



NEWSLETTER

AXELSON UPDATE

JULY 2011

GOD AT WORK IN PORT MORESBY

Last Saturday we were invited to the dedication of a church building by the chairman of the PNG Bible Translation Association. He is a lay pastor for a congregation in a settlement area nearby. Since moving to Port Moresby we have had a number of interesting opportunities to connect with the Christian community here. In the capital we are seeing a young but maturing church. We have started attending Boroko Baptist Church and Jim has been helping them with their sound system. The services are primarily in English with some occasional Tok Pisin. It is exciting to hear that during its history it has been a place where people who are disciples have then gone out to plant other churches. They have been involved with two mission churches in the Port Moresby area.



There are settlements scattered around each of PNG's cities. They are places where people have come, mainly from the Highlands of PNG, and basically are acting as squatters on land that does not belong to them. The residents range from a few who have jobs and small houses to the abject poor. The land is poor and not good for gardening. It is such a contrast with the villages where people do not have material wealth but have ample food and shelter. The settlements are known for high crime, poverty, and a sense of hopelessness.



Morata Baptist sits just off a very rough dirt road aptly named Mosquito Street. We were very moved as we heard how the late Pastor Kabanua and his wife, Anna, began serving there in 1994. For years they faithfully reached out to the settlement community without much fruit to encourage them. Sundays when no one attended services, Pastor Kabanua would go out and preach under a mango tree to the gamblers and street vendors along Mosquito Street. It was a very discouraging first few years but they prayed and pressed on. In time God began to draw people to himself and a small congregation began to form. As is common in PNG it began with children, then mamas arrived and then fathers began to come bringing with them the family line. It was at this time that our friend, Andrew, the board chair of BTA, was called to come and minister there. He shared how his car was stolen on his first visit but he was determined that the devil was not going to chase him away.



The small congregation has been building this new building as funds have arrived over the past three years. There are two other local Baptist fellowships that have helped some but the small congregation has given sacrificially with both funds and labor. The building still has a little ways to go – no windows yet, etc. – but this group of believers was so joyful and so thankful to celebrate what God has done. It



was such a blessing to share the day with them. One highlight in the afternoon of speech making was the commitment that the church made to stay under the mentoring of the leadership of the two sponsoring churches. It was beautiful to see the bonds God has built between these church families as well as the support of others in the Christian community. There were folks there from Operation Mobilization and a Korean church that has helped out with Bibles & Sunday School materials. The Baptist Union representative shared how, up until 10 years ago, the denominations were deeply divided (which is true in much of the nation) but now they work together in many ways. Please keep this valiant congregation, who are a light in a dark place, in your prayers.



UKARUMPA VILLAGE TOK SORI

We received this good news from Tim Lithgow, the SIL Branch Director. God began something great on Easter Monday that took another major step last Saturday, 2 July. Backing up a bit before that – through most of last year, the SIL centre at Ukarumpa was under significant criminal activity – house break-ins and invasions on an almost nightly basis. This calmed down some in October 2010 when a security guard was murdered, and the valley was crawling with additional police. However, real change began at Easter 2011. One of the Ukarumpa village pastors conducted an evangelistic crusade, resulting in these young men, most of whom had done jail time, wanting to publically apologize to me, on behalf of all of SIL. The village pastors recognized that even if the former criminals had done jail time, and even if they had apologized to me, as director of SIL, they still needed to make a public apology to the people who were impacted by their former criminal activities. That happened last Saturday. On Saturday a number of us went over to Ukarumpa village. The local pastors led in prayer and gave a message from the Bible. A drama was presented demonstrating their former criminal ways, culminating in them turning their lives over to Jesus, with a closing song in their local language, in Tok Pisin and in English, speaking of Jesus being their only friend. Then, each former criminal publically apologized for their crimes and the hurt that this caused. A few of them made a particular point of going to the owners of houses they had broken into, to apologies –



including one young man who broke into my house in April 2009. The community then gave a gift of lots of garden food, as a practical element of their apology. The size of this wonderful gift caught us a little off guard! We decided to use two vehicles to bring it to the meeting house for church on Sunday – to enable all to see the outworking of Ukarumpa village's apology, and to receive some of this gift to SIL. They also gave several hundred kina in cash! The former criminals were very conscious that a number of people have already left Ukarumpa on their furloughs, or left finish, and likely are still harboring hurts. These former criminals would have liked to give their public apology to all who were impacted, but their hope, and my hope, is that this letter telling of what these former criminals did last Saturday will go some way to helping others begin to heal from the hurts of their criminal activities.

Church the next day was a testimony service! A few of the testimonies were related to these security events – people recognizing and repenting of our own lack of faith and belief in the power of prayer; people commenting on a lack of balance between justice and grace and forgiveness. We are all on a journey, us in SIL and the Ukarumpa village community. My prayer is that this report will be an encouragement and help for you, along that journey.

This July 4th we had the unique experience of being invited to a celebration at the US Ambassador to PNG, Teddy Taylor's, residence. This was a result of our new position in public and government relations. Ambassador Taylor addressed the over 400 dignitaries, diplomats, and members of the business community citing Psalm 121. He said that the Lord has worked miracles in PNG and it was because of the Lord that PNG did not go down the path of a military government or a dictatorship. This was our first time attending an event like this and we had an enjoyable time celebrating the 235th Independence of the United States of America. It is exciting to see what God has done and will do in PNG which has only been an independent country for 36 years. Pray that God will continue to bless the nation and the people of PNG.

FAMILY NEWS

Jim – continues to learn his new roles in Port Moresby as the Regional Center manager and Public Relations Officer.

Michele – continues her work in the international project office. She joined Jim in Port Moresby in early May and is learning her new role in Public Relations.

David - Graduated from GIAL with his Master's degree in linguistics. He is now working in Dallas to pay back school loans and seeking God for his future.

Rachel – completed her junior year at Carson-Newman and is attending Army training in Fort Lewis, WA. After that she is heading to Germany for more nursing training.

Michele's Parents and brother – Michele's mom has faced severe health challenges following a fall. She is also experiencing some early signs of Alzheimer's which has been difficult for Michele and her parents. Her brother, Dan, is also facing serious health issues. We are seeking God's mercy and healing for them.

PRAISES & PRAYER REQUESTS



Praises

- For God's direction in our life.
- For God's strength in the midst of a very busy season in our service in PNG.
- God's provisions to meet our needs and the needs of our children.

Prayer Requests

- For us as we begin our new responsibilities in Port Moresby and for our physical safety.
- Direction for David as he finishes his Masters program.
- Completion of Rachel's summer activities with the Army.
- God's provision for our increased support needs.

Communications Central

Mailing Address

SIL POM Office
PO Box 5359
Boroko, NCD 111, PNG

E-Mail

Jim_axelson@wycliffe.org
Michele_axelson@wycliffe.org

Web Address

<http://www.wysite.org/sites/axelsonfamily>

For Gifts

Wycliffe Bible Translators
P.O. Box 628200
Orlando, FL 32862-8200
(On a separate paper note:
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Jim & Michele Axelson)