

## *The Village Church*

Well, when we aren't fighting the scourge of HIV / AIDS in this country, or the complexities of unusual writing systems for new languages, or giving counsel to SIL PNG Branch through the Executive Committee, or stressing with an Australian Doctor to prepare for an emergency medivac, well....



Younger Bafi ministering in crowds after a church service (original church building)

**One of the joys** we have had living in PNG has been participating in a local church body. We attend, and are involved with the EBC (Evangelical Brotherhood) church in the local area.

The church was originally built by the "three aunties". These are three sisters who worked for SIL as children's home parents in the 1950's and early 60's. When SIL told them it was time to retire, their response: "we're too young to retire!" So they left SIL, crossed the river, moved into the village, founded the present church and oversaw the construction of its buildings and offices. Their old home is now the pastor's home. We still worship in the old church building they helped to build.

Twenty years ago when we began to attend this church, our beloved Bafi (Buffey) was the pastor. He moved on from that role, but remained involved in the village church and in the broader church in the local area until his recent graduation to heaven. He is greatly missed by all as he was a great encourager. I can remember after speaking at a Sunday service, Pastor Bafi genuinely complimenting me on my expository talk. He simply said: "Brian, you have a gift." And he sincerely meant it. I really treasured his counsel. I was also encouraged by the remark as it means that I have been able to successfully move into another culture and language to minister.

After this, and just before he died, he traveled around the valley and encouraged and prayed for many. It seemed he knew his time was short. He came over to our house, and asked me to consider joining the other men of the church in their lay-ministry to outlying village churches. In PNG not every village or hamlet can support a pastor. One pastor will serve a number of villages in an area with trained lay preachers helping to fill Sunday morning pulpits.

That's where the men at the Ukarumpa Church come in. On Thursday nights they will meet together, and discuss the passage of Scripture to be preached and taught on the next two Sundays. Then we are assigned to the various village churches. Kenneth is the head pastor and a delight to work with. Most of the men walk to the different villages, a trip that may take up to 1.5 hrs. It is easier for me, since we have an old, but faithful, 1981 Toyota Land Cruiser that still takes us just about anywhere, even in the worst of road conditions.

Helen comes along for encouragement when she can (and she attends church in Ukarumpa village when I am out of town when possible), but some Sundays cannot travel. This is due to her duty as the "on call" doctor at our mission clinic. Because she shares the load with the other doctors here, there are some weekends where she can not leave the mission center.

Pastor Kenneth, the local fulltime pastor, is a fine man who was born and raised in the Gadsup language and culture so he is uniquely qualified to minister to the Gadsup people living around us in the Aiyura valley. Kenneth is well taught from his studies at Bible School in the coastal port town of Lae.

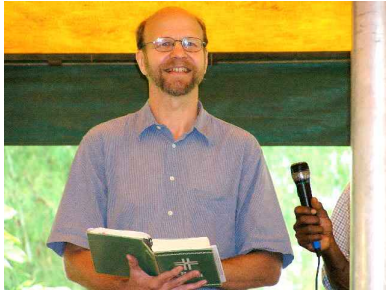
When I preach, it is in Melanesian Pidgin, the trade language. Although most of those in the congregation understand it, it is a limited language and many concepts do not interpret well. I use a mix of Pidgin and English for some concepts and the translator is usually able to explain it in Gadsup. I hope to both help people understand the scripture passage in its cultural and Biblical context and also to help them to make personal application from the Biblical text to their lives (no small feat crossing the language/cultural divide).

People are generally fascinated by any Hebrew life and culture clues that



Helen enjoys the women she meets at the distant Orege village church fellowship

we might be able to relate about the Jews or the Egyptians, or Babylon of the ancients. Jewish cultural norms that often lead to insights in understanding the Scripture text are also appreciated. So even though we do not have formal seminary training in the States, our basic knowledge of the Scriptures is often well received. We also have access in English to many Bible helps in books, something that most of us take for granted.



Brian sharing from the Word of God at an open tent pavilion combined service

It has been quite enjoyable to minister in simple ways among the Gadsup members at Ukarumpa. Recently the church honored us by accelerating the date of the new church building dedication. They purposely advanced the date to April of this year, because they found out we were going on a short furlough in May to see our David graduate from Virginia Tech University.

**Prayer:** As EC Chairman, I have to start planning all the many details to host a biennial SIL Branch Conference of perhaps 400 or more attendees. You can be praying for wisdom as I lead this huge undertaking

that I must confess, I have never had the privilege of ever doing before in my life. The Conference will be March 22<sup>nd</sup> through April 4<sup>th</sup>.

With much appreciation for all your many prayers and support of our ministry to the people of Papua New Guinea..... blessings to you and your family.

*Brian C.*



Our new church building still under construction. Price? \$10,000

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