



SPREADING THE GOSPEL IN NIGERIA



BY PETER NEWBURN

Country Coordinator for Cameroon

Peter has served in full-time ministry for over thirty-five years. He and his family spent three years as missionaries in Cameroon, where Peter was a theology teacher at the major seminary. He also worked for almost nine years as a parish life coordinator in the Diocese of San Bernardino, California, where he was responsible for overseeing all aspects of pastoral ministry and the administration of a large parish.

This was my first time in Nigeria and Renewal Ministries' first mission there. We did not go to the southern, Christian part of Nigeria; instead, we traveled to northeastern Nigeria, which is near the birthplace of Boko Haram. It is predominantly Muslim, and Christians are in the minority. (Boko Haram means "Westernization is Sacrilege." It has been declared a terrorist group by the government.) Foreigners are not very common in northeastern Nigeria.

I partnered in this mission with Fr. Jude Langeh, CMF, the Claretian superior in Cameroon who has become my main collaborator. Bishop Hilary Dachelem, a fellow Claretian, invited Fr. Jude and me to lead the annual retreat for priests in his Diocese of Bauchi.

We flew into Abuja, the capital city, and were met by two transitional deacons from the Diocese of Bauchi. They drove us nearly seven hours to Bauchi the next day. We stayed at the diocesan pastoral center for a week-long clergy retreat.

The next morning was the Feast of the Epiphany. We were invited to a local parish, where Fr. Jude presided and preached. We were both warmly welcomed. It was a wonderful, lively, and faith-filled liturgy.

Later, fifty-two priests from the diocese gathered with their bishop for an annual retreat. Fr. Jude gave the first presentation on the Call to Holiness for priests. Then, I proclaimed the fundamental message of the kerygma (the basic content of the Gospel), exhorting the priests to apply it to their lives personally and to let it form the foundation of their preaching and priestly ministry. At the conclusion, one priest stood up and exclaimed:

"We have been taught philosophy and theology, but why have we not been taught this?"

He expressed that he loved hearing the Gospel message proclaimed in such a simple-yet-impactful manner.

UNBOUND – THE 5 KEYS –

1. Repentance & Faith
2. Forgiveness
3. Renunciation
4. Taking Authority
5. The Father's Blessing

The basic content for the retreat was Unbound as a method for healing, deliverance, and freedom. As we took the priests through each of the Five Keys—repentance and faith, forgiveness, renunciation, taking authority, and the Father's blessing—we led them in prayer related to each key. As is always the case, the teaching on forgiveness and the invitation to forgive was especially impactful. So many people have made vows that they can never forgive someone. We explained that holding on to unforgiveness is like drinking poison and hoping the person who hurt them will die. It was very evident that several of the priests struggled with unforgiveness, and many of them experienced greater freedom through a decision to forgive.

One afternoon, after a teaching on the Father's Blessing, we led a time of worship and opening up to the Holy Spirit. Several priests testified that they were touched by the experience. The final presentation focused on the Call to Mission. Dinner was a celebration with special food, drink, music, and dancing. It was a fun and joyful evening.

DAY OF FORMATION

After the retreat, Fr. Jude and I led a day of formation on the Five Keys to about 190 laity and religious at the diocesan cathedral. The participants were very engaged, open, and hungry for the teachings and testimonies we shared. A group of young men responsible for leading the diocese's outreach to young people approached me with great appreciation. They asked for copies of our PowerPoint presentation to translate into the local dialect and share with others in their purview of ministry around the diocese. I gladly shared it with them, with the permission of Matt Lozano, who is responsible

for Unbound training for Heart of the Father Ministries.

Bishop Hilary appreciated our willingness to include the laity in our mission. In fact, he and his advisors announced they plan to make it an annual tradition that whoever they bring in to facilitate their clergy retreat should also present a summary of the content to the diocese's lay leadership and religious.

FUTURE PLANS

The door seems open in Nigeria for more Renewal Ministries' mission opportunities. On my return flight, I met two other bishops from the northeast and a priest from the southern Nigeria who may be interested in having us come to their dioceses.

I am so grateful to all those who support and pray for Renewal Ministries, who help make it possible for our missions to clergy, religious, and laity in Nigeria, Cameroon, and elsewhere.

Peter Newburn prays over Fr. Jude Langeh before a talk. Together, the two led a day of formation on the Five Keys.



Testimonies

In his closing comments to the priests, Bishop Hilary expressed appreciation for the retreat content and how we shared it with great conviction and authenticity. He highlighted the collaboration between Fr. Jude and me, exhorting the priests to recognize the gifts of the laity and to seek ways to collaborate with them, each with their own gifts and charisms.

In a private conversation with Fr. Jude and me, Bishop Hilary acknowledged the division, tribalism, and mistrust amongst the presbyterate of the diocese, and the challenges he himself experiences as bishop. He said,

“Even if I am not fully unbound, this is something that is so needed in our church. I will be recommending this program to my brother bishops!”

Fr. Bitrus (meaning “Peter”) shared with me that he now understands how to pray with the authority of Jesus and to help those he is ministering to realize the power and authority they have as children of God. They do not need to fear any other power influencing them or their families. This is a common pastoral concern in central Africa.

Fr. Dennis shared with me that he loved the retreat.

“What you presented was so simple, yet so deep,” he said, with great appreciation. The vicar general of the diocese declared: *“This was one of the best retreats I have ever made.”*

Bishop Hilary added,

“If you change the life of one priest, it will transform the lives of one thousand others.”