

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

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**T**his month we have several items to report. The most important of which is in regards to challenges we are facing in Vanuatu. We report this information simply to be truthful with our supporters. Please pray for our team as we work to overcome these challenges.

This month we not only discuss the Baker's reporting trip to the States, but the Brandells also give an update on Titus.

Finally, we introduce you to five new Christians that have been added to the Lord's church. There is so much to share, you had better get reading!

## Growing Pains By: Eric Brandell

**T**he underlying purpose of *Mission Vanuatu Minutes* is to allow our team to communicate effectively with our supporters regarding our work. Naturally, we are inclined to focus on the positive aspects of that work, but we also realize that focusing exclusively on the positives would not qualify as effective communication. Too, when we consider the content of Paul's epistles we see that mission work often has as many downs as ups. Over the past few months we have mentioned to many of you in personal exchanges that we are experiencing some problems here in Vila. Most of those problems have been a direct or an indirect result of the building project. At present, there are two main issues: [1] three men and their families refuse to worship with the congregation at the new building until it is completed and subsequently "dedicated" according to local custom (a large meal and associated ceremony), and [2] accusations that I stole money from the building fund.

First, with the completion of the roofing on the building Shem Gabriel (a "leader" in the Vila church) suggested to me that we go ahead and begin worshipping in the building. The move was made based on the following points of logic: [1] Shem's suggestion, [2] the church in Epau Village had recently begun meeting in their new building before it was completed (which incidentally was never "dedicated"), [3] the church was currently meeting in a public hall that rented



## ...Growing Pains, cont.



for approx. 56USD per week (the team and the congregation splitting the cost), [4] the church was constructing a building for the purpose of meeting in it, and though it wasn't finished, it was suitable to meet in (well-lit, protected from the elements, etc.), [5] meeting at the building would enable many Christians to walk to worship (several of whom often did not come because they lacked money for transportation), and [6] the assumption that the congregation would be excited to get into "a place of our own" (the public hall was also the meeting place of several very-distracting [loud] denominations). The two other "leaders" in the congregation, Stephen Felix and Gomon Mesa, were adamantly opposed to the move, though they did not voice their opposition until after the move was made (by boycotting services). Shem, though originally in favor of the move, quickly jumped ship to fall in line with Stephen and Gomon. When asked why they were opposed, through a line of reasoning we do not understand, they proclaim that they fasted and prayed for a church building in Vila, and therefore personally refuse to worship in it until it is completed. Attempts to reason with them that it is simply impossible to yield to the personal inclinations of everyone (in every area of life) have failed. Additionally, there is a dedication ceremony that often takes place with regard to a new church building. We were vaguely familiar with

this custom, but had not waited on it for several reasons (which have been offered by both us and local Christians): [1] Shem's suggestion and Epau's example made it clear that the custom wasn't always adhered to, [2] meeting in the building for worship for a month or two would not prevent the congregation from having such an opening once the building was completed, [3] the custom seems contra-biblical, having denominational roots rather than cultural (i.e. it seems to answer the question, at what point does a secular building become "the sanctuary"?). They have emphasized on several occasions that their opposition is based on personal preference and not custom.

On Sunday, September 17, 2006, we began meeting in the new building. Shem, Stephen, Gomon and their families have not worshiped with us since that time. In public and private meetings with these men, they have emphasized that they are not opposed to us (the mission team and all the new Christians) worshiping at the building, but that they simply choose not to until it is completed and "dedicated." However, never seeing each other and not worshiping together naturally causes a rift – an "us against them" mentality. Since we are seen as the leaders of "the

### *...Growing Pains, cont.*

other group," tension is created. The immaturity of these men is revealed by the fact that they are unwilling to overlook their personal preferences for the good of the congregation.

Second, I was recently accused of stealing money from the building fund. I was selected as our team's liaison for the building project when we divided up our 2006 work. By default, I became the "foreman" on the project when no locals accepted the task. There are far too many details to try and explain all that has happened to result in these accusations being made. The source of the accusations can be broken down into three parts: [1] a few individuals have a personal problem with me and want to degrade my character, [2] near the completion of the project, I used money from my personal work fund to purchase materials, and subsequently reimbursed myself from the building fund. Both Mike and Antony Raine (a Christian in New Zealand who was responsible for raising the funds for the building project) knew about these transactions, and [3] I was asked (against my better judgment) to give a status report on the building project in the presence of several Christians. It was against my better judgment because we were talking about dollar amounts that most of the men present could not even fathom (I voiced my hesitancy, but was persuaded

to proceed). During the meeting one of the men present made the statement, "this building should not cost 4 million vatu" (the amount raised for the project). Quite frankly, this man has absolutely no clue how much a building should cost. Rather, as I feared some would, he simply sees 4 million vatu [approx 37,000USD] as an outrageous amount, and thinks you should be able to build a five-star hotel with that much money. Some have made similar conclusions, and the men who know better have chosen not to speak up in my defense (specifically Stephen Felix and Gomon Mesa, whose names are on the building fund bank account along with mine). I can assure you that I did not steal any money, nor have I done anything that could be considered questionable. I have made available records of every vatu that was spent, with the associated receipts for each transaction that was made.

Perhaps worst of all is the fact that the building project, which seems to be the crux of the matter, is currently at a standstill since Gomon and Stephen refuse to sign a withdrawal slip for me to continue work. Thus, the project is in their hands, and no progress has been made in almost a month. There also seems to be an element that is seeking to force us to exit Vanuatu because of these and other issues.

## ...Growing Pains, cont.

Though this report is fairly lengthy, there are numerous other details that space, time and relevancy simply do not allow me to discuss. I wish to communicate that we have absolutely nothing to hide, and welcome any questions that you may have regarding either of these two issues. We do not claim to have done everything

perfectly, but promise that we are doing our best. As a mission team, we are more discouraged than we have ever been. Please join us in praying that these issues will be resolved, that truth will prevail, and that much good can be accomplished in 2007.

## Bakers Reporting Trip to the States By Aaron Baker

**S**ince November 15, 2006, Cindy, Kaela and I have been in the States visiting our supporters. Our travels so far began in Denver, CO and have taken us to Kansas City, MO, Wichita, Stafford and Norwich KS, Bella Vista and Fort Smith, AR, Enid, Altus and Tulsa, OK. In under two months we have traveled over 3,300 miles and still have a long road ahead.

The hardest part about all this traveling is not being trapped in a car, sleeping on a different bed every 3 nights, nor having to adjust back to American style food. Rather, the most difficult part of our trip is being away from the mission field. As you have most likely read about the problems we are having in Vanuatu at the moment, our desire is to be with Eric, Shawnda, Titus and Mike to help them through this time. As a team, we rely on each other often, especially in times where we need wisdom to guide us through the storms. So, as you can guess, we sure do miss the rest of our team, our friends, and our Christian family in Vanuatu.

Pray for us as we continue to visit our supporters through the remainder of January. We will be back in Vanuatu soon, but have many stops ahead. Please pray for our safety



**Left:** Kaela gets her first taste of snow in Kansas City. She is not sure what to think of these freezing temperatures.

**Right:** Aaron and Cindy enjoy the new year in Tulsa, OK with friends from 29<sup>th</sup> and Yale.



## New Addition By Eric Brandell

Our prayers were answered at 4:30am on November 24<sup>th</sup> when we welcomed the addition of Titus Taylor into the world, our family and our team. Weighing in at 6lbs. 6oz., at a length of 19.5 inches, Titus was happy and healthy. He came into our home upon his release from the hospital on the 25<sup>th</sup>, and we have thoroughly enjoyed every minute of it...we can't imagine our lives without him.



The adoption process in Vanuatu is fairly simple, but unfortunately we have not been able to make much headway in that department to date. Nothing is wrong, we are just operating on "Vanuatu-time," which is even slower around the holidays. You can keep up with Titus through his website at [www.missionvanuatu.com/brandell/titus](http://www.missionvanuatu.com/brandell/titus). Please be praying for baby, mom and dad, and the adoption process.

## Conversions in Vanuatu By Aaron Baker



Each person we come in contact with has a story to tell. Each story has the power to move us to the very depths of our souls when we see people turning from death to life, from sin to forgiveness, from Satan to God. From mid-November through mid-December our team is excited to share that there have been five baptisms. Please meet your new brothers and sisters in Christ.

**George** – From Marou village, Emau island. Baptised into Christ November 18<sup>th</sup>.

**Salome** – Etas village, baptized into Christ November 29<sup>th</sup>.

**Morgan** – Etas village, baptized into Christ December 3<sup>rd</sup>.

**Claude** – Port Vila, baptized into Christ December 5<sup>th</sup>.

**Peter** – Etas village, baptized into Christ December 11<sup>th</sup>.

We invite you to read their conversion stories at:

[www.missionvanuatu.com/conversions/home.html](http://www.missionvanuatu.com/conversions/home.html)



# Mission Vanuatu Minutes

A ministry of the

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**ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED**

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