

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE PROPRIETOR PASTOR EMMANUEL AKOH APEH

EGA Radio: Good afternoon Sir

Proprietor: Good afternoon, you are welcome.

EGA Radio: We are crew members of the EGA Radio, and are here to interview you.

Proprietor: You are welcome.

EGA Radio: Can you tell us about your person?

Proprietor: Oh... My name is Emmanuel Akoh Apeh. I am from the Idoma extraction but schooled in the extreme North. I am a Pastor by calling. Presently, I am the proprietor of ExcelGrace Academy, but before now, I have served as a teacher and also principal of other schools. I am also the resident Pastor of Foundation of life Chapel. That is what I have to say for now. I am happily married to Christiana Apeh and for my age, the grey hair will speak.

EGA Radio: From what perspective did you conceive the idea of establishing a school?

Proprietor: Hmm... Well, as a teacher, I told you before that I have taught in several other schools. There is a deviation from the normal, and I saw the need to get back to the kind of education the whites left for us. We are out to develop the young people to be able to face the challenges of tomorrow and this can be done through training, both academically and spiritually. That will be achieved by true ardent pursuance of true academic excellence and through Jesus Christ.

EGA Radio: As a pastor, don't you think veering into school business is a distraction to ministry work?

Proprietor: School itself is a ministry. You are aware that there is a slogan "catch them young". It is not different at all. It is part and parcel of the ministry.

EGA Radio: Can we say establishing school is also a call to ministry?

Proprietor: Yes, it is part and parcel of the ministry work. It is under the ministry. We are able to arrest the children young for Jesus Christ.

EGA Radio: What informed the name ExcelGrace?

Proprietor: Hmm... As you may be aware, from the beginning, the school was called ExcelGate and our philosophy was to serve as a gateway to excellence, but when we were about registering the school at Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC), it was discovered that there was another school that bore the same name. As a result, God divinely gave us another name as a substitute which is ExcelGrace.

EGA Radio: What are your challenges as a proprietor?

Proprietor: There are actually no challenges as the running of the school is deemed on solving problems and not pursuing the problems. So we don't have challenges but are rather looking for problems to solve.

EGA Radio: Looking at the present economic crunch in the country, do you see any viable reason why people should be encouraged to venture into school business?

Proprietor: Well considering the economy of the country, those who want to get money through school development, I encourage them not to venture in to the school business. They should do it to train these children and not money because they will be established.

EGA Radio: Sir, as a private investor in primary and secondary education, do you see the investment as being worthwhile despite all odds?

Proprietor: Point of correction, we only have secondary school, so we are rendering our services to the students. I see the weak becoming strong, the dull becoming intelligent, the bad becoming good, God really changes lives through us here. To me, it is a worthwhile venture.

EGA Radio: As a pastor, you have served the school in the capacity of the principal right from inception before finally handing over to a substantive principal, what has been the relationship with your staff and students?

Proprietor: Our philosophy is to make ExcelGrace a very large family with the proprietor as the father, staff as daughters and sons while students grandchildren.

EGA Radio: You have staff strength of over sixty teachers (mostly graduates) handling the variety of subjects offered in the school. How have you been coping with this number?

Proprietor: I told you, we operate by the grace of God. All of my staff have seen the decay of the outside world and the need to renew the society. They have seen the naked happenings around and they have all decided to join us to accomplish the vision in the upcoming generation.

EGA Radio: Records have shown that your school performs credibly well in the external exams of WAEC, NECO, MOCK, BECE and UTME, what is actually behind this success?

Proprietor: I might not be able to say it in one sentence, but it is a foundational matter. We face what is called character formation. We work hard and believe in God. The children work hard and take instructions from the teachers. But we noticed that the students that have stayed with us here (through experience) make it excellently well. We believe in hard work and we are not surprised because the secret is hard work. We don't just rely on the information we have. Sometimes when I am not around or out of town, I go out to interact with other great schools and it has really contributed to the greatness of this school.

EGA Radio: Based on the investigation carried out, we learnt that the school fees for each term per student particularly those staying in boarding houses is not commensurate to the standard of the school? How are you coping to survive?

Proprietor: We believe our Lord's prayer, "give us this day our daily bread", So we depend on God and not on man. And the Lord has not failed us and we are looking up to Him. We know we are in rough economy and we cannot just allow parents bear the burden alone. We render services and not necessarily about the financial income.

EGA Radio: How would you allude to the fact that most private investors are more favourably disposed to investing into the establishment of both primary and secondary schools in the state without giving much attention to quality maintenance of such schools, but are rather, more inclined to making money?

Proprietor: Personally, I don't look at eh ----- what people do and criticize them easily. If there are some that render services for money, they will be disappointed. I am not in the position to say this is good or bad, I give parents the opinion to venture into it. It depends on what drives them into it.

EGA Radio: Considering the age of your school, infrastructural development has been tremendous giving room for rivalry criticisms and envy. How have you been able to fund these projects in the face of economic recession?

Proprietor: Actually, the only baby I have is ExcelGrace, so I make sure everything is put in order. Whatever is for the school is used for the school and I always rely on God for my needs. As we are here on earth, our help comes from the Lord who made the heaven and earth. So in as much as I am the proprietor of the school, I am on salary like any other teacher. That is the reason for the fast growth of the projects.

EGA Radio: Is the conduct of your staff and students in line with the vision upon which the school is established?

Proprietor: By the grace of God, every staff here is in line with the vision and when this is communicated to the students, they follow the vision and this brings success.

EGA Radio: How do you feel when your students participate at competitions, do excellently well and bring back prizes?

Proprietor: I am not surprised but I feel on top of the world because more attention is given to them by their teachers. That is why we have been ruling Benue and for the past two years, we know that our name is ExcelGrace.

EGA Radio: How would you assess the performance of the present administration of the Benue State Governor, His Excellency, Samuel Ortom in the area of education as compared to the past?

Proprietor: Well, I am not in the position to say this is doing well or not. God seriously warned me against criticizing leadership. As a governor, I don't think he is sleeping, I know he is enlightening people and it's too early to criticize him.

EGA Radio: Do you think, the decision taken by the state government to return granted-aided schools to private owners in the state is a welcome development?

Proprietor: Emm ... well, am not part and parcel of the committee that advised the government to do that so I can't tell. If the load is too much on the government, they should be able to return it to the private owners. They founded it and so should be able to take care of it.

EGA Radio: Recently, over two thousand illegally established primary and secondary schools in Benue State were shut down by the Honourable Commissioner for Education, Prof. Dennis Ityavyar. Do you see that decision as being healthy?

Proprietor: If what they are doing will improve the capacity of learning in the state. I don't see any problem with it. My feeling is that instead of outright closure they should also think of what will help the schools.

EGA Radio: What would you want to be remembered for?

Proprietor: It's a wonderful question. It's like a wedding plan. What I have sold my life for is to raise young ones and bring them up fearfully. If one day, God will call me to rest, I will want each and every child to say, "Oh, I am what I am today because of one Pastor Apeh". That is why I take my time to make a so called nobody somebody by the grace of God.

EGA Radio: Any advice to government and the general public?

Proprietor: The government at large, they are doing their best just that those who are far think they are not doing action. I want to encourage the Benue State Government particularly to engage in holistic education, they should do their best to educate children. The two major reasons why Benue is still suffering is insecurity and which scare the foreign investors. Most foreign are afraid of investing in Benue State so that the government should look into it. As for the security they are playing their role very well.

EGA Radio: Give the populace your words of encouragement sir.

Proprietor: Well, my advice is that God has packaged something in every one to enable us succeed in life. Sometimes, crisis and challenges would come, but one assurance is that we will make it. Believe in God and yourself and you will make it. There is a saying that a bend on the road is not the end of the road. Like Late Major Gideon Orkar said, "a man that fails today will rise tomorrow". You can also be a star and your star will shine even more. This is to say that everyone can become anything at any time, any day, if only more efforts would be made.

EGA Radio: We appreciate your sincere response to our questions and do hope to keep a date with you.

Proprietor: Thank you all. Once again, you are welcome.