

IN THE SHADOW – UGANDA

The past week has been a rather hectic one. Marla Abe, David and Mary Sollenberger, Gordon Hoffert, and Caleb Dakwak arrived for a visit with the Rwanda and Uganda COB. It seemed like it was a quick stop at each church, a few words, and another bouncy ride to the next.

As expected, there were a few hold-ups along the way. Like the hotel in Rwanda that overbooked, meaning that we had to scramble around late at night to find another. Like the Uganda border officials that hadn't yet processed the new on-line visa (there's a first time for everything). Like the bridge that was out requiring a ferry ride. Like the plugged up fuel filter on one of the Rwandan vehicles and the brakes that needed major work halfway across Uganda.

Really though, these are normal and expected. Frustrating maybe, but part of life. The week truly was an awesome one. For me, it was a great joy to show Gordon and the Sollenberger's around Rwanda. And Marla got caught up with friends she hadn't seen for a couple of years. Gordon took care of the Uganda part of the trip. It was the first time there for me and Grace (as well as Marla, Caleb, and the Sollenberger's).



As Annual Conference Moderator, David could pick any of the international Church of the Brethren groups to visit. In my very biased opinion, I think he chose well. The energy and enthusiasm in Rwanda and Uganda makes for an inspiring time. I'm excited that with David being the videographer/COB chronicler that he is, this great story will be shared widely.

Caleb is pastor of the Abuja, Nigeria Church of the Brethren. He has visited Rwanda twice in the past. As mentioned earlier, this was his first time to Uganda. His quiet humility and gentle wisdom is greatly appreciated. In particular, his sharing of the EYN (COB Nigeria) situation regarding Boko Haram is important for everyone to hear – loving our enemies and sharing the Gospel in the midst of persecution. I consider him a dear brother in Christ.

Gordon has been connected with the Uganda COB since 2019, when he met with Pastor Bwambale Sedrack in a brief one-hour interview. He made a return trip in January 2020 and visited the churches, schools and orphanage. I met Sedrack, wife Diana and daughter Shadrose, his brother Hezekiah, and Diana's mother Rose in February 2020 when they came by bus to Rwanda to meet Etienne, Galen Hackman and me.

Among the things that attracted them to the COB (Sedrack found us on the internet) is the New Testament emphasis and, like I have heard time and time again from Africans, the teaching of peace. Way too many of these brothers and sisters have lived through horrific violence, struggling with PTSD, bitterness and the need for forgiveness. The only true peace is found in Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace!



One of the Uganda congregations we visited on Sunday morning required motorcycles (called *boda bodas* in Uganda) to get to. It was up a muddy trail to a little mud-brick building, but what a welcome we received! After some time of lively worship and sharing, we gave them Bibles in their own language. These were donated by churches in Southern PA and Mid-Atlantic districts. Then we had lunch. Rice, watermelon, beef, cabbage, peanut sauce, etc. Another *boda boda* ride down the mountain and on to the next church. Singing, worship, Bibles, and another meal. On to

the next church for singing, worship, Bibles and another meal. It was worth it just to eat the peanut sauce.

On Monday we visited several more congregations, a school, and an orphanage/school. The Rising Star Orphanage/School greeted us with their brass band and led us to their facility with a parade. I've received lots of warm welcomes in my life, but this was a first! I think there are about 80 resident orphans along with some day students. They live very simply with no electricity or running water. The New Planet Academy is located in a very remote rural area that has experienced a lot of civil and tribal violence. Because of this there are many widows and orphans. Their simple stick and wattle structure was packed with worshippers. Singing,



worship, Bibles and another meal. The peanut sauce was awesome.

None of these churches have what we in America would consider



adequate structures. A few of them have roofs. Several are meeting under tarps. One of them is under construction with half of the roof and a very muddy floor. It becomes quickly apparent that facilities (or the lack thereof) have little to do with their desire and passion to honor God. Maybe I'm stepping out on a limb to say this, but I get the impression that there is an inverse relationship between the value of the buildings and the power of the worship.

For the Master, Chris Elliott with the Church of the Brethren Uganda.