

Howell's – eMail News

Saturday – August 4, 2007

Dear friends and family,

Greetings from cool, dry Mozambique! August is already upon us – June and July were very, very busy, so this newsletter is officially late! We returned in May from our quick trip to the States for Alan's brother Andrew's wedding. Andrew and Krystle's wedding and the trip overall were great, though the trip was really fast, and when we came back our interns had arrived a few days earlier. For about seven weeks we had five college students with us, mostly from Harding University, all interested in foreign missions. They rotated among our team, staying with each family, living with us, learning a little of the Makua-Metto language, and going with us to work with churches here in town and farther out in villages. They participated in daily life for Makua people: going out to the machamba (farm), pounding corn, making xima, mudding a building, and they each spent a weekend out in a village with a Makua family without us missionaries. This was our first time to host interns, and they were a great group. They had great attitudes about trying new things and getting out of their comfort zones and being flexible when plans had to change. One night they even cooked a meal for our whole team and watched our kids at a different house, which is a treat we usually don't get over here! We all said that they have really raised our expectations for interns for years to come, and we look forward to seeing where God will lead each of them.

Our family is in a transition time at the moment that we have been looking forward to for awhile: beginning to transition out of full time language learning into more ministry time. From the beginning, as you will remember, we have been committed to being able to minister and teach in the heart language, which is no small task. We had set a goal awhile back for the middle of this year for Alan to drop a day of language learning to be a day out in the villages with churches. Of course we will always be learning since language is so complex and vast, but we have reached a point where Alan can start scaling back to focus more time and energy on ministry, and that is exciting to us. So in addition to teaching in Nekwaya on Sundays, Alan has been going up to Chipembe on Tuesdays and together with believers from Chipembe going further north to a village further off the beaten path called Nkuunama in order to meet with people interested to hear the story of God. On the first day of teaching in Nkuunama, as he stopped in Chipembe to pick up the believers there, Alan saw the chief of Chipembe, a respected Muslim man with whom we have a good relationship (we have stayed at his house on our weekend visits), and asked if he wanted to come along, and so the chief did. They all went to Nkuunama and met with the chief there, to explain again who they were and why they wanted to start visiting Nkuunama regularly. The chief of Chipembe also spoke up and vouched for Alan and the believers from Chipembe, that he knew us and what we were about, that we had stayed at his house. His testimony about us and the church in Chipembe is a huge blessing as we begin relationships in a new place; in the culture here it is not appropriate to just show up alone somewhere new and start teaching – instead you take the longer route of going through the relationship network and relying on the testimony of others that you are trustworthy and not up to mischief. So Alan and some of the believers from Chipembe have begun teaching through the Old Testament in Nkuunama; for now they are meeting at the chief's house there.

We have had two weekend seminars recently. First, in June we, along with our teammates the Smiths, took our interns out to the Balama district to spend the weekend with the church there. It was good to visit with them – it is a very hard hour-and-a-half ride on a very bad road, and so we don't see them that often. It was a little different than when we usually go out to the bush in that it was our first time as a family to be out in the bush with another family from our team, not to mention the interns, so of course Abby and Ellie loved playing with Luke and Andrew and getting covered in Balama's red clay dust from head to toe! Jeremy and Alan did most of the teaching: mostly from the book of Mark and discussing some questions in the church. Then in July Alan and our teammate Aaron Roland had an all-weekend teaching seminar in town for all the churches in the Montepuez district. There had been some confusion regarding the dates of the seminar, and in the few days before the weekend we wondered if many people would be able to come. We were pleasantly surprised, though, at the really good turn out, with about 40 people participating. Another concern we had for that seminar was Alan's health. About a week before Alan developed malaria, and while we treated it pretty quickly, he had several side effects from the medication that lasted about a week, including pretty severe vision disturbances. His vision was blurry, his depth perception was off, and he had great difficulty focusing his eyes on a page, which was very frustrating to him. Many of you knew he was sick and many of you were praying for him and sending emails of encouragement, and we were so thankful. Bowing out of the conference was not a good option because many of the participants had walked all day to get there. We were thankful to God for healing his body and also for restoring his vision – by the time the seminar was scheduled to start he could focus just enough to teach, and God blessed it. Alan and Aaron taught through the book of James and it went really well.

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We continue to worship with the young church in Nekwaya most Sundays; we finished going through the Old Testament awhile back and right now we are going slowly through the book of Mark (one of the few books that has been translated into Makua-Metto). Some of our other weekly activities include women's and men's Bible studies here in town, participating and studying with them. I have taught a couple of times, though most weeks one of the Mozambican ladies teaches, and my teammate Martha has taught many times as well. The ladies' class has really flourished since we started rotating among different ladies' homes earlier this year instead of just meeting at the church building.

Speaking of Bible translation, in early July we went to Nampula for Alan to participate for a few days in a training seminar at SIL (Wycliffe Bible Translators). We are sponsoring a couple of our language teachers to be trained in translation and revision in order to translate some leadership training materials from Portuguese to Makua-Metto. Alan participated in the training seminar for a few days in order to get a glimpse of what they were being taught, methods of revision, etc, and that was an informative experience. To date, only Mark, Jonah, Genesis, and James have been translated into Makua-Metto, and the SIL translation team continues to work away at this huge task. We try to collaborate and communicate often with SIL missionaries and their national workers to support as much as we can our common desire to see the whole of the scriptures available in Makua-Metto.

Sometimes ministry in Mozambique isn't always pleasant; sometimes people want to be leaders who are not yet mature enough. Tomorrow Alan is going to Nekwaya and afterwards will meet with the church there and in the nearby village of Nakuka to deal with some accusations and finger pointing that has been taking place between the "leaders" there. He's taking some church leaders from Montepuez to help sort it out and also serve as witnesses. So pray for us as we deal with immature believers and try to help them grow.

About two weeks after the interns left, my parents came for a visit, which we enjoyed very much. We dragged them with us all over the place, meeting and greeting so many of our friends in Chipembe, Nekwaya, Nakuka, and here in town. They were very patient and endured much time on really bad roads and many conversations that they couldn't understand because they understood how important it is to our Mozambican friends for my parents to visit their homes. They learned a few phrases in Makua, shared meals with the churches in Chipembe and Nekwaya, and my mom even tried carrying a large bundle of cut grass on her head (we got some great pictures and video footage!). We also enjoyed all the fun items from the States that they brought to us, including some presents for Abby's birthday party while they were here, and they even brought some gifts for our workers, which were all a big hit. They were also good sports in that we all got really sick after eating up in Chipembe the first Sunday. For almost a week, each day one of us was really sick with vomiting and diarrhea – we're still not sure if it was a bug or food that wasn't cooked properly. But we eventually all recovered! Abby and Ellie really enjoyed playing with Papa and Nana and monopolizing their time and attention, and of course, the visit went by way too fast. Just yesterday we put them on a plane in Pemba, and as I type they are in Johannesburg waiting to catch their next flight back to the States tonight.

In less than a week we will be receiving another visit, this time from Steve Adams and Tom Purkey from the Donelson Church of Christ in Nashville, our sponsoring church family. This is Donelson's first visit here, and we are really excited to have them here with us and let them see and experience our life and ministry here in Mozambique. On top of that, while Steve and Tom are here, our team is also looking forward to receiving a visit from Jim Parks, our website administrator and elder with the Redlands Church of Christ in Redlands, CA, one of Jeremy and Martha Smith's supporting churches. The girls are doing well; Abby just turned four and seems so tall and grown-up; she loves flamingos and the color pink. Ellie is 20 months old and has just recently really taken off putting words together to make short sentences. Other team news includes that the Rolands are expecting baby number 2 in November and the Smiths are expecting baby number 3 in December, so we are looking forward to meeting those 2 little ones soon!

Well, we know that was long for a newsletter – hopefully we will not delay so long again – bless all of you who stuck it through to the end! As we close, we ask you to pray for the following:

- For the Kingdom of God to come among the Makua-Metto
- For our health
- For language learning, ministry, and parenting, and the balance of the three

We love and miss you all,

In Christ,
Rachel, Alan, Abby, and Ellie