



## *Expanding Christ's Kingdom in Kenya*

July 2019

Dear friends,

Greetings from Kenya!

We've been behind with updates (though have posted more regularly on our blog). So let's catch up. **December 2019** was a great month. Besides keeping busy making progress on editing the Maa language introduction to the Bible, we had visitors! Our dear friends the Dahlbakha family, Bible translators with Wycliffe Bible Translators, returned from Finland for the dedication of the Sampur New Testament for the Samburu people. Not only to we rejoice that the Sampur NT has finally been published, but we were able to catch up with these dear friends.

Years ago when we lived in the Maasai Mara (2007–2008) and then in Narok town (2010–2011), it seemed that each time we came to Nairobi for meetings and stayed at the Mennonite Guest House, the Dahlbacka family was there as well. We met when I heard Magnus speaking Sampur (the southern Maa dialects and the dialect of the Samburu have a 70% linguistic overlap) with a Kenyan. (Ruth and I can get by in Sampur, and have had a number of Samburu students through the years.) A long friendship ensued between Magnus and Anna. As I (Joshua) was working as a translation consultant for The Bible Society of Kenya's much needed revision of the Maa Bible, the Dahlbackas and I often had occasion to exchange notes and discuss translation issues. Here are our two families together. I am happily holding a copy of the Samburu New Testament together with the newly published Samburu-English lexicon.





This is a young couple we've been mentoring, both before and after their wedding (in February 2016). Our children have enthusiastically adopted them as a Matthew 19:29 / Mark 10:29-30 aunt and uncle.

**2020 started out like a normal, everyday year.** In January we were busy with the usual ministry and life-in-Kenya things. Ministry happens even when we drive to Nairobi to do some big-city shopping.

We continued to make progress in our Swahili-learning, the children enjoyed their Thursdays with their HomeSchool co-op friends, progress continued with the editing of the Maa language introduction to the bible, and we finalized preparations for the course Joshua taught in February. In addition, Joshua took his final PhD seminar course. (A ton of reading and a research project remain before he can sit for his comprehensive exams. Due to pandemic school closures, that will probably be this next January.) His program work have already been paying off both in our curriculum development and in the courses he teaches. Here's his classmates relaxing over lunch.



Oh, and we celebrated Shalviah's fifth birthday. Here she is with Ahaviah (7). Ahaviah's in a Maasai dress that was given to Alitzah years ago. You'll note our Christmas decorations are still up (on the window grill, as fir trees don't grow at the equator).

In February Joshua was about to return to Oletukat to teach his *History of Christian Missions* course for a group of Maasai pastors. Last year, James ole Sakat revived the defunct MIEA (Mission Institute East Africa) to offer missional training to Maasai pastors. As we mentioned in our November 2019 newsletter, Ruth and I have met with him (in Oletukat) to help work on the curricula of MIEA. (For more on this, including some music, visit the [“Send Me”](#) post on our blog.)





The Maasai pastors in the course represented four or five different denominations. We have continued to communicate with James during the pandemic quarantine.

In March we were scheduled to start assisting with the preaching and teaching at a small church plant (it meets under a tree in the village market), between Kiserian and Magadi in Kajiado County. Alas! The pandemic, with consequent quarantine and travel restrictions, intervened. So while 2020 started off more

or less as we had expected, it didn't stay that way. Here's a summary of our work this year so far.

## **CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT**

The Maa language introduction to the Bible and its genres and books (the working title translates to *What is the Bible? An Introduction to the Holy Writings*) has been completed and we have secured funding for its printing from LATM (Literature And Teaching Ministries, [www.LATM.info](http://www.LATM.info)). Last year and this year through March, Joshua was working with Benson ole Kurraru (of the Africa Inland Church) on editing the final draft; Francis Yenke (of the Community Christian Church) is our other Maasai editor. We've completed the Old Testament and Gospels sections. Kenya's quarantine regulations have greatly slowed our progress — we were expecting to go to press by May at the latest. The quarantine has continued, but regulations have just been somewhat relaxed, and so hopefully work should resume later this month or in August.

When this goes to press, we will discuss with national church leaders (AIC and CCC) which current back-burner project should come next (if not at the front of the queue, our Total Christian Stewardship course maybe be up next to develop into a book; an alternative is one of Ruth's projects).

## **MATERIALS PRODUCTION**

Due to great demand for the now out-of-print "red song book" of Maasai hymns, we are partnering with the Kenya Church of Christ on a new edition that will retain all of the old songs (with the same "hymn numbers" for convenience of use) but add new songs which have been written by Maasai believers in the Kenya Church of Christ, the Community Christian Church (CCC), and the Africa Inland Church. (At the request of some CCC leaders, two choruses written by Joshua will probably be included.) When completed, this will be distributed through all three of these denominational groups (at least).

## **MAASAI DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING SCHOOL**

Some of you may recall that after helping to resurrect the MDTI some years ago at a new campus (in Olepishet), we expanded to having "mobile DTI" sessions, twice having sessions in Kawai in TransMara. Due to lack of funding, MDTI plans to have mobile DTI sessions in Samburu Land and Turkana Land (at the request of Samburu and Turkana CCC leaders) have been postponed. But In January through April of this year, we were working with Francis ole Yenke, Moses ole Mashipei, and Paul Lupempe to organize a mobile DTI to meet in Kajiado County (probably at Ng'ataek). The thirteen-week session was to have started either the last week of April or the first week of May. Unfortunately, the pandemic intervened and in compliance with the directives of Kenya's government this session has been postponed. So a lot of planning work toward that will not bear visible fruit until quarantine restrictions are relaxed.

However, early this week, I (Joshua) had a productive (if very socially distanced *via* the internet) meeting with Francis. Note that our partnership with MDTI always had been independent of our former position with CMF but that as a CMF representative I had assisted MDTI with their budgets. Having been informed that a former teammate was going to assist MDTI with that, we have only helped with other aspects of planning, curriculum development, and vetting of teachers. Francis informs me, however, that such help has not been forthcoming and has asked us to resume our former role in helping MDTI with their budget formation and oversight. (MDTI is a CCC ministry, and CCC leadership has thus far asked me to continue as the chair of the MDTI steering committee.) So I will resume wearing, at least occasionally, that particular “hat.”

## **HOMESCHOOL AND HOMESCHOOL CO-OP**

Covid-19 entered Kenya a good bit later than most countries in the West. Once it was here, the government of Kenya responded by closing schools. Earlier this month, the government announced that schools here will stay closed until next year (!), January 2021. Our HomeSchooling has of course continued. The children are doing quite well.

After our HomeSchool co-op (we’re the only non-Kenyan family) took a break for a few weeks, we resumed via Zoom meetings. Ruth has continued to be active with this and to minister to the other parents.

The children have a bit of the Quarantine Blues and miss seeing their Kenyan friends face-to-face. *(And if we’re strictly honest, the same is true of their parents!)*

## **NO VISITORS AFTER ALL ...**

First Christian Church in Greeneville, TN, had planned for a group to visit us (and the MDTI) in June-July of this year. The pandemic has postponed that trip until next year, but it is worth noting that we had spent a considerable number of hours in planning for that visit.

## **ZAIDI YA KISWAHILI** *(More Swahili)*

We are diving deeper into the intricacies of Swahili as a family. At the end of our last term (while we were still with CMF), learning Swahili this term was part of our plan for this term. Swahili is one of Kenya’s two national languages. Being able to communicate in Swahili will open further doors for ministry, as well as increasing our already considerable “street cred.” Just being able to exchange greetings in Swahili have already opened ministry opportunities for us — including a number of opportunities for Ruth to engage in prayer ministry. Often once we have developed teaching materials in Maa, we are asked for a Swahili version as well.

## **MENTORING AND NETWORKING — JOSHUA**

With some ministry venues temporarily denied to us, we have looked for silver linings.

I (Joshua) have co-founded a network of scholars and students for African Christian Theology. As of July 19th, the group had grown to at least 635 members. Members include African pastors, ministerial and seminary and doctoral students, lecturers, and professors. I have been able to mentor younger African church leaders (via correspondence and various internet meetings) and to provide a large body resources for both pastors and professors. Here are some things others have said:

- **Mark Shaw** (Director and Professor, Centre for World Christianity, Africa International University; also my faculty advisor): [“I am excited to see this group begin. May God bless it and use it.”](#)

- **Dion Forster** (Professor, Stellenbosch University, South Africa): “Joshua you are a polymath! Wonderful! I could see some good evidence of someone who understands African hermeneutics here. Wonderful! ... You are doing amazing work! ... As I mentioned I could quickly tell that you had a particular 'sensitivity' for Biblical scholarship and hermeneutics in Africa. That is a rare gift!”
- **Stan Chu Ilo** (Research Professor of World Christianity and African Studies, Center for World Catholicism and Intercultural Theology, DePaul University; Prof. Ilo is from Nigeria): “I am impressed with your work. ... Thanks ... for including me in your network. I am utterly amazed at your leadership and agency in helping to create a common forum for this kind of partnership and collaboration in furthering African theology and African Christian studies in general. ... I see a kindred spirit between us because what you are doing is what I have been doing among Catholic theologians in Africa, while searching for other outliers like you with whom I could strike a wonderful partnership to take this to another ecumenical level. ... I hope we can further our conversation as we seek the path towards the future.”
- **Alistair Wilson** (Lecturer in Mission and New Testament at Edinburgh Theological Seminary; formerly at a university in South Africa): “Thanks for making these resources available. ... It's good to see thoughtful and robust discussion taking place. I am glad to be a part of the group.”

These professors (and others not listed) are training tomorrow's leaders of African churches. I have received numerous other notes of thanks from group members of each type listed above; I've just taken a moment to list a few.

#### **MENTORING AND NETWORKING — RUTH**

Ruth has formed a similar network to help others who have suffered from abuse and misogyny. I could list even more words of gratitude that she has received than I listed above for my project, but noting the time I see I need to pause my writing and go ahead and send this.

This is in addition to her ongoing mentoring relationships here, which she has been able to continue via phone and internet conversations.

*Mainosa ilomon! ... neaku taa lelo.*

*(Let's chew the news! ... And that's the way things are.)*

*grace and peace and thanks to you in our Lord Jesus,*

*Joshua & Ruth*

*joshua & ruth barron*

**MissionStream-Kenya**