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Dear Friends,

Christmas - A time for Surprises

The Gospel stories reveal Christmas as a time for the unexpected - a time for surprises! First Joseph had the rather shocking surprise that his bride-to-be, Mary, was pregnant! Then the mind-blowing surprise that Mary's son was to be special, to be Jesus (Saviour) and Emmanuel (God with us) [Mat 1:21,23]. Their unexpected travel to Joseph's home town (Bethlehem) for registration, the birth in a stable, the visit of the shepherds ... one after another the surprises unroll like a hedgehog! But all so clearly part of God's plan and purpose.

Last year when we wrote we anticipated being back in the UK by November this year but it is nearly Christmas and we are still here! I am due to retire at the end of this month on my 65th birthday, but as a birthday treat the Methodist Church have agreed to extend our sponsorship by 6 months which means we will return to the UK in mid-April next year. We will then be involved in deputation work for 3 months. This gracious extension not only rescues us from returning to the UK at the beginning of winter but also allows time to bring to a conclusion current projects.



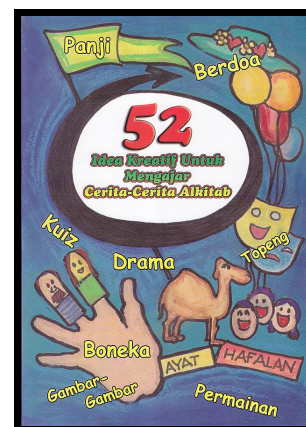
We first came to Malaysia in 1970 and so have spent a major portion of our married life here. The time has been a rich experience, frequently challenging and full of surprises. But looking back we can trace God's hand and purposes. I still remember my first ministry involvement in Peninsular Malaysia teaching Sunday School on a rubber estate where most of the children were Indians from Hindu families. One of the children in my class had been born in a stable! Her mother had gone to milk the cow, gave birth in the stable and without fuss carried home both baby and the fresh milk!

After 17 years in the Peninsular where I taught in the University of Malaya and helped to plant and lead a Methodist Church and Rhona became mother, homemaker, Sunday School teacher and educator we returned to UK in 1987. There the whole family (parents and three children) studied, Rhona became breadwinner teaching literacy in an inner-city school. Then after 8 years of studies, several failed job applications the Lord again led us Eastwards this time to Sabah in East Malaysia. This time to be involved in pastoral training and education amongst the indigenous tribal groups.



The past year has continued to be fully occupied as we have continued certain ministries and attempted to hand over others to local people. Rhona has perhaps been most successful as having moved out of the city Bible college (STS) she has managed to hand over the Family Ministry project and Project Tabitha (business project) to a full-time local staff.

The past year has thus been an opportunity to tie up loose ends on these projects that included publication of a book for Sunday School teachers providing 52 creative ideas for teaching.



Cover of book for Sunday School teachers.



Our neighbour's house

But it has proved very difficult to put a lid on things as constantly new opportunities arise. Early this year Rhona discovered that we had a family living next door with seven young stateless children who had never been to school. This proved a need that could not be ignored and Rhona began to teach the three eldest children to read and provide at least a basic education. Rhona has also been working with another literacy project which is attended by around one hundred children many of them the children of illegal workers. Through such ministries we aim to show the love of Christ.

To bring closure to this ministry Rhona is working to prepare a literacy programme (basic reading skills) that can equip local Christians to continue this important outreach work. In October this year we were in Peninsular Malaysia to work briefly amongst some of the indigenous tribal groups there. As a result of that contact Rhona is also preparing outline Sunday School material that can be used with a recently published Children's Bible in Malay.



Maybe as a preparation for leaving Malaysia the Lord has moved Rhona to develop an extensive ministry of intercession for the work here. This at least is something that can continue as we return to the UK.

Somehow I am not so skilled as Rhona at bringing things to a conclusion as, as fast as certain projects are completed new irresistible opportunities appear. During the year I have continued to teach part-time at both MTS (the rural Bible College) as well as STS the city seminary. I will again be teaching until March next year in both places (worship and preaching) and then my lecture notes will be firmly closed as we return to the UK.



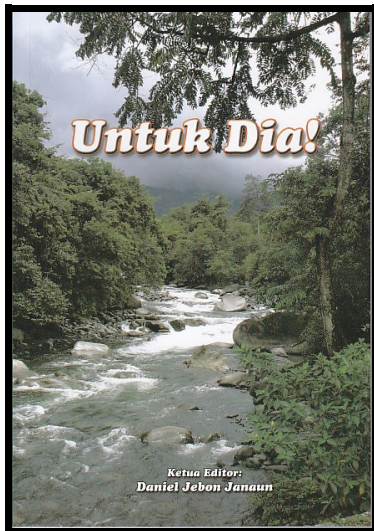
My main role at the moment is as Development Co-ordinator for MTS, the rural Bible College. This is an all-encompassing role that embraces curriculum, staff training, accreditation and infrastructure. This year we have finally (I think) agreed the constitution of the College Board and now the challenge is to get it functioning effectively. We have also developed some new curricula and finalised (I hope) a staff manual that provides guidelines for best working practice, regulations and responsibilities. We also have 4 lecturer candidates studying overseas in English - that was a major challenge, as English is not widely spoken here in Sabah but is very important to bring the College and Church into the 21st Century.



*New Student Hostel Nearing
Completion (December 2011)*

However, much of my time has been occupied in overseeing the building development. This year we are constructing two new student hostels one of which should be complete by January ready for the new students. This has been very time-consuming involving co-ordinating the whole project - working with the contractor, architect and sponsors. It has also involved some fund-raising as the main sponsor is only paying for the main structure and not other features.





*Front Cover of the
New Book*

The other areas that have consumed much of my time and energy are publications and development of a media ministry. Publications involve the whole spectrum from writing, editing, layout and design to printing and sales. This year the SIB Church (Borneo Evangelical Church) has caught the vision of publications and I worked with them to publish their first book entitled 'Untuk Dia' [*For Him*] the fruit of a writing workshop. This project has unearthed new local talent and they have already started on a second project to write the history of the Church over the past 75 years since the first coming of the missionaries.

Perhaps because I have been side-tracked in helping others my book on preaching in Malay is waiting its final editing so it can be printed early next year. [Sadly the book on discipleship is still only in my head!]



The other area that has consumed a lot of energy has been the development of a Media Ministry. Since the beginning of May we have set up **Media Productions** housed in the SIB church Headquarters but operated as an independent entity with its own oversight group and independent funding. Currently the group has a part-time technician who handles the filming and editing as well as an assistant who comes in to work on a project basis. The group is funded through the sale of products or through charges for filming and production of video materials. The aim of **Media Productions** is to prepare teaching, promotional and outreach materials.



*Cover of Artwork DVD
for Sunday School
Teachers*

Just recently a young Design graduate has assisted us and I am hoping she may be able to work with us on a more full-time basis and take over the administrative side that I have been largely handling. As a development from Media Productions we have just produced the first newsletter for the Church Headquarters and this will hopefully be continued on a regular basis.



Cover Page of Newsletter

The reality is that as a Christian opportunities are ever present and that the more you do, the more you realise needs to be done. Wisdom comes in knowing what to do oneself and what to surrender to the Lord of the Harvest to raise up workers for His Kingdom.



As our fulltime ministry in Sabah draws to a close we value your continued prayers especially for:

- ❑ Wisdom in winding down and handing over projects and in deciding priorities for use of our remaining time
- ❑ Early fixing of the programme for our UK deputation work so that we can prepare before leaving Sabah
- ❑ 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 Christmastime.

David and Rhona