

Celebrating Christmas & Easter Conventions

Dear Friends,

I bring you greetings from myself and family and the people of Akrampa, particularly the children in the Akrampa School. The first term of the academic school year is about to end. It begins in September each year and ends in December. September brings new students into the school, particularly in the Kindergarten class, and it is the time when the rest of the students advance to the next grade level.

Their school vacation starts before Christmas, but the date is never fixed. The second term starts in early January and ends just before the Passion Week. This is so the children can go to their 'other hometowns' to join family and friends for the Passion Week and other Easter related events. And you may be asking, "what does he mean by 'other hometowns'?"

The majority of the people of Akrampa ethnically belong to two communities: one is on the coast and the other is not. These two different origins characteristically have conditioned the people to live either as fishermen or farmers. Those who do not know about the origins of the Akrampa people never associate them as being part of the fishing background and have always thought of them as farmers because they don't live on the coast.

But there is an interesting part of the people of Akrampa that I'd like to share with you. Most of the people actually come from another community, outside of Akrampa. There is a town about 45 kilometers from Akrampa called Mankoadze, on the coast. Many of the people have fathers that originate from Mankoadze, so when family events like marriages and deaths occur family members will travel between Akrampa and Mankoadze to be with loved ones.

The head of their ancestry clan still lives in the main town of Awuku Bereku to which they pay allegiance, and for whose chief they used to serve as executioners and priests of the idol that sits at the entrance of the town. This idol now has lost so many devotees as a result of the Gospel of Jesus coming into the town. A handful of devotees now are almost neglected and have lost recognition.

When the children are on school vacation for Christmas and Easter, some of them join their churches to go to a selected town or community away from their home for a revival or renewal of fellowship. Such gatherings involve many churches of that denomination, sometimes from twenty or more towns. When this happens, large numbers of people come from all over a certain area, traveling away from their homes to gather in the selected town for what is generally described as a 'CONVENTION'. Therefore, a gathering of huge numbers of people attend such events. At Christmas time it is known as a CHRISTMAS CONVENTION, and it is an EASTER CONVENTION, when it takes place at Easter time.

Conventions are held in open fields, almost always on a school field in the chosen town. The school field is often preferred because then the worshippers and the congregations from the various towns can be given permission to use the school as a place to sleep. I also regard these events as 'setting up a town', because when these masses of people move to any town, and onto any chosen school field, literally a temporary town is set up. Vehicles move to and from with worshippers and other church members who do not sleep at the place; small-time traders set up shops of all kinds, shoes, clothing, and food stalls of all types. It is like a huge festival, almost like a carnival. The commercial activity that goes on is also quite awesome. Sometimes one wonders whether they are there to shop, or to fellowship and worship God, seeking personal revival and renewal for their churches.

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These conventions mostly run for a week, ending on Sunday of that week, when a huge closing service is held to bring the event to a close. These conventions are almost always held by the Neo-Pentecostal, other non-denominational churches, and Charismatic churches. Rarely would congregations of the mainline churches (Catholic, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Methodist, etc.) move to towns or fields for week-long programs like this. Some of the mainline churches will hold 'Camp Meetings' that last a maximum of three days, ending on Sundays.

When the children return to Akrampa from participating in such events the teachers use the opportunity to teach writing skills. The children are asked to write essays to describe their experiences at the Conventions, which the children really like to do. Rarely would a child go by himself or herself to these events; they would attend with their parents. Some of the young adults and teenagers do go by themselves without their parents.

Blessings, Pastor Ben