

June Prayer Points

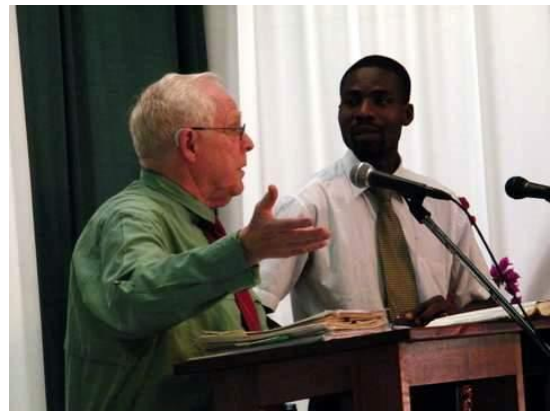
Those who do not have time to read the stories may get the prayer requests and main points in less than a minute by scanning the portions in bold italics.

Dear Friends:

To all who prayed, thank you for remembering the annual Fiel Conference for pastors and church workers which took place last month, 8-12 June. Those prayers were much needed as the work this year far exceeded what could be done through the scant human resources at our disposal, but God more than made up the difference. There is good reason to think this latest meeting represented another step forward for the Fiel ministries here in Mozambique.



To accommodate the full schedule of one of our speakers, contrary to our usual custom we hosted this year's conference during the school year instead of the annual winter (July) break. Though we expected a drop in participation, attendance actually increased 33% over last year despite the inconvenience, with 312 church leaders coming from all parts of the country. An additional 40 persons – staff, paid workers, and volunteers – were also present during the four days of meetings, making for a large assembly. Our speakers, Wayne Mack from the States and pastor Jaime Marcelino from Brazil, provided



Speaker Wayne Mack and translator



Pr. Jamie Marcelino

fine messages on the Christian home, and we pray that in time God will use the truths they presented from His word to raise up strong families and churches throughout Mozambique.

1) Please thank God with us for signs of His continued presence in the FIEL ministries and . . .

2) Pray that the principles learned this year on the Christian home may make their way into practice.

While I hope the conference was indeed a blessing in the eyes of those who attended, this year there were several disappointments for me personally.

- Two days before ten eagerly-awaited house guests arrived, the line draining two of our four toilets was found to be plugged with roots. Roto-rooter is not an option here, so the 17 of us had to get by with only two toilets the first days of the meeting!

- To our chagrin, several of our house guests came down with significant GI complaints soon after the conference began. Two of our guests (one of whom was our main speaker) became so ill they had to skip the last day of meetings. Thankfully our speaker only succumbed to the illness after completing his last message, but he returned home to a hectic schedule in poor condition.
- Just hours after the conference got underway I discovered to my dismay that the boarding house where we had reserved 38 beds had filled all but 14 of them with people NOT associated with the conference. By the grace of God I found just enough places in other boarding houses to bed everyone down for the night. However, searching all over town for empty beds was not the way I had intended to spend the first hours of the conference!
- Due to the lack of local help in hosting this year's meetings, and due to the unexpected 10 day delay in our return from South Africa, I was much taxed getting everything ready in time. The days before the conference I repeatedly had to work all through the night and the next day with no rest, and this necessity continued during the conference itself. Like many of our pastors, I too look forward to the meetings as an excellent opportunity for personal revival, but sleep deprivation rendered that impossible this year, a disappointment keenly felt by me!
- Because we expected a drop in attendance rather than a 33% increase, the kitchen was caught with no serving trays or flatware for 40 of our guests! These last minute registrants were informed when they signed up that they could not be included in the meal program, a disappointment most of them bore well, but the solution was not entirely satisfactory and cast the only significant shadow across the conference that I have observed since its inception.
- As this was the ten year anniversary of the Fiel Conferences in Mozambique, I had arranged to import a fireworks display from South Africa for use the evening we celebrated the occasion. This event had to be cancelled when friends from South Africa who expected to help with this year's conference were unable to come. Though fireworks would have been an impressive novelty here, it may be just as well that we could not attempt it. With 30 years of uninterrupted civil war still fresh in the memory of most of our participants, a fireworks display might have been just the thing to send them running into the bush seeking cover the way they used to do whenever guerilla soldiers sprang up in the darkness of night



Men who have never missed a conference cut the birthday cake – Watch your finger, Karl!

firing off AK 47's, bazookas, and rocket launchers prior to sweeping through the villages. I know from personal experience with our hospital which was attacked and overrun by guerilla soldiers four times our first two years here that once terror-stricken people have fled into the bush they won't come back for days!



The women's workshop led by Carol Mack

developed over the past 18 years. While I much appreciated the fine teaching on the Christian home and the points that were raised by our speakers, I am convinced that the single most important element in transforming our families, churches, and communities is regular worship in the home consisting of daily instruction from the word of God, time spent praising Him through excellent hymns and choruses, and prayer on our knees as family members beseech God in behalf of their communities and one another. The family that repeatedly reads through the whole Bible together ends up covering every conceivable matter that needs to be addressed in preparing children for life in this world (II Tim. 3:16-17). Potential problems get worked out at the family altar even before they can manifest themselves - or perhaps family worship simply brings



One of three dining areas at the conference

down God's special protection from divisive influences and the multitude of sorrows that can easily befall any home.

For 18 years now our family has been able to invest 45 minutes each weekday in corporate worship and we have seen good fruit come from it. For one thing, there is a vast amount of learning that takes place when 45 minutes a day is multiplied by 18 years. Our children have hundreds of Bible passages memorized, scores of hymns learned by heart, and a whole system of Biblical theology well in hand, just from those 45 minutes. Africans who follow our example have experienced identical results in their homes. This practice does require that we each rise 45

The greatest disappointment for me was a recurring one at these conferences. I am always so busy preparing for the temporal needs of the participants that I have no time or energy to address the spiritual concerns which I consider vastly more important. As this year's conference was on the Christian home, my ardent desire was to prepare a short monograph on the importance of family devotions which I intended to provide free to every participant together with the Scripture memory catechism our family has

down God's special protection from divisive influences and the multitude of



minutes earlier than we like (and get to bed earlier too), but the benefit is definitely worth the investment.

I had wanted to seize this opportune moment to stir our African brothers to make family worship the first priority for their homes too, and to supply them with the Scripture memory catechism that has served our children so well, but with all the obstacles that rose up in the weeks preceding the event, this task remained undone. And that was my greatest disappointment.

But for those at the conference not thinking about what could have been, the meetings were surely blessed of God. And there were special encouragements for me as well. One was the visit of Hester Austin, a woman about my age who was recently widowed and came to the conference from South Africa to consider whether working with us might be the Lord's plan for the next stage of her life. She is currently a nurse practitioner and before that had a career as a bookkeeper. We put her in charge of the bookstore, and she was a gem, working till all hours of the night to insure everything was done just right, and providing artistic touches the Fiel Conference has never known under my tenure – floral arrangements and professionally decorated cakes to mention two. Our entire family was delighted to learn at the end that God had knit her heart to the book ministry and to us such that she will be returning shortly to provide her services on a permanent basis.



The bookshop beautified

3) Please thank God for sending us a much needed associate in Hester Austin, and . . .

4) pray that He will prosper her efforts to soon join us in Nampula.

Another benefit of the conference for me was the presence of Pastor Doug Van Meter from Brackenhurst Baptist Church in Johannesburg and Barry Jamie, one of their members preparing for church leadership. I am certain they were impressed with the opportunities for assisting the church in Mozambique and am hopeful they will one day come under the yoke with us. Toward that end, Barry will be returning in a few months with his wife as they consider together working in Nampula. Both visitors made valuable contributions at the conference with Barry speaking on Biblical soteriology (salvation doctrine) an immensely practical and important subject needing attention in the church here. Pr. Van Meter's presentation on his church's discipleship program and its results stirred me anew to follow their example, a response reflected in the faces of several other leaders present.



Barry Jamie leading a seminar during the Conference

5) Pray that God may lead the Jamie family and Brackenhurst Baptist Church

to make up what is still lacking in our ministry here in Nampula.

This year Pr. Van Meter is serving as director of the Sola 5 association of churches, a group of Reformed Evangelical congregations spanning southern Africa. Many of our past speakers from Zambia and South Africa are part of Sola 5, so we invited Pr.



Doug Van Meter speaking on discipleship

Van Meter to speak about the principles governing this association, particularly the five solas of the Reformation. Their doctrinal statement was just recently translated into Portuguese, and I had 280 copies on hand. I mentioned to the pastors that this statement would be an excellent resource to use in preparing confessions of faith for their own churches, and immediately there was a near stampede as the leaders sought to obtain copies not only for themselves but also for associates back home unable to attend

the conference.

In the weeks that followed I had repeated calls for more doctrinal statements and many queries about how to join Sola 5. The denominational leaders of three large groups of churches in northern Mozambique paid a formal visit lamenting the lack of doctrine in their churches, hoping that joining Sola 5 would promptly remedy that deficiency. Two of these men have participated in the Fiel conferences from the beginning, and I was much encouraged to see their concern for a matter close to my own heart. I explained that merely adopting a good statement is not the same thing as believing it in one's heart. They said they would summon all their pastors to a central location and devote two days to letting Sola 5 explain the doctrinal statement in detail, then they would believe it. I doubt two days of meetings will answer the real need which is a lifelong thirst for understanding the Bible, not a creed, but am immensely grateful to God that the concern to have a well-ordered, systematic understanding of key doctrines exists on the part of these leaders, and that for want of other options they are looking at an excellent doctrinal statement and future association with churches that can steer them in a good direction.

6) Please thank God for these signs of fruitfulness of the Fiel ministries in Mozambique, and

7) pray for the success of these three leaders in establishing doctrinal foundations for their churches.

8) Pray that I may capitalize on this opportunity to lead seminars on the five solas of the Reformation to pastors of some of the leading denominations of northern Mozambique.

Probably the greatest encouragement of the past month came at the week long seminar on systematic theology offered immediately following the conference. This year I came to know the most exceptional student I have encountered among the 60

men I have taught at the seminars. He was a pastor named Tiago Bernardo who journeyed from the capital city 1200 miles away to attend the conference and then stayed on for the seminar. He had been well educated in the Catholic church and groomed for leadership by the padres before coming to salvation through friends in the Nazarene church. Eventually he made his way to a moderate Pentecostal church where he was serving when he ran into Karl Peterson (our colleague in the FIEL ministries) who maintains an office in the capital. Karl put him on the mailing list of Editora Fiel. It was through devouring their quarterly journals for pastors that his eyes were first opened to the doctrines of grace. He wanted to see these truths heralded throughout his denomination and soon found a speaker in the States committed to Reformation truths who he summoned to lead a seminar on Romans in the head church in the capital city. That seminar sent tremors he hadn't counted on through the denomination and nearly got him expelled.



Tiago receiving his certificate for outstanding performance during the post-conference seminar

Tiago is a voracious reader and eagerly bought up close to a thousand dollars worth of books at the conference book store (on sale for 20% of their recommended retail price). Like the owner of a casino when someone starts making huge sums at the roulette wheel, I was summoned to the book room to consider this intimidating order, as Grace Missions pays 67% of all book purchases at the conference and this order alone was going to cost us dearly. Karl had tipped me off about Tiago, so when I saw the name on the order I told the workers to sell him everything he wanted, knowing that the

money was being well used. After getting to know Tiago at the seminar, I can readily believe that he might read all of those books. He already knew everything I could teach, and for him the main delight of the course was simply lending his help to other pastors who were coming to grips with the material for the first time.

I was further impressed and relieved to discover that Tiago was outward looking and not a mere ivory tower academic. One of the homework questions for the students was to list among 14 means of grace the three God had most used in promoting their own spiritual development. Besides the Scriptures, Tiago listed evangelism and serving others as the channels through which God had most furthered his growth in grace.



Graduates of the FIEL Seminar

Tiago's desire to bless others has resulted in his leading a number of Maputo pastors to firm convictions on the doctrines of grace, and these men are ready to form their own association of churches if they are asked to leave their present denomination. It would be a boon to Mozambique to have a denomination of indigenous Evangelical churches that were doctrinally sound and steadfastly committed to rightly dividing the word of truth. Tiago seems well prepared by God to lead such an association.

Much of the time I feel the Mozambique church has yet so far to go that even after being part of the scene for 20 years it still seems we have not even begun to move. But then one gets a glimpse of what God is doing in the life of a man like Tiago, and it becomes evident that the labor in Mozambique is not in vain.

9) Pray that the remarkable theological growth evident in Tiago Bernardo would be repeated over and over again among Mozambique pastors, and that they may be an influence for good in their various denominations.

The cost of hosting this year's conference was over \$39,000, or \$150 per participant. The church leaders pay \$7 each and Grace Missions, Editora Fiel, and Karl Peterson make up the difference (\$37,000). We are amazed and grateful for the Lord's provision in meeting these expenses which apart from Him would leave us staggering. And we are deeply grateful to our respective donors for being the conduit through which God has provided. We believe your contributions are making a difference here.

Next year we expect 450 participants to attend, but to avoid being caught again short of supplies I am buying all the materials needed to host 600. I have already purchased an additional midsection for the tent to lengthen the seating area by 33%. At the conclusion of this conference the work crew doubled the size of our outdoor kitchen and increased the serving lines from two to four. We have ordered an additional 300 steel food trays at a cost of \$3500. I am now arranging tents, cots, and bedding to sleep 60 more out of town pastors. I calculate that GM will have to spend \$14,000 for additional supplies beyond the \$20,000 it costs us to cover our share of the operating expenses for the conference. As I look at this large price tag, I am grateful that up to now the money has always been on hand to meet these annual expenses, one of many signs that make me confident the Lord Himself is the real force at work in the Fiel ministries here.

10) Please thank God with us for His financial provision for these conferences, and pray that it may continue as costs rise with increased participation.

With the conference behind us, we are looking forward to the return of Mike and Hilda Stolk to resume construction of the hospital – but that is another story that will wait until the next letter. Meanwhile . . .

11) Please pray that God will enable Mike Stolk to get the hospital building erected and covered and the exterior finished out in the next five months.

After more than ten years, it will be wonderful to soon show pictures of what will at least look like a completed hospital!

By His grace:

Charles and Julie Woodrow

For those unfamiliar with the Fiel Ministries, Editora Fiel (Faithful Publishers) is a Banner-of-Truth style publishing house in Brazil that translates excellent Reformed and Evangelical literature into Portuguese and distributes the books throughout the Portuguese-speaking world. In Mozambique, over 90 pastors have already received one free book a month from Editora Fiel for 36 months, and 60 church leaders are presently on the three year reading program.

Besides distribution of literature, Editora Fiel has held yearly conferences in Brazil for more than 25 years and in Mozambique for ten years. Karl Peterson and I have the privilege of hosting the Mozambique conferences which take place in our family's town of Nampula, Mozambique's second largest city with over 400,000 inhabitants. Our intent is to encourage and strengthen African pastors as they minister to the various denominations in Mozambique and to acquaint them with the rich legacy left the church by its Reformation Fathers.

I am grateful God has so worked that the greatest impact of these conferences is right here where our family lives and ministers and where we hope one day to see a strong medical/evangelistic ministry referring interested patients to churches prepared to disciple them in salvation by grace through faith in Christ.