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## HERALD

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Grace Baptist Mission

### A VISION FOR THE GOSPEL IN TOGO



GRACE BAPTIST  
MISSION



## A vision for the gospel in Togo

At the end of May, **Ian Flanders** returned to Togo, where a small but faithful group of churches are working hard to realize their vision for wider gospel influence in the country

There are few countries in francophone Africa that one can visit with relative ease and safety, but Togo is one of them. I had been there twice previously, in 2016 and 2018, and this time I travelled with my wife H  l  ne and GBM chairman, Tom Forryan. For both, it was their first visit to Africa. Our destination was the provincial town of Atakpam  , located about one hundred miles north of the capital, Lom  .

### Hosts and churches

We stayed in a guesthouse run by a Christian, and the accommodation was of a good standard with amenities that many Africans do not possess (running water, WC, fridge, and air conditioning). We were very well looked after by Wijneke Kanri, a Dutch missionary who is married to Alexandre, a Togolese pastor and

one of the key leaders within the 'Grace in Christ Churches of Togo.' This small association comprises around a dozen churches; most located in and around Atakpam  , others in Lom  . These churches have a doctrinal position, ecclesiology, and ethos similar to our own. Sadly, this makes them a scorned minority in a context where many unorthodox and wild ideas predominate, foremost amongst them, the prosperity gospel.

### Ministry—Tom and Ian

On my first Sunday, accompanied by H  l  ne, we walked up a steep rocky path to attend a church named Kpatam  , where I preached. Tom worshipped and preached at a more accessible church called Campement. Worship is far more Bible-centred and reverent than in many African



Arriving at Kp  tam   church



Ian and Tom meeting a Togolese pastor



H  l  ne with the Bible club children



Naftali with Ian after the first women's meeting

churches. It starts at 8am and finishes beyond 11am. The first hour is a Sunday School involving interactive Bible study, and then later an hour is given for the sermon (this includes translation from French into Ewé). Traditional French hymns are sung; many have been translated into the local language. There are times for prayer and opportunity is given for people to give testimony of God's goodness.

As well as preaching on the two Sundays, I also taught—with Tom's help—for three evenings during the week. This was to those undertaking a ministry training course, but the sessions were opened for anyone who wanted to attend and around fifteen to twenty were present for each session. We did an overview of three of the Minor Prophets: Jonah, Habakkuk, and Haggai. The teaching on these unfamiliar parts of Scripture was much appreciated.

On the first evening, just as I had finished and a question-and-answer session was underway, a massive thunderstorm erupted with torrential rain pounding on the corrugated iron roof, making it impossible to hear each other speak. This lasted for an hour and a half before conditions improved enough for people to return home. Most had walked or arrived by 'Zed' (taxi-moped).

### Memorable moments

Hélène and Tom returned to the UK after a week, but I stayed on for a few extra days and had the opportunity to make a few visits, of which I want to share the following highlights.

I was taken to visit a lady—a long-standing member of the church. When I arrived, she sent word to all her neighbours, inviting them to hear a visitor announce the gospel. A few minutes later her modest courtyard was filled with around twenty children, teenagers, and women

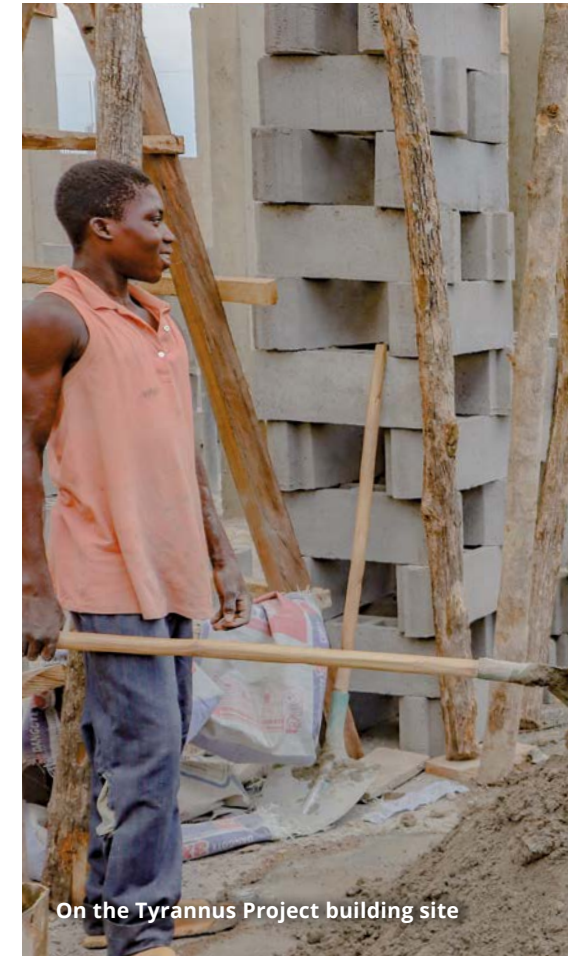
and I was able to give an impromptu message from the parable of the lost sheep in Luke's Gospel. This was followed by some discussion around a couple of questions and comments raised.

One evening I visited a rural church and ate with two pastors and their families. We had a good and insightful time of fellowship, and their story reflects something of the vision of the churches and the context they find themselves in. The two men originally attended Pentecostal congregations but enrolled on the ministry training programme run by the Grace in Christ churches. During this time, they came to an understanding of sound doctrine, and they started to teach this in their home churches. However, this was not well received, and they ended up being ejected from them. Yet today, both are faithfully persevering as pastors in small village churches where life is not easy and the challenges great.

### Ministry—Hélène

Hélène had been longing to visit Africa for many years, and she really enjoyed her time there. She had the opportunity to run two afternoon Bible clubs for children. Thirty or so attended, and they were thrilled to participate in all the activities that Hélène had prepared—they do not usually get visual aids or craft work, so this was a special time for them. Pray that the spiritual lessons would be as memorable as the occasion. Hélène remarked that the children were wonderfully well behaved and a delight to teach.

Hélène also led two afternoon women's meetings, and these were well received and appreciated. She taught one session on the life of Joseph and another on Elijah. The young woman who translated Hélène from French into the local language has requested to receive our



On the Tyrannus Project building site

booklets and has the desire to also learn how to teach women. The meetings concluded with the women singing and dancing and Hélène enjoyed participating in this.

### Tyrannus Project

This small group of churches is undertaking an ambitious construction project conceived with a view to facilitating the spread of sound biblical and doctrinal teaching throughout Togo and beyond. The Tyrannus Project involves three stages. The first, which is well underway, is to build a Christian conference centre. The second will be to add an on-demand print facility to the complex, and this will make available and encourage the dissemination of good Christian books to the region. We will give them permission to print our *Espérance Aujourd'hui*

booklets and this will provide an additional outlet for our written resources in this part of the world. The third stage will be the opening of a fully-fledged Bible training institute designed to prepare men, from all denominations, for pastoral ministry.

The Lord has been providing for this project in remarkable ways and at present one of their main prayer requests is that the right people be found to fill key positions such as the manager of the print facility and the director of the Bible institute.

### Radio

Our radio ministry, *Espérance Aujourd'hui*, has never had a huge presence in Togo but I took along a few memory sticks containing all our radio programmes—just in case! Providentially,



The possibility arose to place EA on a radio station in Atakpamé

an unexpected opportunity arose to meet the Togolese director of operations for an American mission in Togo, and we learned that they run two radio stations. We gave him a couple of memory sticks, and he said he would place them with the radio stations. Do pray that this would happen.

Then we had discussions with some of the Grace in Christ pastors about getting our programmes placed on a commercial radio station in Atakpamé that has a wide reach. We left a memory stick with the pastors, and they will discuss the matter and approach the radio station. One issue that concerns them is that many Pentecostal pastors from the town already have prime time spots on the radio station but sadly just seem to use the time to run each other down. Pray for wisdom to know whether

it would be beneficial or counter-productive to air our programmes in such a context, especially as the airing time would need to be paid for.

As is the case when I visit Africa, I feel that I have gained as much as I have given. It was encouraging to see the level of commitment to God's word and church life by so many of these believers. It was stirring to see their dedication to bringing about the vision for wider gospel influence that the Lord has laid upon their hearts. It was humbling to see their devotion and faithfulness to Christ in a context where many are poor and where the safety nets we depend upon when misfortune strikes are virtually non-existent. However, they rely upon the Lord, in prayerful trust and hope, and upon each other, in brotherly love.



## A time for giving thanks

After more than forty years' service in Colombia, **Theo and Sonja Donner** have reached an important milestone in their lives. Some things are changing as a result but much else will continue

This is a time for giving thanks. Our relationship with our sending church, Eden Baptist Church in Cambridge, and with GBM changed in July—which makes this an occasion to thank all those who have so generously supported us over the years in our ministry in Colombia, ever since we were commissioned at Eden in the summer of 1982. With Theo having turned seventy, we have become 'associate missionaries' with GBM and our status as international workers with Eden also changes.

But our ministry in Colombia is not changing. Theo continues teaching at the Biblical Seminary of Colombia here in Medellín, and attending to all the other commitments that come his way. We hope that you will continue to pray for us as we seek to serve the Lord in this country. We plan to be in the UK in October, including at Annual Mission Day in London when we will share something of God's faithfulness over the years. It has been some journey!

### Life in the Seminary

This year started with two new courses at the Seminary for Theo: 'Historical Theology' in the master's in Biblical Interpretation, and 'The Study of the Old Testament' for a new master's in Christian Ministry. This new programme is for people in ministry who have a prior university degree, but no degree in theology. It is still awaiting approval from the Ministry of Education. Initially, the Seminary was informed that the Ministry had turned down the application for accreditation, apparently because they could not see how one could combine students present in person with students connected by Zoom. The Seminary was given an opportunity to appeal the decision and, so far, we have not heard back from the Ministry. In fact, of course, the Seminary has been using the system (students present in person and students connected by Zoom) for years already in the existing master's in Biblical Interpretation but, after the experience of this last semester, I agree that it is a major challenge.