

## My Meeting with the Africans at Cape Town Dr. Theresa Newell, Chairman of CMJ USA

I first stepped onto African soil in the mid-1990s. As Travel-study director for Trinity School for Ministry in Pennsylvania, I organized our first ten-week semester biblical study tour into the Middle East – starting with Israel, travelling to Egypt and then across the Red Sea into Aqaba, Jordan. Since Joseph, son of Jacob, Moses and the Israelites, and Yeshua and his family did the Israel to Egypt route, we used the Bible as our GPS.

In 1999, I was part of a mission team with my Pittsburgh Bishop Robert Duncan into Rwanda and Uganda – central sub-Sahara Africa – which resulted in a five year partnership with genocide-ravaged Rwanda. Rwanda’s Archbishop Emmanuel Kolini was our host.

Five years later a group of us returned to explore setting up another partnership with Uganda Christian University where our seminary Academic Dean and his wife had committed ten years to building this first Christian university. Along the way, we built many relationships with the church leaders. I fell in love with African believers with their warm hospitality and unending smiles in the midst of difficult daily life. Most of all I loved to worship with them – full of life, praise, rhythm, multi-layered harmonies – and dancing! Little did I know that I was being prepared for CT2010 and its amazing multi-national worship!

As we spoke about Jewish evangelism in their churches and schools, we found a high degree of interest among our new African friends. Their strong sense of PLACE, beginning with their own home villages was very prominent in their thinking. We learned that when Israel was mentioned, they thought of it as “Jesus’ village,”! It was where *he* walked. And he was Jewish!

Many in Uganda were also aware that in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Uganda was considered to be the place for the Jewish homeland. This fact added to their sense of connection to the Jewish people. For example, the Archbishop of Uganda CMJ ordained CMJ’s Jerusalem pastor, David Pileggi in Kampala. The symbiosis continues!

Soon doors opened to bring Global South church leaders to Israel to do sabbatical biblical study programs through CMJ’s Alexander College program centered at Christ Church, Jerusalem. To date, about 200 African leaders have completed this program. Several from Uganda and Nigeria now bring their own group of church leaders to Israel on Shoresh and Alexander College programs.

Bruce and I hosted Bishop Henry Orombi, at that time bishop of Nebbi Diocese in northwest Uganda, Dr. John Senyoni, assistant dean at Uganda Christian University, and Archbishop Kolini of Rwanda on one of the first of those tours. Then the Anglican Bishop of Egypt, Mouneer Anis, sent his older son to Trinity seminary, and we came to know this family at the heart level.

In only a few years, Bishop Anis was named Archbishop of all of the Middle East, North Africa and the Horn of Africa. Bishop Orombi was called to be Archbishop of Uganda, and Dr. John Senyoni was named Dean-President of Uganda Christian University (when our Trinity dean retired). Archbishop Anis then invited our seminarians to visit Egypt and Tunisia. In Tunis, we worshipped in St George's Church built by CMJ in 1909 next to the now demolished Jewish Quarter.

Now what does all of this have to do with LCWE CT2010? I realized that God had been preparing my heart for South Africa over the last two decades by giving me the privilege of working along side godly African men and women through the years. I had great joy when I met up with many of them in Cape Town.

So beginning in North Africa and then to Central Africa, I finally made it to SOUTH AFRICA!

I was thrilled to see that many of my African friends had leading roles at the Cape Town conference. Archbishop Henry Orombi of Uganda was Honorary Co-Chairman; Archbishop Robert Duncan of Pittsburgh was on the Planning Committee; Archbishop Anis came; and Bishop Ben Kwashi of Jos, Nigeria gave a plenary address on evangelism. I ran into several of our seminary graduates from various African countries who are now in leadership positions in their countries.

The first day, we were instructed to meet with our "table group." When I found Table D-821 in the cavernous room, who was my table leader? Bishop Joel Obieta of Uganda, who had been with me on our last study tour in Israel!

What did I learn from the Africans I met at CT2010? I can summarize under several categories:

1. The Greatest *Challenges* to the spread of the Gospel in Africa:
  - a. Resistance by radical Islam in Muslim-dominant areas and pressures against the Gospel even where there are Christian majorities;
  - b. The struggle to recover from colonialism and establish an authentic "African" church;
  - c. Lingering Tribalism/nationalism ("Identity in Christ must trump ethnic identity," one African told me).
  - d. The need for on-going Bible translation and creative ways to convey the Gospel in a society whose tradition has been oricular;

- e. The spread of “Prosperity Gospel” teaching. Examples given me was that some were told “to be saved is to be made rich.” This is a distortion of the person of Jesus and his suffering and death on a cross, they said. Femi Adeleye of Nigeria said when she asked why his cousin hadn’t gone to church, he replied because he was “waiting for his car [from God]”;
  - f. The need for deeper discipleship, leadership and theological training;
  - g. The need for workers, especially for the youth. Each pastor ministers to several churches on miniscule salaries;
  - h. Training for leaders in business and administration areas.
2. The greatest *blessings* that the Church in Africa is bringing to the rest of the Church are:
- a. Its deep commitment to evangelism;
  - b. Its “priesthood of all believers” mentality that mobilizes lay as well as trained ministers;
  - c. Its perseverance in Gospel proclamation in the face of persecution and poverty;
  - d. Its love of learning and teaching the Bible. As Michael Kenmonge of Cameroon noted, “The UN will NOT relieve biblical poverty.”

It was at the first Lausanne conference in 1974 that the Western church leaders witnessed that the fastest growing area of Christianity was in the Global South. Philip Jenkins later documented this phenomenon in his book *The Next Christendom* and subsequent titles. At CT2010 we felt that vibrancy and heard about it from Bishop Ben Kwashi of Jos, Nigeria – whose churches and homes have been repeatedly fire bombed and whose people have been killed and mutilated. Ben Kwashi is one of the most energized evangelist I have ever met!

Bishop Joel Obieta told our table group that he had over 600 congregations of which 60-70% are under 35 years of age. Archbishop Anis of Egypt said that while there are ten million Christians in his country, persecution comes regularly from a radicalized minority. Poverty, illiteracy and poor medical care challenges this archbishop who is himself a physician and who has begun the first schools for the deaf in Egypt. Whole churches of Sudanese refugees are also under his care.

Having said all of that, one of the daily printed newsletters at CT2010 reported the following mission initiatives begun by African countries:

1. The Church of **Nigeria** through the Nigeria Evangelical Missionary Association (NEMA) has initiated the Vision 5015 which is mobilizing 50,000 believers with a commitment to send out and support 15,000 missionaries.
2. In **Kenya**, the FTT is an arm currently mobilizing and helping churches to adopt the 22 Unreached Peoples groups of Kenya.
3. The Church of Pentecost in **Ghana** currently has 70 mission outposts in a number of countries around the world.
4. There are currently several **Congolese** Church pastors in many countries around the world.

The African enthusiasm for the Gospel inspires and edifies me. I count meeting that enthusiasm and unflagging devotion face to face as one of my greatest blessings of our time at CT2010.

*Theresa Newell*  
*cmjusa@comcast.net*