

My Visit to Ghana 12-20 October 2004

It all started on a Sunday by a notice on our church table inviting us to the Portsmouth Cathedral hall taking place that afternoon, a talk with slides on Ghana. Fr. David Williams was behind me, also taking an interest and he very kindly offered to take me. From the time the talk started I knew I had to visit this exciting country. Little did I realise I was going to be our representative with Nsawam in Ghana.

After attending various meetings, medical checks, visa, etc., I found myself on Tuesday 12 October heading to the warm climate of Ghana. The flight took 6 hours - Ghana was one hour behind us, so no jet lag. How Angela Herring, our leader, could pick out our driver



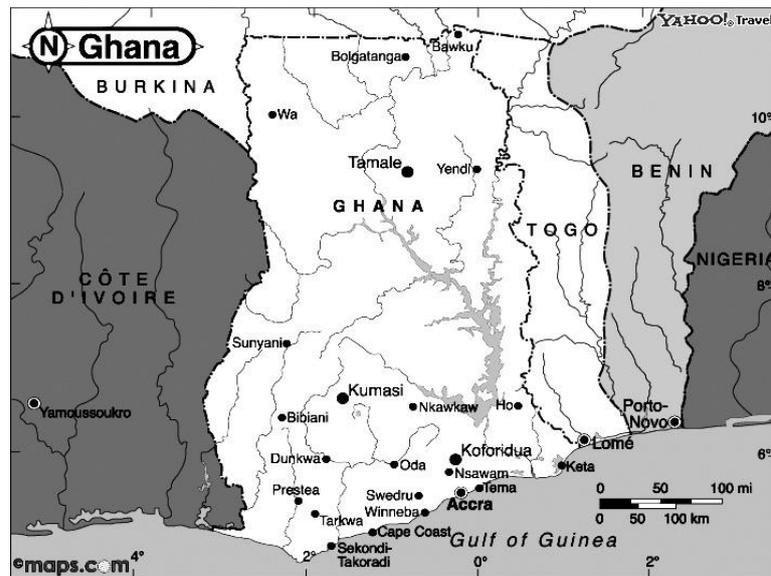
Aloko Akata (*pictured above*) at the arrivals hall from all the wonderful smiling black faces, I shall never know. We were then whisked away to our first hotel in Accra.

The next day (*Wednesday*) we were driven to Koforidua and enroute we visited the Aburi Botanical Gardens, which have some wonderful old trees.

Thursday we visited the market.

After lunch on the Friday we went straight to the cathedral of Koforidua to be presented to the Bishop and to be linked up to our allotted Priests – mine of course, was the most handsome! His name is Fr. Felix and we got on famously. He even had the same happy smile as our Fr. David. He gathered up my bag and led me to his “not so new” car and off we went to, I don’t know where and I didn’t care. I was so happy to arrive safely and was looking forward to whatever! It so happened it was to his home up in the hills. His wife was there to greet us. As she was a headmistress to two schools, I thought the best solution to all your gifts was to hand them over to her for distribution, except one small teddy which I gave to the “maid’s” little girl who followed me everywhere.

Saturday, Fr. Felix took me to the famous dam of Ghana (*Akosombo Dam on the Volta River*). It was pretty impressive. After lunch I was surprised to find I was packing again and off to Fr. Felix church and rectory in Nsawam about 2 hours away. The roads are terrible, full of potholes, but they are trying to get a “through Ghana” highway - they complete one section and then run out of money. We stopped half way for coconut



milk, which is my favourite drink, but it is difficult to be lady like slurping from an open shell.

Eventually, we arrived at *"The Rectory"*. Just as well it was dark when we arrived, because it was like stepping back in time. I soon realised why there were buckets of water by the shower and candles everywhere, because just as I was getting ready to retire the lights went out and no water. I had come prepared for such eventualities!

The next day was Sunday. This was the day I was looking forward to and was not disappointed. Off we went at 9.00am to our first parish and service, which was in a classroom out in the sticks. It was a very simple communion and Fr. Felix wore the usual vestments, which surprised and pleased me, even to a lace cloth that had been draped over a long black board. My they do love their hymn singing.

The second port of call was in a villager's house, but as we were walking through the scrub land we came across *"so called"* school rooms, with a corrugated iron roof that was half falling off and pitted with holes. I was so upset that I asked how much would it cost to replace and was told £250 and no way could they have found that kind of money. So when I came home I forwarded the money and I have just heard (5 November) from Fr. Felix that he has received the cheque, so I have requested the roof be called *"Pamela's Tin Roof"*. We then went to another village and the house we visited was the owner's birthday. My, he looked splendid in his gold dress. Once again he was blessed with holy water, we also got a splattering, and then came the hymn singing, wine and cake. Guess where I will be in May next year – yes I shall be going back!



The following day (Monday) Fr. Felix took me back to Koforidua to meet up with the group. It was sad saying goodbye to a few days that I shall never forget. So here we all are with wonderful memories which we will share later.



Off we go again to one of Ghana's National Parks and the famous *"Tree Walkway"*. It was a steady climb to the top but worth it. At the top of the trees was this walkway of rope and steel wires stretching from one side to the other across a chasm. Only one person crosses at a time as it can sway from side to side. When my turn came I was very careful except half way across the stick that I was holding in my mouth, as my hands were busy on the ropes for balance, fell! Great gasps from either side of the walkway. The stick fell across me so my historic dance bow came into action by putting one foot behind

the other I could elegantly sink and retrieve the offender without the walkway swaying too dangerously. Much laughter from either side. We all got down safely and finally made our way to our last hotel. We had our meal overlooking a wonderful lake with a weaverbird's nest right beside us, but the birds had disappeared. However, a couple of *"crocs"* in the water were very much there!

The next day (Tuesday) was to the *"Gold Coast"*, this being our last stop. Our accommodation was by the side of the beach, but only the brave would have attempted to even paddle, let alone swim. The waves were very powerful. We visited the Fort where all the slaves were imprisoned until bought on whatever! I really did not like that side of the trip so I wandered off and then we all met up for our final meal together before heading to the airport for our evening flight back home. This has been a wonderful experience that will remain with me for a long time.

Signs – some of the wonderful signs seen over shops, lorries and cars whilst travelling through Ghana:

<i>By God's Grace</i>	– auto garage
<i>In Jesus name</i>	– store
<i>Wonderful Jesus</i>	– back of jeep
<i>Father forgive them</i>	– lorry
<i>Son of God</i>	– broken lorry waiting for help!
<i>God is First</i>	– mobile to mobile

Pam Le Goaziou

(The Inter Diocesan West Africa Link (IDWAL) in the Portsmouth Diocese has a growing network of 'parish to parish' links. The Havant Deanery is linked with the Koforidua Ho Diocese and St. Faith's with the Nsawam parish in Ghana)

My Second Visit to Nsawam Ghana 2-16 May 2005

I left home on 2 May for my flight to Ghana via Amsterdam where they almost always lose my luggage during the transfer of planes. However, this time, to my great surprise, it went straight through with no problems.

I had no idea who was going to meet me in Accra, as my appointed driver had moved up north. Over the period of time, I have learnt to "let go" and let it happen. Believe me, it always works! Well it does for me, and who should be at the arrival barrier but Fr. Felix's wife, Grace, with Fr. Felix not far behind. My goodness, what a wonderful surprise. I've put that down as one of my treasured moments.

So out of the airport we went to face the cars, taxis, coaches, and the heat. What turmoil, but Grace, in her cool calm way, got Fr. Felix out of the horrendous confusion and soon we were speeding along the "highway" to Nsawam. Grace is a headmistress to a very big school, so the following morning she left early.

I spent part of the morning of the 3rd sorting out my bag with presents, etc. I asked Fr. Felix if I could go out to the church, which was just over the road. He hesitated somewhat and when we went and opened the door, to my horror, it was like a tip. They were in the throws of cleaning and sanding the pews which were similar to ours. Seeing it was my birthday the following day, I really wanted to celebrate in church with all the congregation of Nsawam, but Fr. Felix led me away and said it will all be put back for my birthday the following day! So I got Fr. Felix's "boy" to sneak over to the church and grab two great vases stuffed with artificial flowers so I could wash and arrange them and get them back into the church before they were missed. They were very dirty due to the sanding of the pews.

Next day, 4th, was my birthday. The morning was very busy with people trying to keep me away, lots of phone calls, people popping in to the Rectory to have a whisper. It was all very exciting. At 5pm, Fr. Felix, a lady from the church myself and Grace, who had travelled back from her school (1½ hours drive away), as she just wanted to share my birthday, all sat down to share Marion Simmons wonderful cake that she had made me and then we all went our separate ways – me to my room to put on my Ghanaian dress to prepare for the service.

We then all trooped over to the church, which looked as if it was locked up for the night. As soon as we arrived at the door, all the lights went up and the church was packed, including the lovely children. At the side of the pews, there sat a lovely birthday cake, nestling on a table, with a lovely lace cloth and more cards. I was once again officially introduced to the congregation who already knew me from last year. This was followed by hymns and blessings. Then the two piece band started playing, just like the buskers in Chichester High Street – they were great! There were three children by my side itching to dance, so I got up and we all danced together.

Well that was the beginning of my visit. What happened in the 12 days left would fill a book. It certainly filled my exercise book!

Ghana is just like you see on the television. Mainly scrub land with trees dotted here and there, one "main" road going from north to south, and of course, you have the Volta River running through the lovely Shair Hills.

Seeing I did not know where I was heading when Grace turned up one day with her driver and the manager of the school, the next thing I knew I was whisked away dressed only in a shirt top and sandals to climb the hills. However, I got to the top with gentle encouragement by my burly black guys and down again. Although it was

an animal sanctuary, no animals were seen – they were all asleep as it was 1pm and the sun was at its highest. The area is all scrub land and stunted trees. I think it has a beauty of its own and one would not expect anything more, certainly not in that heat.

I found the people a very proud nation so I did not notice whether they were poor or rich. They just struck me as a wonderful loving nation, always smiling. I got on very well with them – as you can imagine I will talk to anyone maybe that was why Fr. Felix would not let me out on my own! He was very protective. Coming back to the services, they were of the old version and I found it very difficult to follow the prayer book. Fr. Felix hopped from one page to the other and then back again, always using great energy to get over what he was preaching, with much gesture of the hands, eyes closed, pacing up and down, but bless his heart, he would suddenly realise I was in the congregation and revert into English. I think he was thinking, let's keep her awake! It was very clever how he did switch from one language to the other and I did appreciate it. The amazing thing I found was the "washing up" bowls – you would never guess what they were for – collection! Well it did make sense, because it is all paper money out there and you can imagine using a plate. (*The currency in Ghana is the cedi*). One puff of wind and it would be raining money as most of the services were held out in the open on scrub land. It was the only way many people could attend, because the parish stretches a long distance and there is a lack of priests.



I had quite an experience when Fr. Felix was holding a funeral service for a young lad, no more than 20 years old, who was knocked down by a reckless driver and was killed. I was invited to attend and there was a black dress laid on my bed the night previous. The church was absolutely packed. In fact, they had to run around to find chairs for us. I should imagine the whole of the Salvation Army was there as the deceased had been a member. Once again, quite a few hymns and prayers and a very long address. We were invited back to the village of the boy. Somehow Fr. Felix and I got split up and I found myself in this small commune sitting with the ladies eating rice and drinking water. I was assured by the ladies that Fr. Felix would find me. He did!

The funeral lasted three days. The first day is private, the second day is for the villagers and the service, and the third day is for the family at the burial ground. Apparently, Friday is funeral day in Ghana.

On the Sunday we had yet another open air service somewhere out of town. Maybe it is held there so that the out of town villagers can attend, but this service was the longest yet – five hours! Fr. Felix spent a lot of time welcoming visitors and going through "what is coming up". This service was anointing of oil, followed by the Eucharist, but the "long" version, then followed the "washing up bowls" – in other words fund raising. Fr. Felix would start with a high amount of cedi and drop until someone comes and puts that amount called out into the "washing up" bowl and then the figure will drop little by little until everyone has donated what they are prepared to give – it was like an auction. In this instant they wanted to buy a couple of motor bikes for a priest to go visiting giving communion to the "out back" people. We both came home very tired.

I had so many wonderful moments but too many for this article. I just loved every minute of my stay and was very sorry to leave, but Fr. Felix did reassure me that I was welcomed at any time. I asked him whether I could be his secretary, but the reply was I would be too expensive! Still I did try.

Here ended my magical two weeks in Ghana. Can't wait for my next visit!

Pam Le Goaziou