

Bukavu, the Hilly City

I am very grateful to the Lord for finally allowing us to minister in Bukavu.

I was to do an evangelism training in Bukavu in 2004 but it was not possible because of the financial constraints. I was to combine with some training in Kigali (Rwanda) but the pastors had done more financial commitments for the work in Kigali than I had anticipated so it was not possible to combine.

The first picture of Bukavu was friendly people even though a lady in the customs wanted to cause a bit of trouble. I had lost my Yellow fever immunization card and Gituma had not gotten one. Our host pastor had to part with some Francs (Congo currency), it is not treated like corruption, and they give it as though they are buying in a shop. They negotiate corruption like buying items in a market.

It had taken long to conclude on the dates to get to Bukavu. When I had met with Pastor Wabulasa in Bunia, we had settled on September and we parted with the agreement that he would communicate the dates when he got home to Bukavu. Rather than giving me the date, when he got home he kept writing asking when they should expect me, I tried reminding him about our meeting in Bunia, the next communication was a text asking me to tell them when they should expect me and how many would be going. Since it was already in August I had to set a date or call off the mission. I replied that we will leave Nairobi on 8th September and most likely we would be two.

I started plans fairly late because of the wait but God's grace is sufficient. God not only provided finances for two people but also 10 cartons of Bibles and 9 cartons of tracts in Kiganda, Kinyarwanda, Kirundi, Congolese Kiswahili and French. This was a great blessing considering the great need for reading materials in the region. I had to carry all except the Kiganda because I was not planning to stop over at Kampala. I had to send the Kiganda tracts through a friend. We carried with us 18 cartons. We left 7 in Kigali with an American missionary and our host as we were clearing these materials with the customs.

We were received by Pastor Wabulasa at the Congo entry point. We had trouble directing him at what point we were entering. There are two entries about a Kilometer apart. The bus took us to the first entry where most of the passengers alighted but we could not get out because we had 11 boxes of Bibles and tracts. The driver and the conductor never bothered to explain anything. It was after we suggested we alight that the driver told us that they could not offload our luggage at that point. He also told us that we risked paying extra money for the luggage in form of tax. We later realized that we had to collect our luggage in the bus company office in Bukavu. The bus then moved to the next entry. The conductor told us to proceed to Congo on our own and check our materials the following morning. When we enquired why the bus was parked as though to travel back to Rwanda we were told that since it had rained that morning there were chances that the bus could not make it to the hilly muddy Bukavu. We did not know how our luggage got to Bukavu.

We were received as we were checking into Congo. Pastor Wabulasa had gotten a four wheel drive car to pick us and in about thirty minutes we were at the hosts house. Our Host is the overseer of CNCA Bukavu. We were warmly received and after a short while we were planning the week's ministry.

It is amazing how Congo pastors plan for a minister without any expectations. I though Pastor Wabulasa had explained what we were coming for. He had gotten explanation from Pastor Mathe in Bunia and I thought I had filled in when we met briefly.

It did not seem to bother him, we explained from scratch what we intended to do. We needed pastors, Evangelists and the youth. It seamed impossible to meet the youth because the schools were open, but after suggestions and consultations it was agreed we could teach in the school that was sponsored and managed by the Church. In fact we came to learn later that most of their pastors doubled as the teachers in the school.

We planned to do Leadership training and True Love Waits (A youth sexual purity seminar) in three Locations; Bukavu, Kampuse, Ijwi and Uvira. After some investigations we discovered going to Ijwi would be complicated since we needed to use boats. By the time we were enquiring nobody would confirm the day of departure or the day the boats would return to Bukavu. (Ijwi is an Island three to four hours boat ride from Bukavu depending on the power of the engine of the boat).

On Monday we did leadership training with church leaders. On Tuesday we did three seminars. Since the youth available were the students in the school, the pastors advised that we teach those in the High school. We did not know the criteria used to select students but we had about 50 in the morning session and about 100 in the afternoon session. I guess the afternoon session had more students because the pastors had developed confidence. A total of 72 students made vows and signed commitment cards to remain sexually pure till marriage and to remain faithful in their marriage when they marry. In the evening we spent some time with the choir and worship leaders to challenge them to seek God on true warship and seeking God constantly so that they would lead the church to true worship as opposed to entertaining.

On Wednesday we traveled to Kampuse, a two hour drive and two hour walk uphill and downhill. We experienced the real harassment of the drivers by the police. A saloon car carried six passengers, two in front and four at the back. We paid about \$2 each and by the time we got to Kampuse half of what we paid went to the police on the road blocks. It looked so strange because whenever we approached the road block the driver would stretch his had toward the passenger next to him. The passenger would give his fare, the driver would take part or it, give to the policeman who, when satisfied would remove the roadblock. If the policeman would not be satisfied he would keep the road blocked until the driver complied with his demands. Many times the driver would plead to be allowed to give less. I was seated in front and I could see the frustration on the drivers face.

We thought the venue of our training in Kampuse was in town. We learnt that the pastor that was leading us had also not gone there before and so had no idea how far the place was from town. He only knew someone would be waiting for us even though he had no idea what he looked like. Before we reached Kampuse the pastor tried to enquire and we learnt that we had about two hours walk to do. The passenger we had enquired from wanted to help us so when we alighted he talked to someone who was happy to take us on his motor bike (He was happy, an opportunity for business).

The pastor was hesitant to negotiate the transport, one reason, he did not want us to know he was a stranger like us, secondly he was not prepared financially (we paid our way and had even to buy whatever we needed for our training). As the motorbike owner was trying to persuade us (of course we needed more than two motorbikes since we were three) A man seated near where we were standing got interested and came nearer. He turned to be the man who was sent to receive us. With him he had two others, an elderly lady and another man. On learning that we had gotten help the motorbike owner left without a word.

We started the trek. Before we could think about the distance and the number of hills we needed to climb a group of women carrying very heavy luggage passed where we were standing. A number of them were carrying meat. We learnt and saw that each cow would be divided into four and therefore a whole cow would be carried by four women. We wondered why they would carry meat instead of transporting the cattle to slaughter them in town. We were told that some of those cows had traveled very long distances and they needed to rest to make it to town. Since it was a market day and they had only one market day per week, they had to kill them and carry meat. Some of those women had traveled with the meat for more than ten hours up and down the hills. The statement by Jesus (Matthew 11:28) "come to me all who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest", came alive in my mind. It really painted a clear picture of the reason of our travel to Congo (of course not to relieve the physical burden, the spiritual burden is even heavier).

The three who had come to receive us took everything we had so we could travel light. I refused to give my bag and they were a little offended. The lady who was relieving me was elderly and did not look strong, so I felt guilty walking free as she struggled. The fast slope was so steep, I felt like sitting down and sliding the way we did when we were children. I felt embarrassed that I was finding it hard to go down while the women with burdens on their backs climbed with less effort. We learnt that some could have been traveling with those burdens for a number of hours.

After about an hour and half we got to the school where the training was to take place. The pastor had been waiting since early in the morning and they were excited we had arrived. It was about 1.00 then, but we still needed to see the overseer who was ill at home. We walked another about 30 minutes, put down our luggage then walked back to the training venue. We trained on basic discipleship and how to effectively share the Gospel. We had very good interactions with the leaders.

We had a tough day of long travel and no food. We noted that most of the families don't have breakfast. Since most cook with firewood, the trouble is so much so whenever we started the day early we started on empty stomachs. That was the situation when we left for Kampuse. We also traveled the wrong day because all the women had gone to the market including our host's wife. Our first and only meal that day came 9.00pm. That day I valued kiosks. The nearest place that one would buy anything was the shopping centre we had passed while coming. It was a shock to us because we needed to buy soda and mandasi for our True Love Waits seminar. I tried to imagine improvising but our guide pastor assured us that someone would go to buy. Sure enough, our host's son, who is the teacher in the school walked all the way. The pastor had not given enough instructions so the young man brought three sodas instead of four. The young man had to travel the whole distance the following morning for the fourth soda.

We had a very effective and interactive true Love waits Seminar. The pastors and teachers were amazed to see the students enjoy the seminar. They freely answered and asked questions. Out of 70 who attended 57 committed themselves to sexual purity. One student was so happy; he left in a hurry to be able to write a note to us. (Am yet to understand its content, because, it is written in French).

That afternoon we left for Bukavu because we needed to travel to Uvira the following day. Four men escorted us all the way to the shopping center. By four we were back to Bukavu. We visited with a few pastors and rested for the day.

Early the following morning we boarded a van to Uvira. To get to uvira from Bukavu we had to travel through Rwanda. We asked how it will work since we had a single entry visa, the pastor and the driver assured us it would be okay. We were convinced since actually we had no interest in getting to Rwanda. The same had happened when we traveled to Bunia from Aru, We had to get to Uganda then back to Congo. But we did not sign out when we entered Uganda. This time at Bukavu we had to sign out. That is the problem because we were not allowed to enter Congo again. I guess they would have softened if we would negotiate a bribe. We became so uncooperative that they did not know what to say. They held our passports until we got our bags from the van then we checked back to Rwanda. We had carried many evangelistic tracts so we gave the officers a number and the rest we gave to the host pastor. The pastor was so disappointed but we had no other option.

We got two motor bikes to Rwanda Burundi Border, The got a taxi to Rugombo in Burundi then a Nissan Matabu to Bujumbura. Pastor Nestor of FECABU Kanyosha accommodated us for the night and got us to Kampala Coach the following Morning on Saturday. We got to Nairobi on Sunday later afternoon.