



## **Jos Jottings, May 2023**

### **Weeping with those who weep**

On 29 May, Nigeria's President-elect Bola Ahmed Tinubu was sworn into office, against the backdrop (in CNN's words) of a fractured nation, an ailing economy and spiralling domestic insecurity. He promised in his inaugural speech to make security "the top priority of our administration", something which would be very welcome to Christian rural communities in northeast Nigeria, including Plateau State and Jos.

Last month, I shared with you news of a reported deadly attack by ethnic Fulani militants on Runji village in Kaduna State, 100kms due west of Jos, on the night of 15-16 April. During my recent 25 April – 1 May liaison visit to Jos, I had the sad privilege of visiting that same village, seeing the 31 homes that had been burned down, and going house-by-house on a prayer walk hearing from survivors the horrific stories of death, bereavement, destruction and violence in each home. We prayed over the mass grave where 33 of the 37 dead villagers – mainly women and children, one a beheaded 4 year old child – were buried on 17 April. We visited 2 of the 23 villagers remaining in hospital locally, recovering from serious wounds.

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#### **The faces of two victims of violent persecution**



Meet two recovering victims of horrific "ethnic-cleansing" violence, Asabé and Xavier, together with Archdeacon Mark Mukan. Asabé and Xavier are testimony to the appalling violence being deliberately directed at women and children in persecuted communities in Nigeria. Asabé is the woman with two burned arms in bandages. But two badly burned and bandaged arms are just the start. Those who attacked her in her home forced her first to watch them kill her two children in front of her, before they doused her with petrol and set her on fire. By the grace of God, the petrol only caught alight on her arms (although the burns were still severe), and not the rest of her body. Xavier is the little 4

year-old boy sitting on Mark's lap. His smile and game determination to hobble around as best he can masks the truth that he is recovering from a wound in his hand and lower leg, inflicted by a bullet passing through him. What we cannot see is that the bullet that passed through his leg went on to kill his mother, who was holding and seeking to protect him. Small wonder that he should now try to sit close to men who can be trusted and who will not hurt him.

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Grief hung heavy in the air, with the odour of smoke and ash. Walking in prayer with the traumatised mainly Christian villagers and their Anglican and Baptist pastors was probably

the most deeply moving and confronting experience of my entire pastoral life. The sheer level and extent of the violence of this organised deadly night-time attack by armed men on motorbikes against a rural community at peace with its local Fulani neighbours was frightening. It was clear that this was no low-level local dispute over land usage, but a deliberate act of ethnic cleansing, as local church leaders and villagers had claimed.

There were many encouraging aspects to my visit. These will be shared in future Jos Jottings. However, I thought it worthwhile to start by sharing this village visit because it showed me just how truly strategic is our partnership assistance to Jos Diocese:

- immediate and long-term emergency relief to persecuted rural like Runji village (and many in exactly similar circumstances) is vital.
- support and care of orphans and underprivileged children who, like Xavier, are innocent victims of horrific violence, bereavement and displacement is a huge need; and,
- the work of the Christian Institute in Jos to prepare Anglican village pastors (like the local priest in Runji village) to be faithful shepherds like the Lord Jesus, staying with and being prepared to lay down their lives for their flock, is literally of the highest priority.

Once again, please consider how you or your parish might be a part of this lovely growing partnership, and how you might work to raise a contribution towards a specific target in one of our project areas. And if I haven't yet visited your parish or school to tell your community more about the needs in Jos, and the opportunities we have to empower gospel mission in word and deed there in Jos, do drop me a line!

#### **For prayer:**

- Praise God for my encouraging liaison visit to Nigeria, and for safety during the trip.
- Ask for God's wisdom and guidance as our collaboration with the Diocese of Jos develops in the areas of emergency relief, schooling and theological training.
- Please pray for the people of Runji Village as they recover from the attack, that they will be able to re-establish their homes and livelihoods, continue to cling to the truth of the gospel, and keep trusting in our Lord of comfort, peace and healing.
- Pray for the Anglican Diocese of Jos as it provides food and other essentials to Christians displaced by attacks.
- Ask God for peace and justice in Nigeria following Monday's inauguration of incoming President Bola Tinubu, and alongside the ongoing opposition legal challenge to the election results.
- Please pray for Archbishop Ben Kwashi, and his wife 'Mama Gloria', as he prepares to retire as Archbishop in September, after 31 years of serving as Bishop of the Diocese of Jos. Give thanks for his faithful leadership and pray for a smooth handover to the new leader of the Diocese.

**To make a tax-deductible donation to projects under our Diocesan partnership to support our persecuted fellow-Christians in Jos and Plateau State in Nigeria, go to <https://anglicanaid.org.au/locations/Nigeria> . To book a presentation on the situation in Nigeria and our partnership with Jos Diocese for your church, school or fellowship group, contact Rev Canon Patrick Cole on [pandncole@bigpond.com](mailto:pandncole@bigpond.com) .**