

Tuesday, February 16, 2010

Greetings to everyone!

After a month of travels Letha and I are back in Lyon. We wanted to update you and also ask for your prayers.

First of all, as many of you have probably heard by now, Letha and I have accepted the regional coordinator responsibilities of Africa in addition to our current responsibilities in Europe. Here is some background that went into this decision. Pete and Cindy Ekstrand have very capably served as Regional Coordinators for Africa for the past 11 years. They desire to step down from those responsibilities in order to return to Congo in the coming year and to totally focus on the ministries there as well as being our liaison to the Covenant churches in Sudan and Kenya. Currently our mission staff in Africa is greatly reduced from what it was in previous years. Our staff in Europe is also smaller in numbers. At the beginning of last year we were approached with the idea of incorporating the regional coordinator responsibilities for Africa into our current responsibilities in Europe. We have taken much time to pray and carefully consider this possibility. We have sensed a great peace and affirmation as we prayed and explored this idea. In some ways it made so much sense. When Letha and I were first married we served as short-term missionaries in Karawa, Zaire, now Democratic Republic of Congo, from 1981-1983. It is during that time that Katy was born. We knew most of the current missionaries now serving Africa from that point in our lives, when we were all young and just beginning our missionary service. The areas where we are ministering in central Africa are French speaking. With the current economic crisis and the reduced numbers of missionaries in Africa we believe it is also a question of stewardship of resources. Being located in France puts us in the same time zone as our colleagues in Africa and a plane ride from Paris to Yaoundé. Yet this will be a team effort. Pete and Cindy will be available to consult and advise as needed. They will remain as the liaison with the Covenant churches in Sudan and Kenya. Keith Gustafson will continue in his vital role as the liaison with the Covenant church of Congo. Byron Miller is heading up the work of the Paul Carlson Partnership and is in close communication with the Ekstrands and Keith. Our main responsibilities will focus on our missionaries in Central African Republic, Cameroon and Congo. We consider it a high honor to serve our missionary colleagues in Africa.



As I mentioned Letha and I have just returned from a month of travel. We had an excellent visit with Fred and Kelly Prudek in Prague from January 14-18. We met with them to assess the previous years of service and to look forward to their first full one year Home Assignment which will begin this coming June. There was plenty of snow while we were with the Prudeks in Prague, barely making it out for our early morning flight to attend meetings in Denver.

Once in Denver we participated in three days of leadership meetings for Covenant World Mission from January 20-22. Following those meetings we attended a two-day missions conference entitled "Mind the Gap" put on by Covenant World Mission. The focus was culturally relevant evangelism. The speakers were Jim Gustafson from Thailand, Beatriz Arguello from Colombia, Sunil Sardar from India and Daniel Jin from China. It was well attended and there was a great deal of good interaction among participants.

Next we attended the Midwinter Conference which was also held in Denver. As always, it is an intense time of many meetings. Letha and I were able to sit down for one-on-ones with our Africa-based missionaries who were present at Midwinter: Pete & Cindy Ekstrand, Tim & Helen Smith, Paul & Sherly Noren, Galen Johnson and Ron Ziegelbauer. It was moving to listen to their stories and hear of their hopes and plans for Africa. Following Midwinter we flew to Dallas to spend a few days with Leonid & Leanna Regheta and their 4 BEAUTIFUL children. It was an delightful time with them, to be in their home and talk about their current

context of ministry. Leonid is networking with Russians in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area and continues with periodic trips to Russia. He has been asked by the Swedes to visit them in Sweden in March to work on plans for joint projects in Russia. He will travel to Russia in June for the second joint soccer camp hosted by the Swedish Covenant Church. From Dallas we traveled to Houston and spent a couple days with our daughter Katy. She is thriving in her involvement in MissionYear and loves the church where she is based, Ecclesia, in the inner city of Houston. We met her nine house mates and saw her in the context of her ministry focused on the arts and working with the homeless. Letha then went on to spend a few days with her parents who winter in southern California and I returned to Lyon. I then spent a few days in Belgium to participate in ministry there. We are now both happy to be back home in Lyon.

As you can imagine, getting up-to-speed with all that is going on in Africa is a daunting challenge. We realize that the next six to nine months will be very intense as we become acquainted with the various aspects of ministry in Africa. In light of this we ask for your prayers for the following:

- That we can quickly become familiar with the various aspects of our new responsibilities in Africa
 - That we achieve a balance with multiple responsibilities in Europe, Africa and still have balance in our personal lives
 - For our time with our son Evan who will visit us from March 2-June 3
 - For our upcoming travels as listed below
- Here is our travel schedule for the next few months
- February 20-24, visit to Belgium with Swansons and Bakers
 - March 11-24, trip to Central African Republic and Cameroon to meet with Danforths, Stokers and Ekstrands
 - April 6-10, meetings in Lyon
 - April 16-28, Euro Vision Trip, visit to all our ministries in Europe
 - May 7-12 EuroRetreat in Beatenburg, Switzerland

We are very excited that our son Evan will be coming to Europe to visit. It has been two years since we were together. He will be accompanying me (John) on the Euro Vision Trip as he will be doing some filming for us. He will also be with us at the EuroRetreat.

We thank you for your prayers during this initial time of our incorporating Africa into our focus of ministry. We count it a tremendous privilege to serve such amazing people in both Europe and Africa. We thank for your concern and for your prayers.

Blessings,
John and Letha

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