

The Ministry of Jesus Togo

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Dear Friends and Supporters,

The day we returned to Kara from the seminars, the weather suddenly transitioned from the cool dryness of the harmattan to the heat and humidity of the hot season. It seems like our ministry is always transitioning as we grow and as our leaders grow. Yet, in the change, our guiding vision and values remain the same. Another thing that remains a constant is the wonderful group of friends, prayer warriors and generous givers who support us. We appreciate all you do in bringing about all that happens here.

Core values

As part of his training in Ivory Coast with InterVarsity, Pastor Nagbandjoa led the Board of Ministère International de Jésus (MIJ) in an exercise to determine what are the core values of the church. What amazed me was how the core values kept coming up again and again in the teachings, questions, comments and reactions throughout the two weeks of seminars for our pastors.

Preston Junkin joined us for the sixth time and brought along his wife, Loretta, for her first visit. Preston drew on his many years of experience and training in the corporate world to teach on "Effective Leadership Teams." **Team leadership** is definitely one of our core values. So is **humility in leadership**, as Preston emphasized many times. Before moving on to leadership skills, Preston

Preston and Loretta Junkin giving Africa Study Bibles to MIJ leaders Nakpergou, Nagbandjoa, and Nakordja. Coming back to the same place year after year is one of the keys to effective short-term missions. A regular and long-term relationship has been tremendously encouraging to the MIJ leaders and to us.

Jeremie and Tani were sent to the city of Atakpame a year ago to plant a church in the last region of Togo without a MIJ church. It has been a hard, discouraging work and Jeremie noted that the seminar was a time to recharge his batteries. He was enthusiastic about changing his ministry style and his planned preaching schedule to implement what he learned about Christocentric preaching.



spent a good amount of time teaching about **the importance of the leader's character**, the subject Tom and Joan Beak invited me to teach on in 1992 and something we emphasize constantly.

I taught the first week on **Christocentric peaching. Preaching the gospel** and being gospel-centered in **doing ministry the way that Jesus did** is one of our most repeated core values. This is the second time I've taught on the subject, and this time it seemed like people really understood and embraced it. Typical African sermons tend to have lots of statements like, "You should," "You must," and "You have to." The major goal for the seminar was for the church leaders to understand that **understanding what Jesus did for us motivates lasting change much more than telling people what they must do for Jesus**. A secondary goal was to help people understand that all scripture texts properly interpreted point to Jesus and his saving work on the cross. **In brief, speak more about what Jesus has done for your members than about what your members need to do for Jesus.**

The African leaders continued the seminar the second week. Pastor Nakpergou taught on being a shepherd. **Values such as leaders following the example of Jesus by laying down their lives sacrificially were emphasized.** Pastor Nagbandjoa taught on the importance of all the members of an organization understanding its vision, mission and values.

What is true vs. What works

"Pastor, you care too much about what is true, I only care about what works." That statement was said to Pastor Jeremie B. by an elder of another church in Atakpame. Jeremie told Pastor Nakordja and me how everyone who comes to church wants you to give them some kind of holy water that they can use for healing, blessing and protection. **African traditional religion is all about getting power to manipulate the spirit world to get what you want.** Prayer centers or churches led by "prophets" which mix Christianity with traditional beliefs are now located near most of our churches. They attract large crowds and even draw away members from our churches.

It is a great temptation for church leaders to adapt these practices in order to retain or attract members. Our church leaders are poorly paid by their congregations and they see the false prophets and teachers rolling in money. When I said something to Jeremie about the Atakpame pastor of the largest denomination in Togo, he rolled his eyes and smiled. He went on to describe how, even this pastor from a denomination normally known for biblical faithfulness, was participating in the sale of holy water and similar practices. **Pray that the MIJ church leaders will stay faithful to biblical truth even in the face of great poverty and the loss of members.**

Student Update

In the last newsletter, we wrote about Epiphanie, Augustin, and Bodjana. All are key leaders who tested positive for hepatitis B. On her way home from the seminar in Dapaong, Epiphanie stopped in Kara and led a seminar on how to start a micro-credit group as a ministry of the church. She is leading such a group in Sotouboua and the people in Kara were very enthused about the idea. Augustin travelled to Ouagadougou with us when we took Preston and Loretta to the airport. **Please pray that he will be admitted to the master's program there.** In our last newsletter, we shared that Pastor Nakordja and his family were caring for Bodjana in what, barring a miracle, would be his final days. During the seminar, Nakordja shared that the last time Bodjana went for a checkup, the doctor, surprised to see him still alive, asked him what his secret was. **The doctor knows that, medically speaking, Bodjana should not be alive and walking around.** Bodjana shared that his secret is Jesus. The doctor wants him to go on the radio and share his secret! **Praise God for the work he is doing in Bodjana's life and continue to pray that God will bring his healing to completion.**

Political update

The government and the people of Sokode have negotiated a truce that involves troops being withdrawn and an agreement not to have marches. **Marches against the government continue 3 days a week in Lome.** This is devastating the economy and touching the livelihood of many, like Daniel's friend Fousseni, who can only go out and work as a taxi driver 3 days per week. Even those

days there are not as many clients as before. **Please continue to pray for a solution that brings peace and justice.**

Personal update

We are continuing to enjoy life with Essodezam. He has learned to enjoy staying with some of our graduates when we are traveling. **Pray for his salvation and that he will thrive during our absence this summer.** We are leaving Togo on April 2 and will arrive in the US on April 10, after a brief visit with missionary colleagues and friends Sena and Jane Ounate-Lare and their family who are church planting in Normandy, France.

Finances

We praise God for the gifts that have allowed us to start negotiation to buy the land for the farm in Sotouboua! The land they have found sounds wonderful, (we can't go see it yet or the price will increase significantly.) It is near a main road, an elementary school, and a junior high school. The project to vaccinate and treat our students for hepatitis B has turned out to be more expensive than we anticipated. (The fact that many of those who tested positive are our very best leaders convinces us that this project was inspired by the Lord.) **Would you consider a special gift so we can start to develop the farm and so we can complete the work of treating and vaccinating our students?**

Prayer

- **Pray** that all of the key MIJ leaders will be united in their vision and values and that they will be able to communicate them to the village leaders.
- **Pray** that God will continue to raise up humble, servant leaders who are willing to follow the sacrificial example of Jesus.
- **Pray** that the Togolese church would stand united and faithful in the current political crisis.
- **Praise God** for the understanding of our mission expressed by the MIJ Board plan to plant 30 new churches and train 30 new leaders in the next 5 years.
- **Praise God** for young leaders like Jeremie B. and Tani who are willing to pay the price to plant God-pleasing churches.
- **Pray** for unity between us and the African leaders and between the African leaders.

A brief stop in Sotouboua to visit with Nadje, an impressive young man using his talents for the Kingdom. Nadje was one of the first students helped by our student program. Now he heads the agronomy division of one of Togo's largest employers. He is also a member of the MIJ Board and is now negotiating for the land for our farm.

"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Matthew 6:33

Thank you for joining us in Jesus' ministry and mission to bring LIFE to the people of Togo. We thank God for the ways our friends and support team show how much you value us and His work here.

In the joyful service of the King,

Gregg and Jayne

