

Jim's Journal - July 2012

Furlough 2011-2012

This is a brief Furlough report, starting October 2011 when I was back in Europe for 3 weeks, to my regular furlough December 2011 to April 2012.

In the *Alliance for Vulnerable Mission* we now have close contact with senior leadership of TWR. TWR is encouraging various countries to pick up the financial burden for their own radio stations so as to avoid unhealthy dependency on the West. Such overlap with AVM issues has resulted in TWR co-sponsoring our 2012 US and UK vulnerable mission conferences. TWR UK is committed to assisting us in publicity, finance and administration if we go ahead with organizing a 2013 conference.

Our two conferences, plus my visits to colleges and churches, have generated a lot of interest and discussion on AVM amongst people from North America, Germany, Switzerland and the UK. Many of the relationships formed hold promise for future cooperation at various levels.

Three books that I have been working on for a number of years have come to press since September 2011. All are selling well. They all point to the need for vulnerable mission. In March the manuscript that I wrote during my 2011 sabbatical was accepted for publication in book form. Some friends are helping me do some checking / editing. The total number of academic articles that I have now published in journals is 31, with more awaiting publication.

Apart from our VM conferences, I have also attended and spoken at:

1. *World Evangelical Alliance* missions commission professional invitation-only consultation, attended by over 200 evangelical mission leaders from around the globe. (We have had a lot of significant discussion with leaders over the internet subsequent to the conference.)
2. Mission-net biannual youth missions' congress, that attracted about 2,500 young people interested in serving in mission.
3. My five regular supporting churches, plus churches and groups in Germany, plus a lot of individual supporters, plus a number of other churches who have invited me to speak with them following their interest in vulnerable mission.
4. Theological / mission training colleges in the UK: *All Nations* (Hertfordshire), *London School of Theology*, *Redcliffe College* (Gloucester), *International Christian College* (Glasgow), *Oxford Centre for Mission Studies University of Birmingham* and others.

I have spent time with and strengthened many personal relationships with people up and down the UK and beyond.

I have been very active in discussion groups over the internet, plus various other correspondences.

The Professor with a Reality-Check

Professors come up with great ideas. Then they write about them, convince others about them, and generally make a name for themselves. Well, in some ways I may resemble the professor with the great ideas. But then – I go right down to the grassroots, and have a reality check! Most professors of mission don't live in an African village and, almost daily, engage with people of a vastly different culture on their own agendas using their own languages.

It would be easier to follow another trick practiced by many professors; send students out to do legwork then to report back to them in English. That would be back to the *great leveller*: official versions being reported in European languages. People don't realise how this process can render the complex into the simple, or vice versa. A well cooked five course meal can become 'potatoes and a cow'. A beautiful wedding can become 'he grabbed her'. A complex family occasion can be 'superstition', a week's camping holiday a 'forced eviction'.

"They can't get it" I was thinking to myself as I shared from the Scriptures with 20 or so people in a home. I had to realise that from where these people were standing, it must be so difficult to make sense of what I was trying to say. They were intent on driving away evil spirits they perceived as constantly attacking them. I was trying to encourage them to see things from a basis of understanding instead of as evil spirits needing to be exorcised . . . was I on mission impossible?

Much of Western academia at the moment seems convinced that so many Christian missionaries have been too paternalistic. Outside of Christian circles, in Europe especially, Christians in general and missionaries in particular are widely used as scapegoats. Come on folks. Get real please. Life is more complicated than that. It's time academics went forward instead of just round and round. Why always blame others? Many Westerners don't seem to realise the complexity of situations being faced by missionaries.

(PS: I have been awarded the grade of 'Professor' by Global University's school of Bible and Theology. See <http://www.globaluniversity.edu/PDF/catalogUG.pdf>)

The Demise of Extension Teaching

Extension theological teaching is in some circles heralded as one of the greatest things ever to happen to poor countries such as those in Africa. It is perceived as a way of getting that vital theological information needed by church leaders out to people in the job. In practice, my experience has long been different. We have kept an extension teaching programme running for over 18 years. More recently we have declined to the point of having just two students. One of them approached me the other day to tell me that his colleague has told him that he will not continue. The same encouraged me by all means to make sure that the teaching programme not come to a halt. The reason being – that he wanted to get his certificate which might enable him to get promotion should the government be looking for election clerks.

Report on Children in my Home in Kenya

Christine, aged 14, is getting more serious in school work.

Okoth, aged 23, has finished school so helps out at a building site intermittently as he seeks direction for his future.

Zachary, aged 16, continues to be a polite youth, and takes school seriously.

Michael, aged 10, has got very good at reading. Sometimes likes complaining.

Doreen, aged 22, is now staying with her grandmother as she works at a local hospital.*

Ouso, aged 13, is these days well behaved and very helpful.

Michelle, aged 16, has to work hard to get a good grade to finish her primary schooling.

Laura, aged 9, enjoys understudying her older 'sisters', and is mastering housework.

Stella, aged 18, unfortunately got pregnant in school and is due to give birth in May 2012.

David, aged 15, is knuckling down to work as he approaches the end of primary schooling.

Andrew, aged 10, has a great maturity, and interest in local traditions and languages.

Paul, aged 8 is less withdrawn than he was.

* No longer staying with me permanently. (False names used throughout.)

A Day in the Life of ...

23rd May 2012. After a time of devotion, I had a short while to continue reading issues raised by Professor Kwah in South Africa – regarding the essential role for African languages in the future of the continent. Then I left for a church meeting. After pushing my bike for the first 100 yards, I had to realise that today it was too muddy (*chuocho ngeny*). I had to battle with mud on foot. I took the bike back home, and set off on foot around 8.10am.

8.35am I reached the church. Only one lady had arrived so far. I decided to walk (through more mud) to the secondary school, to discuss some issues regarding my children who attend there. When I got back to the church, a small crowd of 10 or so had gathered. More came slowly. I was told that the rain and mud was responsible for the small numbers. I walked into the church through the mud barefoot (that's their rule – *ma e chikgi*). Before my time came to share, a lady had prophesied (*koro wach*) to me about some issues with a cheque, and with some children (*in gi wach moro gi nyithindi ariyo*). I did not respond 'in kind'; that is, my response was not one to encourage the kinds of spontaneous prophecy (*koro*) this church engages in. I shared with the people there about the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 14:15-27) (*Roho Maler / jakony*).

After battling home through the mud, thickly plastered onto my sandals, it was soon time to go to Yala to run some errands. Amongst other things, I bought some paint for home-decorating purposes. My home was on the rota for a church mid-week meeting (*nyolworo*), so today 20 or so people gathered. Unexpectedly, I was asked to preach even at my home. (Usually a visitor is asked to share rather than the person at whose home one is.) I was given 2 minutes to prepare my message. I shared on Esther (*kaka ne en jachir*).

After tea and bread and our visitors had left, I set out for a *matatu* (bus) to take me to Maseno. At Maseno I was out of water. Fortunately one of the night-watchmen (*jarit mar gotieno*) agreed to get some water for me. He brought 200 litres using a wheelbarrow to fill my two drums. Soon afterwards, I was amazed to find ants crawling all over my kitchen. Ant battles ensued, between three different species of ant, including army ants (*morno*), all clearly antagonistic to each other. Pieces of dead opposing-ant were carried back to wherever the ants' homes were. I had a few hours to work on the computer, and fortunately a good night's sleep without ants in my bed! (*Nanindo maber.*)

Chasing Sins!

Approaching the mud iron-roofed building I heard the occupants chasing away sins. They named selfishness, adultery, jealousy and were noisily driving them away one by one. I found about 12 women, half a dozen children, and 2 men at this regular Friday time-of-prayer. One of the ladies castigated the others for their regular late-coming. In due course, they moved into a time of worship, having picked up and began beating two large drums and noisy metal rings. More time was given over to having several of the ladies address the whole congregation encouraging them to be faithful in their Christian walk. I always find myself warmly welcomed by this small committed group, who were very happy to have me share with them from the Scriptures in their own language.

The above is just one of the local church contexts that I am able to spend more time with now that I am not at Kima. Pray for encounters such as the above that enable me to be a part of building grass-roots Christian communities.

Jim could have prevented the Global Economic crash in 2008!

Some people expect an African missionary stuck out in the bush to be pretty ignorant. Hmmm. I'm sure they're right in some ways. Then how can an isolated African missionary have prevented a global economic crash: By knowing how to bridge widely disparate cultures. I entitled my last lecture in Oxford "the Great Delusion". To think that people from vastly different cultures can understand one another simply because they use one language (English) is a delusion! This includes understanding the economic behaviour of new immigrants to the West. Maybe more people should listen to missionaries.

The Most Influential Anthropologist in the World?

Social-networking site *linked-in* has a discussion forum for anthropologists. A discussion I initiated on that site has had more contributions and participants than, it seems, any other. My name often comes to be listed as the "most influential" anthropologist in a particular week!

"What's all this about" some may be asking? My long-term exposure to Africa combined with academic training has helped me to acquire insights that, it seems to me, many anthropologists around the world are missing. To me, adherence to the Gospel of Christ is not an optional-extra private religion that is otherwise irrelevant to

life. It is an essential pre-requisite to living life in its fullness. Not all anthropologists appreciate that message. Pray that more realise – that a relationship with God is not an “optional extra”.

Many people including non-anthropologists, do not seem to have realised that *foundationalism* has been undermined. That is – it no longer makes sense to talk of science or objectivity as challenging “religion” or faith in God. Too many people's faith in science is unfounded. When people will realise that much of western academia is rooted in arbitrary assumptions, they will be freed to reconsider the claim of Christ.

It often seems in Britain (Europe?) particularly – that the church is ill-prepared for the coming revolution. Are we as Christians too used to being beleaguered minorities? Are we really ready to throw open the floodgates and have not ten but thousands of disillusioned / misled secularists rejoin the fold? I see this as a vital coming challenge to the church in the West, which has sometimes become too narrow in its doctrinal base.

A Prophetic Voice?

Two things happened on the same day. One, a local pastor had to be locked up to stop him from disrupting a church service that he had organised – so enamoured had he become with demon chasing activity. That evening, another pastor friend came to visit me, and said “we really must stop paying so much attention to the casting of demons”.

The centrality of demon-exorcising practices in the African church is well known. The above events point to an openness for these practices to be brought to the discussion table. Whatever the “solution” is to the dilemmas that the practice presents – I don't suppose it is simple. It is amazing that a church that seeks so strongly to be guided by the West should be left with such a prevalent non-Western practice. Perhaps though, that is the point – that the Western church providing the theological education for the continent of Africa can hardly be helping to solve a problem that it barely recognises, and does not understand.

Alliance for Vulnerable Mission

The AVM conferences that we held in March were very much a success. The quality of papers presented was good. Write to Deborah at dcn08a@acu.edu to receive copies of papers and to see presentations in the USA for a cost of just \$10.00.

The longer I spend back in Kenya following my recent furlough the more convinced I am regarding the urgency of the need for me to be engaged in writing and publishing. I find myself increasingly in a unique position; it is very hard to these days to find Westerners who have had long-term in-depth exposure to African people and ways of life. This, amongst other things, reveals many insights that are vitally important for inter-cultural communication of all sorts. Pray that I will be able to focus clearly on such writing, to find appropriate openings for publication, and that others will be inspired by what I have written.

See the front-cover of this journal for books already published. I have a further book that has already been accepted by publishers. I hope it will be out within the next year. Please do publicise the books. (The one entitled “Three Days . . .” would make an excellent Christmas present. Hint!)

The Way forward - Yala and Siaya

Various difficulties have prompted us to change our approach to Bible teaching ministry in *Siaya Theological Centre* and (the recently renamed) *Gem Bible Institute* (until recently *Yala Theological Centre*). In the past local Christians have, I've been told, seen our activities as foreign, so needing to come with foreign funding. I have already re-oriented myself to visiting local churches in their regular meetings instead of setting up our own classes independently. *What I have started doing in recent weeks is to encourage churches to arrange their own seminars and then to invite us to share in them.* The responsibility for the event then falls to the local church. It remains to be seen what uptake we will have on this.

For Prayer in Kenya and Beyond

Pray for an old lady who I periodically visit who cannot walk and is in constant pain in her kidneys.

Pray for a very old lady who now cannot leave her bed.

Give thanks for the new cell-groups of my home church.

Pray for people I am counselling who are going through divorce or separation.

Give thanks for a friend's continuing to serve Christ and not going back to alcohol.

Give thanks for a very animated Bible teacher I come across periodically.

Give thanks for the bible class opened in Yala!

Pray for Kenya's elections – within 12 months.

Pray for churches to arrange teaching seminars for us to share in around Yala and Siaya.

Give thanks for the office I am able to use at an Anglican college in Maseno.

Pray for *Kima International School of Theology*, which I visit periodically.

Give thanks for a fellowship of missionary men in Kisumu that I attend occasionally.

Pray for us in a context of massively rising prices, especially of food.

Give thanks for the many opportunities I get to speak and share God's word.

Give thanks for the children and those who look after them at my home.

Pray for young people I work with who are searching for jobs/their life's vocation.

Pray for a housebound old couple living near me.

Pray for the many aged widows around us who are housebound and lonely.

Pray that I will be an encouragement to struggling pastors and church leaders.

Give thanks for evangelistic crusades going on in my vicinity.

Pray for people who find themselves hurt by people in the church.

Give thanks for good neighbours around my home in Yala.

Engaging in Missionary Training in the West

The vulnerable mission concept is getting more traction. Affiliated members of the *Alliance for Vulnerable Mission* number many hundreds. A few branches are opening amongst missionaries and church leaders in different parts of the world. Plans are afoot for conferences in 2013.

It would be good to attend the above conferences. I have already found many openings to share in the training of future missionaries between September and November 2013 at mission institutes and agencies, Bible colleges and Christian universities in Germany, UK, Canada and USA. I need to make a decision on going ahead with this programme. Funds are needed – that need to come through the offices of the AVM – designated to my use in travel promoting VM (vulnerable mission). Please contribute (contact kathleen@vulnerablemission.org on how to do this). Please pray. Please tell me (jim@vulnerablemission.org) if you feel led to encourage me to go ahead with this trip, or otherwise.