

Tuesday, March 02, 2010
7:00 AM – Sheraton, Lagos (Nigeria)

I arrived in Lagos last night via Amsterdam. Other than a flat tire on the way to the airport and my Chicago to Paris connection being cancelled due to weather – sending me to Amsterdam via KLM and putting me on standby to Lagos - the flight was uneventful. (I obviously moved off the standby list).

Emmanuel and Blessing Ogunyemi and Marshall Reavis were waiting for me at the airport. The later had flown out a few days earlier for business in London and then to do an entrepreneur workshop for Life Builders, the ministry Emmanuel – let's call him E – is running. Unemployment is running 40% for college graduates in Nigeria, so there are real ministry reasons why E would want to help people learn how to be entrepreneurs.

E has been back in Lagos since completing his PhD at Trinity (an ICS degree with a focus on AIDS/HIV education) 11 months ago. Blessing, his wife, and their kids arrived a few months later after school ended.

The plan for today is to visit a former slave market and one of the largest church camps in the world.

Tuesday, March 2, 2010
7:30 PM

Just back. We covered a fair bit of ground today – very slowly. Traffic here may be the worst in the world. For starters the roads are terrible. Potholes are so large they need their own zip code, maybe two. And then you add lots and lots of vehicles and motorcycles. It took an hour to go just a couple miles.

Thankfully Emmanuel and Blessing are great hosts. And I learned a lot while sitting in traffic.

- Lagos – like NYC – is the premier city in Lagos state even though it's not the capitol. There are 14 million people living here, most of them young.
- Nigeria itself has 150 million people – or 20% of the population of Africa. It's growing, in part because so many people have fled here due to the instability of their country. Given the fact that Nigeria has had a dozen coups since gaining its independence from the British in 1960, you know things are bad when you come here for stability.
- E believes the last president (a Christian man who was brought out of jail to lead like Mandella) curbed the military's propensity to take over. Otherwise he's quite certain they would have had a coup when their president went missing over the last three months. No one knew where he was. It turns out he'd traveled to Saudi Arabia for health reasons. But even though he supposedly returned last week, no one has seen him – not even the Vice President. This guy has taken a page right out of the Strogger family guide to politics.

- There are three main tribes in Nigeria (Yoruba, Ibo and Hausa) and about 270 smaller ethnic groups. It is unusual for a person in one of the main tribes to marry outside of it. E and Blessing can tell what tribe someone is from by their name and appearance.
- Nigeria is about 55% Christian, 40% Muslim and 5% other. Most Christians end up in church 3 times a week, driven there in part by needs fueled by poverty.
- Islam is not growing in Nigeria. In fact, despite an influx of Libyan and Saudi money being used to offer free education it appears to be shrinking, and those who do subscribe are generally moderate. I only saw two burkas today, compared to the hundreds I saw in Kenya, Ethiopia and Egypt (and the one burka I saw in Lake Bluff the other day). There are many Muslims coming to faith in Christ. In fact, so many Muslims are secretly attending church that Islamic leaders have moved their weekly services from Friday to Sunday in an effort to duplicate what the church is doing and prevent Muslims from being available to go to church.
- Part of the religious violence in the North is tribal. This violence led to over 200 people being killed in Jos last month, causing me to cancel that part of my itinerary. Muslims kill Christians living in the North, but generally only kill the Hausa Christians who are from the South. E says that the violence is the Muslim reaction to Christianity spreading in that region. (He also says it is always initiated by the Muslims.)
- Even though Nigeria is the 10th largest oil producing country in the world, it does not refine oil and the government has to spend 600B Nairu (150 N to 1 USD) subsidizing the cost of gas they buy back. (They had refineries back in the 70s and 80s but did not maintain them. Now all efforts to get them rebuilt are undermined by politicians who profit from the import of generators.)

We made three principal stops today: Redeemer Church Camp – the largest Christian camp in the world; Winner’s Chapel – the largest church building in the world; and Life Builder’s Estate – the work E is heading up.

- Redeemer is the home of monthly, all night prayer meetings that gather as many as 2 million people. I’m not sure who is counting, but they have acres upon acres of benches under a high roofed awning that supposedly extends for one full mile. They also have unpaved parking that goes in every direction. E says that during their Christmas services the highway in front of their church is turned into a parking lot.
- Winner’s Circle also extends in every direction. They moved to their current location ten years ago and already have a residential university with close to ten thousand students and a church building that seats 50,000 people. Their theology – as their name suggests – is built around winning. Think Joel Olsteen. E told me that most Nigerian Christians give away well over the

tithe and that the folks at Winner's Circle are giving as much as 30%. (Maybe I should have the deacons pay them a visit!)

- Life Builders is – as I mentioned – the ministry that E and B (Blessing) work with. E is actually dividing his time between teaching / administration at WATS, pastoring Gospel Faith Mission church and leading Life Builders.

WATS – West African Theological Seminary – is an interdenominational college and seminary with about 350 full-time students, 150 part-time, 23 faculty and 6 degree programs (of which are Masters level). E was serving as Academic Dean before doing his PhD. He is currently in that role on an interim basis. Like many such schools, this one is struggling financially. They are five months in arrears on paying their faculty. E has been encouraging the board to take a stronger role in governing the institution. Right now about 80% of the funding comes from outside Nigeria, a number that's considered substantially too high for its stability.

Gospel Faith Mission is the church E pastors. He serves as the Senior Pastor but has a Resident Pastor "who does all of the work." I need to look into that model! (I take that back, Blessing does a fair bit of the work with the women, especially the widows, who she is helping acquire business skills.)

LifeBuilders (LB) is a Christian nonprofit Emmanuel started 10 years ago and incorporated in 2006. They do a variety of things – e.g., 10 years ago they bought 45 acres of land to set up a buying cooperative so the poor could secure land for a home. (Today this site is about 1/3 developed. E & B are building a home there. They've been working on it for 8 years. It's almost complete.)

I say that LB does a variety of things. Their current mission statement is actually quite focused: LB exists to mobilize and equip the African church and community leaders to address HIV/AIDS and other poverty related issues with the power of the Gospel.

E does a lot of HIV / AIDS training in public schools and churches. HIV/AIDS has infected at least 7% (6.5 M) of the population in Nigeria. E thinks this is the reason life expectancy in the country – which he believes is in the 50s – is dropping. LB also cares for orphans (they have 85 disbursed into a number of private homes), and a job training / microloan program for widows. Widows are among those hit hardest by 40% unemployment, especially if their husband died from AIDS, which carries a very high stigma.

LB intends to build a school and health care clinic on Life Builders Estates, which is the land they are building their home on.

Stray thoughts as I get ready for bed:

- E is also calling for a meeting to set up a Nigerian ACTEA (Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa), because the government of Nigeria does not recognize the authority of the group.
- E says that drugs are not a problem and that crime in Nigeria is overstated in the foreign papers.

- I liked the bill board I saw on one of the roads: Marriage – two forgivers living together.

Wednesday, March 3, 2010 – 9:30 PM
Lobby, Sheraton Hotel, Lagos

A full day. E and B picked us up at 10 a.m. for a trip out to a museum built around the location of the slave auction and the Point Of No Return. That was a bit later than planned because of traffic. It took them three hours to get home last night after dropping us off at the hotel – a trip we just made in 25 minutes in moderate traffic.

It took about 2 hours to get to the slave center. Plenty of time to talk.

- We spent about an hour – up until E missed the exit, backed up on the highway, got a ticket and then spent 30 minutes trying to coax a receipt out of the police, which they never would grant. (He said few of the tickets you pay make it into the treasurer.) Anyway, we spent about an hour talking about the LB board, board structure in general and all things related (I am supposed to offer some coaching to their board when they meet on Friday.).
- Nigeria had electricity through the 70s but today has little. E & B have only had two hours of power in the LB office since June, and they only get it about once a week in their apartment. Generators are everywhere – often so loud you can't hear other things. And the cost of gas is so high that few can run them full time. E & B run theirs 5 hours a day - but that is not enough to keep food in a refrigerator, thus she shops every day.
- Nigeria also has rampant inflation. In 1978 1 Naira (their currency) was worth 2USD. Today 1 USD is worth 150 Naira.
- The Government in Nigeria is doing a better job on AIDS education than the church is. Pentecostal and Charismatic churches are doing nothing. The Evangelicals are doing little. (His conference last year, which drew 1,200 pastors, was one of the biggest things to happen on this front.) Main line & RC are doing the most but still not much. Infection rates are climbing. He believes it is 15% in Lagos and 17% in the military. (Two months ago he met with the health officer for Chevron who reported that their infection rate had doubled in the last few years.)
- E confirmed that Fyne teaches at WATS on a part time basis and may be returning to full time soon. We spent a while talking about WATS and its future. He argues strongly that although present leadership has not honored commitments made to CISF scholars that we should support a new scholar there. He feels that as the largest nondenominational school in the region it is uniquely positioned to minister to some of the largest independent churches in Nigeria. He also points out that they only have 2 PhDs on their faculty and need more.

- Like India, the women are dressed very modestly and very ornately. Their dresses are bright and beautiful, often even when they are working in places that are very dusty and dark.

The Slave Market was located in the city of Badagry, a coastal town about 30 miles South of Lagos. Our tour began with an up close look at the chain collars put around slaves necks, as well as other instruments of torture and inhumanity. They were used in a camp set up by African Chiefs to retain slaves prior to their sale. The holding rooms – where 40 people were held at a time, occasionally for as long as a week – were unconscionably small, dark and hot. We stepped in one for just three minutes and it was stifling – and that is with five of us in there not 40.

The tour included a trip – via a small boat - out to the island called “The Point of No Return.” We walked the pathway hundreds of thousands walked, stopping at the graves of those who died on the march and also beside the well the voodoo doctor reportedly drugged so that after the slaves drank from it they’d “never remember anything after that.”

If only...

I might have learned more if the tour guide spoke American English. E claims he was moving back and forth between British English and Pigeon English. Whatever, I saw enough to feel horrible. Mankind’s ability to be cruel to other humans knows virtually no bounds. (One of the most horrific slave sellers was an African Muslim who had been sold into slavery at the age of 6. He returned to Nigeria from Benin years later as a Slave Master. We saw his home – which he lived in as recently as the early 19th century.)

I’d not thought much about how many Africans were complicit in the slave trade, but some were, including parents who sold “difficult children” to the slave traders.

On a lighter note we also saw the place where the Gospel first entered Nigeria via the Anglicans in 1842. (I need to double check that date. It seems late, but that is what they are claiming.)

After the slave market we traveled to Life Builders and saw their office, which is a three bedroom apartment located not far from their home. We met the two orphans who are living there – one of whom told me he was sponsored by Mary Pat Tropp. We also saw:

- Their sewing institute – which is set up for widows and jobless women.
- Their sun oven – which was made in Elburn, IL and can cook 2,000 loaves of bread a day. This equipment was acquired to provide jobs for people.
- Their computer training lab, established to train orphans and other youth in basic computer skills.

Finally, we headed to their home for dinner – which was delightful. We were able to meet all of their children (Becky – 15; Mercy – 13; Glory – 11 and Victor – 9) and have a great meal of chicken, shrimp, yams (their staple), rice and lots of fruit and vegetables.

March 4, 2010 – 1:00 PM
 Akrofi Christaller Institute
 Akropong, Ghana

We took an early (and short) flight out of Lagos to Ghana for a series of meetings outside of Accra. My attention was focused on Akrofi Christaller Institute (ACI), a school where we are supporting one CISF scholar. Marshall is interested in ACI but also Opportunity International. He also has dinner lined up with a pastor from The Gambia that he met at Christ Church.

ACI is about 90 minutes drive from the Ghana airport – and though there are stretches of the road with a few potholes, the situation is nothing like Nigeria. Traffic flows freely. There are few people in obvious economic distress. Buildings are painted. Whatever problems Ghana was having 25 years ago, this is an African success story. (Note from later conversations: 1) after 8 years of stable currency – 1 USD = 1.4 Cedi, low inflation – they now have 12 % inflation and Marshall noted an ad for a bank offering 29% interest rate); 2) they have had four successful transitions of presidential power. None were easy but all happened without bloodshed; 3) My contacts here told me that Ghana is very safe.

James, our driver, was not overly talkative, but he did provide some colorful commentary here and there. Among the sites we saw on the drive out – and up, we climbed at least 1000 feet, which makes the climate a bit more moderate than Lagos – was the Presidential retreat (think Camp David). We also saw Bob Marley's house.

Me: "I thought Bob Marley was Jamaican?"

James: "Maybe, but that is his widow's house."

Given that it was painted with a picture of Bob Marley on it, I wasn't going to disagree. His widow or a raving fan.

As an aside, there are many houses back in Lagos that have been spray painted with the message, "This house is not for sale. Beware of 4 1 9." Apparently some years ago there was lots of money to be made selling homes without the owner's awareness to say nothing of permission. In an effort to make sure that this didn't happen the previous president passed the rule of "four one nine" (not 419). It says that if you get caught doing this it's life in prison, no parole. I assured Marshall that when we got back to Lake Bluff I'd spray paint his house with the message "This House is not for sale. Beware of 4 1 9."

We arrived at ACI about 10:00 a.m. and were welcomed by Michael Ayensah, their VP of Advancement. Abraham Waigi Ng'ang'a, a CISF scholar, joined us a few minutes later. Among the things we learned:

- Ghana's main cash crop is cocoa. Number two is gold. English is the Lingua Franca. It is spoken by about 70 percent of the population.
- ACI occupies a 150 year old campus that was given to them about 30 years ago by the Presbyterians. Five years ago the school completed all of their accreditation work and is now fully accredited.

- About 75% of Ghanaians claim to be followers of Christ. (About 20 percent are Muslim). Islam is growing, as is the church. And, for that matter, so is the indigenous religions. (In other words, there is a lot of syncretism going on.)
- The churches that are growing are the indigenous ones – i.e., not the Presbyterians and Methodists, although you still see a lot of those kinds of churches.
- ACI was founded in 1985 by Kwame Bediako. They started out only offering MTh and PhDs. More recently they have added MA. More recently still – like this AM after we showed up – they started a new program, entitled MA (Pentecostal Studies Option). The fastest growing church in Ghana is the Pentecostal one. Within the Pentecostals, the largest is the Church of the Pentecost. Starting today, they began an MA program just for them. The first class is 30 students. Given that they only had 65 students before hand, this is a big deal.
- They have 7 faculty (8 counting Andrew Walls and Abraham), 11 PhD students, 25 MA students.
- The school suffered a big set back when Kwame died. They recently appointed Rev. Dr. Benhardt Quarshie – a Princeton PhD – to be the new President. (They call the position Vice Chancellor or Rector, because the President of the country appoints all of the Chancellors – which is an honorary title.)

After an hour or so with Michael and Abraham we moved into a meeting with the Rector Ben Quarshie, Deputy Rector Gillian Bediako (Kwame's widow, who is also a professor and in charge of their publications) and Grace Nartley (the registrar). We spent the first 30 minutes catching up on what had happened since CISF and ACI leaders met 5 years ago. I learned:

- Everyone likes Abraham and believes he is going to be a top flight scholar and leader. He is winsome one-on-one and a dynamic presenter. They want him to stay on staff. Kwame really wanted him to be part of his team. Abraham is in his 6th year of his PhD, but that is understandable given: 1) Kwame was his mentor (i.e., he lost a lot of time when Kwame passed away); 2) Andrew Walls was not able to give much time to Abraham last year because he was caring for his wife, who has since passed away; 3) Abraham's sister recently died. He should finish things up by March of 2011.
- Ken Luseni – who had applied with CISF to study at ACI – was not accepted into their PhD. ACI has not had great success with Nigerians who had an MA but not a ThM.
- The expansion of ACI into this new program – today with one Pentecostal denomination, but talks with others are in the works, including the Baptists – is a big deal for them.

3:00 PM

Marshall, E & B took off right after lunch. I've spent more time with Abraham.

- He and his wife – Claire, who is Brit and may also pursue a PhD in African Studies but is currently pregnant with their second – thought about staying in Ghana but feel that Kenya will work better for them. They expect to head back in late 2011.
- Abraham and Claire are considering options. Among the schools they have had some conversations with are: St. Paul’s University, Day Star and NEGST.
- In addition to teaching – their full-time focus – they are thinking about other ministry options. He would like to do some audio books in his language. They also have an interest in cross cultural awareness type work.
- His PhD is in African literature – the sense of God in secular African Literature.
- I asked Abraham how the school was doing. He said that last year they enrolled 12 MA students in the last year Bendiako was teaching. In the first year after his death they enrolled 22. Last year it was 24, and this year they think it will be over 40. (The Pentecostal group turned out to have 16, but they are expecting it to be 20 next week.)
- He said that the students really like the community they find here, that Dr. Quashie brings stability, etc.
- He did note that the hostel (dorms) are not adequate. They have not had running water in 2 weeks and they often go without electricity. (There is no generator hooked up to them.)
- He feels like the school’s best days are ahead of it.

There are a lot of pregnant women in Nigeria – and a lot of little kids. I’ve not thought much about this before, but the contrast with what I see in the US is striking.

There are very few people who are overweight in Nigeria or Ghana. E says it’s because it’s so hot that people don’t feel like eating that much. Also, they walk so many places they get plenty of “forced exercise.”

March 5, 2010
9:00 PM – Lagos

We are back at the Sheraton in Lagos after a long, hot but very good day.

I got a ride back from ACI with James – whose English is much better than my Khan, but still not good enough to answer many of my questions.

Marshall tracked me down in the Novotel lobby and invited me to join him for dinner with Pastor Forbes, a friend of Michael Eitiene’s who I had briefly met at Christ Church a year or so ago. Pastor Forbes is from The Gambia – the smallest country in Africa. It’s located on the Western most coast. They: 1) have a population of 1.5 million people (about twice the size of Lake County); 2) are 90 percent

Muslim; 3) are – to use his words – timid. (The church is called Abiding Word Ministries – www.awmgambia.com.)

He is friends with virtually everyone there, starting with the President and moving down from there. And he's known by virtually everyone because of his daily radio and weekly TV program.

The flight back from Ghana was uneventful. (Marshall tells me this was the exact same flight the underwear bomber recently took before boarding a Lagos based jet for New York.) I spent most of it working on FencePosts 3.3, which is on Death, Judgment and Hell. I'm late getting this to the proofreaders and editors, but these topics are so heavy that I'm trying my best to make them clear.

After picking up the van, our first stop was an outdoor art store set up under a highway overpass. I bought a simple oil painting for 1500 Naira (\$10) – to add to my paintings from Kenya, India, Ethiopia, etc. Marshall bought a carved rhino – his animal of choice. He says it's the same thing to him that Press On is to me. (I thought I recently heard that Rhinos can run 60 mph but only see about 10 feet in front of them. Not sure that symbolism speaks well for either of us.)

E mentioned that the bridge we were meeting under was built in 1979 – and it was the last new highway /public works project in Lagos. Back then there were less than 4 million people in the area. Today there are 15 million. (That is 4X the people with no new roads – and I can't imagine they've done much to maintain the roads they have in the last 25 years either.)

The second stop was WATS – the West African Theological Seminary – where Fyne Nsofor was Provost and E has served as Academic Dean. (We came here instead of going out for lunch because E got his finger caught in the car door and needed to come to their clinic. His finger was a mess.)

We got a quick tour of WATS's new campus, which they purchased just three years ago. As I mentioned earlier, they have about 500 students total, but only 2 PhDs teaching there. The campus is a series of seven or eight very simple buildings. I had a chance to meet many of the faculty, including two of the three people from WATS who have applied for CISF scholarships. Over lunch I had a chance to interview both of them.

- Jeremiah Oluwadare has applied to do NT at TEDS and Biblical Studies at Asbury. He has an MDiv from WATS, where he serves as Director of Christian Ministries – which: 1) places all students in field ed; 2) is showing the Jesus Film and the Passion of the Christ as outreach; and 3) operates a medical clinic. He is also the Dean of Men. He wants to return to WATS after completing his PhD and teach. He's been accepted at Asbury but has not yet heard from TIU.
- Godspower Ughbo has been accepted at Oxford Centre. He did his MA in ICS in the Philippines and is now teaching missions at WATS. He grew up in ECWA (Evangelical Church of West Africa) but became a Methodist with his parents a number of years ago. He is also the founder of All African Outreach Ministry, which has six full time missionaries in the field doing outreach and medical work. Ten others are preparing to head out. (He and his wife spend 6 months living in the North among the Muslims to begin to determine who to send there next.)

From WATS we set out for Life Builders for a meeting of their Nigerian board. While driving there Sunday Agang called E. (I must know about 10 people in Nigeria, so I was quite thrilled when someone

called I knew.) He called about the meeting E is trying to coordinate to set up the Nigerian equivalent of ACTEA.

Sunday is the Academic Dean at Jos Evangelical Theological Seminary (JETS), a school I was intending to visit before religious violence broke out there last month leading to the death of 200 people, including one of their students. He said that things have quieted down but that they were told that JETS was one of the main targets of the riot.

The Life Builders board meeting was sparsely attended for a variety of reasons – e.g., a conference two of them needed to attend, the wedding of the brother of a board member, and traffic. (One man got there just as our three hour meeting ended. He had spent four hours in traffic trying to make it.)

Those who were there had a good meeting. E introduced me as the pastor of the church that “has done more for Life Builders than any other church or denomination in the world.” He then went on to list the things people at Christ Church have done, noting:

- Over 80% of the orphans are sponsored by Christ Church members
- The sewing machines that are used to train widows were donated by Christ Church members
- Most of the monthly support for LB is coming from Christ Church Global Ministries and members
- We sent people to the HIV /AIDS conference they sponsored – which 1,200 people attended
- It was someone from Christ Church who bought the Sun Oven
- It is someone from Christ Church offering pro bono legal work.

(North Bridge Church and Church of the Holy Spirit were later mentioned for helping Emmanuel and LB as well – I need to be sure to thank Mark Albrecht and Jay Sidebotham.)

We spent the time discussing ways to position this board – which has only met one other time since E got back – for long term growth. It is a good group. It will be fun to watch LB grow.

Insights from the day

- We’ve stayed on the opposite side of Lagos from the Ex Pat community. Apparently they live in “Victory Island,” where apartments rent for as much as \$50K per year. (LB pays \$1,200 per year for the three bedroom apartment they use as an office.)
- We stopped at a bank. There is a guard on both sides of a small revolving door – which operates in such a way that only one person can enter or leave the bank at a time, and it takes about 10 seconds per person. There is no way a group could rush in.
- While E and Marshall were saying good bye, I finally got Fyne Nsofor on the phone. He’s been in Ghana. We had a bad connection, but in the four brief calls we had I learned that he and the WATS leadership are considering merging the two works together. Fyne has started a school, has some water projects, computer training, some HIV /AIDS related initiatives and some Muslim-Christian dialogues going on – all under the banner of “Global Christian Ministries (GCM).” They – WATS and GCM – are in the early discussion phase at this point.
- One of the oddest things about this trip has been going without my phone.

- Marshall pointed out that we saw very little begging. Every time our van stops people approach to sell us something, but there is virtually no begging.

Tomorrow I meet some of the orphans and then prep to preach on Sunday. Marshall heads out early.

March 6, 2010
Sheraton Lobby, Lagos
4:43 PM

E and a friend of his – Isaac – picked me up this AM and we headed out to LB offices. We were stopped twice by the police. One time because they claimed that E was going the wrong way, although there was nothing at all like a sign indicating such, and there were other cars headed the same way. (I have to believe they saw me – a walking dollar sign – and were hoping for a bribe. The second time – which happened about 3 minutes later - we were stopped preparing to make a right hand turn when a police woman walked up to my side of the car, tapped on the window, asked me how I liked Nigeria and then set out her hand and said, “Weekend.”

It was pretty obvious what she was after. And I was more than willing to hand her 1000 Naria – about \$7USD because we’d just spent 20 minutes sorting through the last “shakedown,” I was pretty sure E did not want me to offer money. So, I said nothing. (E was on the phone.) When he got off he told her he was a pastor and he’d pray for her – that was his “weekend offering.” She asked about me. He informed her that I was also a pastor and she roller her eyes and waved us on.

When we finally made it to LB the offices were filled with widows and orphans who had come to say thanks. E explained that most of them were sponsored by people who attended the church where I was the pastor. There was about 15 widows and another 40 kids. I sang to and prayed for. We then took a bunch of pictures – I ended up having my picture taken with everyone who was sponsored by someone from Christ Church – all of them with me about 6 feet in front of the generator exhaust, which made the 95 degree day about 120.

The littlest kids were the sweetest. And one mother who I met. She is sponsored by a Christ Church couple as well. She was widowed by her husband, who undoubtedly was HIV positive at the time they got married. He died three years later leaving her with two children – one 18 months and one 4 months. His family came by and took everything, “even the mattress,” blaming her for his death, even though she “had never ‘met’ a man before him.” She showed up at the church, was taken in and cared for. Her kids are now sponsored and, when it was determined that she was HIV positive (the kids, thankfully are not) she was able to start the retroviral drug treatment. She claims she is “very fine” now, but it was all I could do to keep my composure when I prayed for her.

(BTW, I asked E if she would have been able to stop her deceased husband’s family from taking all of their possessions. He said, “not really.” I asked. “Would the police help?” But as soon as I asked it I knew

the answer. He confirmed it. “No one really ever calls the police because they will not do anything except favor whoever gives the biggest bribe.” E had earlier told me that it was actually a very good thing that all police officers are federal because “the local officials are not mature enough to not abuse that kind of power. They would rig elections and have opponents killed.”)

After the pictures and praying was over we tried for about 30 minutes to print out my sermon. They have three or four second hand printers, but none that was working. So they brought me back to the hotel.

I spent a half hour by the pool – like I said, it’s 90+ degrees out – and I’m now going to do some sermon prep and work on FencePosts.

Tomorrow after church they are offering free AIDS tests. All of the leaders are going to volunteer to go first.

March 8, 2010
O’Hare Airport
8:45 AM

Sundays in Lagos are just as colorful and interesting as every other day of the week. E picked me up at 8:30 a.m. for the 10:00 a.m. church service (that he also told me would be two hours long). En route he told me that 70% of Lagos would be headed to church or Mosque. (Businesses are all closed.)

In response to my question about how many people would understand me when I preached in English verses how many would need the translator, E said that about 70% spoke English, but with my “heavy accent” it would be hard for some of them. When I suggested that I was an American and didn’t have “an accent” that everyone else did, he laughed.

The service did start at 10:00 a.m., but only sort of. Eight other churches have decided to join us for a first of its kind district meeting, so we waited to really get going until 11:00 am. E handed me a bulletin just before 11:00 a.m. that showed the order of the program and included the estimated time of each event. I added it up at more than 3 hours – and that didn’t include about five events which didn’t have times next to them. When I pointed this out to him he canceled two songs, but, well, the service went until 2:45 p.m.

There were about 300 people in the building with another 100 sitting outside looking in through the windows. It was very hot. Fans moderated things a bit when they worked. The service itself was wonderfully African - lots of energetic singing and dancing, extended times of congregational prayer (where everyone is praying out loud at the same time) and lots of glory to God.

- I especially appreciated both offerings, in which people proceed to the front of the church by rows to put their money in the plate – first the tithers and then everyone else. Often those

heading forward are dancing as they move. (I wonder how that would go at Christ Church? I wonder how a 3 hours service would go at Christ Church?)

- I also took notes when they limited communion to those: 1) Who had received Christ; 2) Had been baptized; and 3) had only one wife – no polygamists allowed.
- Several times someone would come up on stage and hand me – and me alone – some water to drink. I figure it would be pretty obvious if the guest speaker, not to mention the only Anglo in the building, passed out from heat.

At E's request I preached on forgiveness, using a sermon I'd recently developed for The Lord's Prayer series. It went OK, but only OK and only that because E rescued it by coming up after I was done and adding about 200% more energy in his summary. (He went on for about 15 minutes. It was powerful. It was fun to see him in his element.)

I actually didn't stay for the whole time. I slipped out about 2:00 p.m. to eat lunch, missing the presentation on HIV / Hepatitis. (I believe they ended up testing about 300 people today.) The NGO leader they'd brought in to speak about AIDS said that many Nigerians die of Hepatitis thinking they have AIDS, but that the lifestyle here makes Hepatitis a real risk.

Kule gave me a ride back to the hotel. He's a car mechanic who loves the Lord and is thrilled with E's leadership. He says that since he came back the church is really taking off, mostly because E leads by example. "If he asks us to do something you know he has already done it. And he is very organized."

I spent the late afternoon back at the hotel, packing and doing a bit of work. E & B showed up at 7:30 p.m. to take me to the airport. That means they signed up for another 3 hour drive back. I did all I could to insist that I be allowed to take a taxi, but they insisted. And of course they sent me home with more gifts – including several Nigerian outfits.

I got to the airport at 8:00 p.m. and spent about an hour trying to get my ticket and not get pulled into a fight. Charles, my self-appointed-best friend, took my luggage as soon as I walked in and started to help me move through the system. Before I fully understood all that was going on he had taken my baggage to the front of the inspection line – causing lots of yelling. Most of it was at him but it eventually got directed at me. Then Delta didn't have my ticket because Air France had cancelled me out of the system. That took about 30 minutes to resolve. Then Charles wanted \$100 for his efforts. "I almost got killed," he complained. I pointed out that: 1) I didn't ask for his help; 2) I was very willing to stand in the lines myself; and 3) he almost got me killed! In the end I gave him \$40.

My seat mate on the flight to Atlanta was a Chevron Oil Exec who lives in the Eastern Delta region. He and his family are on a three year assignment – during which he gets 60% bonus pay and doesn't travel anywhere without armored protection. He loves Nigeria except for the traffic.

Well, that's it for this trip. I'm back in the good old US of A where I've just learned that another 200 people were killed in Jos. No word if JETS – the school led by a handful of CISF scholars – was targeted or involved in this round or not.

Much to process and pray about.