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22nd December 2010

Dear Friends,

Christmas is Upheaval Time

In some small way, our life regularly seems to shadow Mary and Joseph in the sense that Christmas-time is marked by upheaval. For Mary and Joseph, it must have been a traumatic experience to travel back to Joseph's ancestral home at Bethlehem with Mary heavily pregnant and with questions being asked about the father. Could it have been the embarrassment of staying with relatives that caused the holy family to seek lodging at a local inn? Perhaps even the landlord used the 'house full' excuse to hide his moral outrage? But despite the trauma, blessing arrived in the form of a baby boy Jesus, our Emmanuel. This surely is both a challenge and an encouragement that upheaval and trauma may be God's opportunity, God's channel for blessing. Without doubt, we can be sure that He is our Emmanuel - the sign that God is with us.

Last December (2009), was a hectic time for us. I was still Acting-Principal at MTS, the rural Bible College near Ranau, and both Rhona and I were busy working on the College site overseeing and being involved in building renovations including the house where we were planning to stay. Just two weeks before the end of the year, when everything had been planned for 2010, I felt that I had no choice but to resign for certain reasons. This I did with a very heavy heart. We continued however to work at the College until the end of the year, putting the finishing touches to the renovations and celebrating Christmas in one of the unfinished houses. The event was traumatic for both of us as Rhona was completing her ministry at STS and planning to move with me to MTS to the house we had been preparing.

But God is Emmanuel and with trauma and difficulty comes opportunity.

Although I resigned as Acting-Principal, I still retained involvement with the College as Development Co-ordinator. In particular, this has involved assisting with training of future lecturers and also with drawing up a comprehensive development plan for the campus. Next month, we hope to begin building a new hostel block to cope with the growing number of students and in future years we plan to add more hostel blocks, staff quarters as well as classrooms, a new library and an admin block. My job has been to liaise between the college, the architect and consultants as well as potential sponsors.

At the same time, I have continued to teach part-time at both colleges and been quite involved in writing, publications and media ministry. During the year, we have produced several training videos in Malay covering areas such as preaching, worship and ministry appraisal. I am currently working on a book on preaching.

Rhona, although technically 'retired', is as busy as ever. During the year she has been winding down her involvement with the Family Ministry at STS and from June this year, slowing handing over to a local pastor who will be taking over the project. The Family Ministry has grown considerably over the years and now embraces several aspects that include:

- Children's centre - with pre-school learning activities, library and weekly 'Sunday School' on Friday night.
- Student training - practical hands-on training for Sunday School teachers.
- Women's centre - with fellowship programmes, practical skill sessions and Bible training.
- *Projek Tabita* - a business project involving beadwork jewellery aimed to provide skills and income-generation for families.
- Social support - some limited funding support to provide milk for young children and assistance with school transport.
- Theological education - some of the more capable women are encouraged and supported to attend the academic courses at the College to get a deeper understanding of the Bible and Christian belief.

During the year, Rhona's first book entitled 'A Handful of Beads' was published. Inspired as the title suggests, by the beadwork project, the book is actually a series of meditations beautifully illustrated by a friend and co-worker, Dianne. The Malay version of the book has just been published.

One major project that Rhona has overseen was the holding of a children's holiday camp for the Sengoi children in Peninsular Malaysia. Altogether, despite the wet weather, some 114 children between the ages of 6-12 attended the camp for 3 days. The camp had a varied programme of worship, teaching, small group activities and games and attempted to present the Christian Gospel message based on the Gospel according to Luke. On the final day each child was given a copy of Luke's Gospel in Malay as well as a folder containing all the activity work they had done.

Well we have done it again! We have just moved to a new apartment and are still unpacking, sorting and recycling unneeded materials as we approach Christmas! This is our excuse for the lateness of this Christmas letter. But we should perhaps add Christmas is celebrated somewhat differently here. The Malay-speaking church we attend really begins celebrating Christmas in November and we have a whole series of Sundays taken by different groups of the church - children, youth, women etc all celebrating Christmas. By the time we get to Christmas Day, we shall have said or sung Happy Christmas and a Happy New Year so many times that it is actually quite a

relief when Christmas is over.

And next year (2011)? According to current plans 2011 will be the final year of our full-time service here in Sabah. We are due to return to UK towards the end of November. There is still plenty to do and we need wisdom to know how to use the time available and how to hand over things to local Christians. Rhona is particularly concerned with literacy work - especially the teaching of reading and we were both moved by the plight of the Sengoi children in Peninsular Malaysia who seem very far behind in their educational achievement. Maybe there may be an opportunity for Rhona to train workers to undertake basic literacy work? This needs wisdom and discernment.

I will certainly continue to teach part-time and help to co-ordinate the building work at MTS. I also hope to finish writing two books and develop a media project based at the SIB Church Headquarters.

We value your continued prayers especially for:

- Continued energy and enthusiasm to do the work God has prepared for us whilst at the same time winding down and handing over projects.
- Continued good health.
- Renewal of work passes for our ministry here.
- Clear guidance as to where to settle when we return to the UK as our children and family are spread around the country.

Thank you for your continued prayers and support.

May the Lord bless you richly at this Christmas time!

David and Rhona