

Ministering Among the Fulbe

Ministry among the Fulbe is a blend of high vision, the “dailiness” of life, and confident expectancy before God that he intends to open doors for sharing the ultimate treasure: the Gospel of Jesus Christ that leads to life eternal.

by Phil and Marion Grasham

At Bible college we became intrigued by the Fulbe people of West Africa and their physical and especially spiritual needs. There are approximately one million Fulbe in Mali. They are 99.9% Muslim. There have been conversions (0.006% of the Fulbe), but there is obviously much work to be done to reach these strategically placed people. We were challenged by the concept of living with the Fulbe and sharing their nomadic lifestyle. We wished to understand their language and culture in order that we might share Christ effectively with them.

The vision of our team is that the Gospel will be so thoroughly contextualized into the Fulbe context that it will be seen to well up from deep within Fulbe culture, transforming their worldview at its deepest levels and spreading spontaneously along traditional lines of communication. This should result in growing churches throughout Fulbe areas, which should impact all the ethnic groups across the Sahel for Christ.

Our team leader has written that “life in Fulbe community can be interesting, exciting, even fascinating at times. There are spectacular rainy season storms with the unbelievable transformation of the near desert. There are intimate moments with friends and the feeling of acceptance in a Muslim community. However, life among the poor is also filled with excruciating decisions. There is much satisfaction from helping poor people, but whom do we help? Whom do we turn away? How do we help best? The requests at times seem overwhelming. Life can also be boring and tedious. Fulbe nomadic communities have no newspapers, books, magazines or television. Topics of conversation are limited, but every experience of sharing about Christ, even if the results are meager or seemingly nonexistent, makes it all worthwhile.”

How We Live

Periodically we go to the capital for renewal, recuperation, and regeneration. We aim at accomplishing tasks that are difficult to do while in the village, such as team meetings, administrative duties, translation, and communicating with supporters. In this way, our time in the village is nearly completely free for ministry among the Fulbe.

Living and working with nomadic and seminomadic people requires some preparatory thought and a steep learning curve. On one side, there is the need to live as the people do as much as possible so as to break down some

of the barriers. This can include eating Fulbe food, wearing

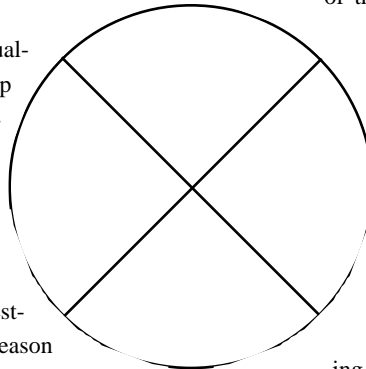
Fulbe clothes, and sharing in Fulbe social life.

On the other side, there is the need to have a few pieces of equipment both for health reasons and so that all one’s time is not taken up with simply living.

We have a tent which allows us to be flexible and mobile. Water filters are absolutely essential. We have a gas burner for cooking and a two-way radio to keep in touch with the other members of our team, but otherwise we try to keep our “stuff” to a minimum.

Friendship Evangelism

What is important, however, is not imitating the people, but identifying with them. Our evangelism strategy can be basically described by the word “friendships.” We live among the Fulbe because we want to develop rela-



tionships with them. We want to talk with them, share with them, understand what makes them tick, and while doing that, we want to show them the power and compassion of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our priorities are constantly challenged, as we live with people with very different ideas and thought patterns from our own.

The Fulbe love to listen to Scripture being read. Much of the Bible relates directly to their understanding of the world.

We want to affirm them in their culture but challenge them in their faith. A nomadic or seminomadic lifestyle is not strange or outdated; it is an effective way of using very limited resources. There is much in their culture to be admired, but we believe their culture could be even stronger if the Lord was to redeem it. We have had some tremendous experiences as the Fulbe question their religion. They are particularly interested in the power of Christ over sickness and evil. On numerous occasions we have been asked to pray for sick people. When we point out that we will be praying in Jesus' name, not everyone agrees. However, many have seen and heard about the strength of Christ.

The Fulbe love to listen to the Scriptures being read. There are very few literate Fulbe, but much of the Bible relates directly to their understanding of the world. We in the Western world often find it hard to relate to certain parts of the Bible, even through analogies, but

the Fulbe have no difficulties relating to wells, droughts, shepherds, searching for good pasture, or defending a flock or herd against thieves and wild animals, etc.

Signs of Promise

What we are finding increasingly encouraging is that more and more Fulbe are asking serious spiritual questions, and slowly but surely the church is being built among them. Cross-cultural ministry is never straightforward, but the Lord uses us as we trust and obey him, as we allow him to work in us and through us, and as we share the ultimate treasure: the Gospel of Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

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