

# Andy Dye's Prayer Letter from Grenada July/August 2011

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As I write this months letter I am listening to reports of another day of riots across cities in the UK. Its terrible to see what is happening and the ripples from them even hit the shores of Grenada as families seek assurance that their loved ones in affected communities are safe. One lady told me that the area of Camden affected was her shopping street when she visits family in the UK.

Lots of analysis has begun trying to work out the roots of these riots. I have heard words like : Community, Power, Being heard, Ownership, Leadership, Parents, Cuts and Poverty all flying around in the conversations on the BBC website and on Facebook. From what I gather from here, it already seems as if groups are coming together to clean up and begin to think about the underlying issues.

I have thought about a few of these words mentioned above in the context of my experiences in Grenada this month.

## **Community**

August in Grenada brings a number of things. For the weather it brings intense heat, humidity and thunder showers. For the events around the island it brings Emancipation day and then Carnival.

Emancipation day commemorates the abolition of the slave trade in the British Caribbean on August 1<sup>st</sup> 1834 then full emancipation on August 1<sup>st</sup> 1838. For a day so significant it is strange to me that more is not made of it in the UK. At my church on the Sunday before the emancipation day a special celebration was made of the African heritage of most people who call Grenada home. It was one of those Sunday celebrations that felt as a real privilege to share with my friends here as part of the community.



*Ricky and some of the kids celebrate emancipation day.*



*Bethel church August fair is at carnival time.*

After emancipation day comes carnival. A carnival which is said to be the biggest and the safest celebration for August in the Caribbean. It consists shows, competitions for the best Soca, Calypso, Steel band, Carnival Kings and Queens of the year. There are 'jump ups' (parties) that happen by the side of roads with massive sound systems and of course processions through the streets.

The processions have all kinds of different things in them from Old mass with placards

giving a social commentary, Jab Jabs which are people covered in oil (or other colours) and represent little devils, through to the colour of the mas bands, or the groups of traditional Carnival characters of Short Knee's and Veckos with their heavy clog like boots. The Monday night is a mass of lights, sound and dancing. Now whether these celebrations are your cup of tea or not, you cant help but be left with a sense of community from the whole occasion. Families are involved together and as you walk around people are constantly greeting each other, talking and laughing together. Its also a time when people can vent steam in dancing and energy but also in their frustrations over the actions of the government. I especially liked the old mas and the calypso for their social commentary and biting wit on the news stories in the island.



*Old Mas social commentary*



*Jab Jab's covered in oil*



*The colourful Short Knee's*



*The strange clog bound Vecko's*



*Monday night mass, dancing, lights and massive sound systems!*



*A carnival queen*

## Leadership

At the end of June two of my friends from church graduated from a leadership course. It is a course that runs at St Georges Baptist church in Grenada, but is open to all from other denominations, faiths or of no faith. The course started as a response to the perceived need in Grenada for leaders. Grenada is still a young country still (37 years old), and one of the negative aspects of the colonial legacy has been seen as an absence of good quality local leadership at all levels of society. Both of my friends who did the course are already in leadership within the Methodist church and outside it, and they both felt it was extremely beneficial to them.



*Servant Leaders Graduation 2011*

## Poverty

Over the last month and a bit I have spent four weeks helping and leading Vacation Bible Schools. These consist of Bible teaching, games, songs, fun, crafts, snacks and children from age 4-14ish.

I was involved in four different locations around the Methodist churches on the island. Different areas bring kids with very different backgrounds.



One of the areas we held VBS in was a *Vacation Bible School* village called Apres Tout. This is an area a little off the beaten track with a huge number of children from quite poor households. This was make clear to me when I was doing an introduction session with some teenagers. We had to go round the circle and give our name and favourite dessert. All was going well until we got to two boys. One boy gave pizza, as his favourite dessert. The other gave, rice and peas. Still others round the circle gave a simple piece of fruit like an apple. I put it down to the kids just joking around but afterwards when I mentioned it to one of the other leaders, they said, that it is probably because they have never had dessert, they don't really understand what it means, so they choose their favourite food or something they like to eat. It opened my eyes again to the hidden poverty that there is here.

## Power

To a certain extent education brings power. Its is often repeated to young people again and again here, to stay in school for as long as possible. Also many students go to a homework club or summer school, similar to the club we run at Bethel church throughout the year.

State run secondary education open to all in Grenada is still relatively new, and in fact the coming September will see the final shift to universal secondary education, which means that students will no longer have to pass the 'common entrance' exam in primary school in order to enter in to the secondary school system. Obviously this is a big change in the culture of the education system. People have said to me, 'Some children wont cope' or 'Its foolishness to send them in to secondary school when they are not ready'.



*Bethel Homework Club*

There are certainly issues for schools to face, not least in terms of human resources so that students with special educational needs can be supported. However this is a massive challenge in a system already running on a shoestring budget. As always at Wesley College I will be trying to assist teachers in this change as much as I can. I am looking forward to being able to take part in some training being led by a team from the US Peace Corps on issues of inclusion and learning needs in schools.

Please pray for:

- Wesley college and the education system in Grenada as we grapple with the changes towards a universal education system.
- Those students who '*don't make the grade*' that they will be provided with the support they need to find success.
- The growth of young leaders within communities and especially within the Methodist church.
- The Methodist church to engage with the community in even greater ways and address those issues of poverty and powerlessness.
- For all those involved in Carnival celebrations that they will stay safe.

Feel free to contact me on the e-mail address above or even write me a letter!

This is my last prayer letter until the end of September as I am going to take a few weeks break and practice my snorkelling skills. Thanks for reading, your interest and most of all for your thoughts and prayers for this island of Grenada.

God bless

Andy Dye

*'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.'*  
*1Thess 5:28*