

Partnership visit to Iglesia Methodista du Guinea Equatorial (IMGE)3 -10 December 2019

Reasons for visit:

- To meet IMGE Church leaders
- To visit few IMGE programmes
- To discuss ongoing partnership issues

IMGE Mission

Have you ever heard of Malabo in Equatorial Guinea? A small Spanish speaking country on the Equator in Central Africa. The British Naval officers set up a naval base at Fernando Poo to combat slave-trade on Bioko Island and this was later moved to Sierra Leone. Its location made it a thriving port for asylum of freed slaves in the nineteenth century after abolishment of the slave trade (1827 – 45). Later the Primitive Methodist began an English mission station at Malabo, but by 1858, the Spanish expelled Protestant missionaries from Fernando Po. By then, its mission had spread inwards on the small island but it never reached the mainland of Central Africa. Records show there are 297,000 residents at Malabo and 1.3m citizens of Equatorial Guinea. Its major exports were cocoa, coffee and timber and recently oil. IMGE is the second oldest Methodist Conference in Africa, yet it is the smallest in size. Equatorial Guinea is the only Spanish speaking African country, still, the partnership between IMGE and MC Britain still exists despite many challenges.



Plaque of Cuban slave deportees in 1869



In light of this, I strived to visit Malabo for few years and eventually did in December 2019. I arrived late at night from Cotonou and was glad to meet IMGE leaders at Malabo International airport. It was great to see the President of the Men's Fellowship with Mr Jeremias – the Gen Sec. It was a long day as I had to travel by road, Lagos – Badagry – Cotonou in Benin Republic. I then travelled by flight from Cotonou since there was no direct flight from Lagos. I started at 6.00am and arrived at my abode at 9.00pm. I later had dinner with Rev Sharpe and Jeremias to know my schedule for the week.

IMGE Mission School



The next day, I visited the IMGE Mission School that has a crèche, both primary and secondary schools. There were 640 students across the board in addition to 40 pupils at crèche. The number dropped from 60 pupils to 40 due to ongoing recession in the country. The Junior and Senior School students attended morning and afternoon school sessions. Late applicants attended the afternoon school sessions since registrations was first-come-first serve. Even so, many parents still struggled to pay school fees making instalment payment the popular option. Despite that, IMGE has many defaulters on its

books. Since the school is a mission priority plus the only income generating source, IMGGE closely monitors its operations.

It has an advantage of attracting non- Spanish speakers as it attracts Anglophone and Francophone to Church and its school. However, since its official language is Spanish, multi-lingual personnel are welcome to teach and assist at the schools and the crèche. The school has a very good reputation, however the government no longer sends staff or subsidise teachers' salaries. The IMGGE Church is responsible for recruitment, marketing and managing both staff and students.



Rev Sharpe (Superintendent) with Bro Jeremias (Gen Sec)

IMGGE Church

The Methodist Church in Equatorial Guinea (formerly Fernando Po) was started by British Naval Officers serving on the island. It was a very busy port for slave trade as it is located just below the West African coast and beside Central Africa. As a Spanish Colony, Catholicism has been the main Christian denomination. However, Methodism is one of the oldest Protestant denomination, offering an alternative Christian worship service to the many visitors and tourists.



IMGGE Cathedral at Malabo



Newly refurbished church entrance

The Methodist Cathedral is located at the City Centre, next to the Catholic Manse (that initially belonged to the Methodist). The small church with a big presence looked nice during my visit. The church entrance was recently renovated by a church member celebrating her 70th birthday, she happened to be the Ghana Ambassador to Equatorial Guinea. This upgrade inspired IMGGE church leaders to renovate the back of the building as well as improve the church infrastructure. Rev Sharpe said the renovated building has attracted more prospective pupils to enrol at the Methodist school. IMGGE is also considering leasing out its premises for events such as weddings to increase income generation.

Meeting with the two new IMGGE ministers

I met two recent graduates from the Methodist Theological Institute (MTI), Sagamu in Nigeria. They both lead mission stations outside the capital as well as teach at the IMGGE primary school to augment their wages. They were grateful for the recent training received at the Methodist Theology Institute, Sagamu, sponsored by MC Nigeria. The two ordinands were still waiting for their ordination to be held at Malabo early next year. However, they will appreciate sponsorship for online postgraduate courses to fill existing skills gaps within the church.

There were two other teachers seeking to attend MTI, Sagamu from the start of the 2020 academic year, pending scholarship offers from MC Nigeria. One IMGE minister also visited MC Ghana on an

exchange program to broaden his horizon and strengthen existing IMGE partnership with Ghana.



The two new IMGE ministers with the superintendent at a meeting

On Sunday 9 December, I had the opportunity to participate as well as partake in the Holy Communion celebration. Service commenced at 8.30am singing Methodist hymns and the Choir later led us in praise and worship. Five church members shared their testimonies – a woman and her child miraculously uninjured by a motor accident. She was distraught about the casualties, but grateful that God protected her and her baby. The Angola Consul General ended his four-term service at Malabo and gave thanks too. He was

unwell and church members prayed for him. He later visited Barcelona and received a clean bill of health, confirming answer to prayers. Another shared how he had been at Bata (another City on the mainland) for few months with work. He was grateful for the successful outcome and glad to be back home with his family. A lady in her sixties shared how she was feeling unwell at the start of the week but fully recovered by that morning. She prayed to God for good sight and has not used her glasses for two years running, yet she sees well. The last testimony was by the assistant Mayor who shared how few fishermen were saved at sea after the canoe's engine failed, None was harmed by the incidence, though she managed to get paramedics to test them as soon as they were rescued. Amazing stories confirming God's faithfulness.

The Bible readings were - Psalm 72:1-7 & 18-19, Isaiah 11: 1-10 and Romans 15: 4-13. The sermon focused on service to God driven by personal decision and not based on satisfying the world. We should receive one another as Christ received us. Jesus became a servant for the revelation of God's truth first to the Jews and then the Gentiles. God fulfils his promises through Jesus, do we honour our promises to him? May the God of peace fill us with joy and peace in believing him? May abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit? We later received the Holy Communion after which I brought greetings to all. We finished service at 1.00pm.

Meeting with IMGE members

I met with the youths on Saturday 8 December 2019. There were around 20 members present. It was an open discussion, with many disillusioned about the lack of musical instruments for choir practices, to conduct choir festivals and inspire youths to write song and poetry. Malabo had no School of Music and asked if MCB could fund training at a Spanish Music College or sponsor a Professional Musician to teach music to interested youths. The youths also asked for assistance with job creation and youth exchange programmes, probably with the Cuban Methodists to ease visa and language problems.

Meeting with IMGE Leaders

IMGE asked if MCB could assist with providing two bikes for the two new ministers serving at the two rural mission stations 22km and 60km from Malabo respectively, but living in Malabo. There is also Evangelist Orland, who leads the Church when Superintendent Sharpe travels to administer Holy Communion at the other mission stations. He commented about insufficient resources in Spanish to help his ministry. Rev Sharpe kindly asked if he could obtain further training to equip him to lead on IMGE church growth strategy, especially on the mainland where Methodists have no presence.

The meeting with IMGE church leaders shared about developing an effective communication

strategy that would boost their web-presence, provide a networking platform and enhance co-operation within and without the country. They welcomed volunteers interested in working at the crèche, teach music and manage projects proficiently.

Bunmi with Rev Sharpe and the Ghana Ambassador at Malabo



Meeting with IMGE Women Leaders

I was delighted to meet with IMGE women leaders on Wednesday 5 December 2019 and we all travelled to both outstations to meet with other women the following day. They considered themselves part of the global Methodist family. The National leader, Madame Cecelia, asked for links with WFWUCW as well as to

collaborating with MWIB. There was request for Women leadership training especially for the young ministers' wives. In addition, many young women in the church were unemployed and wished to start a communal income generating project to empower the unemployed living in rural places particularly widows and single mothers.

Visits to two IMGE mission outstations

(i) Luba English Mission (Bioko – Sur)

The next day, we drove to Luba, about 60 km from Malabo. I was told to always have my passport on me because security is always a serious issue in Equatorial Guinea. On the plus side, it was considered very safe to drive through the province and many roads were recently upgraded. The English Mission station at Luba (as called) was a small church of 120 -150 members, mostly youths. The locals had renovated the church building over several years, preserving its original 19th century floor tiles. The Chaplain (normally was based at Malabo due to no manse in the village), travelled about twice each week to lead services and meet with church members. The church evangelist led mid-week events. In addition, there were other activities such as the men, youths, women and choristers meeting regularly each week. Up to 24 women were members of the Women Fellowship. The women wanted training in modern farming techniques to improve food security and generate fund during recession. Many had emigrated back to the village due to high unemployment rate. It was a joy to see few of the church members first met in 2015 during my last visit.



IMGE members at Luba Methodist Church

Baloeri English Mission station

The next day we travelled to Baloeri village. I witnessed appreciable progress since my last visit. The big Catholic Church was still located at the village centre. However, the Assemblies of God Church building was erected further inland. Less than a mile further was the Methodist Church. Its members had cleared a

path we could drive through being dry season. During my previous visit in 2015, we had to trek through the forest in Wellington boots, this time we drove to the Church premises.

Most members were elderly and quite a few spoke very good English despite Spanish being the official language. This was due to the influence of the Mission station started by early missionaries since the 20th century. The original building was repainted, and the cracked walls plastered. Its surroundings had



IMGE members at Baloeri Methodist Church

colourful landscape beautified with flowers planted by members. The big tree branches were trimmed and chopped into small seats under the tree.

Beside the church was a small vegetable garden with cassava. And behind the church building were new toilets recently built by members under the leadership of a minister. Nonetheless, the new minister travelled from Malabo every week to coordinate midweek and Sunday services. I observed the new music system installed by members to attract new members. Records showed increased church membership from four to more than fifty since the new minister started.

What an amazing testimony.

Many of the village youths had migrated to Malabo in search of work. Nonetheless, the community church members asked if the debilitated minister's manse plus the Junior Secondary School building constructed in the 20th century could be revamped. I encouraged them have faith in God for divine provision and commended them on the wonderful work already done in renovating existing structures. The four of us travelled back to Malabo and I was glad to have an early night. The homebound journey was much easier.

Thank you.

Dr Bunmi Olayisade

Africa Partnership Coordinator

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