



RCA Missionary Update

from the Fords

St. Paul's University in Limuru, Kenya, is an international and ecumenical institution that prepares men and women for ministry in the Christian church and in society. Founded in 1903 as a divinity school, St. Paul's recently expanded to become a Christian university. In addition to doing theological studies, students can now earn a bachelor's degree in business administration.

Peter teaches Arabic as well as courses on the Qur'an, Islamic history, and other Islam-related topics in the post-graduate program in Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations (ICMR) at St. Paul's University. He also works with students on a personal level to help them develop appropriate attitudes toward the ministry of engaging with Muslims, and to teach others to do the same.

Kenya facts:

- Population: 33,829,600
- Size: 582,646 square kilometers (slightly smaller than Texas)
- Major religions: 70 percent Christian, 20 percent Muslim, 10 percent indigenous and other beliefs



MINISTRY

Theological Education

LOCATION

Limuru, Kenya

PARTNER

St. Paul's University

CONTACT

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Dear Friends,

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During the past 27 years in which Patty and I have served as RCA missionaries, I have often reflected on the biblical figure of Abraham as a model for missionary life. This is true once again as we are now in the midst of another major transition: last month we ended our seven-year assignment at Mekane Yesus Seminary in Ethiopia, and in August we will begin a new ministry at St. Paul's University in Kenya. In between, we are spending June and July with family in the U.S.

I've especially appreciated the summary of Abraham's pilgrimage presented in Hebrews chapter 11, in which various dimensions of his journey are highlighted. First, the author discusses his physical movement from the city of his birth to the "promised land," where he "lived in tents" as he roamed from place to place (vv. 8-9). We've roamed a bit ourselves, having started our missionary careers in the UK (for orientation) and Jordan (for Arabic study), and on to successive assignments in Oman, Sudan, Ethiopia, and now Kenya. The passage goes on to mention the development of personal trust in the Lord on the part of both Abraham and Sarah, as they wondered how God would fulfill his promise of many descendants, even though their age and infertility rendered them "as good as dead" (vv. 11-12). Similarly, lasting spiritual fruit is frequently an elusive aspiration for missionaries, especially those who work in the Muslim world as we have done.

Finally, the author refers specifically to God's testing of Abraham in the sacrifice of Isaac, in which he had to rely on God's ability to work out the impossible – even raising his son from the dead (vv. 17-19). We also, like many of our missionary colleagues, have had our meager faith tested in the face of authoritative government rulings, depletion of project funds, or intransigent local church politics.

But what especially strikes me in this passage is the author's reference to the timing of God's implementation. Abraham died long before the promise of land and numerous descendants was completely fulfilled (v. 13). In fact, when Abraham passed on from this life, his descendants who would receive God's blessing consisted of only a single son (though we should not completely exclude Ishmael who would also receive a portion, Gen. 17:20). And the land which he could call his own amounted to a small plot purchased from the pagans in order to bury his wife (Gen. 23:17-20). It would be several centuries before Israel as a nation would take possession of the land of Canaan, and to some extent the original promise still remains unfulfilled. The author of Hebrews emphasizes that Abraham, Sarah and their immediate descendants were willing to trust that God would complete his purposes through them long after they passed from the scene, and that much of that

fulfillment would be spiritual in nature in the form of a heavenly country (vv. 10, 13-16). In the same way, all of us (not just missionaries) must learn to be content when our best efforts to be faithful to his calling produce only limited visible results; we must trust that somehow God will work out his purposes in his time, and that we do not necessarily have to witness the results before we also pass from the scene. To me, this is the ultimate nature of my growing pilgrimage in mission.

As I reflect on our years in Ethiopia, I realize that the visible impact of my work has been limited. Although the Program in Christian-Muslim Relations (which the church there had asked me to establish at Mekane Yesus Seminary) continues to function, it plays only a small role in the larger picture of the church's mission. I personally have had little contact with Ethiopian Muslims over the years, having instead invested in the educational lives of a few dozen students. They have barely begun to put into practice the principles they learned about faithful yet respectful Christian witness among Muslims. Will their efforts bear fruit? Will they receive the support of their local congregations who are often wary of such ministry? Will the CMR Program itself still be running several years from now? These are questions I can only leave in God's hand, recognizing that I may never observe the full answers in my lifetime.

For now, we focus on our new assignment in Kenya. Although I'll be teaching similar courses in the St. Paul's program in Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations (ICMR), my new ministry will also allow me to extend my gifts into new areas. This program will serve students at the Masters level, a step higher than was the case at MYS. Furthermore, the ICMR program draws students from all over Africa; only about half are Kenyan. These students will return to their own countries and teach in seminaries much like MYS; perhaps they will even begin a program in Christian-Muslim Relations similar to the one I helped to establish at MYS. Thus I will have the opportunity to pass on the things I learned in Ethiopia to African teachers who will move into key positions in their own contexts.

So we continue on our mission pilgrimage. We have said our good-byes to colleagues and friends in Ethiopia. Our household belongings have been shipped to Kenya and are safely in storage until our arrival. We are now getting health check-ups and updated immunizations, and are scheduled to fly to Kenya on August 2. As we commit to God this next phase of our ministry, trusting that he will bring our work to fruition in his time and manner, we invite your prayers for the following details:

Housing: We expect to live in a house on campus, but we

will likely need to live in temporary housing for a few weeks. Pray that this can work out in a positive way.

Andrew's schooling: Andrew (age 15) has been accepted into grade 10 at Rosslyn Academy, a fine Christian school not far from St. Paul's. He is enthusiastic about it but naturally a bit apprehensive about moving into a completely new environment. Pray for him as he begins classes only one week following our arrival in Kenya.

Patty's ministry: St. Paul's is interested in having Patty become involved in some aspect of their educational program, but we've not yet had an opportunity to explore the options together. Pray that God will make clear the right niche for her.

Peter's ministry: Classes begin August 31, so I'll have a few weeks to prepare for my new courses; but I'll also be involved in many other details of settling in. Pray for stamina, patience and the wisdom needed in setting priorities.



The Ford family at David's graduation from GIAL.

Finally, we would also ask for prayer for our oldest son David as he continues his own mission pilgrimage. We were thrilled to attend his graduation on June 4 with a Master's degree in Descriptive Linguistics from the Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics in Dallas. He is now a missionary with both RCA and Wycliffe Bible Translators, assigned to serve as a linguistic specialist in Sudan. However, he is not able to make that transition until his financial support is complete, and it now stands at 65%. Pray that David also will sense God's guidance through each step according to his timetable. Our calling, after all, is to be a part of *God's* mission; let us all seek to allow him to direct our ways, even if, like Abraham, we can only see "the things promised... from a distance" (Heb. 11:13).

In Christ who has paved the way,

Peter and Patty

To access extensive information about the Fords, or to make a financial gift for their ministry, simply go to www.rca.org/pford to donate.

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