

Semi-Annual Report, Baissa¹

I. Wukari Classis

After our return from Amsterdam at the beginning of February, 1974, we returned to our original station at Wukari. However, during our prolonged absence circumstances there had changed considerably, though not unexpectedly. In fact, some of the changes were actually the result of earlier planning.

A. Wukari CLTC – The first important change was that I no longer served in the Wukari Christian Leadership Training Centre (CLTC). Prior to our leaving in June 1972, I had served notice to the CLTC committee that I did not intend to continue in the institution, since I felt that the emergency situation under which I took over the school almost against the desires of what was then the mission's Executive Committee no longer existed: there were qualified Nigerians to run the school.

Though Wukari Classis did not accept the resignation from my position as teacher and principal of the school, they did at that time agree to call a recent graduate from TCNN, Mr. Ezekiel Adamu. He would have been well qualified, since he is a graduate of the school and also served as teacher under Miss Sytsma. However, the local Wukari congregation called him for their own purposes and he accepted the latter.

In place of Ezekiel Adamu, a fellow graduate was appointed, a very fine and sensitive person, but with less experience and from a different tribe: Kuteb. This young man, Umaru Rika, is a peaceful person who deeply abhors the increasing tribalistic feelings. He himself is courting a Takum Jukun girl. However, he became victim of the situation and felt that all the Wukari Jukuns were against him, while he also experienced difficulties from the Kuteb since he had not joined the secession. This circumstance, combined with a degree of immaturity, made the

¹ January, 1975.

going for the school rough and for this reason I was requested to step in again upon my return. However, I refused and finally the Classis gave up.²

B. Literature

1. Distribution – The literature distribution program, as it centered in the Wukari Sub-Wholesale and as run by my wife, Fran, had been moved into the Wukari Youth Centre, according to agreements prior to our leaving. That meant no more involvement in that ministry, except the occasional offer of advice.

2. Production – During this period I continued my writing ministry. I was able to complete the manuscript for a Hausa commentary on I and II Samuel. All that remained to be done was to supply questions for the use of Bible schools. But in the process of moving, I Samuel was misplaced and I am still hoping to locate it. If this fails, I will have to entreat Fran to type it over again.

Already before completing the one on Samuel, I began working on a commentary in Hausa on the Psalms. I have completed the first 30 in rough draft. Though eager to continue, the pressure of other work has kept me from this ministry for some months. This is a type of work that needs a certain degree of freedom from pressure, a degree of leisure that is rarely obtained.³

C. Pastoral Activities – It may be remembered that by the end of our previous term, I had only two congregations left which I served as counselor. I had been able to persuade the Bakundi congregation to call their own pastor prior to leaving and before our return they had been blessed with success, as Pastor Iliya Abowa, present chairman of Synod, accepted their call. However, the congregation is in need of financial support for the next few years, before it will have reached the level where it can somewhat take care of her own pastor and evangelists. But I am tired of pushing such matters.⁴

² *Every Square Inch*, vol. 2, pp. 118-121.

³ *Every Square Inch*, vol. 2, p. 119.

⁴ *Every Square Inch*, vol. 2, p. 121.

Thus only the Nyankwala congregation was left but by the time I returned, they were also in the process of calling. They have reached the stage where they need an energetic resident pastor who will once again set them up in a more vigorous course of action. It is a congregation with great potential and little of the infighting that characterizes so many others.

D. Miscellaneous – The last few months in Wukari were spent on a great variety of projects, most of them intended as sort of last-minute-touches before moving to Baissa. I spent considerable time with the Director of the Youth Centre, as well as with Rika, the principal of Wukari CLTC. Furthermore, in cooperation with Pastor Ezekiel Adamu and Pastor Bitrus Angyunwe a few courses were conducted during these closing months. One was designed to give Christian businessmen some sort of Christian perspective on their work. This was not altogether successful. We are used to giving courses to church employees who are then expected to attend such courses faithfully. However, it is a different thing to get and retain the attention of businessmen here, for their affairs slow down during their absence and they were not prepared to make that sacrifice. This was a trial course and we hope to repeat it sometime in the future. Another course we conducted was on Jehovah's Witnesses, who are increasingly active in the Benue area. The third course was left uncompleted – it was teaching *Ajami*, i.e. Hausa in Arabic script. It was not completed because of decreasing interest once it was discovered such a course required some continued stamina.⁵

Throughout our final months at Wukari we felt increasingly restricted because of the strong local leadership that did not leave us enough room for creativity in mission. That was the reason we basically volunteered to move to another location. This should not be considered as an escape so much as a recognition that the Wukari area no longer needs the type of ministry we represent, though, it must be stated, that had the local leaders allowed us more scope, we still could have performed many useful teaching services. We look back upon our Wukari experience with deep gratitude to both God and the Wukari people. They have greatly stimulated us in our Christian growth.

⁵ *Every Square Inch*, vol. 2, p. 96.

II. Gabas Classis (Baissa)⁶

Our position in Baissa is new since Rev. Recker left here some years ago in the sense that, unlike the last few evangelistic missionaries, we are not attached to the Baissa CLTC. Thus I am free to engage in a wider and deeper ministry in the area, since I do not experience the restrictions of an institutional schedule. I hope to continue my writing ministry, though so far I have had very little time since arriving here in November.

A. **Congregations and Evangelism** – As I see it at the moment, my main efforts will be expended on local elders and evangelists. So far three congregations have requested my service as counselor and a fourth one has instructed her secretary to write me a letter to that effect. They are Na’ashong (centre at Ashuku), Ebenezer (Ndafero), Abong and Yahweh (Didan). I have accepted the first two, but am postponing a decision on Abong until I have received that request from Yahweh. Once that request has materialized I will likely turn down Abong on the grounds that Pastor Adamu Eyab is posted to that general area as a denominational evangelist. It would be just as helpful to have him become their counselor, even though his present mandate does not favour such arrangements. If I have the three, including Yahweh, I will have my hands quite full.

Though I have been here only a short time, it appears to me that one function as counselor in these churches is to help them reorganize their finances and to establish fiscal trust in these congregations so that the members will be more generous in their offerings. This, in turn, is necessary in order to make life more bearable for the few evangelists who now receive less than a pittance. Furthermore, these elders need to be taught the art of looking after their charges in a spirit of love, patience and humility. Together with Mr. Vreeke and Nigerian colleagues it is hoped that we can organize short courses for these elders in addition to working with them in their own congregations.

⁶ For the main Baissa story, see *Every Square Inch*, vol. 2, pp. 122-144, 152-153.

A tradition has already been established of annual courses for evangelists and the one for Classes Gabas and Salama was held just last week here in Baissa. In addition to these, Vreeke, while living here, had regular weekly and bi-weekly courses with evangelists centering in Baissa and Abong. The Lord willing, I will continue that useful tradition, especially since the evangelists have indicated strong desire for such continuation. This aspect of the work will be taken up again in April, D.V. I have consulted also with the evangelists of Classis Salama and expect that before long I will receive a formal invitation to arrange similar regular courses with them as well. It is my intention to study together first Genesis and then probably I and II Kings on basis of my two Hausa commentaries on these books. That will alleviate the need for making new notes.

Another one of my aims is to try to transform these churches once again into missionary churches. But I do not have any specific plans by which to go at this point. Though I do not feel that the McGavran school has anything like the answer to a full mission strategy, I do feel perhaps I can pick up some specific strategies from their literature. I hope to find time to read their literature from that point of view.

With respect to the Na'ashong congregation, I stepped into the fire immediately. At the first elders' meeting I attended, they deposed their chairman and even dropped him from the position of elder. Though they sought my active approval for this act, I declined to approve or disapprove on the grounds that I was too recent an arrival to be able to judge the situation. That was no mere excuse on my part. Since that meeting I have visited almost all the villages covered by that congregation in order to determine the nature of the problem. Next week we shall have the elders' meeting and I pray that I will be ready with some constructive advice that will be acceptable to all parties. A course of action is slowly ripening in my mind that includes the following:

- (a) Advise them to accept the elder as elder, but not as chairman.
- (b) Set aside a day for prayer and Bible study in order to break down the mutual bitterness and seek a spirit of reconciliation and trust.
- (c) Spend a lot of time with these elders in their own villages in addition to attending the monthly meetings.
- (d) If (a) and (b) would prove not possible at this point, I will suggest decentralization of the congregation where each village becomes more autonomous, but that only with respect to classis and the denomination they continue to act as one body.

B. School Teachers – Another ministry in which I hope to engage is one involving school teachers. I have contacted those of the Ndafero School and they have shown deep interest in establishing some sort of Fellowship of Christian Teachers in order to engage in Bible study. My aim in this is to attempt to get these teachers closer to the Word than they have been and in that way closer to the church and more ready to share their abilities and finances with these struggling churches. This very afternoon I intend to visit the headmaster of the Baissa School for the same purpose, for the Ndafero teachers would like to do this jointly.

At the last meeting of Classis Gabas they have appointed me as their official Counselor. That was, I must say, an appointment I sought to escape without success.

III. EKAS Benue⁷

⁷ “EKAS Benue” is the first name of the denomination that is now called “CRCN.”

In addition to these local duties, I serve the denomination EKAS Benue in various ways, none of which individually are that time consuming, but *in toto* absorb considerable energy and time. These various functions are –

A. **Denominational auditor** – Though this usually is quite routine, during 1974 it required more effort than usually because of the confused situation in the Benue area. However, the situation from an auditor's point of view has subsided by now. I do not expect to have to spend much energy on this matter in 1975.⁸

B. **Secretary of the Reconciliation Committee** – Whether this will be a dead issue from now on remains to be seen. For some time it was a time-consuming position. At this point not much is being done, and, being a missionary, I refuse to continue to urge the church on in this matter. Whatever happens now has to come on their own initiative, not that of any missionary, regardless of his position.

C. **Chairman of the RCC committee dealing with divorce problems**⁹ – We have been meeting regularly for the last 5 years and have done considerable work. With the temporary dropping out of the secretary, I have taken the composition of reports on myself and that takes much effort, but we hope to have a report ready for the coming RCC meeting. After that the work for that committee will hopefully ease off somewhat. Our aim is to provide the church with a less legalistic framework with which to deal with the numerous marriage palavers. Paradoxically, we are attempting to do so by means of providing her with a number of casuistic rules for solving a number of the most common concrete problems. The emphasis of these rules will be on forgiveness and preventive pastoral care, not an automatic discipline.

⁸ *Every Square Inch*, vol. 2, pp. 55-56.

⁹ *Every Square Inch*, vol. 2, pp. 136-137.

IV. TEKAS

In connection with the literature ministry, I am secretary of a TEKAS¹⁰ committee that seeks to encourage the participation of both Nigerians and missionaries in a drive to have the entire Scripture covered by Hausa commentaries for use in Bible schools and for Hausa-speaking preachers. As secretary of this committee, I engage in quite extensive correspondence that has recently been extended to include all the mission boards that serve the TEKAS constituency. We are now seeking to enlist the aid also of Hausa-speaking former missionaries.

Now that we have been hitting this need rather hard the last few years, it appears that we are making some progress in that a considerable number of Bible books are now “farmed out” to various individuals who have promised to write. Unfortunately, so far all of our own Hausa-speaking missionaries that have been invited to participate besides myself have felt compelled to turn down the invitation. I deeply regret that, for as a Reformed mission we have a deep and beautiful tradition of covenantal Bible interpretation that we should share with all of TEKAS. We now will leave the lion share to those inclined to moralistic interpretation, moralism related to legalism of which TEKAS hardly needs more than it already has!

V. University Ministry¹¹

Behind and beneath all the above activities lies my deepening concern and desire to become involved in the university campus ministry, preferably in Northern Nigeria. In response to my request, BLC has established a committee to study the need for such a ministry. Rather than describe the whole thing once again, I enclose a copy of the report submitted to BLC but not yet acted upon by them. (Sorry: not included here.)

¹⁰ “TEKAS” is the original name of “TEKAN,” the Hausa acronym for “The Fellowship of the Churches of Christ in Nigeria,” a fellowship of a number of denominations, most of which emerged from the different branches of the Sudan United Mission.

¹¹ For the beginning of our quest for university ministry see *Every Square Inch*, vol. 2, pp. 119-121, 143-145.

Though I in no way pull up my nose at our rural activities in Nigeria, there is this conviction I expressed long ago in my reports that we are missing the mark by our present *exclusive* emphasis on the rural. Like it or not, the culture-forming agencies are basically concentrated in the cities and universities. If we are interested exclusively in bringing individuals to Christ, perhaps the rural emphasis is not that far off the mark. However, if we are interested in bringing individuals to Christ in addition to having a reforming influence in the modern structures of the country, then we must take the city and the university more seriously in our mission approach.