

Hello again,

OK, so the 'journey home' won't actually start for another 4 hours, but it has a nice ring to it anyway. This note is a bit long, but don't worry, it's worth it!

Nigeria has been another very unique stop on the itinerary. These past few days I covered a lot of ground and saw a number of different places and met several great people.

I flew into Owerri. This is where our local leader David Umune lives. It's also the closest airport to our ministry locations - which are in very (very) rural spots. The ministry is called TETMI.

I had barely been in Owerri two hours before I ran into an Alongside International team who were on their way out of Nigeria after repairing six water boreholes in the villages. If you're looking for a hands-on ministry experience meeting real needs in an underdeveloped place, it'd be hard to beat an Alongside trip to Nigeria. You'd also find a committed and helpful local host in David Umune.

After my overnight flight and running the Alongside team to the airport, I was pretty much toast. A five hour nap ensued, a little 'football on the tele', then more sleep.

Friday was our day to visit the TETMI school in Akaeze-Ukwu. I'd heard a lot about the school, but seeing it was a real treat. This community is pretty far from any major town. The impetus for David's school was that the local schools were doing such a poor job that even after seven or eight years of education some of the children were still illiterate. David and his mother (the principal of the school) convinced locals to enroll their children in the TETMI school. Before long, their kids could actually read! and do math! To make a long story short, now there are about 350 children attending the school, and waiting list as long as your arm.

Every local official wants his children to be taught by TETMI. This, they say, is not only for literacy and numeric skills, but because they see other intangible changes in the children who attend the school. They say 'you are teaching our children God's Word and it is changing them for the better'. Those are their words, not mine and not TETMI's.

In addition, a church has started at Akaeze-Ukwu as a result of the school. The local people want to know about the God of the people who came to help their children - with no apparent motive but sheer human compassion. That's not common in any country, so they took notice. Now there is a church of about 200 that meets in the school building on Sundays - a multi-purpose facility!

Saturday was our time to go further a field to see some of the church planting sites in the rural villages. And by further a field, I mean WAAAYYY out there! Some of you know I've traveled a bit. I have NEVER seen roads like these ones. David took me out in his car, but we really should've been on motorcycles to maneuver around the potholes. Potholes? Try craters! Basically the rainy season comes and washes away huge chunks of the road, and it doesn't get repaired unless some government official decrees that some funds be set aside. In others words, don't hold your breath.

That there's anyone willing to pay the price to visit these villages is a miracle in itself. But our church planters are called, and they go faithfully, building up fellowships of the faithful with almost no resources. None of them has their own building. Some meet in rented rooms and some under the

most ridiculous temporary shelters imaginable. When the rainy season comes they will basically have to adjourn church for six months.

It's bizarre, and sad that the needs in the village are so overwhelming, while Owerri, the closest city, is littered (I use that term with intention) with 'Christian' religious signs and banners. Every commuter is promised 'Blessings', 'Victory', and 'Favour' - but if only they attend the 'Anointed' church, of course. The 'prosperity gospel' has gripped the place, which is really too bad. It has the effect of turning peoples' faith inward, to the neglect of the real needs of others that are right under their noses - or a few hours down the road.

TETMI, in contrast, represents a whole different spirit. They selflessly travel far from home to meet real needs. What a refreshing and inspiring thing to watch them in action!

Sunday we went to church. And when I say church, I mean CHURCH! I know some of you have attended African church services. It's a great time. Those who know me well know I'm pretty reserved in terms of my own 'worship style'. However, I am also inspired by singing, swaying, dancing and other expressions when they are genuine and not put on.

This service was full of life. I can't really describe it. You had to be there. Let me just say that it involved beautiful choral and congregational singing, some good-hearted shouting, laughter, and an offering we wouldn't dare try in North America - which involved yours truly enacting something I can only call the 'white man's frog dance.' That wasn't captured on tape, to everyone's relief.

I also had the chance to meet with the TETMI board of directors last night. They're a really great group. Well qualified, jovial and committed. You can't have a good organization without a good board, I told David. He agrees, and thanks God for the group of people he has to work with. This work is in God's hands, and in the hands of good human stewards, too.

And so now I sit in David's office, preparing to depart from Africa once more. Thanks for your prayers and support. It has been a meaningful journey, inspiring and eye-opening. At this point I am really looking forward to being home in a couple of days. I miss my family immensely, and thank God for keeping them in my absence. I am so blessed.

I look forward to seeing you all again soon.

Thanks for listening,

Tom

Tom McLagan Director of Development Partners International

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