



The Origins and Evolution of the Men's Christian Fellowship in the United Church of Zambia

Prof. Jonathan Kangwa

Zambia

***Corresponding Author: Prof. Jonathan Kangwa, Zambia**

Abstract: This paper investigates the origins and development of the Men's Christian Fellowship (MCF), the men's guild of the United Church of Zambia (UCZ), situating its evolution within broader ecclesiastical, social, and postcolonial contexts. Drawing on archival research and document analysis, the study traces the historical lineage of the MCF from its roots in the Young Men's Guild (YMG) of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, through its transformation into the Men's Christian Union (MCU) in Southern Rhodesia, and its subsequent transplantation into Northern Rhodesia (present-day Zambia). The analysis illuminates how social, economic and political factors shaped the identity, objectives and practices of the MCF. The paper explores how the MCF, following Zambia's independence and the formation of the UCZ in 1965, adapted and institutionalized practices of fellowship, evangelism, and community service, thereby becoming integral to the UCZ's mission and outreach. The study argues that the MCF has played a pivotal role in shaping the institutional identity, governance and community engagement of the UCZ, contributing significantly to the church's influence in Zambian society and the wider region.

Keywords: Men's Christian Fellowship, United Church of Zambia, Christian men's groups, Masculinity, Zambia, Mission, Evangelism, Church history.

1. INTRODUCTION

The United Church of Zambia (UCZ) was established on 16th January 1965 through the union of several Protestant churches in Zambia. This union brought together the Church of Central Africa in Rhodesia (CCAR) – itself formed from the merger of the Church of Scotland, the London Missionary Society, and the Union Church of the Copperbelt (UCC) in Northern Rhodesia –alongside the congregations of the Copperbelt Free Church Council, the Church of Barotseland and the Methodist Church in Northern Rhodesia (UCZ Constitution 2014:1). The UCZ has a men's guild called the Men's Christian Fellowship (MCF). The MCF has anchored its aim and objectives on the Jesus' great commission recorded in Matthew 28:16-20, to preach the gospel to people of all nations. The great commission is well reflected in the slogan of the MCF which states:

MCF, Ndeya ndeya shimika -MCF, I will go and proclaim the gospel

MCF, Ndeya ndeya ndeya shimika -MCF, I will go and proclaim the gospel

MCF, Ndyeya ndeya ndeya shimika -MCF, I will go and proclaim the gospel

The members of the MCF chant the slogan in Bemba or any other local language while raising their right hand with a clenching fist to show power as a soldier of Christ. Using archival research and document analysis as methods of data collection, this paper discusses the origins and development of the Men's Christian Fellowship (MCF). Archival research involves investigating and extracting information and evidence from archival records, documents and textual material (McKoy 2023, Ventresca & Mohr 2002). This method of data collection enabled the researcher to trace developments regarding the history of the MCF. Document analysis involves interpreting documents to give them a voice and meaning (Bowen 2009, O'Leary 2010). This allowed the researcher to read through the documents and interpret both historical and textual phenomenon.

Using archival research and document analysis, the paper traces the origins of the MCF from the Young Men's Guild (YMG) in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa and the Men's Christian Union of the Methodist Church in Southern Rhodesia and how the African traditional notion of a real man – borrowed from the original understanding of a man in the YMG in the Methodist Church in Southern Africa – forms the basis of the fellowship and evangelism outreach strategy of the MCF.

2. ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE YOUNG MEN'S GUILD

The MCF of the UCZ traces its origins from the Young Men's Guild of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa which was started in Transvaal district and spread to other parts of South Africa (Madise 2013, Madise 2000: 25). The guild was called *Amadodana*, which, in the Zulu or Xhosa language, means men.¹ Drawing on the minutes of the YMG of 2012 in Transvaal, Mokhele Madise records that the YMG started around 1912 in Transvaal and other parts of South Africa when the young men in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa came together to form a men's guild (Madise 2013, Madise 2000: 25). In the local Zulu culture, *Indoda* means a man who is circumcised and initiated into manhood (Dictionary of South African English 2023). It is more than being male in terms of gender. It has deep social connotations. *Amadodana* meant a guild or fellowship of men who were well initiated into Christianity. The MCF of the UCZ traces its origins from this young men's guild in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (Muwowo 2022).

The YMG was formed to provide space for young men in the Church to have fellowship through Bible study, prayers and devotions, to address the spiritual, economic, family and health needs of young men, and to become an instrument of evangelism for young men in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. The young men were inspired by the Women's Guild formed by Mrs Amos Burnet in the Transvaal, which came to be known as the *Manyano* (Zvobgo 1973: 63-70, Madise 2013). The *Manyano* was doing well in providing fellowship to the women and in making converts among black Africans. However, there was no guild for men at the time. The objectives of forming the YMG are summarized as followed (Madise 2013, Madise 2000: 25):

1. To have a day in the week for young men to have prayers, Bible study and devotions
2. To help young men lead good lives and conduct themselves as Christians and be a good example to other young men
3. To win souls for Christ through evangelistic outreach
4. To have time for worship and extend the Kingdom of God through preaching

The formation of the YMG was necessitated by industrialization and social-political developments in mining towns in South Africa where black people were living in abject poverty despite living in mineral-rich townships. The Christian message of salvation by Jesus appealed to young men who had no jobs and were subjected to racial segregation by the whites. Therefore, Young men were looking for a group in the Church where they could pray and conduct evangelistic campaigns (Madise 2013, Madise 2000: 25). The Young Men's Guild (YMG) held evangelistic campaigns every Saturday, aiming to convert more young men to Christianity and welcome them into the guild. The effectiveness of these campaigns supports David Kemp's observation, a Methodist missionary to the Gold Coast, on the influential role of Black Christians in missionary work. Kemp noted that the life of native Christians are a powerful testament as they share the same background and circumstances as their peers and their transformation is both visible and relatable (Kemp 1898: 145-146).

The YMG continued to spread in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa under the leadership of lay leaders before it was officially accepted in 1932 at a meeting chaired by Rev John Mabona in under the guidance of Rev. William Meara (Madise 2013). There was strong resistance from ordained ministers before both the guild and the name *Amadodana* were officially accepted. Many more meetings and conventions were held thereafter. In 1938 the official uniform for the YMG was officially adopted as follows (Madise 2013):

1. A black jack – symbolizing sin and the darkness of the crucifixion of Jesus;

¹ In Zulu language *Amadodona* means men, *Indoda* means a man, especially one who is well cultured.

2. White shirt – symbolizing salvation in Jesus and the light of his resurrection;
3. Black trousers – symbolizing sin and the darkness of the crucifixion of Jesus;
4. Black shoes – symbolizing sin and the darkness of the crucifixion of Jesus;
5. Red waistcoat with five buttons – symbolizing the blood of Jesus which was shed on Calvary to bring salvation. Five buttons of the waistcoat symbolize the five wounds of Jesus when he was crucified;
6. A badge with the letters “YMG” on it – symbolizing a crown;
7. Black neck tie – symbolizing sin and the darkness of the crucifixion of Jesus.

The YMG drafted the Constitution which required new members to be trained for six months before being admitted, and spelled out objectives and rules and regulations for the guild and its mission of evangelizing.

3. SPREAD OF THE YMG TO SOUTHERN RHODESIA

The YMG spread from South Africa to Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). In the 1920s and 1930s people from countries in Southern Africa such as Southern Rhodesia and Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) could migrate to South Africa to work in the mines. Due to the movement of people from South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, the Women's Guild in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa spread to Southern Rhodesia where it continued to be called Manyano (Zvobgo 1973: 63-70, MCR Rules and Regulations 1922). The Manyano was very successful in evangelism and in providing fellowship for women in the Methodist Church in Southern Rhodesia. Due to the success of the Manyano, some members of the Methodist Church in Southern Africa who moved from South Africa to Southern Rhodesia carried with them the idea of forming the YMG. Consequently, the YMG was formed in the Methodist Church in Southern Rhodesia in 1928 by men who were inspired by the Manyano to start meeting regularly for mid-week Bible study (Zvobgo 1973: 63-70, MCR Rules and Regulations 1922). The group was called Amadodana as it was called in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa.

The Young Men's Guild in the Methodist Church in Southern Rhodesia grew in the years following 1928. Young men in the Church found fellowship and social support through the group. The Methodist Church in Southern Rhodesia then decided to change the name of the group from Young Men's Guild to the Men's Christian Union (MCU). The MCU was formed to meet the following objectives (Zvobgo 1973:63-70, MCZF 2014, MCR Rules and Regulations 1922):

1. To preach the Good news of salvation and to build the body of Christ by encouraging men to be preachers;
2. To strive for holiness in the lives of all members in the Church;
3. To seek love and peace and to remove all hatred and discrimination of all types, grudges, disagreements, and misunderstandings;
4. To encourage men to read the Bible and other relevant spiritual books;
5. To encourage men to seek righteousness in order to do that which they were created for;
6. Dedication to the service of the organisation in order to bring others to Christ.

The new members of the MCU were trained for six months before they were badged. The Rules and Regulations of the MCU did not allow the members to take alcoholic drinks, to be involved in quarreling and vain arguments and discussions, getting into debt, and to be extravagant when preparing for the wedding ceremony (Zvobgo 1973: 63-70, MCR Rules and Regulations 1924). The members of the MCU were expected to pay an annual membership fee and to make financial contributions towards the work of the Church and the guild, to take care when choosing a wife, to stay pure by avoiding adultery and fornication, to attend Sunday worship service and to pray for the members of the Church and the MCU. The MCU largely maintained the uniform of the YMG. The uniform of the MCU was black shoes, black trousers, white shirt and red jacket. They wore a red sash with the letters “MCU” written on it and a brown badge (MCZ 2013, Muwowo 2022, Abraham

2024).² The meaning of the colours of the uniform are the same as the YMG as discussed above. The MCU in Southern Rhodesia extended its influence to Northern Rhodesia.

4. SPREAD OF THE MCU TO NORTHERN RHODESIA

The MCU was first introduced in Northern Rhodesia in 1957 by Christians who moved from Southern Rhodesia to Northern Rhodesia and started congregating with the Methodist Church in Northern Rhodesia in Matero compound in Lusaka, under the leadership of Rev Levison Muchunga. According to Andrew Muwowo, the founding members of the MCU in Matero compound in Lusaka included Mr. Daniel Ilunga as Vice Secretary, Mr. Thom Chituka as treasurer, Mr. Peter Nyirongo as Committee member, Mr. Thomas Makwabarara as Chairperson, Mr Matandarizo as Secretary and Mr. Finas Mlambo as Vice Chairperson (Muwowo 2022, Abraham 2024). The MCU in Northern Rhodesia was guided by the same objectives as in the Methodist Church in Southern Rhodesia. The guild focused on encouraging men in the Church to spread the gospel, to pray and to hold Bible studies together, and to have fellowship to strengthen each other in their daily life. They believed in having fellowship in the love and strength of the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:16-18).

The MCU spread from the Methodist Church in Matero compound to other Methodist churches in Lusaka. In 1960, the Methodist Church Union (MCU) was established at the Methodist Church located in the Kabwata compound of Lusaka, under the leadership of Rev. Peter Musgrove (Muwowo 2022, Abraham 2024). Today, the original Methodist Church in Kabwata is known as the United Church of Zambia, St. Paul's congregation.

Mr. Peter Nyirongo, who was a founding member of the MCU at Matero, was very instrumental in the starting of the MCU in Kabwata compound. The new entrants to MCU first received training between three to six months before they were commissioned as badged members of the MCU. The MCU continued to grow. It spread to Methodist churches in present-day Lusaka and Central provinces of Zambia. By 1961, the MCU had grown and spread to the Methodist Church in Muyoye in present-day Mumbwa district. It had also been introduced to the Methodist Church in Kembe under the leadership of Rev. Solomon Makumba. Many men were commissioned as badged members of the MCU in 1961, at the Methodist Church conference held in Northern Rhodesia at Muyoye mission in present-day Mumbwa. In 1962, the Methodist Church in Southern Rhodesia became independent due to ecclesiastical and political developments in the region. There was now no relationship between the Methodist Church in Southern Rhodesia and the Methodist Church in Northern Rhodesia. Many members of the Methodist Church in Northern Rhodesia went back to Southern Rhodesia. As a result, the membership of the MCU in the Methodist Church in Northern Rhodesia dropped drastically.

In 1964, Zambia gained independence from British rule. On 16th January 1965, the UCZ was formed through the union of several churches – as already noted. The MCU continued to exist in former Methodist churches that had now become part of the UCZ in Lusaka, Central and Copperbelt provinces. The group was introduced to other UCZ congregations that were not under the Methodist Church in Northern Rhodesia. In 1967, the MCU was started at the UCZ congregation in Chiwempala compound in Chingola, and was introduced in many other congregations in the Copperbelt. The MCU grew faster in the Copperbelt due to the growth of the mines and easy means of communication. Mr. Peter Nyirongo was one of the instrumental lay leaders behind the growth of MCU in the Copperbelt. Peter Nyirongo had moved to Chingola in search of employment in the mines.

By 1970, the MCU had spread to many congregations across Lusaka, Copperbelt and Central provinces. In Lusaka, the guild had already been introduced in many UCZ congregations including, Busokololo, Marapodi, Kanyama, Mtendere and Chilenje. It had also been introduced in many UCZ congregations in the Copperbelt and Central provinces. Notably, the MCU was introduced at Chitambo mission in Serenje under the leadership of Rev Simon Nsaku Mutambo between 1971 and 1973. Rev. Mutambo also contributed to the spread of the MCU in Luapula province, particularly Mbereshi Mission from 1974 to 1975 (Abraham 2024).

² The history of the Men's Christian Fellowship was presented under the auspices of the United Church of Zambia, Synod Communications department.

The period between 1970 and 1975 saw tremendous growth of the MCU in the UCZ. However, there emerged a strong feeling among members of the UCZ to transform the MCU into a UCZ born and bred men's guild – one which is deeply rooted in UCZ identity.

5. FROM MCU TO THE MEN'S CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

The movement to transform the MCU into a UCZ local guild gained significant momentum in 1975. Early that year, the Synod of the UCZ resolved to rename the organization from MCU to Men's Christian Fellowship (MCF) (MCF 2007:3, UCZSE/75 1975). On February 26, 1975, a special Synod Committee met and formally agreed to this name change. During the same meeting, the Committee approved both the Constitution and Rules for the new MCF, and tasked Rev. W. Hincks with preparing a liturgy for the appointment of MCF leaders and the rededication of its members. These liturgical elements were subsequently incorporated into the MCF Constitution and Rules.

The Committee also decided that the MCF would adopt a distinctive small metal badge, featuring a white cross on a red background with a blue map of Zambia. The badge would bear the words "United Church of Zambia" alongside the letters "MCF." The Synod Executive, convening in Kabwe in April 1975, officially approved all recommendations concerning the MCF under Minute SE/75/13 – "MCU – now Men's Christian Fellowship" (SE/74/83(e)) (MCF 1975:1, UCZSE 1975, UCZS 1976:20, 21). The Executive authorised the immediate distribution of the new Constitution and Rules to all UCZ ministers and staff, for use in UCZ congregations. The MCF Constitution and Rules were printed in September 1975, incorporating amendments proposed by the Synod Executive earlier that year (MCF 1975:1). It was further agreed that Mark 16:15 – "Jesus said to them, 'Go to the whole world and preach the gospel to all mankind'" – would serve as the official motto of the MCF. As a result, 1975 is recognised as the official founding year of the MCF within the UCZ. The MCF continued and expanded upon the mission of the former MCU, encouraging men in the Church to spread the gospel, foster fellowship, pray together, and strengthen one another in faith and in the power of the Holy Spirit, as urged in Ephesians 3:16 (MCF 1975, MCF 2007:3). Despite changing its name to MCF, the guild continued with the objectives of its parent organization, the MCU. The MCF Constitution and the Rules and Regulations indicate the following aims and objectives, borrowed from the MCU (MCF 2007:3):

1. To preach the Good News of salvation everywhere by teaching the people to become witnesses and always ready to live and speak for Jesus (Mk 13:3, Mk 4:3, 6:15, Lk 8:5);
2. To encourage one another through prayers and the study of the Bible and other Christian books;
3. To encourage people to seek the higher kind of life so that they may fulfill the purpose for which they were created;
4. To seek purity of life as members of the Church of Christ by continually seeking love and peace as opposed to hatred and quarreling.

The MCF retained the concept of the men's guild being structured around the African traditional understanding of a real man – *Amadodana* (MCF 2007:3). Despite this continuity, the MCF introduced several changes to the uniform previously used by the MCU, notably dropping the MCU sash and the brown badge. These changes were influenced by various opinions and suggestions from individuals and groups regarding what the MCF uniform should be.

For example, Mr. L. Mpata of Chingola in the Copperbelt province wrote to the Synod on November 6, 1975, conveying that the MCF in the Copperbelt had chosen black trousers (symbolizing having once been in darkness), a white shirt (representing coming into the light before God), and a red jacket (signifying acceptance of cleansing through the blood of Jesus) (MCF 1975:2). Similarly, Rev. C.W. Musgrave of Lusaka recommended a red shirt as part of the uniform.

However, the Synod Committee of the MCF decided against both the red shirt and jacket, citing concerns that a red jacket or shirt would be too expensive for most members to obtain. To address affordability, the committee agreed to provide a red-and-white cloth badge to those unable to purchase a metal badge (MCF 1975:2). Eventually, at the Synod meeting held from January 6 to 11, 1976, the official MCF uniform was approved: black shoes and trousers, a white shirt, a small metal badge, and a large cloth badge with the same design as the metal badge (UCZS 1976:20, minute S/76/29(c)).

After these adjustments, the MCF uniform and its symbolism were established as follows (MCF 2007:3, MCF Manual n.d.:2):

1. Black long trousers – symbolizing days of being in sin and darkness;
2. Black shoes and black socks – symbolizing days of being in sin and darkness;
3. White shirt – symbolizing salvation and new life in Jesus - Life without sin;
4. Red jacket – symbolizing the blood of Jesus Christ which was shed on Calvary for the salvation of humankind;
5. Red neck tie – symbolizing the blood of Jesus Christ which was shed on Calvary for the salvation of humankind;
6. The badge with the inscriptions of the map of Zambia and cross in the middle of the map and the words “The United Church of Zambia MCF” written in red around the map. The badge symbolizes belonging, the red color in the inscriptions symbolizes salvation brought by Jesus Christ, and the Cross across the map of Zambia symbolizes salvation in Jesus Christ brought to the inhabitants of Zambia;
7. The badge affixed on the left flip of the jacket or the pocket position of a shirt when the jacket is not worn.

In 1976, the Men's Christian Fellowship (MCF) was formally introduced across all Presbyteries of the United Church of Zambia (UCZ), becoming an integral part of the church's governance structures (MCF 1975:3, Muwowo 2022, UCZS 1976, Abraham 2024). Initial reports indicated the formation of MCF groups in various congregations throughout the Luapula, Southern, and Copperbelt presbyteries, as well as in Central Presbytery, where the movement had originally begun (MCF 1975:3). It is important to note that Lusaka Province, where the MCF was first established, was at that time part of Central Presbytery. The MCF quickly developed an organized leadership structure, establishing leaders and committees at the Congregation, Consistory, Presbytery, and Synod levels. The Synod MCF Interim Committee included Rev. A.L. Chitundu (convener), Rev. N.W. Hincks, Mr. G.M. Mvula, Rev. R. Kanyimbo, Rev. F.N. Sikazwe, Mr. N.M. Muttemwa, Rev. A. P. Chibende, Mr. T. Mbonshi, and Mr. D. Ilunga (UCZS 1976:31, minute S/76/54).

To govern its operations, the MCF adopted its own official constitution, known as the “MCF Constitution,” to which all members were required to subscribe (MCF 2007:3). The movement experienced rapid growth, especially in the Copperbelt, Lusaka, and Central provinces (UCZCP 1976). It quickly expanded to all the mining towns in the Copperbelt region. Rev. Solomon Makumba was one of the key figures in the growth of the MCF. After moving to the Copperbelt in 1976, he played a major role in expanding the organization's presence in the region. His leadership and dedication led to his appointment as chairman of the Copperbelt Presbytery MCF.

After the group changed its name to MCF and established committees and leadership across all the UCZ's governance structures, a sentiment arose that MCF did not need its own constitution, as it was considered part of the UCZ. As a result, in 1988, the Synod of the UCZ changed the MCF Constitution to the MCF Rules and Regulations (MCF 2007:3). These Rules and Regulations were further revised between 1991 and 1996. According to the MCF manual, this change was intended to avoid creating a sub-constitution within the broader framework of the UCZ. The revision was undertaken by the Copperbelt Presbytery MCF on behalf of the Synod MCF during this period, after realising that some items in the original constitution had become outdated (MCF Manual nd: 1).

The MCF continued to grow by preaching the gospel and providing a space for men within the UCZ to gather for fellowship. In seeking to address the spiritual, economic, and social needs of men in the Church, the MCF redefined the concept of the ideal man, encouraging members to become soldiers of Christ. The MCF experienced steady growth and significant organizational changes throughout the 1990s and 2000s. According to SMCF 7/91, by February 1991, the MCF had a total membership of 3,300 spread across several regions: Lusaka (614), Copperbelt (1,379), Luapula (250), Northern (642), Southern (54), Western (205), North-Eastern (246), and Central (200) (SMCF 1991:2).

As the organization matured, it also faced important policy decisions. In December 1995, under the leadership of Rev. H.K. Mulowa, the Director of MCF, the group recommended to the Synod that

preachers who were MCF members should not wear a preaching gown over their MCF uniforms – a suggestion the Synod accepted (UCZSE 1995:21). The matter of membership renewal fees became a significant point of contention. In November 1997, the Synod Executive resolved not to allow annual renewal fees for MCF, rejecting any proposals to remove members who failed to pay such fees and instructing that any such provisions in church group rules be removed (UCZSE 1997:22). However, this stance was later reversed. MCF, along with the Women's and Youth groups, was eventually required to pay annual renewal fees. The MCF Manual, revised in 2007, officially incorporated these fees. While the intent was not to burden members, the MCF began collecting substantial renewal fees, turning the process into a fundraising venture that placed a heavy financial burden on many poverty-stricken members.

This period of growth and regulatory change reflects both the increasing size and influence of the MCF, as well as the organisational challenges it faced in balancing fundraising needs with the economic realities of its membership.

6. CHANGE IN MCF GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

With the establishment of the MCF at every level of the UCZ—congregation, consistory, presbytery, and synod – a Synod department was formed, led by a convener or Synod Secretary or Director. The UCZ Synod maintained separate departments for youth, women, and men, each with leaders coordinating national programs (UCZ SE/97/54 1997, UCZS 1998:6). In 1997, it was agreed to consolidate these groups into a new Synod department called the Mission and Evangelism Department (MED). This department included the Evangelism Committee, Youth Committee, Stewardship Committee, Women's Work Committee, and the Men's Christian Fellowship (MCF) Committee (UCZ SE/97/54 1997, UCZS 1998:6). The head of this department would be known as the Mission and Evangelism Secretary (MES). In 1998, additional committees – including Hepeta (Helping People to Act) and Doctrine Worship and Evangelism (DWE) – were also placed under the Mission and Evangelism Department (UCZS 1998:6). The Mission and Evangelism Department became fully operational in 1999, following a Synod resolution to open an account with Zambia National Commercial Bank in Ndola and to establish an office there (UCZS 2000:8,15, UCZ SE/99/17(5) 1999). The department's initial activities included organizing a Church Workers and Spouses Conference at Mpelembe Secondary School in Kitwe, held from 23rd to 28th August 1999. In October 1999, it also conducted a Seminar for Training of Trainers for the Southern, Lusaka, and Western Presbyteries (UCZS 2000:15).

These changes meant that the MCF, which had previously operated as a standalone group, now fell under the broader Mission and Evangelism Department, alongside the youth and women's groups and other committees. In 1998, the guidelines for the MCF were formalized as "The United Church of Zambia Men's Christian Fellowship Rules and Regulations" (UCZS 1998:6). Subsequently, during a meeting held in Kabwe from 3rd to 7th April 2000, it was noted that the Synod had granted the MCF official permission to implement these rules (UCZS 2000:7). The main reason for consolidating these groups under one department was to reduce operating costs, as maintaining separate departments for the youth, women, and men was considered expensive. However, some members of the MCF have advocated for a return to independent administration, arguing that combining all groups under the Mission and Evangelism Department has reduced their efficiency. They believe that having separate Synod departments for women, youth, and men would improve the management and effectiveness of each group, especially in mission work (Muwowo 2022b).

7. CONTRIBUTION TO MISSION, EVANGELISM AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

The development and impact of the MCF can be best understood through the lens of Zambia's historical, economic, political, and social transformations since independence on 24th October, 1964. The growth of the MCF and its ongoing contributions to mission, evangelism and social engagement are closely linked to the legacy of colonialism, the forces of urbanization, Zambia's economic dependency on copper and the evolving role of the church in supporting men through complex social changes. Firstly, historical and social foundations are evident. Colonialism and urbanization are deeply intertwined in shaping Zambia's society.

After the discovery of copper in the Copperbelt during the 1920s, Zambia experienced dramatic demographic and social shifts (Sardainis 2014, Mhone 1982). Mining opportunities attracted large

numbers of men from rural Zambia and neighboring countries, seeking employment and the promise of a modern lifestyle (Sardainis 2014, Askew 1997, Mhone 1982, Rotberg 1972). However, mining companies were initially unprepared to accommodate married men, resulting in widespread male migration and family fragmentation. This migration disrupted traditional kinship networks, leaving many men isolated and vulnerable in urban settings (Sardainis 2014, Askew 1997, Mhone 1982, Rotberg 1972). Amid these social upheavals, men brought with them Christian beliefs introduced by Western missionary societies such as the Church of Scotland, the London Missionary Society, the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society, and the Methodist missions. While these churches provided a foundation for Christian communities among African men, the rapid pace of urban change generated new spiritual and practical needs, prompting the emergence of men's groups to address these challenges.

Secondly, economic vulnerability and social dislocation shaped the way the Church responded to the needs of men. After independence, Zambia's heavy reliance on copper exports made the economy highly susceptible to global price fluctuations. This economic dependency led to instability and a range of broader social challenges (Sardainis 2014, Rotberg 1972, Mwanakatwe 1994). The sharp decline in copper prices during the 1970s resulted in mass layoffs and economic hardship (Mwanakatwe 1994, Sardainis 2014). Structural adjustment programs implemented in the 1980s and 1990s further deepened poverty and social instability.

The resulting crisis led to an increase in child- and female-headed households, driven by job loss, illness (notably HIV/AIDS), or death. Women turned to informal trade, while many men experienced unemployment, marginalization, and the breakdown of traditional support systems (Mwanakatwe 1994, Askew 1997, Sardainis 2014). Urban men, in particular, suffered from unemployment, fragmented families, substance abuse, and the erosion of extended kin networks. In response to these challenges, the MCF of the UCZ emerged as a transformative force at the intersection of mission, evangelism, and social action. Drawing on African notions of manhood and integrating them with Christian teachings, the MCF promotes a model of masculinity that is both culturally relevant and biblically grounded (UCZCP 2022). By rejecting harmful stereotypes and affirming positive values, the MCF positions itself as an agent of change within both the church and society. The following are the key contributions of the MCF:

1. **Mission And Evangelism:** The MCF is a vital arm of the UCZ's mission work, mobilizing men to dedicate their time and financial resources to God's mission. The group leads church planting, supports infrastructure projects, and raises funds for missionary work in both urban and rural settings. Through regular prayer meetings, Bible study, and leadership training, the MCF fosters spiritual growth among men (UCZCP 2022, UCZS 1976:69, UCZCP 1976). Its evangelistic activities – including open-air campaigns, door-to-door outreach, and community rallies – have expanded the church's reach. The Christ-like example set by members attracts other men, challenges prevailing masculine norms, and encourages holistic transformation rooted in faith. The MCF thus provides a platform for redefining masculinity in line with Christian discipleship (UCZSMED 2006, UCZCP 2022).
2. **Social Engagement:** The MCF's social action initiatives are wide-ranging, encompassing donations to prisons and hospitals, building homes for the elderly, supporting orphans, and participating in health and poverty alleviation campaigns (UCZSMED 2006). These activities underscore the belief that authentic Christian masculinity entails social responsibility and community service. The MCF's advocacy for education and theological training furthers its commitment to community development. Seminars on agriculture and savings schemes also address poverty in a holistic manner.
3. **Moral Advocacy:** The MCF plays a crucial role in moral sensitization and advocacy, addressing issues such as gender-based violence, property grabbing, and family breakdown. Through teaching and advocacy, the MCF upholds biblical principles of marriage, dignity, and responsible citizenship, empowering men to serve as positive role models (UCZSE 2005).
4. **Institutional Development:** National conferences, leadership seminars and fundraising efforts sustain the MCF's mission and evangelistic work while promoting spiritual renewal and capacity-

building. The organization's evolving governance structures demonstrate adaptability to socio-economic change, despite ongoing debates about issues such as membership fees (UCZSE 1997).

Through this holistic approach – rooted in Zambia's unique history and social realities – the MCF has established itself as a vital bridge between spiritual mission, social engagement, and the transformation of masculinity in contemporary Zambian society.

8. CONTRIBUTION OF MEN'S GUILDS TO THE GROWTH OF CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA

The contribution of men's groups, guilds, or fellowships to the growth of Christianity in Africa has been well documented. The emergence and development of these organizations, especially in Southern Africa, were largely responses to the challenges posed by colonial-era urbanization, economic exploitation, and restrictive political regimes (Banana 1991, Hastings 1994).

Within this context, men's organizations – such as those in the Methodist Church – offered African men rare opportunities for leadership and the development of organizational skills, countering colonial policies that limited African agency (Mackenzie 1997).

Churches thus became centers for political awareness, community development, and participation in nationalist movements (Banana 1991). In line with these broader trends, the MCF within the UCZ has emerged as a vital force for mission, evangelism, and mutual support, particularly amid social fragmentation and economic hardship. The MCF provides a space where men can gather, reflect on shared struggles, and seek both practical and spiritual solutions to challenges such as street children, orphans, early marriage, prostitution, substance abuse, and the breakdown of traditional family networks.

Economically, churches recognized the need to support African men facing exploitative labour conditions by offering literacy training, financial advice, and promoting economic self-help (Hastings 1994, Daneel 1987, Beinert 2001, Chikowero 2008). Socially, men's fellowships addressed the isolation and loss of status experienced by urban migrants, providing fellowship and moral guidance (Machingura 2012, Beinert 2001, Chikowero 2008). Theologically, these groups embodied key Methodist ideals of holiness, service, and lay participation.

The MCF continues the legacy of its forerunner organizations in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Extending beyond spiritual fellowship, it actively engages in fundraising and social outreach, exemplifying the Methodist and broader Protestant tradition of practical Christianity. By fostering solidarity and collective action, the MCF empowers men to navigate their roles in both the church and society, promoting positive models of masculinity and Christian leadership.

Overall, the MCF's contributions to mission, evangelism, and social engagement within the UCZ are substantial and multidimensional. By integrating African cultural heritage with Christian values, the Fellowship offers a compelling model of transformative masculinity. This approach energizes mission work, expands the gospel's reach, and addresses pressing social issues. The contribution of the MCF to mission is consistent with Research which has shown that lay-driven Christian movements have been vital to the growth and contextual relevance of African Christianity in Africa (Hastings 1994, Daneel 1987, Banana 1991, Beinert 2001, Chikowero 2008). The MCF serves as an indispensable part of the UCZ's witness and service in Zambia and beyond.

9. CONCLUSION

The historical evolution of the MCF within the UCZ powerfully illustrates the dynamic interplay between faith, identity, and social transformation in postcolonial Africa. This study has traced the MCF's journey from its foundational roots in the Young Men's Guild of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, through its transformation into the Men's Christian Union in Southern Rhodesia, to its establishment in Zambia. At each stage, the organization was shaped by inherited church traditions as well as the shifting realities of African masculinities.

A central thread in the MCF's development has been the organization's ongoing effort to harmonize Christian values with indigenous conceptions of manhood. By navigating the tensions and opportunities at this intersection, the MCF crafted a distinctive model of Christian masculinity – one that remained faithful to the Great Commission while also being attentive to the cultural context of Zambian society. This synthesis enabled the MCF to play a foundational role in the UCZ's spiritual

life, governance, and outreach ministries following Zambia's independence. The MCF provided men not only with structured pathways for spiritual growth and social engagement but also became a pivotal agent in shaping the UCZ's identity and mission. Its reimagining of Christian manhood resonated deeply, influencing both church life and wider societal norms. In doing so, the MCF exemplifies the vital role of lay organizations in bridging the gap between church and society, and in redefining religious and gender identities during periods of social change. By tracing the MCF's origins, transformations, and contributions, this study enriches our understanding of how African Christian institutions negotiate the balance between tradition and modernity, seeking authentic ways to express both faith and masculinity. The MCF's substantial and multifaceted impact on mission, evangelism, and social witness within the UCZ demonstrates how integrating African cultural heritage with Christian values can foster transformative models of masculinity. This, in turn, strengthens mission outreach and addresses pressing social concerns in relevant, meaningful ways.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Prof. Jonathan Kangwa is the Vice Chancellor of the United Church of Zambia University, where he provides visionary leadership and strategic direction. Prior to this role, he served as Deputy Vice Chancellor and Registrar at the same university, demonstrating a consistent commitment to academic excellence and institutional growth.

Prof. Kangwa has also enriched his academic experience through international visits, serving as a Visiting Scholar at Westminster College in Cambridge, United Kingdom, and at Calvin University in the United States. His current research explores the history and enduring impact of colonial legacies on religion, politics and governance in Africa, reflecting his deep engagement with critical issues affecting the continent. Prof. Kangwa's scholarly work and leadership continue to shape both academic discourse and institutional development in higher education.

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