

A
Chronicle *of*
Covington
COMMUNITY
Church

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Forma Liaison Officer, EYN November, 2024, Abuja, Nigeria

PILGRIMAGE OF FAITH & SERVICE



The world longs for the reliable gospel, true peace, and lasting comfort. In the daily search for fulfillment and purpose, the true essence of the gospel is often distorted. False teachings lead people away from faith and the purpose God intended for humanity.

In such a challenging environment, it's easy to wonder if there is still a compelling reason to reach out to the vulnerable. The demands of modern life often distract us from the core mission of God. Yet, despite the difficulties and risks, some remain steadfast in their calling, carrying the light of the gospel to those who need it most.

Matthew 10:11-14 "Whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy and stay there until you leave. As you enter the home, give it

your greeting. If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet".

We owe a deep debt of gratitude to Peter Douglas Wilkins, Martin Lee Degele, and Rabbi Rod Alan Meyers—individuals whose names hold a place of honor within the EYN Church of the Brethren in Nigeria. These dedicated servants didn't just preach the gospel; they embodied it, living out the spirit of the Great Commission given by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Their journey to Nigeria was a pilgrimage of faith and service, where they encountered the living God and their efforts brought about transformation in countless lives and communities. Though their sacrifices were significant, the blessings they witnessed were even greater. Their time in Nigeria was marked by the miraculous, as they followed Christ's call to bring hope, healing, and the message of salvation to those enduring suffering and devastation.

This chronicle stands as a tribute to their unwavering faithfulness and serves as an inspiration to all who aspire to follow in their path. In a world where the true message of the gospel is often overshadowed, the story of these devoted pilgrims reminds us of the enduring power of God's word and its profound impact. Their legacy bears witness to the transformative light of Christ, which shines brightest in the most challenging and unexpected places, bringing hope and renewal wherever it goes

THE JOURNEY TO NIGERIA



The mission commenced in March 2023, organized by Evangelist Ibrahim Dauda Attagara, whose steadfast commitment set the entire initiative into motion. After months of eager anticipation, the long-awaited day finally arrived—May 1, 2023. The team arrived at Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport in Abuja, Nigeria, only to confront unforeseen challenges. While the Nigerian immigration process shares similarities with that of other nations, it presented its own unique complications. What should have

been a straightforward procedure evolved into a grueling 13-hour ordeal, testing the team's patience and faith.

Amidst this trial, Immigration Officer Daniel Mshelia stepped in to assist the team. He contacted the airport comptroller, who, recognizing the significance of the mission, instructed the officers to handle the situation with care. Meanwhile, Hauwa diligently navigated the complexities of the immigration system to secure the necessary approvals. At last, at 5:30 PM Nigerian time, the long-awaited approval was granted. A collective sigh of relief washed over the team as they received their visas and were able to continue their journey.

A 45-minute drive through the beautifully illuminated streets of Abuja led the team to the EYN Guest House in Utako, where Mss. Charity Buba (Hassana Kuthyi) had prepared a warm meal to offer comfort after a long and stressful day. The team, led by the ever-enthusiastic Rabbi Rod, was immediately touched by the kindness and warmth of the Nigerian people. This initial encounter set the tone for what lay ahead—a journey of faith, service, and profound spiritual connection.

A MODERN REFLECTION OF THE MACEDONIAN CHURCH

Covington Community Church embodies the spirit of the Macedonian Church described in 2 Corinthians 8:4, exemplifying a heartfelt desire to share in the service of the Lord's people. Their unwavering commitment to prayer, acts of kindness, and remarkable generosity is evident in their actions. The church's financial support has made a significant impact, especially on women and children within the EYN Church in Nigeria.

In northeastern Nigeria, the persistent insurgency led by Boko Haram has claimed countless lives, resulting in a tragic increase in widows and orphans among the displaced EYN communities. These communities, violently uprooted from their ancestral homes, have demonstrated remarkable resilience despite their dire circumstances. Many reside in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, such as Gurku IDP Camp, Brethren Village Camp, Shuwari Camp, Maiduguri Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) Center Camp, and Yola Camp, while others seek refuge in the homes of relatives or rent accommodations across Nigeria, and Cameroun.



Photo collections of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) across various camps

Against this backdrop, the visit of the three missionaries—Rabbi Rod Alan Meyers, Martin Lee Degele, and Peter Douglas Wilkins—held special significance. Endorsed generously by former EYN President Rev. Joel Stephen Billi, their mission commenced in March 2023; their journey from Abuja to Yola, where they were greeted warmly by two drivers, Joel Ahmed and Anthony Umaru, marked the beginning of a deep and meaningful connection between the two churches.

A JOURNEY THROUGH HISTORY



**Stover Kulp and Albert Hilser and their families
Photo courtesy of the Brethren Historical
Library and Archives.**

The Church of the Brethren Mission in Nigeria has its roots in 17th March, 1923, when American missionaries Rev. Dr. H. Stover Kulp and Albert D. Helser, driven by their faith, embarked on a courageous mission to Garkida, a village in Borno Province. Joined by three Nigerian men—Garba from Zaria, John from the Igbo tribe, and Mr. Danboyi of the Pabir people—these pioneering missionaries laid the foundation for a mission that would profoundly influence the spiritual and social landscape of many Nigerians.

Their mission extended beyond merely preaching the gospel; they committed themselves to the holistic well-being of the local population by providing essential medical care and education in a region that had experienced a significant lack of both. Later, the missionaries' wives, Ruth Royer Kulp and Lola B. Helser joined them, undertaking a long and arduous journey from the United States that involved traveling by boat, truck, bicycle, and even on foot. This remarkable dedication embodies the spirit of sacrifice and service that has come to define the mission's legacy.

Over the decades, the EYN Church has experienced tremendous growth, emerging as one of Nigeria's largest Christian denominations, with a current membership of approximately 2.5 million. It has served as a beacon of hope and faith, particularly in northeastern Nigeria, where it has played a vital role in advancing education, healthcare, and community development.

Nevertheless, the EYN Church has faced significant challenges amid ongoing conflict. The region has suffered greatly due to the Boko Haram insurgency, which began in 2009 and escalated dramatically after 2014. This violence has left a devastating impact, displacing millions and creating a tragic landscape filled with widows and orphans. During this period of profound suffering and fear, the global Christian community, particularly the Church of the Brethren in America, responded with steadfast support.

THE IMPACT OF COVINGTON'S MISSIONARIES

The 170-kilometer journey from Yola to Kwarhi was challenging, with rough roads and growing fatigue taking their toll. Yet, the team maintained their enthusiasm and eagerness to connect with the community. Peter exhibited remarkable resilience, while Martin radiated infectious energy. True to his character, Rabbi Rod made it a point to greet everyone he encountered, embodying the warmth and hospitality deeply ingrained in African culture.

Upon arriving at EYN Headquarters on April 6th, 2023, the team received a warm welcome from Rev. Joel S. Billi, the EYN President and other EYN leaders. This visit marked the start of a significant partnership between Covington Community Church and the EYN Church, united in their shared mission to spread the gospel.

A HEARTFELT VISIT TO THE IDP CAMPS

One of the most touching moments of their mission was the visit to the IDP camps, where the struggles of displaced families were starkly evident. The missionaries' simple acts of kindness—providing footballs for children, hand creams for women, and candies for everyone—made a significant impact, uplifting the spirits of those facing such challenging circumstances.

The visit to the Brethren Village IDP Camp was especially emotional, highlighting the harsh realities of displacement. Yet, in the midst of their struggles, the resilience of the people shone brightly. The missionaries' presence offered hope, reminding the residents that they had not been forgotten.

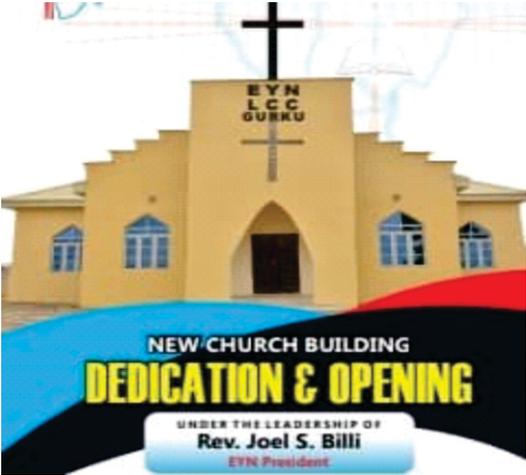
A MEMORABLE DEPARTURE

As the missionaries prepared to depart, they reflected on the deep connections forged with the people of Nigeria. Their mission had become a meaningful exchange of faith, love, and compassion. Although I was unable to see them off due to my commitments at the EYN Centenary celebrations in Jos, I took comfort in knowing they were sent off with the utmost care and support.

Their departure marked the conclusion of a pivotal chapter in the relationship between Covington Community Church and the EYN Church, one that will resonate in the hearts of all involved for years to come. Their journey exemplified the transformative power of faith in action and the enduring impact of love and compassion in a world that often feels divided.

This chronicle serves as a powerful reminder that through faith and service, we can illuminate even the darkest corners of the world. The legacy of these esteemed pilgrims will continue to inspire future generations to carry forth the message of hope and salvation to all.

THESE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY OF THE APOSTOLIC LEGENDS



The journey that began in 2023 entered a significant phase on May 27, 2024, when Rabbi Rod Alan Meyers, Martin Lee Degele, and Peter Douglas Wilkins received their visas upon arrival in Nigeria, marking the start of another missionary endeavor. The three men arrived at Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport on April 4, 2024, at 7:09am. On that same day, I had attended an unsuccessful U.S. visa interview, which made their arrival bittersweet—a mix of joy for their mission and disappointment over my own setback.

Their arrival heralded the second phase of their mission work, with a key focus on dedicating the miraculous church auditorium built by Covington Community Church. Completed in just three months, this church was dedicated on April 7, 2024, and stands as a beacon of hope for the internally displaced people in Gurku, providing them with a larger worship center to accommodate their growing congregation. Rev. Musa Anuwar, the resident pastor, along with the Gurku community, expressed deep gratitude to God for this blessing. Mr. Ibrahim Dauda, who linked this project to the church, and the President of EYN Church, Rev. Joel S. Billi who dedicated the church, acknowledged the unprecedented sacrifices that made this possible. The dedication ceremony attracted over 2,000 attendees, including pastors and traditional leaders, creating a moment of shared joy and celebration.



A cross-section of participants and dancers at the Church dedication service

During their stay in Abuja, the team was warmly welcomed by Dr. Bamiboye Ogunbiyi and his wife, Justice Clara Bata Ogunbiyi, who graciously opened their home, providing an atmosphere filled with traditional Nigerian warmth. They were also hosted by Rev. Maina Pindar and his wife, Mary B. Maina, who ensured their guests felt completely at home. Additionally, Mr. Ibrahim Dauda and his wife generously welcomed the team, offering

not only their space but also a taste of their culture with a variety of traditional African meals during a fellowship gathering. The heartfelt hospitality of these families created a welcoming atmosphere, reflecting the profound sense of community and African hospitality. Elder Elisha A. Shavah also graciously hosted the team, adding a unique flavor to their adventurous mission work. Charity Mike has served as the primary chef for both the first and second journeys, impressing everyone with her incredible fusion of African and Western cuisines. The team's commendations highlight the widespread appreciation of her cooking skills.

A CHALLENGING VISIT TO MAIDUGURI

Among their scheduled activities was a visit to Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State and the birthplace of the Boko Haram insurgency. Since 2009, Boko Haram has claimed over 350,000 lives and abducted more than 20,000 people, devastating communities, including the notorious abduction of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok community, which happen to be my hometown, in 2014.

Ms. Leah Sharibu was one of 110 schoolgirls abducted from another school, the Government Girls' Science and Technical College (GGSTC) in Dapchi, Yobe State, on February 19, 2018. Sharing a boundary with Borno State, Yobe state has also been deeply affected by the insurgency. While most of the abducted girls were released about a month later, Leah Sharibu remains in captivity for refusing to renounce her Christian faith and convert to Islam. Her courageous stand has made her a symbol of resilience and faith, drawing international attention to her plight and the ongoing crisis in the region.

Upon arriving in Maiduguri on April 12, 2024, at 12:20pm, the team was warmly welcomed by Rev. Danladi James, the resident pastor of EYN LCC Maiduguri. During their visit, they witnessed firsthand the

aftermath of Boko Haram's violent activities, including the destruction of homes, farms, and places of worship. EYN Maiduguri Jerusalem, the largest EYN congregation in the world with over 2,500 members, has had its church building burned down twice, in 2009 and 2014.

A GLIMPSE OF SUFFERING AND HOPE

The journey also included a visit to the Shuwari IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) Camp, which houses over 300 households, with a population exceeding 10,000. The inhabitants, mostly from Gwoza, Borno State, live in dire conditions marked by water shortages, poor hygiene, and overcrowded tents. The Christian faith remains a cornerstone of hope for these displaced families.

The team also visited the CAN (Christian Association of Nigeria) IDP Camp, where displaced EYN members reside. There, they were struck by the overwhelming presence of orphans and widows, many of whom had lost fathers or husbands to Boko Haram. The desperate conditions in the camps, including overflowing sewage and a lack of clean water, moved Rod, Martin, and Peter to take immediate actions. They committed to evacuating the sewage to prevent potential outbreaks of cholera or dysentery and repaired a borehole to provide clean drinking water. Their efforts also extended to education. A comprehensive scholarship program was established, covering tuition fees, books, and uniforms for 117 orphaned children whose dreams of quality education had been shattered. This initiative has not only restored hope to the children but also brought joy and relief to their caregivers, enabling the children to envision a brighter future.



At Maiduguri international airport

CULTURAL EXCHANGE AND SPIRITUAL ENRICHMENT

During their stay in Maiduguri, the team experienced the warm hospitality of Yahi Maina's family, with traditional African meals lovingly prepared by Mrs. Hyeladzirra Maina. They were also warmly welcomed and hosted by Mr. Ibrahim Dauda's mother at her residence, further enriching their visit with her gracious hospitality.

EYN Maiduguri presented the visitors with traditional African attire, which they wore with pride during the Sunday service. The worship service was a spiritually uplifting experience, featuring song ministrations by various fellowship groups. Rabbi Rod delivered a powerful sermon titled "Forgiveness and Rebuilding," with Rev. Maina serving as the interpreter. The congregation was deeply moved by the message, and many expressed their gratitude for God's faithfulness.

THE FINAL STRETCH OF THE MISSION

On April 15, 2024, the team traveled from Abuja to Yola, accompanied by Rally Edward, a guest from Germany. They were en route to the 2024 EYN Majelisa (synod) at the EYN Headquarters in Kwarhi, Adamawa State. Upon their arrival, they were welcomed by EYN leaders, including then-President Rev. Joel Stephen Billi and Rev. Dr. Daniel Y.C. Mbaya, who would later succeed him. A significant part of their visit involved discussions about the partnership between Covington Community Church and EYN-Church of the Brethren in Nigeria, as well as tours and commissioning of the newly renovated EYN Clinic, ZME guest house, Kulp water factory, EYN Comprehensive Secondary School Kwarhi, and Kulp Theological Seminary.

Though the team had to depart before the conclusion of the Majelisa, their journey left a lasting impact on the communities they visited. They flew back to the United States on April 19, 2024, with Ibrahim Dauda ensuring their safe return.

WINDING UP

The second missionary journey of the Apostolic Legends was marked by profound moments of service, cultural exchange, and spiritual renewal. From the dedication of a new church in Gurku to their humanitarian efforts in the IDP camps of Maiduguri, Rabbi Rod Alan Meyers, Martin Lee Degele, and Peter Douglas Wilkins' journey exemplified their unwavering commitment to the gospel and the well-being of those in need. Their actions not only provided physical relief but also rekindled hope and faith in the hearts of many. This journey serves as a reminder that, in the face of adversity, love, faith, and compassion can build bridges of hope across nations.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF IMPACT

- **Land Acquisition and Church Developmen**

A plot of land was purchased specifically for the construction of a church building at Gurku IDP Camp. The land was developed with the erection of a magnificent church auditorium, serving as a place of worship, spiritual growth, and community gathering.

This development has provided a permanent and inspiring location for church activities.

- **Building and Dedication of a Miraculous Church Auditorium**

Covington Community Church accomplished an extraordinary feat by constructing a stunning church auditorium in just three months. This remarkable building was joyfully dedicated on April 7, 2024, marking a significant milestone.

- **Building a Teachers' Training School**

To address educational challenges, a teachers' training school was built, providing access to quality education. Additionally, teachers will be trained to ensure effective delivery of education and to lay a solid foundation for the students' academic journey.

- **EYN Headquarters Dispensary**

A financial push was initiated to kick-start the transformational renovation of the EYN Clinic at the EYN Headquarters. This

renovation aims to modernize the facility, enhance healthcare delivery, and ensure better access to medical services for the community. The project represents a significant step toward revitalizing the clinic into a center of excellence in healthcare provision.

- **Scholarship for Orphaned Children**

A life-changing scholarship program was launched, covering tuition fees, books, and uniforms for 117 orphaned children. This initiative has rekindled their dreams of quality education, bringing hope to the children and relief to their caregivers, while paving the way for a brighter future.

- **Youth Training on Livelihood and Sustainability**

At the Gurku IDP Camp, youth were trained in sustainable agriculture and business practices. These trainings equipped them with practical skills for self-reliance, fostering innovation and creating a pathway out of poverty for many young people.

- **Provision of Drinking Water Borehole**

To combat water scarcity in Gurku IDP Camp, a borehole was constructed, providing clean and safe drinking water. This project has significantly alleviated the suffering caused by the lack of water, improving the overall health and well-being of the community.

- **Borehole Repair at Shewari IDP Camp**

A borehole at Shewari IDP Camp was successfully repaired, restoring access to clean and safe drinking water for the camp's residents. This intervention significantly improved the

community's quality of life and addressed the pressing need for potable water.

- **Sewage Evacuation at Shewari IDP Camp**

The evacuation of the overflowing sewage at Shewari IDP Camp in Maiduguri brought much-needed relief to the residents. This critical intervention averted the potential outbreak of diseases, ensuring a healthier and safer environment for the camp's inhabitants.

- **Encouraging Youth to Embrace Giving**

The youth were actively encouraged to embrace the culture of giving and sharing, emphasizing that generosity reflects God's nature and is a gift to humanity. This initiative has instilled values of kindness, empathy, and service in the younger generation.

- **Prayer and Healing Ministry**

Through dedicated prayer sessions and healing services, many individuals suffering from various illnesses found relief and divine healing. One remarkable testimony is that of Mrs. Mary John, a widow incapacitated for many years, who received her healing. These sessions have become a beacon of hope and a testament to God's power at work in the church

- **Evaluating the Impact of Love Brought to the Community**

Acts of love and compassion have brought transformative change to the community. These initiatives have fostered unity, hope, and a deeper sense of God's love among the people, strengthening bonds and igniting a spirit of togetherness.

SUSTAINABLE INITIATIVES AND STRATEGIC EXPANSION

The visit by the ambassadors from Covington Community Church, has laid a strong foundation for outreach in Nigeria. However, to ensure that the impact of their work is not just immediate but also enduring, there is a pressing need to go beyond... The focus must shift toward implementing sustainable initiatives that foster long-term development and spiritual growth in the communities.

1. Expanding the Scope of Outreach

The teachers' training school at Gurku marks a significant step toward a long-term, sustainable initiative that promises to make a lasting impact. Prioritizing sustainable education and evangelism is essential for the mission's success. This approach will not only focus on sharing the gospel but will also equip local leaders and pastors with the skills and resources needed to continue the evangelism work continues effectively.

Moreover, training programs in theological education, practical ministry skills, and leadership development can empower like-minded pastors to lead their communities and spread the gospel more widely. Establishing a theological scholarship for young ministers who feel called to join the ministry would create opportunities for deeper theological education, practical training, and pastoral

mentorship. This initiative could be further strengthened through partnerships with Covington Community Church, providing a solid foundation for collaboration.

By implementing these strategies, the mission will ensure that the message of hope and faith is carried forward by well-trained leaders who can adapt and respond to the community's needs whenever they are called upon.

2. A Hub for Ministry and Outreach

An idea of setting up a transit camp in Abuja, to be named **Mission House**, would be a strategic initiative that could serve as the epicenter of all Covington Community Church missionary activities in Nigeria. This facility could provide temporary housing for visiting missionaries, pastors, and volunteers. In addition, it would serve as a resource center for ministry tools, training materials, and educational resources.

Mission House would not only be a place for lodging but also a hub for fellowship, prayer meetings, and strategic planning. By offering training sessions, equipping workshops, and leadership development programs, it would help in nurturing a new generation of leaders dedicated to spreading the gospel across Nigeria. The center could also facilitate networking opportunities and partnerships.

3. Strengthening the Partnership with Covington Community Church

The collaboration with Rod, Martin, and Peter, as representatives of Covington Community Church, presents a unique opportunity to

make a significant impact in Nigeria. To grow this partnership further, several steps can be taken:

- **Regular Communication and Updates:** Establishing a communication channel to provide regular updates on the progress of the initiatives and the needs of the ministry. This can include newsletters, video reports, or even virtual meetings between the Nigerian team and Covington Community Church leaders.
- **Exchange Programs and Mission Trips:** Organizing exchange programs or frequent mission trips, allowing members from Covington Community Church to visit and actively participate in the work. This would deepen the relationship, offer hands-on support, and give the ambassadors a firsthand experience of the impact their church is making.

By focusing on these strategies, we can ensure that the work started by the ambassadors from Covington Community Church will continue to grow, creating a legacy of faith, development, and transformation in Nigeria. The Mission House in Abuja can be the heart of this endeavor, serving as a beacon of hope and a catalyst for positive change.

CONCLUSION

The second missionary journey of the Apostolic Legends concludes as a profound testimony to the transformative power of faith, service, and compassion. Rabbi Rod Alan Meyers, Martin Lee Degele, and Peter Douglas Wilkins exemplified the heart of the gospel through their selfless acts, ranging from building worship place and supporting education to providing humanitarian aid in dire conditions. Their journey rekindled hope in displaced communities, strengthened local churches, and laid a foundation for sustainable spiritual and community development.

Through their dedication, they not only met immediate needs but also planted seeds for lasting growth, encouraging self-reliance and deeper faith. Their work serves as a shining example of what can be achieved when love and faith intersect with action. As the mission moves forward, the foundation they built will continue to inspire others to carry the torch of transformation, ensuring that the light of hope burns brightly across generations.