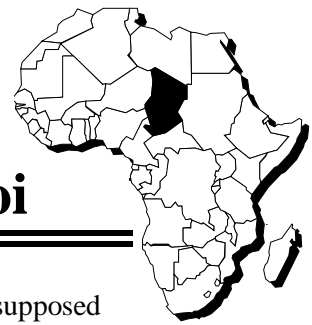


News From Mark and Diane Vanderkooi

October 2012



Another audacious missionary initiative has seen the light of day. I knew I was supposed to be as excited about it as I am sure the missionary colleagues who concocted the plan were. After all, another tribe in Africa which hitherto has had no gospel witness will, if everything goes according to plan, hear the good news in the next few years. But deep down inside, I was not particularly excited. I was, to be honest, pessimistic. Surely, I thought, this is another exercise in futility. After all, the tribe in question is fiercely Muslim. Their rejection of Christ as Lord will be, if the long history of missionary efforts in similar tribes is anything to go by, swift and, unequivocal. (Though as Africans, they will at least be polite about it.) A half-dozen disciples on the margins of the tribe after 20 years will, by any fair measure, constitute a smashing success.

Assuming our colleagues were led by the Holy Spirit – and I have every reason to believe they were – what might we make of such a seemingly futile enterprise? It seems – and this does not make good missionary recruitment material – that sometimes God sends us missionaries to the far corners of the earth not for our hearer's salvation, but so that their eventual condemnation will be made as unequivocal and damning as possible. In the Apostle's words, some missionaries are, alas, destined to be the fragrance of death to their hearers.

If I am right in this suspicion, it will not be a new thing. Isaiah, too, was sent to a people who would be "ever hearing but never understanding." God told Jeremiah plainly that "when you tell them all this, they will not listen to you." Ezekiel was sent to the house of Israel which God assures him "will not listen to you because they are not willing to listen to me." And of course Jesus and the apostles had a similarly cool reception from the Jews in the synagogues. The two witnesses in Revelation 11 will preach before an equally unreceptive audience. Still, God sends them, even as today he sends missionaries on what seem to be futile missions.

Why do they go? Of course at the outset, hope, optimism, and great expectations of what God might do carry the day. But when the decades wear on and obstinacy and indifference are all the missionary has to show for his efforts, then what? Did he waste his life? Did all those supporters waste their money? While the Kwong are nowhere near as stubborn as the Jews of Isaiah's time or the Muslim tribes in question, they have displayed just enough apathy, compromise, and occasional contempt for the gospel that we have sometimes asked ourselves these same questions. Two great theological truths have come to mind during those seasons of discouragement.

The first is that while a missionary labors, prays, and weeps, for the salvation of his hearers, what he desires (or should desire) even more is the glory and honor of his Lord.

The second more sobering reality is a corollary to the first, namely that the Scriptures seem to teach that ultimately, the glory of Christ will shine in the eons to come in the *judgment* of the intransigent just as in the *salvation* of the righteous. In other words, a missionary's ultimate aim (the greater glory of Christ) is achieved even when he is destined to spend his life with a tribe which isn't the least bit interested in what he has to offer. This is not so much a consolation for the missionary as a vindication before the saints and angels (never mind his family and supporters) of his apparently futile expenditure of his life.

This eventuality – that I might spend my life in apparent futility so that God's judgment of a people will be more clearly just and Christ's glory correspondingly greater – was never a part of my missionary orientation. And with reason. Hope and optimism, not sober "what if's" are what a 26 year-old needs (or at least wants) as he sets out to take the world by storm. But failing such a theology of judgment (or something similar), it is hard to see how a clear-thinking person can reasonably give his life to an endeavor whose prognosis of success (by the usual measure) is so poor.

May the glory of Christ fill the hearts and minds of our colleagues as they go forth boldly in this new initiative, so that they persevere in the very difficult task which lies before them. And may God grant them the unspeakable grace and joy of seeing the Son glorified in the great *salvation* of many of their hearers.

Mark & Diane Vanderkooi: BP 127 • N'Djamena, Chad • AFRICA
Email: the_vanderkoois@yahoo.com • Web site: chageen.teamchad.org • Tel: 011-235-66-47-92-32
Serving with: TEAM • P.O. Box 969 • Wheaton, IL 60189 • 800-343-3144 • www.Team.org

The Flip Side

Kwong ministry at a glance – so you can pray.

Discipleship

Mark's enduring desire is to see Kwong pastors take their responsibilities as shepherds seriously. His efforts in this regard with the pastors of the Kwong church district as a whole continue to be a failure. With regards to our local church here in Chageen however, it is good to see Pastor Pierre and some of the elders being more proactive about going out to visit people who haven't been in church for a while.

Diane's Thursday morning discipleship and prayer times with some of the influential women have been encouraging. When one of the ladies suggested suspending their meetings during planting season, the others took exception, and they continued to meet through this very busy time of year.

Translation

Diane is transforming the book of Acts, which we finished translating last year, into a serial radio drama. Meanwhile, Mark, François and Joseph have finished translating the book of Revelation, have tested it for comprehension with several Kwong men, and have written extensive study notes to illuminate the meaning of this difficult book. Quite apart from achieving another milestone in the translation effort, all of us were greatly enriched with the vision of a sovereign God and the Lamb superintending the end of civilization as we know it.

Radio

This coming January will mark seven years that the Voice of Chageen has been on the air, doing an end-run around illiteracy, saving us thousands of miles and months of travel, and being in a general sense the mouthpiece of all that we do in Kwongland. The thing that impresses us most, however, is the faithfulness of our staff – David our engineer, and François and Kaglo our main DJ's. Our main "issue" right now is that the huge lead-acid batteries which are charged by solar panels and which operate the station are aging, and need to be replaced – all 960 lbs of them. This obviously requires a large shipping container but none is on the horizon. For the time being, the Lord has given us wisdom to successfully nurse along the ones we have.

Evangelical Clinic

The Evangelical Clinic of Chageen continues to be the top-rated clinic of our government health district. As such, it is receiving quite generous "merit" grants from the World Health Organization which enable it to make improvements and reduce the prices it charges patients. On the down side, bad blood between the Kwong church hierarchy and the clinic chaplain, Luke (whom some of you may remember from the days when he was on the translation committee) has left the clinic with *no* chaplain at all. This is a pity, because Luke was doing an excellent job, even visiting patients at home after they got better.

Children's work

We continue to teach the children's Sunday school in Chageen every Sunday, and Jonas, our incomparable story teller continues to tell them the history of Israel – which we continue to record and edit for broadcast on the Voice of Chageen. However, after almost 6 years of telling stories, it seems Jonas is getting kind of tired of doing this. He only manages to do another episode about every 3rd Sunday. Mark pinch-hits on the other Sundays telling the kids stories about Jesus, which to be honest, does give some needed balance to the "curriculum", such as it is.

This Paper Newsletter

You may be thinking that it has been a really long time since you received a paper newsletter from us. As a matter of fact, it has been an entire year. That sounds bad, but during that year-long hiatus from paper, we sent out 6 lengthy news updates via email. A sign of the times, you might say. If you are one of the 91 people getting this paper letter but not getting the email updates, and you would like to hear from us more often, send us a note at the_vanderkoois@yahoo.com and we would be most pleased to add your name to the email list.