

September 2010, Prayer Points

Those who do not have time to read the stories may get the prayer items and main points in less than three minutes by reading only the portions in bold italics.

Dear Friends:

It has been a hectic seven months since I sent out my last prayer letter. At that time we were still hard at work on hospital construction. Even before that project was completed a series of deadlines for other major tasks began rolling by that left little time for eating or sleeping. No less important for a missionary is communication with praying friends, but that too had to be sacrificed. The last deadline was the annual FIEL (faithful) Pastors' Conference which took place at the end of July, and that will be the main theme of this letter. But first, a brief account of other activities:



*The 11th Annual Fiel Conference
Nampula, Mozambique*

In March Kent and I traveled to the U.S. so that I could participate in a surgical conference at Vanderbilt University. My way was paid by the organizers, and I took Kent so that we could visit four of the schools he had applied to for college. ***Kent has since enrolled at Covenant College on Lookout Mountain, Georgia and is enjoying the excellent opportunities available there.***

In April we were back in South Africa to pick up our new truck and to import more building supplies. The materials were needed to finish out the bathrooms and other sections of the hospital we intended to use for housing out-of-town pastors attending the FIEL conference.

In May we returned to Nampula and resumed construction work. During that month we also had the pleasure of hosting Barry and Michelle Jamie, members of Brackenhurst Baptist Church in Alberton, a suburb outside of Johannesburg. They came to look at opportunities for church planting here in Nampula. We were hopeful that one day their home church would extend a shoot from its already flourishing missionary vine into our corner of God's garden. It looks like that will have to wait a while longer though, as ***the Jamies decided to remain in South Africa*** and take advantage of opportunities God has given them there.



The hospital work was supposed to end in June, but construction workers who are paid by the day rather than by the job seem to have a way of never finishing. At least that has been my experience on this project! To my great chagrin, work on the hospital continued right up to the day the FIEL conference got underway and the pastors began arriving. ***Attempting simultaneously to run the construction work and prepare for the conference created time pressures unlike any I had ever***



The main hall of the hospital still unpainted



Men's ablution block



Private rooms and bathrooms inside the hospital made ready for use during the conference

experienced before, and that includes my years as a harried surgical resident when one was expected to sleep only during vacation!

The **theme of the four day conference was the five solas of the Reformation** – the Scriptures alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to God alone be the glory. **Our speakers were Joe Sahl** from **Believers Fellowship Bible Church in Fort Worth**, and **Solano Portella** from the **Presbyterian Church of Brazil in San Paulo**. Both men did justice to the rich topics assigned them by **Karl Peterson, co-organizer of the conference**, but I was especially pleased to have Pastor Sahl present as he was my pastor in the States for nearly 20 years. Listening to his passionate yet lucid expositions of these themes and his messages from the book of Galatians carried me back 30 years to the days when I first began hearing the doctrines of grace effectively proclaimed from the pulpit. The thrill of that time was surpassed only by the joy of the first months of my salvation seven years before!



Solano Portella



Joe Sahl

An unexpected disappointment was the drop in attendance at this year's conference. From its inception 11 years ago the conference had grown each year, and for the

past two years we had enjoyed a 30% annual increase in participation. This year, however, attendance decreased for the first time, and by 30%. **While 290 church leaders and wives registered, 235 actually arrived at the meetings.** Of this



number, about half were first time attenders. As usual, the participants hailed from every part of the country and from a wide array of denominations, so the conference continues to be an excellent opportunity to reach

the Mozambican church with the legacy left by the Reformation fathers. However, I was disappointed that our speakers and their theme did not reach the ears of the 450 participants I had prepared for.

Though we had fewer pastors than last year, **we set a record for expatriate volunteers and staff on hand to run the conference.** **Seventeen Mozambican workers and 34 expatriate staff** were kept busy in the kitchens, the conference

tent, and the bookstore. **Community Bible Church from Nashville, Tennessee** sent seven volunteers; each of our speakers brought their wives; **Ron and SouVonna Miller** from **Heritage Baptist Church in Owensboro, Kentucky** were on hand; **Editora Fiel** sent four representatives from Brazil to film the meetings, **Brackenhurst Baptist Church**, mentioned previously, sent **Doug Van Meter**, their pastor and president of the **Sola 5 Association of Churches in Southern Africa**, to lead some of the elective sessions and



Volunteers fill orders at the conference bookstore

teach a course in the post-conference seminar; **and nine missionaries to Mozambique together with seven of their older children all joined forces in getting the job done.** Once all the visitors were on hand Julie was caring for 32 house guests. Lodging that many people is not difficult any more – counting the hospital we have nine bathrooms, two sanitation blocks, and 85 beds at our disposal. As for feeding everyone, I have yet to see a crowd large enough to intimidate Julie. As always, the Lord knew what He was doing when He paired me up with her! The young people had a ball, the pastors and missionaries enjoyed good fellowship, and it was for everyone an occasion to revel in Christian friendship – except, of course, for the fellow whose eyelids were propped open with toothpicks and who was whirling about in a futile attempt to be in two or three places at once.



Many hands are needed to set up for the conference

Part of the reason for the large increase in help was that last year the number of participants overwhelmed our human and material resources. To prevent that from happening again, I recruited more volunteers, bought an extension to the tent that would seat an additional 100 persons, doubled the size of the kitchen and meal serving areas, acquired enough trays and flatware to feed 550 guests, and doubled the quantity of our kitchen equipment. Besides the 100 out of town folk sleeping at the conference site, I had beds and linens made for an additional sixty persons who could lodge at the hospital. Including \$6,000 in subsidized books and all these once-off purchases, Grace Missions' contribution to the conference this year came to \$29,000, but at least we won't have to purchase more equipment to support these important meetings until participation exceeds 500.



Just a few of the supplies now on hand to feed up to 600 guests and workers

If I were to list each volunteer and his contribution this letter would go on indefinitely, but we were especially thankful for the team from **Community Bible Church** which



Most of the CBC team on mount Nampula overlooking the city

pitched up several days before the meetings began. Being encumbered by construction work, I was far behind in conference preparations. However, in those final days they simply did what had to be done whether I had planned it or not, and I was relieved to see things come together just in the nick of time. Even with our usual Mozambican help, missionary colleague **Hester Austin** could not have run the bookstore without their invaluable assistance. One of CBC's volunteers was **Andy Barret**, a professional chef. He arrived a week early in order to meet with

our Mozambican cooks and learn their African recipes. **Having a professional cook running the kitchen made a profound difference that everyone noticed.** Every year we receive many suggestions on how we could improve the meals, but



Andy overseeing pre-conference preparations

from the comments this year, the only way we could have done better would have been to serve steak! Andy had to leave the last day of the conference, and both the kitchen staff and diners noted the sudden drop in quality for our last meal.

Ron and SouVonna Miller from Heritage Baptist Church in Owensboro, Kentucky were with us an entire month and helped out everywhere from the construction site to the bookshop. Ron's endless supply of edifying stories delighted the

whole family, his humor was a great blessing to me during tense days – I never felt so much better after a hearty laugh – and his cheerful winsome ways were much appreciated by the African brethren. SouVonna’s calm demeanor and office skills much aided the **prodigious efforts of Roland Seiler** (local Reformed Baptist missionary with S.I.L.) **to computerize and automate registration, book sales, and the food serving line.**

Ron and SouVonna were in Mozambique to seek the Lord’s guidance about serving here in church work and discipleship. We would like to see them join us not only because of the contributions they could make, but also because of the fine church that would be sending them. What an asset it would be to Mozambique for their congregation to focus its prayers and attention on Nampula! **May God make plain His will for Ron and SouVonna.**



Ron and SouVonna Miller

We thank God for all the people who gave time, talents, and money to this year’s conference. However, it should go without saying that the One whose participation matters most is the Lord Himself. In this respect, there were once again evidences of His hand at work lifting us past obstacles that threatened preparations even before the meetings could begin. These would be stressful for me to recount and tedious for you to read! But to those who upheld us in prayer, a hearty thank you! And even as we saw God’s hand at work in the logistics, we trust it was similarly active on another level – in the spiritual ministry taking place. **Please continue to pray that God may prosper and use the annual Fiel Conference to strengthen his church in Mozambique.**

By His grace,
Charles and Julie Woodrow

