

## **Should I Stay or Should I Go?**

## **Schultes' West Africa Witness - February 2019**

Back in the early 80's, the Clash had a hit with the song, 'Should I Stay or Should I Go?', which is about a man debating with himself whether or not to leave his girlfriend. The refrain of that silly little ditty has been bouncing around in my head for the better part of 18 months. Why?... Because we love our host country Burkina Faso and its gentle people so much, but we've also been watching the deadly menace of militant Islam steadily increase in this poor, struggling nation. We actually sent out a newsletter last year telling everyone we were going. Then we went back on the decision... Aw, it's not so bad.... We should stay...

However, by the time we left for our home service last October, it was back to, "Nah, we should go..." The plan agreed upon with the Office of International Mission was that we would affect the world's slowest evacuation. As always, we had a ton of travel lined up already for the first half of 2019 anyway. After all of the crazy Stateside travel during our Fall/Winter home service, we purposely scheduled 6 straight weeks in our Ouagadougou home to begin our re-deployment, where we could have a sense of being home for just a little while and both catch up on the administrative part of our jobs before heading to Côte d'Ivoire and Togo in February; to Ghana and Taiwan in March; to Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Togo again in April; to Sierra Leone in May; to the US for the LWML Convention in June, and to the Congo and to the States again for the Synod Convention in July. Somewhere in all of that, we've also been talking about plugging in a trip to Dakar, Senegal, to check out our probable new home base before moving there in perhaps August.

Well, as it so often turns out, the Lord had other plans. Two days before the end of our six weeks at home in Ouagadougou and our planned departure for Côte d'Ivoire, it became quite clear that we would need to return to the States immediately to deal with an urgent family matter. I want to thank my boss, OIM Executive Director Rev. Daniel McMiller, by the way, for being so gracious to us and encouraging us to get on the soonest available flights to St. Louis. So that is what we have done. We've had to cancel our trips to Côte d'Ivoire, Togo and Ghana in the coming weeks. A mere four days after our arrival in St. Louis, we met with Rev. McMiller and his boss, Rev. Kevin Robson.

We all decided together that this trial coming upon our family may also be the Lord's way of telling us that we should indeed go, in spite of our wanting to stay so much; that we maybe shouldn't run out the string in Ouagadougou as the situation on the ground there gets increasingly dangerous; that we should go "now, now", as they say in Africa! So the plan is for me as Area Director and Steph as Mercy Medical Coordinator to do our work for the next few months from a base in St. Louis, rather than in Africa. I will pick up my travels again with the Operations meeting in Taiwan in March and then everything else that follows; beginning with my first trip to visit the Church in Nigeria. Steph will jump back into the fray with the MMT preparation trip to Sierra Leone in early April. And we will indeed plug in a visit to Dakar to hopefully find a home and only return to our beloved Ouagadougou, perhaps in August, to pack up our things and have them shipped. We shall never live there again.

"Should I stay, Lord?", says I. "No, you should go," He says, "but before you do go for good, I'm going to make sure to be especially gracious to you during your last weeks in Ouagadougou." We had two of

our sons visit us during our final days in our home there! Jeff actually traveled back with us from our home service to spend 12 days with us in January. Then, in early February, our Air Force C-130 pilot son, Tom, came down with an international military contingent doing six weeks of exercises under the code name Flintlock to combat the scourge of militant Islam. We could not be prouder! Among the thousands of troops involved, his Air Force group from Ramstein Air Force base in Germany numbers about 80. We were pleased to be able to help about half of them acquire SIM cards and data for their phones. And, among all those people, Tom was the only one in his group allowed to leave the security of the hotel when he wasn't flying. He actually spent three nights in our house before we were suddenly called home to St. Louis. He is actually still in Ouagadougou as I write this. Go get'em, Tom!

I tell you, life sure throws you a lot of curves! So much so that it makes you feel at times a bit like the Apostle Paul, who basically mused in Philippians 1:23, "Should I stay or should I go?" Unlike Steph and me in our current circumstance, Paul decided that he should stay because there was still so much work to be done. Indeed, there is! By His grace, we will still be about it, just not in the exact way we planned. In the meantime, Steph and I would both appreciate your prayers for our family! Thank you for those prayers and thank you for your support!

