

Palmer Mission Trip Report November 2024

Uganda and South Sudan

Summary

My trip went off just as planned, with only some sniffles and a day of stomach discomfort near the end. There is much to be thankful for after many miles of driving and what some at first feared was another outbreak of civil war while I was in Juba. A 2-hour gunfight at the compound of the national chief of security seemed to be the sum of it, though it was in the same part of town as my hotel. 😞

Jinja, Uganda, WBS Service Center



If WBS gets a storage building it would fit in this space at the GCM compound



Shared storage with GCM

The ServiceCenter operations have been running smoothly with bussing student answer sheets from recruiters around the country to the office and bussing the next lesson books back. I was able to deliver 2 high-volume toner cartridges for the office printer. Those are not available in East Africa, so have to be taken over or (at high expense) shipped. I am ever thankful when we don't get charged duty carrying them in!



Small office space for Geoffrey

I am proposing upgrades to all our Service Centers for improved office space/working conditions and needed back-up equipment. For Jinja, either buying a container for the property or building an appropriate office/storage building would be a real benefit. We currently share for storage the Gospel Chariot container which has their building supplies stored in it. Although the compound is small, right next to the existing container is space which could be used if Gospel Chariot Ministry allows it. With its own container, if the Service Center ever moves, WBS could move the container to its new location. A better work table for the office, which is in a very small space, would also help.

Jinja WBS Recruiters Workshop

Eight WBS Coordinators from around Uganda (mostly Busoga in the east) attended our ½ day workshop. Three were not asked to come since we were about to do campaigns in their home areas in far western and north-western Uganda. We update and “retrain” these recruiters to encourage “best practices” in their ministries, particularly for consistent student follow-up, lesson collection and delivery, and ensuring lessons turned in are complete and organized. Most have small teams of three or four recruiters helping them in their areas.



85 enrolled near WBS office

We used the afternoon of our workshop to go out in teams and enroll new WBS students in the neighborhood of the WBS/GCM offices. 85 were enrolled as God connected us with several open doors and opportunities, even a nearby school which may make WBS part of their regular Friday Christian fellowship meeting. God led me to a Muslim man who was at first a little hesitant to enroll, but finding out who we were was eager-- his grandson is the driver for the Gospel Chariot!

Ft Portal Recruitment Campaigns

Two steady WBS Coordinators work in the Ft Portal area—Francis Asiimwe and Kaliba Samuel. Each planned two days for us to campaign in some of the locations he serves. At Kabarole Church of Christ we had a

combined worship service, then rolled out 5 teams of 6 people per team to canvass the neighborhood. 121 were enrolled. Two young men were baptized that evening, one a newly enrolled WBS student.



The next day we went to the impressive and prestigious Mountains of the Moon University where recruiter Masereka Rogers has raised interest in WBS. We met with a group of 21 of whom 6

Interest at Mountains of the Moon University



enrolled for paper courses and several others chose to register online.

I am very impressed with Kaliba Samuel, who has a special connection with study helper Sharon Walker at Campbell St Church of Christ in Jackson, TN. We did a campaign at Kiyaga Church of Christ where he preaches and enrolled 24. We visited a nearby school and introduced WBS where enrollments

should follow, given the receptivity of the head mistress. His other campaign location was Fort Portal Church of Christ in Kihembe, a new congregation, where we enrolled 95. That afternoon we drove 1 ½ hours to the Buloga congregation in Kamwenge District. We showed them how to recruit, but time did not permit us to go out that afternoon. We did, however, ceremoniously hand out 35 *Knowing Jesus* booklets to excited members who were waiting for that book.

West Nile Recruitment Campaigns and Recruiters' Workshop

West Nile has a special place in Elaine's and my heart, not least because of Charles Oyungroth, a spiritual pillar in that area, and Gilbert Osendi, a sweetheart of a man, visually impaired, with a model Christian family and total dedication to the Lord's work. The 31 congregations in West Nile are the result of WBS work begun 2 decades ago, in large part by the late Lloyd Deal of Memorial Rd Church of Christ in Edmond, OK. We campaigned for 2 days in Charles' home town of Parombo and enrolled 300. It just so happened that the Uganda Christian Bible College preacher trainees (from Kigumba, Uganda) were conducting an 8 day evangelistic campaign in and around Parombo, the last two days of which overlapped with our campaign. They baptized 8, the last of whom was a WBS student.

We did a recruiters workshop in Nebbi attended by 21, four of whom came over from Mahagi in the Democratic Republic of Congo. I was sad not to have French WBS courses for them. We need a more concerted effort to supply this zealous group who have fought hard to get the church legally registered in their district (and have succeeded). Despite very little WBS materials to work with, what they have had has had a significant impact on the work there.

After the workshop, we went out to recruit for WBS in the church/Bible school neighborhood. 120 were enrolled. It still seems a work in progress to get WBS recruiters to think strategically and go to where the population and educated English speakers are.



Three of the brothers from the DRC, a two-hour motorbike ride away.



Gilbert (red shirt) strains his eyes to enroll in WBS neighborhood recruiting

Juba South Sudan Recruiters Workshop & Bible Seminar

My last trip to South Sudan was in November, 2022, just before the first ever sizeable shipment of WBS courses and Bibles arrived there. Poor numbers in S. Sudan for the previous couple of years, and the newness of Ocean Bridge, led us to leave a self-grading system in place where the two WBS offices (in Juba and in Bor)

graded lessons coming from recruiters in their areas. Bor made some progress, but Juba basically abdicated, occasionally sending inventory to Aweil where better use was being made of the courses. In 2023, with primarily just 4 recruiters, there were 100 that graduated from WBS in Bor. In 2024 there have been 200 enrollments and there will be 40 who graduate. There have been 8 baptisms. By comparison, in Aweil, they registered 123 in 2023 of whom 118 (96%) graduated. 97 of those registered (79%) were baptized!! In 2024, 139 have been enrolled and all 139 are on track to

graduate as soon as they finish *Live a Life of Love*. As reported, of the 139 “only 37 (26%) have been baptized”! This has been done basically with 4 recruiters who have served 6 schools and communities where they evangelize. In the last 4 years, 30 congregations have been planted in the 5 districts in Northern Bahr el Ghazal State, of which Aweil is the chief city. It is a predominantly Muslim area. The Faith Village Church of Christ in Wichita Falls, Texas, and Starfish Foundation are very invested in backing the work in this area, especially with leadership training. There is a Learning/Reading Centre in Aweil from which WBS is promoted.



Patrick Lazarus (left), Dut Akol from Aweil (with backpack) at Juba Recruiters Workshop

The Juba WBS Recruiters' Workshop had 21 people from 6 Juba area congregations present, plus one we brought from Aweil and 2 from Bor. Transportation to Aweil has to be by air. We had intended to do some neighborhood recruiting with this group, but the Lord sent a mega-thunderstorm right at that time. A representative from each congregation was sent back with recruiting supplies and a plan for their local WBS outreach, either to grade lessons at home or bring them back for the WBS center to grade and supply the next book. Inventory management is in place. I have high expectations, having Patrick Lazarus back (after 4 years at Bible school in Ghana), who gave WBS a dramatic start in Juba in 2017. We plan to still use local grading throughout 2025 in anticipation of possibly starting Ocean Bridge in 2026.

The 2 WBS offices have run on a skeletal budget for 2 years (\$50 a month for each office). Bor believes more funds would produce more results, citing lack of transportation funds as the major challenge to their productivity. Some of their recruiting is done at a costly distance from the office, and the infrastructure in South Sudan requires personal travel rather than just "bussing" of materials. However, without a funding mechanism such as with Ocean Bridge, it is hard to justify adding to the South Sudan budget for 2025. Having said that, Aweil is requesting its own WBS office, which surely seems warranted. The big challenge is getting books there, which so far have had to be flown there from the Juba inventory in small quantities. Current stock will not last through 2025, but restocking via a container going to Kisumu, Kenya, in May is being looked at.



Group Discussion in 'Building a Steadfast Christian Community' Seminar

As always when I go to Juba, the brethren asked for a Bible seminar on a topic of their choice. This one was on 'Building a Steadfast Christian Community.' Attendance was 28 from 6 congregations. The seminar was designed to be practical, for those from each congregation to be able to strategize growing the sense and practice of "community" in each of their congregations.