

MISSION VANUATU MINUTES

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VENTURING INTO THE VILLAGE

-By Aaron Baker

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This month, we wanted to give a clear picture of what our life is like living and working in a foreign country. Eric and I had the opportunity to go to a village to study with one man, which resulted in very interesting events. Here is the story.

First, Cindy and Shawnda had been studying with a girl named Yoland who works at a fast food place in town. Yoland is from a village named Epau, but is now working in Port Vila. She has a boyfriend named Willie Joe who lives in Epau and works on his farm. Willie came to town where Eric and I met him through talking with Yoland. Willie agreed to study the Bible, but was going to have to go back to Epau (about 1 ½ hour drive out of town) to the farm. The two of us were not going to let a great opportunity pass us by, so we offered to go stay in the village of Epau from the 3rd through the 5th of June in order to study with Willie.

As we organized our plans that we had made on Wednesday the 1st of June, we realized that we must move quickly to pack for this stay in the village, complete any Bible studies we would teach, and contact someone to stay with. Fortunately for the two of us, Eddie Karis, a Christian from Eton Village, has a brother in the village of Epau. We talked with Eddie on Wednesday and told him of our plans to go to Epau and study with Willie. He was excited and wrote a note to send to Ada, his brother in Epau. In America, Eddie would have just picked up the phone and called to make the preparations and that would have been the end of the story. However, in Vanuatu, Eddie wrote a note on a piece of paper, sent the note with a local bus driver who was headed towards Epau, and the bus driver then delivered the message to Eddie's brother, Ada, in Epau. Whew! I am out of breath just typing that.

The Day of Departure:

Once Friday the 3rd came, Eric and I picked up Eddie from his son's house in Port Vila. We took Eddie to Eton where he picked up a few items, said hello to his wife, and then we were off again. While the trip to Eton is not too long, 45 minutes, it is just as far to go to Epau, another 45 minutes. So, by the time we arrived in Epau, I was glad to get out of the truck.

Upon our arrival Eddie, an old man but spry as a youngster, jumped out of the truck and greeted his brother Ada. Ada has a small shed where Peace Corps workers stayed when they came to the village of Epau. He made the shed ready and showed us around, which didn't take long, and we began to settle in. A quick survey of the two cots, hand-woven mats which covered the floor, and a small light on the ceiling welcomed us as home for the next few days.

Our humble abode while in Enau



After we unloaded our stuff from the truck, we thanked Ada for letting us stay with him on short notice. As customary in Vanuatu, we gave him a few small gifts as payment for staying with him. We gave him rice, ramen noodles, canned corned beef, tea bags, Tupperware type containers, and canned fish. As a rule of thumb, you should give the person you are staying with as much food as you would eat during your stay. As they do not go to town too often, we brought them several things which they were grateful to receive. As they don't have refrigerators in their houses in Epau, canned goods are great gifts. Everyone in Vanuatu eats rice, so that was a no-brainer for us, and the Tupperware was for them to store stuff in.



Teaching classes in Epau

As a guest in the village of Epau, Eric and I wanted to be as courteous as possible and not break any cultural boundaries. In short, we wanted to “walk softly” while on their land. We spoke with Eddie and arranged for a small meeting with the chief of Epau to let him know why he would be seeing us in his village for the next few days. Eddie sent communication to the chief that we were there and wanted simply to tell him thank you for letting us come to Epau.

A little history about Epau, there are about 8 Christians there. Eddie, the Christian from Eton, has two brothers there. Both of his brothers (Ada and Kalo) are Christians and there are a few other men and women there also. When we told everyone we were there to study with Willie Joe, our presence became the “talk of the town.”

Once we were settled in and met all the family and friends of Ada, we took a walk to his garden. Ada works about three different plots of land and takes it's produce and sends it to the market to be sold (usually by his wife). After walking 20 minutes out of the village to his land, he showed us his crops of manioc, dalo, Chinese cabbage, spring onions, and yams. Man, everything grows here! All of his crops looked great as compared to how something usually looks when I plant it.

Willie had gone to his garden early that morning—before our arrival in Epau. While we wanted to study with Willie the day we arrived, it simply was not possible during the day to study. That evening, however, Willie returned from his garden and we talked with him for quite a while. We made our preparations and studied with Willie at about 6:30pm. The study was finished in one hour and we were informed that the chief was going to talk with Eric and I that evening.

Our study for the evening concluded, so Willie left to go play in his band. Willie plays the guitar in a “string band.” The band has quite a distinct sound that Eric and I love. It sounds like no other type of music found in the U.S., and is typical of Pacific Island music. As the music filled our ears we decided to go listen to a few songs. Now being in a small village, this is THE entertainment for the village. Everyone was there, or so I thought. Kids were standing in open doorways and peeking in through the windows, and adults were crowding together to hear the band play. We listened for 30 minutes then went back to Ada's house.

The chief cometh...

Up to this point in the day and into the evening, our day had been low key. Christians in Epau would come and greet us and then be on their way. However, as soon as we got word that the chief was coming, everyone began scurrying around. Eric and I upon arriving in Epau wanted simply to sit down and talk briefly with the chief to show honor to their culture and by showing respect to the chief through giving him a few small gifts. However, events during the day began escalating. I think that when we found out the chief was coming, Ada's house was catapulted into Defcon 3.

At the beginning of the trip, we told Eddie that we wanted to meet the chief. Our simple plans, however, at this point had ratcheted up about 10 notches. No longer were we going to sit down and chat with the chief, oh no! Now, instead of us going to the chief's house for a visit, he was going to come and see us! Not only was the chief, coming, but the

assistant chief was coming also. Since he was coming to Ada's house where we were staying, there would be food, drinks, and now a small ceremony.

With a quick glance around the yard one could see women preparing the table for the food, men were carrying and placing benches around the outdoor table for us to sit at, children were whispering back and forth, and Eric and I were starting to get nervous. I mean, it appeared as if even the chickens had an important task as they scratched the ground furiously to "prepare for the chief."

After watching the string band for about 20 minutes, we headed back to Ada's house since we knew the chief would come soon. We were glad to get away from the nervousness of waiting for the chief. However, as nervous as we were before, it would all get worse. As we arrived back at Ada's, a Christian man who drives a bus hopped out and announced that the chief was on his way. Eddie told Eric and I that when the chief arrived, we were to greet him and then sit down at the same time as him. Then, Eddie would talk on our behalf to the chief expressing our gratitude and respect to him. After Eddie's speech, one of us would stand up and talk to the chief and say a few words. Following our speech, we would drink Kava and then give our gifts to the chief and finish the ceremony with eating the prepared food.

As the chief arrived a pitcher was placed on the table. It's contents looked as if a fistful of grass was thrust into a blender with milky water and then blended on high for a few minutes. I was informed that this was the grassy milkshake I would soon be drinking, called Kava. If I wasn't sweating before, I sure was now!

The chief and another man walked in and everyone stood up. I didn't know which person was the chief until he sat down in a chair we had placed at the "head" of the circle. I met him and the man with him, who is the assistant chief. I half expected him to be carried in on a chair supported by two poles in which four men would be shouldering the load and serve as his transportation. I was wrong. I didn't recognize him until he sat down and I realized that he is a person just like everyone else.

Eddie stood up and welcomed the chief with his speech. As we had just arrived that morning, he thanked the chief for our "surprise" visit and his cooperation in meeting with us. Over the course of his five minute speech he mentioned the fact that there have been many people come preach and teach in Vanuatu and work with the church here. However, he pointed out to the chief that we were here for at least five years. While others have come and gone, we were here to help the church really grow and be a support to the church and the nation of Vanuatu as a whole. In addition, he relayed our gratitude for the good news about the land that the church is seeking to use as a meeting place.

After Eddie spoke, it was now time for one of us to speak. The two of us worked out beforehand that I would speak in Bislama to the chief. I stood up and thanked them for agreeing to talk with us on short notice. I also mentioned that we were in Epau in order to teach the Bible to those willing to learn. I made sure to express my gratitude to him for meeting with us as we had recently heard the good news about the land issue being settled. (Formerly, there had been quite a dispute with the Presbyterians not wanting to let the Christians meet in Epau. It was quite a heated topic until one man said he would sell his land to the Christians there so they could use that land to meet on).

Once my small speech was finished, the chief stood up, poured the kava, for himself, the assistant chief, and the two of us. Once the four bowls were poured, we touched our bowls to theirs and lifted the cup just above our heads to show we were grateful for receiving it. Now, custom says that in drinking kava, one is to drink all the kava at one time without stopping and then spit the last mouthful out on the ground. However, kava is a substance which basically has the same effect as alcohol. Knowing this ahead of time, we spoke with Eddie and Morris (two Christian men from Eton) about the situation. They recommended that we receive the kava, but only take a tiny sip to show respect and then pass the kava on to another man who would then drink the remainder of the bowl. Eric and I told the chief that we were very glad that he prepared this special ceremony for us, but that we were unable to drink the kava. He understood and was glad we accepted it, but knew why we didn't drink it. By discussing this with the chief, he retained his dignity, and we retained our convictions regarding the drinking of kava.

The next part of the ceremony was the exchanging of gifts. Before our arrival to Epau, we knew we wanted to talk with the chief and meet him. So, we purchased 2 big yams, rice, and a wrist watch in Port Vila to give to him as a gift. After

the drinking of the kava, while we were standing, we gave the gifts to the chief. He graciously accepted the gifts and said that now since we have participated in the ceremony and have given these gifts, that all problems regarding the land and the church in Epau were wiped clean. In a sense, he forgave any problems that had arisen before.

Saturday the 4th

The day after the ceremony with the chief, Eric and I turned our minds toward studying the Bible with people. We had arranged to meet Willie at 7:30 AM and begin our studies bright and early. However, Willie had to help a cousin work on his house that morning and would come study with us later that day.

That afternoon we made preparations to set up a big tarp under which we arranged for a light to be brought and a chalk board to be fixed to a pole. We got everything set for that night when we would teach two, one and one half hour classes. Aaron throughout the day studied with Ada and his two granddaughters (Winnie and Kathleen) about many topics in the Bible. It was apparent that they were just as eager to learn the Bible as non-Christians are to learn it the first time.

That night about 20-25 people showed up for the study. Again, we only expected to study with Willie, but the word spread like wildfire through the village. Once people found out that we were teaching the Bible to anyone interested, many people came to listen. The 20-25 who showed up were the ones who actually sat on the logs under the tarp, while others outside were listening, but not counted as actually "attending" the study.

Eric taught two great lessons that evening. He taught the first lesson on "God's chain of authority; How we got the Bible," and the second lesson on "The Old Testament versus the New Testament." Eric and I had discussed the fact that people knew only a little English, but grew up speaking Bislama. We were just the opposite, having known English all our lives, but just beginning to learn Bislama. We decided that since they knew so little English, we would go ahead and teach in Bislama and then supplement that with English. The results were tremendous. Many people told us that for the first time, they understood what the Bible taught. It was a great boost for us to know that our work learning Bislama has paid off so far and that people actually understood the Bible.

After the lessons, we retired to our shed. It was small, but had two small beds up off the ground. We were grateful for what we had as most people sleep on the ground/floor on mats. We were glad to have a bed and even a pillow. They truly treated us like special guests.

Sunday the 5th

We woke up early and went to Eton (35 minute drive to the South) to pick up Eddie. We then drove back to Epau and then went to a village on North Efate, called Pounangisu (30 minute drive North of Epau). There are two Christians that have been meeting faithfully in their homes. They were glad to see us and we were glad to discover another place where the Lord's church could be planted. We met two men, Harry Archie and Chris (I don't know his last name). We took them back to Epau to worship with us and that we might encourage them in their Christian walk.

We began classes at 9:30 AM. There were 12 Christians, 15 non-Christians, and 10 children in attendance. Eric taught on the importance of the church and the identifying characteristics of the church. Again, he taught in Bislama and people were hanging on every word he spoke. This was the first time that many heard the teaching on these subjects in their own language. Every eye was glued to the board as he wrote his outline, every Bible was open and in use-searching to see if these things were so. It was a beautiful experience to see many hear and understand the Bible. After Eric finished teaching, Eddie stood up and helped clarify what he taught by speaking Bislama and giving a brief overview of the lesson.

Worship began at 11 AM (yes, Eric taught for 1.5 hours with absolute attention given by the audience to his lesson). After singing a few songs, a Christian named Max officiated the Lord's Supper and giving. After a prayer, I preached on 1 Peter 1:13-25, talking about proper Christian behavior. I preached in Bislama, but did not have as good a grasp on the language as Eric did. Though the lesson was with broken Bislama, it was still understood better than if we had taught and preached in English.

After worshipping together that morning, everyone shared a meal together at Ada's house. The standard foods were there, including: rice, bananas, laplap, bread, pork, island cabbage, and noodles in a broth.

Following the meal, a lady who had attended nearly all of the lessons indicated that she wanted to be baptized and wash away her sins. While Eric and I were trying to focus on Willie

Joe, those convicted of sins still have a responsibility to get right with God, and that is exactly what Leisande wanted to do. Several Christians and non-Christians walked down to the ocean where Eddie baptized her. Now, we have a new member of the Lord's Body and a new sister in Christ! We did not know before, but Leisande is Yoland's grandmother. We were glad even to just reach one soul for the Lord in Epau.

After the baptism, we went back to Ada's house and I took the Christians back to their village of Pounangisu. Meanwhile, Eric continued to talk and work with Willie Joe one-on-one to try to help him reach a decision about his life. He knew that he needed to become a Christian by being baptized into the body of Christ, but he was not ready quite yet to make the decision. He even said himself that if he were to die, he would go to hell. That was not something usually heard in the states, but not uncommon for people to talk so frankly in Vanuatu. We warned him of the danger of being outside the Lord's body where there is no salvation, and he understood. We didn't want to "talk him into" making a decision, but at the same time wanted to make him aware of his spiritual condition.

Once I returned from Pounangisu, Eric and I loaded up our stuff in the truck. It seemed as if the whole village was there to say goodbye to us. It was a touching goodbye because we grew close to the people of Epau even in just a few days. They truly made us feel welcome and we were glad to have the opportunity to share the Gospel with them. Thus, with our departure, a chapter ended in the chronicles of the Mission Vanuatu Team's work in Epau.

!!URGENT UPDATE!!

I am pleased to announce that Yoland (who was studying with Cindy and Shawnda) was baptized on the Saturday (4th of June) while Aaron and Eric were out in the village of Epau. In addition to this great news about Yoland, her boyfriend, Willie, was just recently baptized as of the 17th of June. We are excited to announce both another brother and sister in Christ added to the Lord's church!

Pictured here from Left to Right: Eddie Karris baptizing Leisande in Epau; Willie (left) being baptized by Ada in Epau; Shawnda, Yoland, Cindy and Kaela after Yoland's baptism; Yoland (left) being baptized by Shem



Harry Archie and Chris from Pounangisu

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

IN THIS ISSUE:

- † Venture Into The Village
- † Leisande Is Baptized
- † Meeting the Chief



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