

December 2007

Dear Christian friends and family,

First of all, I hope this finds all of you enjoying (or having enjoyed) the holiday season with its change of pace and its renewal of family and friendship ties. I will be sending letters of New Year's greetings in January, as per the French culture.

We are blessed this year to have the Jeff Brauers (Tia, Jeff, Ameleah) with us from Padova, Italy, for a few days. We miss our other daughters and Pam's family, but have been able to talk with all of them over the phone, which helps. And the grandchildren seem to be doing well. As I said to someone the other day, it gets harder, as we get older, to be so far from family. But we knew that would be the case, so I'm not complaining. God has blessed us mightily in every way, especially in the three special young ladies who are our precious daughters.

In spite of the fact that I forgot last year, the December letter has traditionally been given to a moment of reflection. This year I remembered, so here goes. I think I'd like to talk about mission funding this time.

I can hear you saying: "Here we go; he's going to go into all the reasons why missionaries need more support, why we should send him more, etc." Well, yes and no. I think that the November letter was clear enough about the drop of the dollar in the past few years; so we won't get too much into that. And those who have been reading these letters over the past few months already know that we have had some large drops in over-all support, so I won't get much into that, either. What I want to tell you is that, even if our support is seriously hampered by recent developments, we are doing all right. We have plenty of food to eat, an apartment to live in, a nice office to work in, a roof over our heads, clothes to wear, and lots of wonderful brothers and sisters in the Lord. Should we be complaining ?

In fact, we have always done all right. After a few years working in Grenoble, we decided to buy a small house. We negotiated a loan and bought the place. Then, within the next year, the dollar lost half of its value against the French franc, which meant that our monthly payments were doubled. Astringent adjustments had to be made, but we did all right then, as we are doing now, just being very careful. The Lord is good.

Three times during our 30 years on the field, our sponsoring congregation has informed us that we need to find another sponsoring congregation. The reasons varied from 1) not feeling like the sponsoring elders could supervise adequately, to 2) resentment in the sponsoring congregation because too much money was being sent too far away, to 3) administration and management problems in the sponsoring congregation. Each time we have done all right. The Lord has always held us up and provided other sponsors to continue the work. Sometimes He has done this in the most unusual ways, but always He has helped us keep on working here.

When I announced the 40% drop in the dollar over the past five years, a congregation in the States decided to make a large contribution to our monthly fund over the next year. Not that

very grateful.

I guess that, by telling you all of this, I am walking a fine line. You might be saying, well, if they can get along on less, why even try to maintain a certain level of support? If they lose contributors and can still say that are doing OK, why even worry about it? My answer to that is that when Churches commit to mission support, they should indeed be concerned about whether or not that support is maintained. It is, on one hand, a matter of honesty, and, on the other, a matter of responsibility. Honesty because when the sum committed is not being received, Christian integrity would require doing something about that; responsibility because, for example, the Church would not allow its preacher's salary to be cut by 40% without reacting, for purely practical reasons: it would probably lose him! So, please don't think that I'm saying everyone should just forget about contributing. We do need your support in order to live and work here. When it is reduced, working and living funds essentially "go in the hole," making painful adjustments necessary.

Let me go at it this way: A certain amount of funding is necessary in order to maintain mission presence in any foreign country. The high cost of living in Europe and the fact that missionaries must obtain their Euros by changing dollars are two major factors in their finances. When the available funding is reduced by variations in the exchange, missionaries can adjust ... for a time. They live by faith, as every Christian should, and they know that a reduction in salary is not the worst thing that can happen to them, even if (at least in France) a reduction in salary is indeed considered disastrous, since the sacrosanct "acquired status" must not be reduced. As I said in a recent letter, folks here demonstrate in the streets and break things when their salary is raised by only 3% in one year.

(If anyone is interested in my feelings about how Churches could respond to falling-dollar problems, you might read the chapter entitled "Fund-Raising" in my 1990 book entitled *The Missionary Myth*. If it is not out of stock, you can order it from J. C. Choate Publications, choate@worldevangelism.org. )

Paul seems to address this sort of situation in his letter to the Philippians when he says : "Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Phil 4.11-13). Then he adds: "Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction" (Phil 4.15). I don't think the word "affliction" applies to us, though. We're not suffering hardship or misery; we are simply, well, working in the red in some areas at present.

With that, I will leave you for this time. We wish for you and yours a wonderful year in 2008, as you serve our Lord!

God bless you all!

Sincerely,

Charles and Pam