

Streams of Life Newsletter

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The Nigeria Trip *continued from page 1*

there. There was a conscious effort on Del's part to avoid this brand of prosperity gospel and instead focus on Christ and His sacrifice for us. So many of the Nigerians lack financial resources, and there was a struggle to balance that reality with a doctrine that said God wants Christians to be financially successful.

There are a lot challenges facing the Nigerian church. One of the buildings that was used lacked a roof, making services in the rainy season impossible. AIDS is also a struggle, not as much within the church, but definitely within the surrounding culture. Nigeria's oil wealth has also been a double edged sword. So much of the money ends up leaving the country, and it breeds corruption within the government. Many of the jobs go to

imported workers, so most Nigerians know none of the benefits of that industry.

Del found a vibrant and growing church within Nigeria. Men like Bishop Noah are committed to spreading the message of salvation, especially in areas like the northern Muslim region, an area that desperately needs it. However there are needs. Money is needed to support the church, and leaders need to be found to guide the young congregations.

Pray for the church within Nigeria. Pray that God would provide resources and raise up leaders to further his kingdom.

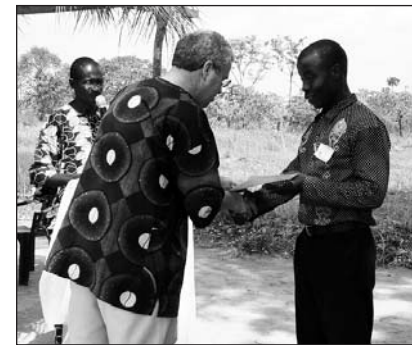
STREAMS of Life

Volume 3, Summer 2008

The Vibrant Church of Nigeria

The first things that come to mind when most people think of Nigeria are either oil production or bogus check scams. Recently, with the price of oil hovering near \$120 per barrel, we have heard various experts blame part of the rise in price on unrest within the country. But Nigeria has other important things taking place within it. Del recently had the opportunity to minister within Nigeria and connect with the vibrant Christian church there.

In April, Del Burkholder and Marc Hostetler made the long journey from Pennsylvania to Ikom, Nigeria. For around 10



Del handing out seminar certificates to the pastors

years, Bishop Noah Effiong Udokanem has been inviting outside guests to Nigeria. They help to train pastors and often hold evangelistic meetings in the part of Nigeria he lives in. His burden is to bring the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ to people in towns and villages that haven't

been exposed to the gospel. Bishop Noah is also a missionary in his own country. Noah willingly spends three weeks a month traveling among church plants, ministering and providing guidance to those that attend. He founded a church plant network called the City of Faith. In American terminology, this is the district or denomination in which Bishop Noah and his fellow pastors operate within. City of Faith operates as part of a larger group of Pentecostal churches that work in unison in Nigeria. This is a genuine grass-root denomination, founded by a Nigerian solely to minister to his fellow Nigerians.

The denomination also runs a Bible school/college located in Uyo. Dr. Jeremiah is the dean of the Bible school, overseeing a staff of four professors. They train lay persons sent to them by the church plants so they can return and more effectively lead.

One of the first things that struck both Del and Marc upon their arrival was the Christian music playing in the airport. Unknown to most outsiders, Nigeria boasts a strong Christian population along with its robust oil industry. In fact, Christianity is gaining on Islam in Nigeria. The country is loosely divided into the

Muslim north, and the Christian south. Lagos, the former capital city and the place where the flew into, is located in the southern part of the country. Christian music was not only in the airport, Christian radio and TV were common throughout the area.

The city of Ikom was used as the base of operations while in Nigeria. The days consisted of leadership training at pastor's conferences in one of two villages, Abinti or Alysi. Both villages were located within the jungle region, and



Pastor seminar in a tropical setting

the hour long drive consisted of sight seeing and trying not to get the car hung up on the rutted roads. At the pastor's conference Del spoke extensively about the importance of servant leadership. It was an important message. Some of their other guests from the U.S. had portrayed a style of leadership that focused on following a personality, not serving through humility.

After the training conferences Del and Marc would return to their hotel in Ikom. The time at the hotel was spent relaxing, emailing home, and preparing for the evangelistic meetings in



Children at church

the evening. After supper, there was another ride back into the jungle. The meetings were held in the open air, with only a couple of light bulbs illuminating the gathering. Worship was an integral part of the service. Pastor Solomon Odey is a gifted worship leader, and would lead times of expressive worship. Most of the church is fairly young in age, and whole families attended together. Everyone participated, from the men and women, all the way down through to the young children.

Del used his time to focus on a purely evangelistic method. Apparently, others that had gone before had focused their message on the U.S. church, particularly the wealth that can be found

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STREAMS of Life

Reflections of a Nigerian Prison

During our recent evangelistic meetings and pastors' conference, it was agreed by the host group to try and get me into a prison sometime during our busy schedule. Other than the Nigerian



Del Burkholder

military forming a perimeter around the prison, I found there were more similarities than differences between the prisons of Nigeria and the United States. For example, when we got inside, we discovered that the top administration had never gotten the notification of our arrival even though the paper work had been submitted ahead of time by the prison chaplain. So we got to cool our heels on a bench, waiting to find out

if they were going to let us in. In all my years of prison ministry, this is one part I have become well acquainted with. It was the part of the Nigerian prison experience that most reminded me of the U.S. system.

Finally, the deputy superintendent (they had another title for him) came and allowed us to go in. He looked at us and sternly stated the amount of time I had to preach. I chirped back, "Is that African time or American time?" I had been in Africa just long enough to know that the way we interpret time is entirely different. A broad smile formed on the superintendent's lips as we followed him inside the gates. He must have been serious about the time though, because they set a table up in front of me with a clock on it. This, by the way, was the only clock I had seen during my time in Nigeria.

One of the administrators told the guard to gather the Christian prisoners for the service. I heard the guard leader quip back, "Why would an American evangelist want to come to this place?"

What he didn't understand was that no matter what type of more "prestigious" meeting we hold, our ministry's first calling is to preach the gospel to prisoners. As they gathered the prisoners under a tree, I observed their clothes seemed clean and their appearance healthy. I preached about how the soldiers with Saul on the road to Damascus had heard only a voice, but Saul (Paul) heard the voice of Jesus Christ. I told them about our need to discern the voice of God from a whisper or from thunder. We talked about the discipleship taking place by inmates in our prisons in the U.S., and how mature Christian inmates were mentoring newer believers. I challenged that the same needed to be done here in Nigeria.

During my short time there, I noticed there were strong Christians in the group of inmate believers. The local churches in Ikom, Nigeria were already doing a very good job ministering to these prisoners, and some even had Bibles. I found in this Nigerian prison, a vibrant body of Christ. Some things were different, modernization and conditions are not as good as they are here in the states. Often there are prisoners waiting for trial over long periods of time, and some of the charges are questionable to say the least. All in all, Jesus is doing a work in the Ikom prison, and even there the body of Christ is alive and well.

In the Master's Service,
Del Burkholder

Thoughts on Traveling to Nigeria by Marc Hostetler, Ministry Traveling Coordinator

It continues to bring joy to my heart to know that the Body of Christ is so large and to experience the unity we have in knowing Jesus. Even though we are living our lives in separate parts of the world, the Word of God unites us into one purpose and mission: to make Jesus known to those around us as well as to the ends of the earth.

During our trip to Nigeria, we met pastors that have a deep love for Jesus and for bringing all people into the Kingdom of

God. Del and I spent time in 2 small villages where churches had been planted in the last few years. Just a few years ago, in the village of Abinti, there were no believers at all. Many worshiped idols and did not know who Jesus was. God worked through Bishop Noah in establishing a fellowship of believers. Many idols were burned and lives were changed for Jesus. Brother Noah's life was threatened for a time, but God's hand of protection was upon him, sparing his life.

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Jordan Martin

As I am sure many of you know, May 1st was the National Day of Prayer. There were many people throughout the nation that took time out of their schedules to gather with other believers and lift our leaders, both political and spiritual, up to the Lord in prayer. As I prayed that morning I was struck by the sheer number of local, state, and federal leaders that are accountable in one way or another to us. There are literally thousands of people in government whose daily decisions have a profound impact on us as Christians. Our President, Governor, congressmen, judges, and local leaders are just some of the ones that come to mind. As I thought about that fact, I realized how neglectful I had been in lifting these people up in prayer.

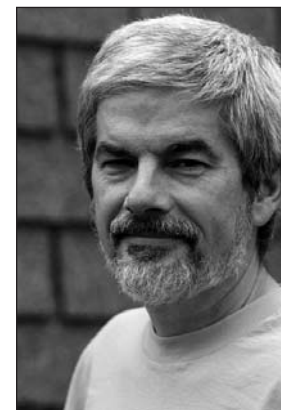
It is so easy to sit around and criticize every wrong move that they make. Just as it is easy to say on Monday what the football coach should have done on Sunday, so we "Monday-morning quarterback" our leaders. It is so easy to pick out the wrong decisions and moral failings of those in leadership and decide they are not worthy of our prayers. Or, we think that since they are not believers, our prayers have no impact on them. But, just as the persistent widow received justice from the hard-hearted judge in the Bible, so can God use our persistent prayers to accomplish His will through unbelievers.

If ever there was a time that our leaders need us to pray for them it is now. All across the country leaders are making decisions that will shape our country for years to come. In my opinion, the current lack of moral and ethical values within this country is a direct result of the church's, myself included, lack of prayer for its' leaders. It is not easy to put ourselves in the shoes of those whose decisions may literally be a matter of life or death. If America is to have any hope of returning to its Christian tradition we are going to need to begin earnestly praying that God would reign in the lives of our leaders. God has purposed us to encourage and lift up those around us, especially those who bear the responsibility of leadership.

Remember, prayer is a far more effective weapon when dealing with disagreements than arguing, name-calling, and cajoling ever are. In 2 Chronicles 7:14, God says that "if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." Our land desperately needs to be healed....will we do what it takes?

Thoughts on Traveling to Nigeria *continued from previous page*

Pastor Solomon Odey shepherds a fellowship of believers in the village of Alisi. He is a dynamic worship leader, full of energy and passion for Jesus. We saw God working through him as he led believers into energetic praise and worship of our Lord and Savior. It is such a blessing to see people excited about being together and worshiping God in many different ways.



Marc Hostetler

We developed a great appreciation and respect for Dr Jerry who is a pastor in Uyo, as well as a professor at a Bible school in that same city. He is also a tremendous worship leader and a man who portrays Jesus through his words and actions.

We were touched by the testimony of a young pastor by the

name of Monday Akpan. Having grown up not knowing who Jesus was, he gave his life to Christ and was mentored by Bishop Noah for several years. Bishop Noah calls him one of his many "spiritual" sons. Pastor Monday is currently a pastor in the church in Ikom, and he is also studying at the Bible school in Uyo.

I was greatly encouraged to greater faithfulness by interacting with these pastors and others who we met during this time of ministry in Nigeria. God is doing a great work among these people.

Bishop Noah, the one who invited Del and me to Nigeria, has a God given vision to bring the Gospel to many more unreached villages in Nigeria and the neighboring country of Cameroon. I pray that the Lord will provide all of the resources needed in order to fulfill that mission.