

Official greeting of Ghana.



WHY GO TO GHANA?

Akawaaba is the greeting of welcome to Ghana, and they are a very welcoming people.

Ghana is located in Western Africa and is bound to the north by Burkina Faso, west, the Cote d'Ivoire, to the east is Togo and to its South is the North Atlantic Ocean. It has a population of around 19,000,000 with 69% of its population being Christian, 15.6% Muslim and 8.5% tribal religions. Why go to Africa? Why Ghana? The good news is that Christianity is growing rapidly (we know that the Holy Spirit is already at work) in most of Africa and in Ghana as well. The exception is Northern Africa, which is majority Muslim. In Ghana, the church is alive and on fire for Christ and they are receiving many new believers. But with growth comes challenges. The growth of the Christian community has outpaced their ability to train and appoint pastors to local congregations. The number one challenge is to train pastors to keep up with the growth to provide basic lead-

ership to the Ghanaian Christian Church.

A second challenge to Ghana is the spread of Islam. Arab nations are pouring millions of dollars into Africa to claim the whole continent for Allah. They are building mosques near every village and city they can with their own schools. Our Christian brothers and sisters are crying out to us for help. With

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lack of good teaching and dilapidated schools and churches, the balance is being tipped in favor of Islam.

Norcross First UMC of Norcross, Georgia, has sent out three short term mission teams to Ghana. I was privileged to coordinate the first team and serve on two of those teams. Our first team went out the Sunday after 9/11/01, led by Dr.

Jim Lowry. In spite of a turbulent time, the team went and the people of Ghana whom they touched will forever be changed in the way they think of Americans. They were praying for our nation in our time of crisis. They witnessed members of this team who had made great sacrifice to help build a church and to serve on their team for the Walk to Emmaus. They worked along

side Dr. Mathias Forson, who is a Methodist pastor, educated at the Candler School of Theology serving in Takoradi, Ghana. He

also serves as the head spiritual leader of the Ghana Emmaus Community.

I served on the 2002 and 2003 teams. To address the first challenge, the International Leadership Institute (ILI), founded under the Mission Society for United Methodists has appointed Dr. Mathias Forson and their family to build a training center and equip pastors to

address this great need. Our 2002 team assisted in the

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building of the ILI, located near the capital city, Accra. I preached in two Methodist churches and the Tema Unified Church while there and provided leadership development training to 40 young people through the Institute in its temporary quarters in Accra. On the construction sight, we labored side by side and forged new relationships.

One of the Methodist churches we went to was located in a village in the Central Region called Srafa. The church had little or no roof, dirt floors and no glass in the windows. Yet it was by far the most spirited church I had ever attended. You have never heard such melodious joyful singing unless you have worshiped with Ghanaians. The Chief had never attended the church in its several years of existence. Our team represented the first missionaries to come to that village and so we were welcomed enthusiastically with dancing, singing and beating of the drums.

The Chief even attended the worship services and this village was won for Christ. This is significant because a mosque had just been built near this village and they had tried to get the Chief's support. Once this was gained, they would have converted over 500 to Islam. The next year we returned to this village with a medical mission team, a great need, because any medical clinic or hospital is several miles away. We were blessed to have Dr. D. Ann Travis, LuRae Ahrendt, (registered nurse) and Jennifer Plant, (physician's assistant) along with the assistance of a few local medical doctors and nurses to assist us. In five days, over 500 people received much needed medical treatment.

We also were able to provide for the first Chrysalis Flight which took place in Adjudako, Ghana. There were 72 Caterpillars. The young people are extremely hungry for spiritual direction. They traveled great distances with great

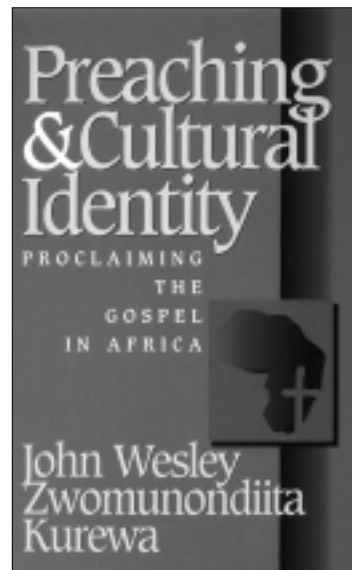
financial sacrifice to be apart of this event. Five accepted their call to the ministry and many young people renewed their faith in Christ and felt a greater understanding of who Christ is and how Christ is the way to salvation. This is critical in the faith development of the Ghanaian people. Although it is a religious nation, Christ becomes just another path or just added on to other religious traditions. It is important that in our enthusiasm we do not lose sight of the danger of syncretism. We must instead strive for contextualization of the Gospel so that it becomes the very fiber of one's faith development.

We will return to Ghana in July, 2005, because these experiences have deeply touched our people with much of the misconceptions of Africa being stripped away. Ghana is not some backwards country, with hungry natives running around. It has a literacy rate of 74.8%. Yes, they have needs and want to be in partnership for a better future. It is also a safe, peaceful, and beautiful country. We need them as much as they need us to transform our faith into a faith that matters, lived out in service to God's people. We are in need of medical and dental personnel to reach villages for Christ. People are drawn to the God who suffers along side and cares for the whole person. This is something uniquely Christian and is a strength of our witness. We will also engage in Chrysalis Flight #2. For more on Ghana, I may be reached at jrtuck12@bellsouth.net. □



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