In late October 1962, an unexpected letter from abroad landed on the desk of Maurice L. Draper, second counselor of the First Presidency of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Dinah Tommy wrote on behalf of thirteen Christian congregations located in Abak, a town in the Efik-speaking region of southeastern Nigeria.

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In 2001, the RLDS Church changed its name to the “Community of Christ,” but, in this article, I will refer to the Community of Christ as the “RLDS Church,” “Reorganized Church,” and “the Reorganization.” I will use these names interchangeably.

southeastern Nigeria, to request “affiliation with your church group in America.”

She prayed for the Reorganized Church to send “some American Missionaries or Spirit Filled Missionaries” and a “few copies of Ref. Bibles and Textbooks.” After reading Tommy’s letter, Draper forwarded her plea for support to the Council of Twelve, but the council simply returned the letter to him with a brief note that read: “Thanks for letting us see this.” Without guidance from the officials responsible for adjudicating church expansion, Draper decided to reply to Tommy’s vague letter. In his November 29, 1962 response, he stated that her request provided “insufficient information.”

The Reorganization wanted “a brief description of your movement, including a history of its origin and experience to date, a list of its officers, and a statement of your basic doctrine,” before it could make a judgment. Since the church had been officially organized in the mid-nineteenth century, it had not engaged in missionary activities in Africa.

Tommy’s letter set in motion a series of interactions and events that would ultimately lead to the establishment of an official RLDS mission in Nigeria in 1966.

This article relies on correspondence and missionary reports housed at the Community of Christ Library Archive located in Independence, Missouri, to explore not only why Christian congregations in southeastern Nigeria were drawn to the Reorganized Church, but also the significance of RLDS fact-finding missions in southeastern

3 Tommy to the RLDS Church, October 22, 1962, folder 65, P74, Percy Farrow Papers (hereafter Farrow Papers), Community of Christ Library Archives, Independence, Missouri (hereafter CCLA).

4 Ibid.

5 Bolton, Apostle of the Poor, 79; Draper, Isles and Continents, 79; Draper, “Isles and Continents,” 78.


7 The First Presidency to Tommy, November 29, 1962, folder 65, Farrow Papers.

8 Ibid. See also Draper, Isles and Continents, 79; Draper, “Isles and Continents,” 77.

Nigeria during the early 1960s for the church in the late twentieth century. This essay makes two arguments. First, it argues that the members of Tommy’s church were drawn to the RLDS Church primarily by a desire to improve their access to resources. Second, it contends that the entry of the Reorganized Church into southeastern Nigeria showcases the church’s shift towards a liberal Protestant message focused on abolishing poverty and care for the poor that accompanied the unprecedented international expansion of the RLDS Church into the non-Western world during the 1960s. Unlike early RLDS missionary strategies that focused on traditional proselytizing, RLDS church leaders in the 1960s wanted to develop a mission strategy that would allow the church to contribute to the long-term development of the postcolonial Nigerian nation.

**The Church of Jesus Christ and the Religious Environment of Southeastern Nigeria**

The letters that Draper received in response to his request for more information about the history and beliefs of Tommy’s religious movement enable historians to contextualize this group within the broader religious environment of southeastern Nigeria. “The Church of Jesus Christ,” as Tommy’s church group turned out to be called, was founded by Gobert Edet, an Efik speaker, in 1954.

Edet had been called to serve God at a “very young” age, but he

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11 Edet to the First Presidency, December 12, 1962, folder 65, Farrow Papers. See also W. Wallace Smith to the Council of Twelve, undated, folder 65, Farrow Papers.
resisted “the Divine Call to Preach the Gospel” out of fear that he would be unable to lead and preach the word of God effectively.\(^1\)
When he finally embraced the call to serve at the age of twenty-one after “prayer and fasting,” Edet established his church through “house-to-house evangelism.”\(^2\)

Going door to door and speaking with individuals in their homes about the gospel, he built up a following of “people of like calling and faith.”\(^3\)

With their assistance as “workers and preachers,” Edet organized congregations in more than thirty towns around Abak.\(^4\)

Edet’s religious movement espoused a diverse mixture of doctrinal statements. Some of these doctrines were rather uncontroversial from a Christian standpoint. Edet indicated that his church believed in “One True and Living God, “Three persons in one, namely, God the Father, Son and the Holy Ghost,” “the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,” “the Virgin Birth of the Lord Jesus Christ,” “Sanctification,” and “the existence of Heaven and Hell.”\(^5\)

He also said that he believed that “the Holy Bible is the inspired word of God” and that “the righteous shall share in the everlasting happiness, blessing and glory with their Lord Jesus in Heaven,” while “the unrighteous will suffer with Satan forever in Hell.”\(^6\)

His church, however, also possessed many Pentecostal characteristics.\(^7\)

Not only were the members of Edet’s congregations “baptized with the Holy Ghost,” but they also spoke “in tongues as the Spirit gives utterances.”\(^8\)

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\(^1\) Edet to the First Presidency, December 17, 1962, folder 65, Farrow Papers.
\(^2\) Edet to the First Presidency, December 12, 1962; Edet to the First Presidency, December 17, 1962. See also Smith to the Council of Twelve, undated.
\(^3\) Edet to the First Presidency, December 12, 1962.
\(^4\) For a list of these thirty towns, see Ibid. See also Smith to the Council of Twelve, undated.
\(^5\) Edet to the First Presidency, December 12, 1962.
\(^6\) Ibid.
\(^8\) Edet to the First Presidency, December 12, 1962. See also Edet to the First Presidency, December 17, 1962; Smith to the Council of Twelve, undated.
even claimed that he believed in the practice of “Divine Healing,” which was a common practice among Pentecostals.\textsuperscript{20} Some of Edet’s other doctrinal statements were also compatible with long-standing beliefs and practices of Mormonism, including “Baptism by immersion,” “tithing,” and the importance “of abstaining from all kinds of alcoholic drinks and tobacco.”\textsuperscript{21}

Edet’s eclectic Christian doctrines and practices reflected the diversity of the religious environment of southeastern Nigeria. Over the course of the twentieth century, the southeast became known for its intense religious competition and innovation. Following the arrival of European missions in the late nineteenth century, the area around Abak became the object of intense interdenominational rivalry.\textsuperscript{22} Squabbles over the mission boundaries in the southeast between the Primitive Methodists, United Free Church of Scotland, and the Qua Iboe Mission led to the neglect of local adherents.\textsuperscript{23} The discontent and dissatisfaction of local Christians with these European mission churches fostered high levels of religious experimentation in southeastern Nigeria that contributed to the rise of dozens of independent churches and religious movements, such as the Oberi Okaine


\textsuperscript{23} Udoh, “Religion and Change among the Annang and Ibibio,” 206–7.
Christian Mission. By 1968, sociologist David Barrett had confidently reported, in his encyclopedic study of six thousand churches across the African continent, that the region had “the densest concentration” of African independent churches on the entire African continent. Barrett concluded that there were more than fifty denominations with more than 250 congregations within a five-mile radius of the town of Abak alone. When, in 1959, two Mennonite missionaries arrived in Uyo, another town in the Efik-speaking region of the southeast, they encountered a similar situation: “We found seventy-five churches within a radius of five miles. How many more were still hidden in the bush we could only guess. These people have too many churches we thought!” Their observation can be corroborated by a survey from

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27 Weaver and Weaver, The Uyo Story, 13, also 47. See also Wilbert R. Shenk, “Go Slow through Uyo”: Dialogue as Missionary Method,” in Fullness of Life for All: Challenges for Mission in Early 21st Century, ed. Inus Daneel, Charles Van Engen, and Hendrik Vroom (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Rodopi, 2005), 300; R. Bruce Yoder, “Mennonite Mission Theorists and
1963, which reported that “there were 225 Christian congregations
within a five-mile radius of Uyo representing some forty different
denominations.”²⁸ LaMar Williams, an LDS missionary who went
to southeastern Nigeria in the early 1960s, similarly reported there
were “Churches everywhere, everywhere.”²⁹ Gobert Edet’s Church of
Jesus Christ had been born out of this “confused, competitive, and
divisive ecclesial situation.”³⁰

Edet’s discovery of the Reorganized Church within this crowded
religious marketplace remains an unlikely story of chance. Edet
learned about the Reorganized Church when members of “some
American and English Missionary Crusade and Global Frontier
Crusade,” likely an interdenominational evangelical mission organi-
zation, came to visit southeastern Nigeria in 1962.³¹ These American
missionaries preached both in churches and also in the open air, and
they distributed religious literature to local onlookers who stopped
to listen to them preach the word of God. Although this missionary
organization was not affiliated with the Reorganized Church, its selec-
tion of religious literature included tracts about the RLDS Church.

Practitioners in Southeastern Nigeria: Changing Contexts and Strategy at
the Dawn of the Postcolonial Era,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*
37, no. 3 (2013): 139; Robert Bruce Yoder, “Mennonite Missionaries and
African Independent Churches: The Development of an Anabaptist Missio-
ology in West Africa: 1958–1967” (PhD diss., Boston University, 2016),
44, 257, 283.

²⁸ Shenk, “Go Slow through Uyo,” 330. The late religious studies
scholar Harold Turner has also shown that there was a high concentration
of African independent churches around Uyo, Eket, Ikot-Ekpene, and Aba.

²⁹ LaMar S. Williams Interview, Oral History 692, Salt Lake City, Utah,
1981, 67, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day
Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter Church History Library). A convert to
the LDS Church also reported that “there are at present other Religious
Sects—A great many of them spring up from here, bearing native Church
names.” E. I. Okpon to Williams, October 12, 1960, box 1, folder 2, LaMar
S. Williams Papers, 1959–1962, Church History Library.

³⁰ Yoder, “Mennonite Mission Theorists and Practitioners in South-
eastern Nigeria,” 141. Historian Wilbert R. Shenk echoed this position
when he stated that Southern Nigeria “was rife with religious confusion.”

³¹ Edet to the First Presidency, March 4, 1963.
According to Edet, “one of the American Missionary Crusade people” gave an RLDS pamphlet to a man who was a member of the Church of Jesus Christ.32 Because this unidentified congregant did not speak English, however, he was unable to interact with the missionary who shared the pamphlet with him, or ask the missionary for additional information about the Reorganization. Instead, he took the RLDS tract home with him and shared it with Edet and others who found that the pamphlet was “Biblical, arousing and inspiring.”33 And then in October, after much deliberation, Edet’s church decided to write to the Reorganized Church to request “affiliation and co-operation.”34

Edet was motivated to affiliate the Church of Jesus Christ with the Reorganized Church to gain access to basic resources that would allow him to be a more effective church leader. His letter to the First Presidency, dated December 12, 1962, included an appeal for “Financial Support,” “One Gospel Car for our use in the whole field,” and “Reference Bibles and your doctrinal books and other missionary text books and papers.”35 These and similar requests were reiterated in subsequent letters and welcome addresses for the RLDS missionaries that visited his community.36 The most important request from Edet, however, was a burning desire to pursue advanced education in the United States. On March 19, 1963, Edet begged church leaders to allow him “to apply for [a] scholarship in one of your Bible

33 Edet to the First Presidency, March 4, 1963. See also Bolton, Apostle of the Poor, 79.
34 Edet to the First Presidency, March 4, 1963.
35 Edet to the First Presidency, December 12, 1962.
Theological Seminaries or Bible Colleges in America.”  

He believed that he could not effectively lead his congregations and command authority without advancing himself educationally, since “[t]here is nothing that lowers a minister of the Gospel in the respect and affection of his audience so quickly and so openly than to be guilty of gross breaches in English language.”  

From the early days of colonialism, Nigerians treated Western education not only as an important source of prestige and respect within their local communities but also as the key to personal betterment. One of the most effective ways to gain access to this type of education was to join a Western church.  

As a leader of a poor church whose Ekh-speaking congregants did not have command of the English language, Edet adapted this long-standing social survival strategy in southeastern Nigeria to the context of the

37 Edet to the First Presidency, March 19, 1963, folder 65, Farrow Papers. This request was reiterated in subsequent letters over the next year and a half. See Edet to First Presidency, April 3, 1963; Edet to Farrow and Couey, December 11, 1963; Edet to the Manager of Herald House, January 11, 1964, folder 3, First Presidency Papers E thru J; Edet to Farrow, February 25, 1964, folder 65, Farrow Papers; Edet to Farrow, March 9, 1964, folder 65, Farrow Papers; Edet to Farrow, December 4, 1964, folder 65, Farrow Papers.

38 Edet to the First Presidency, March 19, 1963.

postcolonial environment by appealing to an American church for support.40

When Edet appealed to the RLDS Church for assistance he placed himself within a longer historical trajectory. The practice of using religion to gain access to basic resources was intimately bound up in the economic history of southeastern Nigeria, which has been defined by the extraction of mass commodities including slaves, palm oil, and petroleum for the global economy.41 This extractive economy prevented the colonial administration and postcolonial politicians from making any serious effort to develop the southeastern part of the country over the past one hundred and fifty years. Within this larger economic context, as historian Caroline Ifeka-Moller has demonstrated, Nigerians living in the area around Abak, who were “frustrated by acute competition for scarce material resources and exclusion from the rewards of political and economic power,” turned to the “only plentiful resource” that could facilitate social advancement and “a reasonable standard of living”: religion.42

Edet’s desire to affiliate the Church of Jesus Christ with the RLDS Church to improve his access to resources did not preclude him from being interested in the doctrines of the RLDS Church. Edet repeatedly expressed his concern for doctrinal purity. After articulating the doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ in response to Maurice Draper’s request for more information, Edet emphasized that “anything contrary to your doctrine can be omitted out, stamped


out or cancelled, and the correct ones inserted or added." Edet reiterated this point when RLDS missionary Merle Guthrie visited Ikot Oku Mfang in 1966. “[W]e’re looking to you to tell us the evils [in our village],” Edet proclaimed. When RLDS apostles Percy Farrow and Duane Couey visited Edet’s community in late November and early December 1963, they claimed that Edet “is converted to the basics of our movement. He with a majority of his members already consider themselves part of our church in Nigeria. We are convinced that this arises out of sincerity rather than an endeavor to pressure us into accepting them.”

Edet’s interest in the doctrines of the RLDS Church, however, does not explain why he would seek to affiliate his church with the Reorganized Church as opposed to some other religious organization. Part of the appeal of Mormonism within an African context, as historian Philip Jenkins has pointed out, lay in the space that it created for prophecy, visionary experiences, and divine healing, but Edet could find dozens of other churches throughout southeastern Nigeria led by prophets and apostles that embraced Pentecostal religious practices, such as the Cherubim and Seraphim Society or the Brotherhood of the Cross and the Star. In other words, Mormonism, to borrow the words of Jenkins, appeared “absolutely mainstream” within the southeast. What made the RLDS Church unique, then, within the competitive religious marketplace of southeastern Nigeria was not its beliefs, but rather the way in which it merged the religious

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43 Edet to Draper, December 12, 1962.
45 Ibid.
beliefs and practices that appealed to Edet with access to international resources that these local churches lacked.

**CECIL ETTINGER AND THE REORGANIZED CHURCH’S FIRST TRIP TO SOUTHEASTERN NIGERIA**

The letters that Maurice L. Draper, second counselor of the First Presidency, received in response to his request for more information about the Church of Jesus Christ between December 1962 and March 1963 convinced him and other church leaders of the need to investigate the Nigerian situation. On April 22, 1962, the First Presidency asked Cecil R. Ettinger, an RLDS missionary in Birmingham, England, who also served as an apostle in the Reorganized Church from 1960 to 1974, to visit Nigeria to make an assessment of the Edet situation. Between finding a date that did not conflict with his prior missionary obligations and navigating the difficult process of acquiring a Nigerian travel visa in the United Kingdom, Ettinger was unable to arrange a visit to Edet and his congregations in southeastern Nigeria until August 1962.

Ettinger arrived in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, on August 1, 1962, for a three-week visit. His arduous journey to the village of Ikot Oku Mfang illustrates the absence of basic infrastructure in the southeastern part of Nigeria. Since the southeast lacked reliable public transportation, Ettinger, Edet and two unnamed men who met Ettinger at the airport, needed to charter three separate taxis to get from Port Harcourt to Edet’s village (Port Harcourt to “the crowded, noisy, and dirty town” of Aba, Aba to the “native market” of Ikot Ekpene, and Ikot Ekpene to Abak). At every stop in this day-long journey, it not only took them an hour or two to locate a taxi to hire for the next leg of their trip, but they also needed to negotiate both the taxi fare and the destination in advance with the taxi driver. When Ettinger returned to Port Harcourt after five days in Ikot Oku Mfang, he would have had to do this all over again, if it were not for the fact that the postmaster

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asked his friend to drive Ettinger to Port Harcourt after he had spent “nearly three hours” waiting for a taxi in Abak.\textsuperscript{51}

Ettinger’s experience in Edet’s village demonstrates that religion was a communal affair among the peoples of southeastern Nigeria. During his visit to Ikot Oku Mfang, the village chiefs held a meeting “in which they voted to disassociate themselves from other religious groups in order to wait for the time when we could send missionaries so they could associate themselves with us.”\textsuperscript{52} They also offered to give the Reorganized Church a tract of land to build “a church, mission house, and any other necessary buildings,” and this offer was reiterated in subsequent years.\textsuperscript{53} Both of these practices were common throughout southeastern Nigeria.\textsuperscript{54} Nigerian communities, for instance, also offered the LDS Church tracts of land on which to build churches and other structures.\textsuperscript{55}

After his visit to Ikot Oku Mfang, Ettinger spent the remainder of his three-week survey mission discussing the opportunities and challenges facing the Reorganized Church with American diplomats and Nigerian government officials in Enugu and then in Lagos. While many of the Nigerian civil servants whom he spoke to were “unwilling to commit themselves” to helping the RLDS Church establish a mission in Nigeria until the church submitted “a definite plan for entry and work,” members of the American diplomatic corps provided Ettinger with guidance about “immigration and educational procedures.”\textsuperscript{56} Both Robert P. Smith, the principal officer at the U.S. consulate in Enugu between 1962 and 1965, and Peter Tarnoff, a political officer at the U.S. embassy in Lagos from 1962 to 1965, believed

\textsuperscript{52} Ettinger, “Report of Survey Trip to Nigeria,” 3. See also “Trip to Nigeria, West Africa.”
\textsuperscript{55} See H. J. Ekong to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day [sic] Saints, September 3, 1960, box 1, folder 2, LaMar S. Williams Papers; Williams Oral History, 12.
that the Reorganization could assist in providing much needed educational services throughout Nigeria. Other employees of the U.S. government, such as Milton Ploghoft who led a U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) project to develop a teacher’s college in Kano, discussed with Ettinger “some of the problems and some of the joys of a protracted stay in the country.”

Ettinger returned to England on August 17, 1963, with high hopes for the Reorganization in Nigeria. In his report to the First Presidency about his three-week survey trip, he made a few recommendations that would shape the contours of the RLDS ministry in southeastern Nigeria over the coming months and years. First, Ettinger recommended that “a committee, consisting of two members of the Council of Twelve and one member each of the First Presidency and the Presiding Bishopric, be formed to study the possibilities of opening the work in Nigeria.” Shortly after Ettinger submitted his official report, the Council of Twelve implemented this recommendation by assigning two RLDS Apostles, Percy Farrow and Duane Couey, “to continue the studies and research commenced by Apostle Cecil R. Ettinger.” By October 1963, Farrow and Couey had already begun the process of planning the Reorganization’s second trip to Nigeria.

Second, Ettinger recommended that the Reorganized Church needed to acquire funds to bring Gobert Edet, the leader of the Church of Jesus Christ, to Graceland College. “Edet,” Ettinger reported, “is the kind of man we can build upon. In fact, he is essential to our success, since he commands the love and respect of his people. If he were to come to Graceland, he could prepare himself for greater potential service.”

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of the First Presidency, must have anticipated Cecil Ettinger’s recommendation. As the First Presidency was preparing to ask Ettinger to travel to southeastern Nigeria in order to assess the religious situation in Ikot Oku Mfang, church officials had already made inquiries about Edet pursuing advanced studies in the United States.\textsuperscript{62}

Ettinger also suggested that the RLDS missionary endeavor in southeastern Nigeria should focus on development work.\textsuperscript{63} He observed that the country could greatly benefit from the assistance of foreign “[t]eachers, agricultural advisors, and nurses.”\textsuperscript{64} Ettinger reiterated this point in a letter to Farrow and Couey who were preparing for their trip to southeastern Nigeria in October 1963: “I would advise before you start out finding out all you can about United States Governmental aid to underdeveloped countries. I know there is an aid program in education and in medicine, where private organizations, such as churches, can use this aid in order to set up schools, hospitals, etc.”\textsuperscript{65} Ettinger’s observation, which reflected his concern about the absence of basic social services in southeastern Nigeria, shaped the nature of RLDS missionary enterprise in the region. Farrow and Couey’s trip was defined by a consistent wish to learn more about the possible role that the Reorganized Church could play in providing such basic services.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{62} Carl Mesle to E. J. Gleazer, April 10, 1963, folder 65, Farrow Papers; Harvey H. Grice to D. O. Chesworth, April 15, 1963, folder 65, Farrow Papers; Harold L. Condit to Chesworth, April 24, 1963, folder 65, Farrow Papers.
  \item \textsuperscript{64} Ettinger, “Report of Survey Trip to Nigeria,” 7. See also Farrow to Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Graham, February 28, 1964, folder 65, Farrow Papers.
  \item \textsuperscript{65} Ettinger to Couey and Farrow, October 24, 1963.
\end{itemize}
PERCY FARROW, DUANE COUEY, AND THE REORGANIZATION’S SECOND TRIP TO SOUTHEASTERN NIGERIA

As soon as the Council of Twelve assigned Percy Farrow and Duane Couey “to continue the studies and research commenced by Apostle Cecil R. Ettinger,” they quickly began to make preparations for a second trip to Nigeria.66 Throughout October and November 1963, Farrow and Couey reached out to colleagues, friends, acquaintances, and civil servants who might provide them with information about Nigeria to help them prepare for their trip. Because of their interest in development work, they were particularly interested in learning from government officials whether there were any opportunities for the Reorganized Church to establish either a medical or educational mission in the region.67 Farrow and Couey also wanted to establish contacts with other foreigners and missionaries in the country, such as Seventh-Day Adventists or employees of Shell Oil Company, who could provide in-country assistance.68 They even reached out to members of the RLDS community who worked for financial organizations to help them better understand the economic and banking conditions of southeastern Nigeria.69

Farrow and Couey left Independence, Missouri, for Ikot Oku Mfang on November 19, 1963.70 Farrow and Couey’s experience in southeastern Nigeria mirrored Ettinger’s experience in the region. Their travels from Port Harcourt to Abak were so “very similar” to

67 Farrow to the Nigerian Canadian Embassy, October 28, 1963, folder 58, Farrow Papers; Farrow to the Secretary of UNESCO, November 1, 1963, folder 58, Farrow Papers.
69 Percy Farrow to Gomer Farrow, October 23, 1963, folder 58, Farrow Papers; G. L. DeLapp to Albert L. Fern, October 29, 1963, folder 65, Farrow Papers.
Ettinger’s that they did not even bother detailing their trials on the harrowing roads of Nigeria in their official report.\textsuperscript{71} During their nine-day stay in Ikot Oku Mfang, Edet organized “a conference,” the exact nature of which remains unclear from archival documentation, that presented Farrow and Couey with an opportunity to meet congregants from all around southeastern Nigeria.\textsuperscript{72} After finishing in Edet’s village, Farrow and Couey returned to Port Harcourt, flew to Enugu and talked with many of the same government officials that Ettinger had spoken with during his visit, including Robert P. Smith and the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Education for Eastern Nigeria. They then traveled to Lagos, where they spoke with Peter Tarnoff, and some USAID workers. The two apostles left Nigeria on December 14, 1963.

Although Farrow and Couey’s trip did not break new ground, their travels were notable because they reaffirmed Ettinger’s recommendation to bring Edet to Graceland College for advanced studies. “The first step which is absolutely essential to the establishment of such a mission,” wrote Farrow and Couey in their official report, “is to bring Reverend Gobert Edet to America on a program which will further his academic education.”\textsuperscript{73} “We believe,” Farrow and Couey continued, “that if Reverend Edett [sic] attends Graceland College that for practical experience in ministry after he is baptized and ordained, he might well be placed under the leadership of the Stake President in Lamoni, cooperating with the College, and giving him experience in the congregations of the Stake.”\textsuperscript{74} Education in the United States would not only provide Edet with the tools to “lift his people further than their present status, religiously, economically, or culturally,” but it would also give him the opportunity to understand how the church was organized and structured by bringing him to the Midwest—the center of the RLDS faith.\textsuperscript{75}

Ettinger, Farrow, and Couey’s recommendation to bring Edet to the United States for advanced education was notable, because it simultaneously distinguished the Reorganized Church from mainline mission churches already present in southeastern Nigeria as well as

\textsuperscript{71} “Report of Percy E. Farrow and Duane E. Couey on Nigeria,” 2. See also Farrow to Robinson, May 13, 1964.

\textsuperscript{72} “Report of Percy E. Farrow and Duane E. Couey on Nigeria,” 2.

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 8.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 8.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 3.
made the church more like them. During the mid-twentieth century, many mainline churches had made the same shift from evangelism to an emphasis on educational and medical work that the RLDS Church made in the 1960s.\textsuperscript{76} For these churches, however, the development of mission schools and hospitals between the 1920s and the postcolonial period “actually seemed to necessitate the continued presence and control of foreign missionaries,” because, as the late Catholic historian Adrian Hastings has pointed out, these churches “had done strangely little in most places to train a local clergy which could possibly replace the missionaries outside the villages.”\textsuperscript{77} The RLDS Church, however, as the recommendation to educate Edet in the United States demonstrates, wanted to fold local leaders into the RLDS administrative structure. By bringing Edet to the United States to be educated in the fundamentals of RLDS theology and to experience for himself how the church was structured and organized in the Midwest, the RLDS Church eliminated the need to organize a cadre of American missionaries to teach Nigerian RLDS converts the contours of their beliefs and reorganize their congregations in the southeast. Put another way, this mission strategy made it possible for church leaders to foster the development of southeastern Nigeria as well as the expansion of RLDS congregations with limited financial and human investment of their own.

\textbf{Gobert Edet at Graceland College}

After Farrow and Couey returned from their trip in December 1963 and submitted their recommendations, church leaders formulated a plan to bring Gobert Edet to the United States. In January 1964, the Missions Abroad Committee explored how much it would cost the church to bring Edet to the United States.\textsuperscript{78} Two months later, in March, the committee recommended that “Gobert Edett [sic] be brought to the United States at church expense for a period of

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Draper, Memorandum to the First Presidency, January 28, 1964, folder 3, First Presidency Papers E thru J.}
\end{footnotes}
up to two years.” It was not until April, however, that a concrete plan of action materialized. On April 28, 1964, Clifford Cole, the Commissioner of Education and President of the Council of Twelve, wrote to the First Presidency that Edet should spend his first year in the United States at Graceland College in Lamoni, Iowa, and his second year at Central Missouri State College in Independence, Missouri, where the headquarters of the RLDS Church was located. While he was at Graceland College, Edet would pursue a program of general education to solidify his training as a teacher. Cole’s educational agenda was influenced by the Reorganized Church’s desire to contribute to the long-term development of southeastern Nigeria. “I think we need to keep in mind the fact that this man is a teacher,” wrote Cole. “His interests lie in this direction . . . and the men of the council of Twelve who have visited Nigeria all emphasized the importance of educational work in Nigeria.”

Cole’s program for Edet in the United States also embraced the RLDS Church’s plan to fold Edet directly into the RLDS organizational structure. While at Graceland College, Cole also proposed that Edet should take “a course in the History of Latter Day Saintism” and “a course in a survey of the Bible,” both of which would provide him with the knowledge to be a more effective religious leader for the Reorganization in southeastern Nigeria. Furthermore, church leadership would work with the local bishop in Lamoni to create opportunities for Edet “to be involved” in the Lamoni Branch during the course of the school year. Edet would then build on his experiences in the Lamoni Branch during his second year at Independence, where he would participate in “activities which will familiarize him with the church and operations around Headquarters.”

By the end of May, the terms of Edet’s visit to the United States had been finalized. While the Reorganized Church agreed to pay for Edet’s education, maintenance, and transportation during his stay in the United States, Edet needed to make arrangements with

79 Couey to the Joint Council of the First Presidency, the Council of Twelve, and the Presiding Bishopric, March 9, 1964, folder 65, Farrow Papers.
80 Cole to the First Presidency, April 28, 1984, folder 3, First Presidency Papers E thru J.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
his father-in-law to take care of his wife and family. Apart from the unnecessary financial burden that the presence of Edet’s family in the United States would have placed on the RLDS Church, church leaders also wanted Edet’s family to remain in Ikot Oku Mfang because they believed that this would prevent them from having to worry about Edet acclimating to American culture and society and then failing to return to Nigeria once he completed his studies. Church leaders also told Edet that he could not expect the RLDS Church to provide his family with any financial assistance. Once Edet agreed to these terms, the Reorganization provided him with a plane ticket to the United States.

Edet arrived in Kansas City, Missouri, on July 26, 1964, and what transpired showcases how an affiliation with a religious organization could facilitate access to resources. By the end of August, it became clear to church leaders that Edet had not been honest about his family’s situation. “I believe . . . that there is some degree of misrepresentation here,” wrote Duane Couey to Clifford Cole, president of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, on August 28, 1964, following a long conversation that he had had with Edet about how he was settling into his life in the United States. “He said that his father-in-law would exercise a general oversight over his home but that he was unable to support his family. . . . He showed me a letter which he received from his wife which indicated that they were out of funds until she received a one pound note which he sent her just before leaving Nigeria.” In order to avoid missing the opportunity to pursue advanced education and training in the United States, Edet misrepresented his family’s situation. In doing so, he created a situation that required RLDS church leaders to provide some financial support for his family. After some discussion, church leaders agreed to provide Edet’s children

84 Couey to the Joint Council of the First Presidency, the Council of Twelve, and the Presiding Bishopric, March 9, 1964; Cole to Edet, May 13, 1964; First Presidency to the Presiding Bishopric, September 2, 1964, folder 65, Farrow Papers; Cole to Edet, September 9, 1964, folder 65, Farrow Papers.

85 The First Presidency to Herbert Lively and L. W. Kohlman, September 2, 1964, folder 65, Farrow Papers.


87 Couey to Cole, August 28, 1964, folder 3, First Presidency Papers E thru J.

88 Ibid.
and wife with a monthly stipend of forty dollars at a time when most local pastors for international mission churches in Nigeria received around twenty dollars per month and trained nurses made around fifty dollars per month. While it is unclear whether Edet intentionally misled church leaders, he nevertheless used his affiliation with the Reorganized Church to improve his family’s economic situation.

In September 1964, Edet commenced his educational program at Graceland College. Although very little information may be gleaned from the archival materials about the details of his studies at Graceland College, the documentation indicates that Edet excelled. On March 24, 1965, for instance, Farrow wrote in a letter to Edet that “Brother Ettinger makes fine report on your work at Graceland College.” About a month later, on April 27, 1965, Farrow similarly communicated to Edet’s wife, Justinah, that the “reports which we have received from time to time indicate that Gobert is doing very well at Graceland College.” The RLDS Church’s positive experience with bringing Edet to the United States for further education laid the foundation for other Nigerian church leaders, such as Sunday Charlie Akpan who studied at Selly Oaks College in Birmingham in the late 1970s, to pursue training abroad.

During his time in the United States, the RLDS Church performed the religious rites that would permit Edet to return to Nigeria as a minister in the RLDS tradition. Shortly after his arrival in late August


90 Cole to Farrow, July 15, 1964, folder 65, Farrow Papers; Edet to Farrow, undated, folder 65, Farrow Papers; Farrow to Edet, September 11, 1964, folder 65, Farrow Papers.

91 Farrow to Edet, March 24, 1965, folder 65, Farrow Papers.

92 Farrow to Edet, April 27, 1965, folder 65 Farrow Papers.

93 Akpan to M. U. Etuk, May 9, 1978, folder 21, First Presidency Papers E thru J.
1964, Percy Farrow baptized Edet in Lamoni, Iowa.\textsuperscript{94} In May 1965, Cecil Ettinger recommended to church leaders that Edet was ready for ordination, which the First Presidency sustained on June 1.\textsuperscript{95} On November 14, 1965, Edet was ordained as an elder in the Reorganized Church at Slover Park Church in Independence, Missouri, with his wife and children by his side, whom church leaders had brought to the United States for this momentous occasion.\textsuperscript{96}

One day after Edet was ordained as an elder in the Reorganized Church, the Reorganization officially announced, on November 15, 1965, that missionary work had been “opened” in southeastern Nigeria.\textsuperscript{97} Church leaders declared that Edet would return to his country “as a ministerial assistant” and that “two missionary families” would travel to southeastern Nigeria in summer 1966.\textsuperscript{98} What was notable about the declaration approved by the First Presidency, the Council of Twelve, and the Presiding Bishopric, however, was the absence of a clearly articulated focus on proselytization. Heeding the recommendations of Ettinger, Farrow, and Couey, church leaders stated that as the Reorganized Church became more established in Africa, it would instead focus on “social projects” such as “agricultural, educational, and medical services.”\textsuperscript{99}

When Edet returned to Nigeria towards the beginning of 1966 he was accompanied by Merle Guthrie, an RLDS high priest assigned

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{94} Cole to Farrow, August 7, 1964, folder 65, Farrow Papers; Edet to Rev. and Mrs. Farrow, undated, folder 65, Farrow Papers; Farrow to Edet, September 11, 1964.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{95} “Recommendation for Ordination,” May 28, 1965, folder 4, First Presidency Papers E thru J; The First Presidency to Ettinger, June 1, 1965, folder 4, First Presidency Papers E thru J.}


\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{97} The First Presidency, “Work Opened in Nigeria,” 26.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{98} “Africa,” October 20, 1965, folder 4, First Presidency Papers E thru J. See also The First Presidency, “Work Opened in Nigeria,” 26; Draper, “Isles and Continents,” 79.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{99} “Africa,” October 20, 1965.}
to begin work in Nigeria. Like Ettinger, Farrow, and Couey before him, Guthrie came to the conclusion that the Reorganized Church should focus on development work. During his brief visit to Ikot Oku Mfang, Guthrie observed that Edet’s congregations wanted “help for their children. They need health care . . . as well as proper nourishment and education.” Apart from baptizing RLDS adherents and ordaining local leaders, he suggested that the RLDS Church needed to explore “the possibility of establishing a school—preferably a trade school, and a children’s outpatient clinic.” The interest that RLDS church leaders like Guthrie showed in contributing to the development of the postcolonial Nigerian nation exposed the transformation that the church had begun to undergo in the 1960s—a theological liberalization that would come to fruition in the 1970s.

**CONCLUSION**

Despite its announcement that southeastern Nigeria had been “opened” for missionary work, the Reorganized Church’s plan to lift Edet and his congregations “to higher heights” would have to wait. For the remainder of the 1960s, the Reorganization experienced setbacks that prevented the church from initiating its work in the southeast. After Guthrie returned from his brief trip to Ikot Oku Mfang in 1966, he and another RLDS missionary assigned to begin work in southeastern Nigeria, Bob Seely, were unable to acquire long-term visas. The church then had to postpone its work following the

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100 The First Presidency to Edet, May 31, 1966, folder 4, First Presidency Papers E thru J.


102 Ibid.


outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War.\textsuperscript{105} Although the circumstances of the war prevented the church from sending missionaries, church leaders did not abandon their Nigerian congregations. Over the course of 1969 and 1970, the Reorganization provided thousands of dollars to Edet and his congregations for relief as they struggled to cope with starvation, disease, and death.\textsuperscript{106} After the end of the war, the RLDS Church picked up where its work had left off by establishing a health ministry in southeastern Nigeria during the 1970s.\textsuperscript{107}

