



The Methodist Church

ROS CULWILL, MISSION PARTNER, NIGERIA, NOVEMBER 2007

I am in excellent health and I suffer no colds no fever and no single attack of malaria though I sit outside each evening and am bitten. Having decided to live here permanently I need to have a sensible and palatable diet. The local diet here is full of starch and I have put on a lot of weight which I am not comfortable with. Recently I went to see a very experienced nutritionist to get her advice. She went through my entire diet, changed it a lot and introduced some new foods like breadfruit which is starch free and unripe plantain so I now have a variety and am really enjoying my food again. I am very strict with myself as I cannot do much in the way of physical exercise. I do 2 hours a day inside and walking outside. When I move to my house and have space I shall use the exercise bike someone gave me but for now that's not possible. So what am I doing with myself? Ozuzu-Oke is my new project. A project which aims to establish a retreat Centre within the Methodist Church. Nigeria is developing slowly but the temporary site in Uzuakoli has enabled me to offer Spiritual Direction to almost 30 people since I began. Plus, one week of Guided Prayer for 12 people and a Day Renewal in August which was attended by 80 people and since Ozuzu-Oke has been asked to run such days in every circuit in the Diocese, our constant need at present is funds. I am using my stipend for all costs and am permanently broke and unable to organize what I'm asked to with regard to the permanent site. I left the site Uzuakoli community were offering when they started talking of rent. I went to another community in a remote rural village with little development but fabulous terrain up in the hills. The Bishop formally requested land for Ozuzu-Oke and we have been given free of charge a large expanse of land owned by the two families. The Methodist conference has now appointed a management committee to help me establish it a wonderful group of 7 utterly committed people one of whom is an experienced builder who has built many of the Churches structures over the years. From the work done, 3 people have come forward very interested in the work and I have been training each of them as and when funds permit (either myself or using the Catholics Novitiate where priests are trained in depth). One of those trained in full is a Methodist minister and conference has posted him full time as the coordinator of Ozuzu-Oke. They are paying his salary and it is great to have a Nigerian colleague. He is now proving himself in terms of the work. The other Professor is extremely bright and disabled after being attacked by armed robbers and shot. He has a deep desire to console the sick and terminally ill which is a huge gift for Ozuzu-Oke. I am gently introducing him to Sheila Cassidy whose books are riveting. HIV/Aids is damming so much for so many here. The training sessions I am doing for these and 2 others in my future team of directors are enabling me to consolidate what this new area of work really means for me. All my hours and hours of reading and ordering books are really paying off. I continue to network with others in the field both in Nigeria and in the wider world. We have been working flat out on refining the original proposal for Ozuzu-Oke and funding it. We are submitting it to several funding bodies in November. It's a lot work but we are near the end. Yesterday we drew up all the staff we shall need and worked out all their salaries. An architect in UK, a minister (Anglican), has designed the entire Centre for me. If we can build it re-his specifications it will be something special. In Africa we have visited other Centres and taken time to do the plans carefully. I have

a 3 man technical team on the management committee and they are so committed. As you can see I am busy, happy I am on the Boards of all the institutions in the Diocese, well involved with the colony and Amaudo both of whom are doing well with the usual ups and downs of financial shortages here, I am blessed this year with 2 wonderful carers both very focused and more important- good friends. So I have a most peaceful household. I have so much to be thankful for: lots of loving and lovely people around me and a busy round of weddings burials and thanksgivings which keep me out of trouble. At weekends my energy levels are very high even with my strict diet. Nonye is also fine though has had some health problems, malaria and hepatitis. I think 2 yrs in UK destroyed his immunity. He is enjoying his Fine Arts studies, seems well settled here if anxious to be an independent man on his own. He's just back for 2 months break from Enugu where he is in College. He is growing up and learning his lessons.

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Much about life here now is disappointing now we are again under Civilian rule but the life of the politicians is marked by incessant corruption. There is no improvement in the integrity of the government. If any thing it is worse as the politicians only chose to favour their own people's village. Crime is very bad now, armed robbery worse than before, unemployment very high, thousands of graduate roaming the streets unemployed and poverty levels very high. A glimmer of hope is our new president. Too early to say much more yet, many cry for the army to return these days which is desperate. Education and health service still a shambles, the Niger Delta has provoked a spate of kidnapping all over the country as a way of getting money. I feel safe but many don't. My citizenship here is now through but I am waiting to send the funds to actually receive the new passport in Abuja. The world Church office in UK kindly helped with the cost of this. No more visas and resident permits. One of my joys here has been the 3 children in this compound. I have been so closely tied up with their growth and development. Divine Favour has now become the light of my life. The oldest of them, a girl Queen can now remove and put on my leg splint and we do lots together. She picks flowers for me and understands all my quirks. She is 6/7 years old. Last Sunday I filled the car with kids and we went and had a lovely afternoon in the sun on the grass. My carers had a ball and it was a great day. I shall miss the kids when I move. They unknowingly have helped me through what could have been a lonely time in my life. I have never been so utterly involved with children like this. I often say if I could start again may be I would do it all differently but I guess truly speaking I would not change a thing. I am not traveling this year. I am now back on 2-year contracts and don't have cash to travel any where so will not take any leave this year. Next year I am due to visit the UK for 3 months and would like to do it in the summer but it all depends on a carer here being free to come with me and also on having a place to stay in UK for such a time. I do not want to go and be a burden on my family who have such busy lives so we'll wait to see. My case against the hospital went to trial in July and the Judge will give a verdict in November. They offered me £25000, which we rejected. The world Church office is talking about finding or assisting with accommodation for missionaries on leave so the outcome of these will determine what I do next year.