

A Brief History of the Churches of Christ in Mozambique *The Beginning and Spread of Churches of Christ*

In 1959 a Mozambican by the name of Dias Bento Feliciano moved to neighboring Malawi. While in Malawi, Feliciano became a member of the Church of Christ and studied for three years. In 1968, Feliciano returned to the district of Alto Moloque in the province of Zambezia to the village of Mihawa in the Nauela administrative post. Feliciano's father was a member of the Union Baptist church, so Feliciano tried to work with the Union Baptists. However, this resulted in a division within the Union Baptists, with some deciding to join the Church of Christ. The divisions in the church led Feliciano being taken to court and put into prison by the Portuguese colonial government on three different occasions in the districts of Alto Moloque, Gurue, and Quelimane. In 1969 Feliciano together with his father and some other believers began to worship independently from the Union Baptists in the village of Mihawa.

In 1913 a group of Swiss evangelical missionaries worked in the Zambezia province and founded a mission which eventually became known as the Evangelical Swiss Mission of Christ in Mozambique (Missão Evangélica de Cristo em Moçambique). The churches associated with this mission were the Evangelical Churches of Christ. In 1960 a leader of the church by the name of Cornelio burned a child to death and claimed the power to raise him from the dead. When this did not happen the colonial government banned the church. One pastor of this church, Martinho Campos, traveled to Maputo (then Lourenço Marques) to see if the Evangelical Churches of Christ could merge with the Union Baptists. This was in 1962. Many did not want to join the Union Baptists, so when in 1969 others heard of Feliciano beginning the Church of Christ they were interested in joining with Feliciano. Due to the similarity of names, many left the Evangelical Church of Christ to join the Church of Christ.

In the following years Churches of Christ began to be established around the province of Zambezia. In 1970 Faria Raul began the Church of Christ in the town of Alto Moloque. That same year a Church of Christ was planted in the Cuamba district of the Niassa Province with coordination of Mozambicans and Malawians. In 1971 Feliciano began a church in the town of Gurue, and Cruz Nicola began a church in the Mocuba district. In 1974 a Church of Christ was begun in the Mopeia district of the Zambezia province. That year Anducaue Vasco was sent to Mutarara by Churches of Christ in Malawi to evangelize the Tete province. This evangelism was also facilitated by Feliciano naming 30 men to be leaders in the churches in various parts of the Zambezia Province. (As of this writing, only about a third of those are still alive.)

At the end of 1979 Feliciano asked each of these thirty leaders to choose and send men to study the Bible with him in Nauela. Abilio Morais Natoto and Quimwaha also helped to teach in this school. This school ran from 1980 until 1982 where 26 men studied. The majority of these are still alive today and some continue to be influential leaders in the church. Others abandoned the church or ended their studies prematurely. The objective of this training was to send out workers to distant areas to establish churches.

Manuel Eduardo Martins was sent to the city of Nacala in Nampula to establish a church in 1981. Sozinho Nacuário Cotomola was sent to Maputo, but this plan never materialized. The other evangelists who were trained stayed in the Zambezia province, strengthening the existing churches and evangelizing in new villages.

In 1982 Feliciano went to Malawi to receive medical treatment. In light of the civil war in Mozambique, he decided to stay in Malawi until 1992. During this ten year absence, the men who had been appointed by Feliciano as leaders in the 1970's continued to lead the churches to grow. In 1987 Inácio Chomeque began the first Church of Christ in the city of Nampula. During this time Sozinho Nacuária was in Gurue. He began a Bible School in 1990 and trained four people from the Gurue district: Albino Vanhuia, Germindo Jaime, Basilio Tomas, and Manuel Nipuesa.

In 1992 Feliciano returned to Mozambique, following the end of the civil war. He began teaching the Bible again and trained 7 men from Gurue and Ile. Several of the students from these two schools were sent to other districts in 1993, namely, Albino Vanhuia to Lioma (Gurue), Basilio Mario to Muluvala (Ile), Germindo Jaime to Alto Moloque, Rosario dos Santos Tomas to Cuamba (Niassa Province). These students were sent at a

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church conference where over 1,500 people had participated in Alto Molocue, including Manuel De Oliveira from Portugal and Solomone Nchere from Malawi.

In 1994 Feliciano planted a church in the city of Beira, and in 1995 established a church in the town of Chimoio. These are probably the first Churches of Christ established outside of the north of Mozambique. In 1995 a Zimbabwean, Bernardo Kanchia was sent to the Manica province to establish a church. In the late 1990's students who studied at the Bible school in Machava, Maputo began the first Church of Christ in the far south of the country.

In the mid 1980's a church was established in the Mukholo village of Namuno, Cabo Delgado. This was the first Church of Christ in Cabo Delgado. In November of 1999, Germino Jaime moved from Alto Molocue, Zambezia to Montepuez, Cabo Delgado and began to plant multiple churches throughout the province. In 2000 a church was planted in the city of Pemba by Antonio Pulaisse. In 2001, other churches were established in the Balama and Chiure districts of Cabo Delgado. In 2002, a Church of Christ was established in the village of Nanjua in the district of Ancuabe. In 2008 a church was founded in the district center of Meluco.

More recently, the Churches of Christ have been looking into means of supporting national evangelists to plant churches in new parts of the country. A fund has been formed so that a preacher training school can be started in Mocuba, Zambezia and evangelists sent out to unreached parts of the country. Many churches have been participating in the contribution and over \$1,000 (USD) have been contributed by Mozambicans.

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Foreign Missionaries

The first foreign missionary to Mozambique from the Churches of Christ was Carlos Esteves from Portugal. Carlos worked closely with Feliciano and they were even imprisoned together for about six months. Loy Mitchell, a missionary to Zimbabwe, made visits into Mozambique in the mid 1970's visiting Carlos Esteves and the churches he was working with. After Carlos Esteves was released from prison he returned to Portugal and then moved to Brazil. Due to war and religious persecution no missionaries entered the country until the end of the war in the early 1990's.

In 1987 Jacob Michael visited the city of Nacala and spoke with church leader Manuel Martins, who reported the existence of 387 churches. Manuel De Oliveira visited Mozambique in the early 1990's and saw the great needs of the churches in the Zambezia province. As a result he moved to Swaziland and began teaching Mozambicans, who came to study at the Bible School in Manzini. A survey trip was also conducted by a mission team from Abilene Christian University headed by Richard Chowning in this time period. None that participated in the survey returned to work in Mozambique, however their survey reports were distributed widely which helped to inform churches of the mission needs of Mozambique.

In 1992 several missionaries from the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ came to Mozambique and began an organization known as Good News For Africa or Boa Nova Para África. The three original families were the Michaels, the Byrds, and the Rays. They moved to Machava near the capital city of Maputo and built a Bible School which began to train Mozambican evangelists in 1995. In the following years a number of missionaries came to live and work in Machava, most notably, the DeOliveiras and the Hulseys, who remained in the country for many years. In 2001 Cecil Byrd was shot and killed when thieves broke into his house. Others who worked with Good News For Africa include: the Hawkes, the Brooks (1996-2000), Juanita Miller, and the Becks. The original goal of Good News For Africa was to work with all Independent Churches and train existing leadership. At the time of the first missionaries' arrival, the Churches of Christ were considered by the government as part of this group of Independent Churches.

In 1998, Jacob and Nila Michael moved to Nampula in the northern part of the country and began to visit rural churches by teaching seminars. Nila became sick with cancer and died in 1999. Jacob remarried and returned to work in Nampula until 2008 when he moved to Chimoio. The Gardners (2001) and Beens (2005) also moved to Nampula and began working in the city of Nampula. From 2000 to 2002 a Bible School was held in Nampula and about 50 students were trained, primarily by Jacob Michael and Shawn Gardner. In 2003 a team from Harding University, including the Caldwells, Holtons, Howells, Rolands, Smiths, and Westerholms, moved to the north where they began to work with the Makua Metto (Montepuez, Cabo Delgado) and the Yao people (Lichinga, Niassa).

This is an incomplete listing of missionaries who have served in Mozambique. Many others have served for shorter periods of time. Several others deserve mention as well. During the wartime, Brazilian missionaries worked with Mozambican refugees in Malawi. Dale Mason has made multiple extended trips to Northern Mozambique on a yearly basis. A Brazilian Christian Church missionary named Klebbur began to work in Nampula and founded a church known as the Church of Christ in Mozambique (Igreja de Cristo em Moçambique). Originally Klebbur hoped to work with the Churches of Christ, but due to doctrinal differences this did not happen. Also a missionary with the "one cup" movement began working with Churches of Christ (especially those associated with Feliciano) after many years of work in Malawi. Other missionaries from Malawi have traveled into Mozambique to visit existing Churches of Christ and have given training to many Mozambicans in schools.

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Divisions

Unfortunately, a history of the Churches of Christ in Mozambique would be incomplete without a treatment of divisions that have taken place. Much division has centered on the founder of the Churches of Christ in Mozambique, D. B. Feliciano. Feliciano had left the country for about ten years during the war. In 1993 when Feliciano returned he began to teach that churches were to baptize in the name of Jesus only rather than in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. He insisted that all those who were not baptized “properly” were to be rebaptized, and he insisted that the new leaders who were appointed during his absence step down. Many objected, notably Manuel Mongessa of Gurue. In 1995 a meeting was held with Mozambican church leaders, Manuel De Oliveira, and church leaders from Malawi to try to resolve these problems. For the most part no long term solution was found. Later these divisions developed and deepened through a controversy over taking communion with one cup or multiple cups.

These divisions have spilled over into the official registration of churches. Since churches must be registered with the government several different registrations have been made with the government by various church leaders. D. B. Feliciano registered churches as the “Church of Christ of the New Testament” (Igreja de Cristo do Novo Testamento). Manuel Mongessa made a registration of “Churches of Christ Northern Branch” (Igreja de Cristo do Ramo Norte) and Germino Jaime initiated a registration of “Universal Churches of Christ” (Igreja de Cristo Universal). Klebbur founded the “Church of Christ in Mozambique” (Igreja de Cristo em Moçambique) which uses instruments in worship and is charismatic. Although these various names are written on government documents, practically all groups use the name “Church of Christ”. Another group exists known as the “Evangelical Church of Christ” (Igreja Evangelica de Cristo), but this denomination has no direct ties to the Restoration Movement.

Some church leaders (including Feliciano) objected to churches working in collaboration with Jacob Michael since he was from the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ. Others accepted Jacob’s ministry and the training that was being offered at the Bible School in Maputo. Many Churches of Christ object to the ministry of Good News For Africa because it includes missionaries with the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ. Sometimes these churches have more ties to Bible Schools in Malawi or Zimbabwe.

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Conclusion

In 40 years, the work of the Churches of Christ in Mozambique has been impressive. In June 2008 Dias Bento Feliciano died in Gurue, Zambezia. In his life time he saw from a small beginning in the Gurue district, churches planted throughout multiple provinces, especially Zambezia, Tete, and Nampula. While church statistics are difficult to verify, some church leaders claim up to 2,700 churches in existence. Works in Cabo Delgado, Niassa, Beira, Maputo, and Manica continue to develop. Plans are being developed to mobilize locally funded evangelism. Division threatens to disrupt the work, but there is a sense of unity that prevails among the brotherhood. Leaders, ethnic differences, and doctrinal differences work to divide, but all recognize themselves as “members of the Church of Christ”. Many areas still require much work and evangelism. The provinces of Inhambane, Gaza, and Maputo have few (if any) Churches of Christ. The Shangaan, Yao, Makondes, and Mwanis are just some of the ethnic groups that have few (if any) members of the Church of Christ. The Makuas make up a large percentage of the country’s population, but there lacks a significant witness among them. Like any country in the world, the Churches of Christ in Mozambique have both strengths and weaknesses. They seek to be used by God to further the advancement of his Kingdom as his servants.

Written by: Chad Westerholm 2008

(Much of this report is due to information gained from the short history written by Germino Jaime and Sozinho Nacuaria.) Other sources included [Among the People of the Sun](#) by Donna Mitchell and email correspondence with Jacob Michael. For more information see www.goodnewsforafrica.org, www.makuateam.org, www.yaomission.org, and www.gardenersforGod.org.