

Howell's – eMail News

Thursday – January 3, 2008

Dear Friends and Family,

Happy Holidays from the tropics! The last couple of months have been warm and wet here in Mozambique, with more of the same to come. It is hard for us to imagine the chilly and downright cold temperatures most of you are having, though it is fun to try! It has been either very cloudy or rainy, though, ever since Christmas Day, which really helps cut the heat this time of year, and so the last week or so we have only been reaching about 85 degrees every day, which is a nice break from the more normal soaring temperatures. Mangoes have been ripening and falling for awhile now, and we REALLY enjoy that – we have three different varieties of mangoes just in our yard!

In mid-November the provincial conference for Churches of Christ was held in Balama, about an hour and a half further out in the bush from Montepuez. Since it was not at a central location this year, we decided that the girls and I would stay home so more Mozambicans could fit in the car together. Our team also helped out with additional transport, and about 60-70 church members were there from southern Cabo Delgado. The weekend went well and it was good to see people we usually interact with in separate areas together in one place. Jeremy, Chad and Alan used our teaching times to teach about giving and to address problems the administration of the offering in the local churches. We taught about the reasons for giving, how to use the offering and even some practical basic bookkeeping techniques. Not surprisingly, we've seen that in churches where the offering is not handled appropriately there is mistrust and people do not have a desire to give.

Living so far away means that we miss a lot of holiday get-togethers with our families back in the States, but we really enjoy celebrating different holidays with teammates and other friends from the missionary and expatriate community. This year for Thanksgiving we had Sam and Nancy Shewmaker, who have been mentors to our team, visiting as they wrapped up their travels and were heading back to Rwanda, as well as three other missionary families from Balama and from Nampula. When everyone was counted we had 29 people at our house for Thanksgiving, almost half of which were small children, who all enjoyed splashing and swimming in the wading pools to get a break from the heat! We also took advantage of having so many people in one place to spend some time worshipping together in English, which was refreshing.

It was a great blessing to have Sam and Nancy Shewmaker here to visit our team. We enjoyed their fellowship and especially their counsel and the years of experience they have to share. We are in a strange position here as doing something we have never exactly done before we came, and being far away from the people we work for, most of which have also never done exactly what we are doing, so we do not often have close, regular access to people who are beyond us in experience and wisdom in a specific context like ours. This means that we really treasure having time with people of whom we can pick their brains, hear their stories, ask technical questions, and have them ask us hard questions, too. Two gifts Sam and Nancy have that we really benefited from this visit were their learning posture and their networking abilities. Sam and Nancy, though far beyond us in wisdom and experience, are still learning new things, seeking out new information, and trying new ways to do things, all of which they are happy to share with us. In addition to this, they serve well in a role as connectors, helping to network different people together. After some good conversations about ministry and teaching while they were with us, Sam helped get several conversations started over email about strategy and teaching curriculums with different missionaries from all over the continent, and Alan has taken this and run with it. We are at an exciting point in our work here where more and more of Alan's time is filled with teaching and starting studies in new villages, and he has been eager to connect and collaborate with others beyond our immediate community and hear how they are doing what they are doing. There has been a steady stream of informative and interesting emails, and Alan has been eating it up!

While we were in Pemba taking Sam and Nancy to the airport to go back to Rwanda, we tried to get plane tickets to visit our friends the Holton's and Caldwell's in Lichinga in December. We were surprised and disappointed at the prices of the tickets – apparently the promotional prices we had heard about were no longer valid. We were really looking forward to being with them and also to get to see and experience their work in person. They have a development farm where they have worked on many different projects, ranging from appropriate technology to agriculture and animal husbandry, all as ways to teach and empower people with hope and tools and skills to invest in and bless their families and communities. We are excited to begin trying a few projects here in Montepuez, and we really wanted to see Malo Ga Kujilana (the name of their farm) first hand. We will have to postpone until ticket prices are cheaper or the earth is drier, since the highway doesn't yet go all the way through between Montepuez and Lichinga, and December is a very muddy, rainy time to go driving off into the bush (sometime in the next few years it will be a nice paved highway; right now much of it is tire tracks through the tall muddy grass!)

Speaking of rain, please continue to ask God to bless Mozambique with a good rainy season and enough crops this harvest to last until the next. Though this year was not as bad as the drought of '04-'05, it wasn't a great year, and there has been a lot of shortages of food and a lot of hunger. We have done a small scale grain distribution

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for hunger relief, but it also seems that this year people are having trouble finding seed to plant as the rains have started. We daily live in the tension of having so much among people who have so little; we learn to give and share a lot while being humbled still more at the same time at how much we still have to learn and how far we still have to grow.

With the rains and the planting many people are actually living or staying for extended stretches way out in their machambas (small farms). They are tilling and weeding and planting and chasing away the rats, monkeys, and other small animals who are stealing the seeds they just planted. Just Friday a friend of mine came by to ask for help to buy corn seed as she had just been out to her machamba again and not a single kernel of corn she had planted was left in the ground by the rats. Some of the smaller churches or groups have suspended their weekly meetings until February or March, like the village of Nkuunama and the women's Bible study here in town, when people won't need to stay out in their machambas so much.

Alan is still meeting and studying regularly with groups in Khambiri, Chiure, and Nkororo, all at different levels and with different group personalities. The village of Khambiri has had a large group meeting weekly to study and hear the story of God, and has been eager to get things going, faster sometimes than we would like. They baptized ten people last week, and we have heard that there are another ten next week who want to be baptized, while Nkororo has been at a more moderate pace. In Chiure Alan studies with a smaller group of leaders from several more established (5 years) churches in that district, and instead of the beginning overall story of God, they are studying deeper themes of discipleship and leadership and inner transformation. Alan has been trying to incorporate some of the ideas and input he has gotten from his cross-continental email conversations, though sometimes it is challenging. For example, several of those he has been communicating with really recommended teaching in very small groups (a smaller group of say, four, having the benefit of deeper interaction and a more indigenous transmission of the Kingdom message as those few share and teach in their own communities and families) but when Alan studied in Nkororo for the first time, 45 people showed up! Please pray for the roads during this rainy time; one of the bridges that is important for getting to Khambiri has collapsed and Alan has had to drive through the river bed to get there – this is fine for now when there is not much deep water, but in a few weeks that will not be possible.

We enjoyed a rainy, not-too-hot Christmas with our teammates Chad and Amy Westerholm and their daughter Maggie. They actually spent the night at our house so we could all wake up and have Christmas morning together, and that was a lot of fun. This year the postal service seems to be running slower than last year – the Christmas packages many of you sent are still coming in at a slow, steady stream – hopefully we will get them all before February! Thank you so much for all the goodies from “home” - it makes us feel not quite so far away and takes the edge off the loneliness we feel from time to time being such a distance from you whom we love!

We are also VERY happy to announce the births of Elijah Roland on 15 November and Joshua Smith on 30 December. The Roland's will begin their journey back to Mozambique from South Africa next week, and the Smiths return to us from the States in February. Abby and Ellie REALLY like babies, and we are very much looking forward to meeting our two new little teammates!

January 12-14 Alan will go to Mocuba (farther south in Mozambique, two provinces away) to participate in a gathering of Mozambican church leaders to talk about missions and evangelism. The more mature churches in other parts of Mozambique have been trying to figure out how to send Mozambican missionaries into more unreached places like where we are serving. Sometimes there has been tension between the expatriate missionaries and the national church leaders from farther south, but they have invited us to participate in these meetings and we believe we have something to contribute to the conversation. Alan has been working very hard on preparing some resources for this meeting, and we would love it if you joined us in asking God to open the hearts and ears of everyone at the meeting.

We will wrap up here. Please continue to ask God for rain and plentiful crops, and to bless the meeting down in Mocuba in a little over a week. We will be on furlough in the States in April, May, and June, and we are really excited to spend time in person with as many of you as possible! We love and miss you all, and it is our prayer that in this new year God will give each of you the strength and courage and hope to continue to pursue Him and his love, so we may walk a little more fully in his Kingdom every day.

Love,
Rachel, Alan, Abby, and Ellie