

## Partnership visit to Nigeria and Togo from 26 September – 10 October 2012

The Methodist Church Nigeria (MCN) celebrated 170 years of Methodism in Nigeria and 50 years of autonomy. The partnership visit aimed to rejoice with Nigerians, strengthen partnership and evaluate ongoing relations.

### Fundraising event for a Methodist Medical Centre at Abuja

I accompanied Chris Elliott who represented Martyn Atkins at the MCN events. The purpose of this occasion was to thank God for his faithfulness these past 50 years and commemorate it by raising funds for a Methodist hospital in Abuja – the capital of Nigeria. The Prelate of the Methodist Church Nigeria acknowledged the presence of MCB representatives and mentioned the fact that MCN was the first denomination in Nigeria to gain autonomy. Since then the church has waxed stronger and grown exponentially through the years. It has expanded in size and to all regions, having 73 ordained bishops and up to 6 million members.

Guests as well as important dignitaries from all over the country were treated to a lovely dinner buffet, we listened to beautifully composed indigenous Christian songs and we saw plans and the Prelate shared his hopes for the Medical Centre at the event. The centre would deliver medical services as well as train medical personnel such as nurses, lab technicians etc. The proposed site has been purchased and surveyed by MCN and it now seeks private and corporate supporters to develop the site.



Chris and Bunmi at MCN dinner



Worship session



Presentation during church

### Press conference on the 170/ 50<sup>th</sup> MC Nigeria celebrations – 29 Sept 2012

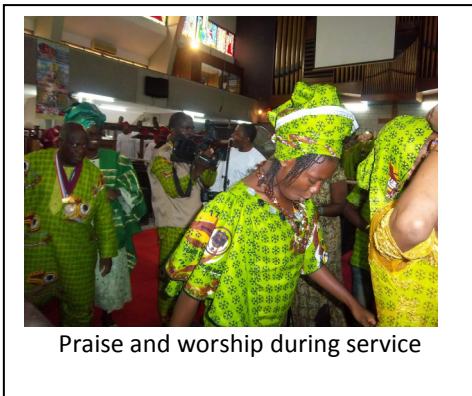
Prelate Makinde of the Methodist Church Nigeria at the press conference promoted the need for dialogue with those of other faiths to reduce terrorist attacks, interreligious violence, reduce poverty and corruption. Prelate Makinde also mentioned the importance of dialoguing with residents of Bakassi Island off the South Eastern coast of Nigeria. The people living there have borne Nigerian names and identity for centuries but have now been told to become Cameroonians because of the discovery of oil on the Island's shores. The residents are resisting the move to become strangers in a nation where practices and culture are alien to them. The island was given as a gift by the past President of Nigeria to Cameroon without consulting with the islanders. Their situation could be likened to the Falkland Islands near Argentina whose residents are said to prefer being British.

### Celebrating 50 years since autonomy

Methodist people gathered at churches across the nation to celebrate the primacy of Christianity, the Methodist Church having been autonomous for 50 years as well as being in existence for 170 years. Methodists assembled together from South, North, West and East to give praise, honour and adoration to the Almighty in recognition of the love, goodness and faithfulness of God. It was their prayer that the Methodist Church will be undivided with increased strength to serve God and humanity.

Methodism arrived at the shores of Badagry in Nigeria on 24 September 1842 as a result of an official invitation from the indigenous people. Following the release of freed slaves at Freetown in Sierra Leone, some of the liberated slaves wished to return to their motherland. Consequently a party of 'Yarriba' from the slave coast of Guinea purchased a condemned slave vessel from their earnings and engaged a white man to navigate towards Badagry. They arrived at their native country in 1839 and were well received by natives; however the party that landed at Lagos were not so fortunate. It was interesting to note in the Wesleyan Methodist Mission that the slave-ships that carried people away from native shores would return in the same vessel owned by liberated slaves, now as messengers of the gospel of peace through the very port from which they were taken.

Many of the returned slaves began to spread the good tidings of the gospel of salvation and Chief Warraru of Badagry decided to support their effort by countersigning a letter dated 2 March 1841 from one of the church members who took up the name James Ferguson at his baptism. He addressed his letter to Rev Thomas Dove, his former pastor in Sierra Leone. Upon receipt, Rev Dove then wrote a letter dated 24 November 1841 to the Wesleyan Methodist Church with a request for a minister to serve in Badagry. Rev Thomas Freeman along with Mr and Mrs De Graft (Africans from the Gold Coast) accepted the offer to serve in Badagry. On the South Eastern coast of Nigeria, the Primitive Methodist Society entered Nigeria in 1893 – 94 from Fernando Po. These two mission stations later became separate overseas districts and merged just before autonomy in 1962 to become the Methodist Church Nigeria.



Praise and worship during service



Chris being interviewed by a Nigerian TV journalist



Presenting 'Singing the Faith' at the Circuit Community Hymn

**It is time to celebrate** – *(composed by a. a. Oyedipe 2011)*

1 it is time to celebrate  
 It is time to celebrate  
 Christ, our Lord to elevate  
 All our lives and all we won  
 Unto God whose love has shown  
 May the Lord be magnified  
 Sixteen decades and ten years  
 He upheld us by His love

3 We thus earned auto-no-my  
 In years Nine-teen Sixty-Two  
 Yes, our Gold-en Jubilee  
 Which today was celebrated,  
 Thus we thrive as Methodist,  
 Preaching Christ o'er hill and vale  
 Winning souls with hymns and prayer  
 To our glorious Lord of aye.

2 Overview and troubles seas  
 Light of gospel did not cease  
 For Birch Freeman sowed the seed  
 Which the Wesley's brood indeed  
 Not for naught their labours were,  
 Gospel moved from coast to coast  
 South, North, East, West, Nigeria;  
 From the shores of Badagry!

4 Let us all unite and sing  
 To our maker, Lord and King  
 Lo, He's doing a new thing,  
 Gate of hell shall not prevail  
 Step by step new courses chart,  
 Day by day new churches plant,  
 Worthy is the Lamb of God!  
 That now reigns forever more!

## Meeting with Prelate Makinde and MCN church leaders

- Grants

I mentioned the new application guidelines and processing timetables for the rolling grants and there are two ongoing NMA programmes supported by the WMF

- Church twinning

MCN is very much interested in this and details of MCB churches requesting twinning will be sent later for both of them to consolidate links

- Group training SALT scholarship

The Prelate was very grateful for the impact and success of this programme these past years. The model could be expanded to other African partners after impact assessment. A further enquiry was made with a view to training laity and youth leaders using the same model

- Interfaith training

The scheduled meeting with the Chairman of PROCMURA – Bishop Josiah Fearon - did not take place in Abuja as planned. However we had a conference meeting by phone and both agreed to sponsoring the Principal of Zonkwa College

- NHCP training request

Dr David Cundall, the NHCP UK co-ordinator, has requested disability training for Rev Ekere who is currently the social worker at Uzuakoli Leprosy colony. A relevant one year course in Ghana was identified. MCN is to send a SALT application to WCR

- Bishops' visit

35 bishops on a first-come-first-serve basis are to attend the SALT leadership training short course at Cliff College in 2013. The final list of names and the itinerary are to be co-ordinated by RJ (Cliff College), OO (WCR) and DO (the UK Chaplain for the Nigerian Methodist Fellowship). MCN is responsible for flight expenses.

- UK Chaplaincy

DO is to arrive in the UK in 2013 to finalise his stationing and link Nigerian Methodists with MCB churches in their localities as well as promote the Belonging Together initiative in the UK

- Endowment funds

MCN has been advised to move its endowment funds into its London account as advised by MCB Finance department

- People to people programme

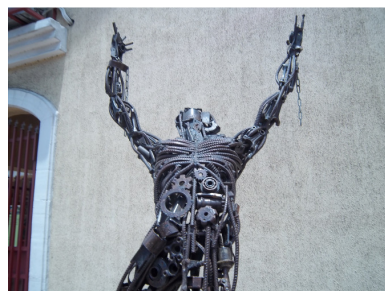
I encouraged MCN to forward its proposal for youth, women, church and ministerial exchanges to our new WCR Leader, Dave Friswell, who is keen to get ideas from partner churches

- MP's visa issues

HV has requested assistance for his visa application as a mission partner and the process is getting increasingly difficult with continued changes in immigration guidelines



Remnant of the prison cell



Freedom statue



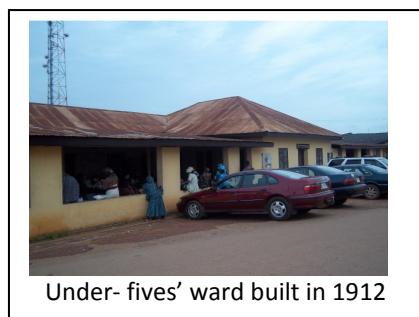
Freedom fighters

## Visit to Freedom Park to celebrate 52<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of Nigeria independence

I visited Freedom Park on Lagos Island – where past Nigerian heroes and heroines who fought for Nigerian independence were incarcerated for years by the Colonial government. The maximum security prison has become a tourist attraction giving very well presented information to tell Nigerians and friends about the struggle for independence. The first picture on the left depicted the cell size, the middle picture showed the statue made from recycled materials and the third picture was that of the three regional Premiers for the West, North and East Nigeria. The first statue is of Chief Awolowo and the third Dr Azikwe – both were Methodists. The middle picture was that of Amadu Bello who was a Muslim confirming that Muslims and Christians can work together for peace as well as respect each other's beliefs.

## Visit to Wesley Guild Hospital, Ilesha

The Wesley Guild Hospital Ilesha was built in 1912 by British missionaries who served in the Western region of Nigeria. It still has a high reputation for turning out great medical professionals. There were 250 student nurses in the Nursing schools, and medical doctors' as well as other workers' salaries were paid by the government. Many of the initial buildings were still standing and the chapel is at the heart of the compound. New buildings have gone up to meet the growing demand for the medical services. A Methodist Church deaconess serves as a resident chaplain for the students and the patients on site.



Under- fives' ward built in 1912



NMA post holder – NHCP Health Secretary, Ronke with Chris



New addition...

## Togo visit

The aims of my visit were to strengthen our existing partnership, extend our condolences following the sudden death of the Secretary of Conference, Revd Loko, and visit MCB mission partners serving in Togo.

Eglise Methodiste du Togo is one of our Francophone partners in Africa. This Methodist Church is a fairly small church because Protestants are in the minority in a population of about 7 million Togolese. Methodism was started in 1843 by Rev Thomas Freeman after his arrival in Badagry, Nigeria in 1842.

I was met at Lome airport by Michael, Sheila, Srijana and Saffron Holland and later rested. Discussions with Michael and Sheila covered both work and family life in Lome. The girls have settled in well, Srijana is now 15 and Saffron 7. Both are into music – Saffron playing the windpipe and Srijana the piano and guitar. They both love school and are fluent in French and Mina – the local dialect.

Michael is a British Methodist minister serving with Eglise Methodiste du Togo as a mission partner. His speciality is training both presbyters and laity on theology and leadership courses. He researches and produces creative resources in French because most theological materials available in French are by Catholics. He plans to have a workshop on conflict management as well as work with the new Musicology Officer to train church worship leaders. One of his greatest challenges has been providing contextual materials for participants and Rev Charles Klagba asked if MCB could assist the church with this. Sheila teaches English at Aneho Secondary school (part-time) and she assists the Development unit of the church with its social work. She works closely with vulnerable and disadvantaged families.

## Meeting with Eglise Methodiste du Togo Connexional staff team

About twenty staff members gathered together in the meeting room for their weekly fellowship from 9.00am – 10.30am. I visited the Church community clinic where outpatient services were administered to children and community members. The most senior nursing post is being funded by the NMA grant. Common ailments treated are malaria, cough, gastro-intestinal problems, skin diseases, minor injuries etc. There are up to sixty out patients per month during slack periods or 10 cases per day usually during busy times. Treatment was free but now patients are charged CFA 300 – 500 (75p) per person depending on circumstances. When children benefit from the Compassion programme, the treatment fee is paid by the Compassion scheme. EM Togo is responsible for the salaries and every Saturday children are fed free of charge just outside the clinic.

I also met the newly appointed Music officer, Mr Ben Hillah, who started in September 2012. He aims to train and attract youths into increased participation in church life especially 'praise and worship. There is both a lack of music teachers and of youths who can read music. He wishes to train choirs and promote inter-district music contests. A formal request was made for books, musical instruments and specialised computers for facilitating new compositions, and this was later endorsed by the Presiding Bishop. The Church is planning to merge their two current hymn books into one volume with over 500 hymns in time for the 170<sup>th</sup> celebration of Methodism in Togo.



Micheal with NMA Music officer



Few of EM staff at the meeting



At EM Community Clinic. Lome

## Meeting with Rev Charles Klagba – Presiding Bishop of EM Togo

- New grant application policies

Rev Klagba made a request to submit a SALT application for a short refresher course in Ghana for the new Music Officer. The sudden death of the Secretary of Conference has delayed many processes; however the application must be submitted as soon as possible. A request for postgraduate ministerial training for two Cote d'Ivoire ministers to study at UPAO, Benin was also discussed.

- Rolling grant application submitted

I received a request for assistance with the provision of training manuals, resources and equipment for presbyters and laity particularly because little French material is available on Protestant theology – There is often more on Catholic liturgies. MH has produced a teaching manual on the book of Manual and plans to organise a workshop on conflict management soon. Charles has requested that MH works with BH to train worship leaders. MH is to link up with UMC Bishop Patrick Sheriff based in Switzerland

- Succession planning

There is a need for an Assistant Training Officer to work with Michael as his brief expands and for future succession planning when his contract as a mission partner comes to an end. Sheila continues to teach English at Aneho Secondary School and work alongside her colleagues

- Cote d'Ivoire

After prolonged discussions, Charles confirmed the split in the Ivorian Methodist Church and that the court judgement was now published. The West African Methodist Churches look forward to the participation of EMUCI in regional issues as this has been missing in the past decade. The new officials are seeking moral support and help with ministerial training as the church wishes to embrace the British Methodist tradition. Sending a representative from

MCB to enquire and attend the event was highly recommended, and working with GBGM to resolve the issue was approved.

### **Women's empowerment scheme at Vogan, Togo**

I visited a thriving congregation started by one of the Church evangelists, Roger, at Vogan about 60 kilometres from Lome. The church has 35 – 40 adults and 40 – 60 children. The catchment area is in a radius of about 1 kilometre, and many of the members are women. A link with the Methodist women of Cumbria was established sometime ago and funding to purchase and erect a water storage tank fed by a well was given. The water is piped and used by the women to irrigate the nearby plot of land to grow vegetables such as legumes, tomatoes, onions etc. The produce is then consumed or sold by the women. The evangelist has spent two years with the congregation and is about to leave for another location. He commented that voodoo practices were still common, and therefore intense bible teaching and support is needed for new converts to become Disciples of Christ.



### **Assisting hidden orphans in Lome**

Abigail (not her real name) is a single mother whose partner left her when pregnant with her child – Godgive. God give was ill – he had malaria and his mother was struggling to feed her. Abigail eventually got medical assistance for her son and a small allowance to feed her son. She now lives and works in a Fufu bar in Lome and receives food subsidy for Godgive. She was very grateful for the concern and practical help received from Sheila and colleagues. Some other women were provided with food packs and a small loan to start a business. A refund of CFA 1000 per month is collected and the money is used to help someone else. The women who are recipients of the money are then able to feed their children and support their schooling.

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