

# Mission Vanuatu Minutes

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A newsletter published by: Aaron, Cindy and Kaela Baker • Eric and Shawnda Brandell • Mike Olson

## STUDYING AT ETAS

-By Aaron Baker

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For several months now our team has been reporting on our sowing the seed of the Word of God through our "preaching in the park" program. Through this method of publicly teaching and preaching we have been able to pass out hundreds of tracts as well as set up many Bible studies. One such study that was set up was with a couple named Sam and Leimawa Tabaua.

After our October session of Preaching in the Park, Aaron and Cindy met Sam and Leimawa and set up a weekly Bible study with them. Sam and Leimawa live just outside of Port Vila in a small community called Etas. The culture of Vanuatu is such that you simply cannot go into a community and begin teaching, rather you must be invited to come teach and preach. We were elated to be invited to come and teach the Bible not only to this couple, but also to members of their family who also lived in the Etas area. What began as a study with just the four of us quickly grew to an average study group of 8 to 10 people.

Sam and Leimawa are currently worshipping with the Nazarene church in the Etas area. However, they recognized that some of the teachings of this group were outside the scope and practice of the New Testament church they read about in the Bible. At our weekly studies they would ask great questions about the nature, beginning, worship and practice of the church they read about in the Bible. It is truly a blessing for us to be able to teach this group about the church which Christ died for and purchased with His blood (Acts 20:28). While Sam and Leimawa have not yet been converted to Christ, there is much hope for them. We need your prayers for their souls that they might be willing to submit to Christ and to the pattern they see in the worship and practice of the New Testament church.

On a side note, Sam and Leimawa live close to the city dump. Often while Sam is at work, Leimawa will take the kids and go to the dump, scavenging for anything they can use. This family is very, very poor. The clothes that the children wear are ones that people throw away. Despite their family being poverty stricken, I can scarcely think of one family that is happier and kinder than the Tabaua family. Often when we go to study with them we come back with some kind of fruit or island kakae (food) from Leimawa's kitchen. It all goes to show you that "rich" is a state of mind (Acts 20:32; 2 Cor. 8:9).





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## Volcano on Ambae

*-By Aaron Baker*

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As you have probably seen in the news throughout the month of December, Ambae, Vanuatu has been in the news. On the island of Ambae is a live volcano that as of late has been very active. Reports and news wires have been racing around the globe showing pictures of clouds of smoke and ash that have been spewing out of the lake Manaro which is atop the live volcano.

We are glad to report that our team is safe and sound. The main island we are on (Efate) is about 80 miles from the island of Ambae, so we are far enough away to remain safe. However, not all are so lucky. Remember back in September when we reported on our trip to Ambae to visit the Christians of the Duviara church of Christ? The Duviara congregation is located very close to the volcano. The government of Vanuatu had at one point called for a partial evacuation of the island. Villages close to the volcano, including Duviara, were sending people to the areas of Ambae where they were a safe enough distance from the volcano to avoid disaster if it did spew molten lava. Our brothers and sisters in Christ at Duviara were sent to a part of Ambae, called Lolowai, to stay in the dormitories at the St. Patrick's College.

Thankfully, the volcano did not erupt fully. The volcano did send smoke, ash and steam about 10,000 feet up into the air, but for the most part the action was minimal. As a result of the ash falling down to the earth, the water in the areas close to the volcano are undrinkable due to the contamination of the ash in the water system for a period of about 8 weeks. Though there are some who have left St. Patrick's College to return to their villages, there are still about 250 people waiting for the O.K. before heading home.



Our appeal to you who receive this newsletter is to pray for the people of Ambae, especially those brethren from the Duviara church of Christ. Some have returned to their homes, while others wait for the water contamination to decline. The Lord may be able to use this "disaster" to open a door for the Word to go to areas its feet have not previously trodden. Please join with us in praying for the people in Ambae.

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## Christmas in Vanuatu

*-By Aaron Baker*

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Many have asked us, "How do the people of Vanuatu celebrate Christmas?" To this question, we answer definitively, "It depends." What we find here in Vanuatu is that people from different islands celebrate Christmas differently. Typically Christmas is celebrated here in Vanuatu in two ways:

First, there is a "Western" celebration of the holiday. No, I don't mean that people dress up as cowboys and Indians and chase each other around town. By "Western" I mean, according to popular western culture. That is, a family may cut a small pine tree, string garland above the doorways and along the ceilings and turn on some island music to "set the mood" for Christmas.

Second, there is a "Traditional" celebration of the holiday. The culture of the locals from the island of Tanna is to celebrate Christmas and also the New Year for the first 15 days of January. Locals from Tanna tend to not celebrate Christmas as such, but to wait until January 1<sup>st</sup> and then sing every night until the 15<sup>th</sup>. Typically, several families will



all get together to sing traditional songs in their local language. This gathering and singing will last through the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month and conclude with a large meal on the 15<sup>th</sup> to celebrate Christmas. Interestingly, only people from the Tanna island really practice this type of celebration.

People from islands outside of Tanna will all celebrate the Christmas season differently depending on their own family's tradition. One family might put up the pine Christmas tree and then hang their children's gifts on the tree while another family puts them under the tree, while yet another family may not exchange any gifts at all. One thing is for sure, people here don't put up the Christmas lights as in the States. To go see lights, you have to walk to the Sea Front Park where the electric company strings lights and decorates a local pine tree with lights to wish all a "Merry Christmas."



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## KALJA KONA

*-By Aaron Baker*

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**W**hen we heard about the volcano erupting on Ambae, we wondered how this would affect locals. Hundreds of years ago the culture of Vanuatu was polytheism, or the worship of many gods. In the past, if the volcano was "angry" people would think that the god of the volcano was unhappy with their worship or lifestyles and they would go make a peace offering to appease the volcano.

Though the country of Vanuatu has come a long way from the polytheistic practices it once claimed, there are still traces of these beliefs in the country. For example, we spoke with one man from Ambae who told us that the volcano god was indeed appeased when some local chiefs took local mats and a pig's tusk and threw it into the volcano to "calm" the anger of the volcano god.

The locals believe that there is indeed a god of the volcano who periodically becomes angered. To avoid an eruption the people just simply pay their respects to the volcano with their peace offerings and then wait for things to return to normal. Fortunately for the locals this time, the volcano did not erupt and destroy the villages on Ambae island.

The difficulty with this type of culture is evident. One cannot worship God and yet hold to custom beliefs that there is a god of the volcano, sun, moon, water, or anything else. As you can guess, this is a tremendous hurdle to overcome when people who have such beliefs become Christians. We constantly must reinforce that the God of the Bible continually despises those who worship other "gods." For example, in Numbers 25:1-3 the worship of other gods is likened unto harlotry which ultimately results in a "ruined" people (Hosea 4:12-14).

Unfortunately, there are some Christians on the island of Ambae who have taken part in the ceremony to "appease" the god of the volcano. Our work as missionaries in Vanuatu is to teach and preach the truths of God's Word which clearly states that we "shall have no other gods before Me" (Ex 20:3). The people here have followed culture and custom and in this case have gone against the teachings of the Bible. Please pray for these young Christians as they seek to do what is right.

# MISSION VANUATU MINUTES

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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Check us out on the web at: [www.missionvanuatu.com](http://www.missionvanuatu.com)