
Cross Cultural Discipling Mission Benjamin & Karen Rees End of June 2011

IF YOU RECEIVED THIS VIA E-MAIL: We value your prayers, but we also value your good will. If anyone who receives this would rather not receive it in future, please let us know and we will remove your address from our list.

IF YOU ARE READING THIS ON THE INTERNET and would like to receive this prayer letter regularly (roughly once a month), please send your request to <reesmission@gmail.com> and we will add you to the mailing list.

Weather (11:40 a.m. on 28 June): overcast and rainy. Temperature, 26 °C (79 °F). Relative humidity, 93%. Air pollution index, (general) 25-50, (roadside) 60-75.

JOPLIN TORNADO

I think most of you who will see this have probably heard about the big tornado in Joplin, MO, on May 22. It was even mentioned numerous times in the news here in Hong Kong. Many of you know that we have strong connections with Joplin. Our son Matthew, and our daughter Megan and her husband Matt Robertson, live in Joplin. So do my brother Dan and his wife, and my sister Phoebe. Another sister, Joy, lives about 40 miles away, in Lamar, MO, but makes frequent trips to Joplin. Our forwarding agent, Penny Graves, lives there, as do all the other members of our mission board of directors. Our largest supporting church, the College Heights Christian Church, is a Joplin church. I graduated from Ozark Bible College in Joplin, and Karen attended. We have many friends there. For the first couple of weeks after the catastrophe, a large part of our time was spent checking on the latest news from Joplin, and on how various relatives and friends had been affected. We also received messages from people around the world asking how our family had been affected.



Megan sorting clothes in their bedroom after the storm. Notice the devastation both inside and outside the broken window.

The greatest impact on our family was that our daughter Megan and her husband lost their house, which they had just moved into a few months previously. They were in the house at the time, sheltering in an inside bathroom, and watched the roof lift off over their heads, but they were unhurt. They were able to salvage some of their possessions in the days after the storm, but the house and both of their vehicles were a total loss. Although my sister Joy lives the furthest away, she had a narrow escape. She had been helping in a Christian community theatre that afternoon, but left early because the weather had turned bad. The tornado hit about a half hour after she left, levelling the building, killing two outright and seriously injuring others. The rest of our family members in Joplin all live in the north part of the town, well outside the disaster line.

Penny Graves, our forwarding agent, lives only about a block away from the WalMart store that was destroyed, and her house and yard sustained some damage, but, praise God, the house is still liveable. The rest of our directors live further away. So far we have only

heard of one person we knew personally being killed or injured. Faith Dunn, who was a few years ahead of me at OBC and later taught there, was killed. But quite a few friends lost their houses.

We have been inspired by accounts of Joplin people – especially Christians and the churches – helping each other in the aftermath of the storm. No sooner had the tornado passed, and with their own house lying in ruins, than Megan and Matt were out checking on their neighbours. Many of our other friends and relatives were doing the same. The College Heights Christian Church and Ozark Christian College both became major distribution points for contributions of supplies. Our son Matthew had a two-week break from teaching and spent most of it helping with the aid distribution at College Heights.

* Thank God that most of our family and friends were spared physically.

* Pray for Megan & Matt and their needs at this time of major loss.

* Thank God for the example the churches and Christians in Joplin have been able to show to the community and the nation at this time of crisis. Pray for the whole Joplin community as they rebuild houses, businesses and lives.

MEGAN & MATT'S VISIT TO HONG KONG

If it had not been superseded by the news of the tornado, my lead story in this letter would probably have been Megan and Matt's visit to Hong Kong. They arrived on Good Friday, April 22, and left on May 4. Their time here gave Megan a chance to show Matt where she grew up, and we hope it will help him understand her background better. It gave us a chance to get much better acquainted with him. They were able to join in our church Easter celebrations. There was a statutory holiday and a church outdoor fellowship on May 1, for which Megan was the guest speaker. She shared some of what she has learned about relationships in her training and experience as a counsellor. Since they were not able to stay until my birthday on May 5, we had an early celebration on May 3.

* Thank God that they were able to come and had a good visit.



L-R: Matt, Karen, Megan, and Jovy Mejorada, waiting for others to come for the "Sonrise" service on Easter Sunday morning.

CHURCH AND MINISTRY

Christmas and Easter: The special programs in the church for both Christmas 2010 and Easter 2011 featured Bible passages interspersed with musical numbers, both congregational singing and special numbers by various members. Both programs told the story of God's plan for redeeming mankind through Jesus Christ, but with a slightly different focus determined by the particular holiday. The theme for Christmas was "God's Plan Through the Ages." For Easter it was "Jesus Lifted Up." For Easter we urged all those who delivered the Scripture passages to give them from memory rather than reading them. Not all were able to do this, but the majority did, and we are proud of their accomplishment.



Three of the four fathers in the church were present on Fathers' Day: Johnny Alejandro, Ben Rees, and K.K. Kong.

Mothers' Day, Fathers' Day and Valentine's Day: Mothers' Day is always a big event for the church since about 40% of our members are mothers, but they get little recognition because they are not able to have their children with them here in Hong Kong. This year was no exception. Since we have so few men in the church, Fathers' Day is a much smaller occasion, but the church does honour the fathers we do have (this year there were three), and it gives a chance for all present to remember their own fathers. The Faith Circle group presented mementos to both the mothers and the fathers on their respective days. So that the singles are not neglected, the church officers (especially the married ones), always prepare some kind of program and give some kind of memento to the singles on Valentine's Day.

Faith Circle and Ambassadors Activities: The Ambassadors group continues to meet roughly once a month, on Sunday, with an alternating emphasis on Christian money management and evangelism. The Faith Circle also meets roughly once a month, but on the statutory holidays.

Besides being times for fellowship between the church members, these activities also provide a "non-threatening" introduction to the church for newcomers.

The Sri-Lankan Refugee family: Raja and Chitra recently had their third daughter, whom they named Hadassah. Karen continues to visit the family a couple of times a week, most weeks. She helps with the kids, helps them in their dealings with various government departments, and leads them (especially Chitra) in Bible study.

* Thank God that all recent church activities have gone well. Numbers attending, though, are gradually declining, so pray for improvements in outreach and shepherding.

* Before Hadassah was born, doctors who viewed the ultrasound scans thought that her head might be smaller than normal. Thank God that she was born normally and seems normal so far.

* Pray that the UNHCR will make a decision on Raja and Chitra's case soon and will confirm their status as refugees. Pray that they then will be granted resettlement in a country where they can find a good faithful church to attend.

MISCELLANEOUS (including follow-up on past news and requests)

After the tornado, a few people asked if we would go to Joplin ourselves. It has been difficult being so far away at this time of crisis in our children's lives, but they are coping well and have a lot of support there in the area. I think a visit at this time would be more for our own benefit than theirs. In fact, with housing in short supply, both because a third of the city was destroyed and because of the many volunteers who have flocked to Joplin to help, I think we would be more in the way than any real help. We did not plan to go to the U.S. this year, and I think we will stick to that plan. We have been invited to speak at a Bible college in the Philippines in September and have tentatively accepted that invitation. We hope to make our next trip to North America (including Canada, if possible) sometime next year. If you are in North America and your church would like to invite us for any particular event or time period, please let us know ASAP so we can begin planning.

* Please pray for God's guidance and provision for these trips. Pray for wisdom regarding the Philippine trip. For the trip to N. America, pray for the itinerary, for housing and transport as we travel, and for the need for people to look after the church here and our apartment and mail. Pray especially that everything will work out with less stress than our last few U.S. trips have involved.

* Thank God that my blood pressure has been fairly good recently, although I still take medicine occasionally to help keep it that way. .

* I will probably need to have my second cataract operation soon. Pray that that goes well.

* We are still trying to sort out our medical insurance situation now that Karen is 65 and eligible for Medicare, and we keep running into various problems. Please pray that we can get something settled soon.

* Thank God that Karen has sold a couple more articles to Christian Standard. One appeared in the April 3 issue (<http://christianstandard.com/2011/03/truth-matters/>). The other is tentatively scheduled for October 16.

* The YMCA did raise the rent this year for the room the church meets in on Sunday, but they also gave us a small additional discount that partly offset the increase. Offerings continue to be low, but they have improved some, and each month the church has somehow managed to scrape by.

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