

AFRICA NOTES

From Adrian & Wendy Helleman

Associates with Christian Studies International
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“My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him.
He alone is my rock and my salvation.” Psalm 62. 1-2a

Dear Friends in Christ,

A month has gone by since our arrival in the Gambia in mid-January, and what a month it has been! We have been dismayed by a number of unforeseen challenges, but also amazed to find that doors keep opening for us, encouraging us to keep going on the path we undertook upon our arrival. It is time for us to share with you both our joys, as reason for thanksgiving, as well as our concerns that we bring before our heavenly Father in prayer.

As you know, our primary goal for this trip was to arrive in time to begin teaching in the Christian Studies program at the University of the Gambia, the one and only university in this country. We immediately tried to get information about the scholarships as advertised in churches from which students for the program would come (hoping that this had been done in December). But first, the university held orientation days for the new semester, and then the entire country was at a standstill for the inauguration of a new term for the president. But a few days later we were asked to attend a meeting of the committee of the Gambia Christian Council (the body appointed by the government to oversee the Christian Studies program, indeed all Christian activity here). We discovered that not only had availability of the scholarships not been advertised; even the criteria for students to apply for these had not yet been developed. At that meeting we gave our input, but to date we are still waiting for the three bishops (Catholic, Methodist and Anglican) to agree to them. The upshot is that there would be no students in the program this semester, for most students depend on scholarship aid to study at the tertiary level.

Even so, we did visit the university, to pay our respects to the Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Kah, and to inform him of



our availability to teach, should that still be possible. We were given an appointment for Monday, January 31, and expected to speak with him briefly to pass along a gift. What happened next was quite amazing. While waiting for the arrival of Prof. Kah, we were introduced to the deputy Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Omar Jah. Although we were not aware of it then, he had been opposed to the program in the past. But there was no evidence of this attitude in our discussion with him. We told him of our desire to start the program, especially since we had taught in such a context in Nigeria. He was intrigued, and asked us to explain how the Department of Religious Studies was conducted at the University of Jos, with Muslim and Christian colleagues working side by side. We surmise that even before the arrival of Prof. Kah, Prof. Jah had communicated with him by phone, for after some

delay we were ushered into a meeting of a number of university officials, including Dr. Gomez, acting dean of the School of Arts and Sciences, who is a Christian and has been our main contact at the university to date.

After Prof. Kah introduced those present, he asked Dr. Gomez to explain the history of the program in Christian Studies, and then asked us to make any comments. We presented our gift, and explained again our desire to see the program started, and to help in the lectures. We were told of a lone applicant, and it became clear that, short of a miracle, the program could not start that semester. However, Prof. Kah asked us to state our own credentials, and when we finished and mentioned the nature of the organization which supports us (IICS/CSI), he asked us to head up the program, i.e., to see to the provision of faculty for the program to start in the fall. We promised to do our best, not only for the Christian Studies program, but also for other areas where the university needs faculty: English, Mathematics and Political Science.

In fact, because we are not now teaching the other courses, we have volunteered our services for some introductory courses in English. This will be helpful in giving us some idea of how things are done at the university, and allow us to get to know the faculty. At the end of the day we realized that, even though we would not yet be teaching in the Christian Studies program this semester, the warm reception given us meant that some very large hurdles to starting the program at the university had been crossed. You may remember that, since our visit to the Gambia in 2010, we have on many occasions asked you to pray for the removal of some barriers, especially for Senate approval of the program. We were quite amazed, therefore, how the Lord has heard our prayers and given us answers quite beyond expectation!

This time we ask that you would continue your prayers, *that the *criteria for scholarships would be approved* in the near future, *that *worthy students* come forward, and *that the *scholarship money will actually get to these*, so that *the program can really start by September 2012*. Pray also with us as we *search for the faculty needed* to teach the second-year level courses (Old Testament, New Testament, Tools in studying ancient languages, Church History and Introductory Theology I and II). In our meetings with Gambian Christians, especially those in leadership positions, we have noted their joy when they heard about this program becoming a reality. Thus, in spite of setbacks, we recognize the Lord's direction in sending us here at this time. And we thank God for your share in helping us to continue our ministry here!

Your ambassadors for Christ in the Gambia,

Adrian and Wendy Helleman

Associates with *Christian Studies International* and
Visiting Professors, Department of Religion and Philosophy,
University of Jos, Nigeria, West Africa
Also Visiting Professors, School of Arts and Sciences,
University of the Gambia,
And teaching with the *Gambia Theological Institute*, the
Gambia (sponsored by the *Gambia Christian Council*
and *Wycliffe College, University of Toronto*)

In The Gambia:

The Christian Volunteer Movement (Kololi NGO
Compound), Box 3044, Serrekunda, The Gambia
Tel. +220 313 97 60 (Adrian) +220 313 97 63 (Wendy)



E-mail: "Adrian Helleman" <adrian.helleman@gmail.com> "Wendy Helleman" <hellemanw@gmail.com>

PS Please check our blog for recent updates on our work, with more stories and photos of our project in the Gambia:
<http://hellemannews.blogspot.com/>.

Donations can be sent to ***Christian Studies International***:
Dr. Harro Van Brummelen, Executive Director
#31-21138 88 Avenue, Langley, BC V1M 1A1
Phone: 604 888 0192 Email: csidesk@gmail.com

In U.S.A., please send your contributions to:
International Institute for Christian Studies,
PO Box 12147 Overland Park, Overland Park,
KA 66282-2147 Phone: 800-776-4427

Web: www.christianstudiesinternational.ca

E-mail: iics@iics.com Web: www.iics.com