

Howell's – eMail News

Thursday, November 8, 2007

Dear Friends and Family,

Greetings again from Mozambique! We can hardly believe it is already November – life and ministry have been moving along, and once again we are late getting out a newsletter! It has really begun to get hot here just in the last week or so, and so we are continually sweating as our bodies adjust to the temperature change. In a matter of a few days we noticed ourselves drinking much more water than the week before, and it is actually a relief to take a cold shower at the end of the day!

august visits

When we last wrote, we were expecting Steve Adams and Tom Purkey, two of the elders from Donelson Church of Christ, our sponsoring church family in Nashville. We really enjoyed having them with us, though their visit flew by really fast. We took them with us through all of our weekly activities, and they visited many Mozambican Christians and several village churches: Nekwaya, Chipembe, as well as Nkuunama where Alan has been teaching and working towards planting a church. They were very good sports – they endured riding for long stretches on bad roads, and eating strange food with people they couldn't communicate with! They got a glimpse of what work is being done towards advancing God's kingdom here, as well as a glimpse of what a week is like for us here in Mozambique: our family routines, our relationships with Mozambicans, and the ways our team works together. This was our first visit from Donelson, and we enjoyed it so much – we just wish it could have been longer, though I know their families missed them and were ready to have them back. During their visit, our team also received a visit from Jim Parks, our website administrator and an elder with the Redlands Church of Christ in Redlands, California, one of Jeremy and Martha's supporting churches. It was his first visit to Mozambique as well, and we thoroughly enjoyed having him here.

caleb gardner

As most of you already know, two different families in our mission fellowship here in Mozambique, Good News For Africa, had very serious health crises at the end of August. Down in Nampula, our dear friends Shawn and Sarah Gardner's one-year-old son Caleb had been sick for a few days when it quickly developed into severe respiratory distress. Through God's grace and help from a lot of God's people, Caleb was life-flighted from Nampula down to Johannesburg, South Africa on Saturday August 25. He had been intubated (a breathing tube inserted into the trachea) by two Cuban doctors at the hospital in Nampula that day, and then he spent several weeks under heavy sedation breathing on a ventilator in the ICU down in Johannesburg. After about three weeks on the ventilator with several serious complications, he was finally extubated successfully and began breathing on his own without tubes and machines. Over the next couple of weeks there was a lot of uncertainty as to whether or not Caleb had sustained any brain damage due to lack of oxygen when he was in severe respiratory distress and being intubated back in Nampula. For awhile he was groggy and agitated and had lost several developmental milestones, but over the following weeks, with many people continuing to pray, God continued to restore his body. He was released from the hospital after nearly eight weeks, and he has regained many skills that the doctors were uncertain of right after he was extubated: swallowing, drinking, sitting up, making eye contact, control of his limbs, smiling, tracking sounds, putting fingers in his mouth, and we recently heard that he had begun crawling again. We are so thankful for God's care of Caleb, and we ask that you continue to ask God for complete restoration of his body and his mind. Shawn, Sarah, and Caleb Gardner, along with his brother and sister Ben and Olivia, have gone back to the States to be with family and to rest and recuperate from this crisis. They have return tickets to Mozambique next year, though they are waiting to see how Caleb recovers to decide whether or not they will return to Mozambique only for a few months or to stay longer.

amy westerholm

Exactly one week after Caleb was flown out, on Saturday September 1, our teammate Amy Westerholm was driving back to Montepuez from Pemba (where we had just finished having a team retreat) when she had a serious car accident. Her husband Chad was still in Pemba, as he and Jeremy Smith were staying a few extra days to teach a weekend seminar with the church there in Pemba, but their daughter Maggie was in the car with Amy. The car both spun and flipped and ended up right side up on the other side of the road, and Amy received multiple severe lacerations on her head, one arm, and one hand, and thankfully, miraculously, Maggie was not hurt at all. A physician with a vehicle passed by the accident soon after it happened (that is extremely unusual), and took her and Maggie directly back to Pemba, where they went to a clinic and later to the hospital (both of which had very little medical supplies). A missionary doctor we know in Pemba stayed with Chad and Amy to help them navigate the Mozambican health care system, and he strongly recommended calling a medical evacuation plane, especially since there is no

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equipment or facilities in Pemba to assess the extent of her head or neck injuries. So late that night Amy was life-flighted down to a hospital in Johannesburg. Once there CT scans showed that she didn't receive any spinal injuries or head trauma deeper than her scalp lacerations, and she had several surgeries in that first week or so for the surgeon to clean and close up those wounds and to put a pin in a broken thumb. God has watched over her so much – from keeping Maggie miraculously unharmed and from keeping Amy from further, more serious injuries. On October 10 Chad, Amy, and Maggie arrived back in Pemba, and we have been so thankful to have them back safe, healthy, and healing. The car insurance company has already cut a check for Toyota in Pemba to go ahead and begin repairs on their truck, though we know it will be a little while before it's done. We praise God for his loving care of our teammates, and we ask that you continue to ask God to continue to heal Amy completely.

car accident care

As a side note, we wanted to describe a little more what happened on the day of the accident so people can understand a little more what life is like in Mozambique. Amy's accident occurred in a very remote area on the highway, though it is amazing that she actually had cell phone coverage and was able to call Chad in Pemba and us here in Montepuez. Up until very recently there was no cell phone coverage except in the main cities – none along the highways and not even in smaller towns. In addition, there is only one place in the 210 km stretch between Pemba and Montepuez that has a phone booth with a single land line. "Roadside Assistance" in any municipal or even commercially organized form doesn't exist, so while Chad and the Smiths took care of Amy in Pemba, Alan along with our teammate Aaron Roland had to go take care of the truck on the side of the road. It was not drivable, so they had to first go and greet the traffic police and a few different points along the highway (these are the guys who sit in the shade on the side of the highway and check drivers licenses) to report the accident and fill out some paperwork, and then Alan and Aaron had to go hunting around Pemba for somebody with a large enough truck to bring the Westerholms' truck to Pemba. Unable to find a large truck with a crane to lift the car out of the ditch to put it on the truck, they eventually found a guy with a smallish flat bed truck that agreed to carry it. On Sunday, Alan and Aaron drove back out to the accident site where they had paid a few guys to stay with the car all night (to keep it from getting looted or stripped), and the truck from Pemba arrived as well. They had to hire 20 men to help lift the car by hand to put it onto the flat bed of the truck. At first the owner of the truck wanted to put Chad and Amy's car on bed-first, but as their car was longer than the flat bed, he realized that wouldn't work, and so the 20 guys had to lift the car off again by hand and turn it around and put it on the other way. The medical care available in Pemba is not like what you see the United States, either. They spent a few hours in the nicest room in the Pemba hospital, which was bare, painted concrete walls, and there was very little choice in medication to help with the pain while she got stitches. Once when the clinic staff told Amy to get up and go get in her car to go to the hospital for x-rays, the South African missionary doctor even intervened to stress that they still didn't know if she had any spinal injury or not, and that they should transport Amy properly on a back board with her head immobilized. Chad was able to contact their health insurance company and arrange for the medical evacuation flight to come up from South Africa, but since the plane would arrive at night Alan had to go to the Pemba airport, speak with the air traffic controller to tell him what had happened and make an official request for the airport to remain open and keep the runway lights on! All this is just an example of the lack of infrastructure and public services in this corner of the world.

teaching in villages

The last few months we have continued to worship with the church in Nekwaya, with Alan finishing up going through the Old Testament and the book of Mark and now nearly done teaching the series on the life of the church. We had not yet gone to stay for a weekend there in Nekwaya, and so in the middle of September we picked a weekend, took our tent and fellowshiped with them through the weekend, mostly spending time together, but also a few times for teaching and worship. Sunday morning several people had decided to be baptized, so we had to drive quite a ways to water (it is a very dry time of year), and then we worshipped together and headed back to Montepuez. It was a fun weekend, and we thought about how different it was from our first weekend that we ever stayed in Chipembe, back when we could hardly speak Makua – it was such a huge difference being able to communicate! Also that weekend, we took a few hours to go and visit the village of Khambiri, where several people had said they wanted to talk to us. We met the village leaders and also several family members of Christians in Nekwaya. We explained who we are and what we do and heard from a small group that wanted to start a church. Alan encouraged them to worship with the church in Nekwaya for a few weeks to get to know people there and see what it was all about, and so that Sunday three people from Khambiri walked 2 hours to come worship with the church in Nekwaya, and they have continued to do so most Sundays. Alan has gotten together with some of these people and also with Christians from Nekwaya and Chipembe and had several conversations about where to go from here, and so the plan is that sometime in December

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Alan will start going to Khambiri every Tuesday to teach those who are interested in hearing the story of God (he will go through the Old Testament, and the book of Mark, and then the lessons on the life of the church). By then he will have finished that same series of teaching in Nkuunama on Tuesdays, and the group that meets to study on Tuesdays in Nkuunama, several of which have recently decided to publicly confess Christ in baptism, will need to decide if they will declare themselves a church in their village. If that happens, then we will phase out of regular Sundays in Nekwaya to regular Sundays in Nkuunama. Nkuunama is only about 5 km from Chipembe, and it has been neat to go with Christians from Chipembe to teach and to work towards planting a church there together.

We realize that these village names are strange and unfamiliar to those of you far away – we hope we are doing a fair job of describing what is happening in each place. It may help to remember that our vision has always been for a church-planting *movement*, as opposed to planting just one church, as well as that we try to encourage and empower Mozambican leadership from the beginning, trying to avoid over-dependency on the missionary, so that churches grow and mature. So, speaking generally, our pattern has been to meet regularly (every week) with a group to teach through a series of basic lessons (studying through the Old Testament, studying through the book of Mark, and then studying the life of the church). Then when we reach the end of that, we begin a different phase in our relationship where we visit less often so they have some space to grow, but continuing to teach when we are with them, building on the foundation they have already learned, and focusing on leadership training. So we started weekly with the very small church Chipembe back in early 2006, and by the end of that year we were with the Chipembe only occasionally and meeting with the very small church in Nekwaya weekly. Soon we will be with Nekwaya only occasionally and meet with Nkuunama on weekly on Sundays, should they decide to declare themselves a church, and then Khambiri will be the place where Alan teaches on Tuesdays.

other districts & leadership training

In our regular weekly work, up to this point, our team has largely focused on a certain geographical area, the Montepuez *district* (the equivalent of a county) in our work with village churches and with villages where people are asking to study, with the exception of the Westerholms who overlap a little into the district to the east. In response to requests for teaching from churches in the other southern districts (Balama, Namuno, Ancuabe, Pemba, Chiure) of the Cabo Delgado province (the equivalent of a state), for 2007 we committed to make one weekend visit for a teaching seminar during the year in each district. We have generally paired up for two families to go do the seminar together, and this has gone pretty well. In addition, the churches down in the Chiure district, about 2 hours away (highway), are older and more mature than the young churches up here closer to us. So recently Alan and Jeremy have begun going together two Saturdays a month to study with a small group of leaders from those three churches, using a curriculum called "Train and Multiply" to disciple and empower them to lead their churches. We also have begun the process of translating those materials into Makua-Metto from Portuguese.

weekly women's study

The weekly women's study is still meeting on Thursdays, rotating between different women's houses. It has definitely been a stretch for my language abilities to teach occasionally, but it is exciting to see improvement in my ability to communicate. One week in August all the women (including Martha and me) met as usual on Thursday and we all went together out to the village of Opaco to study with the women from the church there. We fellowshiped and worshipped together and spent the night out there, then studied scriptures together the next morning before going back to Montepuez. Then again one week in October we met like usual on a Thursday but went out together to Chipembe, fellowshiped, spent the night, and studied together with the women there. Alan and I laughed that the visit to Opaco in August was my first night ever away from Abby and Ellie – and I was out in a Mozambican village sharing a very tiny tent with a very pregnant teammate!

language learning

And lest we forget that all-important task of language learning – yes, we are still chipping away at it! It is getting easier and easier to communicate, which of course means it is also getting more and more fun. And the learning curve goes up the more you learn – we have realized that we can retain things much quicker now (new vocabulary, a certain kind of prefix, a tricky verb tense) than when we began. Our language learning activities have evolved as well; we spend less time with a tutor and less time studying, and we spend more time preparing lessons and materials for teaching and going to the tutor for help with certain parts. Spending time with people (lots and lots of it!) is always the key, though – actually *using* the language we are learning – in the beginning and even still now. I am currently still working on a few of the more tricky verb tenses (conditional, subjunctive), forming clauses, and I know I still have a ways to go

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with my sentence structures. Just for fun, as an example, to say "I do not understand what you are saying" we use 8 words in English. In Makua-Metto, it is said "Akineewa inulumacenyu." "I do not understand" is communicated as one word "akineewa," and the descriptive clause "what you are saying" is communicated as one word "inulumacenyu." God has given us the strength and endurance to persevere in this huge task, which isn't always pleasant each day!

our house and utilities

The house we rent here in Montepuez had a lot of repairs needed back when we first came, and in many places in Africa those repairs or improvements are the responsibility of the renter. So we have continually worked on repair/renovation projects, mostly in our spare time or hiring other people to do the work. The day after our elders from Donelson left, we began a kitchen renovation that involved hiring a mason to bust out the concrete-block kitchen counters (they were very low and a very poor use of space) and then put down tile and put in cabinets. We also had a contractor come up from Nampula to do the plumbing for the kitchen sink, the twin-tub clothes washer out on the porch, as well as doing some electrical wiring and putting some tar over our leaky spots on the roof. Alan has also recently gotten our solar panels up on the roof, and the whole system connected and up and running. The city electricity has been steadily going downhill over the past year; we have been without power every other night for quite awhile now, but then just recently it has gotten much worse. The city of Montepuez uses huge generators for their electricity, but when they break, it can be hours or days before they are fixed. They have at least one generator that is working, and they focus that power on the main line in town that includes the hospital and city/district government (and 2 of our teammates), but it is not enough to power the whole town, and so when the other generator is broken, the rest of the town is without power. Poles and lines bringing in hydroelectric power (from the Cahora Bassa dam) are on their way to Montepuez, but may not be up and running until sometime next year. And so it was literally only a few days after Alan got the solar panel system up and running that the other generator broke. Most of the city (including our house!) is currently going without city power for days at a time. We have been so thankful for the solar panels and that we aren't having to worry about food spoilage, that we can continue activities like charging up the computer so we can send emails and write newsletters, and run the fans at night since it has gotten so hot lately.

kids and new team babies

Abby and Ellie are growing and having fun (Ellie turns 2 next week), learning to speak a little more Makua here and there. I gave them each haircuts awhile back, knowing that the hot months were coming, but the haircuts made them each look so much older that we both thought "time is going by too fast!" Ellie has been talking so much more lately – it has been fun seeing her enjoy being able to tell us what is on her mind! Our team has started an informal "Preschool" on Thursdays for the kids, rotating to each different family each week, and the kids enjoy it so much. We have also been watching each other's children a little more regularly, taking turns to give each other time to focus on other tasks like language study. Speaking of children, the Rolands left a month ago for South Africa to have their second son, due next week, and the Smiths leave in couple weeks for the States to have baby number 3 sometime around Christmas. We are really looking forward to meeting these two new babies!

Well, we will wrap up here. Please keep the following things in your prayers:

- For the Kingdom of God to come among the Makua-Metto
- For the coming rains, that they will be plentiful, and that the crops will grow
- For the hunger until the coming harvest in April
- For language learning, ministry, and parenting, and the balance of the three

Oh, and don't forget – Jim Parks, our website administrator, took back CD's with lots of pictures on them to post on our website, so feel free to go take a look at those. We love and miss you all!

Love,
Rachel, Alan, Abby, and Ellie