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Christmas 2017

Dear Friends,

This is to wish you all a Happy Christmas and a Peaceful New Year, to thank you for your prayers, and to bring you up to date with my news, especially with regard to Kenya as a country, the Methodist Church in Kenya, and Kenya Methodist University.

In my last prayer letter I said that we needed to pray for rain because of the famine conditions which existed in some parts of the country at that time, and I am pleased to be able to report that our prayers have been abundantly answered over the past few months. In fact, the rain has been so abundant that some crops have even been washed away by the floods, but in most parts of the country there will be good harvests and plenty of food, for which we give thanks.

I also asked you to pray for the general election that was due to take place in August. As you may have heard in the news already, though the initial election went well as far as the election of members of parliament, members of county assemblies, and county governors was concerned, the result of the presidential election was contested on the grounds of numerous irregularities. The Supreme Court declared it to be invalid and called for a second ballot. This was held at the end of October, but was boycotted by the main opposition party because it was not satisfied that the causes of the irregularities had been sufficiently rectified, so only about 39% of the population voted. The inevitable result was that the incumbent President, Uhuru Kenyatta, was declared to be the winner and sworn in for a further 5 years. At least 50 people are said to have died in the post-electoral violence, but we can at least be thankful that the loss of life was much less than it might have been, and pray that the country may now move out of this period of political turbulence into a calmer and more settled state.

A similar scenario was played out in the re-election of the Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church in Kenya, Rev. Joseph Ntombura, this year. Last year, his opponents in the Church took him to court to answer various charges and this year, since he had delayed in clearing himself of the charges, they were able to secure a court order to stop the annual MCK Conference from meeting in August. However, this time the Presiding Bishop fought back, got the court order lifted after about a week and, in the meeting which followed, was re-elected Presiding Bishop for a further 5 years. Once again, we can be thankful that this episode seems to be over and that the Church can now concentrate more fully on its primary tasks of ministry, mission and evangelism.

Regarding Kenya Methodist University, the continuing need for austerity mentioned in my last prayer letter led soon afterwards to a radical retrenchment of staff. However, around the same time, the Vice Chancellor himself was laid off by the University Council and replaced by an 'acting' Vice Chancellor. We need to pray that he may be given the wisdom he needs to put the university on a firmer financial footing. Meanwhile, at the spiritual level, the university community is in good heart: the Chapel services held on Sundays, Mondays and Thursdays, are being well attended, and an all-night prayer meeting held at the beginning of November (described as 'awesome' by one of those present) attracted an attendance of about 300 students.

You will no doubt recall that KEMU received 38,000 theological books last year from Wesley College, Bristol. The processing of these books has continued over the past 11 months, and spaces are being found in the Main campus and the Nairobi campus for their storage and display. Moreover, through the auspices of Methodist Church House in London, KEMU has received part of a generous legacy from a former mission partner, designated specifically for theological libraries in Africa, which will enable us to buy the shelves necessary to hold all these new books. This gift was totally unsolicited and unexpected, but has providentially come at just the right time. We need to pray that the whole process may be brought to a successful conclusion and may be of great benefit to the staff and students for years to come.

Otherwise I have continued to enjoy my teaching work at KEMU, though it became quite onerous at the end of the second trimester when I was presented with over 1400 scripts (half being written assignments and half exam scripts) to mark from my 'Christian Beliefs' course, which had been attended by over 700 students. Providentially, no less than 7 volunteer markers were found to assist me move this particular mountain, some in Kenya and some in UK, and the marking was complete not long after the normal deadline. I am grateful for the help they gave, and also for the fact that I was given a lighter teaching load this trimester!

Meanwhile I have continued to preach on Sundays in churches around the Meru region, from time to time, and have continued my attachment to the Kinoru Circuit. This year, the circuit has planted a new congregation at a small rural community called Gatobora, a few miles off the tarmac road to the west of Meru Town. The congregation already has a Sunday School of about 20 children and an adult congregation of about 40 members. Currently it meets in a temporary wooden structure but, with the help of the circuit, is in the process of buying a plot on which to build a more permanent church building. We need to pray that this new congregation, along with the other two congregations in the circuit, will continue to grow, both in numbers and in spiritual depth.

This Christmas I hope to visit a former student who is pioneering a new Methodist Church at Katoro, west of Mwanza in the north-west of Tanzania. We shall be worshipping in the open air, and will no doubt be experiencing very different weather conditions from those forecast for UK this Christmastime, but we shall be united in worshipping the same God, whose being 'made flesh' for us in Jesus we celebrate at this time of year.

Yours in Him,

Peter