

Diocese of Sunyani, Ghana

1st - 17th march 2001

10 April, 2001

The team comprised:

The Reverends Matthew Grayshon, (St Mary Hanwell),
John Hereward (St Mellitus, Hanwell) and
Jeremy Trigg, (Holy Trinity, Milton Keynes);
Miss Anne Allan (St James, Southam),
Mrs Chris Cooke (St James, Southam),
Mr Robin Green (Holyrood, Fareham),
Mrs Linda Pullen (St Mary, Hanwell).
Miss Rachel O'Shea (St James, Ealing),

The Primary purpose of the visit was a conference for Clergy.

This was well received. We used the SOMA Christian Basics Manual as the basis of the input. The delegates appreciated bible-based teaching on the Holy Spirit, their personal walk with Jesus, and their Freedom in Christ. Most delegates availed themselves of prayer ministry on several occasions, were affirmed in their evangelistic confidence in the Jesus, affirmed in their exploration of "indigenous spirituality" and for many the offer, by Jeremy, of sacramental confession proved important.

Each delegate was given the Christian Basics Manual and encouraged to spend the next year teaching their way through it.

Bishop Thomas Brient was fulsome in his appreciation of the ministry of the team. "You have empowered us all in our ministry, and encouraged us in our faith". We were encouraged to see the fresh spiritual enthusiasm which shone in his face.

Like so many Bishops in Africa, he has a demanding and endless entrepreneurial side to his ministry: constantly seeking funds and resources for his diocese; acting as bridge between local chiefs (and their role as focal point for local resources) and local needs; seeking to prise religious freedom and integrity into the media and politics.

Sunyani diocese lives with a tension between morning and evening worship. The mornings bear the ponderous imprint of USPG high church, liturgical, sacramental worship based on 1928 BCP, whereas the evenings are informal and more "indigenised". One is tempted to say the evening 'services of the word' are more readily authentic culturally and spiritually, but this would not be fair on the genuine spirituality and grace to be found in the sacramental morning services. The clergy seem more able to give freedom in the evenings than the mornings. It is encouraging to find that some churches had intercession teams, deliverance groups as well as choir and musicians.

Most outstations and churches, including the cathedral, had large Sunday schools running parallel with the main morning service. It was not clear how integration is encouraged. There is anxiety about young adults changing allegiance to the less liturgical and more charismatic churches.

In Sunyani Diocese the Anglican church is in a minority (the Roman Catholics and Methodist denominations are the strongest with many SDA churches). There is an element of "keeping up with the St Jones's" eg in the use of loud amplifiers, and building large churches. There is perhaps the temptation to emphasise building the building rather than building the fellowship.

Colin and Rita Crompton were warm and helpful hosts to us. They enabled travel from the airport to the Anglican Retreat Centre, had encouraged Bishop Thomas to generate a programme and accommodation for us in Sunyani, and gave many helpful insights into the life of the church in Ghana.

We thank our Intercessors - personal, parish and SOMA for their faithful labours. We were all well, tho' Jeremy had a mobile two days. We were very grateful for travelling mercies (one of our drivers was a constant spur to arrow prayers).

Each team member sensed the undergirding work of the Holy Spirit, for each of us was challenged to step out in faith, both in leading sessions and in offering prayer ministry. I think each lay member found the ministry times in the churches particularly demanding.

We were grateful too for our one-ness in Christ. In human terms we were a group of contrasting personalities and personal histories. There were several moments of difficulty when seeking guidance, notably on how to divide into two teams, but again, we sensed the grace of God in uniting and binding us.

So far as we know our intercessors were safe - but my family and especially my wife Jane knew spiritual attack - attempted burglary twice in one night, the casting of spells around the Rectory, and relationship problems.

Perhaps a particular thank you should be given to Jane who co-ordinated many phone-calls and emails, and to Hilary who supported Jane in sensitive and thoughtful ways.

I again thank the team for their financial commitment to the ministry. Most of the financial support by team members and friends was given through Gift Aid. The tax rebate enabled us to give considerable help to Bishop Thomas and his Diocese, rather than to subsidise our costs.

The Itinerary

Thursday 1st March Daylight flight to Accra where we were met by Bishop Thomas, Revered Colin and Mrs Rita Crompton.

Friday 2nd A day for acclimatisation and being together as a team.

Saturday 3rd In two cars for three hundred mile, nine and a half hour journey to Sunyani. Accommodation for the first week was to be in Roman Catholic Retreat Centre which was comfortable and quiet.

Sunday 4th Team in pairs to various churches to give testimonies and preach. This was a good and encouraging first step for all the team members. A warm welcome and universally friendly people made us glad of our arrival. I set a new personal record for longest service ever attended at 4½ hours, (plus 30 minute photo opportunity). I took to measuring service length in 'bottles of water'. This one was a 2-bottle service: robes in 100°F+ are definitely dehydrating..

In the evening we went to the Methodist 'cathedral' for a united Churches Together in Sunyani service - notable for the loud amplifier, synchronised choir and brave preaching: the newly appointed Regional Minister (political not religious) was present and the sermon and speeches encouraged him and the new government to resist corruption and to remain faithful to their promise to serve the people. As the Bishop said, "The day you accept your first bribe is the day our country begins to fail once more". (A year ago such preaching and comments would have led to arrest, prosecution and persecution - these are challenging and heady days for Ghana).

Monday 5th - Thursday 8th **Conference** for clergy, wives, catechists, deacons and churchwardens. There were fifty folk in all. Each day began with eucharist led by diocesan clergy - 1928 BCP.

Ministry in the mornings was in two sessions, using material from SOMA Christian Basics.

Monday was teaching and ministering in the Holy Spirit, led by John.

Tuesday a devotional day on John 10: 10 "I have come that you might have life in all it's fullness", with ministry and sacramental confession, led by Jeremy.

Wednesday was a day on freedom in Christ and Spiritual warfare, led by Matthew.

Each afternoon we divided into groups. Robin joined a different group each afternoon with his "Bible Roadshow" - an excellent review of the place of scripture in church and personal life. The other groups reflected on the morning input in the light of experiences in the parish. These group seminars were often moving and prayerful.

The *churchwardens* met with John and Linda (a former churchwarden),

The *clergy and catechists* met with Jeremy and Anne,

The *wives* met with Chris and Rachel.

Each evening we had an informal time of worship (Ghana style with rhythm and harmonies), with ministry of the word on the morning's theme and prayer ministry. It was a joy to see the Lord move in healing, peace and reconciliation.

The final morning of the conference was particularly moving as the clergy prayed for the bishop and he anointed them and all stepped into a new reconciled relationship.

Thursday and Friday evening we led "Revival meetings" in the Cathedral. Around a hundred and fifty people came to these. Many came for prayer ministry.

Saturday 10th we divided into two teams.

Team 1 comprising Matthew, Robin, Rachel and Chris went to Nkoranza.

This team was lodged in a hotel with "carry-in food" from the Archdeacon. We had a gruelling time travelling to many churches and outstations in the daytime, visiting twelve churches all together. At each we gave our testimonies, preached on John 4 and led prayer ministry for many people.

Each evening we were in Nkoranza church covering some of the material from the Conference. The team were able to minister to and pray with many people.

For the team it was a joy to join such confident and whole-hearted worship, and to meet so many people who were one in the Lord. A notable gift to each of us was a pot of local 'wild' honey. Dark brown and smokey, it is delicious. We assume it was a considerable sacrifice that we should have been so blessed.

For the churches it was an encouragement to receive fellowship and ministry from people far away, several people made a point of saying this to us.

Team 2 who went to Atebubu, were John, Jeremy, Linda and Anne, accompanied by the bishop + driver. John writes: "As anticipated it was a long and hot journey. We were billeted in a guest house by the Yam market and had meals at the "mission" ie vicarage which was about 10 minutes walk away.

"On the Sunday we dispersed with Linda keeping the bishop company and being asked to preach, John going to Atebubu a village about 20miles away and Jeremy and Anne experiencing a "Harvest" at one of the outstations.

"Monday and Tuesday were both full days starting with worship at 6am and ending whenever we stopped praying for people after the revival meetings in the evening. We more or less repeated the material covered in the conference the previous week and were very encouraged by the response.

"Being in a smaller group meant that there were more opportunities for people to try out their giftings. Team meetings were shorter, partly because of time constraints, and we learnt to depend on one another. The main draw-back was vulnerability. Two members of the group felt quite unwell when we arrived in Atebubu and it would have been a very different experience if they hadn't recovered.

"One of the things we enjoyed most was the hospitality we received at the mission. We were welcomed as part of the extended family, Linda and Anne in particular struck up a rapport with the children which was a source of mutual delight. We did not feel at all inhibited by having the bishop around and were indeed very grateful for his intervention in the middle of the night getting the electricity to our guest house re-connected. It had been cut off during the day as the landlord was in arrears!

"My over-riding impression is that the concept of taking the conference teaching out to the parishes worked well at Atebubu and it was a joy to share in ministry in this way."

Wednesday 14th Teams meet at Kumasi en route to Accra

Thursday 15th Respite and shopping in Accra (lamentably the team voted against the Museum and for the beach. Presumably just because it was winter in the UK.....)

Friday 16th Rest, swimming and then overnight flight to UK.

We were all grateful for good health, safe travel, enough water, fairly comfortable living conditions and the opportunity to live simply for a few days. It was the end of the dry season so everything soon gained a layer of red dust. (On asking the RC Sister who had been our tender-hearted and prayerful host in Sunyani how she coped with the dust, she replied it was marginally preferable to the mud that would come with the rains!)

Food was ample but heavy: rice, yam, maize porridge (a kind of impossible grey wallpaper paste) or fried plantain: groundnut or meat gravy, a little cabbage and a small piece of fish. Breakfasts were sweet white bread and fruit.

Some personal observations from Rachel regarding the spiritual depth in people:

"I asked Regina how she drew strength in difficult times from the Lord and she told me that God had given her a gift of healing and also delivered sbrength (midwifery). On many occasions she had prayed for sick people as well as for expectant mothers and God had blessed and healed people and delivered babies safely.

"She also told me that they always just had enough food and that neighbours would look out for each other in her village and if someone was without food then someone else would provide it and vice versa.

"I noticed a depth in people's walk with the Lord which is rarely seen in the west where we rely on so many other comforts in life we hardly need the Lord!

and regarding the worship:

"I learned so much from them about rejoicing before the Lord and affirming one another in the Lord during worship. I love the way they use dance to testify about the Lord's goodness and they will rejoice on behalf of each other smiling and affirming one another during worship which is an amazing dimension in a church body. So often we are together but apart in our churches whereas they have more depth in their unity than I am used to here in the UK.

"I also noticed that they give God the fruits of their worship and they also go boldly into his presence very quickly rather than having a warm up time! I was very touched by seeing children lost in prayer and praise to God in a completely un-self-conscious way.

Some personal observations from Chris Cooke

I was surprised at how many came forward for personal prayer and healing, I felt very fortunate to be able to share their personal worries and pain, and to pray for them.

I found their welcome wonderful and especially when going out to the more remote out-stations, because of this ease, I found it easy to speak at the services and to share my experiences.

I feel that I have gained personally from this trip, it has showed me that I have a strength in speaking and in healing ministry that I was unaware of, I feel more confident in standing up for what I believe.

I am very much at peace since coming home, I feel that I did what I set out to do and more.

Some personal observations from Anne Allen

The people who attended the conference and also the services held, had a very unselfconscious faith, boldly coming forward for ministry and genuinely worshipping God from the heart. They relied on God for their provision as opposed to material objects as we westerners seem to be distracted by. Their faith was humbling. They did not need to be shown the way to salvation. The opportunity to express their faith with others was obviously a delight for them.

I also observed the Holy Spirit's work within the Bishops life, it was very moving to witness him ask his priests for 'revival' and 'renewal' they all shared.

My time there has certainly deepened my understanding of the Christian walk and I particularly gained from discussions about the power of the Holy Spirit and of Spiritual warfare. I also was blessed by participating in the ministry and healing sessions.

What a wonderful work God has done through this mission, both Chris and I have been touched by our friends positive comments on our return, of how we appear to be since the journey and we have both given testimony recently which has also touched the hearts of many who attended the services we spoke at.