

## The McCain Celebration of 30 Years in Nigeria (University of Jos, 9-10 September 2019)

The McCain family arrived in Lagos, Nigeria on 8 September 1988. The next day, 9 September 1988 we flew to Port Harcourt, in southeastern Nigeria to begin a new life and a new ministry, teaching the Bible and theology in a public university in Nigeria. That means that on Sunday, 9 September 2018, we completed 30 years of living and serving in Nigeria. We could not allow this important milestone to go without some kind of celebration. And we could not celebrate in Nigeria without doing this celebration the Nigeria way. And when it comes to celebrations, Nigerians really know how to celebrate. They spare no expense or trouble in order to create a memorable and enjoyable celebration for all who come.

So after three months of planning and praying, the two-day celebration has finally arrived and is now over. We had actually planned three different celebrations. The first was a special program in the Sunday morning service. The second was the main celebration which was a three-hour program. The third was an academic celebration on Monday. I will give a brief description below of some of these wonderful activities.



**Thanksgiving Service.** We had about a 30-minute segment during the Sunday morning of the Chapel of Faith, the Protestant Chapel on the University of Jos campus. We followed the normal practice here in doing such things. Mary and I were called to the front at a certain point in the service. We were supposed to dance to the front but neither Mary nor I have any DNA dancing genes. We were then followed by about 150 - 200 “supporters” who wanted to identify with us in our celebration and most of them did have dancing genes. I made about a six minute speech which I will include below. Dr. Keith Campbell, the director of international relations for Global Scholars, gave a five minute speech using a wonderful North Carolina proverb which communicated very well with the proverb rich society in Nigeria. (“If you go into a field and see



a turtle on top of a fence post, you know it did not get there by itself.”) Then the immediate past vice chancellor of the University of Jos, Prof. Hayward Mafuyai, gave another tribute. We were then prayed for by three pastors, an Anglican priest representing the Bishop of Jos whose name I have forgotten, Rev. Danjuma Byang, one of my former students and now a significant church leader in Jos and the Protestant chaplain. Apart from those who regularly attend the Chapel of Faith there were at least 100 or so people who left their Sunday morning churches and came to participate in this service, including dozens of pastors, Nigeria missions leaders, a half dozen or so expatriate missionaries, former students, many who came from a far distance and at least one Anglican bishop, also a former student. This was a

thanksgiving service so we gave a modest thanksgiving offering toward their ongoing building program. That service ended by 11:35 and we had less than two and a half hours to prepare for the big thanksgiving celebration in the afternoon. However, that did not prevent us from visiting with many wonderful friends, many of whom we had not seen for years.

**Thanksgiving Celebration.** At 2:00 PM, we met at the union hall on the university campus which is only about a quarter of mile from our house. We then experienced a three-hour program of speeches and singing and eating and praying and paying tribute and listening to what Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn declared to be a few "stretchers." Mary and I hardly recognized



ourselves in some of the stories and tributes that were presented. Nigerians know how to make a person feel good. It really was a lovely time of great fellowship with wonderful friends and delightful music provided by the JETS ECWA Church musical band. Daniel gave a wonderful PowerPoint presentation on behalf of himself and his two sisters, who were watching in California via Facebook live streaming. (Several others were able to see the program as well. It is archived on Mary's Facebook page.) There were at least 400 people who attended that

celebration. There were at least eight or ten of my Muslim colleagues who came to this program. One of them, Prof. M. T. Yahya asked to speak at the occasion but the MC chose not to allow him because of time. He later told me what he was going to say: "Prof. McCain said once that he has tried hard to make me a Christian without any success and I have tried hard to make him a Muslim with the same lack of success.

Therefore, he said, "Since we can't convert one another, we may as well work together." We have since worked together on HIV/AIDS projects for the last 18 years. Another Muslim colleague, Umar Farouk, had actually planned to attend the church service but had to change plans because his uncle died on Saturday night and he had to go to Kano. He came to see me as soon as he returned and reminded me that I had said to him one time: "Umar, you are such a good man, we are going to make you an honorary Christian."



Mary gave a delightful speech with some wonderful Nigerian humor and an interesting little parable describing how she adapted to Nigeria. (I have included her speech below.) I also gave a speech that probably sounded a bit like a sermon. I told them I was going to resist the temptation to tell a lot of interesting stories but I did tell one:

Once, when we lived in Port Harcourt, I was invited to participate in dedicating a new Christian primary and secondary school. The invitation said that the meeting was going to be at “10 AM Jesus Time” so I thought I should get there early. I got there a few minutes before 10 and was the first person there. The lady said she felt that the Lord was leading me to dedicate the school. I had only been in the country a few months and had never done anything like this. I could dedicate that school in five minutes but knew I had to stretch it out to make it worthwhile for people to come. I decided that we should go around and pray for the different parts of the building. We went to the administrative offices and prayed. And then we went to the classrooms and prayed and then to the library. We went outside and prayed for the playgrounds and even the carpark. I thought we had prayed for enough of the new school but the proprietress came up and whispered in my ears, “What about the amenities?” I said, “Do you mean that toilets? Do we really have to pray for the toilets?” She thought we should, so we went back upstairs and we all crowded into one of the sets of toilets. I called on a Pentecostal preacher to pray for the toilets. He apparently thought the Lord was deaf and started praying very loudly. At one point in his prayer, he prayed, “And, Lord, may from this place flow rivers of blessings.” I was thinking to myself, “No, Lord, please ignore that prayer. We don’t want anything to flow from these toilets.”

The audience responded well.

I paid tribute to four people who have had a great impact on my life, all of whom are now deceased.

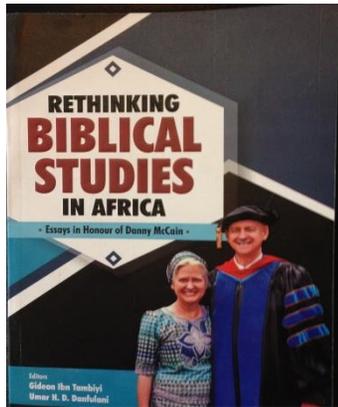
These include Dr. Friday Nwator, who was the first Nigerian I met and the Nigerian most responsible for me moving to Nigeria, Apostle



Geoffrey Numbere, one of the outstanding church leaders in Port Harcourt, Prof. J. A. Ilori, with whom I worked on CRS projects for many years and my first PhD student, Dr. Gwamna Dogara Je'adayibe, who rose to the rank of professor and exceeded me in academic publications.

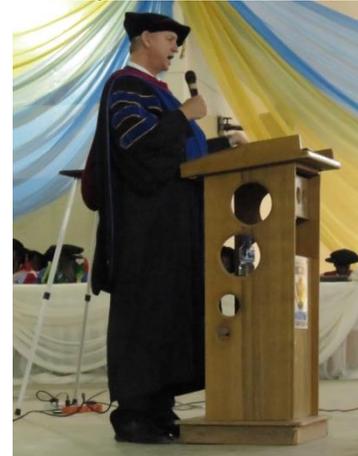
I actually spoke on the Romans 11:33-34: *Oh, the depth of the riches of the **wisdom** and **knowledge** of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! "Who has known **the mind of the Lord**?"* I basically said that I had attempted to live my life by 1) the wisdom of God in helping me come up with practical projects to advance God’s kingdom; 2) the knowledge of God which I taught in my classes and 3) the mind of the Lord to help me live a holy life. To the extent I have been able to do those things, to God be the glory. To the extent I have failed, I pray God will have mercy on me.

We cut a cake; we sang “Great is Thy Faithfulness.” We watched a group of Anaguta traditional dancers who had been sent there by their chief. We were invited to come down and dance with them with about the same result as the church service earlier in the day. We had more prayers prayed over us by my great friend, Prof. Yusufu Turaki. I was told the food was all good though Mary and I chose not to eat which may have caused us to miss some of the ongoing activities. I cannot imagine the celebration going any better.



One of the other fascinating things about this 30-year celebration is that one of my students, the new Dr. Gideon Tambiyi, decided to create a book in my honor. They tried to keep this a secret but the information leaked before the ceremony. It is entitled *Rethinking Biblical Studies in Africa: Essays in Honour of Danny McCain*. It has 15 essays in it, mostly from my former students but also including some of my colleagues. It also has two longer tributes, one written by one of my Muslim colleagues and nine shorter tributes. The whole thing was put together in less than three months. It was delivered on Saturday, 8 September, 2018, the day before the celebration. I am a man of books so it is a great honor to be so celebrated.

**Inaugural Lecture.** The inaugural lecture was on Monday morning at 10:00 AM. Unfortunately, we experienced heavy rain before, during and after this presentation which cut down on the attendance a little. However, we probably had between 400 and 500 people present, including all of the principal officers of the university and dozens of other senior university academics and



visitors from many parts of Nigeria. A 10-minute citation was read about me by Katrina, who was dressed in her academic regalia and I then gave the lecture which lasted 59 minutes (I was allowed an hour). It was all quite formal, done in academic regalia. We fed 600 people after the event (not sure where the extra 100 came from—perhaps there was some double dipping) and then had another reception at our home afterwards. The topic of the lecture was: “Dramatic Language: The Unappreciated Genre of Biblical Literature.” I was satisfied with the presentation. I did not see anyone sleeping and the audience laughed at the right points so I think it went over well. We returned home in the rain and enjoyed *suya* and *maza* and fried and Joliffe rice and plenty things to drink.

I was very pleased with those who made a great effort to be there. Global Scholars sent over both Dr. Keith Campbell whom I have already mentioned and Dr. Ted Barnett, the chairman of our board of directors. He made a presentation





during the Thanksgiving Celebration and was probably the only speaker who stayed within his three minutes of allotted time. Dr. Gary Maxey and Prof. John Brown came from West Africa Theological Seminary (WATS) in Lagos and two of my first students in Port Harcourt also flew up for the occasion. We had two video tributes. The first was by Pastor Rick Addison of the Grace Place and the second was by Paul Adefarasin, the pastor of House on the Rock, one of the large churches in Lagos.

The bottom line is that it was a delightful occasion. It was made possible by a small group of planners who worked very hard. Dr. Katrina Korb was the chair of the “Committee of Friends.” Dr. Roslyn Yilpet was there and took responsibility for organizing the food and the venue. Dr. Gideon Tambiyi, who is a provost of a seminary and my most recent PhD graduate (I received notification of the formal awarding of the degree only five days ago), was responsible for several things. Dr. Stephen Akintunde, the university librarian, focused on the university side of things and James Ameh, who has been something of a personal assistant to me for several



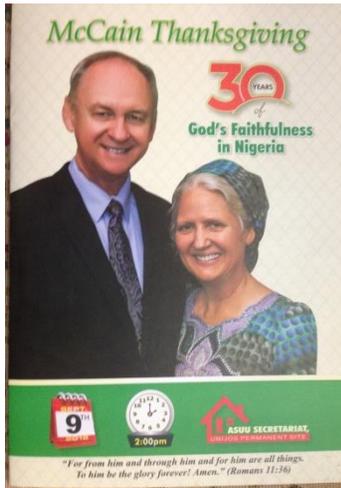
years, was involved in everything but particularly focused on the inaugural lecture part of the celebration, including the printing of my lecture by the University of Jos Press. There were dozens of others, including my students, my workers, friends and people I did not even know, who pitched in and helped out. I also should mention that Daniel came to Jos on Wednesday before the celebration. He spend many hours, including five hours on line with Carmen, putting together a 15 minute looping slide show of the McCains during the last 30 years and also his own PowerPoint presentation. We are grateful that the whole weekend was characterized by excellence, a spirit of cooperation and we pray that it glorified the Lord.



I would be ungrateful if I did not mention all the other ways we received help. One of the big expenses of the occasion was the printing of the program. Printing standards have improved in Nigeria so these things are always done quite beautifully. During these occasions, the celebrants normally give “souvenirs” to the people who attend—something with their name and picture on it to remember the occasion. We decided to go with a modest 20-page program and a “jotter” which is a notebook with our picture on it. Luka Vandi, the managing director of Africa Christian Textbooks (ACTS) was helping us get quotations for these things. He had gotten two or three quotes and was talking to a printer in Kaduna who has done a good bit of work for ACTS. After hearing the request, the printing manager said, “Who did you say this celebration is for?” The ACTS MD said, “It is for Prof. McCain, our chairman.” The printer said, “Isn’t he the one that we have printed so many books for?” Luka said, “Yes, he’s the one.” The printer said,

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“Then, in that case, we will do all the printing for this occasion free.” They wound up printing 470 programs, 200 jotters, 200 beautiful cloth bags for putting your souvenirs in. When they



delivered all of this to the house, we discovered they had also, without our knowledge or requests, included 200 mugs with our picture on them and 200 ink pens with our names on them. We just could not believe their generosity. In addition, ACTS provided at least 200 baseball caps with our picture on them and also key chains with our pictures on them. One of my former students, Rev. Edward Joseph, also printed 100 “jotters” which are much more beautiful and professional looking, with lots of pictures in them which he had gotten off the Internet.



I was presented three plaques during the two day occasion. One was from the Faith-Based AIDS Awareness Initiative. A second was presented by my New Testament students. The third was presented by the Vice Chancellor as a commemoration of my inaugural professorial lecture.

We are most grateful to God for giving us 30 good years in Nigeria. The major missing element was the fact that most of you, who have made it possible for us to be here these 30 years, were not here to celebrate with us. However, please accept our great appreciation for your part in our 30 years of life in Nigeria.

### Remarks for Thanksgiving Section of Protestant Chapel Service on Sunday Morning 9 September 2018 by Danny McCain

The Chaplain, Chairman and members of the board of elders, colleagues, students and friends.

I have asked permission from the chaplain to use a little portion of this service to offer thanksgiving for something very special. It was on 8<sup>th</sup> September 1988 that I arrived in Lagos airport with my family and it was on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September that we arrived in Port Harcourt to begin our service to the universities of Nigeria. I initially told my family that we would go to

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Nigeria for four years. However, those four years have stretched out to 30 years. So I have asked some of my colleagues, former students, present students, friends and others to gather here with us to honor the Lord for these good years.

As I was thinking about this service a couple of weeks ago, I read this verse which reflects my feelings about these 30 years. *“For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.”* (Romans 11:36).

- It was from the Lord that I received the vision and desire to bring my family to serve in Nigeria.
- It was from the hand of the Lord that I received the education and experiences I needed to teach in a public university.
- It was from the wealth of God’s goodness, that I received the wife and children I have who were so supportive and uncomplaining in those early years, before Nigeria had really become our home.



James says, *“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows”* (James 1:17). That means every asset that I have and have used during these 30 years has come from the hand of the Lord.

The Romans passage also says it was *“through him”* all things have been done.

- It was through the ministry of the Holy Spirit that I was given an idea of starting an academic organization that would function within the public universities of the world to help build up God’s kingdom. This vision has placed 311 academics in 148 universities in 22 academic disciplines in 54 countries outside North America in the last 30 years.
- It was through the aid of the Holy Spirit that I have been able to teach classes and do research and work on committees and perform other functions here at the University of Jos for the last 27 years.
- It was through the power of the Holy Spirit that I have recovered from 23 attacks of malaria and three attacks of armed robbers on our home.
- It has been through the ministry of the angels, sent by God Almighty that we have traveled hundreds of thousands of miles without any kind of serious accident or robbery.
- It has been with the assistance of the Holy Spirit that I have preached hundreds of sermons and organized dozens of workshops and conferences that have helped build up the body of Christ.

Jesus said, *“I am the vine; you are the branches . . . apart from me you can do nothing”* (John 15:5). Therefore, it has been through the strength and power and authority of God that we have done any good thing that has been a blessing to the body of Christ.

The scripture also says that it was *“for him”* that all things are done. When I first started thinking about serving God overseas, I thought it would be good for my family. It has been good for my

family. When I left America to come to Nigeria, I came with the view of building up the body of Christ through providing better theological education for pastors and church leaders. As I have continued living in Nigeria, I have tried to do things that would help those living with polio and leprosy; I have tried to better train CRS teachers; I have tried to positively influence the values in this country by writing materials related to it. I have tried to bring Christians and Muslims together to re-establish peace on the Plateau. However, the real reason all of these things were done was for him—the one who called me to Nigeria.

Jesus once told a story about a judgment scene and after saying that they had fed him and clothed him and visited him when he was sick, he concluded with this statement: *“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”* (Matthew 25:40). All that we have done is for Jesus. All the good that has been done is for the glory of Jesus. Therefore, the best way to conclude this brief statement is: *“To him be the glory forever! Amen.”* (Romans 11:36).

### **Remarks by Mary McCain at the 30 Year Celebration on 9 September 2018**

#### **Verse 1**

*When upon life’s billows you are tempest tossed,  
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,  
Count your many blessings name them one by one,  
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.*

#### **Chorus**

*Count your blessings, name them one by one;  
Count your blessings, see what God hath done;  
Count your blessings, name them one by one,  
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.*

#### **Verse 4**

*So amid the conflict, whether great or small,  
Do not be discouraged, God is over all;  
Count your many blessings, angels will attend,  
Help and comfort give you to your journey’s end*

#### **Chorus**



Preparing for this thanksgiving has given me a good an opportunity to “Count my many blessings.” Remembering all of these blessings has helped me to rejoice over how God certainly has proven himself to be true and dependable. I have seen how God has been with us throughout these thirty years and provided just what I have needed.

### **Specific Thanksgiving Items**

I am thankful for the blessing of friends, for example like Prof. (Mrs.) Jane Mallum. When I first moved to UniJos, she provided me an opportunity to get to know the whole community in the

Permanent Site Staff Quarters by taking me around to visit all of our neighbors. I count friends like Prof. Mallum and our neighbors as a blessing.

Another blessing is that God has been faithful in allowing us to stay connected with our family in the US. We traveled home every two years, but we still missed important occasions. But God allowed me to be home the summer that my father passed away in 2000 and that meant a lot to me, and I think it also meant a lot to him and my mother. That was a very special blessing.

God has been faithful in providing people for me in awkward situations. When we first came to Nigeria, we went to a village to visit a church of some friends. This was during the two-week visit before we moved to Nigeria permanently. Of course, I did not know how to do all this toilet stuff in the bush. Thankfully, there was a young girl there who could understand my heavily accented southern American English accent. She helped me find the toilet. I went in and there was a seat over here, and then there was a little hole over there. I wasn't sure whether I was supposed to sit on the seat or squat over the hole. I later realized you had to move the seat to be over the hole. But that was after I had already used it. I can count this young English-speaking girl as one of my blessings.

Bible Study Fellowship started in 1991 when we arrived in Jos after living three years in Port Harcourt. In Port Harcourt, we were not able to join a church because my husband was preaching in so many different churches. BSF in Jos gave me accountability and helped me make friends. I count BSF as one of my blessings.

On Sunday afternoons after church, neighborhood children run up to my front porch with bright smiles, eager for what we will learn in Bible Study. The children are sweet and patient, accepting me the way that I am. They go right along even when I sing off-key. I have loved to watch the children I have worked with. Most of them are well mannered, thoughtful, talented, and helpful – evidences of good parenting. They jump in and do whatever needs to be done, from leading the singing to washing dishes to coloring pictures for me. I count the children who sit quietly and eagerly listen as I read to them as blessings. I consider them among my best friends.

The Lord has blessed us with the cream of the crop helpers who have cleaned, cooked, driven, and in many ways blessed us. Those who have worked in our home have always been honest and dependable. And they have all taught me a lot about living in Nigeria – including how to tie a head tie and select appropriate shoes. They have shown me how to care for and help one another. I count them as my blessings.

Another amazing blessing has been Dr. Katrina Korb. She came 11 years ago and has been a wonderful helper in many ways. She is a wonderful teacher and has helped Global Scholars in many ways. But she has also been a wonderful friend to me helping in everything from setting the table for breakfast to being chairman of this event today! God knows just what we need!

### **A Nigerian Metaphor**

When my parents first visited us in Nigeria about 1989, some of Danny's colleagues wanted to take us to a really nice place. It was not far from Owerri...a really beautiful clear spring fed lake.

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They rented a “flying boat” and took us on a tour. One very interesting spot they showed us was where the small river that flowed out of the lake, which was filled with blue spring water, met another bigger river filled with muddy water. There was a distinct line where the two rivers came together. On one side of the line was the blue spring water and the other side of the line was the muddy river water and they flowed side by side for a long distance without much mixing. But eventually a little brown bubble would appear in the spring water and then there was more and more mixing until eventually the two rivers were completely one and you could no longer see any evidence that there had been two streams. The clear and the muddy waters had become one.

This story is a nice metaphor for my life in Nigeria. Before I moved to Nigeria, my life was like one river with its own distinct color. At first, I was like an American river flowing beside a Nigerian River. However, after a while little parts of the Nigerian river bubbled over into my side and then there was more and more mixing and merging and combining until there was no longer an American and Nigerian river but just a happy mixture of the two. Hopefully, the best of both of those worlds have merged together and that new unified river is better than the old single river.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I want to add my appreciation to all that has been said. Thank you for all of the kind words. I am also grateful for this opportunity to count so many wonderful blessings that God has given us during these 30 years in Nigeria.



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**The Anaguta Dancers**



**Workers with their Specially Designed Uniform for the Occasion**



**I guess I did make them laugh.**

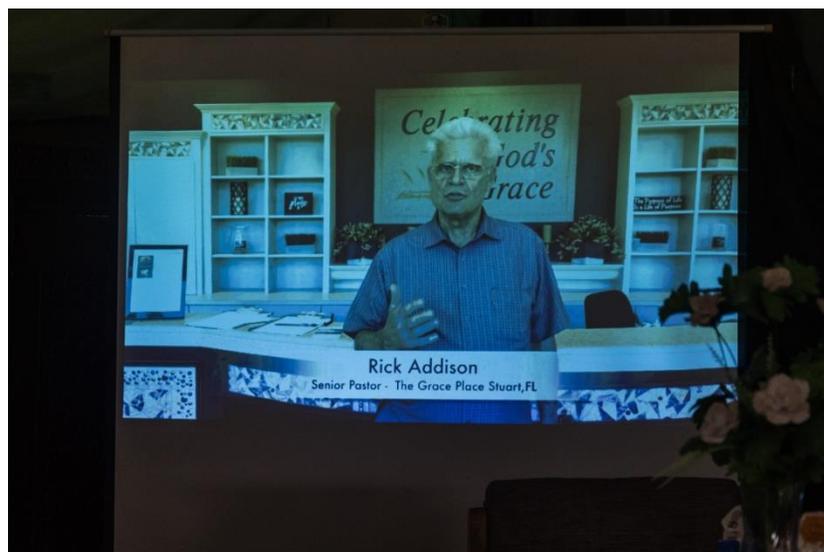
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**JETS ECWA Church Band**



**Linda Sani and some of the children who attended**



**Rev. Rick Addison of the Grace Place Presenting a Video Tribute**