

"Still on African Time..."



That was our tutor group's verdict on us after one term at All Nations! The problem is, we're also still on African temperature, and so are finding this winter, that people keep telling us is the mildest in years, VERY cold!

After 4 months back into the UK we are feeling quite at home, although Catherine still finds buying bread a stressful experience - why does anybody need 30 different types of bread to choose from?! We miss Africa, but are hopeful that it won't be too long before we head back out again.

The latest news from Sierra Leone is that the work ended well. Rainbows of Hope Sierra Leone was also awarded a certificate by the Evangelical Fellowship of Sierra Leone acknowledging the contribution made by the mission to church development in the country. There was a big thanksgiving service with the WEC West Africa directors present and contributions from many of the projects that Rainbows had worked with.

We still hear from many of our friends in Sierra Leone and are reminded that life really does happen round the clock when someone rings at 1am 'for a chat'! We are grateful for these friendships, which continue to offer chances to talk openly about our faith, but it is not always easy, when some ask about the possibility of sending money. They are poor, but money alone will not solve their problems in the long term. Stephen needs wisdom to deal with such situations graciously and without causing the individuals to lose face.

The last few weeks have been busy at All Nations and have given us opportunities to process some of our experiences in Sierra Leone. How do the Old Testament Prophets speak into today's social injustices? What is Christian development? To what degree is our ministry and the church affected by globalisation? This should give you just a taste of some of the questions we have grappled with on a daily basis!

It seems strange to realise that we only have 6 months left at All Nations, and so our thoughts head towards the future. Although nothing is 'set in stone', here is the situation at the minute.

THE HIGHS AND LOWS

Highs...

- 1 Enjoying electricity and water when we want it!
- 2 Being able to catch up with family, including nieces and nephews
- 3 Meeting Beth – Cath's brother's daughter – at 3 weeks old!
- 4 Reunions at the CMS- Mid Africa Ministry Conference in November
- 5 Meeting Elias and Alain – Congolese from Ituri Province
- 6 Studying at ANCC – a privilege

Lows...

- 1 The cold!
- 2 Can't think of any more!!

**PLEASE
PRAY...**

- 1 For the continued discussions with WEC re: Congo
- 2 For further opportunities to visit churches and supporters
- 3 For a clear vision of our ministry in the future

We feel that it is right to remain with WEC, and still feel the call to DR Congo and post-conflict Africa very strongly. We are discussing with WEC the possibility of going out to Congo to join the WEC team there. This could involve establishing some sort of work with children in the refugee camps. However, in addition to the stability of the region, there are questions about the future of the ministry in Congo. The WEC related church has been established for a while and is very active. If it would be beneficial for us to work alongside them then we would go. However if this is not the right place for us then we will look at possibilities for ministry in other countries.

It is bizarre to think back to this time last year. We were preparing for Christmas in the Tropics - our palm branch 'tree' complete with salt dough stars (learning point: they don't last long in 95% humidity) took pride of place in our living room! There were brass bands playing carols and parties to organise for the boys in the prisons, complete with pass-the-parcel and pass-the-paper. At the same time, people struggled to eke out an existence for their families. Wandering around Ware the contrast couldn't be greater. There are lights, presents, cards, food, decorations everywhere.



Now we're back in the UK, it's so easy for us to forget those marginalised millions who are struggling for food, warmth and survival. Right from his birth, Jesus lived life with the marginalised - prostitutes, lepers and tax collectors. As Christmas comes we want to remember our friends in Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Uganda, Egypt, Burundi and Congo who have faced incredible trials, but celebrate the birth of Jesus who brings meaning and joy to their lives. They are an example to us and it is a privilege to know them.

Once again, thank you for your friendship, support and encouragement. We pray that this Christmas will be a very special time and that we will all learn more about what it means to celebrate Jesus' birth. God bless, and if ever you are passing, you are welcome!

Stephen & Catherine