

News from Mark and Diane Vanderkooi



February 2011

The reality which is sneaking up on the Kwong churches is that we are both 47 years old, and having spent about 20 years with them, we only have – the contingencies of cancer, civil war, and the like aside – 20 more years with them. What is more, we are probably the last missionaries which will ever work among the Kwong. As fewer and fewer young people choose careers in missionary service, it is simply too much to expect that a small tribe of some 20,000 people will continue to benefit from a foreign presence when in Chad alone something like 60 tribes have had little or no missionary work whatsoever. Either the Kwong “get it” during these 40 years, or they will find themselves singing the “if only...” song in 2030. Anyone who has followed our ministry over the years knows that we have left no stone unturned in our quest to help them get it - translation, discipleship, radio broadcasts, health care, and children’s work.

To be sure, we have some excellent laymen and women who do get it – our translators, Jonas, our radio staff, and some of Diane’s ladies come to mind. But the distressing truth is that most of the *pastors* of the 20-odd Kwong congregations don’t. They love to “play church” and enjoy the accolades which come with being a pastor in Chad, but they don’t take their jobs seriously. Much of what we have to offer them is proving to be like so much water running off a duck’s back. There is, as it turns out, a committee of eight Chadian “bishops” in the capital N’Djamena who are supposed to give oversight to these pastors. But charged as they are with 1600 congregations in 43 districts spread out over half-a-million square miles of Chadian bush, it is simply unrealistic to think that these 8 men can bring to bear anything like the kind of discipline and accountability the Kwong pastors so desperately need.

So the missionaries in Chad are beginning to think that maybe we can help. Maybe we – who are in many cases more in touch with the grassroots of the church than the guys in the capital – have something to offer in terms of spiritual oversight and discipline. To the uninitiated, this might seem like an insight into the obvious, but in fact, beginning with the “black consciousness” movement in the 1970’s and continuing right down to the present day, the notion of a white missionary exercising real ecclesiastical authority in the African context is unthinkable. They are happy in Kwongland, for example, to welcome us as glorified technicians who translate the Bible, build a radio station, administer the clinic, and work with the women and children, but it is inconceivable (again by way of example) that we should insist that Bible study and prayer be a regular part of the monthly pastoral convocations. The conventional wisdom dictates that we settle for “influence” in these matters over the exercise of raw power – something we have been only too happy to do for many years with some modest success. But as the years go by it is apparent that there are systemic, lethal traditions in the Kwong church which by all accounts those 8 men ought to be dealing with – but don’t, and probably can’t.

So we are going to challenge the status-quo. We are going to try to paint for those 8 bishops a picture of what *is*, and what *can be* if they would be so pleased as to take advantage of the spiritual oversight and counsel we are willing to bring to bear on their behalf at the grassroots level – whatever our skin color. To this end, Mark did something he never thought he would do – he sought, and was accorded on January 29 ordination as an honest-to-goodness pastor by three of our churches in Indiana and Ohio. We have no illusions about this being a silver bullet, but given the African fondness for fancy credentials, it renders somewhat more plausible the possibility that the bishops will be favorably disposed to make us their regents in Kwongland. Pray for us as we try to tactfully make our case to these 8 men.



With the three ordaining pastors: L-R – Bruce Bryan, us, Paul Orrick, Kirk Heldreth

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The *Flip Side*

Home Assignment is half over

Three and a half months have elapsed since our arrival in the USA on October 28. We spent the month of November in Diane's home town of Union City Indiana, and the months of December, January, and part of February in Cedarville Ohio, which was Diane's adult home. **As of February 17, our new home is the venerable parsonage of Wasco Baptist church in Wasco IL**, just to the east of Mark's hometown of Dekalb.

During our time in Union City and Cedarville, we preached or shared our ministry in 5 churches on 12 occasions and spent time with about 65 singles or families. We loved every minute of it. Additionally, we represented TEAM at the Cedarville University missions conference and were able to encourage 14 students individually and another 40 in classroom settings concerning the work of missions. All in all, it was a very satisfying time. **We are still scheduled to return to Chad on June 1.**

News from Chad

A year ago, a new cell tower was installed 20 miles south of Chageen. This means we are able to stay in touch with our colleagues every few weeks. In general, things are going well. We are somewhat concerned, however, because it sounds like the clinic is struggling with a drop-off in the number of patients. The resulting drop in revenue is making it difficult to pay salaries, and that of course discourages the staff. There is not much we can do from 6000 miles away, but we do pray that as harvest-time approaches in March and people have more money to pay for treatment (the average bill is \$2), the patient load will pick up again. Also, we have been concerned that Elizabeth, the wife of David, our main radio technician, seems to be chronically ill and a trip to the small hospital 50 miles to the west of Chageen did not turn up any obvious diagnosis. Please pray for her.

Support situation

We have been well supported these past two years in Chad, and our support continues to hold up well. As a matter of course, however, there is always some attrition in our support base as people's situations change. There are also some modest increases in insurance premiums, home office fees, and the like. The net effect is that we are needing roughly \$600 per month of additional support. Our salary and benefits are already covered by our existing support base, so this additional amount will help us do the actual business of missionary work – running the radio station, paying translators, supporting the clinic, and getting us around Chad. If you would like to support us, go to our website at <http://chageen.teamchad.org/support1.htm> or send a check to TEAM, PO Box 969 Wheaton, IL 60187 with note indicating that it is for our support.

Still looking for a midwife and kids workers.

About a year ago, we prepared a brochure describing our need for some new co-workers in Chageen – a midwife to work with Diane in ministry to Kwong women, and a couple willing to train up a new generation of Kwong children from childhood to early adulthood in a "school of character". We are pleased to report that a couple of young ladies in various stages of midwifery or nursing training have expressed an interest in coming to Chageen, though as with anyone at that stage of life, it is a little hard to know just how things are going to pan out. To our disappointment, though, no one has expressed any interest in working with Kwong children. Please pray both for a midwife, as well as for a couple willing to work with the kids. We have posted additional information about both opportunities on our website at:

http://chageen.teamchad.org/you_can_serve.htm