

March Prayer Points 6

Those who do not have time to read the stories may still get the main points in less than four minutes by scanning the red print and looking at the photos.

Dear Friends:

Here is an update on our assistance to local churches through the Fiel ministries.



Last July we conducted our 14th annual four-day Fiel Conference, in tandem with a second Fiel Conference hosted by Editora Fiel in the capital, Maputo, 1300 miles away at the far southern end of the country.

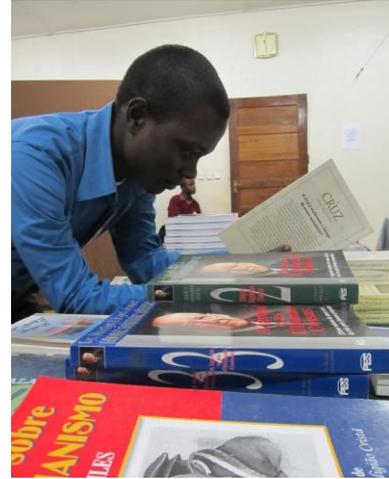
Between the two conferences, 540 church leaders from every part of Mozambique heard excellent messages intended to refresh their spirits, equip them to better serve their congregations, and acquaint them with the rich legacy left us by the Reformation fathers. Sound Christian literature was on sale for only one third of our own purchase price, which was already discounted 40-80 percent by the publishers.



Maputo Fiel Conference

Literature is an esteemed blessing in this country, yet Christian bookstores are almost non-existent because the poverty of the people requires that bookstores operate at a great loss if they hope to get books into the hands of church members.

Our conference ministered to 290 of the 540 participants. It was only the second time in the conference's 14-year history that we suffered a decline in participation, this time by 40 persons. The drop was due entirely to decreased attendance by pastors from out of town, many of whom felt it was unsafe to travel through the countryside because of a fresh outbreak of violence between political rivals and former belligerents Frelimo and Renamo. (Thankfully, that period of unrest was brief and soon subsided, but not before many casualties had been inflicted.)



Books, sold for one third our cost, are a valuable resource at the Fiel Conference

Our speakers at the conference were Brazilian Franklin Ferreira, Director of Martin Bucer seminary and the first Evangelical Brazilian to author a comprehensive textbook of theology, and Daniel Simango, first African president of the Bible Institute of Cape Town.

One of the high points of the conference was a message from one of our own Mozambican brothers, Timóteo Bila. He is the author of a catechism on the doctrines of grace for Mozambican churches and the leader of Mission Ekklesia, an indigenous ministry founded to promote the five solas of the Reformation among the churches in this country. Timóteo delivered a message from Psalm 110 that was a worthy example of Christ-centered expository preaching. This year we are scheduling three messages to be delivered by Mozambican church leaders who have the same priorities as the conference founders and who are fully capable of addressing their peers on these important themes from the Bible.



Mozambican brothers Timóteo Bila and André Kizito, who will be preaching at the XV Fiel Conference this June

As satisfying as it was to see a Mozambican brother preach well at our conference, the highest point for me was my own opportunity to preach to the men on a much-neglected topic, church discipline. It was not so much the discipline side of the message that burned in my bones, though that is important if our churches are to be



Food serving lines in the outdoor kitchen

Biblical. My long time burden has been the need for leaders to address the problem of unchecked carnality in the African church. This bane arises in part from a superficial understanding of the profound transformation that takes place when sinners are genuinely reborn by the Holy Spirit, in part from the insecurity of leaders who are not well-grounded themselves in the truth and are therefore afraid to act, in part from a lack of zeal for the name of Christ which is tarnished by the conduct of church

people who say they follow Him but do not, and by a lack of love for and involvement in the lives of the sheep on the part of their leaders. The response of the men was encouraging. There are many long-time conference participants who love the Lord and who today resonate with the doctrines we have been teaching over the years and with their proper application.



Workshops for the women and the men are a regular feature of the conference

As always, there were examples of both the Lord's participation in the details of the conference, as well as the hand of the evil one attempting to derail it.

Re: the latter, the team of 13 Brazilians sent by Editora Fiel to participate in the conference, including one of our two main speakers, was stunned when their plane touched down in Nampula to be served with orders from the Provincial Director of Immigration to leave the country within 24 hours.

It is an irony these days that sometimes the cheapest way to fly from the capital, where the team had just participated in the Maputo conference, to the northern city of Nampula is via Johannesburg in South Africa. These were the flight arrangements that the Brazilian travel agent made for the team. Unfortunately, when the team left Maputo to fly to Nampula, the Mozambique immigration officials canceled their single entry visas because their plane was headed out of the country, even though their tickets had them landing in Nampula again only a few hours later. Upon arriving in Nampula, immigration officials noted the cancelled visas and intractably insisted that without valid visas they were in the country illegally and could not remain.

Until recently, many foreigners did not need to get visas before coming to Mozambique, but could obtain visas at the airport upon arrival, as is the custom in many other countries. Though that era has passed, many people continue to land in Mozambique without making prior arrangements, and our Provincial Director, tired of the abuse, had adopted a zero tolerance policy. Nothing the team did to point out their diligence in obtaining permission before coming to Mozambique could convince her to re-instate the canceled visas, though she had the power to do that if she wished!

You can imagine the consternation, prayer, and scurrying about to make alternate arrangements that this news created. Though we hoped the Director would relent at last, we had to prepare for the worst, and this diabolical twist utterly derailed the already pressure-packed routine that I must normally follow in the final 24 hours before the conference. The next day, as we hoped she would, the Director reinstated the cancelled visas, but not until it was too late for me to accomplish the tasks I originally needed to do!

God de-fused another crisis in a manner that deeply impressed both my daughter Grace and me. Transporting all the visitors, church volunteers, speakers, and organizers of the conference from our mission property to the conference site 30 minutes away is a big task every morning that requires all that the mission's five vehicles can contribute to the cause. Each vehicle leaves at a different time with a different team according to each team's responsibility.



Transporting the Brazil team in the mission's truck

On this morning, all the other vehicles had left the Mission and Grace was assigned to transport the speakers and other VIP's to the conference site in the last carpool. But when she went out to the Land Rover, she discovered she did not have the key. Our motorist had taken his set of keys and I had inadvertently taken my set, and now there were no keys left at home and no time to arrange an alternate means to get the speakers to the first session which was to begin in 30 minutes.

Grace ran to our key cabinet where hundreds of keys are kept on 140 key rings hoping to find a third set of Land Rover keys. In fact, no third set of keys exists, but not knowing this, she did find an old Land Rover key and ran to the car praying to God, asking specifically that the key in her hand would work.

To her great relief, the key was the "right" one and away she sped with the speakers, little realizing the significance of what had just happened. Late that evening, when she and I were preparing to transport the last groups of volunteers back to the mission, she put the key into the ignition but it would not turn. Sometimes that happens when the steering wheel is in the wrong position, but nothing she tried would free the key to turn in the ignition. She called me to help, but I too could get nowhere with the stubborn ignition.

Finally I pulled from my pocket the key that I had inadvertently taken with me that morning, and using that key the ignition turned at once. Comparing my key to the one Grace had attempted to use, it was obvious why her key would not work. It was a much different key made for an entirely different vehicle! When I got home I tried using her key again, but the ignition clearly recognized it as the wrong fit and refused to budge.

So we declared the results that morning to be a bona fide miracle from the Lord in answer to fervent prayer. It is the sort of thing we are accustomed to expect during our annual conference and which we depend upon because of the equally reliable opposition we encounter from contrary spiritual forces.

Again this year I hosted my week-long intensive seminar on Systematic Theology after the conference. This year there were 27 participants, including my own children Grace and Benaiah and two other members of our church. I enlisted several "honor graduates" from our church to help with grading all the homework assignments and tests, the only way I could accommodate so many students.



As usual, our four church members taking the course did well, as the curriculum is their regular meat and potatoes. The next highest score was made by a youthful, intelligent, dedicated pastor who I was very pleased to know. Editora Fiel always places the men who do well in the course on their free literature distribution program so they can receive 36 books

over three years, giving them a substantial start on a good theological library. **Over the years we have had the privilege through the seminar of discovering and influencing many choice servants of God, three of whom I will feature in the next installment.**

Before ending this report, **I want to extend a personal invitation to all our friends and supporters who would like to visit us here in Nampula to consider coming out for the fifteenth annual Fiel Conference this 10-13 June** – you would be most welcome to come sooner or stay later! Because of the dates of this year's conference, we will not have our usual team of Brazilians with us to help, nor will our team of local church volunteers be available – so we would heartily welcome any visitors from home at this time!

By His grace,
Charles Woodrow

**Gifts to this ministry can be sent to: Grace Missions, c/o Faith Community Church,
723 South D. Street, Oxnard, CA 93030**