

Howell's e-Mail News

Friday, April 22, 2005

Dear Friends and Family,

Greetings from northern Mozambique! We realized that while we have written a number of "quick updates" concerning our situation with the government, we had not written a "newsy" newsletter in quite awhile – so this one is long overdue!

Our biggest news is... yes, the rumors are true... we are expecting Baby Howell No. 2 in mid-November! We are very excited and looking forward to meeting him or her, and we have been trying to explain to Abby that she is going to have a baby brother or sister, and we think she is happy about that idea, as far as we can tell. Rachel is feeling good, just a little tired. Abby is also doing well. She climbs on everything, and has a pretty articulate vocabulary for a little person who is not yet 2 years old. She continues to keep us on our toes, and she is probably part of the reason Rachel is a little more tired than with the first pregnancy!

Also, our teammates the Smiths and the Roland's returned to northern Mozambique in March after being away to have babies in the States and in South Africa, respectively. It has been so good to have them back and start working together again in person. And of course, it is a joy to meet little Andrew Smith and Josiah Roland, both born in January, and only three weeks apart!

We are very thankful to all of you who participated with us in our Day of Prayer and Fasting on March 15, also the two-year anniversary of our departure from the States. We know God hears and acts on our prayers, and so we are grateful for everyone who joined with us in petitioning Him for our return to Montepuez town and Cabo Delgado province, and for His Kingdom to come among the Makua-Metto people there.

We continue to work toward our return to Montepuez. Since the last update we've had a number of meetings with government officials and even with the new Governor and through all these trips to Pemba we have developed good relationships with both the Director of Justice and the governor's Chief of Staff, and they have both grown very helpful and sensitive to our situation. On our most recent trip to Pemba, Jeremy and I had met again with the Governor's Chief of Staff and she squeezed us in for a meeting with the governor on the spur of the moment (we raced across town to make it just in time!). In that meeting with the governor, he did not approve or reject our paperwork, but instead provided us with a third option of writing a new document, requesting official approval at the national level to work in Cabo Delgado. After the meeting the Director of Justice said that once we had this document from Maputo (the capital down South) he would continue to help us move through the proper channels to get our situation resolved. We are hoping that the resolution is just around the corner, though it's hard knowing how our hopes have been let down before. Our team has made 17 trips to Pemba from Nampula to work towards this resolution – roughly the distance of driving across the continental US and back again!

So what's taking so long? A quick timeline/summary: We were told to leave our homes in Montepuez in mid-June 2004. We now understand more fully how there was absolutely no way anyone in the government was going to help us before the December elections. With the rumors circulating that we were foreign spies for the minority party, we were a political hot potato, and no one wanted to take responsibility for us. After the New Year, though, with the majority party securely in the victory position, we began to see a little progress with the government as our continued persistence, even after elections were over, showed that we were not there for political reasons. Also since the beginning of the year, though, the folks in the government have begun appointing all new officials from the top down – and they are still not done! It began with the old governor of Cabo Delgado leaving to join the new president's cabinet, so then a new governor had to be appointed, etc. etc., and on down through the district level. All this shuffling of officials has taken much time, meaning they have less time to meet and work with us. In addition to all this, the old governor left some 1500 documents for the new governor to handle, and of course he began with all the matters with financial strings attached, so we were pretty far down the list. We have been thankful, though, to God for providing new relationships with government officials that we think will be a blessing long-term. Throughout this process hope

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and progress have come in glimpses, and for a few months now it has not seemed to be an issue of "if" we will receive approval to return but an issue of "when."

In the big picture, we remain unified as a team that working among the Makua-Metto people in the Montepuez area is the best place for us. There is so much fear and darkness, and so little presence of God's Kingdom there that our burden for working long-term in the area has only increased. That said, we feel that we are responsible for our work and our time to those who have sent us, and do not feel it would be a wise use of time and resources to continue down the road to long-term work in Montepuez "indefinitely," but only as long as is reasonable. That, however, is difficult to define! So we have been discussing "Plan B" as a team: re-reading and discussing our 2004 survey reports, talking with other mission organizations to learn where they are planning on placing workers, and trying to decide when we should look towards other locations for long-term ministry.

In between trips to Pemba, we have stayed busy in Nampula. We have enjoyed working with a group of churches here in Nampula, teaching, preaching, and building relationships with and disciplining a few of their leaders. Spending time with these church members has provided more insight into typical "church culture" and worldviews that are so different from our own but are important to understand to be able to communicate. Many of them have been part of these churches for awhile but have heard very little about Jesus and his message about life in God's Kingdom, and recently several of them have begun taking classes at the Christian Training Center in town run by one of our Good News for Africa colleagues and several Mozambican Christians.

We have also continued to work some on learning the Makua-Metto dialect, though progress has been slow as it is a dialect that is not spoken here in Nampula, so it nearly impossible to actually go out and practice. We have been practicing with a Metto-speaking teacher from Cabo Delgado named David a couple times a week (when not making trips to Pemba). One activity that has been helpful is to go through a few booklets of Bible stories that have been translated into Makua-Metto by SIL missionaries. Our teacher is a very nominal Muslim and so as we read through the booklet telling the story of Noah, he liked hearing it for the first time. He was very surprised to hear that the rainbow was God's sign that he was committing to make the earth a safe place and never again destroy the world by flood, and he told us that most Makua people were afraid of rainbows, seeing them as dangerous and believing they can hurt people. For example, if a rainbow is in the sky over the neighborhood where he lives he will wait until it disappears before going home! I always assumed that everyone enjoyed seeing rainbows in the sky, but this conversation showed again that the message of hope needs to be shared, as well as how much we have to learn!

In closing, we will be going to the States for the month of May for Rachel's brother's wedding in Texas and for me to take a missions class at ACU. We are very much looking forward to spending time with our families – Rachel's parents have not seen Abby since she was 11 months old, and my parents haven't seen her since she was 3 months old! We are also looking forward to stocking up on Claritin, eating at Chili's, and leaving Abby with her doting grandparents so we can have a date!

Thank you for keeping us in your prayers. We ask you to specifically pray for:

- The Kingdom of God to take root in the hearts of the Makua-Metto people
- The government officials in Pemba to be helpful in facilitating our return
- The right documents to get approved by the right people
- Perseverance for our team as we work to return to Cabo Delgado
- Our team as we try to discern when to look for another location for ministry
- Our family as we prepare for Baby Howell No. 2 in mid-November

God Bless you, and we miss you all,
Alan, Rachel and Abby

PS – new pictures to come soon!