

Uganda Conference Update

I want to begin by saying "thank you!" to everyone who helped make our recent five-day conference in Uganda a huge success. It was truly a powerful time of ministry, fellowship, and interaction. We had right at 100 delegates, all of whom were bishops, overseers, pastors, and senior elders who represented literally hundreds of churches. Bishop Roman Okware, who was in charge of organizing everything did an excellent job. He was thrilled with the leadership quality of the men and women who attended. We had a good group from Burundi, and good groups from Rwanda and Tanzania, along with a bishop from Kenya. So we were talking to the right people.

I spent the first day sharing vision and talking about the importance of coming together in unity as ministers and churches. Unlike many independents in America, these Africans ministers did not seem to have an independent spirit and were very interested in building long-term relationships that would enable them to strengthen one another. They all agreed that building a community of churches and ministers committed to working together would greatly facilitate reaching the unreached areas of Africa. I explained that I was not returning to Africa to be the "Bwana Kubwa" (the big boss), but would make myself available to help and serve in any way that I could, and would try to network them with American churches and ministries who had a vision to do something in Africa.

By mid-morning of the second day we began to address the issue of poverty, specifically poverty in the ministry and in the churches. Wow. We got into some amazing things. It was an awesome time, but it also broke my heart to hear their personal stories of how extreme poverty has affected their families and congregations. When you consider that over half of the population of sub-Saharan Africa exists on one dollar a day or less, it is amazing what these men and women of God have been able to accomplish. Just think what could happen if we could help them effectively address the issue of poverty. And we will - but more about that next time!

The thing they said that made this conference different from other conferences they have attended was the fact that I wanted to hear from them. I think it surprised them to see me taking notes! They are used to being preached to and exhorted and encouraged, etc. Rarely, if ever, does a mzungu (white person) come in here, listen to them and interact with them about the very real and urgent needs that hit them so hard right where they live. It is time for us to hear them, and be willing to change our missions methodology to more effectively empower the nationals.

The fifth day was set aside to meet only with key leaders and those who expressed a genuine interest in coming together into a community of churches. It was awesome to see their excitement and to see such amazing qualities of leadership come forth as these ministers from many different nations and tribal groups discussed back and forth how to connect with each other. They chose to elect from among themselves a committee of 10 ministers from all five nations who were to take the constitution and by-laws of HCI and edit them to work within the African context. This is very important because we want them to invest themselves and their resources - to take ownership of the vision and see this as their ministry, rather than simply joining something from the U.S.. This is truly the hour for the national churches to rise up, embrace their destiny and take the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Vail and I consider it a great privilege that God would call us to move back to Africa to work alongside them and advance the Kingdom of God in east and central Africa. The Lord is truly building an international community of churches dedicated to strengthening local churches to reap a global harvest. Again, thanks to everyone who helped make this powerful time a reality. Your seed sown will bear lasting fruit in the nations.