

APPOINTMENT WITH THE KIRSCHNERS

PRAYER AND MINISTRY UPDATE --DECEMBER 2009

The Importance of Presence

One of the harsh realities of life on the Evangel Hospital compound in Jos, Nigeria is the nearly daily gathering of Nigerians near the hospital morgue. When a person dies, it is expected that as many friends and family as possible will gather together to escort the body back to the village for burial. These are somber, quiet occasions where very little is said. But the important contribution of the mourners is not their words or their cries but their presence.

As we prepare to leave Nigeria after our 5-month term here, we are very aware of the importance of presence. It has been so good to be among our Nigerian “brothers and sisters.” Hopefully we have accomplished something through teaching and surgery. But just staying here with them has been ministry itself. And, of course, we have been ministered to as well. As we eagerly look forward to being together again with family over the Christmas holiday, it is just the presence of one another that is the most highly treasured aspect.

Of course, this is why Emmanuel—“God with us”—is such an important truth of the Christian faith. Our God, who seeks out active, ongoing relationships with us, pursued that to the point of choosing to become a child born of a virgin. Many get hung up on the “virgin birth” part—but it is more amazing that the all powerful, all knowing Creator would take on the limitations of humanity and BE PRESENT with us as man. In Jesus we see the love of God manifest as presence. May this Christmas season rekindle our awareness that He has promised never to leave us or forsake us—and the baby in the manger is the God who is present with us.

The Hospital Ministry

In short, it has been a wonderful 5 months. Our relationships with Nigerians seemed to take off again as if they never had been interrupted, and so did our work at ECWA Evangel Hospital—now being transitioned to Bingham University Teaching Hospital. It turned out that Carolyn was very much needed in her position as a VVF surgeon, performing over 150 major operations on these needy women. Greg’s work encouraging the training of Nigerian Christian doctors and supporting the hospital management team carried him into a wide range of service opportunities. There have been some discouragements of course—but a profound sense that we were exactly where God wanted us. Three doctors and a nurse visited us from the States during our time here—including our niece—and all commented on how comfortable and at home we seemed to be in this environment. Wow! We never would have imagined 14 years ago that anyone would have said that about us in the West African setting! But God has given us, as a family, this special gift of being present with Nigerians for a season of life. We know it is time to go back to life in America, and we look forward to patient care and time with family and enjoying God’s presence in our life there. But we also know we cannot just walk away from what God is asking us to do here in Nigeria. Pray with us as we seek ways to be supportive of the ministry here from long distance — and as we plan future trips back.



So Who Is Where Now?

Stephanie and Jon completed a semester at Hillcrest School in Jos. It was a good term, filled with multicultural relationships and great opportunities. We were particularly blessed to see them actively using their musical gifts, as Stephanie played piano and sang while Jon drummed for worship and other events almost weekly. It was also special that Carolyn and Greg could join them in leading worship in the missionary community on multiple occasions. We thoroughly enjoyed our time together here as a family, with significantly fewer distractions. Our need to lock up doors at 6 pm each evening created regular family time. We enjoyed a few outings as well, including a short return to the Yankari Game Reserve in neighboring Bauchi state. Highlights included a baboon who stole our Pringles, and some great “up close” time near a small herd of elephants. Stephanie returns to the States for her final semester of high school, and is awaiting word on which college she will be attending next fall. Jon will continue as a high school sophomore. Both plan to continue their active involvement in music, beginning with the pit orchestra for the school musical.



Katie held down the home front as the only Kirschner on American soil during the past 5 months. She is a sophomore at Wheaton College, and continues to refine her thinking about her major, her future, and her involvement in theater. We are so proud of the way she functioned during our time apart, as she had to face several challenges and did quite well. Christine also made us proud, as she completed a 6-month internship in the mountains of Peru, living with a family and working with victims of domestic violence. She will graduate from Wheaton next May. Thanks for your prayers for our family these past months as these girls pulled all of this off!



In January Greg and Carolyn will return to clinical practice in the suburbs of Chicago. It will be a bit of a transition, of course. Hopefully we'll remember what language we are working in, how to use electronic medical records, and how to do robotic surgery!

So, How About You?

If you have been praying for us and for Nigeria—DON'T STOP! Of course, we can use prayer for the transitions coming over the next few weeks and for direction as we seek to keep assisting the people of Nigeria. But pray especially for the country of Nigeria, and for the great medical and spiritual needs here. As we write this, the President of Nigeria is being treated for a serious illness at a hospital outside the country. The health care sector faces enormous hurdles. The immediate future of Evangel Hospital, and of the role of missionaries here, is uncertain as it attempts to become a university teaching hospital. There is no shortage of needs to place before God. If you want to give Nigeria a gift this Christmas, do as the Bible admonishes and pray without ceasing. For those who have been giving financially, thanks for all your sacrifice. There are many ways to continue to be involved financially through our parent mission of SIM. One worthy cause here is of course the VVF (vesicovaginal fistula) program, which continues to see large numbers of patients and faces an uncertain financial future. Donations should be made out to SIM USA c/o the address below, and designated for the "VVF Project #96209".

Staying In Touch

Thanks for reading and praying. We look forward to hearing from many over the holidays and in the coming weeks. As we celebrate the Christmas season, we reflect on how important your presence is in our lives. We will be getting our phone service reestablished as soon as possible, and also now use SKYPE regularly. So let us hear from you!

Thanks for coming along with us on this recent "safari"—not so much one through a jungle, but rather one through a season of service and growth.



Blessings and Merry Christmas to you and your family!



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