

Partnership visit to the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC) 10 to 20 March 2020

Aims:

- To attend the induction of the Moderator and Synod Clerk of PCC in Buea
- To meet with ex-SALT students to receive feedback on recent studies at ARI Japan
- To meet with NMA grant beneficiaries
- To discuss with PCC Church Leaders about the ongoing crisis in Cameroon
- To meet with MCB partner – UPAC, Yaounde

Arrival at Buea – PCC Headquarters

The flight to from Nairobi to Buea was delayed but I was glad to eventually arrive at Douala Airport. A PCC member picked me at the airport and we travelled 70 km to Buea. There were many military check-points along the way and it was sad to notice that the lush banana plantations planted for miles along the highway as we drove to Buea were all gone. I was told that the separatists persistently molested the plantation workers, and some were maimed for



Destroyed banana plantations along the highway from Douala to Buea

showing up for work. Eventually, Del Monte Farm (An American Company) departed from Cameroon, worsening the unemployment situation in the Anglophone region. In addition to this, the adjoining Cameroon government rubber plantations were left unkempt, due to restrictions imposed by the separatists. Work remained suspended until the Cameroonian Government held dialogues with them. We also drove through many ghost towns, confirming the exodus of many displaced families to other parts of, or outside, Cameroon. A few check-points protected by only a few deployed few military personnel provided security in the region.

Meeting with the PCC Moderator – Rev Samuel Forba



PCC German partners at the induction ceremony

That same evening, I made a courtesy call on Rev Forba and his family at their house. He was glad I came despite the COVID-19 (Corona Virus) pandemic. He shared how the PCC had to cope with the persistent challenges from the separatists, though the Northwest region – Bamenda area, was worst hit with regular lock-downs. Till date, more than 100 Presbyterian Schools remain shut as problems escalated but two Presbyterian Secondary Schools remain open in Buea, two PCC schools at Limbe and one school at Kumba. Many rural

churches were closed and the displaced families moved on.

In response to this, PCC raised some funds at two of its schools at Yaounde (administrative capital of Cameroon) and Douala (the commercial capital of Cameroon) to service some of its debts. Since these two thriving cities were in the Francophone region of Cameroon, PCC recently started another bi-lingual school for its Anglophone citizens working in those cities. That way, more students from the Anglophone could accompany their parents' move to Francophone regions to work. PCC seized the opportunity to relocate some of its teachers to the bilingual school in Douala to reduce redundancy costs.

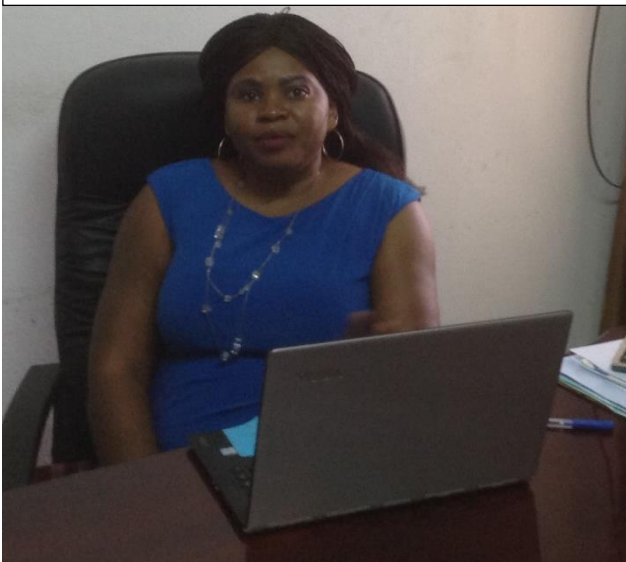
The lack of dialogue between the Cameroonian government and the separatists is destabilising the Anglophone region. Prolonged inaction by the government has enabled the separatists to operate as 'territorial vigilante groups', exerting illegal powers within rural dwellings. For example, a resident cannot work on Mondays, yet they must pay protection fees for their unwanted interventions.

Consequently, PCC is constantly lobbying the Cameroonian government for a roundtable discussion. PCC appointed a Parliamentary officer under the National in Mission Appointment programme to facilitate Cameroon religious leaders to break the deadlock by mediating between both factions. Unfortunately, the Cameroonian government repeatedly postponed such talks plunging the Anglophone region into socio-political and economic hardship.



Bunmi with Rev Forba at his induction

Jessy Eben – PCC Development Secretary



Meeting with the PCC Development Secretary – Mrs Jessy Eben

PCC has four pillars, and its development arm aims to complement the spread of the gospel by liberating God's people from poverty, illiteracy and injustice. It achieves its aims through various programmes. It has prioritised the continued support of its internally displaced families by starting a skill acquisition vocational centre at one of its youth centres at Limbe.

PCC recently carried out a 'Needs Assessment Survey' to identify and run courses for prospective participants such as crafts, fashion, ICT, hospitality management etc. If successful, the skills training would be rolled out to Bamenda in Northwest region. Afterwards, Prescraft Centre, Bamenda, would become

the one-stop venue for training community members and marketing PCC products. In the meantime, PCC plans to upscale activities within two Agriculture Centres in the Anglophone regions. It also embarked on insurance services plus exploring investments opportunities to increase profits.

Despite the tough times, PCC continues with delivery of health care services. One of its medical doctors was assigned to serve in the rural area among the separatist controlled region. He shared how he has to tread carefully not to upset the separatists as he served the rural dwellers. He is the only medic in the region since most have moved to safer locations. The common endemic diseases and conditions were malaria, enteritis, hypertension and malnutrition. PCC continues to place itself in a strong position to serve God and the people of Cameroon.

Meeting with NMA beneficiary – Godwin Numfor (PCC Webmaster)

Godwin is the PCC Webmaster responsible for making PCC more visible locally and globally. He started in 2016 and since then communication within PCC has immensely improved and the spread of information has become faster, easier and cheaper to operate. He supports the two PCC Radio stations –CBS Buea and CBS Bamenda and enables live streaming. He also promotes networking and communication on several social-media platforms to engage various stakeholders such as interactive forums for ministers, groups, church leaders etc. These have been crucial in disseminating news since the onset of the crisis in 2016. He covers PCC events online as well as with still and live pictures online. He thanked MCB for the NMA programme and hopes the post continues after the NMA programme ends.



Mr Godwin Numfor - PCC Webmaster



Bunmi and Christina at PCC HQ in Buea

Meeting with NMA beneficiary – Ochonu Christina (Asset Manager)

Christina, a Banking and Finance graduate, was appointed in 2016. She developed the Asset Management Policy along with the PCC Financial Secretary and designed the PCC Asset Manual. This document offers guidelines on implementing standard procedures. She regularly updates the PCC Asset Register and ensures it is reflected in the PCC’s annual audited reports. Christina has identified lapses with the use of a more modern software. The

software offers better data management that integrates an efficient labelling system for all equipment and furniture within PCCs Institutions and properties. This eases tracing of items, asset transfers, asset sharing and eventually links to the invoicing for its register. Christina loves her job and expressed gratitude for the opportunity to serve under the NMA grant scheme.

Meeting with NMA beneficiary – Joseph Malafa (Small Business Credit Manager)



Joseph Malafa – Small Business Credit Mgr

Joseph trained as an Accountant and started in this post in 2019. Prior to this, he served with the Internal Audit Team for 3 years and later became an Audit Analyst for two years after his MSC programme at Mauritius. His main clientele are private sector employees, PCC members, petty traders and public sector employees. His office was in Buea town, opposite the University of Buea.

He offers business advisory services to interested members and obtains suitable business plans for loan applications. He promotes the role of microcredit in the society to improve the social capital of the people particularly in its slow economy. He seeks to translate many proposals into viable business ventures. I encouraged the adoption of groups as a small cluster for securing loans and self-help projects as successfully practiced elsewhere. Group members select themselves and step in when one of them defaults. That way, they can pursue defaulters to pay or dissuade

culprits from joining. He agreed that it would prevent the Church from debt collection during the crisis or seen as an easy target for delinquent loans.

Establishing reputable small groups gives members a voice in whatever sector they operate. This further boosts entrepreneurship and creates employment. The Free Methodist Church in Rwanda operates a similar system successfully and many of its small groups translate into cell groups once a week, offering both social and spiritual support to one another. Joseph was very excited about pursuing similar ideas to boost PCC's ventures.

Meeting with NMA beneficiary – Agwa Linus Tarnonge (Public Affairs Officer)

Agwa was a Liaison Officer at the National Institute of Statistics and had very good contacts in Yaounde prior to taking up this position in 2018. He said the creation of this post was timely as he works tirelessly in the field liaising with organisations to assist displaced victims. He also creates platforms for the Church to relate positively with the media, other religious leaders and the Cameroonian government. Agwa was instrumental in tracing missing students, ministers and dignitaries. He lobbies Parliamentarians to break grounds and remove barriers for communication. He said 60 – 70% of the PCC was paralysed by the crisis i.e. hospitals, churches, schools especially in Bamenda.



Agwa Tarnonge - Public Affairs Officer

He visits difficult locations to promote inclusiveness. As the Head of the Christian Council in Cameroon with 11m members, Rev Forba can mediate at the roundtable dialogue along with other religious groups if the Cameroonian government accepts. As the Public Affairs Officer, he also updates external partners on grass root realities. He prays to experience a peaceful and tranquil Cameroon where all Cameroons can unite and respect each other.

Meeting with two ex-SALT graduates of the Asian Rural Institute (ARI)

I was glad to meet both Rita Ngoh and Hildah Ngwe that recently graduated from ARI (December 2019) after nine months training in Japan. They were full of praise and gratitude for their opportunity to learn new farming techniques and were bursting with ideas for their farm centres. Both women are Agriculture Technicians at two different Agriculture Centres in the Anglophone region. Both farm centres were started by British Methodist mission partners in the ninety-nineties.

Rita plans to boost her poultry and piggery productions at her farm centre this year, in addition to improving production of bush mangoes, plantain, maize and pepper. Rita and Hilda also shared briefly on Organic Farming, Rural

Development and Peace studies. They hope to apply newly acquired skills and knowledge to address post-harvest losses, food insecurity, food processing challenges, hunger and poverty. Rita hope to practice the concept of servant leadership.

Hilda shared on the significance of community building. She seeks to be good communicator that facilitates learning, develops solutions and builds communities even though she has to contend with people that consider her too young and are sexist towards her. Finally, she wishes to be supportive and compassionate towards her staff and trainees by asking for their opinions especially the lower level staff to validate their inputs. Hilda plans to focus on preventive and control measures of organic farming in addition to cultivating various sources of organic fertilizer. Hilda and Rita expressed their sincere gratitude and love to the British Methodists. They look forward to extending knowledge to other community members living around their farm centres, especially the youths.



Hilda Ngwe, Bunmi and Rita Ngoh -both were ex-SALT graduates of ARI

Meeting with Prof Bouba Mbima - UPAC, Yaounde

It was a good opportunity to meet with Prof Mbima whilst in Cameroon. Prof Mbima is the Head of the Theology department at the Université protestante d'afrique centrale (UPAC). He had travelled from Yaounde to Buea to discuss partnership issues at UPAC. UPAC currently has four faculties with 1,050 students. The Theology department has 204 enrolled students. One of his lecturers, Dr Alagbada is a NMA beneficiary. He leads on Wesleyan Studies in Francophone Africa, yet I was unable to visit due to travel difficulties within Anglophone Cameroon. He was thankful for the existing partnership UPAC has with MCB. Prof Mbima stayed back for the PCC induction service at Buea the next day before departing back to Yaounde.

PCC Induction service held at PCC Secondary School grounds at Buea

It was a bright and sunny day on the Sunday morning, 15 March 2020. We got ready for the event as early as 8.25am. By the time we left the hotel, too many vehicles from far and near had blocked the road, hindering movement. We eventually arrived by 8.45am just before PCC member, guests, ministers and dignitaries filled the venue.

Numerous choirs led the procession of pastors, ministers and elders. Rt Rev Samuel Forba welcomed us all to the service followed by prayers, praise and thanksgiving. Rev Forba later joined the dance group from his first parish that came to celebrate with him. Afterwards, he preached his sermon from Revelations 3:2 – wake up and watch out.



Rev Forba preached that a church that fails to carry out its mission is bound to fail citing the Sardis Church in Rev 3: 1-6) as an example, he said a complacent church often speaks of past victories and eventually becomes a hollow church that compromises, becomes complacent, sleepy and eventually a living dead. He admonished us to wake up and strengthen what remains. He emphasised six words from the passage – wake up, strengthen, complete, remember, obey and repent. We the Church should honestly face up to our failures and evaluate how to progress, rather than stick to familiar ways of doing things. We are to wake up and watch out for a new PCC wherein justice, peace, unity and fraternity are possible.

More than 100 of the displaced families in Cameroon were invited to the Induction Service on 15 March

Inter-faith leaders with external partners at Douala. Cameroon



2020. A few shared their ordeal as the church continues to pray and support them. This persistent crisis also led to the closure of many rural churches. Consequently, bigger churches in towns had to increase serving ministers e.g. up to four ministers served in one congregation to minimise redundancy costs.

The new PCC Synod Clerk with a few external partners gave away some relief items to internally displaced families at the service. I also brought greetings from MC Britain before we dispersed at 4.30pm. It was a glorious day.

The next day, a few external partners with Cameroonian religious leaders, travelled to Douala to meet with religious leaders to understand ongoing challenges in the Southwest and Northwest regions of Cameroon. There were plans to meet with Cameroonian politicians to try and alleviate suffering among the displaced families. The religious leaders wish to also mediate between the separatists and politicians to promote peace in the region. Thank you

*Dr Bunmi Olayisade
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