

Mozambique Evangel

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Dear Friends:

For some of you it has been a long while since you last heard from us. In the future we will be relying more on e-mail communications and updates through our website. If you would like to receive those notices, please send an e-mail to gracemissions@juno.com so we can have a record of your interest. Please also visit our website at www.gracemissionsministries.org. Click Media, Newsletters to access the most recent newsletters and articles.

Hospital Construction: Construction has not resumed since we completed the two sanitation blocks and built the foundation walls for the main building before furlough. The next stage is erecting the walls and putting on the roof; but before undertaking that, we must recruit additional helpers to assist with other ministries that also demand our attention.

Bookshop: The downtown bookshop has been in operation for two years now. It is the only Christian bookstore I know of in northern Mozambique, and it is a vital ministry. We keep over 500 titles in stock which the publishers graciously supply at huge discounts (up to 80% off the list price) because of the extreme poverty of most Mozambicans. I reduce that price even further, selling the books at less than our cost. Even then, few Mozambicans can buy them without making a sacrifice in other essential areas, so we also maintain a library where they may read the books for free. Throughout the week I offer Bible classes in the reading room of the bookshop. Several pastors who participated in the last FIEL conference are now attending the Thursday doctrine classes and are doing well on the homework assignments and tests.

Our shop is strategically located on the main street in the center of town, and we have a large sign advertising its existence; yet few local Christians realize there is a place in Mozambique, let alone their own city, where they can buy Bibles, hymnals, and Reformed evangelical literature written by men like Martin Lloyd-Jones, J.C. Ryle, J.I. Packer, A.W. Pink, Charles Spurgeon, John MacArthur, R.C. Sproul, and the Puritan fathers.

We are seeking a missionary associate to oversee this ministry, to publicize it among the Christian community, to expand its usefulness, and to handle the administrative work involved. The bookshop costs \$500 a month for salaries and overhead, none of which is recovered from sales. Since January we have spent an additional \$6,000 subsidizing the books that are bought, lifting our total outlay above \$10,000 during eight months. Now you know why Christian bookshops do not exist in Mozambique! However, we believe this is a ministry the Mozambican church much needs, and as God enables we are committed to maintaining and even expanding the work. You are warmly invited to be a part of it!

FIEL Conferences: Since the last report, we have hosted two nation-wide pastors' conferences for church leaders and their wives. Karl Peterson and I began these conferences six years ago because of the great lack among church leaders of instruction in the doctrines of salvation by grace through faith.

This ministry is carried out in conjunction with Editora FIEL ("Faithful Publishers"), a Brazilian publishing house that translates Evangelical Reformed literature into Portuguese and distributes it throughout the world. Karl handles publicity, organizes the program, and brings in the speakers who come from Africa, Europe, and North and South America. I handle the details involved in hosting the conference locally. We each cover the portion of expenses incurred by our respective responsibilities. Our speakers this year were Martin Holdt, international conference speaker from South Africa, and Josefá Vasconcelos, once a famous crusade evangelist known throughout Brazil. The conference was well-attended, with 180 men and wives registering and 75 out-of-town participants signing up for lodging at the conference grounds. Generally our participants come from 30-40 different denominations and 8 of Mozambique's 10 provinces.

We have not yet analyzed the statistics from this year's conference, but we expect they will show we continue to reach a diverse audience with the doctrines of grace. The need for these conferences is underscored by excerpts from the following testimonial offered by Matt Zook, a missionary with New Tribes Missions which has been extensively surveying the church in northern Mozambique for the past year. "The church in Mozambique is a mile wide and an inch deep, if we dare say even that.

On our survey we talked with many pastors. The two main shortages we found were: 1) the pastors themselves did not understand grace teaching, and 2) the pastors have very little written material to study. To illustrate the first point, I will show several of the responses that were characteristic of the church leaders to our doctrinal questionnaire to one of the most telling questions of all. After asking what the penalty for sin was and normally hearing death and hell, we asked if there was any way for man to avoid this punishment. Here are some answers: "One man, well churched and in charge of church relations for the translation of the Bible in his language, told us that to be saved, 'a person must follow the commandments in the Bible.' When asked which ones, he said, 'the Ten Commandments.' One elder (similar to what is called a pastor in the western setting) overseeing a large church told us that to be saved one must 'stop being problematic, love others, help the poor, keep the Ten Commandments.' These were given as examples, he said, as to be saved you have to obey everything in the Bible. Another elder of a church told us that to be saved people must 'conform to the commands of Scripture, leave the evil ways, and follow the straight paths of God. It is also necessary to repent, keep the Ten Commandments, and love one another.' He was the leader of a church with 95 members. "These are examples of the Christ-less and grace-less salvation message that is common everywhere here. Beyond that, these were not the answers of common people but of respected Christian leaders.

Every church leader with whom we talked mentioned the need for Bibles and Christian materials, an interesting request when it would be hard to concede that some of them were even believers. When we asked the church leader mentioned above with 95 members how many people in the church had Bibles he said 'somos três' - 'We are three.'

"In contrast to these encounters stands one Mozambican pastor we met on the trip. He was very clear that salvation is possible only through the work of Christ on the cross. He was the first of two pastors or religious people that we met on the trip that said salvation came through faith in Jesus Christ instead of works of righteousness. No one else even mentioned the name of Jesus in regards to salvation. He was a pastor (pastor here usually means leader over many churches, as in his case). He said he was responsible for 60 churches and 1,600 people. There are 36 elders and 26 deacons working under him. "Unlike other pastors who only have one translation

and very few materials, he has several Portuguese Bible translations including the Geneva Study Bible. When I asked him how he got all his books and Bibles he said that some he got at Hephzibah, a Dutch Reformed Seminary in Mozambique, and others he obtained at the FIEL Pastors Conference in Nampula hosted by Dr. Woodrow. When I told him this year's conference was happening the very week we were visiting together, he said he knew and wanted to go but did not have enough money. Registration costs \$8.00, with meals and lodging provided free by the sponsors. "I hope this is an encouragement to those of you are praying for and supporting the ministry of Dr. Woodrow.

The need is great here and the impact of grace teaching and written materials, be they books or Bibles, have greatly blessed our lives. It is through ministries like Dr. Woodrow's and that of FIEL publishers who send pastors a book free each month for 36 months and conduct an annual pastors' conference in Nampula for church leaders from all over Mozambique that this message and these materials are continuing to bless people all over the world, even a pastor working in a place that to us seems to be close to the middle of nowhere in the Zambezi Province in Mozambique. " The cost of hosting the four day conference is significant – about \$100 for each participant. I pay for the meeting facilities, transportation, food, and lodging which usually comes to \$5000, though this year it was \$4000. I have already reserved the facilities for next year's conference. This time we plan to run for the leaders' wives parallel, simultaneous meetings geared to their special needs and level of understanding. As we have reached the maximum seating capacity of our meeting hall, for the conferences to continue growing I hope to purchase a tent large enough to seat 300-350 people.

Pray that God would continue to provide the resources for this ministry and that He would lead us to someone qualified to work alongside Karl and me not only in organizing the conferences but also in assuming the responsibilities of the bookshop and some of Karl's monthly workload in the book distribution program.

Post-conference Seminar: This year for the first time I offered a post-conference seminar for pastors who wished to stay on and take an intensive 6 day course in systematic theology. It ended up being the most satisfying event I have participated in during 15 years of ministry here. The annual conferences have been thrilling

because of the good attendance and excellent speakers, but at the seminar it was gratifying to see men actually come to grips with salvation by grace through faith and all the ramifications the true gospel has in Christian doctrine and practice. The men studied 60 hours in six days, spending 25 hours in lecture, 15 hours in discussion, 15 hours doing homework, and 5 hours taking 13 tests. I limited enrollment to 20 men because of all the grading involved. I was up late each night checking about 100 homework papers and tests from the day, but the time spent grading was more than compensated for by the progress being made. There were some clear thinkers and spiritually mature men in the group, and in their case it was evident the conferences and books had plowed up the ground ahead of time. Others were just beginning to think Biblically. In every case it was rewarding, though two did not pass the course, and the men enthusiastically asked for a follow-on seminar.

I have kept the contact information for each of them and believe if I offered another seminar next month they would fill it several times over with their associates. For those who participate, the seminar is even more important than the conference. It is the conference, with its excellent speakers, good fellowship, and affordable (i.e., almost free) literature, that draws men from their respective districts and gives the seminar credibility and exposure. But in the seminar, they are compelled to interact with Scripture and to learn to think and preach Biblically. During the week the men looked at 500 Bible texts covering 24 doctrinal issues in 80 pages of handouts. Several mentioned the benefit they expected to derive just from having so many scripture portions to consult in upcoming sermon preparations. The seven highest scorers were awarded concordances or Geneva Study Bibles.

Total cost of feeding and lodging the men, providing the curriculum, and renting the facilities was \$900 or \$45 per participant. If we were not leaving the country to recruit the missionary help we need, I would soon offer a repeat seminar. However, under the circumstances, I will have to wait until the next conference to repeat the course.

Pray that God would continue to provide ways of maximizing the opportunities provided through the FIEL ministries here in Mozambique and that He would provide the human and material resources they require.

Conclusion: There is much more I need to report – family news; church work; testimonies and conversions; efforts to find eight missionary associates; field visits from supporters; changes made in Grace Missions; upcoming States-side church visitation; and a follow-up on the story about Faustino, our church member and beloved associate who was murdered while working in our bookroom. These things are covered in brief updates already prepared and available now on our website which others will receive month by month so they may have time to “read all about it.”

For the present, let me express our gratitude to those who have remembered us despite the dearth of news. I did prepare four reports in the past eight months, but for various reasons they could not be sent out. Your prayers and support are important to us, for without them we would not have these many ministries to tell about!

By His grace,
Charles and Julie Woodrow