

**September 29, 2017**

**Dear Brethren in Nor Cal,**

Thank you for your prayers for my trip to Togo, Benin and Cameroon. I returned to France on Sunday after spending two productive weeks in Africa. In this letter, I wanted to update you on my trip and wish you a meaningful Day of Atonement.

As you heard from Maryse, there were massive demonstrations in Lomé, the capital of Togo, days before my arrival, with more than 100,000 taking to the streets. The Togolese president is currently serving a third, five-year term succeeding the previous president, his father, who was president for 38 years. So, after 50 years of this father/son pair, the populace wants a change. To avoid problems with social media, the government regularly disconnects the internet to the country. They did this right before and after my trip, but the internet connection was still quite unstable during my stay.

After a night's rest, I traveled by road the 100 miles from Lomé to Cotonou, Benin with three other church members who were attending the planned leadership conference. The road is paved, but with the border crossing, checkpoints, broken-down vehicles and city traffic, it took about six hours.

Benin makes the list of the top 10 most illiterate countries in the world with only 42% of the population able to read (for women the rate is less than 30%). With more than 40% of the population under 14, it is a country that is struggling. We have a congregation of about 25 in Cotonou, the economic capital, and it was in Benin that we convened a leadership conference of 20 of our west African leaders including their wives for four days of intensive instruction. We discussed Biblical principles of marriage and family, church administration and reviewed core church doctrines. I brought with me Bible marking supplies for each participant and we spent many hours chain referencing our Bibles on topics ranging from the Holy Days in the New Testament to tithing to encouraging prayers in scripture. The conference was made possible by generous donations from two congregations in the United States.



**Pastor Moise Mabout providing instruction during the West African Leadership Conference**

On the Sabbath, I had the opportunity to ordain a deacon from our congregation in Man, Cote d'Ivoire and a deaconess from our congregation in Lomé, Togo. Having around 45 people for the Sabbath was a wonderful treat for the brethren as this is the typical size of a west African Feast site.



**From left: Tim Pebworth, Jacob Dromadji, Pauline Dromadji (new deaconess), Mamadou Tokpa (new deacon), Marthe Tokpa, Moise Mabout**

After the conference, I returned to Togo for meetings with the pastor of the Lomé and Momé-Hagou congregations, managing to avoid continuing unrest. After two days of meetings, and on the morning of my departure for Cameroon, demonstrations were planned not far from my hotel and so I left the hotel five hours before my flight, even though the airport was only 15-minutes away. We took several side streets when we saw demonstrators gathering at various intersections and thankfully avoided any issues.

On this trip, I carried a guitar donated by one of our French brethren for a member in Douala who composes and directs weekly special music; quite a treat considering there are only about 20 brethren in our Douala congregation. I was hassled by customs agents on arrival, but all they really wanted was a bribe. I reluctantly paid \$10 and the next day we presented the guitar during the announcement period of services on the Feast of Trumpets. Of course, perhaps it would be better to have a Trumpet on the Feast of Trumpets, but in Africa a guitar is significantly more useful! After services, we distributed the eye glasses and clothing that you donated.

Also on this trip, I obtained a visa for travel to the Democratic Republic of the Congo at their consulate in Douala. I had been trying to obtain a visa from the US for more than six months, but had been advised repeatedly by several visa agencies in the US that due to ongoing conflicts in the region, the Congolese Consulate in Washington was not issuing visas to Americans. With this visa, I can now visit members and prospective members in the capital Kinshasa and in the south-central part of the country, about 150 in all.

These experiences of unrest, dysfunction and physical and spiritual poverty in Africa provide a sharp contrast to the grandeur of the removal of the god of this world as pictured by the Day of Atonement. Whether we're North American, European or African, we all desire to love and be loved, to live in peace, and to understand a greater purpose for our lives, but our great adversary and our human nature collude to destroy what we hold most precious. No one is immune. It is the day of our liberation, the "year" of Jubilee that we celebrate on this Day of Atonement. In our hunger and fatigue, let's not skip too quickly over this day and its meaning.

I wish you safe travels, and we'll see you after the Feast of Tabernacles.

#### **Tim Pebworth**

Pastor – Oakland, Petaluma and Senior Pastor French-speaking regions of Europe, West and Central Africa