



Dear Friends,

We have survived yet another hot season, though as always, we wondered if we would live to see the end! The end of May brought the return of Michaela and Josiah home to Ghana from boarding school for summer break, and we have been enjoying games, movies, swimming, and a vacation to the southern part of the country. It's hard to believe their break is half over already! JoyAnna and Micah are also on school break while Claude and Rhoda take some time to visit family and friends in the US. Shortly after they arrived in the States, Claude's twin brother Clyde passed away after an 8-year battle with cancer. The brothers celebrated their 70th birthdays in June. We praise the Lord for Clyde's life of service and Christian love, and that he is now with his Father in heaven.

One of the trips we have made this summer was a visit to Gbintiri, the Komba village we spent 10 years in before moving to Tamale in 2012. Our intent was to greet many friends, enjoy the market, and worship with our fellow Lutheran brothers and sisters. We did end up doing those things, but in the wee hours of Sunday morning, something happened that transformed our worship service. Before I relate that event, let's go back about 8 years to a workshop David, Nathan Esala, and some local pastors hosted for the Komba Christians. Here is an excerpt from our June 2011 prayer letter:

**Gospel in Culture**

*The point of the workshop was to acknowledge that as humans, we are part of a culture. Since God created culture, there are things in each and every culture that are good. However, because of sin, each and every culture has things that lead us away from God.*

*At the April workshop, we tackled the issue of death and funerals... During our time together, we walked through the cultural practices associated with funerals. As a group, we discussed the meaning of each practice in order to determine why it was needed. What purpose does it fulfill in the culture? We came up with a pretty long list of things that (culturally) had to be done, such as: washing out the deceased person's mouth, deciding which direction the deceased persons head should face, and how many times a widow should be carried around her husband's house. We then went through the list and determined which things were absolutely against Biblical teaching. Some practices did not violate Christian principles, so it was determined that those practices could be continued. Those things that were not Scriptural were discussed in depth to determine if they could be replaced with Biblically appropriate practices in line with the culture's underlying intent.*



*Workshop participants were eager to talk about these important issues (2011)*

In the early morning of Sunday, June 23, Madam Samata passed away. She was among the first Komba converts to Christianity. For many years she had been a spiritual pillar and women's leader in Immanuel Lutheran Church in Gbintiri. Her son Lazarus is now one of the few seminary-trained Komba pastors. God had certainly blessed her earthly life, but she also faced many challenges as a follower of a 'new' religion living among adherents to a traditional belief system focused on the reverence of ancestors and the use of witchcraft. Her husband tried mightily to thwart her efforts to attend church services and, even more than 30 years after the Good News came to the Komba people, many of her family members still remain in the traditional religion.

While Madam Samata is certainly not the first believer to pass away, each death or other crisis is an opportunity for Satan to try to get a foothold as Christians

are thrust into a situation that has long-standing traditions. There is a spiritual struggle as church family and blood relatives each have deeply held beliefs about how a deceased person should be prepared and buried.

One of the essential topics that came out of the 2011 workshop was the issue of washing out the mouth of the deceased person. Not being against the Word of God, this is still practiced by Christians. This is usually performed by the one who is with the person when they died or the first person to discover the deceased person, and signifies they accept the responsibility to start the rest of the process in motion. Because of this, the Komba church leaders pinpointed two very important things they wanted to begin putting into practice. The first was to encourage all believers to make it known to their family members that they want a Christian burial and funeral. It is hoped, then, that even followers of the traditional religion will respect the wishes of their loved one and call a pastor or other Christian to put things into motion. The second essential practice is that all Christians should come together at times of death or other crisis and support each other in the face of opposition from staunch adherents to the traditional religion.



Evangelist Anthony encourages Rev. Lazarus (R) on the morning of his mother's death.



Because it was early Sunday morning and all the church leaders were gathered together with Rev. Lazarus, there was a question as to what to do about worship services. It didn't take long for them to decide to hold a joint service at Samata's family home where she would be buried later that morning. At this combination worship and burial service, all Christians in Gbintiri and some surrounding villages came to show their support to Rev. Lazarus and the Lutheran community at the loss of their loved one.

Thanks to the availability of the translated Scripture and the Gospel and Culture workshops held 8 years ago, the Christian community does not have to wonder how to handle the death of a fellow believer. They had gathered together, delved deep into their traditional cultural beliefs and practices, consulted God's Word, and come out with their own protocols. Though there are several Christian denominations in Komba-land now, they still come together to support each other in times of need. No one stands alone.



Memorials were danced up and put in a basket before the coffin was placed in the ground.

### **For Correspondence & Contributions**

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### **Praise God With Us**

- For the strength and unity of the Komba Christian church, the translated New Testament, and the work being done to complete the Old Testament
- For the summer to spend with all our children at home
- For 20 years of marriage we recently celebrated
- For Claude and Rhoda's sweet service to our family and the love they have for our children.

### **Please Pray With Us**

- For David and all of us as he prepares to begin another season of travel (he's been home several months now)
- For the administration of Lutheran Bible Translators as they deal with a shortage of administrative staff and more requests for missionaries and funding assistance than they can fill
- For wisdom as we handle repairs on our car. As it approaches its 17th birthday, more and more things are wearing out and need to be fixed or replaced.

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