



the
well
is
deep

USPG Lent Bible Study 2010



Anglicans in
World Mission

Looking at the story of the
woman at the well and the work
of the Anglican Church in Ghana

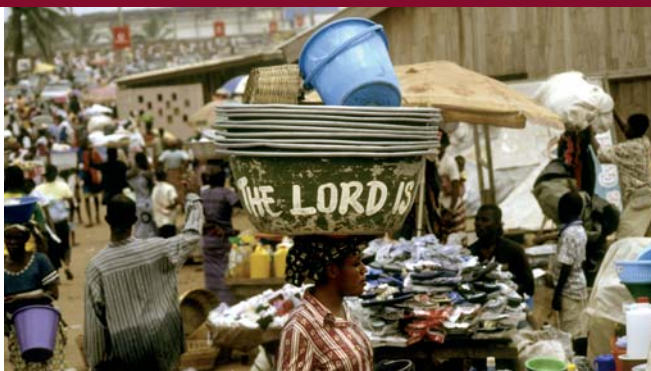
the well is deep

This Lent study course has been designed to help you delve deeper into the meaning of mission for today.

Over five weeks, we will be looking at the work of the Anglican Church in Ghana and examining the story of Jesus' meeting with the woman at the well (John 4:5-52).

The woman is a Samaritan – despised by the Jews – and, having had five husbands, we can imagine she was not highly esteemed by her own people. But Jesus treats her with utmost dignity. It is a richly layered encounter – the well it offers is indeed deep.

Through this study course, we hope you will uncover fresh insights into mission which result in a greater understanding of our Easter Saviour.



Before you begin

Each week we focus on a different verse within the New Testament passage (John 4: 5-42). However, it might be a good idea for participants to become familiar with the whole passage before beginning the course - although there will be a chance to read it as a group during the first session.

• Detailed notes for leaders by USPG's Theological Consultant Clare Amos can be found at www.uspg.org.uk

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Children play on the beach and (opposite) a busy market day, Cape Coast, Ghana.

Welcome to Ghana!

USPG first became connected with Ghana 260 years ago and since then we have supported work in a wide range of areas, including education, healthcare and training for church leaders.

So, for those of us who haven't been to Ghana, what is it like?

It is largely peaceful. Ghana has mostly avoided the civil unrest and international conflict experienced by many of its neighbours. However, the country does face challenges. Economically, it is a developing country, though the government is predicting Ghana will attain 'middle-income status' by 2015. Infrastructure is certainly improving, but standards of living are low for many and, perhaps as a consequence, crime is on the increase in some areas.

The Anglican Church is doing what it can. In particular, St Nicholas' Seminary (see week 3) is attempting to train a new generation of church leaders who are equipped to preach the gospel in an increasingly globalised and pluralistic world.

And so, despite being the smallest of the mainline churches in Ghana, the Anglican Church has positioned itself at the forefront of Ghanaian life, as it strives to live out the gospel in a fast changing and developing world.



Ghana factfile

Population:

23.9 million (UN, 2008)

Capital: Accra

Major languages:

English, African languages, including Akan, Ewe

Major religions:

Christianity (69 per cent), indigenous beliefs, Islam

Life expectancy:

60 years (UN)

Main exports:

Gold, cocoa, timber, tuna, bauxite, aluminium, manganese ore, diamonds

Anglican Church:

Ghana is part of the Church of the Province of West Africa. There are nine dioceses: Accra, Cape Coast, Ho, Koforidua, Kumasi, Sekondi, Sunyani, Tamale and Wiawso.

What is mission?



Getting started

Whatever mission is, we can probably agree it is something that happens between people, something involving God, communication and action. To get us thinking about communication, place your mobile phones in the centre of the room and briefly share your thoughts about the different ways that people communicate – and how this is changing constantly. Are all forms of communication equally effective?

View from Ghana

Since gaining independence from British rule in 1957, Ghana has earned itself a reputation for being one of Africa's most stable countries politically.

Indeed, the country is often seen as a model for reform on the continent.

However, the country also faces challenges. The Rt Revd Emmanuel Arongo, Bishop of Tamale, explained: 'Ghana is a developing country and, as such, life is not easy and has been made worse by the global recession. Food can be scarce, especially for those

who have no work. Children develop big stomachs and thin legs, and the lack of nutrition affects their school work. Fortunately, we have good drinking water through bore holes, because otherwise things would be worse.

'We have National Health Insurance, but not many can afford the insurance so they



cannot get good quality healthcare even though there are hospitals. In addition, roads and transport are poor. When women are in labour, they are often transported by donkey and cart along rough terrain from the villages to the health facility. So all these things highlight how difficult life can be for many people.'

The Anglican Church in Ghana is attempting to address these issues through a range of practical outreach programmes, and it is having a powerful impact – for

example, Bishop Emmanuel himself is personally involved as he accommodates university students who otherwise might not be able to continue their education.

The Rt Revd Daniel Sarfo, Bishop of Kumasi, commented: 'The Anglican Church is growing steadily. The worship is dynamic. We have indigenised our worship by using local languages and dialects so the people understand the liturgy and the songs – they understand everything that we do. So the

church is growing.'

He added: 'Our mission is broad, but it is the basis of the church. It is the mission of God and we are participating in it so that we live as light and salt. Wherever the church is it must have an impact on society – socially, physically, spiritually and morally – so the church is a transforming agent of society and community. We have a lot to do!'

Wherever the church is it must have an impact on society – socially, physically, spiritually and morally.

Cape Coast Castle, where slaves left for America (top), adobe housing in Tamale (below), and a shoe shop in Cape Coast (opposite page).



Discussion

- For many people, the word ‘mission’ still conjures up images of missionaries in pith helmets hacking through the jungle. What is your understanding of mission? Share some experiences you have had of ‘mission’. What was effective? What was less effective?
- What differences are there, if any, between mission and evangelism?

Using the Bible

John 4:26: ‘I am: the one who is speaking to you.’

The group might like to have a brief moment of silence to reflect on these words before continuing.



Although the phrase is half-hidden by most English translations, in verse 26 Jesus discloses his divine identity to the woman by saying ‘I am: the one who is speaking to you’. This is the first time Jesus says ‘I am’ in the Gospel of John – words which deliberately remind us of God’s self disclosure in Exodus 3:14: ‘I am who I am.’



1. Is it significant that the first time Jesus says 'I am' in this Gospel, it is linked to the phrase 'the one who is speaking to you'? What does this suggest to us about the relationship between mission and communication?

2. Look through John 4:5-42. As a whole, what does the passage suggest to you about 'what mission is'? Compile a list of suggestions offered by members of the group.

Closing prayer

Jesus, mysterious 'I am',
Word proceeding from the Father,
Underwriting all Creation,
Stretch our hearts and grant us a generous vision of
God's mission,
Enabling all to share in the graciousness of the Holy
Trinity.
Amen

For next week

Bring a photograph of your local town or village and somewhere you have visited

Where does mission happen?



Stephen and Vicky Ager on placement with USPG in Ghana.

Getting started

This week we are considering the geography of mission: where does it happen. As a visual aid, place photographs of the town or village where you live, and photographs of places you have visited overseas, in the centre of the room. What are the connections and differences that you have found between 'here' and 'there'?

View from Ghana

Steve and Vicky Ager, from Derby, said an eight-month placement with the Anglican Church in Ghana took them out of their comfort zone and gave them a fresh insight into world mission.

Their placement, in Cape Coast, was arranged through the *Experience Exchange Programme*, a programme run jointly by USPG and the Methodist Church to provide volunteers with an experience of the world church.

They were visiting a country where an estimated 69 per

cent of the population are Christians.

'It's so refreshing that people talk about God so openly,' said Steve, an architectural technician who helped with teaching at a vocational skills centre. 'Many taxis have bible quotes on the back windscreen, and many shops and businesses have



Christian references in their names, for example God's Grace Hair Salon, Pray Hard Provisions Store, and God is Good Welding.'

Steve added: 'Something I have gained on placement is a greater understanding of the struggles and difficulties faced by people in developing countries. Every day we in the west take for granted the fact that we have clean water, food to eat and electricity – but these things aren't necessarily easy to come by in Ghana.'

'I think it's important that everybody should try and understand more about different cultures and people of different faiths, something I certainly experienced while I was there.'

Vicky, an optometrist, was helping at an eye clinic. She said: 'I'm the kind of person who likes to know exactly what I am going to be doing and when – but that wasn't always the case in Ghana. I learned to accept that things can suddenly change direction at any time, and to

expect the unexpected.'

She added: 'Through my experience, I think I've gained the confidence that I can survive in unfamiliar situations and that I can be stretched by moving out of my comfort zone.'

'I volunteered because I feel privileged to have had such a comfortable life. I wanted to contribute to a community where everybody is not necessarily as fortunate as I have been.'

Something I have gained is a greater understanding of the struggles and difficulties faced by people in developing countries.



Students at Cape Coast Technical Institute.

Discussion

- Share with the group a cross-cultural experience you have had in another country, whether as part of a mission programme or not. What was the main lesson you took away from the experience?
- Consider as a group how you might use these lessons to inform how we might carry out mission at home.

Using the Bible

John 4:26: 'Jacob's well was there, and Jesus tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.'

The group might like to have a brief moment of silence to reflect on these words before continuing.

In biblical times, the well or spring was the essential focal point for the common life of a town or village. In the Old Testament it is often the place where God appears to a person – or where new relationships are forged (see, for example, Genesis 16:7; 24.11ff).

This is also true in John 4. But the time is important – normally water was drawn early in the morning or in the evening when the day was cooler; the fact that this woman was fetching water at noon was a clear sign of her exclusion from normal social life.



1. What are the equivalents in our own society of the 'well' – places where people gather and where mission can happen?
2. How do you think the woman – an outsider in many respects – would have felt during this encounter? What changed for the woman so that she felt inspired to become an agent of mission?

Closing prayer

Jesus, wellspring of our life,
 Offering your own thirst,
 In order to quench our desires and longings,
 Meet us at the centre points of our human
 existence,
 Drawing all together in the flowing stream of your
 refreshing love.
 Amen

▼ For next week

Bring a photograph of yourself or your family.

Who does mission?



St Nicholas' Seminary, in Cape Coast, and student Lovia Owusu-Aseidu.

Getting started

This week we want to think about how everyone is remarkable in God's eyes. Create a collage of faces using images of yourself of your family. Invite each member of the group to describe a remarkable person they have met and explain why they were so outstanding or unusual.

View from Ghana

At the age of 61, Lovia Owusu-Asiedu has come late to theological education. Married for 38 years, with three sons and a daughter, she was living a comfortable life, working as a midwife and helping at her church in Obuasi, when she finally felt she could no longer resist a calling to the priesthood.

She is now studying at St Nicholas' Seminary, in Cape Coast.

Lovia explained: 'I have always been involved in church. The longer I have been involved, the keener I have become, so I decided

to devote the rest of my life to the service of the church.'

Despite a strong sense of calling, Lovia said returning to college was not easy. She said: 'My children are grown up and happy, I have worked all this time, now I should be



able to sit at home! So to come to St Nicholas, to a small room with a small bed, and try to get used to seminary life – ah, that is something! But my husband and my family have been very supportive.'

Another challenge is being one of the first two women ever to be trained at the seminary. Lovia said: 'The person I have most bonded with is Hannah. We share a room, attend lectures and eat together. She is from a different part of the country;

we speak almost the same language, but our customs are a little different. She is a teacher by profession; I am a nurse.

'We have so much to talk about. And it was a joy having another woman around because the men never stopped making fun of us, asking why we were there, teasing and sometimes really arguing with us, saying that St Nicholas was not a place for women. But we coped and, gradually, they are coming to

accept us as colleagues.'

Lovia is looking forward to working as a priest in small village churches, sharing her knowledge of God and making use of her healthcare skills.

Since 1975, St Nicholas has trained over 200 priests who are now serving in parishes throughout Ghana and West Africa. Courses are specially tailored to accommodate African culture.

I have always been involved in church. The longer I have been involved, the keener I have become.

Worship at St James's Anglican Church, Elmina, and seminary student Lovia Owusu-Aseidu (opposite page).



Discussion

- Share experiences where you felt a strong call from God. Reflect as a group on whether people experience God's call in similar ways.
- Share with the group situations where you felt like an outsider. How did you react and what did you learn from the situation?

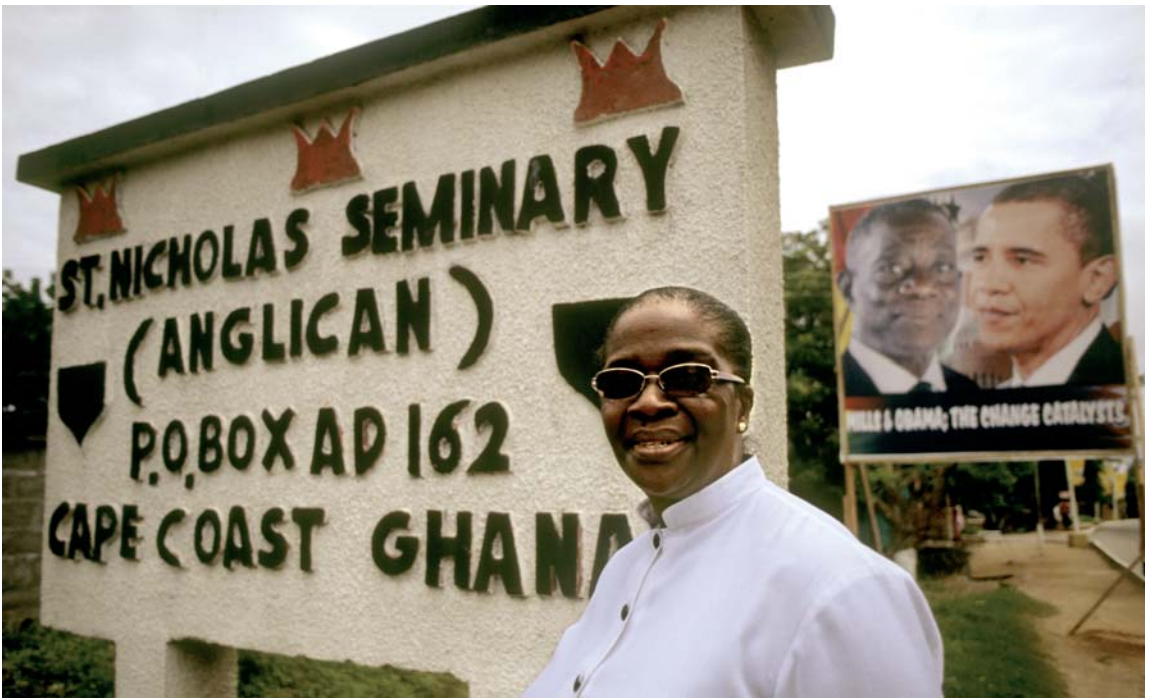
Using the Bible

John 4:39: 'Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done."'

The group might like to have a brief moment of silence to reflect on these words before continuing.

On the face of it there wasn't a more unlikely 'missionary' than this woman. Indeed the very fact that she was a woman meant that her words counted for far less than would those of a man. The disciples' astonishment when they discovered her alone

and talking to Jesus (4:27) emphasises how far she has stepped outside the traditional expectations which constrained the lives of women in biblical times – constraints which, to some extent, still exist in parts of our world today.



1. This week both the bible story and the illustration from Ghana explore the role of women in mission and ministry. Are there particular contributions that women can make, as women, to the mission of God?
2. The woman's testimony led to her fellow townspeople believing in Jesus. How far is it important, when we engage with others in God's mission, to share what God has done for us personally?

Closing prayer

Jesus, challenger and conversation partner,
You empower the unlikely and unloved,
And grant the dignity of service to both women and men.
Make us bold to bear witness to your story,
Telling how your presence gives meaning to our own lives.
Amen

For next week

Bring a cross. Look especially for crosses from around the world.

Why do we do mission?



Worship at St James's Anglican Church, Elmina.

Getting started

This week's object for reflection is a cross – or, if you have them, a selection of different crosses. Mission, if it is to be Christian mission, must at some point present both the story of the cross and explore its meaning for our world today. If you have a number of crosses, ask people to notice what is distinctive about each of them.

View from Ghana

Ghana is a peaceful country, despite a 23-million population that comprises over 60 different language and ethnic groups.

Christianity, Islam and traditional beliefs are the main religions, with Christians making up more than two-thirds of the population. Despite this rich mixture, the country has been remarkably trouble-free. According to the website of the Anglican Communion's Network for Inter Faith Concerns (NIFCON): 'At all levels,

Christians and Muslims mix and do things in common, right from the family to national levels. Christians and Muslims attend each other's religious festivals and services. Muslims ask for and appreciate Christian prayers offered in the name of Jesus! Similarly, Muslims offer prayers for political leaders irrespective of their religious affiliation.'



One reason why Ghana has avoided major conflicts, such as those faced by some of its neighbours, could be due to how Ghana came to independence in 1957, with the country's leaders endeavouring to unite all tribes and religions under one banner. The national football team, the Black Stars, became a highly visible symbol of this goal of unity, with players not being discriminated against on tribal or religious grounds.

Where conflict has occurred, religion was rarely the major

factor – but rather ethnic and cultural issues were the main consideration. For example, British colonialism brought Christianity and a better standard of education to the south, but it neglected the north; and a British policy of indirect rule in the north placed Muslim leaders over non-Muslim groups, generating resentment.

The Revd John Azumah, a Presbyterian minister who advised the Christian Council of Ghana on Christian-Muslim relations, said: 'Generally there have been

very good relations between Christians and Muslims.'

Mr Azumah said a few incidents of conflict over the last couple of decades 'had more to do with money, power and personality' than with religious differences.

He added: 'The message given by Christian leaders has consistently been one of reconciliation. Our message is the Good News – something that brings people into relationship with each other and with God.'

The message given by Christian leaders has consistently been one of reconciliation.



Crucifix in St Monica's Chapel, Kumasi (above), and a mosque in Cape Coast

Discussion

- Try describing to the group any incidents in which you feel you were able to learn from an encounter with people of another group or faith. How did this encounter change your perspective of this other group?
- What do you think is the aim of mission – what is the end result you would like to see?

Using the Bible

John 4:9: 'The Samaritan woman said to Jesus, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?"'

The group might like to have a brief moment of silence to reflect on these words before continuing.



In New Testament times the barrier between Jews and Samaritans was unyielding. Both regarded the other as fundamentally unclean, despite the fact that their religious beliefs were similar. So Jesus' engagement with a woman from a rival group is an example of the gospel of



reconciliation (see 2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

1. Why do you think hostility exists between people of different religious traditions? How can these hostilities be resolved?
2. In mission today, what barriers or walls do you think it is especially important to try and break down?

Closing prayer

Jesus, Jewish stranger,
Reconciling this world to God,
Building bridges to span our abysses of human
hatred,
Help us to hold out our hands in greeting and
welcome,
To reach across the boundaries imposed by culture
or convention.
Amen

▼ For next week

A member of the group is invited to bring a globe or map of the world.

How do we do mission?



Elijah Alhassan Yakubu, a catechist trained with USPG funding, in Tamale.

Getting started

Place a globe or a map of the world in the centre of the room. This will serve as a reminder that mission concerns the whole world and that Jesus had all people in mind throughout his ministry. Discuss briefly in the group whether the modern 'globalised' world is something you find inspiring or bewildering; do you feel better connected or does it make you feel insignificant?

View from Ghana

The work of the Anglican Church in Ghana is varied, including projects focusing on healthcare, theological training, child trafficking and income-generation.

This work is carried out despite obstacles typical of a developing country. One particular challenge is a lack of priests, which means the church relies heavily on lay ministers – also known as catechists – such as Elijah Yakubu, aged 33, who is married with a daughter and teaches agricultural science at an Anglican school.

'I serve as a link between the parishioners and the priest,' he explained. 'I preach, organise bible studies and hold prayer meetings. I also visit parishioners, especially the sick, when the priest is not around.'

The catechists are dedicated. To reach remote congregations, they will



often walk many miles without complaint.

'All the catechists are voluntary workers in the vineyard of the Lord,' said Elijah. 'The reward is not in monetary gain but in the blessings of God, and that makes us happy even though we are poor.'

The Rt Revd Emmanuel Arongo, Bishop of Tamale, commented: 'The catechists are the foot soldiers of the church. We are so proud of them because they offer their lives to Jesus Christ.'

He added: 'My hope for the people of the diocese is that they will grow richer and richer in spirit, so they can have the hope that God is always with them.'

The Revd Francis Sencherey expressed a similar sentiment. He is the chaplain at Mampong Babies' Home, run by the Diocese of Kumasi. In a country in which one in ten children do not reach their fifth birthday, Mampong looks after orphan children during their early most-vulnerable years,

before returning them to their extended families. [In Africa, children are classified as orphans if they have lost one parent.]

'If it were not for the home, most of these children would not survive,' said the chaplain. He added: 'The care of children is a very important part of mission. It is like caring for a seedling. You incubate life and give life an opportunity to mature and grow into the life it can be.'

The reward is not in monetary gain but in the blessings of God, and that makes us happy even though we are poor.

USPG-supported Mampong Babies Home, in the Diocese of Kumasi.



Discussion

- Share with the group some of the difficulties you have faced in trying to live the Christian life and witness to Christ. In such circumstances, what inspires you to keep going?
- We each have different skills and personalities. What is the best way to discover your personal 'style' or 'place' in mission?

Using the Bible

John 4:42: 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the World.'

The group might like to have a brief moment of silence to reflect on these words before continuing.

Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well touches on many issues: the need for water and food, gender issues, the role of the outsider, a debate about tradition, the need for reconciliation. So when the passage concludes with a

declaration that Jesus is the 'Saviour of the World', the nature of this salvation must be broad, with physical and spiritual dimensions. Such salvation comes with a price: the meeting takes place at noon (v6) – perhaps the writer had in mind another



noonide when Jesus was thirsty, on a cross in Jerusalem.

1. What does it mean for you to call Jesus 'Saviour of the World'?
2. As Holy Week approaches and we reflect on Jesus' suffering, what do you think would make Jesus thirsty in our world today? How can we help to quench his thirst?

Closing prayer

Jesus, Saviour of the World,
Lord of all Creation, yet also intimate friend,
Offering nourishment for body and soul.
Travel with us in the coming weeks and months,
As we seek to reflect the healing glory your cross offers this earth.
Amen

Travel with us in the coming weeks and months, As we seek to reflect the healing glory your cross offers this earth.

Further resources

- **Background material** for this study course can be found at www.uspg.org.uk, including commentary notes and imaginative retellings of John 4:5-52 from the point of view of different characters. Written by Clare Amos, USPG's theological consultant and Director of Theological Studies for the Anglican Communion Office.
- **DVD:** Features a short film and a PowerPoint talk looking at the Anglican Church in Ghana.
- **Photo exhibition:** *Life in Ghana*, available for hire.
- **Book:** A collection of reflections for every day of Lent, written by Bishop Michael Doe, USPG General Secretary. Entitled *Today! The mission of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke*. Price £5/€5,45.
- **Study group material:** *The World is My Parish*: a course for clergy or church study groups looking at the biblical and historical basis for world mission, ways of engaging with mission, and how involvement in world mission also builds the church at home. The material could be used for a weekly meetings or in a single training day. Free from www.uspg.org.uk from November 2009.

Resources can be ordered at www.uspg.org.uk – or use the contact details on the back page.



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‘The church must have impact on society – socially, physically, spiritually and morally – so we have a lot to do!’

The Rt Revd Daniel Sarfo, Bishop of Kumasi, Ghana

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