

Howell's e-Mail News

Friday, October 29, 2004

Dear Friends and Family,

Greetings from Nampula! The temperature is really beginning to crank up here as the rainy season approaches (we have heard some here say they think November is the hottest month in Mozambique) so while we know that the calendar says that it is nearly November, because of the weather our brains don't really believe it!

We are only about six weeks away from our one-year date since we arrived in Mozambique, and we are amazed as we look back over the past year. Recently we have called the past year the "year of the unexpected," since so many of the things we tried so hard to plan well for have happened so differently than we thought they would. But while full of the unexpected, the past year has been an exercise in faith and flexibility that has resulted in stretching and growth that may not have happened without such an occasion. And while some of the years' events have brought much hurt and frustration, God's hand has been faithful and present and visible, bringing healing and a clarity of vision and increased passion for ministry among the Makua-Metto that also may not have happened without such an occasion. So we continue on this journey, prayerfully casting visions and making plans, but with more open minds to the possibility of unexpected turns in the road, knowing that we continue to be in God's hands.

So yes, we are still in Nampula! We continue to ask for your prayers regarding our return to the Cabo Delgado province and to Montepuez city/district. We are expecting that after elections are over, this document-approval process will finish. So we are trying our best to understand our context so we may plan and prepare well, and we are hoping to be back in our homes by the end of the year.

We also want to ask for your continued prayers for the Makua-Metto people and the Montepuez area. The longer we are here in Mozambique, even while we have been away from Metto-land, the more we learn and understand about the people and about the area. It is a strange and dark place where forces like fear and contempt reign in many hearts instead of the peace and love of God. As a group they are not usually referred to with positive attributes, but with lying and stealing and cheating. We feel very strongly called to live and work among the Metto, and see God's Kingdom take root and redeem them as a people.

As a team we have been using this time in Nampula to focus on who we are and think critically about how we may best fit in the context of the Montepuez area. To begin, we have addressed the issue of structure. Previously, we functioned more on a consensus model without any long-term specifically-defined roles for any teammates. We realized that this made no sense in our context of Mozambique where people think in defined positions that fit into authority structures. So while all of us still participate fully in our conversations and dialogues and decisions, we have assigned specific roles to a few teammates in order to function more smoothly as a team and fit better into the paradigm of authority structures that exists here. These structural changes have already been a blessing to our functioning as a group. Also, considering our context of the Montepuez area, we have been working hard to flesh out our visions and strategy for our work among the Metto people, both short-term and long-term, and with corresponding goals. It has been tough but good, to dream together and to try to together mesh our expectations with the realities of our context.

In addition to working with our team focusing on our life and ministry among the Makua-Metto, we as a family have been involved in several other activities. Alan is taking advantage of this time away from Montepuez (and the faster internet connection in Nampula!) to take an online class from ACU, and we have been participating in ministries of other Good News for Africa missionaries here in Nampula. Alan is spending two mornings a week at a Christian Training Center run by one GNFA colleague, and we have been investing in one of the students (Alberto) from the Center by attending his church while we are here. Alan has preached several times, and I have had the opportunity to teach twice at a women's literacy group in Alberto's Bairro (neighborhood). These experiences have been full of fascinating cultural insights, and we come away with more questions to consider and issues to explore. It has been good to help out in ministries here and better learn what is going on in Nampula. For awhile we put off hiring a language teacher since we are not in Metto-speaking territory and Metto speakers are very few and hard to find to practice with. However, we will probably begin this within the next two weeks,

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especially since the possibility exists that we may not get to return to Montepuez as quickly as we are expecting. Keep that in your prayers as well! Language learning is fun but very challenging no matter where you are, but we liken intentionally studying the Metto dialect in Nampula to a beginner going to Spain to learn Portuguese!

Another of our team goals during this time in Nampula has been to make visits down south to the province of Zambezia, which in many ways is Mozambique's "Bible belt." GNFA (the organization that we are legally a part of here in Mozambique made up of all the Church of Christ and Christian Church missionaries in the country) has a long history of relationship with a large network of churches in the province of Zambezia, and it was important for us to visit these churches to introduce ourselves as the new group of missionaries in GNFA and to communicate our commitment and vision to encouraging a church-planting movement among the Makua-Metto. We have made trips to two different locations already, and there is the possibility of a third. It was good to spend time with the Christians there, and it was also good to share our plans and prayers to work up in the Cabo Delgado province, which is so far away for many of the Zambezia Christians that it might as well have been the moon.

Coming up soon for us at the end of November we will be attending the annual GNFA retreat, where all the missionaries in GNFA will meet to go over policies and team and family goals. We will end the retreat and leave Nacala on Thanksgiving morning in time to come back and try to put together a Thanksgiving meal with other Americans here in Nampula in the 100-degree heat!

Abby is doing great and is as cute as ever. Tomorrow (October 30) she will be fifteen months old, and this past month she finally decided that she was ready to start walking. Time flies so fast, and we still feel like such beginners as parents! She has turned out to be quite verbal and talks all the time to anyone who will listen (and even when no one is listening). Recently while visiting some friends in a Bairro, they were amazed that Abby was speaking English! Many of these people grow up bilingual (Portuguese and a Makua dialect), but most have not had much formal education, so they think English is really hard. They don't realize that it is no more fascinating for Abby to babble English words than for their toddlers to learn to speak in Makua or Portuguese! Right now only a handful of her words are Portuguese or Makua, but we know that someday she will probably be more at ease in these languages than we are.

Well, we will wrap up here, and mention again our main requests for your prayers:

Please pray for:

- encouragement in the light of the past "year of the unexpected"
- peaceful elections in Mozambique
- timely return to our homes and routines in Montepuez
- wisdom and patience as we consider our presence in the context of the Montepuez area
- for Metto people to come to know God's peace
- language learning
- our team as we will be spread out soon due to the Roland's and Smiths traveling to have babies
- safe and healthy pregnancies and deliveries for new Roland and Smith babies
- for the Caldwell's and Holton's as they get started in Lichinga and are both expecting babies

We love and miss you all (a little more every day!)

Grace and peace,
Rachel, Alan, and Abby