

Prayer Points

October 2008

By Charles Woodrow

Dear Friends:

On the hospital project we have continued to creep along, hampered by the city's delay in renewing our building permit. Frequent visits to city hall got the authorities working and now they say they have accomplished all but the final step which is for one of their technicians to inspect the building site and the work we completed before the previous permit expired.



Given the seven months it has taken the renewal process to get this far, it is not surprising that daily phone calls and frequent visits to town hall for two weeks failed to rouse the appointed technician into activity. Mike Stolk came to Nampula in July with a hearty work ethic, expecting to have the entire structure up and covered by December, but it is almost November and we continue to gather cobwebs while awaiting the permit requested three months before his arrival! Mike has borne with much patience this initiation into the second law of how things are done in our part of the world, but I think for a retiree life is too short to be spent this way.

And so, after waiting seven months for the permit, I have finally resorted to the third law of how things are done here – forget the paperwork and just press ahead! I definitely do not like doing this because it launches us into the perilous domain of the first law governing how things are done here – the one that has something to do with paying excessive fines, which when you rearrange the letters spells b-r-i-b-e. There are a number of words here that rearrange themselves that same way, often to the surprise of unsuspecting and well-meaning relief workers like us. In this case, the b-word could be defined as a fine one simply pays in advance to avoid the delay of doing things accord-ing to the second law, and to avoid the risk of doing things by the third law which renders one vulnerable to much higher demands once he has actually put his neck in the noose.



However, Mike and Hilda return to South Africa next week and we simply have to get the slab poured on top of the foundation before he leaves. If we wait until he returns next year, the coming rainy season will turn the foundation back into a jungle of tall grass and other vegetation, destroying all Mike's meticulous preparation. So this week, I have swallowed both fear and scruples, stepped up to the gallows, and put my neck in the noose.

1) Please beseech God that the building permit may be renewed soon – but not too soon! We now hope the ever-procrastinating city authorities will remain inactive just one more week so we can finish pouring the concrete and lay off our workers before the promised inspection. If the inspector finds a bee hive of building activity going on when he shows up, the “fine” we have failed to pay thus far at great loss in time and labor will end up being paid thrice over and will likely go straight to the same pocket we were supposed to have addressed months ago.

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During my trips to the municipal offices I learned to my dismay that the city leaders want to appropriate the front 30 meters of our property so they can widen the existing highway at a future date. That does not affect the work done so far, but giving up that much land will prevent us from enlarging the surgical block from the existing two operating rooms to the six rooms we had projected for the future. We hope the city will revert to its original plan to widen the highway using the 50 meters of clearance carefully maintained for that purpose from the beginning on the other side of the road. As the present change will hurt many others even more than it does us, we have reason to hope the city will have to abandon its course once it becomes widely known.

2) Please pray that we will not lose the land in front of our hospital as currently planned by the city authorities.

Since there is so little progress to report this month, I will use the rest of this update to feature our scripture memory catechism class. These are 21 fellows from various churches and backgrounds who meet together on Saturday’s to check off on scripture memory done during the week. Though all of them appreciate the passages they have committed to memory, perhaps few would have put so many hours into the effort without the material remuneration that was the reason we began the program over ten years ago.

Living in a land of ubiquitous poverty, we are beseeched continually by beggars want-ing alms, by more sophisticated strangers pleading for large bursaries for study programs or house building, and by our own brothers and sisters in Christ facing press-ing financial needs to continue school or obtain medical care. Driving a car and owning a computer while surrounded by so much poverty is one of the disadvantages of living in a place like Mozambique. In our early years I sometimes wished I could return to the States for a few moments so I could enjoy an occasional candy bar without feeling guilty. Over time one does become inured to such



things, but then he must lament what has happened to his soul in the process.



Mindful of Christ’s instruction to give to everyone who asks, yet not wanting to promote a welfare mentality, we always tried to find some job people could do to earn the money they wanted. However, some people requested a whole month’s salary (\$77 here), many handicapped people couldn’t work at all, and the time it took to help all the supplicants “earn” their money soon made the first approach unwieldy. Finally we stumbled upon the idea of paying people to memorize

scripture. We offered everyone requesting money a day's wage for every eight verses they learned. That way they could get as much money as they really wanted at the rate they needed it. We soon found that most people didn't need the money that much, but over the years perhaps a hundred have been diligent to earn significant sums of money this way – single mothers with little ones to feed, students with school fees to pay, and even young children trying to lighten the family's financial load. A few ambitious single fellows even constructed excellent huts and paid all their bills just from their memory work. The total assistance for all participants seldom exceeds \$60 a week, yet it makes a significant difference for those who take advantage of it.

The preceding explanation is offered to lessen on the one hand the gall that some would perceive on the part of someone paying people to memorize Scripture, and to avoid on the other the unwarranted pleasure of thinking the memory work was being done solely for its own sake. One pleasant assertion we CAN make without qualification is this: the family sponsoring the scripture catechism project does love the word of God and would gladly lay out much more to see that word penetrate the minds and hearts of even more Mozambicans.

The Scripture verses are arranged like a catechism, with 323 questions relating to both doctrine and Christian living. Each response is a short passage of Scripture, usually one to four verses in length, which answers in a pithy, distinct fashion the question set forth. The first two pages of the catechism are given out for free, but after that the participants buy each of the 40 succeeding pages. Anyone who does not own a Bible puts half of his first earnings into purchasing one at a cost of \$3.00 (eight verses). Each Saturday the participants check off on their verses, but before they receive credit for new ones they must successfully pass a short review of previously learned passages. That way they keep their memory work fresh through constant review at home.



Of the 21 people now in the program, eight have learned the entire 323 passages and serve as proctors for the other students. The proctors can earn up to \$6.00 (about two days' wages) each Saturday by passing a review of 30 previously learned passages. In this way they cycle through the entire catechism every 11 weeks.

Though the original reason for the program was to help with the financial needs of people who were motivated to help themselves, we have seen satisfying spiritual results, especially in the case of our church members. One man years ago went through a period of trial at home that caused him to cease attending services for a month. When he returned he testified to the congregation that during this time a verse he had memorized in the program, I John 2:19, kept repeating itself in his mind, "They went out from us, but they were not really of us, for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us." The thought that this verse could possibly apply to him was so disturbing that he roused himself from his lethargy and returned to the Way, and continued faithful right up to the time of his death.

Another young woman strayed into sin and was chastened severely but lovingly from the Lord. Rather than growing bitter, she saw a host of verses she had memorized on chastening being played out in her own life and was full of wonder that God would love her so much as to compel her to abandon the path she was pursuing. Of her own volition she confessed her sin to the church and gave a moving testimony from one of the verses she had learned in the scripture catechism, Proverbs 3:11-12, "My son,

despise not the chastening of the Lord, neither be weary of His correction, for whom the Lord loveth He correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth." Since that time she has grown consistently from strength to strength, walking close to the Lord and loving Him.

There are other encouraging stories related to the scripture catechism program, but space is limited and I must close. Thank God with us for the fruitfulness of His Word, and pray that we might see more of its transforming power in our ministry.

Charles and Julie Woodrow

