

## Palmer Uganda Trip Report November, 2019

### Purpose

The importance of a visit to Uganda was suggested by the remarkable jump in enrollment numbers there in 2018—from 17,000 in 2016 to 22,000 in 2017 to almost 51,000 in 2018. Finding out what contributed to that increase and encouraging the continuation of that trend was the purpose of this trip. Two things have been identified that have likely boosted our enrollment. First, the Gospel Chariot uses our Short Intro lessons so that respondents' lessons come back to the Service Center. Second, service center worker Geoffrey Oguttu has made WBS campaigns an emphasis in outreach by churches of Christ, especially in Eastern Uganda.

### Summary

The logistics of travel, etc., were characteristically blessed, though the vehicle I rented had some issues that led to inconvenience and a little less time at the WBS Service Center in Jinja than I wanted to have.

I had taken an extra suitcase of WBS lessons and a considerable number of recruiting aids (pens, bags), all of which passed through customs without even an inspection. All my planned appointments took place as I'd hoped.



**Blowouts, overheating, flat tires... but always plenty of helping hands around**

### Training Workshop(s)



**Training Session for northern, West Nile and Kampala WBS coordinators**

I had intended originally to bring the major WBS coordinators from around the country to Jinja for a one-day workshop, but the venue of the hosting church/Bible school fell through because of a scheduling conflict. I therefore met with the coordinators regionally, three in Jinja, three in Kampala, one on the Ngora District campaign and two on the Kasese campaign. These men are the primary conduits advancing WBS recruitment and follow up around Uganda. I supplied them with the latest printed tools, discussed strategy, and tried to encourage them with a small appreciation gift (WBS notebook, day-planner and pens). Some of their feedback will be reflected in the paragraph below on 'The Future.'

## WBS Campaigns

### Bugabula

The Bugabula (pron. bu-GAH-bula) Church of Christ, about 2 hours northeast of Jinja, hosted our 2-day WBS campaign. I had not known until I arrived that the Uganda Gospel Chariot was also there those days. 39 people from 4 congregations participated in training, and formed 10 teams that went out for neighborhood (village) recruiting. Over 335 people were enrolled in WBS. One of the challenges was a lack of knowledge of English to do the lessons. After worship on Sunday 13 young people and 1 adult woman were baptized in the Gospel Chariot baptistry.



**Baptisms in the Gospel Chariot baptistry**

### Ngora

Near the eastern town of Ngora (1½ hours north of Mbale) in the village of Aciisa (pron. ah-CHEE-suh) our WBS campaign was an addition to an already in-progress evangelistic campaign by preacher students from Uganda Christian Bible College. It was in an area of the Teso people, who were Elaine's and my target population when we did church planting back in 1999-2001. 17 preachers from 13 congregations took part, and a number of members of the Aciisa congregation. I was only there 1½ days during which around 60 people were enrolled in WBS. Several baptisms took place during the overall campaign. UCBC director Rhone Anguaza also took supplies to add WBS recruiting to the Gospel Campaign going on in Arua, Uganda, and in future outreach by the Bible school students.



**Hut-to-hut Bible study and WBS enrollment in Aciisa**

Kasese



**Recruiters re-group after "storming" the city market**

Kasese is a major town in western Uganda at the foot of the Ruwenzori Mountains. There are perhaps 25 congregations in the area. The Kasese Town congregation hosted. The WBS campaign began the day before I arrived and continued the afternoon that I left, by which time the enrollment of WBS students had reached 226. Twenty-one preachers from 9 congregations took part. It had been planned to visit and enroll at a local nurses training college, but a scheduling conflict caused us that to be put off until another time.

For three years a congregation in Texas has sponsored a downtown WBS office in Kasese at a cost of \$100 a month. That support has been discontinued, though that kind of visibility greatly aids the work, especially

since almost no Ugandans have a PO Box to receive their mail, and the WBS office can facilitate receiving student lessons both coming from and going to the USA. What Ugandans do have are cell phones. It is now urged that **American study helpers include those phone numbers right after the student name when addressing courses to send to East Africa.** I have urged the brethren around Kasese to take more responsibility and share ½ the cost of the office if another US sponsor is found.

Ft. Portal

Going to new places brings challenges, and what was originally scheduled as a 2-day WBS campaign at the Kabarole Church of Christ in Ft. Portal was reduced to a 2-hour training session and supplying the brothers there with recruitment materials. At issue was the reputation of the leaders and their history with the long-

standing congregations of Ft. Portal. I counselled the leaders to seek restoration with the area brethren (Matthew 5:23-24), and we could review their partnership with WBS. Nonetheless, I found the group to be humble and very enthusiastic about the WBS work, having over 20 students actively working on the lessons and several ready for graduation. Two preachers from other congregations were also at the session.



**Kabarole Church of Christ WBS training session**

Entebbe

The Entebbe congregation meets in the home of a relatively well-off older lady, Sister Pauline Ekinu. I was thoroughly impressed with this "matriarch" of faith whose life story is worthy of a book. Her husband, once a candidate for a Ministry office in the Ugandan government, was abducted and murdered some 30 years ago. At the same time, Karamajong cattle raiders decimated Pauline's home farm in Eastern Uganda. When she moved back to her husband's house in Entebbe, she found a Bible in a drawer that the late Sospater Akwenyu, one of the earliest converts in Uganda,



**Paulina Ekinu—hosts the church in her home**

had given her husband on their wedding day. In the back of the Bible were "steps to salvation," which led her in her Bible study to understand the truth and leave Catholicism and become a founding member of the church in Entebbe. The church now has about 20 members.



**Dinah explains WBS to a passerby.**

The 2 days of the Entebbe WBS campaign saw 16 of us doing neighborhood enrolling. Entebbe is impressive as a quiet town with the population generally well educated and more knowledgeable of English. (There are schools on virtually every corner and street). The success rate of enrollments was impressive: over 90% of those we spoke with chose to say 'Yes.' We enrolled 138.

Service Center

The Jinja Service Center has flown through the printed Short Intro Lessons and flyers this year. 4,000 intro's were handed out at the National Trade Fair alone in October. The network of WBS recruiters, especially in Eastern Uganda, has continued to grow and be better organized. Service Center director Geoffrey Oguttu has gone well beyond his duties in operating the office as he collaborates with church leaders to do WBS recruiting on a broad scale. The age-old problem of postal mail being undependable continues to plague the work. Bus couriers can be used, but not from Jinja to West Nile since no buses run directly there. (A middle-man handler in Kampala would be needed for that). Workers also consistently want financial assistance to go do recruiting and collection/delivery of lessons. Most lessons now have to go through the church or WBS worker's PO Box or they do not arrive.



**Duncan Ojiambo in the WBS/Jinja Church of Christ office**

## The Future

While overall I am the most pleased with Geoffrey among the East Africa service center directors, his personal financial position may threaten to limit his effectiveness and the smooth operations of WBS in Uganda in the future. Geoffrey is essentially a full-time teacher for Harding Academy (about 15 miles outside of Jinja), but his salary there is less than the part-time salary we give him. That position is also unsure as the school struggles with administrative issues. I propose, especially given Geoffrey's already proven dedication to WBS' work in Uganda, that we expand his job description and increase his salary. For the last year his salary has been \$120 a month and the service center operating budget \$80 a month. I would like to increase his salary to \$250 a month while keeping the service center budget the same. His new job description would include WBS campaign coordination and supervision of lesson delivery and collection. Other special costs that may arise would be handled through the budgeted Uganda account or the GBEA account. (I also expect to propose changes to Kenya and Tanzania budgets and job descriptions).

Feedback from coordinators and recruiters has suggested that we add places besides just the service center that can scan student lessons directly to the US since internal mail delivery and its alternatives are unreliable. The loss/delay of student lessons has regularly stymied the work. An often made appeal in town is for a local WBS offices that has visibility. Bibles are requested as encouragement for recruiters and gifts to school administrators who allow us to recruit.

The expectation of having some pre-positioned courses in Uganda by May, 2020, requires some guidelines be in place and appropriate personnel training done for the effective use of those materials. This we should cover at the next IR meeting.

I am expecting to travel to E.Africa in late January-early February, primarily to Nairobi and Monduli. A May trip to Uganda is also anticipated, and a multi-country trip in July.