dinner is served



Kitchen staff



Dancing Time

Living Word Assembly of God End-of-Year Party on December 24, 2023 at the Church premises in pictures



Pastors and some Church Leaders



Church members



Members being served



Church members



Members being served



Church members



Praise and Worship Team



Church members



Church members

2024 New Year's Eve Service Held at COP Calgary

By Staff Reporter, Calgary, AB

Over 300 people gathered at the Church of Pentecost Canada Calgary Worship Center to usher in the new year, 2024. The 2024 New Year's service was a night of praises, worship, thanksgiving, warm fellowship and seeking the face of the Lord to welcome the new year. cont'd on pg. 34



In the ‘big tent’ of free speech, can you be too open-minded?

People often extol the virtue of open-mindedness, but can there be too much of a good thing?

As a [college dean](#), I regularly observe campus controversies about the Israel-Hamas war, race relations and other hot-button issues. Many of these concern free speech – what students, faculty and invited speakers should and shouldn’t be allowed to say.

But free speech disputes aren’t merely about permission to speak. They are about who belongs at the table – and whether there are limits to the viewpoints we should listen to, argue with or allow to change our minds. As a [philosopher](#) who works on “[culture war](#)” issues, I’m particularly interested in what free-speech disputes teach about the value of open-mindedness.

Talking together in the ‘big tent’

Free-speech advocates often find inspiration in the 19th century philosopher John Stuart Mill, who argued for what we might call a “big tent” approach: engaging with a variety of viewpoints, including those that strike you as mistaken. After all, [Mill wrote](#), you could be wrong. And even if you’re right, the clash of opinions can sharpen your reasons.

Some critics believe that Mill’s arguments haven’t worn well, especially in an age of demagoguery and “fake news.” Do I really need to listen to [people who believe the Earth is flat](#)? [Holocaust deniers](#)? My relatives’ crackpot conspiracy theories at the holiday dinner table? Whose benefit would such openness serve?

The primary argument for the big tent approach is rooted in [intellectual humility](#): properly recognizing the limitations to what each of us knows. In one sense, it is a recognition of human fallibility – which, when combined with hubris, can have disastrous results.

More positively, intellectual humility is aspirational: There’s a lot yet to learn. Importantly, intellectual humility does not mean that one lacks moral convictions, let alone the desire to persuade others of those convictions.

Having spent several decades advocating for same-sex marriage – including participating in dozens of campus debates and two [point-counterpoint books](#) – I’m convinced of the value of engagement with “the other side.” At the same time, I’m acutely aware of its costs. All things considered, I believe that the marketplace of ideas should err on the side of a big tent.

The limits of listening

The contemporary [philosopher Jeremy Fantl](#) is among those concerned about the big tent’s costs. In

‘Live a Christ-like life in 2024’ – Apostle Charles Anokye-Manu

cont’d from pg. 27

He reminded the congregation, who had gathered to celebrate a smooth journey through 2023, not to forget that it was the love, grace, and mercy of God that made this possible.

The 31st Night Service was attended by the Chairman of the Apostles Continuation Church International, Apostle Clement Brakatu, who visits the church from time to time.

The Chairman’s visit is a blessing since he chose the Toronto church out of more than 40 branches spanning Africa, Europe, North America and the Middle East, to observe the ushering in of the New Year.

his book “[The Limitations of the Open Mind](#),” Fantl notes that some arguments are cleverly deceptive, and engaging with them open-mindedly can actually undermine knowledge. Imagine a hard-to-follow mathematical proof, its flaw difficult to spot, that indicates $2 + 2 = 5$.

Interestingly, Fantl sees his stance as consistent with intellectual humility: No one is an expert on everything, and we’re all unlikely to spot fallacies in complex deceptive arguments outside our expertise.

There’s another worrisome cost to engaging with deceptive counterarguments: Some of them harm people. To engage open-mindedly with Holocaust denial, for example – to treat it as an option on the table – is to fail to express appropriate solidarity with Jews and other victims of the Nazi regime. More than giving offense, engaging those views could make someone complicit in ongoing oppression, possibly by undermining education about genocide and ethnic cleansing.

What about closed-minded engagement – that is, engaging with opposing viewpoints simply in order to refute them publicly?

Fantl grants that such engagement can have value but worries that it is often ineffective or dishonest. Ineffective, if you tell your opponents from the outset “You’re not going to change my mind” – a conversation-stopper if anything is. Dishonest, if you pretend to engage open-mindedly when you’re really not.

Learning while convincing

In my view, Fantl misunderstands the goals of engagement and thus sets up a false contrast between open- and closed-mindedness. There’s a space between these two extremes – and that may be where the most constructive conversations happen.

Consider again my same-sex marriage advocacy. When I debated opponents such as [Glenn Stanton](#) of Focus on the Family and [Maggie Gallagher](#) of the National Organization for Marriage – a prominent nonprofit group opposing same-sex marriage – did I strongly believe that I was right and they were wrong? Of course I did. And of course they believed the reverse. Did I expect that they would convince me that my position on same-sex marriage was wrong? No, never – and neither did they.

In that sense, you can say I wasn’t open-minded.

On the other hand, I was open to learning from them, and I often did. I was open to learning their concerns, perspectives and insights, recognizing that we had different experiences and areas of expertise. I was also open to building relationships to foster mutual understanding. In that sense, I was quite open-minded.

Audience members who approached the debates with similar openness would commonly say afterward, “I always thought the other side believed [X], but I realize I need to rethink that.” For example, my side tended to assume that Maggie’s and Glenn’s arguments would be primarily theological – they weren’t – or that they hated gay people – they don’t. Their side tended to assume I didn’t care about children’s welfare – quite the contrary – or that I believe that morality is a “private matter,” which I emphatically do not.

Reason and respect

At the same time, there were prominent figures whose position on the marriage question did change.

David Blankenhorn, founder of the think tank the Institute for American Values, had been a [same-sex marriage opponent](#) for many years, albeit one who always recognized some good on both sides of the debate. [Eventually he came to believe](#) that instead of helping children, as he had hoped, opposition to same-sex marriage primarily served to stigmatize gay citizens.

So sometimes the clash of opinions can surprise you – just as Mill suspected.

Does this mean that I recommend seeking out Holocaust deniers for dialogue? No. Some views really are beyond the pale, and regular engagement has diminishing returns. There are only so many hours in the day. But that stance should be adopted sparingly, especially when experts in the relevant community are conflicted.

Instead, I recommend following Blankenhorn as a model, in at least three ways.

First, concede contrary evidence even when that evidence is inconvenient. Doing so can be difficult in an environment where people worry that if they give the other side an inch, they’ll take a mile. Blankenhorn’s opponents would often gleefully seize on his concessions, for instance, as if a single positive point settled the debate.

But keeping beliefs proportionate to evidence is key to moving past polarized gridlock – not to mention discovering truth. Indeed, Blankenhorn has since [founded an organization](#) with the explicit goal of bridging partisan divides.

Second, strive to see what good there is on the other side, and when you do, publicly acknowledge it.

And third, remember that bridge-building is largely about relationship-building, which creates a space for trust – and ultimately, deeper dialogue.

Such dialogue may not always uncover truth, as Mill hoped it would, but at least it acknowledges that we all have a lot to learn. **The Conversation**

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2024 New Year's Eve Service held at Church of Pentecost Calgary

cont'd from pg. 32

The Calgary District Pastor, Pastor Richard Adjei, spoke on the topic "The Lord will Take Great Delight in His People." Zephaniah 3; 1 Peter 2:9-10; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18.

Basing his sermon on Zephaniah chapter 3, Pastor Richard stressed that as the people of God, God loves us and calls us His own. He calls believers by affectionate names such as "Daughter of Zion", "Daughter Jerusalem". We are special to Him. He loves and cares for us so much that He delights in us and rejoices with us with singing. Believers can rest in His love.

Zephaniah (meaning "Jehovah hides", "the Lord has hidden") was a minor prophet who prophesied against the nations that were aggressive toward the land of Israel, such as Assyria, Ammon, Moab, and Philistia 640-609 BC. Let us know that the Lord is a holy and righteous God who cannot stand sin. He will judge sin in individuals and nations as prophesied by Zephaniah and other prophets.

The Lord judges His people to correct them and bring them closer to Him. When we find ourselves in sin, let us humble ourselves, confess our sins to Him, repent of them and turn back to Him because the day of the Lord's judgement will surely come.

When God's people repent and become like Israel's faithful remnant in Zephaniah 3, God is happy with us and restores unto us as He takes delight in us. He promises to be a mighty Warrior for us and save us from our enemies. He promises that they will no longer live in fear of our enemies.

In 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, God wants His people not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers. It does not mean not talking to unbelievers or isolating ourselves from the rest of society. It however means not allowing ourselves to be influenced by the sin and evil going on around us, no matter how enticing. It means recognizing that we are the temple of the Living God and as such keeping ourselves holy and unpolluted from the world's depravity. It means letting our lights shine in this dark world. It means being the salt in this tasteless world

The congregation prayed fervently to commit the new year into the Lord's hands.

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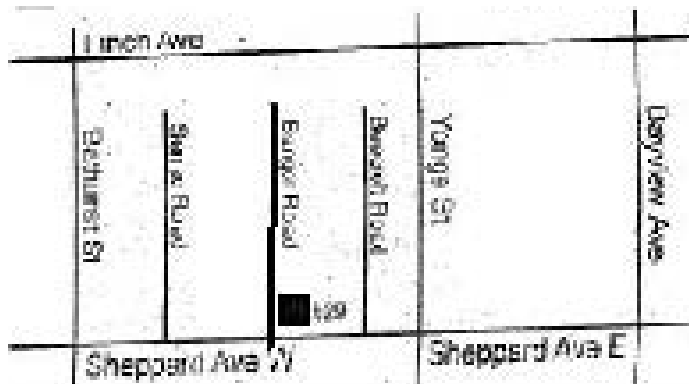
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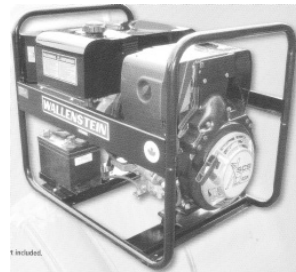
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Life can change overnight. 2 families share what people should know about power of attorney

Mary Jarratt was thrown into action as power of attorney when her brother had a life-changing stroke

When Dr. Mary Jarratt's brother, Billy Jarratt, asked in 2018 if he could designate her as power of attorney in the event something should happen to him, she thought little of it.

Billy's wife had just died, so while updating his will, he also needed to designate someone new to make medical and financial decisions for him should he no longer be able to do so himself.

"Billy was the last person that you'd ever would have thought would become disabled," Mary told Dr. Brian Goldman, host of CBC Radio's *White Coat, Black Art*.

"Billy led a very active life. He had a very good job. He'd been with the senior management of the town of Oromocto [N.B.] for 32 years ... worked out at the gym every day."

But in January 2023, at the age of 58, he had a massive hemispheric stroke that left him unable to speak and reliant on a wheelchair.

Mary is a family physician from Saint John, N.B. — and therefore familiar with power of attorney situations — but she says she still underestimated what's involved. Now she's calling for more awareness of the topic and easier access to resources for Canadians to help them make informed decisions about power of attorney, and to help them prepare to take over if needed.

The laws that govern power of attorney (POA) vary depending on your province or territory, as does some of the terminology. In New Brunswick, where the Jarratts live, the process is guided by the Enduring Powers of Attorney Act that came into effect in 2020.

You might assign a power of attorney for a short period when you need someone to take care of a financial matter while you're out of the province. An enduring power of attorney, on the other hand, is what's required for an ongoing situation such as Billy's.

There are two types of enduring powers of attorney — an attorney for personal care, who makes decisions on your health care, and an attorney for property, for financial matters. These duties can be assigned separately. If it's the same person, however, it can be taken care of with one form in New Brunswick.

Mary Jarratt said that when it became clear that Billy was going to survive his stroke, it was time for her to start to try to take charge.

"Billy owns a house, he has a son in school, two [adult] stepchildren that were living with him at the time," she said. "Lots of bills and various responsibilities."

The search for documents

Their biggest mistake, according to Mary? Billy had not given his sister a copy of his will and power of attorney. Without those documents, she couldn't proceed with the crucial work she needed to do. His lawyer had retired and had not kept copies of his client's files.

Initially they found a copy, said Mary, but for privacy and fraud-prevention reasons, the bank needed originals in order for her to access his accounts.

Once those were found, the next major hurdle was the utility bills. "The challenge with that today is that everything's electronic," she said.

Billy didn't have a trusty shoe box or accordion folder with everything she'd need. He had been the only one with the account numbers, let alone the passcodes. She had to slowly approach each organization and figure out how to get access.

But that's only the money side of the equation. Mary also had to ensure there was a plan for taking care of her nephew, Billy's son, Shane, who still had a year of high school to complete (one of the hockey moms in Shane's life took him in so he could do Grade 12 with his friends), find a live-in care facility for Billy and — eventually — make the difficult decision to sell his house.

Lawyer Kavina Nagrani, who specializes in estate and elder law in Ontario, said she recommends that the person designated by the POA documents at least know the location of a dossier of documents containing the pertinent information in the event something happens.

'Duties are endless'

Michelle McDonald, chief executive officer of the non-profit Brain Injury Canada, said a POA's "duties are endless" and often come on top of hands-on caregiving.

"I don't think people understand the magnitude of this," said McDonald. She noted that — in most cases — that's fine because the worst never comes to pass.

But in her organization's work with those affected by brain injuries, she's seen some complex situations that people acting as attorney must navigate. "And there really is no training," said McDonald.

When you Google the topic, the top results are mostly from law firms, so it's hard to get unbiased information, she said.

"Because the impairments that are associated with brain injury can be cognitive, physical, emotional, behavioural, that can make it a challenge in itself for someone who's a power of attorney," she said.

"That person themselves might not know that they need someone, or they may be resistant to having someone else making decisions for them."

She says more could be done to support family caregivers thrust into the role of attorney by creating resources and training.

When we were younger it was all theoretical and abstract. This time it was real. - *Mike Cels*

When Mike Cels of Oakville, Ont., was first diagnosed at age 54 with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), a degenerative motor neuron disease, back in 2017, both he and his wife, Carmen Cels, had a lot to get their heads around. Fortunately, they weren't new to the concept of a power of attorney.

Married in 1996, they'd drawn up wills once they had children a few years later, said Mike. The next time those needed an update — but while they were both still healthy — they designated each other as power of attorney.

Speaking to CBC through assistive technology that allows him to use his eyes to type out responses to questions, Mike said that when his disease had progressed considerably by 2020, he and Carmen "realized that we had to update everything to ensure it reflected our new reality."

"When we were younger, it was all theoretical and abstract," he said. "This time it was real."

Today, the couple's power of attorney documents cont'd from pg. 51

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'2024 is the year of making more disciples' – Bishop Bob Tacky

Bishop Bob Tacky, the founder and leader of Impact Lives Church, has declared 2024 as the year of making more disciples for God.

Reflecting on Ephesians 2:10, he stated that Christians have been mandated by God to perform good deeds, which in turn, would lead to the creation of more disciples for God.

This revelation was made by Bishop Bob Tacky during the 31st All-Night Service held by the church to welcome the New Year. He expressed, "The world is observing our actions as children of God. If we let our light shine, they (the world) will be drawn to the light."

cont'd on pg. 49



Bishop Bob Tacky



Bishop Tacky and Praise Team



Jubilating for the New Year



Bishop Bob Tacky and wife Lady Tacky



Congregation



Bishop Tacky with a members



Bishop Tacky with Praise and Worship team



Praise and Worship Team

Montreal Hene, Nana Kwaku Kwateng Amanin ‘goes home’

By Emmanuel Ayiku & Ebenezer Amankwah, Montreal Quebec

The nation bid farewell to a beloved figure, Nana Kwaku Kwateng Amanin, also known as Montreal Hene, on December 16, 2023.

Nana Kwaku Kwateng Amanin’s extensive philanthropic efforts and commitment to community development made him a stalwart in the community both in Canada and in Ghana. His influence extended beyond the Ghanaian community in Canada, touching the lives of individuals from various nationalities.

Canada’s Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, expressed his condolences to the bereaved family. He also took to X, formerly Twitter, to mourn the loss of his ‘friend’, further emphasizing the impact of Nana Kwaku Kwateng Amanin’s contributions.

Nana Kwaku Kwateng Amanin passed away on November 13, 2023, leaving behind a legacy of service and community engagement. His life and work continue to inspire many across the nation.

The funeral was attended by many dignitaries including the Ghana High Commissioner to Canada, His Excellency Anselm Ransford Sowah, representatives from the Canadian Government, representatives from other nationalities in Montreal, Traditional leaders from various ethnic groups in Canada and the clergy.

BIOGRAPHY

King Nana Kwaku Kwateng Amanin was born on November 6, 1954 in Sunyani, Ghana. He was the beloved son of the late Adwoa Serwah and Kofi Nsowaa from the Krontie family.

King Nana Kwaku Kwateng Amanin’s life was a testament to his remarkable

journey from humble beginnings to becoming a cherished leader, devoted husband, and community pillar.

His educational journey began at the Sunyani High Street Elementary School, where his charisma and natural leadership abilities were evident from a young age.

cont’d on pg. 41



Family members



Okwahuman Association Representatives



Islamic leaders



Well-wishers



Ghana House Montreal Representatives



Representative of Ga-Adangbe Assoc.



Traditional Dancer

Montreal Hene, Nana Kwaku Kwateng Amanin ‘goes home’

cont'd from pg. 40

As a teen, he embarked on his professional journey working as a shop assistant before destiny intertwined his path with his beloved wife, Mercy Kwateng Amanin.

Nana Kwaku Kwateng Amanin’s love story with Mercy blossomed in their late teens leading to a lifelong bond. In 1979 they exchanged vows and their journey together took them across continents.

In 1981 the couple relocated to Germany and in 1987 they made Montreal, Canada their new home.

His early work life at TBC Manufacturing laid the foundation for his entrepreneurial spirit.

In 1989 they welcomed their firstborn, Kevin Kwateng Amanin and in 1993, they welcomed their youngest son, Edwin-King Kwateng.

The family’s journey continued with a relocation to Ottawa in 1994 and later returned to Montreal in 1998 marking the inception of Mama Africa Beauty Supply. The business became a thriving success, establishing the family’s prominence in the community.

A beacon of light in his community, Nana Kwaku Kwateng Amanin emerged as a distinguished business leader and community organizer, gaining recognition from notable figures, including the Prime Minister of Canada and various elected officials. His commitment to community engagement was evident through his management of local sports teams, where he skilfully handled logistics and finances.

Nana Kwaku Kwateng Amanin’s legacy lives on through the lives he touched, the businesses he built, and the community he passionately served.

His departure leaves a void that can only be filled by the fond memories of his warmth, leadership, and unwavering dedication to the betterment of others.



Ghana High Commissioner to Canada Anselm Ransford Sowah (center) with Mission staff and Mary Delos, Councilor (2un left) , Park Extension and husband



Cultural Dancers

May his soul rest in eternal peace.



Traditional Chiefs



Traditional Chiefs



Traditional Chief



Mlourners



Asanteman Association Toronto and Montreal

Zumunta End of the Year Symposium and Dinner

By Emmanuel Ayiku & Ebenezer Amankwah, Toronto, ON

The Zumunta African Muslims in Canada have organized their annual end-of-year symposium and dinner event in Toronto, Canada.

The event also marked the inauguration of the newly elected President of the Association, Hajji Nurudeen.

It was a sight to behold as Zumunta African Muslims, both male and female, from across Canada convened to be part of this event.

Alhaji Mohammed Mubarak Muntaka, a Member of Parliament for Asawase in the Ashanti Region of Ghana, who was also the guest speaker, lauded the association for organizing such an event. He stated that it is through such events that leaders can advise and encourage each other for their common good.

He expressed concern about the lack of synergy among the leaders in the Ghanaian communities across various provinces. He asserted that the Ghanaian-Canadian community can only develop when the leaders collaborate.

Alhaji Mubarak Muntaka pointed out that other communities in Canada, such as the Jewish, Pakistani, Indian, and Iranian communities, are all growing faster due to their zealous nature. He therefore advised leaders of the Ghanaian communities to work hard, map out strategies, and negotiate with neighbouring communities for shared knowledge.

Alhaji Mohammed Mubarak Muntaka advised Muslim parents to build assets by educating themselves and their children. He stated that the biggest risk for Ghanaians in the diaspora is raising their children according to their beliefs since these children are exposed to a different culture and beliefs. He also encouraged parents to allow their children to marry within the community in this regard.

Alhaji Mubarak Muntaka further urged all those gathered to pay particular attention to their health and not to be swayed away by the struggle for riches.

The Deputy Imam of Al Asuna, Sheik Lamin Husein Cissey, who was the special guest speaker for the event, thanked Allah for His protection throughout the year and also prayed for blessings in the coming year.



Alhaji Mohammed Mubarak Muntaka, a Member of Parliament for Asawase



H.E. Ahmed Maiwada chief of Takoradi Zongo in Ghana



Chief of Zongo of Ontario Alhaji Abdala Larry deliver a message



Chief of Zongo of Ontario Alhaji Abdala Larry and his Cabinet



. A child reading Holy Quran



President of Yankasa Association of NY Ibrahim Masigan delivering a message



President of Yankasa Association of NY Ibrahim Masigan delivering a message



Community members



Zumunta out going Alhaji Zubeiru presents an award to President Emmanuel Doudu



Community members

FRUITFUL COMMUNITIES celebrate its Food Bank Volunteers

By Ebenezer Amankwah, Mississauga, ON

Fruitful Communities, a subsidiary of Fruitful House, serves individuals and the community by providing food, connecting seniors, and empowering youth. The organization recently celebrated its volunteers for their dedication.

the volunteers for their hard work throughout the year.

Pastor Susan emphasized the volunteers' work as the anchor and

heartbeat of Fruitful Communities. She acknowledged that there is more to be done in 2024 and encouraged everyone to continue showing love to individuals in the community.

Pastor Susan also expressed gratitude to corporate agencies and other community non-governmental organizations that partnered with Fruitful Communities in the previous

cont'd on pg. 49

The Fruitful Communities Food Bank is known for distributing healthy groceries and a variety of items, offering the option to select what best meets your dietary and family needs. The volunteers are friendly and foster a non-judgmental environment.

Pastor Susan Akonnor, the leader of Fruitful Communities, stated that the appreciation event was not only to crown the year of serving the Lord and the community but also to celebrate



Rev. Dr. Albert Akonnor



Mrs. Susan Akonnor



Volunteer



Volunteer co-ordinator receiving an award



A volunteer receiving an award



Student Volunteer



Volunteer co-ordinator receiving an award



Volunteer



Partners of the Foodbank receiving present



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FOOD FOR LIFE

Bringing the Gospel to our Community *By Rev. Isaac De-Graft Takyi*

THE CHRISTIAN IN 2024: REACH UP IN 25 YEARS LIFE PLAN

Quotes

We all need lots of powerful long-range goals to help us past the short-term obstacles. Jim Rohn.

The only reason we really pursue goals is to cause ourselves to expand and grow. Achieving goals by themselves will never make us happy in the long term; it's who you become, as you overcome the obstacles necessary to achieve your goals, that can give you the deepest and most long-lasting sense of fulfillment. Tony Robbins

Never let a short-term desire get in the way of a long-term goal. Curtis Martin.

Exercise: Please Do this exercise

Write down your current age, add 25 years to it. What is your emerging age?

8 BIBLICAL REASONS AND BENEFITS TO PLAN YOUR LIFE GROWTH FOR THE NEXT 25 YEARS

REVELATIONS 5:1-14(NLT)

Goal setting and making life plans is a God-thing. What do I mean by that? God is a goal setter and a goal getter. God is a planner. God sets life plan or goals. One such life plan was **the plan of salvation** so that all would come to Him and have eternal life through Christ. Think about it. **It was a goal – to save mankind from his sin.**

It took *planning, thinking, timing, implementing in order to make this gift of eternal life available to all.*

That is an awesome plan that many people had and continue to reap the blessings from.

Throughout the word of God there is evidence of God setting goals or life plans for His children and for the effective working out of each of those plans in their lives.

Today, it's no different, God has life plans for you and I and wants to work with us to accomplish them.

Even though, goal setting is a God-thing. **We need a strong why? The Power of your Why?**

There are several reasons why you and I should set goals and work to make them happen. Let's take a look at these eight:

1. 25 Years Goal setting is spiritual

How is that? Your life plans should reflect the will of God for your life. For sure the plans He has for you are good and are worth looking forward to. "For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope." -Jeremiah 29:11 (NLT)



However, when it comes to you there are plans specific to you and no one else. This is where life planning or goal setting gets spiritual. You will need to spend time in reflection, prayer, thanksgiving in order to learn His plans for you.

The good this is that you may already have a good start at knowing His specific will and plan for you. **Usually, the very desire of your heart is the very thing God desires for you.**

The things in life that you're passionate about form part of the big plans God have for you. The important key is to ensure that these inner desires are good and acceptable to God (Romans 12:1-2).

2. 25 years Life Planning Set the Course of Your Life

If you choose not to plan, then you live by default and everyone else's suggestions and plans become your own. You react rather than respond to life because you have no life plan to keep you from wandering through life aimlessly diverting away from your main goals.

However, to plan and do it with God is to be purpose driven. Jesus and the Apostle Paul are excellent examples of meaning specifics. They had an aim and worked towards those goals, their life's purpose regardless of the obstacles.

To have goals or a life plan means that you know where you are going. You are not side-tracked or easily distracted when you have a plan.

3. 25 years Goal setting is faith-based

Goal setting and faith go together. When you set goals, you are making statements of faith. You are saying that you have faith in God to accomplish a specific thing by a specific time frame or period. Are you confident in God that the goals (the hope you have) will happen? "Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see." -Hebrews 11:1 (NLT)

FAITH Plans honour God. FAITH goals please God. Those mentioned in the Hall of Faith had an aim, a life goal that they believed God would be able to do. **Plan the next 25 years of your life with faith in God. Set your goals with faith in God. Believe that God will help you make them happen.**

4. 25 years Goal setting is faith-stretching

Your faith in God is stretched or challenged only when you set goals that **is not** within your reach and therefore require God's intervention to be achieved. The bigger the goal, the riskier the goal, the more your faith will be stretched. **A faith-stretching goal compels you to run towards God and to believe that He will reward you as you seek Him.** Try setting goals based on what the word of God says in Ephesians 3:20 MSG "God can do anything, you know—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us."

5. 25 years Goals focus your energy, Resources and Time

When you have goals, they keep you from wasting **people, time, money, or energy.** When you have focus you have an effective life. Like Paul you are driven by **"this one thing I do"**. The more you focus your life the more powerful and effective it will be. Don't think that you have to do everything. God doesn't expect you to. You are human and knows that very well. Set the goal and then focus your energy to achieve the goal. **The key is do what matters most. Do what has eternal value.**

"You know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize. So run to win! All those who compete in the games use self-control so they can win a crown. That crown is an earthly thing that lasts only a short time, but

our crown will never be destroyed. So, I do not run without a goal. I fight like a boxer who is hitting something—not just the air." – 1 Corinthians 9:24-26

6. 25 years Goals keep you active and persistent

Having goals fills you up with hope and give you something to look forward to. They make you persistent even when the going gets tough. You are able to see past the pain and aim at the prize. This is just what Jesus did – **"who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."** (Hebrews 12:2, NKJV)

Goals give you a reason to get out of bed in the morning and to be enthusiastic about life. They give you something to look forward to. However, without goals you feel hopeless; you don't see a good future ahead of you (Job 6:11, NLT)

Have something to look forward to. Have something to live for. If you do you won't lose hope and give up.

7. 25 years Goals build your character and Integrity

The greatest benefit of setting and working on your goals in not the achievement of the goals but what happens to you in the process. Success is said to be a journey – a journey that starts with you and produces a better you as you work with God and allow God to work in you. Through the process of goal setting and goal-getting, God is more interested in your character than your accomplishments.

cont'd on pg. 48

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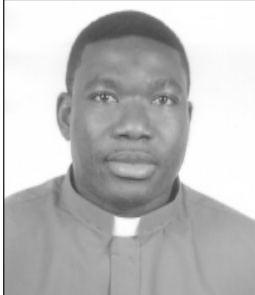
The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. 11.1 am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. Amen.
John 10 :10-11

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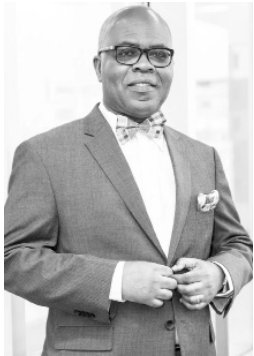
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Be transformed by the renewing of your mind... "Rom.12:2a

The Christian in 2024: Reach Up in 25 Years Life Plan

cont'd from pg. 45

He is more interested in who you are and who you become. While you are working on the goal, God is working on you.

As you create your life plans, aim to be more like Christ – to know him and to make him known to others. You cannot become the man or woman God wants you to be unless you're intentional about it.

solely on God, the CEO of your life, to guide you and help you every step of the journey.

"Commit your actions to the Lord, and your plans will succeed." -Proverbs 16:3 (NLT)

So, as you start now! Commit all your plans to the Lord and one day and one step at a time let Him work in you, through you and with you to bring into reality your heart's desire.

**8. 25 years good goals
will be rewarded**

The beauty of goal setting for Believers is that you have the advantage of doing it with God and of being guided by the Holy Spirit on a daily basis. This is an uncommon advantage but one that is often taken for granted or not recognized.

As you plan your life for the next 25 years, and set your goals and work toward them, you will be rewarded on earth by people and by God in heaven.

Proverbs 19:21. "Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails."

NOTE

A life plan helps you be a good steward of your resources Proverbs 21:5. "The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty."

The key to success in the end depends

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Church without God:

How secular congregations fill a need for some nonreligious Americans

Shared testimonies, collective singing, silent meditation and baptism rituals – these are all activities you might find at a Christian church service on a Sunday morning in the United States. But what would it look like if atheists were gathering to do these rituals instead?

Today, almost 30% of adults in the United States say they have no religious affiliation, and only half attend worship services regularly. But not all forms of church are on the decline – including “secular congregations,” or what many call “atheist churches.”

As a sociologist of religion who has spent the past 10 years studying nonreligious communities, I have found that atheist churches serve many of the same purposes as religious churches. Their growth is evidence that religious decline does not necessarily mean a decline in community, ritual or people’s well-being.

What is an atheist church?

Secular congregations often mimic religious organizations by using the language and structure of a “church,” such as meeting on Sundays or hearing a member’s “testimony,” or by adapting religious language or practices in other ways.

For example, there are a growing number of psychedelic churches, which cater to people looking to experience spirituality and ritual through drug use.

There are also secular organizations that promote the idea that people can live forever, such as the Church of Perpetual Life. Members believe they can achieve immortality on Earth through radical life-extension technologies such as gene editing or cryonic preservation – freezing bodies after death in hopes that they can someday be resuscitated.

These secular congregations often appeal to atheists and other secular people, but their main purpose is not promoting atheism.

However, “atheist church” organizations like the Sunday Assembly and the Oasis explicitly celebrate atheists’ identities and beliefs, even though not everyone who attends identifies as an atheist. Testimonies and activities extol values like rational thinking and materialist philosophies, which promote the idea that only physical matter exists.

There are also long-standing humanist and ethical communities that promote secular worldviews and provide secular ceremonies for major life transitions, like births, funerals and weddings. The American Humanist Association, for example, describes its values as “Good without a God.” And for decades, Unitarian Universalist congregations, which grew out of Christian movements, have drawn on teachings from both religious and nonreligious traditions, without imposing specific creeds of their own.

But there has been a recent rise in secular congregations that explicitly mimic religious organizations and rituals to celebrate atheistic

worldviews. Many have just one or two chapters, such as the Seattle Atheist Church and the North Texas Church of Freethought.

However, Sunday Assembly and the Oasis have networks with dozens of chapters, and Sunday Assembly has been dubbed the “first atheist mega-church.” Many chapters of Sunday Assembly see hundreds of attendees at their services.

Testimonies, singalongs – but nothing supernatural

Many features of atheist churches in the U.S. are directly borrowed from religious organizations. At Sunday Assembly, where I spent three years doing research, services include collective singing, reading inspirational texts, silent reflection and collecting donations. They center around a central lecture given by a member of the congregation or a member of the larger local community. I attended one service where an astronomer gave a talk about the New Horizons spacecraft’s mission to Pluto. At another service, a member of a local community garden organization talked about building community through her community garden program.

Atheist church organizers I met told me that they intentionally borrow the structure of a church because they see it as a good model for building effective rituals and communities. More generally, the structure of a “congregation” is popular and familiar to most attendees.

However, there are key differences. Sunday Assembly has no hierarchical structure, and there is no pastor or minister, meaning that decisions are made by the community. Attendees share duties for running the services and finding speakers and readings.

The other key difference is the complete lack of reference to the supernatural. Lectures and rituals I have encountered at atheist church services are centered around affirming atheistic beliefs, celebrating science, cultivating experiences of awe and wonder for nature, and creating communities of support.

Sociologists of religion call these practices “sacralizing the secular” and “secular spirituality”: activities that enable nonreligious people to express their shared beliefs and cultivate a sense of belonging and purpose.

One example is collective singing: borrowing a familiar aspect of religious services that can give members a sense of transcendence. Most Sunday Assembly chapters have church bands that lead singalongs to pop songs like “Livin’ on a Prayer” by Bon Jovi and “Brave” by Sara Bareilles. When the astronomer talked to Sunday Assembly about NASA’s mission to Pluto, the congregation sang “Across the Universe” and “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds” by the Beatles to reinforce their reverence for the vastness of the universe.

Another borrowed ritual is the sharing of testimony. Many Sunday Assembly

services involve a member standing in front of the congregation to share something they learned recently, to express gratitude, or to affirm their atheistic beliefs by sharing why they left religion.

Some atheist communities, although not Sunday Assembly, even engage in “debaptism” ceremonies in which they renounce their former religion. Some atheists I interviewed sent their debaptism certificates to their former churches as a way of solidifying their new nonreligious identity.

Change ahead?

As rates of religious affiliation continue to decline, many scholars and pundits have argued that there will be a decline in community engagement and other important indicators of well-being, such as health, happiness and people’s sense of meaning and purpose.

However, atheist churches are an example of how nonreligious Americans are finding new ways to meet those needs. A member of Sunday Assembly

told me: “I honestly can’t think of a word to describe it. I mean, ‘life-changing’ sounds stupid, but Sunday Assembly just helped so much. I’ve always struggled with depression, and I’m so much happier now that I have this group of friends who share my beliefs and who are trying to do good out in the world with me.”

Atheist churches are still fairly new, but studies have shown that participation in them and other types of atheist organizations can bring social and emotional benefits. In particular, it can help atheists buffer the negative effects of experiencing stigma or discrimination.

Whether the atheist church trend will continue remains to be seen. But such churches’ recent growth is evidence that they can work much like religious organizations to build community, cultivate rituals and bolster well-being in a time of religious change.

The Conversation

FRUITFUL COMMUNITIES celebrate its Food Bank Volunteers

cont’d from pg. 43

year. She appreciated their benevolence and expressed hope for their continued support in the coming year.

Special packages were given to all the volunteers and the corporate agencies in recognition of their dedication.

Reverend Dr. Albert Osa-Akonnor, the senior pastor of Fruitful House and the visionary behind Fruitful Communities, praised the volunteers, especially Pastor Susan Akonnor, for her tireless work in keeping the Food Bank operational.

Reverend Dr. Osa-Akonnor highlighted the welcoming nature of Canada and encouraged everyone to give back and improve upon what they have received.

He mentioned that, despite a temporary

setup, Fruitful Communities aims to extend its services beyond Ontario.

He advised the volunteers to prepare for more work as the organization plans to expand and double its capacity.

Reverend Dr. Osa-Akonnor shared that the vision for 2024 is to secure a 10,000 to 20,000-square-foot facility to provide comprehensive aid to newcomers.

He expressed his belief that through this expansion, the word of God will reach more places and urged every volunteer to keep this vision in mind.

The Fruitful Communities Food Bank is located at 6731 Columbus Road, Mississauga, ON, Canada, L5T 2M4. It operates twice weekly, on Wednesdays and Saturdays between 2pm and 4pm.

‘2024 is the year of making more disciples’ – Bishop Bob Tacky

cont’d from pg. 39

Bishop Tacky advised Christians to refrain from comparing themselves to others, as everyone has a unique assignment. He encouraged them to limit their social media usage, make prayer a lifestyle, and focus on God’s plan for them.

He emphasized that Christians derive their strength from God and should not rely solely on their abilities. “You can never do good work by your strength,” he added.

Bishop Bob Tacky expressed satisfaction with the fact that Impact Lives Church has nurtured strong disciples who believe in giving back to the community by assisting the less privileged.

The church welcomed the New Year with prayers, singing, and dancing. During the celebration, Bishop Tacky consecrated anointing oils to be used for various purposes throughout the year.

Lifestyle changes can reduce dementia risk by maintaining brain plasticity — but the time to act is now

Walk 10,000 steps a day, cut back alcohol, get better sleep at night, stay socially active — we're told that changes like these can prevent up to 40 per cent of dementia cases worldwide.

Given that dementia is still one of the most feared diseases, why aren't we pushing our doctors and governments to support these lifestyle changes through new programs and policy initiatives?

The truth, however, is more complex. We know that making lifestyle changes is hard. Ask anyone who has tried to keep their New Year's resolution to visit the gym three times a week. It can be doubly difficult when the changes we need to make now won't show results for years, or even decades, and we don't really understand why they work.

Taking control of your health

Anyone who has watched a loved one living with dementia, facing the small and large indignities and declines that leave them eventually unable to eat, communicate or remember, knows it is a devastating disease.

There are several new drugs making their way to the market for Alzheimer's disease (one of the most common forms of dementia). However, they are still far from a cure and are currently only effective for early-stage Alzheimer's patients.

So lifestyle changes may be our best hope of delaying dementia or not developing dementia at all. Actor Chris Hemsworth knows it. He watched his grandfather live with Alzheimer's and is making lifestyle changes after learning he has two copies of the APOE4 gene. This gene is a risk factor for Alzheimer's, and having two copies significantly increases his risk of developing the same condition.

Research has identified modifiable risk factors that contribute to increasing the risk of dementia:

- physical inactivity
- excessive use of alcohol
- less sleep
- social isolation
- hearing loss
- less cognitive engagement
- poor diet
- hypertension
- obesity
- diabetes
- traumatic brain injury
- smoking
- depression
- air pollution

Our understanding of the biological mechanisms for these risk factors is varied, with some more clearly understood than others.

But there is a lot we do know — and here's what you need to know as well.

Cognitive reserve and neuroplasticity

Cognitive reserve is the brain's ability to withstand damage or neurodegenerative disease. If there is tissue or functional loss in one part of the brain, other brain cells (neurons) work harder to compensate. In theory, this means lifelong experiences and activities create a dam against the damages of disease and aging in the brain.

Neuroplasticity is the brain's amazing ability to adapt, learn and reorganize, create new pathways or rewire existing ones to recover from damage. The key takeaway is that neuroplasticity can happen at any time and any age, which means learning and activities should be lifelong.

Many of the risk factors linked to dementia likely work in combination, which is why an overall lifestyle approach is crucial. For example, studies have shown that exercise, cognitive and social engagement stimulate your brain and maintain its plasticity by growing new neural connections and building cognitive reserve.

The mechanism behind this is a combination of factors: increased oxygen and blood flow to the brain, stimulating growth factors that keep neurons healthy and reduced inflammation.

The opposite is also true. Poor sleep, diet, social isolation and untreated depression are linked to decreased cognitive reserve.

The same rationale applies to hearing loss, a key emerging risk factor for dementia. As a person's hearing decreases, it can make it difficult to socially engage with others, resulting in a loss of sensory input. The brain has to work harder to compensate for this, potentially drawing down its cognitive reserve and leaving it less able to withstand dementia.

The role of stress and inflammation

Stress responses and inflammation are the body's complex answer to injury. Inflammation is an important component of the body's immune system, helping

defend against threats and repair tissue damage. While short-term inflammation is a natural and good response, chronic or prolonged inflammation disrupts normal function and causes damage to the brain's cells.

For example, one of the commonalities between dementia and untreated depression is the inflammatory process. Prolonged exposure to stress hormones can lead to chronic inflammation. Hypertension, physical inactivity, smoking and air pollution are also associated with chronic inflammation and stress, which can damage blood vessels and neurons in the brain.

In a newer area of research still being explored, social isolation has also been linked to inflammation. As we learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, the brain is wired to respond to social engagement as a means of bonding and emotional support, especially in times of distress.

With surveys showing more than one in three Canadians feel isolated, the lack of social connection and loneliness can trigger the body's stress response and neuroendocrine changes, and prolonged exposure to this inflammatory process can damage the brain.

Similar pathways across multiple diseases

Several of these risk factors, and their biological pathways, cut across multiple chronic diseases. Accumulating evidence of decades of research supports the concept of "what's good for your heart is good for your head."

This means that making these lifestyle changes not only reduces your risk of dementia, but also your risk of diabetes, hypertension and heart concerns. This highlights the complex nature of dementia but also offers a united strategy to deal with multiple health concerns that may arise as people age.

It's never too late

It's never really too late to change. The human brain and body have a remarkable capacity for adaptation and resilience throughout life.

While there are benefits to being physically and socially active at any age, some research shows the payoff from those gains can be higher after age 40 when the body's metabolism slows, risk factors increase and cognitive reserve becomes even more essential to help protect against cognitive decline.

If making lifestyle changes means you can watch your child navigate adulthood, stroll 20 blocks to your favourite café every day and continue to live in your own home, perhaps walking the daily 10,000 steps, changing diets and keeping your friendship network strong is worthwhile. At worst, you'll be healthier and more independent with or without dementia. At best, you might completely avoid dementia and other major diseases and keep living your best possible life.

The Conversation

Life can change overnight. 2 families share what people should know about power of attorney

cont'd on pg. 38

account for every scenario, including each of them needing alternate attorneys should something else unexpected happen.

Carmen said she maintains a portfolio of documents that includes their wills, POAs, financial details, cemetery plots and contact numbers for their lawyer and financial planner. One copy lives in a safe deposit box and another in an encrypted computer file their children, now in their 20s, know how to access.

As things stand today, says Carmen, Mike still makes decisions on his health care. "As I advocate for his care today, I can identify options and potential care plans, and I can suggest reasonable next steps. And yet, sometimes he selects a route that I wouldn't have expected or chosen for him.

"And so sometimes I wonder if I can make the decision that Mike would

want when the time comes and he can't direct me."

Crucial conversations

It takes a lot of open conversation about the kind of scenarios they may face with the progression of a disease, said Mike.

That's a kind of conversation people don't get to have when their situation changes drastically overnight, as Billy Jarratt's did.

Looking back, Mary said she regrets not talking to her brother sooner about what his wishes would be. She wants others to avoid the same pain.

"If someone asks you to be POA, spend an hour sitting down with them just getting an idea of what their wishes would be and maybe some basics about their finances, about their house ... and what they would want for their children." CBC

Health/Lifestyle

The science behind building healthy habits can help you keep your New Year's resolution

Every New Year, millions of people make resolutions, with the most common resolutions being health-related. Despite their popularity, up to 80 per cent of resolutions fail, mostly within a few weeks. As a result, many people make the same resolutions year after year.

At the same time, resolutions can bring focus to an area that's important to you. I research the importance of behaviours to health, and write the Become Your Healthiest You blog. Here's how using scientific strategies can increase your chances of success with your resolution.

Setting SMART resolutions

Resolutions are like goals and putting time into planning your resolution can increase your success. Using the SMART goal framework (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely) is a good foundation for setting your resolution.

A specific resolution is clear and focused. Unfortunately, most people set vague resolutions, such as wanting to exercise more, be healthier or lose weight. While admirable, resolutions that provide a clear description of what you want to achieve (exercise three times a week for 30 minutes, lose five pounds) provide more direction and are more readily attained.

Also, aim for positive resolutions such as eating more vegetables, in contrast to eating no junk food. Positive resolutions are approach-oriented, while negative ones are avoidance-oriented. In a survey of 1,066 people, those who had approach-oriented resolutions were more likely to be successful.

A measurable resolution means you can assess when you've achieved it. A goal of eating healthier is hard to measure, whereas a goal of eating three fruits a day can be easily measured. Essentially, your resolution becomes a target. And a target can also bring focus to your resolution, such as with wanting to run a marathon under four hours. In a study of nearly 10 million marathon times there were far more finishes at 3:59 than at 4:01, which suggests that having a clear target may have helped people run faster.

You also want your resolution to be attainable, which means it's realistic for you to achieve. Big, long-term resolutions may be more easily approached by breaking them into smaller ones. However, your resolution also needs to be challenging, as challenging ones result in better performance and are also found to be more satisfying than easier resolutions.

A relevant resolution is one that's meaningful to you. For example, exercising so you can have more energy throughout the day.

Relevant resolutions are more likely to be intrinsic in contrast with extrinsic ones, which are externally motivated (such as getting a promotion, winning a trophy or receiving praise). Extrinsic resolutions tend to be fleeting while intrinsic resolutions are associated with greater well-being and satisfaction.

The last part is having a resolution that's timely. This means having a deadline for when you wish to achieve it. A resolution without a deadline rarely gets done. A timely resolution helps prioritize your days and weeks leading up to it. If your resolution is to lose five pounds in two months, this can be the foundation for your plan on how to achieve it.

Succeeding at your resolution

Having a good implementation plan is as key as having a clear resolution. In some cases, you may need to change your environment to be more supportive of your resolution. This may mean moving snacks out of sight, putting your workout gear near the front door or using sticky notes as reminders.

If your resolution requires starting a new habit, combine it with a habit you already do. If you want to floss your teeth, combine it with brushing your teeth. Combining a new habit with an old one is referred to as piggybacking, stacking and temptation bundling.

Temptation bundling is a more specific version of piggybacking in which you choose an activity you enjoy and bundle it with your newly desired activity. If you want to start exercising, bundle it with a favourite TV show, podcast or music. People who used temptation bundling with audiobooks were more likely to keep up with their exercise routine.

To encourage yourself along the way, try positive thinking. This can be as simple as saying to yourself *I can do this, I'm proud of myself for trying* or *I have the power to change my mind* a few times each day. Positive thinking may help increase perseverance and is believed to increase the neurotransmitters dopamine and serotonin, associated with pleasure and mood, which can reinforce behaviours.

Enlisting the support of others can also help in achieving your resolution. People with greater social support networks are more likely to achieve their goals.

Social support can be broken into four categories:

- instrumental support consisting of someone doing something for you, such as driving you to the gym or helping in meal planning;
- informational support in the form of someone giving you advice, whether it be from family, friends or professionals such as your doctor or a dietitian;
- appraisal support, including evaluation and constructive feedback, which may come from the same people who provide informational support; and
- emotional support from people providing love, empathy and caring.

Challenges and setbacks happen

Even with proper planning, challenges and setbacks can happen and are a normal part of any process of changing one's behaviour or attempting something new.

Some setbacks may be temporary, such as an illness interrupting your exercise program. Others may occur regularly, such as dinner parties that may affect your desire to eat a healthy diet. These challenges can be minimized by planning ahead. In this example, your plan may include contributing a meal to the dinner that fits your needs.

If a setback occurs, accept this as a natural part of the process. Focus on the progress you've made so far and review your plan. What has worked for you to date? Is there anything you need to revise to account for any future challenges?

Starting a new behaviour can sometimes be a process of trial and error, and learning from setbacks can support future success. Good luck and Happy New Year!

The Conversation



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Mohammed Kudus' magic secures vital point for Ghana against Egypt

Mohammed Kudus scored two magical goals for Ghana but two costly mistakes ensured that the spoils were shared with seven-time record champions, Egypt.

The results mean Ghana has its first point at the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations while Egypt has two points after they drew in the first game.

It was a good start for Ghana with Majeed Ashimeru dazzling in the midfield with his fast pace and trickery.

Kudus made his first effort at goal in the opening quarter but lacked the power to beat Egyptian goalkeeper Ahmed Elshewani.

This was certainly the Black Stars we knew of as they maintained possession and curtailed the offensive threat from the Egyptians.

Mohammed Salah was largely kept quiet by Gideon Mensah who had a brilliant opening half hour.

Egypt's first attempt came in the 31st minute but Mohammed Abdella's effort was easily gathered by Richard Ofori.

Liverpool forward Mohammed Salah was eventually substituted in the late



stages of the first after an injury.

There stepped up Ghana's star boy

Mohammed Kudus who powered in a low shot past Egyptian goalkeeper Ahmed Elshewani in the third minute of first-half added time.

The Egyptians started the second half on the front foot and the ball at the back through Mohammed Ahmed but the was adjudged to be offside.

The pressure on the Black Stars was very intense with the Egyptian seeking to pull parity.

Despite being on the back foot, Antione Semenyio had a good opportunity to score another goal for Ghana but his effort lacked the power to beat goalkeeper Elshewani.

Inaki William made a costly mistake in the 68th minute as his back pass gifted Omar Marmoush a sight at goal and the striker capitalised on it.

But once again Mohammed Kudus stepped up and curled in a low strike just two minutes later with the 2 0,000 fans chanting his name.

The celebrations couldn't last long as another mistake from substitute Usman Bukari would prove costly as Mostapha Abdella capitalized on scored from close range.

Both sides held on as the points were shared at the end of 90 minutes.

Source: GNA

“Two errors cost us victory” – Coach Hughton admits frustration

Black Stars Head Coach, Chris Hughton has said the team was denied victory by two costly errors against Egypt in the second-round group game of the TotalEnergies CAF Africa Cup of Nations in Côte d'Ivoire. Ghana led twice and bottled it all to allow Egypt to pick a point from the game.

The visibly disappointed Coach told the media that he was not is not giving up adding that they would continue to fight till the end of the first round.

“We will continue to fight. It is true that at the moment there is a lot of frustration in the locker room. Our team deserved more, but football is like that. It's frustrating.

“In a similar performance, we would surely have won. Two errors cost us the match. We didn't take this opportunity to take the three points,” he said.

Osman who was brought on in the second half was substituted again for Joseph Paintsil.

Hughton explained that the winger's errors were worrying, and he had to decide to take him off.

“Firstly, I would like to say that we love Osmane. However, I had to take him out because his mistakes were starting to affect his performance,” he explained.

Hughton's mind is now on Mozambique, the Black Stars' next opponent.

“There are no more small teams in Africa. We are preparing for a tough match against them. The calculations are already made, we need a victory to pursue our dream and I know we are capable of it,” he noted.

Source: GNA



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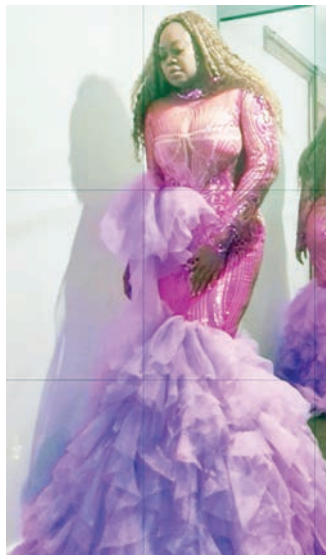


New year trends and fashion

One of the top trends that we will see in 2024 is the idea of quiet luxury. This means wearing pieces that look expensive, but don't necessarily come with a high price tag. It has also been referred to as "old money" style, which means you should be thinking high-quality materials and perfect tailoring, which we are known for at Beni Boo Styles. We tailor outfits for every occasion , from date wears to engagements ceremonies, traditional wedding gowns and now white wedding gowns .



This year , A-line and ball gown silhouettes will be widely popular wedding dress styles due to their universally flattering nature as well as their equally traditional and grand appearance. The silhouette cinches at the natural waistline before flaring outwards. Always remember the world is your runway so be your own kind of beautiful.



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FOOD AND RECIPES

Traditional African Dishes

Compiled by Nana Ama, Toronto, ON

Turnip Fries

This turnip fries recipe is a delicious snack. They're high in vitamin C and are a great option for healthy fries.

INGREDIENTS

- 4 turnips
- 1–2 tablespoons coconut oil
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- sea salt and black pepper, to taste



Cook Mode Prevent your screen from going dark

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 425 F.
2. Peel turnips and cut into steak fries, about ½ inch thick.
3. In a large bowl, toss all ingredients until turnip fries are well coated.
4. Place in a single layer on a cookie sheet lined with parchment paper.
5. Bake for 20 minutes.
6. Flip fries and bake an additional 15-20 minutes.

You can use grapeseed oil, butter or any other healthy oil in place of coconut oil if you prefer.

Don't go overboard with the oil. If you use too much, the fries will come out soggy.

Dr. Axe



Turnip Juice



Abunabunu (Spinach Soup)

Ingredients

- 2 Bunches of Nkontonmire
- Dry River fish (Faan loo)
- 4 large tomatoes
- 2 medium sized onions
- Chilli pepper aka Kpakposhito (as much as you desire)
- 4 Giant African Snails
- Goat meat
- 1 Tablespoonful of Lemon Juice
- Salt
- 1 Maggi cube

[View fullsize](#)



Method

Light soup base

1. Blend together tomatoes, onions and pepper. Set aside
2. Spice up the goat meat with ginger and onions; preferably the night before.
3. Boil the snails in the shell. Pry them from the shell. The Giant African Snails are very slimy delicious creatures. But the slime can get icky. Sprinkle a generous amount of salt over them and work it through with your hand for about 2 minutes. Wash under cold water and pour the lemon juice over it. The stickiness is much reduced and the flesh almost feels dry.
4. Wash the river fish, which tends to have grains of sand stuck inside its gills and abdomen.
5. Wash the leaves under running water and peel the leaves from the veiny stem. Boil for less than 10 minutes. Blend very smoothly, and set aside.
6. Place a deep saucepan on the stove and add the goat meat. Steam the meat well as you know how tough our Billy and Nanny goats are.
7. Add the snails.
8. Pour the blended tomato mix unto the steaming meats and stir for about 2 minutes and pour a generous amount of water into the pan. Well until the meat is covered and is half-way in the pan. Some choose to sieve the tomatoes but that's nutritious chaff being thrown away.
9. Add the dry river fish so it cooks with the soup and take it out for later. This I find helps prevent the fish from dismantling.
10. Boil for about 20 minutes. Add 1 cube of Maggi for spicing.
11. The light soup should be about ready. Pour in the blended Nkontonmire. Top up with more water.
12. Add salt to taste. Allow another 5-10 minutes for final cooking time.
13. This is the best part. Eating!



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