

**December 3, 2006**

## **A Wonderful Year Nears Its End**

The last "report" that I sent was on September 19. That was the afternoon I watched my wife Debbie, my son Tyler, and his wife Lisa board the plane to return to the USA. We had enjoyed 12 days together visiting friends, tourist sites, and several churches in South Africa. As they took off and climbed out of sight, knowing that I would not see them for 3 months, I felt one of the deepest moments of loneliness this year.

That evening, I was distracted from sorrow and renewed in purpose and enthusiasm when I baptized Hugh Kirby & Cecile Thomas into Christ. I was reminded of why I came here! Since then, Hugh and Cecile have continued to grow in the faith. They have honored me by asking me to perform their wedding ceremony on May 5, 2007. I regret the fact that others have not continued to grow so well. Of course, that is just the way it is, and I am sad, but not discouraged. I must be satisfied to continue working in the good soil I find and look forward to the bountiful harvest of fruit that it will bear.

As I near the end of my first year in East London, I reflect on the people and events that have made it such a wonderful year. I am thankful for the many who have made me feel so welcome and special, not only in East London, but all the church in South Africa. It would be difficult to be treated any better than I have been. I have made friends here that will last an eternity.

The congregation has grown spiritually. Both the addition of new souls to the kingdom and the growth of old members have brought great joy. Many that were not before are now quite involved in the work and excited about the future of Keam Road. Using the example of Acts 6, the whole congregation has selected men to serve as Leaders until we can develop an eldership. Having unified leadership has helped matters a great deal.

For most weeks of the year, I have taught the church, Eastern Cape Bible College classes, or individuals five or six days of the week. I have visited many in their homes. Unfortunately, there are still many I have not yet been to see. I have been through a wedding and a funeral. I have enjoyed dinners, youth meetings, and "elder" meetings. I even got to attend the "Over 60" dinner as a guest last week. I was afraid they would card me, but I got through all right. Do you think it is the white beard that saved me? Last season, they even "called me out of retirement" for a softball league. My cleats are older than many of the players!

I was invited to speak at the SABC Lectureship in September. There I received invitations to teach at a number of other places, including the School of Preaching in Namibia. I have been privileged to visit and speak to congregations in several cities. Two weekends ago, I went to Port Elizabeth and taught a weekend seminar on Maturing The Church. The brethren there were very gracious to me and received the lessons well. I was able to teach once in the nearby East London congregation of Buffalo Flats, and I have taught in Benoni, Cape Town, Rustenburg, and Pretoria congregations as well. Everywhere I go, I am greeted warmly, treated royally, and encouraged greatly by the church.

I have also enjoyed the limited sightseeing I have been able to do this year. I really enjoy the beauty of this country, and I REALLY appreciate the fact that I have not been threatened or robbed even once! Not everyone can say that. God has been kind and merciful to me and kept me from harm or loss. To give you an idea of the crime and risk here, we have recently had two cars stolen and two more broken into right here next to the building during church meetings.

The moral climate in South Africa is declining rapidly, just as it is in America. Just last Thursday, November 30, the law was passed to recognize homosexual unions in RSA as marriage, with all the same considerations as heterosexual unions. I have heard reports that 60% of all AIDS cases in the world are in South Africa. It is easy to see why the epidemic of sin and suffering continues.

As I prepare to fly home for a visit in a little over two weeks, I am a man torn between two continents. I love my home, family, and the church at West End and in the USA, but I also love my family at Keam Road and in South Africa. I look forward to both being home for a visit and my return here in February. The Apostle Paul was torn between his love for the Philippians and his desire to be with Christ. I understand that a little bit.

Earlier today, I sent out the last 13 bulletins to be scanned and posted on West End's website: <http://www.wecoc.org/missions/eastlondon.php>. This letter will also be posted there, though I do not know how long it will take to get it all done. I will try to send notification when things are caught up.

My work here with the Keam Road church has been rewarding and quite well received. I am honored to have been asked to continue working here, and it is our intention to do so. Beginning in 2007, I am going to try alternating approximately three-month periods between the USA & RSA. If you have supported us in the past, I hope you will consider continuing for 2007, as we will need it. Though Debbie is not able to be here with me in person, she is with me in spirit and is a huge part of the work. Were it not for her faith in God and me, and her willingness to sacrifice and send me, I would not be here at all.

I will now close with one of my favorite passages from the Apostle Paul. It is one of my favorites because it applies to me so well. "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service; even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. And yet I was shown mercy, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief." 1Timothy 1:12-13

*Yours in Christ,  
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