

THE LONDON MISSION (CLAPHAM)

'...to Sierra Leone and the Gambia'



Nana Asare and Dein Lawson are from the Clapham Circuit. Last year they joined a trip organised by Walworth Rd. Methodist Church to Sierra Leone and The Gambia. Nana has roots in Ghana and Dein in Nigeria so for both of them it was an opportunity to learn more about life in West Africa. Nana has a degree in Electronic Business and she works as a Business Support Co-ordinator. Dein is a Community Artist and she is involved in an Art Project for the Community. Their report on the trip makes a fascinating story.

'The aims of our trip were to: Explore black heritage and to encourage the involvement of young people with contemporary issues around them in church and community through education.'

We left London for Sierra Leone on 29th August 2005, in time for the National Methodist Youth Conference. It was held in Bo, a large province in Sierra Leone. The main objective of this conference was to empower youths to be better equipped to face the challenges of the future. Most of these youths in the rural area in the provinces experienced extreme violence during the civil war. Over 2 million people in Sierra Leone were displaced during the war and as many as 10,000 children were separated from their families.

The Methodist Church of Sierra Leone set up a youth desk, which was involved in peace building and reintegration of ex-combatants in their various communities. It also serves as the arm of the Relief and Development Agency in Sierra Leone where it is a registered NGO.

Throughout the six days of the conference there were presentations on:

- *How young people uphold Christian values.*
- *The leadership of Joshua the successor of Moses.*
- *Peace building: A way of curbing violence.*
- *The issues surrounding corruption.*

We were also entertained and participated in social events that entailed a singing and dancing competition. There were also drama, cultural and dress festivals.

After the conference we visited the war torn areas of Kenema, Segbwema and Bunabu where we were greeted with a warm reception of traditional music, masquerade and dancing before being formally welcomed at the local church.

In Segbwema we distributed the clothes that were donated by Walworth Road Methodist Church and afterwards went to a concert where we performed a chorus of praise and worship.

Then we headed back to Freetown to visit its historical sites, which included the giant cotton tree - a national symbol and a landmark in the capital. It is also a sign of hope as peace and stability return to the country. We visited the Houses of Parliament, the John Maron Methodist Church, the oldest in the country, built in 1808. We had the chance to

visit the National Museum, which held national treasures such as the Ruiter Stone replica, which is the oldest archaeological evidence of a European presence on the peninsula.

We flew to The Gambia on 12th September. Where the Gambia Methodist Youth invited us to a service of praise and worship at the Wesley Church.

Our short visit focused around the history of slavery. We had the opportunity to visit the historical Roots village and took a boat to visit various islands including Albreda, Juffure and Fort James Island. These islands held the National Slavery Museum, the Freedom Flagpole and the famous cotton tree where Kunta Kinte was circumcised.'

Nana said: 'Reading the astonishing facts about the impact of the civil war in Sierra Leone did not prepare me for the real thing, which I had the opportunity to witness with my own eyes. We are so fortunate compared with Sierra Leone where they still have to suffer so many dangers, especially the children.'

Dein said: 'It was an amazing experience to meet people who have so little but still believe in God. They really believe - singing and worshipping despite the things around them. It made my faith stronger, to believe that God is in control and only God can change things. There is a real struggle to get children off the streets, but they are working there to get money for school fees'.

QUESTIONS:

- In your opinion what is of most value in giving people the opportunity to make this sort of journey? What would you recommend to our churches as the best ways to use and to share such experiences? How important do you think it is for the churches of London to make such visits a priority and how can the visits build up our churches?
- Nana and Dein tell of the effects of extreme violence. What do you think such effects are likely to be?
- What do you think is likely to be involved in the work of peace building? What clues can you see from the story? What are likely to be the greatest difficulties?
- At the conference, the young people studied Joshua as a model of leadership. Which would be your choice of Bible character as a model of leadership ... and why?
- As we look back on the place of slavery in the cultural, economic and political history of our world, our communities and of London itself, what do you think are the right attitudes for our churches to adopt?
- What questions would you like to ask Nana and Dein? There are a number of references in the story to places and events that many of us will know nothing about. As a group, why not find ways to find out about them?

Bible Study: Dein suggested a whole book for the Bible passage that she found most helpful in the light of the trip – the **Book of Job!** Her summary of it was simple and challenging: *‘Job was tempted by Satan, but was really strong. He believed in God. His friends wanted him to turn away, but Job remained strong’.*

- In what ways can you see the relevance of Job to the story of the trip to Sierra Leone and The Gambia?
- In what circumstances of life might Job be an inspiration to different members of your church?

The passage Nana chose is **Lamentations 3:22 – 23.**

- How easy do you find it to believe in these words? What provide the greatest challenges?
- Nana described how the fresh hope that each morning brings sustained the faith of the people she met. What sorts of things bring fresh hope to you?