

Report on SOMA Mission to the Diocese of Jos 6th-18th January 2005

“Into a melting-pot”

This might seem a strange phrase to use, as the five team members (Chris Grundy, Alison Anderson, Diana Hunt, David Ridge and myself) stepped out into the modern airport of Abuja after an overnight flight from Heathrow – but it soon became relevant! We were met by members of the Diocesan Protocol Team, taken for a second breakfast at the Diocesan Guest House, then driven at some speed up to Jos, the central city of Plateau State in Northern Nigeria.

On arrival, praising God that nerves and bodies were still intact (we had frequent reminders of our fragility from the sight of the wrecked cars along the sides of the main road!), we were taken to meet our host, Bishop Ben Kwashi, at the Diocesan Offices – where there were signs of plenty of spiritual power to compensate for the lack of the electrical kind!

We were then taken to the Jos Diocesan Guest House in the city centre, where we were shown to our rooms, clean and neat, but lacking running water, electricity (often) and warm bedding! By that time we realised we were on a “high place” so sent out an emergency request to the delightful staff team for more blankets ...

It was later that we began to realise that, spiritually and in many other ways, we were in a real “melting-pot”. Here are some of the things that made this clear, over the next day or two:

- A key document which Don thought he had sent to the other team members a week before departure, did not arrive (it turned out later that Don had not attached it)
- Several team members were uneasy about the degree of timetable control in the suggested programme (the Holy Spirit had other ideas!)
- The city of Jos, being on a high place, is a target for Islam – hence the violent confrontations that have affected Moslems & Christians over recent years
- It is a centre for Freemasonry, other secret societies such as Ogboni, as well as African cults
- Members of these societies had controlled the churches (not just Anglican) in the past. The Cathedral was “ungovernable” but the Anglican Church has now cut itself off from them. However churches of two other denominations in the area have remained closed for two years because of unresolved disputes
- Several Anglican Churches in the city trace their foundation back to tribal divisions in the past, and are still nearly 100% from one tribe. Some are even now more like chaplaincies to one group, with no care for the local community
- Many people go to church – but sadly, relatively few translate their faith into the way in which they live and work during the week
- The city was founded on tin mining, and is described now as being “governed by darkness and deceit”

The team had a hard time over the first weekend, which changed on the morning of the first Monday (the day of the Diocesan Silver Jubilee Celebration Service and the start of the Conference), when the Lord broke in, with repentance, tears and forgiveness.

By then we had already met with a group of clergy & wives from the Diocese appointed by the Bishop to work with us and pray for us. Although regretfully we were not able to spend as much time in prayer with them as we would have liked, it was a real blessing to minister with them, especially in praying for others in the evening celebrations.

On Monday afternoon the miracles began! It was agreed that we would sit light to the draft programme, and allow the Holy Spirit to direct the timetable day by day. We would as a symbol of that decision not hand out the “**Renewal for Life**” workbooks until the end of the Conference, in case they became a distraction.

What were the miracles? I am sure other team members (as well as the delegates!) will have many more to add to the list, but here are some:

- A fabulous and rousing Silver Jubilee Celebration service – three and a half hours long, with a late supper – but everyone full of joy and expectation for what was to come
- A real openness to the Spirit on the part of the delegates – many of them were there early for the sessions, and wanted “more” right from the start
- Powerful experiences of being filled with the Holy Spirit, and a willingness to give public testimony to this
- Physical healings experienced (long term back trouble, the visible removal of scar tissue, and some ailments such as diabetes which had to be checked out by a doctor)
- Deep healing of relationships, through costly forgiveness, again testified to publicly.
- Depression removed
- A new freedom of worship experienced by the whole group of women
- The key to Chris’s case was lost overnight, but unexpectedly found somewhere else the next morning (prophetic symbolism here?!)

The opening session and the Silver Jubilee Eucharist were held in the Cathedral – but the remainder of the programme was in “The Institute” on the edge of the city, where pastors and others are trained, and there is a Health Education Centre. The main teaching input was given in the mornings. Bishop Ben Kwashi gave a series of homilies; then after the break the team gave teaching as the Lord guided us. Tuesday focussed on our relationships with God and with one another – with the “Cross Exercise” releasing many from long-standing sin and unforgiveness. Wednesday was “Holy Spirit Day” – teaching about how He can bless us, and how we can lead others into that blessing. On Thursday, bearing in mind what we saw in Jos, we focussed on God’s intention for renewal in the Holy Spirit to reach out and transform not just congregations but communities, cities & nations.

The afternoons were given over to workshops. Some of these followed on from the teaching in the mornings, giving opportunity for questions. In addition we held workshops on:

- Our attitudes to other religions (taking into account the recent violence in Jos and elsewhere)
- Preparing Sunday worship
- Family Life
- Spiritual Gifts in Practice

Then on the Thursday afternoon we held separate workshops for Clergy, Women, and Church Workers. The Clergy asked about intercession, leadership styles, the activity of demons, and how they felt about being transferred so frequently from one post to another. The Women’s workshop started by inviting the Holy Spirit to come – and He did, leading to powerful experiences of worship, being filled to overflowing, and a new depth of commitment to the Lord. The Church Workers are often undervalued and looked down on – so David focussed on encouraging them and the development of a servant heart.

The last corporate event of each day (apart from supper) was “Celebration” – with worship, testimonies (many of them, really heart-warming!) and practical ministry. This was not easy to manage, as the Chapel held 150 and there were 200 packed in – but everyone was patient, and received visible and tangible blessings. We used different models of ministry – sometimes inviting the Holy Spirit to come where people were standing or sitting; sometimes inviting people to pray for one another in threes; and sometimes giving an opportunity for people to come for prayer at the

front. We gave permission for those who felt on the edge, to watch, and take their time to come – and they did!

One other thing happened on the Thursday evening... How many Diocesan Bishops hold a weekly chat show on a secular radio station? Well, Chris Grundy had the chance of being interviewed on “The Ben Kwashi Show” (no reference to “Bishop” here!), beamed all over Nigeria. We prayed for him, and were able to listen to the last few minutes, when he gave his reactions to coming to Jos, and carefully avoided one or two tricky questions! Please pray for the impact of this show on the families & homes of those who listen.

After a hectic week, getting up in the dark and arriving back at the Guest House – often lit only by candles, as the generator was rather sick! – we were glad to have a later morning on the final Saturday. After our morning team meeting we went for lunch to the Bishop’s House, not expecting to be met by all the senior leaders from the Diocese and their wives! Their gratitude to us was undeserved - humbling but heart-warming. What remained of the day gave some of us an opportunity to visit the local Museum, and prepare for preaching on the following day.

On the two Sundays we were distributed to different churches. With five members of the team it is impossible to stick to the “two by two” principle – and some pairs found themselves divided up anyway. I think we visited 8 churches between us over the two Sundays, from the city centre to outlying villages, experiencing a warm welcome wherever we went. Some of the most valuable times were spent with our hosts over lunch afterwards, listening to their concerns and what was going on in their communities.

On our final evening in Jos we again went to the Bishop’s House for a meal. Their hospitality was reflected in their open house and open hearts, a fitting complement to the demands laid on all who work in the Diocese. This is a symbol of the seriousness and urgency of the mission. They believe that the situation in Plateau State will get worse, as the intensity of the conflict – spiritual, and maybe otherwise – increases in the coming years. There is no time to waste.

We left Jos the following morning for Abuja, a very different city, where we were able to relax until an early check-in at the airport for our daytime flight to London the next morning.

What does the future hold for our partnership with Jos, and Nigeria as a whole? Three strands are emerging:

- The vital importance of translating the “Sunday faith” into daily life: in families, the work-place and schools, and the community itself. SOMA has a special concern to assist in this process where we are invited to do so
- Chris Grundy and others have a vision for the development of the Alpha Course in the region, as a key tool in bringing people to Christ and helping them to grow in the faith. Alpha courses have already been introduced in two Dioceses in northern Nigeria. Pray for the right strategy to extend this initiative
- We look forward to hearing more about the development of “SOMA Nigeria”, and how teams can begin to go (come?) from Nigeria to other nations.

Thank you, intercessors, as always for your prayers. In a “melting-pot situation” such as this one, we are even more aware of them than usual. Phone contact – even with a Nigeria sim-card in my mobile! – was frustratingly difficult; but the Lord over-ruled. Please keep up the good work – the Christians there need your support

Don Brewin
23.1.05