

## Church Planting Togo

IFE peoples, they are not a large group in West Africa but God used these people in giving the missionaries insight into the people group thinking. They are key and very important.

The IFE people are looking for a 'place'. Those before them looked for a good place to settle. Average annual income is about \$400. Only 60% in Togo can not read any language.

1981 Mike started praying "God, lead me to a place to a people who have a great spiritual need". Mike found the IFE people. To reach these people he had to learn their language. He was the first person to become language specific toward the IFE.

Once you learn the language then you can begin to speak with the people. In 1982 God gave Mike a plan. To come down where the church was established and get 20 Togolese leaders, find someone [within the group] to coordinate them. So they got one of the chief Togolese Christian leaders to coordinate the project. They came up for a three-week village campaign. They showed the Jesus film while they were there, and visited one of the villages where the chief lived. The tribe was animistic. The chief and sub-chiefs believed came to believe in Jesus and that made all the difference.

The group moved up the road and decided there was a need for language specific preaching in that area as well. The mission still thinking Geographic. The mission decided to invite volunteer partners so they invited North Carolina in 1983 and started the Wholeness Project. They built a bridge 210 ft long across the Niger River. It opened access to markets between the IFE people and opened Benin. They developed several water catchments, dug 113 wells. The project ended in 1987 and NC and the IMB had invested over a million dollars. It was a nationwide project. Since that time the Mission has set up a mission center with an evangelist, agriculturist, physician and evangelist couples. They have a nice station of 15 hectare given by the tribal chief to be used. There are now 79 churches among the IFE people, not including the preaching points. There was a couple in Equatorial Guinea that was being led to leave that area. Contact was made with them to come and perhaps work with the IFE people in Benin. They agreed.

Once the mission got a vision for the people, they went where the people were and preached the gospel. On the first time they preached the chief asked if the entire village could become Christians. He could have led the whole village to believe. There was a demonstration of openness. Before the missionaries came [to Benin] there were no churches. In less than 6 months they had 5 churches among the IFE. While in language study these 5 have started 2 new churches. Now we are pulling back out of this saturation area moving into another area. Then comes the training of the leaders [this is up to the team to decide how best to do this]. Target will be to mobilize indigenous IFE people to come over and join the harvest.

With personnel changes in the mission there is now only an agricultural couple to do theological education by extension and storying. Both could do this in IFE language. This leaves one couple in Togo and one in Benin.

In training leaders that went into the village, missionaries were facilitators and catalysts. They assisted in getting resources, video projector and transportation. They provided food for the leaders and found housing. In training, first the coordinator trained the strongest Togolese Baptist leader. He then trained the others. Training was like that used for the Billy Graham Crusade or Campus Crusade, simple.

What's the model of leadership now? All the churches in West Africa are pastored by West Africans. Most do not receive a salary. Some would call them lay leaders because they are bi-vocational.

There are a number of different people groups, what is the strategy on finishing the task? We have talked about exit mentality but have not discussed to date the details. We are not thinking about people staying a lifetime but it doesn't mean they won't stay a lifetime.

There is specific Scripture for a few of the groups. It looks like we are going to send a couple to these two countries and send them to Wycliffe to get the Scripture in more languages.

#### Methodology Used

- 1. Prayer** was a real emphasis. They consistently gathered for prayer as a team. The mission consistently prayed for them.
- 2. Their intention was to use reproducible methods.** They intended to do it idealistically and they did it. When NC came they brought a great number of volunteers who worked in a three-year period project.
- 3. Density of population** they looked for high concentration of IFE people. Didn't settle in the extremes settled in the ethnographic center.
- 4. Later looking for greater spiritual needs.** Went to the heart of fetish worship and started preaching there. No Christians had ever witnessed in this village when they witnessed to the chief. Catholics had tried to get into the village before but could not get in. Early involvement of the Togolese Baptists was key. They didn't just go into the village. They trained the twenty-four leaders and sent them in to do the work. They used diverse tools like, cassettes, bible way preaching, Scripture, health care, well digging, agriculture, bridge building, catchments. They had a view that church 'building' should belong to the people. The issue was not building a building but changing of people's lives. Church isn't building but the church is people.
- 5. Demonstration of caring** for the people. Probably the reason that the Catholics were not successful in their bid to get in was due to a lack of caring.

#### Insights

1. Prayer is more than important. It is essential to being involved with the activity of God.
2. If you want to know where God is at work and you want to know where he wants you to join Him then you have to be talking with Him. God's timing and our sensitivity to it are highly important to our part in His plan. We think in terms of

times and dates and God thinks in terms of sequence of events. Timing is more important than time.

3. Caring is part of the gospel.
4. While it may have been accomplished with far less monetary involvement the methods did produce a church that continues to grow with a declining number of expatriate missionary involvement.
5. The emphasis upon indigenous methods must have helped reduce the number of incidents of non-reproducible ministries and methods.
6. Borders are not the end of people; it might be just the beginning
7. Volunteers have much to contribute
8. Responsive peoples maybe be neglected within a geographical approach to mission
9. We have much to learn.