



# Mission Vanuatu Minutes

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

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## Special points of interest:

- Eric and Flexon defend the faith in Malekula
- Gift exchange in Etas brings smiles
- National holiday serves as backdrop to Christian fellowship

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## The Third Missionary Journey

By Eric Brandell

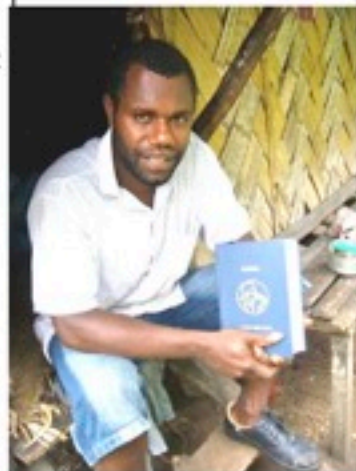
**F**lexon and I were able to return to Malekula Island this month, our "third missionary journey" into Flexon's home village of Tulwei. Our primary focus for the trip was to strengthen and encourage Alsen, who was baptized into Christ during our last trip. Our secondary focus was to again preach publicly and study privately with others in the village who have shown interest in learning more about God's word, with the hope that more might be added to the kingdom.

The apostle Paul often mentioned his concern for those brethren with whom he worked, especially when he was separated from them physically for a time. It would seem he hoped for the best but feared the worst. I understand his concern even better after serving as a missionary here in Vanuatu, especially in relation to Alsen. While Vanuatu has been blessed in recent years with cellular phone coverage on almost every inhabited island in the country, most of the outer islands (such as Malekula) still only have spotty coverage. That means that if you walk to a certain place, hold the phone up in the air and tweak your face just right, you might get "one bar" of signal on your mobile phone. As such, it is practically impossible for me to call Alsen and difficult (and costly) for him to call me. When we are able to make a connection over the phone, I am usually able to hear every other word or so, which means I get the gist of the conversation but by no means get a thorough understanding of how things are going. All that to say, I was eager to be with Alsen face-to-face and learn how this new brother in Christ had fared during his first months of being a Christian. Keep in mind that he is the first and only Christian in the village (and on the entire island), and there-

fore must worship by himself each Sunday. Can you imagine doing that immediately after you were converted?!!?

I was excited to learn of Alsen's continued steadfastness and faithfulness. He had faced some challenges and had met them admirably. I was glad to hear that, even though he had traveled to another village for a couple of weeks, he was diligent to take the items necessary for worship with him on the trip so that he could worship on the first day of every week. This is truly a big step and mustn't be taken lightly by those of us who worship each week without having to exert much forethought. One of the first things Alsen told me was that one of the "elders" of the Presbyterian Church (of which Alsen was formerly a part) had come the prior Sunday and questioned him about his departure from that denomination. Alsen gave him his reasons, and he (John) asked him some questions that he was not able to answer. He invited John to come back in a few days to meet with me and Flexon regarding his questions. I hoped that John was searching for the truth, but feared that he was really just trying to stir up trouble. Flexon and I met with John on Tuesday morning, where he forbade us from teaching and/or baptizing

**Below:** Alsen is glad to have Eric visit him in Malekula. He is also thrilled to have his very own Bislama Bible.



(Continued on page 2)



**Below:** 1 Peter 3:15 in action! Flexon defends his faith to those who question his right to "...go...make disciples of all nations, baptizing them..."



(Continued from page 1)

any more members of his church, and told us that we should tell Alsen to go back to him as well. As kindly as we could, we explained why we taught what we taught, and that we could not stop teaching the truth regardless of who it offended. After over an hour of back-and-forth, we shook hands and departed. I pleaded with John to meet with me during the week to study the Bible regarding our differences, but he declined my offer. The next morning, the entire Presbyterian Session (6 men) came and asked to meet with Alsen, Flexon and myself. To make a long story short, neither group made any headway in convincing the other. While it was a tense situation, there were at least three positives results that came of our meeting: [1] I could not have been more proud of Flexon for standing up for the truth with a Christ-like attitude, even in the face of his elder kinsmen and village leaders. It would have been far easier to cower, but Flexon stood firm and did so in an admirable manner. [2] I could not have been more proud of Alsen for defending his faith. In a "moment of truth" kind of situation, he was put on the spot to speak the truth or defend the lies he had followed for many years, and he stood firm with the truth - lesser men would have conceded from the pressure. [3] There were several unbiased bystanders to our public debate of sorts, all of whom approached me privately afterwards to apologize for the way these men treated me and to say that they appreciated how I used the Bible to answer all queries. They noticed that these denominational leaders stood up on tradition and personal belief, but did not refer to the Bible in their defense.

**Below:** A Christmas gift exchange in Etas village for the kids helps them realize it truly is better to give than receive. Still, Joanna loved the hair bow she received.



For the nightly meetings, I taught a series of lessons on biblical miracles as there had been several questions on that topic during my previous visits. These meetings were once again well attended, and we had 18 adult visitors to our worship service on Sunday morning. There were not any more conversions this trip, but I maintain the belief that there are some who are very close to making that important decision. Please be praying for Alsen, as well as the many others who are considering the cost of making the decision to follow Christ. There is a high cost for these villagers to pay, but the reward is well worth that cost - I pray that they will come to that conclusion as well and be baptized into Christ.

For those interested in learning more about this trip, there is a link to my journal on the homepage at [www.missionvanuatu.com](http://www.missionvanuatu.com). I very much appreciate your continued prayers for our safety and the success of our work. Together we are reaching souls with the truth of God's word, and that is precisely what we have been called to do. Thank you to all of you who are laboring with us!

**Below:** People in Tulwei village on Malekula island want to learn the truth. Many came to Eric's nightly studies on miracles.





## Family Day

By Aaron Baker

December 26th is a holiday in Vanuatu known as "Family Day". It is a holiday dedicated to encouraging families to spend time together and remember the importance of the family unit. The Christians in Etas village wanted to put a spiritual spin on the idea of Family Day and make it a day to spend with their spiritual family—their brothers and sisters in Christ.

At 8am we departed Port Vila to pick up members of the church in Etas as well as their families and extended families for a much anticipated day together at the ocean. By 9am we were at the ocean and selecting a spot to begin cooking the food for a big meal together.

The men worked quickly to get firewood and the area set up for the day. The fire was started and the

grilling began. There must have been 15-18 pounds of chicken wings to grill over the open fire and it took about 2 hours to cook all the wings.

Kids loved playing in the ocean and swimming. Some of the best events were a three legged race, a wheelbarrow race, a water balloon toss, and tug of war (pictured below). It was great fun and very encouraging

to be together with our spiritual family on "Family Day".



# Kids Korner

*This section of the newsletter is dedicated to the children on the Mission Vanuatu Team. We hope you enjoy these updates.*

### Titus Taylor Brandell

Perhaps no one enjoys "the holiday months" as much as Titus. He gets presents throughout the entirety of November (birthday) and December (Christmas), as they trickle in through the mail over the entire two month period. Titus is still scared of Santa Claus, although he did at least accept a present from him this year. His favorite Christmas activities (besides the presents, of course) are listening to his "JJ Bear" read "'Twas the Night Before Christmas" and helping mom make and decorate sugar cookies, which we then delivered to our friends and neighbors to wish them a Merry Christmas!



### Alexis Lynae Brandell

Alexis had no problem sitting on Santa's lap this year, perhaps because he was a genuine, authentic ni-Vanuatu Santa Claus. And those of you who know Lexi well know that she loves ni-Vanuatu men (sometimes even over mom and dad!). Santa brought her a snazzy-dazzy purse and jewelry, which she proudly modeled for the rest of the month. Lexi especially enjoyed a visit from the Raines (Christian friends from New Zealand) this month, and



took a real liking to Kevin - she expected him to hold her at every opportunity! Merry Christmas and Happy New Year 2010!

### Kaela Sue Baker

Kaela has been taking beginners ballet. The end of year show was in December and was great! Kaela loved putting on full costume makeup and dancing on stage with her friends for the program. She did a great job (parent's bias?) and wants to continue ballet lessons next year.

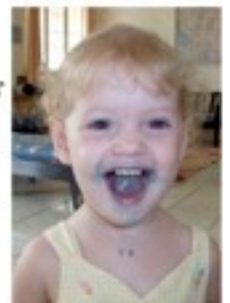
Kaela will be interested to find out if Santa can travel all the way to Vanuatu for Christmas, or if it's too far from the South Pole for the jolly man to visit.



### Melia Madelyn Baker

Melia is all smiles for Christmas! She loves getting up every morning and "pulling the peg" to watch Santa drop one rung lower down the chimney on our Christmas countdown calendar.

Melia enjoys doing anything that Kaela does. Whenever we put on a classical music CD for Kaela to dance to, Melia is right there with her, ready to show off her moves, too.





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**Address Correction Requested**

**Check us out on the web!**

[www.missionvanuatu.com](http://www.missionvanuatu.com)

### **Mission Vanuatu Team**



**New Team Picture**

**Aaron, Cindy, Kaela  
and Melia Baker**

(Left side of picture)

**Mike Olson**

(Middle of picture)

**Eric, Shawnda, Titus  
and Lexi Brandell**

(Right side of picture)