

From our street to yours
Glyn, Susan, Maeyken, Adriaena
February 2004

Connecting with AIC congregations

An Important part of our job here right now is connecting with people and congregations that Bryan and Teresa Born have known for years. (Bryan and Teresa Born, along with their daughters Katie and Emily have been here for 11 years, and are leaving in about a month.) For the last number of Sundays we have been attending at least two churches with Bryan. For Bryan these are farewell visits. For us they are introductory. We will not keep up this pace once Bryan has left but for now it is important that we get to as many as we can.

Last Sunday I (Glyn) went to three congregations with Bryan. At one I participated. At one I preached in Setswana, and at one both Susan and I gave greetings partially in Setswana and partially in English. These are congregations unlike any in Canada. Churches have different starting times and arriving mid way through a service is not a problem. So on Sunday we were at the beginning of one, the middle of the next, and the end of the third.

We arrived at the first one at ten, for a ten o'clock service. There was one person there when we arrived. She was sweeping out the worship space, and getting things ready. By ten thirty, enough people had arrived that things began. As with many African Independent churches (AICs) this was a small congregation meeting in a building with cement block walls, a cement floor, and a tin roof. There were 30 or 40 people in attendance. Pastors in AICs are not paid by the churches (they have outside jobs), so congregations only need enough people to create a critical mass for worship. We sang, Scripture was read, one of the leaders spoke parting words to Bryan and Bryan read from several passages and preached.

At the second congregation, we were welcomed heartily by the bishop that I had already met a couple of times. We entered the worship space with a procession, and sat at the front. We sang for a while. Singing here involves the body, not as a dance, but in rhythmic movement. This is not Canada! Scripture was read, and Bryan introduced me. I preached in Setswana. It was written down, and felt very stiff compared to everything else that was happening. It was also a bit long for me to keep focussed on, and not let the words become mere letters and sounds on a page. However, the congregation seemed to understand where I was headed, and my pronunciation was corrected, which was good because it told me that they could follow me enough to know what the word was that I was mangling. Before we could leave, we ended up in a picture taking event. The bishop wanted pictures of everyone with Bryan, and myself. We were arranged in various groups, young men, old men, young women etc. Hard to imagine that happening in the middle of a service at home. We left, and they continued worshipping.

At the third service we met up with Teresa and Susan. This church was well underway by the time we got there. Still there was lots of singing and speaking. Susan and I both gave greetings. Bryan preached. In any worship service there is lots of preaching often with several people speaking. The various sermons and scripture readings may or may not all connect. In our North American churches we have often made the sermon the central part around which the service is planned. Often our sense of whether or not a worship service was "good" revolves around how meaningful the sermon was. But in the AIC congregations the sermon is not the culmination of the service. The sermon is only one part of the whole. So when the speaking part is finished people enter a time of prayer and singing. There was a noticeable shift in the congregation at this point. The prayer time begins with singing, and dancing in a circle. People participate as they feel led. As they sing and dance people come into the middle of the circle and kneel as the leaders lay hands on them and pray. It is not nearly as orderly as we usually aim for in Canada. Sometimes there is a lot of circle dancing before someone enters the circle to be prayed for.

Into the future

February 21-22 Phikwe to visit Bible class and congregations with Bryan and Teresa Born

February 23-24 Glyn in Francistown to visit Bible class and renew relationships

February 29 Church in Molepolole with Bryan and Teresa

March 20 Adriaena's birthday (A very important day in her life!)

March 21 Bryan, Teresa, Katie and Emily Born leave for Canada

April 8-May 1 Fall school Break. We will spend some time with Brian and Lynell Bergen-Dyck in Umtata, South Africa. (They are Mennonite Church Canada workers and work with African Independent Churches as well).

Sometimes the people being prayed for are not quiet as they experience God's presence in their lives. Usually there is a lot of sweating as people dance and sing for the glory of God. Remember that churches have no air conditioning and most do not have fans as well. This combined with a tin roof can make the room very hot. This time of prayer, singing and dancing is really a time of listening to God, and beseeching God's direct action in the lives of the people. This is also when people prophecy, ask for direction with specific issues in their life or seek prayer for physical healing. Sometimes it is a time where ones whole being is involved in worshipping God. Well, their whole beings ... I do not do well on circles, dancing, spinning, or any of those things. I have helped pray in the centre. And it is interesting to notice that the most energetic dancers are the younger adults. The older church leaders may participate briefly, or sometimes not at all. I do not feel out of place watching, and praying outside the circle dance.

Glyn

Kids



Maeyken and Adriaena start school at 7:15 am every day. That means they get up at 6 am. School ends for Adriaena at 12:15 pm, and for Maeyken at 12:45 pm. They are also involved in extra activities. Maeyken is on the swim team and spends three afternoons a week in the pool for an hour. Maeyken has also joined the school choir and an arts and crafts activity which are both held on Wednesday afternoon. Adriaena is in a gymnastics programme called Monkeynastics on Mondays after school, and has a swimming class on Thursday afternoons. Pick up times vary from 12:15 to 5:15. We are grateful that the school is only two kilometres from our house! The academic expectations at the school are a bit different from what they have been used to in Canada so there has been some adjustments. They are particularly concerned about handwriting so both girls have worked hard to improve their writing. Both of the girls are making friends and are feeling welcomed but both very much miss their friends from home as well.

Other stuff

We have appreciated your emails. Almost every day we check our email in the morning while you're asleep. What a great way to start a day reading an email from someone from home. We have also been pleasantly surprised to get the occasional letter, card or package in the mail. We know how busy you are with your own lives so it's nice to know that we haven't been forgotten!

Something New

We have been writing a letter about once a month to let you know what has been happening.

We are going to try something a little different. We will still include some reflection and observation, but set up in a way that we hope is more readable.

We are sending it as text in the email, but also as a PDF file. It seems to work on our computer. Let us know if this works for, or if you had problems.

Please note our Botswana email address.

Thanks

Reflections on Wealth, Need and God's call

Last week I (Susan) was talking with Maeyken's swim coach and learned that she has recently moved here from Zimbabwe. We talked about the ongoing crisis in Zimbabwe. Since then her words have stayed imbedded in my brain. "I wish we had something that the world wanted." She told me stories of her friends being threatened and hurt. Our newspapers are full of stories of injustice and corruption. Zimbabwe is a country in despair. We constantly encounter "illegal" Zimbabweans who are just looking for a better life. The people just want to be able to live in peace in their own home. And yet they can't. As we follow world events it seems really sad that one has to have something that the world wants in order to have countries step in to stop an injustice.

We look around Botswana and see an incredible wealth. Botswana has an industry that the world wants. Their diamond mines will supply a cash income and provide a sense of security for years to come. We are not living in a country that has and is suffering like the people in Zimbabwe. But as we look around we see a country full of inconsistencies. Many of the churches that we attend are found in an area of Gaborone known as "Old Naladi". The first time I drove around Old Naladi I saw poverty. I saw people who didn't have the money to drive expensive cars (or any car at all), who do not have money to shop at the affluent malls and who wonder where their next meal will come from. On Wednesday I visited a day care for orphans in the village of Molepolole. There I was greeted with enthusiasm by children of various ages. As I greeted these children I was terribly saddened to realize that everyone of these children was being raised by a caregiver other than their parent because their parents had died from either AIDS or another illness.

As I ponder what God has called us to do I sometimes wonder why God has called us to this affluent land. There are certainly places that have greater needs and less available social support systems. And yet as we meet the people we can see the pain that is part of their lives. We can see a country that like our own country is wealthy on the outside but incredibly hurting when one digs deeper to see what the real truth is. Both AIMM and MCC are decreasing their personnel numbers here in the near future. When we came we were a team of 12 adults and 6 children. At the end of March we will be a team of 6 adults and 4 children. The Mennonite presence is shrinking and yet the needs are still great. It is a reality of changing priorities and increasing difficulty in raising funds to send people out. And yet it leaves us wondering what it says to those people whom we (the Mennonites) have partnered with for so many years. We will continue to ponder these and many more questions. But most of all we want to find ways to support our Botswana friends as best we can despite a shrinking team. Hopefully together we will experience God's love and peace in our world that is full of inconsistencies and brokenness.

Susan

Contact us

Mail us at:
Susan Allison-Jones &
Glyn Jones
Box 33, Gaborone,
Botswana

Please Pray for...

Language acquisition. We have Setswana classes 3 times a week, and are progressing. However we are a long way from being able to communicate effectively. Please continue to pray for us as we learn Setswana.

Understanding of our ministry with the AIC people. We are meeting many new people, and are working hard to remember who they are, which church they are connected to, how to find their home, and their church. We are also trying to get a handle on the Bible teaching programme, and how we can assist them in carrying on this important ministry. Please pray for us as we make decisions as to how to most effectively use our time with the AICs.

Cultural Adjustment Almost anything you would want is available here, most of the time. Store shelves are loaded, and have variety. And yet what was there last week, may not be here this week. Last week the main post office didn't have any stamps. All Christmas season we could get cream cheese in a variety of flavours. Now there is none! So we are adjusting to how we shop, and what we can expect. Please pray for us as we adjust to a new place and what feels like constant change in our environment.

Ministry Colleagues and Friendship Our MMBots (Mennonite Ministries Botswana) Team is shrinking! Some very good people have left (Tim and Laura Bertsche) and some more are about to leave (Bryan and Teresa Born and Ruth and Art Thiessen). We will miss these families. We have enjoyed their friendship but also found their breadth of knowledge and experience invaluable. Pray for them as they say good bye and make their own transitions. Pray for us as we say good bye and look to the near future when we will be the only Mennonite couple working with African Independent Churches here in Botswana. Please continue to pray for all of us that we might be able to find friends and supportive persons outside of the MMBots Team. As the team shrinks this is even more critical.



Witness

We welcome your contributions for our support and invite you to send these to:

Mennonite Church Canada WITNESS
600 Shaftesbury Blvd
Winnipeg MB R3P 0M4