

## The Mozambique Evangel

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By Charles Woodrow

**Abstract: 12 months of visitation to 52 churches has uncovered 31 potential missionary families, but none yet called of God to Mozambique and also funds toward a new Land Rover and purchasing the bookshop, though still not enough to fully resolve either difficulty. A donor for the hospital work may be forthcoming. During visitation, God removed adversaries from office here in Mozambique and placed in high places friends who support our plans to establish a Christian surgical center. This is the time to act, and thus a time for fervent prayer!**

Dear Friends:

We are back in Nampula after 12 months of visitation in the States. During that time I was able to present at 52 churches as well as speak at pastors' fraternals and national church conferences, before medical groups, and in many private homes. We are grateful to the churches that gave us these opportunities and are praying that God will bless the seed sown with a future harvest of missionaries, prayer warriors, and co-laborers that will strengthen His people here in Mozambique.

Along the way God led us to 31 families with the specific gifts and preparation necessary to fill the eight positions we are especially praying for – two general surgeons, a general medical doctor, an anesthetist, an administrator for the hospital, an experienced church planter, a secretary, and someone to advance the various FIEL literature and conference ministries. All of these families are faithfully serving God in their local churches and are fruitful in their employment; thus they invariably say that while they are willing to serve God in Mozambique or anywhere else. However, they need some indication that He actually is calling them before leaving the labors He has blessed so far. We agree and prefer that God do the arm-twisting rather than man, so we are praying daily as we stay in touch with these families. Christ's parable in Mark 4:26-29 of the sower who can only scatter his seed and then must wait for God to mysteriously make it germinate and produce a crop has taken on new meaning for us. Now that we are back in Nampula, we are praying that God will make fruitful the time spent sowing at home during 2006.

While on visitation we received considerable help toward getting a new Land Rover to replace our 18 year-old model. We now have \$22,000 of the \$35,000 needed. Grace Fellowship Church in Toronto is making a special effort to collect the funds needed to purchase for us the downtown site of our Christian bookstore. They have \$13,000 of the \$35,000 the owner is asking. The pressure we were feeling on both fronts is somewhat relieved – the wrecked Land Rover has been made operational again, albeit with some audible groans and moans, and the owner of the site we rent for the bookstore has agreed to give us more time to raise the money we lack before selling the location to someone else.

The great question has always been, "How is God going to provide the million dollars needed to build the hospital?" During visitation, God may have led us to the answer. Some of the literature we distributed got passed from hand to hand until it came across the desk of a Christian oil and gas speculator. The details of how God has dealt with this man and his wife over the years make an amazing story which I hope I can someday relate in one of our newsletters. In earlier years he was a generous multi-millionaire philanthropist with five oil companies trading on the NASDAQ stock exchange and supporting a variety of Christian ministries with a special interest in mission orphanages and medical clinics. Later

in life he lost almost everything he owned and nearly died from cancer, and then his wife also was diagnosed with a form of cancer that is frequently fatal. At the end of these reversals they were literally penniless, without money to buy groceries for even a single meal but were grateful to God for sparing their lives. One thing they were able (barely) to hang on to through all of this was the mineral rights to a potentially profitable natural gas borehole. For 30 years they had been unable to exploit this well for a variety of reasons, but finally they are preparing to re-drill the borehole. From the previous attempt they know at today's prices the well can yield up to \$350,000 *per day!* Because of their stage in life and how God has dealt with them, they have little interest in storing that money in a bank. Rather they have dedicated this borehole to funding Christian ministries. We were amazed when we received a call from their accountant saying financial assistance might soon be available from them! We knew nothing of them or how they knew of us. We were greatly encouraged when a providential series of events gave us the opportunity to spend a weekend getting to know them in their home. We discovered to our delight that they are humble, transparent, genuine servants of God who aren't just fantasizing about this borehole. We hope the unlikely series of events that led to our friendship indicates that God indeed plans to bless their undertaking and that He is letting us be one of the projects that may in time benefit from their generosity.

We earnestly solicit your prayers for this couple:

- 1) That God would grant them great success in this attempt. A 14,000 foot borehole is not a trivial undertaking, and the possibility for failure seems significant to a layman like me.
- 2) That God would grant them discernment in today's evangelical Christian climate where false ministries seem to abound and that they might be clearly guided by Him in using the vast resources He has placed under their care.
- 3) That Grace Missions may still enjoy their favor when the day comes that they are able to begin disbursing their profits.

### **Friends in High Places:**

Psalm 127 reminds us that God gives to His children even in their sleep, in order that we might not succumb to anxious over-exertion in trying to accomplish what, in fact, will only be done by God's kind favor. Upon returning to Mozambique, I was pleased to discover that during our absence God orchestrated local changes which suggest we may be approaching the day when He will complete the hospital project begun so auspiciously ten years ago.

In Mozambique, as in perhaps most other places on earth, having friends in high places is essential in accomplishing major undertakings. Similarly, having adversaries in high office can be lethal. Over the years we have had both types of relationships, and the result has been a roller coaster experience of troughs of near-devastation alternating with peaks of sudden exhilaration, as people who have heard our stories are aware.

Adversaries who have almost vanquished us include a Muslim doctor at the "competing" downtown hospital who was promoted to an important position in the Ministry of Health. He used his authority to close down the surgical block at Marrere where we were witnessing to all our patients and conducting weekly evangelistic services for the whole hospital. His decree was overruled by the National Chief of Surgery, a strong personal ally brought in purely by the Lord's doing. But later that assistance was negated by the Muslim Vice Minister of Health, a truly powerful adversary recruited by the local doctor after he was

promoted to the Ministry of Health. The Vice Minister drew up documents closing down the surgical work which, in order that the edict might never be rescinded, he intended to have signed by the Minister of Health. However, as the Minister of Health was considering the matter, a remarkable string of events unfolded that only God could have planned. It gave the Minister a highly favorable impression of our work. In the end, he not only ordered everyone to cease hindering us, but also authorized us to build our own surgical center right here in Nampula.\*

One of the important allies that God used to get us through these near-terminal experiences was the Provincial Health Director from 1995-1999. He began his tenure as the most vigorous opponent of all but in answer to desperate prayer became a strong friend.\*\*

Others who have strenuously opposed the medical work have included one of the major political parties. Being a foreigner I cannot venture into political issues so cannot state in print the reasons for their opposition as it would reveal the identity of the political party. However, for a short while the opposition of important party leaders completely shut down all prospects for building the hospital.

The point is, important allies have been essential all along the way because there have been no lack of adversaries. We imagine the opposition comes from the evil one, who must despise our efforts to take back ground in Mozambique that he has owned for so long.

Having been out of the medical circles for eight years now, all of the friends who once helped us have moved on, and there has been little opportunity to cultivate friendships with those who have replaced them. The Provincial Health Director who helped us so much was succeeded by two others who never even knew Grace Missions. The Minister of Health has also been replaced, as well as the Governor who supported us with his letters of recommendation.

To make matters worse, from 2000 to 2005, the Governor who replaced our ally and who lived just a few miles from our project was the Muslim former Vice Minister of Health, the very man who had drawn up documents to close down once and for all our medical evangelistic work at Marrere! During his tenure no construction was taking place on our large tract of land on the main highway, and to outside observers the project must surely have appeared to be languishing. That was just as well for us. In actual fact, we were tied up behind the scenes re-working our building plans so they conformed to national requirements, and then we spent a further year obtaining a building permit. Finally we were able to start construction. A few months after we finished the foundations, when it became apparent we were actually going to turn our plans into reality, I received a document from the local health office telling me we must obtain approval from four different offices in the Ministry of Health before proceeding further. I had painstakingly obtained all the necessary approvals already, as they knew, but now everyone who had authorized the project was out of office. I feared the new government officials, at least one of whom had previously attempted to finish us for good, intended to argue that we must start all over again obtaining approval from the current authorities. We were in the States on furlough when the ominous letter arrived, and I could not respond until returning to Mozambique. Thankfully, by the time I returned and went to the inspector's office with all my documents, there had been another complete change-over in administrations with a new governor, new provincial health director, and new minister of health.

As the inspector scrutinized my documents obtained years earlier, I scrutinized his face trying to discern if he was friend or foe. His expression changed noticeably when he turned a page and saw the recommendation of the Provincial Health Director who had been so

helpful years ago. He asked me how well I knew the man. I told him he was a good friend and had been instrumental in promoting the project, as was evident from the recommendation he had written. Immediately the inspector's demeanor turned to one of friendliness, and within a few minutes he handed the documents back to me saying that the former Provincial Health Director was now the National Health Director who is directly responsible for our project. He then confided that when the threatening letter was sent there was indeed a larger plan underway, though he didn't reveal any clues as to what it was. He did say it was well that I had been unable to respond in a timely fashion, that now the plan was obsolete, he didn't need any of the documents I had brought, and I could continue with building the hospital. That assurance from the local health officer responsible for inspecting the project was a great relief. But much more than that, I was relieved to find out we are now under the authority of a National Health Director who diligently helped us in the past as Provincial Health Director. What a change from the previous five years when we sat under the nose of a displeased but very able Muslim governor!

That is not all, however. I was grateful to learn upon returning to Mozambique last month of yet another important ally. He is the head of endocrine surgery at the medical school. Ten years ago when I was the only surgeon doing thyroidectomies in northern Mozambique, he and an endocrine surgeon from George Washington University dropped in at the hospital to visit our surgical service. The Director of the Central Hospital had refused to tell them about our work, had refused to give them a copy of our experience with thyroidectomies, and had prevented me from meeting with them. However, the Provincial Health Director (now the National Health Director) did not want me to miss this opportunity and personally drove the two surgeons out to Marrere so we could meet. They invited me to their hotel later where the Mozambican surgeon expressed his disgust at the attempts to limit the surgical program at our hospital. The providential nature of that encounter became apparent months later when the American doctor, Dr. Glenn Geelhoed, paid a return visit to Mozambique just in time to play a critical role in securing the Minister's favor for our surgical hospital.\*

It now appears the encounter may be providential in still another sense, as the Mozambican surgeon who was so irked at the hindrances being placed upon our surgical program at Marrere is the new Minister of Health!

Both at home and in Mozambique, God has strategically situated friends who will surely prove invaluable if He indeed plans to build the hospital during this term. I am thankful for the strides made over the last six years establishing the nationwide FIEL Pastors' Conferences, the literature distribution program, the pastors' training seminars, and the Reformed Evangelical bookstore. Hospital-based evangelism is of little point if there are no churches to refer people to that will proclaim the gospel of salvation by grace through faith rather than the false gospel of salvation by works that is so common here.

These advances in the ministry to existing churches came because the drought on the medical evangelistic front left time for other work. However, I hope that we are finally nearing the end of the dry spell we endured so long and that soon hospital construction will be vigorously underway.

In I Kings 17, God sent Elijah to King Ahab with the unwelcome news that there would be neither dew nor rain for some years except by Elijah's word. God then commanded Elijah to go away into hiding. Finally, in I Kings 18, after three and a half years without rain, God told Elijah to return to Ahab for He was going to send rain to end the drought.

After giving the message to Ahab, it is instructive to note what Elijah did. From I Kings 18:42 and James 5:17-18, we see he went up to Mount Carmel to pray for what God had clearly announced already was going to happen.

Why did Elijah behave this way? One would think his confidence in God's determination to carry out His own decrees would have caused him rather to busy himself finding a safe refuge from the coming rainstorm. But Elijah knew that his prayers were to be the means by which God brought His purposes to pass. While Ahab went off to celebrate, the man of God withdrew to pray – and pray – and pray. When he began, there was nothing but blue sky overhead. However, as he prayed, a little cloud began to form that grew until it turned the whole sky black and finally broke forth in the rushing of wind and the downpour of a heavy shower.

Though circumstances over the years suggest God does intend to build a Christian hospital here in northern Mozambique and recent events further buttress that conviction, this should not produce a let-up in prayer on our part. Rather, I hope this information and our recent trip through the United States will stir a great outpouring of supplication for God to do what it seems He will do, since in the eternal decrees of God our prayers are the means God has appointed by which this hospital is going to be built. It clearly is not going to be a work accomplished by mighty men. As God has ordained things thus far, we have never had the backing of governments, of big mission boards, of mega-churches, of NGO's, of denominations, or of giant Christian corporations. Even our potential hospital donor is without strength apart from an important piece of paper still in his possession. And for reasons that remain a mystery to me, after almost 17 years, we still do not have other missionaries working alongside us. Nevertheless, this ministry is visibly one of the most prominent works in Nampula and through the FIEL projects is reaching churches throughout the nation. As people who have heard the stories realize, progress has come purely by God's grace, often in amazing fashion, with little input from the arm of flesh. Perhaps that is precisely what God intends, but that fact behooves us to pray all the more diligently, even as Elijah did when God told him it was going to rain. For when God plans to do something, He does it through the prayers of His people.

Family highlights from a gratifying visitation time will have to await another letter. For now, please pray that God would

- 1) Abundantly bless our oil and gas friends with more resources for His work than they are able to give away.
- 2) Provide us with the funds we need for the hospital.
- 3) Enable us to get the project up and running while powerful allies are in office to run interference for us against foes Satan would use to thwart us.
- 4) Grant us a harvest of at least eight families from the 31 we have contacted during visitation by extending to them a call to serve in Mozambique.

By His grace:  
Charles and Julie

\* See the Fall 1996 *Evangel*, Vol.12, no.4 which is on the web-site on the "Interesting Stories" page under "Getting the Minister's Approval."

\*\* See the Spring 1996 *Evangel*, Vol.12, no.2, which is on the web-site on the "Interesting Stories" page under "When Adversaries Become Friends."