

For the week ending October 11, 2008

## Nimule, Sudan

We left the guesthouse an hour before daylight and drove through Uganda's capital city in eerie silence—no traffic at all. On the outskirts of the city, we pulled to the side of the road to allow an army convoy to rumble by. Truck after truck, headlights blazing, carried troops and weapons home from the North. It reminded me of the longed for season of peace now enjoyed by citizens in northern Uganda and southern Sudan. Refugee camps have closed down. Families who have lived in exile for two decades are returning home, moving steadily north to their ancestral lands. We were following that migration across the border to Nimule, Sudan, the site of our team's northern-most mission outpost for the last five years.



Six men crammed into Stephan's LandCruiser. The rest of the survey team were still asleep, waiting on their 8:00 am MAF flight from Entebbe to Nimule. They kindly phoned at 10:30 to tell us they had arrived and were drinking tea—we still had five grueling hours to drive. In those last hours, we covered a mere 70 miles over rough and rutted dirt roads. Driving down into one pothole, I noticed that the level ground was three inches above the windowsill of the truck.

The survey team came from College Heights Christian Church in Joplin, Missouri. Three young couples considering long-term missions in Africa accompanied by an elder, the missions chairman, and Mike and Karolyn Schrage (20-year veterans of East Africa). Six of us came from Mbale: Dennis Okoth (MTI Principal),

James Luchivya, Shawn and Linda Tyler, and me. Already on site were our team's appointed missionaries to Nimule: Kennedy Obura and David Bikokwa.



David and Kennedy have served faithfully in Nimule both before and after peace came to the North. Through their efforts and the contributions of many in the US, our 9-acre compound in Sudan has reached out with the gospel to returning and transitioning refugees. They have planted five new churches in Sudan and as many in northern Uganda. They oversee a nursery school sponsored by CRF for 70 local children. Just last year, a dental and eyeglass clinic (SEE Ministries) opened up as part of our mission effort and a drilling team dug a 230' deep borehole to provide clean drinking water.

During this trip, Dennis officially convened a 2-year program to train church leaders. We have offered preacher training courses sporadically over the past five years, but the recent increase in security and peace have allowed us to plan for a regular program of Bible courses in Sudan. The first cohort of 25 church leaders sat for four courses, making Nimule a fully functional extension center for Messiah Theological



Institute. Through these leaders, our mission will reach even farther north into Sudan.



Five years of development have transformed the rocky emptiness of our compound into a thriving ministry center. Fenced by chain link and barbed wire, our nine acres now contain the main building (used by the church, nursery school, and MTI extension center), a dental and eye clinic (with running water and flush toilets!), a kitchen and dining room, a small guest room, and two three-room houses wired to a small bank of solar panels. Each visitor has followed a tradition of planting a tree—many of which are big enough to sit under for shade. Our group planted guava, papaya, and nim trees.

During our stay, the survey team participated in teaching courses, interviewing students, and surveying the town for information that will help

them discern whether they will come to Nimule or not and how they can prepare to live in such austere conditions. There is no pavement within 70 miles of Nimule, and all of the goods sold in the market are imported from Uganda. Though it rained briefly every afternoon, Nimule was much hotter and dryer than Mbale. Returning refugees have lived in camps for the last 20 years, eating handouts from the UN and World Food Program. Many of the young people do not even know how to grow their own food.

Monday morning, we walked down to a tributary that flows into the Nile River nearby to baptize eight of the Bible school students. When we finished, one of the observers asked if he could also be baptized. Working through two translators to get to his language, I asked him about his motivation and understanding. He patiently listened as I explained the gospel of God's grace through Jesus Christ. And then, one of the newly baptized students went down into the river with him to immerse him. He followed us back to the compound to see where the church was meeting and promised to be with them on Sunday.



On the way home, I switched with one of the other guys and boarded a 13-seat prop plane flown by Far Reaching Aviation. Mud was spattered under the wings, and long grass was caught in the mud flaps, but we trundled down the dirt strip and lifted off into the Sudanese sky. The Nile slothfully looped back and forth under the wingtips as we gained altitude and banked south. This was my first trip to Sudan. Two things were obvious to me. First, a lot of work has already been done. The first furrows have been plowed, and there is already a harvest to be gathered. But second, there is a great deal to be done. Anyone who serves in Sudan must be willing to endure physical hardship and spiritual opposition in greater isolation than those of us who work in Uganda. But now that peace has come, how can Christ's church not go where he has opened the door?

Copyright 2008 Phillip & Laura Shero

Permission is hereby granted to: forward this email, post it to a website, print it for church bulletin boards, re-print it in church bulletins, or re-print it in other non-profit missions or church related periodicals.

All other rights reserved.