

Palmer Trip Report November, 2020

Covid 19

While there was some uncertainty how Covid 19 restrictions would affect our trip and its goals, it seems their impact was minimal. Proof of negative covid test results for Elaine and me, attained just before departure, enabled us to enter Kenya unhindered. Kenya has a sophisticated and simple daily reporting system (using an app) which is used in lieu of quarantining, as long as one shows no symptoms. The country is vigilant, with mandatory temperature screening, hand sanitization and mask requirements at all public places. There is also still an 11pm to 4 am curfew.

All Kenya WBS Leaders' Conference

I envisioned an impactful national WBS Leaders' Conference to try and maximize a recruiting re-start after the many months of limited activity due to Covid 19. I feel that God blessed that. 57 select WBS workers were invited, of whom 50 committed to come and 40 were actually able to make it. We made the conference two full days in length, as opposed to one full day as in past conferences. Travel made it a 4-day event for most participants.

Representatives from 9 regions of Kenya, from the prison work, and from the Gospel Chariot gave reports of the last 18 months. A surprising amount was done even during Covid restriction months. Two places that use WBS as the curriculum in a one-year school arrangement graduated 52 and 32 respectively. (The participants completed all the Master Series courses).

The prison work headed by Erick Chepkwony and Ismael Sang saw 450 WBS enrollments, 161 prisoner baptisms and 46 community baptisms. Another hard-working recruiter has baptized 96 so far in 2020, and others report good fruit this year.

A major emphasis was given to returning only **correctly addressed** student lessons, and that that is the responsibility of both the recruiter receiving the lessons and the office sending them to Cedar Park. We also emphasized the importance of using our own PO boxes if the ones given by students cannot be confirmed as reliable. The general acknowledgment of the failure of schools and others to maintain their post boxes, leading to the loss of thousands of WBS student lessons, made it a welcome suggestion that faithful WBS workers be assisted by WBS to open their own PO Boxes. Those can cost from \$20 per year to \$78 per year depending on whether the local post office allows the box to be "private" or requires it to be "business." In Kenya, I had formerly assisted about 5 people with annual PO box rental. We will likely add an additional 20. I see this as a



Ready to register Conference participants upon arrival (Eastleigh, Nairobi). SC director Richard Karima on right

necessary pre-cursor to alternative distribution systems for Kenya, though it will not eliminate other means of lesson distribution, such as bus/courier services.

New forms were distributed for use in requesting additional paper recruiting tools from Nairobi (eg, flyers, short intro lessons, buffer courses). Also, a "lost lesson replacement request form" was issued so that when a



Group discussions evaluate what works and what doesn't

recruiter has students who have waited 6 months or more without receiving their promised next lessons, their information can be used to try and expedite sending their courses again.

Small group sessions included: getting to know one another; discussions to evaluate what is or is not working; and regional networking strategies for those from each of five different regions of Kenya.

The section of the conference that generated the most passionate response was the 2-hour Bible forum on the last day. I gave a lecture called *A Vision for the Church of Christ*, in which I emphasized what the NT church is, the premises of restoration discipleship, and I touched on a few doctrinal matters that are of concern in the churches of Christ in Kenya. It was voiced that those things need desperately to be brought before the whole brotherhood in Kenya for examination, discussion and consideration. With the impossibility (?) of a national conference to host hundreds of participants, it was suggested an online conference be arranged. That possibility is being looked into.

WBS Recruiting Campaigns:

Taveta

On the border with Tanzania, **Taveta** sits in the shadow of Mt. Kilimanjaro. A few small, somewhat scattered congregations have been established in the area among the peaceful (laid-back?) Taita people. Stephen Mwambisi is a native of the area, though he lives in Mombasa. He helped organize the 3-day recruiting campaign in Taveta Town.

21 people attended the Campaign, with about 12 going out to do recruiting. Some were from a distant congregation called Wundanyi. The campaign saw 182 people enrolled for English WBS and 26 for Swahili WBS.



Taveta recruiters prepare to go out. Bro.Mwambisi (with crutches) helped organize the campaign

Kyumbi – Machakos



Ladies at the Kyumbi market look over *The Way to Life* before enrolling

A church near **Machakos** hosted the recruiting campaign organized by the brethren there. The church's preacher finished the WBS Master Series in 2011 and attended Bible school at the church of Christ in Changamwe (Mombasa) in 2013. During the campaign daily classes explored Biblical teaching on several relevant subjects, such as 'What is the church of Christ?' Some 40 people attended those sessions.

The recruiting was done enthusiastically and effectively in the surrounding neighborhood and the nearby trading center, on the main Nairobi-Mombasa highway. About 15 men and women made up the teams. 181 people

were enrolled in WBS. Elaine enrolled most of the ladies whom she taught in a 2-session Bible class. The prospect was high for a large number of additional enrollments after the campaign itself.

Olulunga-Narok

The brethren organizing the Olulunga campaign are from 6 congregations in the rolling hills of western Narok County. 36 people attended. All were of the Kipsigis tribe, having moved to this area from the Kipsigis heartland of Bomet, Nakuru and Kericho Counties in the last 15 years. That area is where many of the strongest and oldest churches of Christ are, after the church-planting work of Van Rheenen, Allison, Chowning and others in the 1970's, 80's and 90's. The topographical inaccessibility of this area's congregations caused the campaign to be located centrally at the home of a gracious friend in Olmekenyu. Having the campaign there has given the brethren confidence that the next church plant will happen there soon, spawned by the WBS outreach. Thorough training sessions, lengthy Bible teaching, and an inspiring Sunday worship made up much of the campaign. The actual recruiting was done on only one day in the neighboring IDPC (Integrated Displaced Person Camp), a vulnerable community which the brethren felt compelled to visit, especially while they had such a distinguished international visitor with them (me). The IDPC residents are families (or partial families) driven by the government from their land and homes in the Mau Forest. They are lobbying for compensation, but at present have little or no assistance, living in crowded quarters (350+ people on about 2 acres). Area denominations



Communion at Olmekenyu

contribute food and other essentials as they are able. This was the first contribution made by the churches of Christ and was unique in its offering of WBS courses. At current count, some 150 enrolled.

Recruiters sign up residents of the IDPC at Olmekenyu, a few hundred yards from our campaign meeting place



New Additional Service Center Worker



A growing trend (and need) among recruiters is to send completed student answer sheets by WhatsApp, Messenger or local scanning, rather than by mailing them to Nairobi. To handle this, I hired Joyce Mmbone at the Koma Rock Church of Christ (Nairobi) to be an "extension worker" of the Eastleigh WBS Service Center. She is well qualified and comes highly recommended. Though I took a couple of sessions to train her, she caught on in minutes. She and

Joyce Mmbone- new WBS clerical worker at Koma Rock Church of Christ, Nairobi

an evangelist from Koma Rock were also able to attend the WBS Leaders' Conference.

Mail Solutions

After some years of investigation, we may be one step closer to being able to recover at least *some* lost mail. I finally tracked down the company in Nairobi handling Alpha Mailing Solutions mail. It is called Skyplan, a sub-contractor of Mail Africa. They are supposed to retrieve from the main Nairobi post office mail that is sent back there as 'undeliverable.' They typically don't do that. However Service Center director Richard Karima and I visited their office and they are very amenable to collecting the returned mail and releasing it to Richard. If they do not have to sort our mail from other mails, they will charge nothing.

Conclusions

WBS continues to have widespread popularity in Kenya and the number of volunteer workers keeps growing. I originally envisioned an attendance of 100 at our national conference, but cost was a limiting factor. Most of our brethren are still suffering financially because of the depressed economy and Covid restrictions.

I like to report the feedback I get when the leaders gather. There was general approval of the new techniques I introduced and excitement over the coming WBS LiteApp. The usual historical frustrations were expressed: that transportation and other costs should be provided, and that no help from the evangelists' home churches can be expected. Covid 19 is still seriously dampening normal routines, especially in schools. I was encouraged by

the enthusiasm in our conference's session for regional networking and strategizing. A couple of regions formed WhatsApp groups for more coordinated efforts. During discussions evaluating what is working some ideas offered include: holding football camps in which students are enrolled; using family gatherings to enroll people; and gathering students who are doing the courses for teaching sessions.

I took advantage of the chance to have a long conversation with the new director of Nairobi Great Commission School, George Onchangwa, and to also visit with some of the staff. I was encouraged by his values and desires for the school and the church. He openly invited visiting professors who are Scripturally "balanced" to fill in one and two-week sessions, if they can come at their own expense. I was also invited to schedule WBS training workshops and my Bible seminar, *Discovering NT Christianity*.

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Some NGCS staff (l to r): Tom Makore, John Githige, Director George Onchangwa, extension school director, Jacob Randiek