

The Beloved Missionary School



Jim Smith

The beginning

Some years ago now, two experiences brought the Beloved Missionary school into being as a vision and a hope.

I am Precious

One day, Mary Smith, co - leader of our African work, was sitting in Blessing Church - one of our churches on our base in Ghana. As she sat there, she became aware of a tiny black figure who had crept into the church, and now sat beside her. Nothing was said, but as Mary reached out her hand to touch the little black child, she touched Mary's white hand over and over again. Then she said "I am Precious and I am four!" and skipped away.

Later as Mary was thinking about this she had a strange vision. "I found myself in the Lord's presence, and Precious was beside me, holding my hand. Precious said to the Lord " Can I have a school?" The Lord looked with love on her and said "Yes.!"

I want a school built right there!

Across from Blessing church on our base is the Servant House, where, along with other team members, Mary and I live. We have a small balcony outside our window. This is quite common in Africa. It keeps the scorching sun out of our rooms and makes it a little easier to live. One day I was standing on the balcony, looking across the base to the surrounding land. My eye was drawn to one small area, just a few hundred metres away. As I looked I heard the Lord speak into my heart. "I want you to build a school there."

But I knew that what he was asking was impossible. All the land around us had been sold a long time ago to Developers (and sadly also Speculators.) There was no hope of getting any land.

As I was thinking about this, Paul, a Ghanaian and our base leader came out onto the balcony. "By the way" he said. "Did I tell you about the man who farmed our land before we bought it? He owns two plots of land and he wants to sell them." "Where are they?" I asked. He pointed to a spot a few hundred yards away and said "Right there." He pointed to the very spot I had been looking at when the Lord spoke to me.

Later that day we put these two experiences together, and it was very clear what we had to do - build a school.

We wanted to name our new “vision”, and we chose a name which we felt reflected the Lord and his love for Ghana. And so “The Beloved Missionary School” came into being - a name which we have grown to love deeply as we began to make our plans.

The beginning

None of us had any experience of this size of project. Fortunately all the building plans would be taken care of by our architect, who was also a great friend and who shared our vision. But what was our vision?

The best thing to do was to ask the One who had given the vision in the first place. We did this over a long period and certain things began to emerge:-

*** Serve Ghana**

“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.”

When I started the work in Ghana, over 30 years ago, I only had a dim idea of what I wanted to start. But one thing was very clear to me. It had to have at its heart the willingness not to be great but to serve. It wasn't long before I had found the title for my work- the Serving Africa Mission. I knew that it is only as we serve Ghana that Ghana can grow great. If we want to grow great, our land will stay small.

This is a key principle in all we do, and our school fits well into this principle.

Ghana, like so many African countries is very short of many skills - in medicine, in business, in education, in commerce, in politics, in the economy, in the civil service and in Government. It isn't that there are not the people to do the jobs, but so many of them emigrate to the West, where they see opportunities are better and the standard of living they can have is better.

We all understand this, but it robs Ghana of what it needs – its own people to serve the Nation so that Nation and people together can rise up. I see that in the area of national responsibility, Ghanaians have a selfish streak, which blinds them to their responsibilities to lift their own land, even if this involved personal sacrifice. Or perhaps they are just so hungry for what the West can give them that they forget their beloved nation and its needs and aspirations. Or perhaps they have not been shown their responsibilities and opportunities.

Ask what you can do for your country

A nation only grows strong as its citizens give to it. President Kennedy set the standard at his inaugural address in 1961 - "Ask not what your country can do for you but ask what you can do for your country."

So we have made this a key foundation principle of the school. We have added to our school name the words "to serve Ghana." We want every child to know that the Nation comes first, and they they have the opportunity to effect the destiny of their whole generation and generations to come. But they must put service to the Nation as their goal.

Does this mean they cannot come to the West? Of course not. The West can help them develop many skills, but their heart must be to return to their own land to serve their own land. But will they come back, or be sucked into Western ways of thinking and behaving, drowned by the material desires of so many people and nations?

If the call of Ghana is in them and on them, many of them will return. It's easy to be cynical, but the call to serve a land is powerful - it has brought me back to Ghana over and over again for 30 years. If we build it in from the very outset, we can surely do it.

*** Under the covering**

He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.

This verse is the basis for a very popular Christian song. It contains a very precious truth - we all live under the banner of the Lord's love. It flies over us, giving us security, a sense of belonging and hope for the future.

Our school needs this covering. Its students and staff need to know the security, the love and the opportunity which the Lord gives. It has to be watched over by someone. So we have designed it with a church teaching centre on the top floor. There we will run our teaching courses for Pastors and leaders, as well as meetings for worship and prayer. The vision for this is simple. The church will be on the top floor, training, studying and learning. This spiritual work will "cover" the school busy working beneath it. The school will be under the rainbow of worship, teaching and prayer flowing from God's people.

We hope and believe that this will shape the atmosphere of school, and help the students grow in their Christian faith.

Christian school

We are a Missionary school, and so the school will have a strong Christian emphasis, but this does not close the school to those of other faiths or no faith. Should students be in these categories they will of course be welcomed and loved, but the parent will have to accept our Christian foundation and emphasis, or go elsewhere. In my experience, this has never presented a problem in Ghana, where we have all learnt to live together, whatever our background.

The Ark

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

"Let the children come to me" said Jesus, and that is exactly how we see the school. It is a place where the children can come to Jesus. We have our own way of doing this.

A few years ago, we started a small work on our base, called the "Ark." It was to be a meeting for children - mostly quite young. Our idea was that these children would run the meetings in the Ark. They would lead the singing, do the preaching and teaching, lead the prayers and handle the money. It seemed crazy at the time, but it has worked really well. Some of the children who started in the Ark are now in our adult church and will move into ministry when they have finished their education. One of them is our Youth Pastor.

We want to apply this principle to the school. We have land next to the school where we will build the Ark Church. Every day, some of the children will come to worship, led by themselves. Over a year, many of them will preach, lead singing and lead prayers. We hope that this will give many of them a new confidence, and bring some into full time ministry - anywhere in Ghana. Most of all, it will give them the feeling that they can take responsibility for the future of the work - physical and spiritual, in Ghana.

Kindergarten

As we began to plan for the school, we realised that we were missing out on the youngest children. So linked to the school is our Kindergarten, which will be tucked into Lydia House, the largest building on our base. Here we can love and serve the tiny ones, and surround them with the atmosphere which we believe will be in the Beloved School. The Kindergarten will be inside our base, which means we will have the joy of seeing and hearing the children every day - an extra blessing to us.

Parents

Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them.

The Lord blessed the children, and we can have little doubt that he blessed the parents and the whole family as well. That was always his way - he never restricted his blessings. So when we come to begin our school and Kindergarten work, we have to take the same position.

Our work in Ghana has a strong emphasis on community. So serving and involving the children will include serving and involving the parents. We, like the Lord, will not restrict our concern or our help. The Kindergarten and the school will each have Pastors which we train, and their task will be to build relationships and friendships with the parents, so that we are helping and involved with the whole family. How this works out in practice we have yet to see, but it is an important part of our vision.

The Shelter

**"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened,
and I will give you rest.**

The Shelter is part of our work with children and the young. We became aware, as a Mission that there were vulnerable children in our area for which there was no place for them to go - especially at night. So we have built into our Ruth House project two rooms where such children can spend the night in safety and out of the weather. This is not strictly part of our school work, but I suspect it will get drawn in to it as some of these vulnerable children will need school places. We have a small foundation "The Ruth House Foundation" which is able to pay the fees for a few children for a short period, and we will use it to help these vulnerable ones.

We have yet to see what our responsibility will be for children – from the Shelter upwards - who might have medical needs. It's easy to think that this is someone else's responsibility, but when a child is sick, it is not possible for the Mission to ignore them. There will also be the need for clothes and food. The need is endless. We will do what we can.

So far...

We have done a lot of thinking on our principles, because we believe that good principles will produce a good and lasting work. We have also made a start. Our Architect has given us a plan, and we have bought the land and completed the foundations of the school. We have changed the interior of Lydia House to accommodate the Kindergarten, and we hope to open somewhen in 2018. The Shelter is built. We are in touch with the Ghana Education Authority and our local planning body. We, as of the end of 2017, are looking for our first teacher.

African work

Ghana is a modern democracy, but it does things in an African way. This is often unclear to western people and agencies. For us, time is flexible. People matter more than programmes and timetables. Events touch our lives deeply, and every timetable or strategy has to consider funerals, marriages and births. Money is often short, and school attendance is disturbed by this, but we have to be realistic and accept this fact.

Children matter to Africa immensely. Every family wants children, and the failure to conceive, or the all too frequent loss of children at birth, is a great heartache for all of society.

Ghana is changing, but there is still a great respect for the traditions of the past, and we hold on to these as precious jewels handed to us by our forefathers and foremothers. To throw away our heritage is inconceivable to us.

The Beloved School is planted among this culture, and will live and grow as an African school, not a Western one. Our focus on serving Ghana will flow from the great tradition we have been handed, and which we in turn must hand on. The sacrifices of the people of the past for our freedom will motivate us to similar sacrifices for those who come after us.

Prayer alone

The Serving Africa Mission has never and will never ask for money. All our accounts are properly audited and lodged with the Charity Commission and are on our website. We are not foolish with money, but we never ask for it. We believe the money comes to us by prayer alone. This principle has carried the work through 30 years of ministry, and will carry us on to the completion of the school and beyond.

Reflection

Being a Christian mission we obviously see the events described earlier as our mandate to build the school. This motivates us, but so do the needs of Ghana. Ghana, like so many African countries, needs all the help it can get, and providing our Shelter/Kindergarten/School is our way of offering the serving heart of the Lord to this land. Some might argue that we should be doing this for our home nations. Maybe, but the Lord has called us here and is speaking to us here, in this situation. Providing a good education for generations of African children, with a strong emphasis on national responsibility is something we feel is strongly in the heart of the Lord, and in our own hearts as well.

The obstacles are huge, but as a Mission we have never focused on the problems, but on the call. If this project is God's gift to Ghana, then it will not fail, and we have the privilege of being the agents by which it comes into being. We will never give in and we will never give up until it is done.

This is the way

Mary and I went to a meeting in a church in the West, and they had asked us to speak about the school. So Mary and I spoke about Precious and the other children on our base - Michael, Barimah, David and Aseda. We showed the lovely natures of these children, and their need to be given a good education for their own development as people. We spoke for nearly an hour, explained that this would come into being by prayer alone, and then left.

Later that week I received this letter.

"Dear Jim. I came to your meeting about your school last week. I was dragged along by my wife. I said to her "It will just be another of those groups begging for money." But I came.

It was very interesting, but I waited for the financial plea and none came! You just said "God will surely do it if we pray" and that was that!

I have never heard such a thing before. I was deeply impressed - by the children you spoke of and your obvious commitment to prayer alone. I want to be part of this. My cheque towards your school is enclosed."

This is the way, and for us the only way. This man gave out of love, not out of begging, pleading or manipulation. This is how the finance is coming, and long may it continue. The school stands on the loving hearts of many ordinary people who just want Precious, Michael, Barimah, David, Aseda and all the others to have something better.

Africa says "Thank you."

Practical details

* The Mission has its own website:-

www.servingafrica-mission.org

* The Mission is registered as the TAKK TRUST with the Charity Commission. Go to their site (www.charitycommission.org) and search for us with the number 290753.

There you can see our accounts, reports and details of trustees.

DAVID SMITH is the chair of the Trust, and is happy to answer any questions people might prefer to ask someone who is not employed by the Mission. (smithy@btinternet.com) If people have no internet access, then contact me and I will forward you to David.

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January 2018

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