



Christmas Greetings Prayer Partners!

"And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him" Mat 2:9b-11.

We're thankful at this time of year for the gift of 'God with us!'

Bible training using printed correspondence lessons from Bible Correspondence Fellowship (BCF)/Prison Mission Association (PMA)

We put together a Bujumbura-based team of three translators with a fourth working remotely upcountry to translate these lessons into Kirundi. The team works exceptionally well together, resolving differences of opinion while learning and improving individually in the process. They have already translated twenty of the thirty-five main BCF lessons into Kirundi and have proofread all twenty-seven one-page topical Bible studies.



We are being pushed to keep up with them in our task of converting literature to International English (IE). IE is simpler English with culture-bound phrases and words removed or made understandable to anyone, anywhere in the world, hopefully, who has a working knowledge of English. Our vision is that this conversion to IE could be a one-and-done legacy work that will make it easier to translate teaching documents into any language in the future. Because our area of outreach here includes eastern and central Africa, we need to translate everything into French, Swahili-Tanzania, Swahili-Congo, or Kirundi. Our partner missionary Method Mwendapole recruited a well-qualified translator who is proofreading the Swahili-TZ versions of these documents.

It would be nice to only work in one language at a time, but we have so many urgent calls for materials to be produced in each language (including English) across a variety of teaching resources which puts a lot of translation balls in the air. This is an amazing blessing to have.

We encouraged Zambian leaders we stay in contact with to get to work on translating BCF lessons into several major Zambian tribal languages just a month or two ago and they enthusiastically agreed. While writing this letter we received a draft from them in the Bemba language; the mother tongue of a large swath of people. A thick layer of icing on the cake is that the Zambian team got this up and running, and completed without requesting money or equipment from us. The intent is that the lessons will be used in churches to provide a backbone of strong Bible training as well as in the prisons. A prison ministry run entirely by Zambians continues strong. Through your gifts to Christmas projects, we're answering calls from Zambia for Study Bibles and runs of printed lessons of 1,000 copies at a time. The first several lessons of the series are even into second printing runs.

Method heads up the teaching outreach that promotes the use of BCF lessons in Burundian churches. His work is expanding around Bujumbura and soon will reach into small towns in the mountains that surround Bujumbura, eventually extending through most of the rest of the country. Due to the low level of education among many of the church leaders in Burundi, we now see the necessity of using correspondence-type lessons to verify the reading, writing, and comprehension capacity of pastors as a way to determine who is ready for advanced in-seat study for ministry. Completion of all the BCF lessons provides a Bible knowledge foundation on which we will build on later in the classroom.

We also received requests for copies of all our resources in Swahili or French from a number of Congolese leaders who will bring these materials deep into the eastern region of their country. The biggest challenge in getting these materials into their hands is getting the materials first translated into IE, then translated again into Swahili or French, proofread, reformatted, and finally print-ready.

Medical Outreach

In addition to translation and literature work, we partner with Amazi Water, a well-drilling charity where Tom provides employee and family health services a couple of days per week. Tom is allowed to use his office there to also do private care for others, including fellow missionaries. At our home day laborers make their way to our apartment entryway seeking care. At the moment, there is a troublesome influenza illness occasionally mixed with malaria that is making the rounds. Although colds and flu are commonplace, because these men live "hand to mouth", none of them can afford to take a day off.



Hope Africa University (HAU) Teaching Assignments

Hope Africa University is our residency sponsor in Burundi and we negotiate our teaching assignments with them each semester. We have each been tasked with developing and teaching a course for the upcoming semester from scratch based only on a brief course description. Managing expectations with the HAU administration given our divided responsibilities and use of time with our other ministries has been a challenge and at times frustrating, but we trust that God is in control. Next semester, Michelle will develop a course on Modern English Grammar and Tom will teach a pharmacology course in the Master's Nursing Program. Michelle also recently taught an academic writing course at Great Lakes School of Theology and is an advisor to one student's work on his final research paper before graduation. This region of Africa is known as the Great Lakes region for the same reason as the upper midwest region of the US due to the many large lakes in the region.

Sidewalk teaching near our apartment has been hampered by the rainy season. We wait until it looks like it will stay clear for at least a half-hour before attempting to engage people. There are usually a few Muslims who listen in at the periphery while we speak, but most participants (twenty to thirty or more), have a light attachment to faith and lean Christian. Among the regulars we gather are two stronger Christians who can read and write well enough to do BCF lessons. Tom plans to gradually share the teaching with them and then transfer the teaching and preaching responsibility to them as they progress.

One advantage of living in this noisy, bustling, commercial Muslim-majority neighborhood is that there are huge numbers of day workers who have little opportunity for growth and discipleship ministry. Whatever religious influence they may have had as a child is often put on the back-burner to the need to eke out a living by carrying goods. This quarter of the city is like a Home Depot divided up into a hundred different small specialty shops. (The Tim Allen in Tom kinda likes it, ugh ugh.) There are also the Islamic calls to prayer that disrupt each day. Over the last few months, they seem to have gradually cranked up the volume on their five times-a-day chants with the first set sounding off at about 4:45 AM and the last at around 7 PM. It is so loud that we have to raise our voices considerably inside our apartment to hear each other in conversation.

Praise

Our kids are doing well in their respective countries. We're grateful that Samara & Phil's work is going so well in Thailand. Simeon & Myra have moved to the Philippines so that Myra can pursue a degree in counseling. Simeon has built his online client base that touches places around the globe. Rebecca will start a new job and has moved from Manhattan to Pleasantville, NY, a quiet, family-friendly town 45 minutes north of the city. Thank you for giving generously to both our regular support and our Christmas projects!

Prayer

Please pray that we and the entire translation team continue to make steady progress in producing quality resources that will endure a generation or more. Please pray that the Afya Yetu radio shows are picked up by more stations in Swahili-speaking regions. Pray that the day laborers grow in their knowledge of Biblical truth and that it spreads throughout our neighborhood.

Pray for impact in our teaching assignments at HAU.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" ~ Romans 15:13.

Thanks to you all again for your faithful support and your prayers on our behalf!

Blessings & Love,

Tom and Michelle

P.S. How many "American-isms" can you spot in the first two paragraphs?



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