

## **THE SECURITY AND PROTECTION OF GOD**

COVID-19 - Dealing WITH Lockdown in Togo.

Greetings,

The last few months have been unique. Some of us were stressed, anxious, frustrated, and fearful. Others were relieved and happy for the break from the 'rat -race' of life. Our children were happy to attend school online, which was successful. Presently it appears the change the pandemic has brought is becoming the 'new normal'.

This is a short account of our experiences as Mission Partners in Lomé, Togo - a small French speaking country in West Africa, sandwiched between Ghana and Benin Republic.

We arrived in Lomé in September 2019 and almost immediately were thrust into the midst of our work. The friends we made among the parents of our daughters' school and the people at our new work place were the main source of local news and information. As a result, our information on the spread of Covid-19 in Togo was very limited and patchy. We knew things were worsening in Western Europe but at the time West Africa was not experiencing the effect on same scale. As a result many people in Togo and the neighbouring countries regarded the pandemic as a 'European' problem. All this changed when Ghana, Nigeria and Burkina Faso began reporting cases and deaths. Togo started public health programs via radio, TV, mobile advertising bill boards, public address systems and mobile phone text messaging.

Personally, things became 'real' when the workshop for Women in Leadership planned for end of March was cancelled because the UK borders were to be closed. Eventually, on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 the government of Togo put in place a number of measures to combat the spread of the virus within the country. All land borders were closed and a 'lockdown', including restriction of vehicular movements between cities and the capital Lomé, was imposed. All schools were closed, church activities were suspended and the opening hours for pubs and nightclubs were restricted. A three-month curfew from 8pm to 6 am was announced.

On the surface, most of the measures had no direct impact on us - with the exception of the closure of schools and churches. The school arranged for online lessons using Zoom and Class Dojo. Joanna stayed home to facilitate this arrangement, making her attendance at the office impossible. After the curfew was relaxed in the middle of May, Michael went to the office every other day. We continued having 'church services' at home.

The closures meant we there were no sporting activities; unable to visit beaches and socializing with friends was banned. To compensate, Michael undertook regular walks to help keep fit. The girls did baking and bird watching. The latter was very interesting as there is a fair selection of flowering plants in our compound that attract a number of birds. As we started to feed them they became regular visitors - resident doves, colourful sunbirds, some beautiful Senegal fire finch and varieties of tits and pigeons.

As Michael went to the office every other day he adhered to the preventative measures introduced at the Connexional Office to protect the staff. This included rotating staff working days, setting up hand washing facilities at the entrance to the building and the provision of face masks.

Presently the Covid -19 statistics for Togo show a total of 778 cases - 551 recovered; 212 active cases; 15 deaths<sup>1</sup>. The Government agreed - after representation – for the Episcopal Council, (Catholic), the Christian Council (including Methodist & Baptist Convention) and the Moslem’s Union - to open a few churches and mosques from 17<sup>th</sup> July. Religious bodies have agreed to strictly follow Covid-19 prevention measures such as the washing of hands, social distancing, wearing of masks and other measures. The Methodist Church, following this announcement, has put in place a team comprising of health professionals to undertake sensitisation programmes for those churches opened in Lome. The sensitisation exercises are to be done during the services and will extend to the other churches due to be opened in the villages. In addition, schools with final year pupils were reopened at the beginning of July to enable them to undertake their final year examinations.

The lifting of the nationwide curfew; the partial opening of churches and schools, and many government offices have brought a semblance of normality to the country. However, land and air borders are yet to be opened and so we are unable to visit family and friends in neighbouring Ghana and Benin.

Gradually the country is returning to normal. At the onset, the prediction for Africa was very gloomy as it was anticipated that the weak health infrastructure in most of these countries may result in thousands dying. Thankfully the predictions, with the exception of some countries in Northern Africa and South Africa, were unfounded. The theories of why Africa was spared are many but we believe God spared us. For us as a family we continue to thank God for our lives and continually lift our eyes unto God our Helper who made the heavens and the earth - Ps. 131 verses 1-3. We have seen the hand of God move in our circumstances, Togo and the countries in the region

We thank the Global Relations Team for their support and concern for us during this period. The regular telephone calls and emails were encouraging. We also thank the Methodist Church of Togo for their understanding and support during this period. We continue to thank God for His sovereign hand upon us as a family and on the church community in Togo as He has preserved our lives and livelihoods during this pandemic.

All glory to God.

---

<sup>1</sup> Government of Togo 24 July 2020.