

Grace Missions Newsletter - July 2006 – by Charles Woodrow

Dear Friends:

Hello from Nampula, Mozambique. We have interrupted our visitation time in the States so I could return to Nampula to host the seventh annual FIEL conference in Mozambique. These are nationwide conferences sponsored by Editora Fiel (“Faithful Publishers” in Portuguese), a Brazilian-based publishing house that translates excellent Banner of Truth style books into Portuguese, publishes them, and then distributes them throughout the Portuguese-speaking world, which includes Mozambique.

In addition to the publishing ministry, Editora Fiel distributes these books free of charge to select pastors. If a pastor can show that he reads, understands, and benefits from the literature through correspondence with the publishers, he will receive one free book a month for 36 months, at the end of which time he has the nucleus of an excellent theological library. This is a real boon to the pastors here, where until a few years ago there were no Christian bookstores at all and Christian literature was almost impossible to obtain. Even today, we know of only two Christian bookstores in the entire country, one of which is ours in downtown Nampula. The next nearest one is 1500 miles away.

Editora Fiel has had at times over 400 pastors from around the world on their free book program, and presently there are 55 pastors from Mozambique benefiting from this ministry. We can never express the extent of our gratitude to Richard and Pearl Denham, Reformed Baptist missionaries to Brazil for over 50 years and the founders of this exceptional faith ministry.

Besides the book ministry, Editora Fiel also hosts annual pastors’ conferences in Brazil, Mozambique, Portugal, and Angola. Karl Peterson organizes the Mozambique conference from South Africa. I have the privilege of being the host missionary as the conferences are held here in Nampula where I have been promoting this literature since the beginning of our ministry 16 years ago.

The purpose of the four day conference is to refresh the spirits of God’s servants, to better equip them for ministry, and especially to acquaint them with the doctrines of grace and the rich legacy left us by the Reformation fathers. Our speakers this year are Conrad Mbewe, gifted African pastor from Zambia, and Adauto Lourenço, creation scientist and Bible scholar from Brazil.

Please pray for these meetings which will get underway on 25 July. Pray that God will grant unction to the speakers as they preach and that He will open the eyes and hearts of the listeners to behold the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

Usually we have 150-160 pastors, church workers, and wives at the conference. They come from 30-40 different denominations and from eight of Mozambique’s ten provinces. Last year we had over 180 participants register for the conference. Registrations this year are running ahead of last year, with 155 received already.

What draws these men from such diverse church and geographical backgrounds is the opportunity to buy excellent Christian literature. We bring in thousands of dollars worth of books sold to us by Editora Fiel at only 20-50% of their usual cost, which we then put on sale at one third of our cost. This year we spent \$10,000 on our book order, which means it will cost us nearly \$7000 by the time all are sold. The conference is provided free by

Editora Fiel to the 55 pastors on the reading program, the rest pay \$10.00 each, though total cost for the conference historically has been about \$100 per pastor.

Editora Fiel, Karl Peterson, and myself rejoice to bear this cost; we see it as a rich opportunity. Because there is no money to be made selling books to impoverished Mozambicans, we have a corner on Christian literature here. If Mozambicans want Christian books, they must get them from us! Therefore they have no opportunity to acquire a taste for froth, man-centered teaching, watered-down doctrine, Christian psychology, or other emanations from western pop Christian culture. We thank God for this opportunity to influence the church in Mozambique for good and to have the ear of all serious-minded pastors seeking to study their Bibles, to consult Christian literature, and to teach His truth to others.

To sponsor a pastor in the free literature distribution program, you can contact the Denhams at Christian Literature Advance, PO Box 4645, Greenville SC 29608. To help me with our expenses in this ministry, which come to \$22,000 per year for the FIEL conference and seminar, the bookstore, and book subsidies, please designate your contributions to Grace Missions for "FIEL ministries."

As I write we are nine days away from the conference and much remains to be done. I am thankful Devin Smith from our home church is here with me. He is helping with many of the details and will be running the book room during the conference. My conference work is complicated by the fact that immediately afterward I will be leading a 60 hour, one week seminar on systematic theology for 20 select pastors from the program. That material had to be organized before turning attention to the conference work.

In addition, Aduino Lorenzo, our creation scientist, has agreed to come five days early to lead four city-wide meetings open to believers and unbelievers on science and the Bible. Even in underdeveloped Mozambique, evolution, life arising from non-life, and the self-creation of the universe are taught in all the schools as scientific dogma not to be questioned, even though each of these things are contradicted by science. Church-going students are assured that the Bible is merely a collection of myths not to be taken seriously. It is doubtful that any of the students have ever heard a scientist challenge these unfounded assertions, or have any idea this can be done on scientific grounds. Please pray for these meetings, the preparations for which are proving much more time consuming than I anticipated.

We are further hindered by the fact that we are running nearly two weeks behind schedule. I returned to Mozambique alone, leaving the family in California. To keep our separation as brief as possible I planned my timetable to allow the minimum number of days necessary to get all the work done. However, Devin and I were held up five days in South Africa as preparations there took twice as long as expected. We had our own supplies to get back to Nampula as well as a truckload of personal belongings from a fellow missionary who had just recently moved from Johannesburg to Nampula and needed the use of our truck. It had been waiting in Johannesburg since last October when we used it to haul our wrecked Land Rover and baggage the 1700 miles we had to travel to catch our flight out of Africa.

This trip we lost an additional four days from delays en route related to breakdowns in the bush and the inevitable customs gauntlet at the border. Those trials are almost to be expected, but being the eternal optimist I had not planned for them. The result is that we have been nearly two weeks behind schedule from the time we got started here in Nampula.

For those interested in African travelogues, the report of our trip and the status of our 17 year old Land Rover are attached at the end of this narrative.

We were grateful to find everything and everyone well on our arrival home in Nampula and are looking forward to the conferences and seminars coming up during the next few weeks.

Eventually I must give an update on our States-side visitation since my last letter written in April. Our hearts are filled with praise to God for the work He is doing in the many sound church ministries we have been exposed to, and we thank Him for the privilege we have of knowing so many choice saints, some of whom were familiar, even legendary names to us before, but now have become personal friends. What a blessing our visitation time has been!

After visitation ended and we had given up nearly all hope, we had some breakthroughs toward meeting two of our financial needs which I must share as well in a future letter. Only a few hours after those developments I was contacted by an officer in an organization that provides funds for hospitals and orphanages in Africa. He heard of us through a friend who attended one of our presentations last November. Our literature was forwarded to him and he contacted me in May. After interviewing me over the phone he said he would like his organization to help us get well along on our construction program. The entire board will meet in another month or two at which time they will consider our project. ***Please join us in praying that this might be the financial breakthrough we have been praying for.*** It is time to get this hospital built!

More news will come in a later letter. In closing, I ask you to pray for God's blessing upon the upcoming city-wide evangelistic meetings on science, creation, and the Bible; for His undertaking in the pastors' conference; for His enabling in the follow-on seminar in systematic theology; for His provision of finances for the many expenses associated with these ministries; and especially for those board members who will soon be considering a contribution toward construction of the hospital.

By His grace:
Charles Woodrow

Land Rover Update:

I was amazed at the good job Dirk Van den Brink, our mechanic and Christian brother in South Africa did getting our aging Land Rover rebuilt. It made the trip back to Nampula ok, though we had two breakdowns with seized up wheel bearings that cost us two days of travel time. Both cases may have been caused by tightening the wheel bearings too much in an effort to reduce wobble in the wheels which I presume resulted from damage in its crash landing when the suspension broke last October and we went out of control, sailing over an embankment on a curve in the road. However, the Land Rover runs fine around town and we are glad we can still count on it for local service.

We trust the 17 year old vehicle will get us by until we have raised all the funds needed for a new Land Rover. We now have \$15,000 toward the \$35,000 a new one will cost.

African Travelogue:

We left Johannesburg about 10:00 p.m. Monday night, expecting to drive all night and reach the Mozambique border at 5:00 a.m. This was necessary as we knew it would take all the next day to cross the border due to customs hassles getting the rebuilt Land Rover back into Mozambique together with the truckload of household goods we were carrying in the Bedford for our missionary friend.

However, about midnight one of the Land Rover's front wheels seized up suddenly, destroying the tire and causing the vehicle to swerve out of control. Devin, who was driving at the time, was able to avoid an accident in part due to the fact that the heavy trailer the Land Rover was pulling kept the car from going broadside and flipping over. We had to get towed back to Johannesburg, finally arriving at 4:30 in the morning. We were just thankful to God everything was still relatively intact and we were alive to fight another day!

We slept for about six hours while the Land Rover was being repaired and then started out again at 10:00 p.m. that night, Tuesday. As planned, we got to the Mozambique border at 4:00 a.m. Wednesday and took 12 hours just crossing it because of all our goods and equipment. We got to the capital, Maputo, that night, where we were delayed 24 hours while the load in the Bedford truck was processed through customs.

We finally departed for Nampula, still 1500 miles away, at 5:00 pm on Thursday. At about 2:00 a.m., a rear wheel bearing on the Land Rover packed up and we were stranded again, this time in the wilderness. At 5:00 a.m. I drove the truck into the nearest town, about two hours away, and got a new set of bearings which our mechanic/motorist put on there beside the road. Around 1:00 pm Friday afternoon we were underway again.

At 11:00 pm the truck trailer tire went flat and our truck driver didn't know it. We knew it because we were driving behind him in the Land Rover, but the single lane, one-way dirt road we were traveling on at the time was so narrow for six miles that we could not move over far enough to even flash him with our lights and he could not hear our horn over the din of the truck engine. By the time we were able to alert our motorist the tire was smoking, completely destroyed, and he was driving on the rim. We spent three hours in the darkness getting the tire changed – it is a big job changing a truck tire in the middle of the night on a dirt track in the wilderness. Our truck driver/mechanic was no use to us at this point, having succumbed to malaria. African immune systems are continuously fighting off malaria, but when fatigue or secondary illness sets in, the malaria gains the upper hand. We started treatment and put him to bed for the rest of the trip.

We were finally underway again at 2:00 a.m. Saturday morning. Then another one of the truck tires began flying apart. At this point we had no spares and were only half way to Nampula, so we had to detour to a town 55 miles off our course where we spent an unplanned \$750 buying two new tires for the truck and trailer. We had to scour all our pockets and bank books to come up with that much cash. Then we had to mount the tires ourselves as they don't do that for you here, though precisely because of that fact we had our own mechanic with us and all the tools for mounting a truck tire on the rim. However, that was another delay of seven hours, so by the time we got to the Zambezi River it was evening and the ferry was not running. We had to spend the night there, then crossed about noon on Sunday. The rest of the trip was uneventful though arduous. We covered the remaining 400 miles in about 15 hours and got home to Nampula at 3:30 a.m. on Monday, one week after leaving Johannesburg.

When all goes well, the 1700 mile journey takes 48 hours of non-stop driving, with the motorist and me taking shifts behind the wheel. We much prefer that to prolonging the experience finding places to bed down every night! There are no Holiday Inns, no roadside restaurants, no bathrooms, and for one 500 mile stretch there are not even fuel stations.

This time the trip took an entire week, stopping only for breakdowns, customs hassles, and the ferry crossing. The record for us is two weeks. That time we had three vehicles and

two trailers, every one of which had a major breakdown in the wilderness, and we spent a week just crossing the border and clearing our goods through customs.

It is a standing joke in our family that the longest part of our trip home each furlough is the ride to the airport! We could fly directly from Nampula, but the cost of getting the whole family from Nampula to Johannesburg almost doubles the air fare we would have to pay for getting to the States. On the other hand, that might be cheaper than the repairs we have had to make to our aging Land Rover the past two trips!