

CHURCH *of* GOD

A WORLDWIDE ASSOCIATION, INC.

P.O. Box 1009
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August 4, 2017

Dear Brethren,

I grew up in a small town in northeastern Arkansas. Most of the people who lived there when I was growing up didn't travel very often and never far from home. A 45-minute trip to Memphis, Tennessee, was about as far as most ventured. Our family was the same. My grandfather came to Arkansas from Tennessee with his young family, and I don't recall him ever leaving. He died at 89 years of age and was buried in his overalls, a farmer to the very end. To my knowledge, my grandmother only left once when she agreed to attend our wedding in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1974.

But when my family began attending church services in 1962 in Memphis, our lives changed dramatically. We traveled out of state each week to attend services, and every fall we attended the Feast of Tabernacles in Texas. We were exposed to many people from different parts of the world. While Big Sandy, Texas, was also a small town and a rural area, for eight days it was home to members from all over the world. I met people from Europe, Mexico, Canada and from every state in the U.S. It wasn't until I was older that I truly appreciated what an education it is to travel and be exposed to people from other cultures, especially when you have a common spiritual heritage.

I am writing this month's member letter on Friday, Aug. 4, from Africa, where we have spent four days in Zimbabwe, five days in Zambia, two days in Malawi and are now in the midst of a five-day stay in Johannesburg. Out of 15 congregations in southern Africa, we visited a total of 11. It has been an exhausting trip, but very inspiring. During our last weekend in Johannesburg, before returning to the U.S., we will conduct a Young Adult Leadership Weekend (YALW) and a special conference for the elders in South Africa.

During our time in Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi, we visited some remarkable people. While in Zimbabwe, I was privileged to share in the ordination of two deacons. In each case the person had proven himself to be a servant over a number of years. We spent considerable time with the pastor for Zimbabwe, Neville Smith, who lives in Durban, South Africa. Mr. Smith works with two elders who serve as the local pastors for five congregations. Harris Hlazo pastors our congregations in Harare and Kadoma, and Steve Tshabalala pastors three congregations in the Bulawayo and Gokwe areas.

Our visit to Gokwe was one of the highlights of our trip to Zimbabwe. The members in this region are very poor subsistence farmers, who depend primarily on maize (corn). When the rains fail to come, food shortages often follow. This is an up-and-down cycle that has wreaked havoc on the members in this region, and in the past the Church has sent funds so the members in this area could have enough food to eat.

To get from Bulawayo to Gokwe, we had to get up at 3 a.m. and drive for six hours, traveling 300 kilometers, mostly on one-lane gravel and dirt roads. We held a midday Bible study, ate a delicious meal and headed back to Bulawayo. This was on a Monday, but since they are all farmers, most of the members were able to make the service. They were so excited to have us visit that they slaughtered a goat so we could share a special meal before we headed back to Bulawayo.

The expected six-hour trip back actually took us nine hours due to having a flat tire and additional mechanical problems with our vehicle. We finally arrived back in Bulawayo at 10 p.m., 19 hours after we got out of bed that morning! But it was worth it! We met so many new people and heard their amazing stories of God's calling in the midst of very difficult circumstances.

From Zimbabwe, we traveled to Zambia, where we conducted Bible studies in the various congregations—Wednesday in Lusaka, Thursday in Mapoko, Friday in Nalubanda, and a combined Sabbath service in Mumbwa. We set a new record for attendance at the combined service, with just under 200 people. From Zambia, we traveled to Blantyre, Malawi, where we held a Bible study on Monday, July 31, for 77 people, including a busload from Lilongwe that arrived very late, but in time for the meal. This was also a record attendance for Malawi. We followed this with a full day of sightseeing and leadership training on Tuesday, Aug. 1.

In Zambia we met four sisters who are longtime Church members. Their story is one of the most remarkable I have ever heard. Three of the sisters live on a farm and make a living by growing maize, cotton and soybeans. Their farm is about 4 kilometers from where the congregation meets, but each Sabbath they travel on foot to services, never missing unless they are sick. One of the sisters (Lissy) is blind and, while walking, must be led with a stick held by another sister. The third sister (Mary) is disabled and unable to walk. She rides a hand-pedaled cart that she peddles herself! The terrain is very rough, but this does not slow them down. In the past, their pastor, Kambani Banda, has offered them financial assistance, but they refused, stating that they were strong enough to work on the farm and any Church assistance that was available should be given to others.



Their remarkable story is only one of the dozens I heard while on this trip. God's people come from a variety of cultures, but there is a common spirit, a common faith and a common courage that joins us together. God's calling works the same in this region as it does anywhere else in the world. It is the same Holy Spirit that binds us together.

There are unique challenges in each region of the world, and we all must depend on God to help us make it through our various trials. Life is hard in distinct ways for different people. We have many more material things in the U.S., but as we mature in the faith, I am confident we believe that the most valuable blessings we receive are not measured in physical terms. God's amazing calling and the gift of the Holy Spirit are spiritual and not physical.

In Acts 3 we find the story of how the apostle Peter arrived at the temple only days after the miraculous events of Pentecost and spotted a lame man asking for alms at the temple gate. Peter looked at him and uttered these words: "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. ..." This man, lame from birth, was instantly healed.

One sees so much poverty throughout southern Africa. It's reflected in poor roads, lack of education, lack of such basics as electricity and clean water, lack of shelter and lack of food. But

you quickly realize that money will not solve the real problems. The greatest needs in Africa are the same as the greatest needs in Asia, Latin America, the Philippines, Canada, the U.S., Europe and everywhere else in the world. The problems are spiritual, and therefore, the real solutions are also spiritual. "Gold and silver" would certainly help, but without addressing the spiritual needs, money is just like a small Band-Aid on a gaping wound.

What a privilege it is to be part of the Body of Christ and know that we have brethren in remote areas of Africa who understand the importance of the spiritual! We are indeed "many members, yet one body" (1 Corinthians 12:20).

Please pray for the brethren in Africa and around the world. Take advantage of opportunities to travel for the Feast and on other occasions. It will open your eyes and give you a deeper understanding of why the greatest needs in this world are spiritual. It is also a fact that these needs will not be fully addressed until the return of Jesus Christ. We provide programs and financial assistance throughout this part of Africa, but the most important thing we have to offer is the spiritual message of eternal life in the Kingdom that God has given us to share with the world!

Sincerely, your brother in Christ,



Jim Franks