

Sent: Sunday, March 25, 2018 12:14 AM

Subject: Greetings from Cote d'Ivoire

Bonjour Brethren in Northern California,

Greetings from Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast)! I wanted to send you a quick update on my trip and wish you a profitable start to the spring holy days.

Thursday, our senior pastor Moïse Mabout, his wife and I returned from visiting the congregation in Blolé, a small village in the northwestern part of the country near the border with Liberia and Guinea (in English). This area of the country was a center in two bloody civil wars from 2002 to 2011 which claimed the lives of thousands of Ivoirians. The only air flights are from the Capital Abidjan and there are only two flights a week, so we travelled the 350 miles from Abidjan to Blolé by rented car. The first 150 miles is on well-maintained divided highway, but the remaining part is on a two-lane road filled with enormous potholes, forcing cars to zig-zag across lanes to avoid potentially breaking an axle. You want to keep your eyes on the road to avoid the car sickness, but then turn away as you see a zig-zagging car coming head-on!

Upon arrival, people literally jumped for joy and everyone gave us hugs. I had met several of the members last year when they took a 10-hour bus ride to join the congregation in Abidjan for Passover. About 12 years ago, a seventh day Adventist pastor came into contact with United Church of God and began to see there was a unity of scripture from Genesis to Revelation that went far beyond just the truth of the Sabbath day. And through the years, what began with one person has grown to a regular congregation of 25 people. Through the generosity of members, the United Church of God built a basic mud-brick church hall. They take good care of it and set a good example in conduct among their mostly Muslim neighbors and within the community of about 3,000 people. I should note as you go farther north in the countries of West Africa, the influence of Islam becomes greater and greater. This morning for example, I was awakened at 4:00 am by the local Mosque's call to prayer over their loudspeaker.

After walking through the dusty roads of the village, we veered off through a forest of Cocoa trees that opened to a beautiful clearing of brightly colored flowers with lush forests and verdant fields all around. It was there we rested in a small camping area used during harvest. All the members here are farmers who raise everything from rice to pineapple and it was such a contrast to see the beauty of God's creation and the satisfaction of members who tended to their farms and gardens against the dilapidated lean-to shelters and crumbling mud-break houses in the village.

God put the first man and woman in a garden and told them to dress and keep it, but instead we have built "house upon house". Whether we live in San Francisco or in this part of Cote d'Ivoire, we were created to be with God in His creation. We catch a glimpse of His nature when we step in His creation, but now this can even be deceptive as with Ivory Coast, these same fields have been used for war, or as they say here "the Crisis".

Friday, we began our annual summer camp here welcoming campers and staff to our rented facility near our church hall in La Mé, about an hour from Abidjan. I will join the camp on Friday and Sabbath and then head back to France on Sunday to keep the Passover and 1st Day in Bordeaux with our French brethren.

I am praying that your Passover preparation yields greater understanding of what God has done through His Son and that this would lead to fresh insights into our motivations, desires and priorities. Jesus said that “His yoke is easy and his burden is lite” (Matthew 11:30), and so if we are feeling burdened by our lives, we are likely not sufficiently giving our cares and concerns over to our elder brother to carry for us. He can lighten our load.

In Christ's Service

Tim Pebworth

Pastor, United Church of God

PS – Photo below of some of our brethren in Blolé in front of the gate to our church hall. Note the EDU painted in blue – “L'Église de Dieu Unie” or “United Church of God”. This is likely the most beautiful and cleanest place in the village.

