

MISSION TO BURUNDI

JUNE 2020

creating a community of grace



Greetings from...right now it's Florida, where a friend from high school days is hosting us as we improve our capacity to work remotely. Being fruitful at a distance has been built on a foundation of time spent getting to know and ministering alongside African coworkers. The hope of future opportunities to labor side by side, encouraging and teaching, helps to sustain our partners. We appreciate the pattern provided at the end of Paul's letters, from a mission point of view, his mention of written and verbal reports, greetings, and encouragement communicated through the coming and going of missionary church planters. The arrival of SARS CoV-2 makes the deployment of missionaries to parts of the world without a consistent, mature witness to salvation by grace through faith more urgent. Deadly transmittable diseases remind us to live in the knowledge that our time is short.

We completed scheduled deputation until the second week of March when the call to shelter in place began. After that, we participated in online conferences



GMI lending a hand with Covid mitigation paying for local production of reusable face masks in Kabwe, Zambia

using different approaches: live-in-the-church but without an audience, Zoom conversations with groups, recorded messages available to watch anytime, email and messaging chatter. Most recently, Tom took part in the GGF leadership conference that was transformed into an online format.

While waiting to enter Burundi, which is closed, we stay in contact with our coworkers in Zambia to support ongoing ministries even while we are making plans for our start-up in Burundi. It seems Africa, as a whole, was spared the rapid initial spike of CoV-19 cases hitting Europe and the U.S., so we had time to act. Together with GMI-Zambia president Simon Mwanamoya and his wife Edna, Eddie, the Grace Church national treasurer, and others, a plan was put in place to manufacture reusable facemasks in Kabwe. The team trained experienced and novice sewers how to make masks and planned around power outages of up to 14 hours during the day. Edna and her team either worked night shift or turned to old fashioned foot-pedal-powered sewing machines that are still used all over Africa.

The initial target for mask distribution was hospital workers who confirmed with Tom that they had very few of even the cheapest disposable masks. Market workers, who are mostly women, needed masks too so they could continue to support their families from sales of fresh fruit, vegetables, dried fish, and other goods among the crowded stands. Bargaining face to face all day long put them at high risk of catching and spreading the infection.

Public facilities for personal hygiene are scarce in Zambia, so working through GMIZ, we purchased and placed about 60 locally-made handwashing stations for use on entering and exiting markets, churches, and other crowded public zones (see photo on back). Helping dampen transmission in partnership with the city council was a demonstration of love to the community.

We continue to edit Bible Correspondence Fellowship lessons and get them print-ready for use in prison and church ministry in Zambia. Limpo, the GMIZ office worker, has registered nearly 600 prisoners who are making progress toward the next certificate. We order 1,000 copies at a time of each lesson to meet the demand among both prisoners and churchgoers at an average cost of \$200/lesson. While in Zambia we had estab-



Taking part in Eastport Bible Church's Virtual Missions Conference



With financial help from GMI donors, handwashing stations were fabricated and distributed to churches and public market places in Kabwe, Zambia

lished a working relationship with Linus, the printer who has the technology available to download and create masters for his Riso machine. The Christmas project fund for printing lessons is now depleted, so if you'd like to support printing more lessons (there are 37 in total and we've printed the first eleven) go to this link: <https://gracem.org/project/bible-correspondence-lessons-for-prisoners/>. Study Bibles from another Christmas fund will be awarded to participants who complete the first 11 lessons comprising an introduction and two overview series. The next 26 lessons focus on the epistles.

What else will we do while SARS CoV-2 tapers down? Tom has been put on the volunteer list with **Samaritan's Purse (SP)** and may get called to go with a **disaster**



Limpo (M), GMI-Zambia's office worker, has registered nearly 600 prisoners for the Bible correspondence lessons

assistance response team (DART) for a month or so while Burundi is closed. Currently, the SP emergency response leaders are watching for a CoV-19 outbreak among the influx of international Alaskan fishery workers numbering in the thousands during the short, intense, June to August catch season. Another SP watch area for an outbreak response is among the Navajo and other tribes in the huge *four corners* area of the western U.S.

Like you, perhaps, we have been meeting with our far-flung families online. We have seen extended family members more often, shared events and frustrations, and prayed together. Sometimes video conferencing provides a way for family members to meet for the very first time! Simeon's wife, Myra, was welcomed as a new sister-in-law/auntie during a Zoom meeting stretching around the world. Without CoV we might never have spent this much time online together.

The GMI Burundi organizational registration process has been started. Hope Africa University (HAU) in the capital city of Bujumbura has remained open up to this point and they may have a place for us to stay while we look for long-term housing. Our upcoming role as part-time faculty at

HAU will provide the opening to disciple and plant churches in the surrounding metropolitan area in partnership with the Mwendapoles from Tanzania. We're waiting for Burundi to resume issuing visas to international visitors. We're looking forward to ministering in Bujumbura and continue to pray for God's timing in our departure!

Praise & Prayer Items:

1. A place to live and a vehicle on or soon after our arrival in Bujumbura.
2. We're at about 90% of support and need to get all the way!
3. That we and our Tanzanian partner missionaries, the Mwendapoles, will be fully supported in time to put our efforts together in Burundi the latter half of 2020.
4. Burundi's election season was relatively peaceful compared to the past, in a longed-for answer to prayer. Though there are concerns about fairness, the issues are going to the courts.
5. Samara and Phil launching into work with a Christian school in Chiang Mai, Thailand, later this year pending CoV resolution.
6. Simeon and Myra launching into tentmaker life and ministry in Cambodia amid CoV lockdown.
7. Our daughter Rebecca launching her tough, final semester of nursing school.

[We] always thank [our] God as [we] remember you in [our] prayers, because [we] hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints [around the world]!

Philemon 4-5 modified

Blessings,
Tom and Michelle

Tom and Michelle Sanchez
c/o GMI
PO Box 9405
Grand Rapids, MI 49509
tom.sanchez@gracem.org
michelle.sanchez@gracem.org