

There's a place in our house for you!

Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire – We visited our pastors in the Cote d'Ivoire again recently. We were there with a small team from our church, five of us all together. What an amazing trip ... and in many ways a VERY challenging trip. And yet God met us there.



We stayed in the jungle, not because we HAD to. We wanted to. We want to understand how they really live. The inside of a hotel looks the same in virtually every country. Dakoupleu, the village that would become our home for two weeks, is an 8-10 hour drive from Abidjan, depending on traffic, road conditions, weather and the dependability of the vehicle, not to mention the driver, his skill, nerve and craziness! All these conditions rated somewhere between poor to mediocre, except for the vehicle. It left MUCH to be desired! It was an old white van, pretty on the outside and pretty BAD on the inside.

The van had three breakdowns on the way, stretching our 10 hours trip to around 34 hours! First it was a break line leak. Then it was a drive shaft that went kaput. Then, while driving in the rain, fog and dark, we hit a deep pothole at 60 mph and destroyed a tire!

When the drive shaft gave up the ghost, it was in the early evening, out in the middle of nowhere. Actually there "happened" to be a tiny village right there where our vehicle came to a sudden stand-still. Several of the villagers came out to greet us and offered to help. One of them had a "make-shift" solution. Seemed to work. So we thanked him and went on our way. Sadly, we only got 500 yards down the road, before the make-shift repair didn't make shift anymore. We painfully pushed the van back to the village. The vehicle would need a new part, meaning that our leader would need to hitch-hike to the next "bigger" village in search of the appropriate part. By this time, it was dark. Our African team leader went to the village chief and asked



if we could park our van and stay the night. The chief accepted without hesitation.



Next thing we know, there's a family in the village who is welcoming us to stay with them! A couple years ago, when we visited this country the first time, the Ivoirians kept greeting us with an expression in French, which translates to, "There's a place in our house for you." I found out that this is a traditional greeting for welcoming strangers. At that time, I was so touch by this generous example of hospitality. On this particular evening two years later, I saw this cultural expression being lived out! These villagers didn't know us from Adam!

How could they trust complete strangers and invite us to stay the night with them?! Wow! It made me think of our expression, "They're not strangers, just friends we haven't met yet." We found out that they actually gave up THEIR OWN BEDROOMS and slept outside under the stars! There WAS place for us in their house for us ... after they had moved out! We were completely flabbergasted! Our hearts melted when we saw this sacrificial love.

Before we found our place in their house to go to bed, the woman of the house told us that they always ended the day by singing a hymn and saying a prayer and invited us to join them! What? Out in the middle of nowhere, we had fallen upon some Christian. "Oui, oui, we'd love to," I said. You know what hymn they sang? What a Friend We Have in Jesus. What a Friend We Have in Jesus! What a perfect hymn to sing, for this unexpected encounter with brand new friends in this village deep in the jungles of Africa. They had so tangibly demonstrated to us the Friendship of our Heavenly Father and His "arms-open-wide" welcome to us.



There were no beds, of course, in these "bed" rooms.

The floor was extremely hard. We honestly didn't sleep a wink that night. But we were convinced that the drive shaft problem was no accident. God wanted to show us, on this first full day of our mission trip, that He is very capable of taking care of His children.

Though exhausted, each one on the team felt so blessed by this warm welcome. It was going to be a great mission trip!

Thank you so much for your prayers and financial gifts to Praise International. There's a place for you in my house. Our Praise pastors put this proverb into practice par excellence, faithfully and fearlessly fulfilling their calling, convincingly, compassionately and consistently.

Pastor Stephan and his family in Mali. He already has a Praise sponsor. That's what they're smiling about.

I'll close with a question for you: do you have a place in your heart for these national pastors, these men and women of God? They could use your encouragement right now?

Thanks again!

Freddie L. Harris, Jr.
Executive Director
Praise International



Pastor Nicolas Kondano serves in Guinea. He has **NO** sponsor. He and his wife have **eight children**. Is there a place in your heart for this pastor, husband, & father of eight?