

St. Paul's & All Hallows Global Partnership Link

Visit of Sean Tucker to St. Paul's Catholic Comprehensive College, Nkwen, Bamenda, Cameroon, 18th – 25th May 2008

To strengthen the link between the two schools Sean Tucker made a visit to St. Paul's Catholic College in Bamenda, Cameroon. This was part of a reciprocal visits scheme sponsored by the British Council. The hope is that a member of staff from St. Paul's will visit All Hallows in the autumn term 2008.

It was an amazing experience to visit another school in the heart of Africa to develop further our partnership which was officially launched in June 2007. I departed from London on Sunday 18th May not sure what to expect. On my arrival at Douala, early on Monday morning, I was met by Fr. Bonaventure and taken to Bamenda in the North West province of Cameroon. Later in the afternoon I visited the school and was greeted by the students and staff dancing and singing a welcome chant. I was given a tour of the school and I received a few words of welcome.

The following day was National Unification Day where I spent part of the morning watching the parades in town from the armed forces, police and various civic groups. Later I was taken to visit the palace of the Fon at Bafut. The Fon is like a local king and we were given a guide by one of the queens. This was a real education in the African tribal religions. I continued visiting other projects supported by the diocese of Portsmouth, including SAJOCAH, a rehabilitation center and two other Catholic secondary schools. In the evening I had supper with Archbishop Cornelius Esua where I shared information about the link and what the future aims were.

On Wednesday morning there was a solemn thanksgiving Mass led by the archbishop for the link between All Hallows and St. Paul's. There were a number of dignitaries present including, the mayor of Bamenda III, the chairperson of the PTA and a representative from the Fon of Nkwen. It was a spectacular colourful celebration with singing and dancing. During the offertory I presented Fr. Bonaventure with a framed aerial photograph of All Hallows school which he assured me would be displayed in the corridor next to the partnership display. At the end I gave a speech recognizing the achievements so far with the link as well as looking forward to the future.

Early on Thursday morning I was taken to see the Mayor and he gave me a tour of his offices and explained some of the work he was involved in. He presented me with a gift and asked me to take a gift back to England for the mayor of Waverley. He was keen to try and establish links between the councils in West Surrey and Bamenda. Later I attended a Mass which was dedicated to Fr. Bonaventure who was celebrating his 10th anniversary of priestly ordination and at the end of Mass there was the annual prize giving for the students. During the afternoon I met with the school council to look at their role within the school and explained what the All Hallows school council does and has achieved. Later I conducted three workshops with the students. Preparatory work had

already taken place and the teachers explained what they had already achieved. The aim was to explore the three global dimensions of interdependence, conflict resolution and diversity. The main focus for the theme of interdependence was the impact of globalisation, in particular within the Commonwealth of Nations, of which both the UK and Cameroon are members. On the theme of conflict resolution was explored issues of trade justice and strategies that can be used to stimulate development on a global scale. When looking at diversity our focus was the different religions represented in the UK and Cameroon as well as different aspects of UK and Cameroon life. These themes were discussed in light of the RE curriculum and links were made with Britain and Cameroon particularly with regard to the historic ties as well as the diverse nature of each culture. Students in years 8 and 10 at All Hallows will be exploring these global dimensions in RE in the summer term.

Friday was the last school day before the students sit their exams. There was a special celebration for Fr. Joseph Mbiydzenyuy, the founding principal of St. Paul's College. He was celebrating his silver jubilee of ordination and there were many ex students present from the Bamenda area. After the Mass there was a reception where he recounted stories of his first years in post setting up the school and the many difficulties he encountered. In the evening the staff and some student representatives dressed up in the traditional costumes from the different regions of Cameroon. They gave an explanation of the regional differences within the country and we shared a diverse array of food. It was on this occasion when I said my farewell and thanked them all for their hospitality and warm welcome. The staff presented All Hallows with a painting from a local artist depicting in symbolic form the link between our two schools.

On Saturday I met briefly with the Chancellor of the archdiocese who discussed with me the links already established between the Portsmouth diocese and the archdiocese of Bamenda. He was pleased St. Paul's and All Hallows had a partnership and wished us every success in our future endeavours. Later we traveled back to Douala, a six hour drive, and rested for a while at Limbe, a fishing port on the coast. That evening I had supper with the Franciscan sisters and stayed with them before my early morning flight on Sunday morning.

It was a wonderful experience, one of which I hope many staff and students from both schools will be able to have in the future.