

**CLIFF COLLEGE INTERNATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE (CCITC) PROGRAMME  
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE METHODIST CHURCH NIGERIA (MCN)  
REPORT ON FOURTH 'RESIDENTIAL' (3<sup>rd</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> January 2012)**

Regular readers of these CCITC reports will know that we do not normally share with you a chronological order of our activities. **But then our 'residentials' in Nigeria are not normally undertaken at a time when an Islamic terrorist group 'Boko Haram' are bombing indiscriminately and when a national strike has been called.** Country-wide demonstrations were already taking place against the Nigeria government's decision (made over the holiday period) to remove the fuel subsidy supported by Nigerian oil revenues from the beginning of 2012, thus more than doubling the cost of fuel for vehicles and light/power producing generators from 65 Naira (25p) per litre to N141 at the stroke of a President's pen!



**Jan 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday** The travelling team of Rev Richard Jackson, (Sir) Keith Phillips, Rev Gilbert and Mrs Sylvia Hall and Rev Dr Jen Smith came from different directions to congregate at Heathrow airport largely unaware of more recent events taking place in Nigeria. We travelled comfortably and well (as usual) with Arik Air to the International Airport in Lagos arriving in the early hours of Wednesday morning. We were met by the National Coordinator of CCITC, Very Rev Paul Olukunga and the Protocol Officer for MCN Rev Agunbiade Busuyi who had stayed overnight near the airport. On transfer to the national airport for the 8.30am onward flight to Owerri we were joined by Rev Dr Deji Okegbile who had travelled earlier to Nigeria. Over breakfast our Nigerian friends and the newspapers made us aware of the disturbed situation and the pending national strike.



Our (one-hour) flight to Owerri in the east was delayed by 'Harmattan' weather until lunchtime. We were in good company as we met with the Methodist Archbishop of Ibadan, Most Rev Dr Michael Stephen, also delayed in travelling to Abuja. Gilbert & Sylvia who have known him and his family from when he was 'nowt but a lad' in 1960's Nigeria enjoyed the chance meeting. We were picked up at Owerri airport and arrived at Hotel Roy next to the college late in the afternoon. We were pleased to find that our partner lecturers in Umuahia Methodist Training Institute (MTI) had made good use of the time in preparing our trainees for a prompt start with the timetabled

programme on Thursday morning.

**Jan 5<sup>th</sup> Thursday** Most of the trainees had travelled to Umuahia for the final residential of the two year programme (2010-12) through road-blocks and some demonstrations. Despite their own family concerns about the troubled situation they responded positively to: **Gilbert & Sylvia's morning devotions on characters from the Bible, backed up by guidance on Practical Preaching; Deji's lectures on 'Fresh Expressions'; and Jen's sensitive presentation (enlivened again by Jude Munanonye's personal experience testimony) relating to Aids Awareness. The International Coordinator's Seminars on team leadership using 'Six Thinking Hats (Caps)' followed by prayers rounded off each day.** By that first evening as we met with the Secretary of Conference and our Nigerian Colleagues it became clear that the worsening situation with demonstrations and the threat of a national strike closing down everything from the following Monday meant that for the safety of both staff and trainees some curtailment of the programme (timetabled through till the following Tuesday) in Umuahia was necessary. Unfortunately, one of the casualties of the curtailment was the 'spouses weekend', led by the Halls' though we were able to organise a truncated version on the Saturday for the eleven wives and three deaconesses who were able to join us.



**Jan 6/7<sup>th</sup> Friday/Saturday** Having made the decision that the programme at Umuahia would complete on Saturday so that everyone could travel on Sunday before the national strike proper began on Monday, the next two days were a blur of prioritised activity: as lecturers (fortunately with notes to distribute) crammed what was required into the time available; Keith Phillips, our administrator with the help of the Registrar and our College Staff partners filled out his spread sheet of marks received and made clear what was required from every student by the closing date of 28<sup>th</sup> February (as well as the completion of their work-book on: Exploring Theological English), if they were to be sure of graduating later in the year. **On Friday Jen, accompanied by Richard fulfilled her (additional) liaison role for the Uzuakoli Support Group** by sharing with staff and viewing the new Maternity Ward, and the Laboratory as well as other building projects at the Royal Cross Methodist Hospital, Ugueke, followed by a well-received visit to the 'Motherless Baby Unit'. Our indefatigable friend Paul Olukunga with college staff support moved here and there in re-arranging flights for our return to Lagos and travel to Sagamu on Sunday, rather than Tuesday.



**Jan 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday** Flights from Owerri were full but thanks to Paul's efforts the team, accompanied by some of our trainees from that area, travelled by road early in the morning to Port Harcourt without major incident. Clearly there was some tension at road blocks manned by police, army and occasional vigilantes, but the presence of clergy and expatriates in our two vehicles meant that little effort was made to extract 'a new year gift' from us on the road. Our Nigerian friends saw us through the chaos of check-in at the busy airport into the relative calm of yet another waiting period before boarding. Jen met (as you do!) with the family of the mother whose funeral she had conducted in Ealing,



London just before Christmas. **Apart from the delay on arrival in Lagos whilst our baggage was returned, the onward journey to Sagamu was uneventful as the Protocol Officer, Busuyi, Driver Emmanuel, and Paul with the additional help of Ms Bukola Mustapha from MCN HQ smoothed our way into the vehicle and on to the much improved main road to Sagamu MTI.** Text messages sent in advance by Paul to trainees linked with the Sagamu residential inviting as many as possible for their own safety to travel on Sunday meant that many were already in residence at the college when we arrived; others arrived later and some were turned back. As usual we were hosted on the compound adjacent to the college, by the Bishop of Remo, Rt.

Rev Babatunde Taiwo. **The Bishop, along with his wife Abimbola, The Prelate, Secretary of Conference and the Bishop of Evangelism with other MCN representatives were waiting to hear whether they would still be able to travel to the World Methodism Evangelism Conference in Jerusalem in the early hours of Tuesday morning.**



**Jan 9-10<sup>th</sup> Monday/Tuesday** It was quite eerie to wake early on Monday morning in Nigeria to the 'Sound of Silence' on the nearby road instead of hearing the sound of beeping vehicles and noisy lorries! **The national strike had begun! It was to be maintained by a 'common community will' to reverse the decision about the 'removal of the fuel subsidy' and through the surveillance conducted by groups of committed individuals in each community who made it clear that breaches of the 'common will' would be responded to by direct action against the offenders.** Alongside this local and almost universally observed strike, peaceful demonstrations took place in many parts of the country. This meant that everything was closed down from early morning to early evening when shops were allowed to open and people as well as vehicles (where fuel could be bought) were able to move about freely. Weekends also were strike free times of movement, though there was always the possibility of being caught up in one of the many demonstrations that were taking place.

Sadly, as the media was quick to report, some of these protests turned violent with lives being lost and people being injured in the clashes that took place. **Unfortunately, the media, both in Nigeria and in the UK struggled to help their readers and listeners to differentiate between these largely peaceful and national political activities and the terrorists of the Boko Haram sect** who have used the hiatus to continue their bombing campaign as they try to de-stabilise the northern states of Nigeria. These atrocities are abhorred and condemned by right thinking Muslims and Christians alike, but as with the historic troubles linked to Northern Ireland such condemnation from within the situation does not easily sever the supply lines of extremist support that come from outside of the country to fuel the fire of perceived wrongs among disaffected groups who live in the predominately Muslim northern areas of Nigeria.

The well-organised nature of the strike overall meant that the MCN group were able to leave for Jerusalem early on Tuesday as planned, though there were reports of Bishop Etim Ekong's (recent scholarship student in England) car being attacked and damaged en route to the airport. The MCN group returned inspired and safely a week later.

**Jan 11/14<sup>th</sup> Wednesday/Saturday** Once again our shared reading of the political situation and the likely continuation of the national strike and demonstrations led us to plan for a revised programme that would allow our trainees at Sagamu to return home by Sunday. In the meantime, as at Umuhia, (see above) we were able to continue with much of the lecturing programme planned through from Wednesday to Saturday. Though it was clearly impossible in the deteriorating circumstances for spouses with children to travel any distance at all, we made ad hoc arrangements through Deaconess Nancy Kennedy-Johnson, a lecturer at the college, for Gilbert, Sylvia and Jen to meet with the wives of tutors and some of the women leaders living nearby on Saturday morning and Monday afternoon. **Overall, the disappointment of not having the spouses together with their partners was assuaged a little by the positive response to the smaller group meetings where training was given and in-depth conversations were shared with a variety of women leaders, numbering more than thirty between both centres.** All of the participants received free books and a few children were blessed with the gifts that were taken to occupy the many!!!



**Jan 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday** The earlier departure of the trainees left the visiting team free to attend the English service at the Mellor Methodist Cathedral at 8.00am and to visit some of the sites at and near Ikenne associated with the name of the much revered missionary Rev William F Mellor. We were

thrilled to be greeted by many of our trainee ministers leading inspiring worship with packed congregations at the churches as we travelled around the area on Sunday morning. We had the added bonus of discovering a broken down pulpit from an original Mellor Church building that we hope will be renovated in time to join the lectern (already recovered) in the Mellor Memorial Methodist Centre at Sagamu MTI.



**Jan 16/18<sup>th</sup> Monday/Wednesday** Once we had confirmed that the cost of changing our (cheap!) tickets to travel back to the UK early was prohibitive and that we were likely to be ‘confined to barracks’ by the continuation of the strike we found plenty to occupy our time. I was able to work with a good friend and lecturer, Raphael Idialu on his book related to Mission and Church Growth through Church Planting; Keith used the time to clarify the



situation regarding registered trainees Umuahia (82) and Sagamu (71)-(lecture note packs delivered to absentees); apart from the meetings with the women described earlier Gilbert, Sylvia and Jen were involved in much coming and going with individuals; Deji with members of the Nigerian support team catered for our every concern with background information and up to date news about what was happening in the country. **A weekend amelioration of the situation that prompted the strike was provided as the government with promises of controls reduced the price of a litre of fuel to N95.**

By Wednesday children were returning to school, businesses were re-opening and it was clear that most people were ready, at least for the time being, to accept this compromise. Traffic was moving freely and we were able to move from Sagamu into a hotel in Lagos in preparation for a meeting with The Prelate and The Secretary of Conference at MCN HQ on the Thursday.

**Jan 19<sup>th</sup> Thursday** As previously arranged, the team were graciously received as they joined in prayers with HQ staff; celebrated Sylvia’s ?? birthday with Mrs (HQ) Phillips birthday cake; and shared lunch at the office with the Leaders of MCN, His Eminence, Dr Sunday Ola Makinde, and Rt. Rev Dr Chibuzo Opoko, the Secretary of Conference. The Coordinators and Administrators met together with the leaders also for a more formal business meeting at which issues affecting the future work of the CCITC in partnership with the Methodist Church in Nigeria were discussed. Our shared vision for a continuation and diversification of the training programme in Nigeria noted the possible impact of the far-reaching and widely publicised ‘Fruitful Field’ proposals being discussed by the British Methodist Church, but apart from questions about visas etc. our focus was upon the more immediate issues relating to:

- 1) **Graduations** for the current programme (2010-12) which are likely to be held **MMMC-building progress** in association with the MCN Conference (6-13<sup>th</sup> August) in Lagos and linked with the hoped-for completion (**further donations gratefully received**) and dedication of the Mellor Memorial Methodist Centre at Sagamu MTI.
- 2) **A 2012 Evaluation** of the training programme to be developed at Regional Centres (in Nigeria and Sierra Leone) as all former trainees and tutors involved will be invited to receive updated Mission & Ministry DVD’s and to complete an evaluation questionnaire highlighting the practical impact of aspects of the programme on their ministry.
- 3) **Plans for possible new (short-term) programmes beginning in Jan 2013** should make provision for: lay training; church growth through church planting; women, youth and children’s work training.
- 4) **Planning continues for a Post-Easter 2013–Episcopal training and Methodist Heritage exposure** through MCN funded (two-week+) programme at Cliff College and with Districts of the Methodist Church in Britain and Ireland. No fewer than 14 of these new Bishops have been involved in the CCITC programme. **Was-2008/10 Trainees President: Now-Bishop Joel Akinola**
- 5) **The current list of ‘Friends of MCN’** was warmly received. These friends may be linked with a Chaplaincy that is likely to be developed amongst the ‘Diaspora’ of MCN friends living in Britain and Ireland.



**Jan 20/21<sup>st</sup> Friday/Saturday** An early start for Lagos International Airport, straightforward check-in and boarding of the flight was followed at 11.00am by a six hour delay sitting on the aeroplane as a fault in the cockpit was being dealt with before guidance/clearance was received from the manufacturer of the plane. Text messages advised those waiting at home about the delay on the ground but later in the middle of the 6-7 hour flight to London a medical emergency

arose which had to be dealt with at Heathrow by police and paramedics before we were able to disembark. **Fortunately, Rev Dr Jen Smith and her husband Keith epitomise the ‘flexibility with a sense of humour’** required of participants in the programme as at 11.30pm the travelling team were treated to Pizzas and a bed for the night at their home in Ealing before travelling on to their own homes on Saturday morning.

The final day of travel with its frustrations being offset by the resigned but friendly acceptance that comes from ‘everyone, being in the same boat (aeroplane!)’ provided a fitting climax to a most unusual period of travel and training. Once again, when tested by particularly difficult circumstances we were reminded how important personal relationships are to the partnership in which we share. **As the visiting team we can only give thanks to everyone for the care, prayer and encouragement that our friends here and in Nigeria have given to us all.**

*Just before we left for Nigeria my attention was drawn to an article by Bim Adewunmi of the Guardian (4 Jan 2011) which is worth reading in full. The Banner Headline-” is not something with which we would disagree!*



*“Nigeria: The happiest place on earth”*

*Nigeria is beset by poverty, corruption and violence – but a poll says it is the world's most optimistic nation. To quote: “In a 53-country Gallup poll, Nigerians were rated at 70 points for optimism. By contrast, Britain scored a deeply pessimistic -44. Why so glum, Britain? And what in the world makes Nigerians so happy?”*

**We continue to pray that God will work together with all its people for the good of the Country of Nigeria and the Continent of Africa where we have found not only the ‘happiest’ but some of the ‘friendliest’ people on earth.**

As we shared in our last report, these are uncertain days economically for the church as well as for society as a whole and the future of the CCITC programme beyond 2012 remains unclear. Many people both here and overseas are committed to its continuation and even its expansion as a proven 21<sup>st</sup> Century partnership model for sharing in training for mission in the world-wide church. The future of this economically viable concept which provides so many ‘added-value benefits’ in terms of world church relations, needs the support of those who value the concept if it is to continue making its unique contribution to the mission of our partner churches throughout the world. Articles, regular reports, evaluations and DVD’s provided since 2002 are full of testimonies to the positive impact made on everyone associated this kind of programme. They will be made available to you on request.

**Richard Jackson (Rev)**  
Home/Office 2, Almond Drive,  
Sale, Cheshire, M33 5QZ  
+44 (0) 161-718-2548  
Email [rev.rj@ntlworld.com](mailto:rev.rj@ntlworld.com)

and at

**International Coordinator CCITC**  
Cliff College, Calver,  
Hope Valley, Derbyshire S32 3XG  
+44 (0) 1246-584-200  
[r.jackson@cliffcollege.ac.uk](mailto:r.jackson@cliffcollege.ac.uk)