

FUTURE PROSPECTS OF KUKI WORSHIP SERVICE

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Introduction.....

Kuki Worship Service in this article refers to both an individual Kuki Worship Service (KWS) Unit located in a particular place as well as all the KWS Units put together as one single entity. This paper discusses about the future prospects of KWS. Prospect as a noun means 'something expected or a possibility and/or 'belief about (or mental picture of) the future'. As a verb it means 'the search for something desirable'. In this article, we will refer to 'prospect' as a mental picture of the future of KWS, something which is desirable.

The beginning of KWS.....

The first Unit, the KWS, Shillong was started on September 21, 1980. Initially it was known as the Kuki Students Worship Service, Shillong (KSWSS). It was under the aegis of the Kuki Students Organization (KSO), Shillong that the worship service was formed and functioned under the students' body. Though many Kuki students in Shillong at that time attended the English Service conducted by the Evangelical Union (EU) Shillong, it was deemed necessary to start a worship service for the Kuki community to facilitate worshipping in one's own language, as well as to provide an avenue for church worship for those students who did not attend the English Service conducted by the EU.

In order to include family members in the worship service and to facilitate their active participation the KSWSS was renamed as Kuki Worship Service, Shillong (KWSS) in 1982. On May 6, 1986, a decision was made to separate KSO and KWS as two separate autonomous bodies.

The beginnings of most of the other Units of KWSs in other cities like Delhi, Pune, Bangalore, Guwahati etc. were similar to that of the KWS, Shillong, initiated by the KSO, except at Happy Valley, Shillong where families took the initiative.

From the very beginning, KWS has a non-denominational outlook, opening the doors to everyone irrespective of one's denomination but following basic Christian belief: in One God eternally existent in three

persons: the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit; the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ embodying his virgin birth, sinless life, death and resurrection; justification of fallen man solely by the grace of God through faith in Christ; the indwelling of the believer by the Holy Spirit; the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; the spiritual unity of all believers in Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Bible as the infallible and inspired Word of God.

KWS today.....

Today there are nine KWS Units in the cities of Bangalore, Delhi, Guwahati, Happy Valley Shillong, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai, Pune and Shillong. There are two Units outside of India, one in London and the other in Kuala Lumpur. As mentioned, the first Unit, the KWS Shillong was started in 1980 and the newest Unit, the KWS Mumbai was formed this year.

From small beginnings as worship groups that meet on Sundays only, many of the Units today function as churches, having Sunday Schools for children, prayer cells, women's fellowships, church building projects, missionary activities, social work etc. besides regular Sunday worship services. Like KWS Shillong, many of the other Units also have KSO and KWS as two separate autonomous bodies while maintaining close relationship between the two.

In order to foster a better relationship and partnership among the various Units, All India Kuki Worship Service Coordination Committee (AIKWSCC) was formed in 2002. Though AIKWSCC has not been able to be very active, it has facilitated consultations, leadership seminars, closer interactions and exchange of ideas in developing joint projects, common constitution, motto and logo for all the Units.

The AIKWSCC has been able to interact with different mother churches in Manipur, Nagaland and Assam. It has also coordinated with Kuki Christian Leaders Fellowship (KCLF) in providing Chaplains and Pastors for various KWS Units and also in dealing with issues and concerns raised by mother churches.

Future prospects KWS.....

A non-denominational church with interdenominational values

The word "church" in the English Bible is translated from the term ekklesia. This word is the Greek words kaleo (to call), with the prefix ek (out). Thus, the word means "the called out ones." However, the

English word "church" does not come from ekklesia but from the word kuriakon, which means "dedicated to the Lord." It was also used as a synonym for the word synagogue, which also means to "come together," i.e. a gathering. It biblically always refers to a local group of believers meeting in a particular geographical location. In the New Testament the word "ekklesia" is normally used to refer to an assembly of believers.

In this sense KWS is a church as a body of Christians worshipping in a particular location, constituting one congregation. But KWS is non-denominational, having its members drawn from diverse denominations. As such, KWS should be able to relate with all the denominations of its members.

Being called out and being sent out

The basic characteristic of the KWS is a group of people called to worship the Lord Almighty in spirit and truth. "God is Spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." (John 4:24) KWS is also called to go and make disciples, bringing others into the presence of God to acknowledge and worship Him. "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"(Mathew 28:19)

Focus on community and focus on God

While the name of the congregational body is KWS and it conducts worship services in the tradition and cultural context of the Kuki community, the primary focus should be on God who is worshipped and not the community, which assembles for worship. God should always be the center of everything. "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God". (Hebrews12:2)

Independent and interdependent

Each Unit of KWS is an independent body, having its own constitution as a local Unit. The individual Units have their own criteria for membership, committees, bylaws, and functions. While preserving this independence, these Units must develop relationship and partnership with the other Units, nurturing mutual understanding and growth. "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." (Philippians 2:4)

Autonomous identity and dynamic relationship

KWS has a separate identity as a worshipping group from the student body the KSO, but both the bodies have a close relationship, as most of the members of KWS are members of KSO as well. Both KWS and KSO are autonomous bodies and their individual identities should be respected while maintaining a dynamic relationship between the two.

Exclusive and yet inclusive

Most of the members of KWS are from Kuki community and it appears exclusive. KWS therefore, is in some way a forum for preserving ethnic identity and culture but this should not deter people of other communities/languages from joining the congregation. There must be an environment of openness, wherein others feel welcome and accepted and in return be enriched by their presence and participation. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

Internal care and external service

KWS provides brotherly love and care to its members, catering to their spiritual and physical needs. It should also be a platform for serving people outside the Kuki community, with the same concern and love. "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Mathew 5:16).

Traditional and yet innovative

The patterns and manners of the functions and worship of the KWS imitate traditional practices from home churches and care should be taken to preserve these traditional values and ethos. However KWS should incorporate innovative ideas and practices outside of mother churches that will greatly enrich the congregations.

Formal and yet movement oriented

KWS started as a movement with a tangible pattern of growth; with a sense of direction, aim and progress. KWS has formulated written constitutions, formalized church management structures, pastors, executive committees and various departments and is engaged in diverse projects. Care must be taken not to kill the spirit of movement of KWS lest it become too institutionalized. If it stops progressing, it would stagnate and would become a still monument, a reminiscence

of the past instead of a movement where God is actively at work. God has initiated this movement with a definite purpose. As a body, it should continue to develop and growth unto Christ-likeness. “..... We will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ”. (Ephesians 4:15)

Conclusion.....

As mentioned in the beginning, the prospects of KWS in terms of a mental picture of the future and something that is desirable is to be an avenue for deep spiritual growth of the members, especially molding and grooming youth to lead a Christ-like life and to become agents of change. KWS is also a model of church unity for the Kuki society. It can also become a channel of blessing for the society at large. ““I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing”. (Genesis 12:2)

Source:

1. *Interview with Dr. T. T. Haokip on September 29, 2008 for history of KWS Shillong*
2. *Meeting minutes of AIKWSCC held at New Delhi on November 24, 2002; at Pune on February 5, 2005 and at Kolkata on October 14 – 15, 2005.*
3. *Proposed AIKWSCC Constitution drafted by Pu L.L. Khongsai & Rev. Lamboi Haokip*
4. *The Holy Bible (NIV)*