

Eddie and Susan Sykes, Mission Partners, the Bahamas, May 2007

Bahamas election news

Wednesday 2nd May 2007 was Election Day. Following a month of campaigning - after every lamp-post, telegraph pole and tree in the Bahamas has been covered with at least campaign posters and stickers; after the erection of hundreds of billboards displaying huge pictures of the various candidates; after thousands of T-shirts, caps, car flags, and other paraphernalia have been distributed to the voting public; after numerous jamboree style rallies attended by thousands all over the islands, - some 140,000+ Bahamian voters took part in electing 41 members of parliament to serve for the next five years.

The result: 23 MPs for the FNM (Free National Movement) and 18 for the PLP (Progressive Liberal Party). The Government of the PLP under the leadership of Perry Christie which had ruled for the past 10 years has to step down to be new FNM one led by Hubert Ingraham (the former Prime Minister, 1992-2002, in turn following 25 years of rule by the PLP since Independence led by Sir Lynden Pindling). The 'red' of the FNM can be seen rejoicing, the 'yellow' of the PLP looks dejected. This is actually the closest election ever, with this new FNM Government facing the biggest opposition in the House of Assembly by any government in power. In the last Government the PLP had 28 seats. This time, among the opposition there are no 'independents', or members of any of the smaller parties. Most constituencies have some 2,000 – 5,000 eligible voters. The total number of votes by which the FNM beat the PLP over all the seats contested is recorded as 3,910 (FNM - 68,547 votes, PLP – 64,637 votes).

One has to say that the use of song and wit was quite creatively used during the campaigning by both parties. The FNM had a variety of jingles which included 'bush-wack - Perry out', or 'It's a matter of Trust', or 'It ain't long now.' For Hubert Ingraham the phrase used was simply – 'Proven Leadership'. The PLP similarly had phrases such as, 'No turning back', or 'So said – so done!' and for Perry Christie – 'Still the right man for the job'.

Election day was peaceful, and after some five constituencies had their votes recounted due to the closeness of the ballot, on Friday 4th May, Hubert Ingraham was sworn in as the new Prime Minister at Government House by the Governor General, the Hon. Mr Arthur D. Hanna. (Incidentally his daughter – Glenys Hanna-Martin - a PLP Candidate who successfully held on to her seat was a school classmate of Susan). The FNM is however investigating some issues where voting irregularities were thought to have taken place.

Several members of the previous PLP candidates lost their seats. One surprise MP who kept his seat was Shane Gibson, who as Minister for Immigration in the previous government, was caught up in the whole Anna-Nicole Smith saga and lost his ministerial portfolio because of perceived irregularities in fast-tracking her Bahamian residency status. That is one tabloid soap opera that everyone is glad has quieted down. Incidentally, after months of tests, court appearances and speculation, Larry Birkhead was accepted as the biological father of Anna Nicole's daughter Danilyn (sp?), and they have now left the Bahamas. No doubt his future appearances in court will be related to his daughter's inheritance. Anna-Nicole and son Daniel rest in peace in the Lake View Cemetery in New Providence.

We now hope that life will become more peaceful and purposeful.

Turks & Caicos election news

Earlier in the year, at the beginning of February, the Turks & Caicos Islands (TCI) held its General Election. Today the total population of this British Protectorate is about 32,000 persons – compared to a population of about 20,000 in 2001. The TCI have a Governor (from the UK) and a Deputy Governor (a Turks Islander). The Legislative Council has 19 seats, 13 of which are elected by popular vote. As a result of the recent election, the PNP (Peoples National Party) has 11 seats and the PDM (Peoples' Democratic Movement) has 2. Previously the number of seats was PNP- 8, PDM – 5. The leader of the PNP, Michael Misick, is now the Premier – a title that came into being in August 2006.

Cockburn Town, Grand Turk (pop. 6,000) is the capital and seat of Government, with Providenciales (population, 22000) the commercial centre and the most 'developed' of the Islands.

So as you can see it has been a busy time in this archipelago, as people make decisions about their future and the directions they hope to progress in.

Croix des missions

In April a United Methodist Church (UMC) Volunteers in Mission team from Southern Illinois, made up of ministers in their final year before ordination, came and spent a week in Nassau to help with the ongoing renovations at the Mission Centre on Quakoo Street. They did a fine job. One day they came with me to the All Saints Community, quite often called the 'AIDS Camp', and shared an afternoon with me in that ministry. It was a life-changing experience for all of them.

Grand Bahama

Recently I spent three days in the Grand Bahama Circuit. The main purpose was to lead the final 'Disciple Retreat Day' as some 37 persons completed the United Methodist Publishing House course entitled 'Disciple – Becoming Disciples Through Bible Study'. It was a great day as persons focused on how God has gifted and is gifting and guiding them to be effective disciples of Jesus Christ. The highlights were in the closing act of worship as members gave their testimony about what this 34 week course had done for them in their walk with God, and in their new understanding of the Bible.

I also spoke at a special 'Crusade Assembly' at St Paul's College, our Methodist school in Freeport. The theme was "Enter a Sinner – Depart a Saint". To explore this purposefully I used various characters from Winnie the Pooh to try and stimulate the students' imagination. (I know the staff enjoyed it!)

It is only now after the devastating hurricanes of 2004, Frances and Jeanne, and later the storm surge caused by Wilma, that Freeport and the rest of the island of Grand Bahama are beginning to pick up. At the very Western End of the island, in an area called 'West End' (surprisingly), a huge resort community is being developed that is hoped will become a major source of employment. Only last year, several long-time businesses in Freeport were either closed or on the verge of closure.

The month of May

I write this heading because this month, to say the least, is very hectic. My two churches have their annual anniversaries; Wesley its 10th since moving to the converted warehouse in Malcolm Road and 168th since the church actually began prior to the schism in Grants Town; and for Heritage of Redeeming Love in Oakes Field it is the 14th Anniversary since the congregation was formed post-crisis by those who felt unsure about the schismatic Bahamas Conference. Each church will be having a series of events which include: seminars, health walk/run, steak out, family fun day, church family meals on the Sunday and of course an invited guest preacher for the main Sunday Service. At each church we will be launching the next phase of our building projects and giving forward notice of Stewardship campaigns that will begin at the end of September.

Other services include ones for Mother's Day, and Aldersgate Day. There will also be an infant baptism, welcoming those who will be receiving their 'First Communion', new items for the Wesley Sanctuary, including chairs, a font and a drums set, to be blessed. There is a Sunday School Teachers Retreat on one of the Saturdays, as well as the completion of the 30 Week UMPH study on Christian doctrine – 'Christian Believer', which has been taken by 30+ persons in the Nassau Circuit. On the 20th May there is the Circuit Church School March and Rally. At the end of the month the Annual Conference Men's Treat will be held in Salt Cay, TCI and the following week, which takes us in to the first week of June, there will be the Annual MCCA Women's Conference in Andros. What a month!

FAMILY NEWS

Jonathan (17) was delighted to be a member of St Andrew's Senior High School soccer team, which won the Independent Schools championship this year. He also ran in the inter-schools athletics championship as a member of the St Andrew's 4x400m relay team which came 3rd. Next year he will be in Year 13 trying to complete the IB diploma course. Thomas (14) continues to swim and play tennis and next year begins his GCSE courses. In the summer, once again they will be attending the UMC Summer Camping programme in East Tennessee. As I write this note Susan is in the midst of report writing for her Year Two Class.

During the period June to August 2007 we will be on Furlough in UK. We are grateful for you prayers and interest in this work.

Wishing you all every blessing and peace.

Eddie, Susan, Jonathan and Thomas Sykes