



The West Africa Witness

Witness Mercy Life Together Witness Mercy Life Together Witness Mercy Life Together
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Praise God that we are finally settled into our new Central African life!

Ask God to bless the February meeting of missionaries and francophone Church leaders who send men to the seminary in Togo for training.

Ask God to bless Steph as she teaches the wives of the Togo Seminary students on Hygiene and Sanitation while the men are meeting.

Praise God for a quiet month and a half for us to settle in.

Ask for His protection as we begin to travel again.

Well, This is a Lot Different!..

Dear Christian friends and ministry partners,



Nearly 10 months to the day after leaving our home in Ouagadougou, we finally settled in our 5th floor downtown Brazzaville apartment on December 13th. Steph was already off, only 36 hours in, to the Czech Republic for a week to present at a short-term team organizers' conference. So it was a wee bit lonely in my new world for a while! I settled in to live the simple life with a foam mattress and a desk and chair I had delivered the second day. A day after Steph returned, our daughter Ariana arrived for a two-week Christmas visit and we all lived the simple life together until happily our household goods were finally released from the port and delivered to the apartment on December 30th.

Many folks think of Africa as one country; not realizing how massive the continent really is – more than 3 times as large as our lower 48! It's a lot different down in these parts, I'll tell you! Here are just a few of the ways...

Apartment vs. House

We've left behind our West African villa with a yard and a dog on the rural edge of Ouagadougou for a fifth floor modern efficiency apartment smack in the middle of downtown Brazza - 5 minutes from both the airport and the Mighty Congo River. This will be fantastic with all the traveling we do, but, man is it different from anything we've ever known in Africa the past 18 years!



Green vs. Brown

Burkina Faso is flat and sits in the Sahel region, which is sparse and has nothing but 50 shades of brown. The Congo has rich soil, forestland, beautiful mountains, and is 100 shades of rich deep green!

Temperate vs. Hot

Brazzaville sits at only 4 degrees south of the equator, while Ouagadougou sits at 12 degrees north. However, the average temperatures here are much more moderate because, I think, the city also sits at an altitude of over 1,100 feet. And the humidity is nothing like the pea soup of the West African coastal capitals or even St. Louis in the summer!

Gorillas in the Mist vs. Elephants in the Dust

Don't get me wrong. Central Africa has everything in terms of flora and fauna, but it also the only place in the world that has gorillas! So we were quick to take Ariana on a day trip to go see some. Amazing creatures – many of whom live a mere 2-hour drive from the capital!

**Crazy Expensive vs. Expensive Airfare**

Even though Brazza is a much more developed city with a much more modern airport, airfare to fly to Europe and the States tends to be extraordinarily high. In fact, for our first trip back to the States for meetings, we are taking a regional airline to Dakar and flying to the US from there. Each time we travel off the continent, we will be looking at fares from Nairobi and all the West African capitals.

Expats vs. Very Few Expats

When we registered at the US embassy the other day, the Frenchman who was handling it told us there are very few Americans in the Congo. In fact, we never saw an American at the Embassy! There just aren't very many Western expats in the country at all. We've walked all over this down and we are pretty much the only people like us we ever see. We only see the occasional European in the big stores or restaurants.

Controlled vs. Random

The Republic of Congo has a very small (only around 4 million) and much more homogeneous population. Possibly as a result, society (in Congo-Brazzaville at least, maybe not the DRC) appears to have much more top-down nanny-like control than the much more random West African societies, which makes things kind of nice for the Westerner.

**Traffic**

In Ouagadougou, the motos fly at you like swarms of mosquitoes and there are few paved roads. Here there are almost no motos on the roads, most are paved, and really there are very few cars at all! And 90% of those are well kept green taxis that can easily take you anywhere! It's wonderful!

Clean Streets

Everywhere you go, you see city crews cleaning the streets and dumpsters and trash cans on every corner. Brazzaville is amazingly clean! In West Africa, they tend to throw trash everywhere.

Fixed Prices (taxis, market goods)

West Africa is a barter society through and through. Here they have government-controlled fixed prices on everything. Every taxi ride in the city is 1,000 francs. Fruits and vegetables have fixed and very visibly posted prices. It's great for us foreigners, but I wonder how good it is for the locals. It also took us

more than a week just to figure out where to buy fruits and vegetables. They are at stands on every corner in Ouagadougou! In Brazzaville, you can only buy them at 2 government-designated mass open markets. We replaced the convenience of randomness, for the hassle of order. It's certainly a mixed blessing!

Wealth vs. Poverty

The Congo has vast amounts of petroleum and mineral wealth. It's not distributed very well, but the people here do still tend to be much more wealthy and educated than the people of West Africa. For example, almost all of our neighbors in these nice apartments are Africans who have nice cars parked outside. Only the very wealthy in West Africa live like that! It almost appears that they have something of a middle class here, which is non-existent in West Africa!

Unplanted vs. Planted Church

And last, but not least, is the local Church. God's Church here too tends to be more wealthy and educated and, for that reason, I think, has exhibited a lot less tendency toward dependency. A few of the top leaders are very strong theologians! In fact, I'm hoping the teachers of the African Church, who will allow us missionaries to go home, will come from Central Africa eventually. The LCMS also did not plant this Church. Various European Lutherans did that. I guess the LCMS didn't come here because it seems like no Americans ever come to this part of Africa! Lol

As different as Central Africa is from West Africa, they all still very much need the same God! The low population is due at least in part to the displacement of hundreds of thousands during a three-year civil war that started in 1998. It's mostly Roman Catholic here. In fact, one of the reasons we settled here is that the Republic of Congo is about the only remaining African country with virtually no Muslims in residence. However, the Catholicism practiced here is only skin deep and mixed with all kinds of Africa paganism and a large strand of European Freemasonry. Please pray for us and for God's Church here as we begin this new phase of ministry. Man, is it different!



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