

The Amani Messenger

Amani Development Center,
Makang'wa, Tanzania

February, 2007

Greetings from this incredibly green land. Greetings from this incredibly WET land! In this midst of this season it is difficult to recall the 'dry season' with its dust and grit – and the winds which seemed to blow day and night. The hill behind the housing is dense with high grasses and a dense forest of thorn trees. They are now beginning to flower. Some are very beautiful.

However the rains have been excessive and the people who had suffered from drought are now suffering from an excess of water. Many farms are water-logged. One woman said, "I hoe the ground and the water comes up!" Our local river, usually a dry sandy bed, has ceased running on only a few days. One some days it has been impassable. Here at the Amani Center we are blessed as our land has a gentle slope and good drainage but much of the valley is relatively flat – and sodden. The older people say that they cannot recall a season such as this one.

Last Thursday, at about 12.30 pm a severe storm developed quite suddenly. It rolled in from the west, passed over our dwellings, and literally 'stormed' across the valley. There was very heavy rain, hail and severe damaging winds. At first the wind blew from the west and then, after a short calm, it blew from the south with gale force. Our six acres of maize was flattened as were many crops in the area. However by noon the next day it was all standing tall once again! The soil is so soft that our 'army' of workers was able to lift it, scoop up some soil, and tamp it down firmly. All seemed well until Saturday when another storm blew some of it over again. However there will be a harvest. Part of the effect of the storm was seen this morning (Monday) as a large number of people arrived seeking Relief Work. Until today numbers had reduced somewhat during the past two weeks.

Many village homes are severely damaged. Some have collapsed. Many of those with an iron roof have lost the roof. (Insert. As I type this we are surrounded by three large storms and the wind is beginning to gust again. Truly I have never experienced a season such as this.) Three of the church buildings were severely damaged, among them St. Andrew's Anglican Church, the large old Parish Church of the area. The roof was completely torn away, twisted and destroyed. Beside the old Church building is the partially completed new building. In the past I have given some assistance with sacks of cement. We worshipped with the congregation on the Sunday following the storm, gathering beneath some trees. Truly, the church building is a mess but the people are full of hope. They have decided to worship under the trees, or a rough shelter, until they have completed the new building. The reality is that in the present circumstances this will take some long time. But I know they will do their utmost.

In the light of this situation I am asking all who can to 'partner' with us here in the work of completing the new building. We estimate that it will cost about \$4,000.00US to fulfill this task. The building is quite large. It will seat 400. The floor plan is in the shape of a fish, an ancient Christian symbol. The 'tail' area includes two vestries or meeting rooms. It will be a fine structure when completed. I do appeal to you to pray about this urgent need. I am confident that we can complete this place of worship to the glory of God and to the benefit of this community.

Now to other matters. Amani for Africa USA Foundation has given us the 'go ahead' to build a grain shed and accompanying small store. The need is urgent in the light of the approaching harvest of maize, millet, groundnuts (peanuts) and simsim. The weather is making progress difficult as we cannot bring a truck on to the land. Therefore each work day begins with about sixty people carrying rock, concrete blocks or sand to the site. Then a group of women spend the morning carrying buckets of aggregate on their heads. Now, they are a happy lot and sing and chat away as they do what I consider to be very hard work. The point is that they understand that this is all progress for their area. Here is hope for the future. As one of them said, "We are in the middle of God's miracle." The heavy 'carrying' will cease tomorrow as we shall have three ox carts available.

Through Hearts for Africa (Australia) we have just purchased a welding machine and a powerful electric drill. We already have a good grinder. These are powered from the generator at the well. God has provided us with some people with developed skills. Sief is a young man who is an experienced welder, electrician and mechanic. He came begging for a job. He is a blessing to us. Athanasio (a catechist – a godly man) is an excellent carpenter. I have been able to provide him with some fine tools so that he can make 'just about anything'. We do also now have four experienced masons. All of this adds up to a fine team of excellent workers. It is truly encouraging to see progress being made. For example, at long last we have rain water guttering – and a 5,000ltr tank full of sweet water! Soon I hope to be able to add three more 3,000ltr tanks.

Our three 'grape men' are keen and able. We are now sending them to the Grape Research Center at Makutupola for 'hands-on' work experience with the people there. Amani now has a 'Tomato King'! Barton is a most dedicated man. We recently sponsored him to a two week seminar conducted by the Department of Agriculture. They are so impressed with the Center (and with Barton) that they want an active working relationship with us – and they intend presenting the Center with a gift of many fruit trees!

I have this past week appointed one of our men as the Head Forester. Peter Kuwa will have three assistants. They were originally the 'stump gang', removing tree stumps and roots in the farm land. Now their task is to plant new trees and to preserve the existing forest. We do have an incredibly beautiful tract of land. The Tanzanian Government is encouraging people to plant trees and many are responding. We intend planting 200 Congo Trees in our initial effort. These are a native tree, tall and straight, useful for timber when mature. The recent severe storm has taught us that we need also to plan for some wind breaks on the land.

It is easy to foresee a time when people will come to the Center to enjoy the beauty of the area. One group of our workers (Nathanial Asbell from Billings is among them) is now bringing to completion A VERY SPECIAL PROJECT. They are building rock and concrete steps up the hill behind our dwellings. There is an abrupt rise to a wonderful place from which to view the great valley and the distant mountains. The view is spectacular. Combined with a plan to maintain a safe walking track around the hills, with some rest areas provided, we shall have our own small 'national park'! Of course, this will greatly complement the Conference Center when we get around to that project. The landscaping work around the buildings continues at a steady pace. We now have Morning Worship every work morning around the great white Cross near the entrance. I am sure the sound of the singing carries across the village. One of the four catechists on the work team conducts worship on a weekly roster which they manage themselves.

The school project: This seems to be advancing very slowly. However in reality a great deal is under way in term of planning and local organization – all very basic stuff but all most important. Now a wonderful group in Brisbane, Australia is opening an Op Shop to raise funds for the school! A long section of the road to the school site has been washed out by the heavy rains. The choir (an excellent choir) from St. James' Anglican Church is presently, with Amani help, bringing rock to the area and restoring the road. I challenged the local people on a Sunday during worship to 'do something' about the road rather than simply wait for 'someone' to do the job for them. The Choir and some adults responded enthusiastically. As soon as the weather changes we shall be able to begin restoring a dwelling on the land as a place for a security man. That done we shall be able to proceed with the school itself. There will also be an old water well to test, clean and, if all is well, equip with a submersible pump. Surely it seems to be very slow but step by step we shall reach the goal.

There is much more which could be shared but this has already become too long.

Do continue to pray for the Amani Center.

Pray that we shall hold to God's purpose.

Pray that we shall be consistently a place of compassion and encouragement.

Pray for the health of the people. Malaria is a terrible scourge.

(Today our Security man at the house went to Mvumi Hospital for treatment.)

Pray that the Government of the country will act wisely and with compassion for the people.

Pray that the local Christian communities will be steadfast in living the Gospel.

Pray for the many, many people across this land who are suffering great hardship through these excessive rains.

Pray that we shall learn the lessons the rains have offered and plan with wisdom for the future.

Pray that we shall not despise the rains but praise God that, after the drought, rain does come!

I add these reflections for those who wish to share the inspiration I receive from them.

Holding the mystery of faith.....(1 Timothy 3:9.)

“Faith is vision plus valor.”

“Faith is the eye through which we look to Jesus. A dim-sighted eye is still an eye; a weeping eye is still an eye.

“Faith is the hand with which we lay hold of Jesus. A trembling hand is still a hand. And he is a believer whose heart within him trembles when he touches the hem of the Savior’s garment, that he maybe healed.

“Faith is the tongue by which we taste how good the Lord is. A feverish tongue is nevertheless a tongue. And even then we may believe when we are without the smallest portion of comfort; for our faith is founded not upon feelings but upon the promises of God.

Faith is the foot by which we go to Jesus. A lame foot is still a foot. He who comes slowly nevertheless comes.”

- *George Mueller*

And this seems most appropriate at the present time –

Habakkuk shouted God’s praises when he beheld the vines without fruit, the fields burned bare, the stall without herds. He rejoiced because he had faith in God. It was his audacious certitude of faith that made him the prophet of the ages.