

The Ministry of Jesus Togo

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Dear friends and supporters,

Scott Johnson joined us to teach in Togo the first time in 1995. He came back every year and blessed us with his love, wisdom and excellent teaching gift. He built strong relationships with many of the Africans. **After a 3-year absence, everyone was overjoyed to have Scott back for an excellent teaching on 1 Corinthians.** His experience allows him to relate in ways that few others can. Missionaries and those they work with crave **long-term relationships** with those who support the missionaries. We know that not every supporter can come and visit here and **we are eternally grateful for those of you who have opened up your homes, your churches, your hearts and your finances to us over the years.**

In 1995 we moved to Togo to focus on training African leaders. As it was in those days, **The Ministry of Jesus is still involved in many other aspects of ministry.** Our Girls Program has restarted this year with 11 new girls. Ministère International de Jésus churches and members are still very involved in **advancing God's Kingdom** through their work in education, agriculture, health, and economic development. But, now as then, our personal involvement is primarily in the area of helping to train African leaders.

Dave Waldrup waits patiently while Gregg, not only interprets, but explains and applies the teaching to the cultural context.

Scott Johnson, Nick Giancola, Dede Haskins, and Dave Waldrup blessed us and the Togolese church leaders by teaching Spirit inspired seminars and by lovingly relating with the church leaders and others with whom they interacted.



Effective cross-cultural teaching by short and long-term missionaries

“I feel like I’m just a catalyst.” That is what Dave Waldrup said about two days into his teaching on making disciples at our recent seminar for our leaders and village pastors in Dapaong. Dave wasn’t complaining, he was joyfully accepting a role that God had given him. Dwayne Elmer, the author of **“Cross-Cultural Servanthood”**, a book I reread twice a year, notes the arrogance of Americans who think that, based on their education and experience in the US, they automatically have something to offer **mature Christian leaders in a culture that is less wealthy and technologically advanced**. I agree with him. **It is important to recognize the wide cultural gap and also to recognize the great wisdom and biblical knowledge already held by the leaders in the culture.** Which is why we’ve adopted a style where the translator often takes off with a two-minute explanation of the sentence he or she is supposed to translate. It is why the translator sometimes warns, “That question is a trap,” or says “Do you mind if I answer that question?” **Short-term and long-term missionaries need to have the humility to recognize that there are often significant, hidden cultural factors that affect the relevance and efficacy of what we teach.** Because of this, we encourage the key leaders to jump in and comment when we are teaching and when others are teaching. **It is not unusual for 2 or 3 key leaders to pop up and contribute when someone else is teaching.** At the end of the week, Pastor Nakpergou stood up and profusely thanked each guest teacher for being led by the Spirit to bring a topic that was just what the churches here needed.

There are some subjects where we explain that we have opened up a subject and **it is up to the African leaders to begin to talk among themselves about the cultural applications.** One such subject was **Dede Haskins’ teaching on Death, Dying and Grief.** We have long been mystified and often disturbed by the reactions to death, dying and grief. For example, Jayne was with a mother when she learned that her daughter had just died. **People were very insistent that she not cry.** We found that even our leaders were often divided on the meaning and thoughts behind many practices. People responded very favorably to Dede’s openness, and many found the teachings on the 5 stages of grief very helpful. But, **most importantly Dede was led by the Spirit to open up discussion of a subject that desperately needs to be discussed.**

Sometimes the way God uses a person most has nothing to do with the main reason the person came. Nick Giancola taught a great seminar on Leadership and Character but it is very possible that his **greatest impact came while riding in the back of a hot, dusty car** on the way from Kara to Dapaong. He shared the backseat with Pastor Nagbandjoa, and Nick was able to share about how God has used Nick and his wife Wendy’s childlessness to open doors for ministry. Nagbandjoa and Claire’s childlessness is a source of great cultural shame and has been a deep and ongoing grief for both of them. **God strategically put Nick in the right place at the right time with the right person.** Often when we try to encourage people to visit Togo they ask, “But what will I do?” People from other countries rightly recognize Americans as being very focused on doing. But, **usually, the most effective work in short-term missions has nothing to do with what you came to do. It comes from taking the time to build caring, loving relationships. Thanks Scott, Dave, Dede and Nick for your sacrifice, love and example.**

African teachers too

For many years we have split the teaching of our annual pastor/leader’s seminar between African and non-African leaders. This year, **Pastor KOMBATE Nakordja taught on cross-cultural ministry.** As the MIJ churches spread across the country, more and more leaders are finding themselves working with tribes other than their own. My own observation is that cross-cultural training helps us understand differences even within the same broader culture. **Every leader went home better equipped to notice and effectively deal with cultural differences in his or her church.**

For many years our leadership team has recognized that administration and planning is one of our greatest weaknesses. **Traditional African Religion encourages people to look to the past**

and not to the future. People struggling from day to day to meet their basic needs don't do a lot of planning months or years in advance. This was the main reason we sent Pastor KOMBATE Nagbandjoa to participate in a training program for top leaders of the Groupe Biblique Universitaire (InterVarsity) in Francophone West Africa. He led a two-day seminar on planning. At the end, a church leader in his seventies said, **"I have to apologize for all of the mistakes I have made because I didn't know this sooner."**

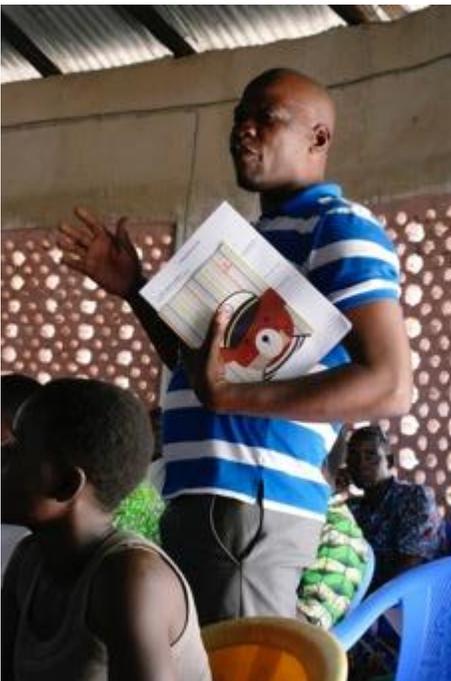
Fourth General Assembly

In 2002, I made the decision that our 3 Zone leaders were ready to take over the formal leadership of Ministère International de Jésus from the group of leaders who had helped Tom and Joan Beak get official government recognition. On Saturday, February 11, 2017 the fourth general assembly was held. **KOMBATE Nakordja was elected the third president of MIJ.** For the first time, two young men who came up through our student program and who are now key lay leaders in their churches, were elected to the Board. When I first introduced Pastor Nakordja to the visiting team as the future President of the Board, he remarked that **"it really doesn't matter if you are a past-president, president, or future-president, because we all work together as a team."** Nothing could exemplify better the attitude we are trying to build into our leaders. When I first visited Togo in 1992, I met the president of Togo's largest protestant denomination. He is still the president. **In almost every denomination, once someone gains a position of power, they never give the position up. We are thrilled with the development of our key leaders and mature leadership they are showing.**

Prayer

- Pray that God will give the new Board of MIJ wisdom, unity and protection during their 5-year term.
- Thank God for giving us health and safety during our travels and time with the visiting team.
- Pray for encouragement and wisdom for Claire who recently received bad news about the long-term prognosis for her leg. Continue to pray for C and N to have a child.
- Pray about whether God wants you or your church to bring a team to Togo to build relationships with and to serve African church leaders.

New MIJ president, Nakordja, contributes from the audience during the seminars.



*"... even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve,
and to give his life as a ransom for many."
Matthew 20:20*

We are grateful to all of those of you who help us train mature, servant leaders, who will lead a thriving church long after our departure, by coming to teach and relate, by your prayers and by your generous contributions.

In the joyful service of the King,

Gregg and Jayne