



Overseas Council
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[Itinerary]

Last month, I visited five training centers that Overseas Council collaborates with on varying levels. These centers include: Evangelical Churches Winning All Theological Seminaries (ECWA) in Jos and Igbaja, Life Theological Seminary (LTS) in Lagos, the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary (NBTS) in Ogbomosho and the United Missionary Church of Africa (UMCA) in Ilorin.

[4 Things in Common]

Upon completion of this visit, I identified four strengths these schools have in common:

1. Each school has high levels of collaboration and camaraderie among the seminary leaders.
2. The academic quality is high, without the usual associated costs (in Nigeria, schools can offer PhD programs without paying to become a state-recognized university).
3. Each training center has rigorous academic qualifications for students and challenging experience qualifications for faculty.
4. Every school I visited has the capacity to respond to the training needs of this populous country (166 million) through e-learning. Life Theological Seminary (LTS) has a Theological Education by Extension program. Each school has identified e-learning as a goal to be achieved in the near future.

[Jos: ECWA Theological Seminary (JETS)]

Nigeria is a leading missionary sending country in the developing world. Nonetheless, there has been significant persecution of Christians. In Jos alone, the death of thousands, including pastors and the destruction of hundreds, even thousands of churches, have been consistent occurrences within the last decade.

This is the context in which the ECWA Theological Seminary (JETS) is found. Operation World identifies ECWA in Nigeria by stating, "The dynamic growth of the Church continues to be impressively solid. This has been among...evangelical groups such as ECWA..." It also explains that ECWA is one of the church networks that is working with the Christian Association of Nigeria to unite national Christians. It is essential that the churches in Africa work on the value of unity in Christ.

There are 29 full-time and 13 part-time faculty that teach 700 students. This training center has extension programs in five locations throughout Nigeria. They have focused programs to train administrators for the Church and other Christian organizations and a program to train agency leaders of ECWA. Their Center for the Study of Religion, Church and Society has shaped reaching unreached peoples in Nigeria. Operation World gave credit to this school for their participation as a "major research partner on the unreached in Nigeria: of 168 least-reached peoples in Nigeria, every group has been adopted for prayer and outreach." Since inception, this program has planted 200 churches with alumni of JETS. Students are also involved in this program through prison ministry and the film and theatre ministry. The seminary also offers computer training to the community and has attracted a lot of community attention through the launch of the HIV/AIDS screening and counseling clinic (the average life span in Nigeria is 47.7 years, according to Operation World). This is one of those schools that you can see has a larger perspective, making impact on its greater community today.

[Igbaja: ECWA Theological Seminary (ETSI)]

In Igbaja, ECWA has another theological seminary. There are 24 full-time and 15 adjunct professors that teach 700 students. Of this faculty, Dr. Stephen Baba is a recent PhD graduate that benefited from Overseas Council Professional Development funding. He recently published a book, "History and principles of Biblical Hermeneutics for Beginners." They have 200 students that attend their summer program and five extension programs with a total of 200 students. There are still at least 50-60 people groups in this area of Nigeria that are difficult to reach with the Gospel. It is pivotal that these programs exist to minister to these groups.

[Lagos: Life Theological Seminary (LTS)]

In Lagos, rural areas lack dedicated pastors because of the relative poverty. Life Theological Seminary (LTS) is training Christians to meet this need. This is an interdenominational Pentecostal seminary that is sponsored by Foursquare Gospel Church in Nigeria. Students come from at least 10 churches and denominations throughout Nigeria and surrounding countries. There are 21 faculty members at this training center with 550 students (200 of which are female). The campus church is pastored by the Provost who considers this role as an opportunity to model pastoral leadership to the student community.

52% of the budget for this training center is locally raised. They have a clear plan for sustainability, and they have purchased land to start a private Christian school to meet the growing needs for private high school education in Lagos. The center currently runs a preschool. With a Theological Education by Extension program, sustainable models in place and the recent land purchase, I am encouraged and excited to see the continued impact LTS has on the larger Lagos society.

[Ogbomoso: Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary (NBTS)]

This is one of the oldest seminaries in the country. Started in 1885, this is the main training program for the Nigerian Baptist Union. Over 50% of the students are from the Baptist denomination. In this training center, 19 faculty train over 800 students. There are also 10 affiliate Baptist denomination Bible colleges that collaborate with the school, training 100 students each, raising the total students to at least 1,800.

This school is working through the challenges of sustainability in innovative, income-generating ways. I am energized to continue to come alongside them and help in this process.

[Ilorin: United Missionary Church of Africa (UMCA)]

This training center is found in a predominantly Muslim city and is the only seminary found there. It is strategic to outreach in the city. UMCA is the main training institution in the denomination that offers higher degrees. They are already in the process of introducing evening classes. There are 18 full-time and 17 adjunct faculty that train 600 students, 50% of which are from Pentecostal or Charismatic churches. We are looking into ways to partner in faculty PhD studies as well.

[Conclusion]

This was a successful trip, and it encouraged me to see the work being done to train effective Christian leaders who minister to the local Church and society. I continue to draw your eye to the faithful faculty in these schools, working hard to train a significant number of students compared to the ratio of faculty to students in other regions of the world. Praise God for His work in this region!

If you would like to get involved in our work in Africa, please contact us at www.overseas.org or email us at jsamples@overseas.org.