

Letter from Africa

by Riley and Duncan Murdock

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Hey everyone! If you are reading this, you are probably in church. Are you in a building, sitting with your friends in Sunday School? Did you come with your parents in a car? Why don't you come to church with me today?

But let me ask you something first. In the US, people spend most of their time inside, don't they? Let's think: people are in school, in church, an office, a store, at home, in a car – where else? Well here, most people usually only go inside a building to sleep. The rest of the time they are outside – kitchens, latrines and showers are all outside. So it makes sense that often a church meets outside too, under a tree, especially a new church. Most eventually build a chapel, but personally, I prefer the tree. It's cooler than a building, it's pretty, you get chickens, dogs, goats and pigs wandering by, and (I confess) if I get a little bored because I can't understand what is going on, I can slip off to the side and play in the dirt.

Ok, so let's go! First, we get into our big red truck with all the young people who live on our compound (students and girls who had to leave home to avoid forced marriage), some of our workers and their kids, and some people from the neighborhood who like to come. Today this makes 30 people! I like to ride in the back of the truck. We drive down the road for about 10 minutes till we get to the little village of Sépunga, then we all pile out and gather under a big tree. There are some benches made of thin logs formed into a circle, but many of us have brought our own stools.

It's more comfortable, plus there are not enough benches for everyone. There is an old car part suspended from one of the tree branches, and this is the "bell" to let people in the village know church is starting, since there is no regular starting time (it depends on the weather



and no one has watches anyway). People start walking from their huts to the tree, some carrying stools or chairs, and a number of kids come on their own since their parents don't



attend. We start with a prayer, then some singing. A woman leads out, and people join in, repeating her phrases (of course there are no songbooks or overheads). There is a lot of clapping, and sometimes dancing. When it is time for the offering, someone puts a little plastic bowl in the middle of the circle, and people go up singing and put coins in. They pray for the offering, then there is a sermon, at which point all the kids go off to another tree for Sunday school. Not all of the MOJ churches have Sunday school, so we are fortunate – and that is one reason there are so many kids coming to this church. There are 30 kids there. Our teacher, Lakwargou, reads us a story about Jesus calling the 12 disciples



and shows us pictures. We usually do a memory verse (in Byali, which I don't understand) and sing, then we play games. Meanwhile, the adults listen to a sermon about who God is, followed by Q&A, and afterwards the leaders pray for those who are

sick. (Once I went up and prayed for people with my dad, and that was really cool.) Now that we are done with the service, everyone goes around and shakes hands, saying “bonne prière,” or, in Byali, “de te yanto” – which



literally means “good prayer,”

but really means something like, “we had a rockin’ good time!”

As I said, only a few of our churches have Sunday school for kids. We’re trying to get more started – please pray that more people will realize how important it is to teach kids, and that they can learn how to relate and teach on a kid level. They need to be pretty creative, since we don’t have craft supplies like paper, crayons, glue, scissors, books, etc, and they have never learned creativity in the classroom.

Soon we will be joining you in your church! Don’t mind me if I shake your hand afterwards and say, “we had a rockin’ good time!”

Quiz

1. Where do people spend most of their time here?
2. Where do churches meet?
3. Does our church service sound like yours? What are the similarities and differences?
4. How can you pray for the kids in our churches?

Trivia question: Which of these things can you buy for a dollar here? (Circle your guesses)

- 1 Snickers bar
- 1 pound of beef
- 10 2nd hand shirts
- 5 huge mangoes

- 2 ½ cups of gasoline
- 1 postage stamp for a letter to the US
- 1 bar of imported soap
- 1 large meal from street vendors

Answers: each thing costs a dollar



