

January 23, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters at Harvest Baptist Church,

I often think that God is very gracious in not letting us know what is coming in our lives. He tells us about our heavenly home and the blessing that we have in Christ. But every day is a blank slate. There are things we anticipate. Sometimes they happen, and sometimes they don't. And sometimes they happen in a way we were not expecting.

We have been anticipating the ordination of two men from the church here to become elders. Along with that, two men and one woman were to be appointed. In this process we have gotten a great deal of help from some of the church leaders from the Semandang tribe. Well, the ordination took place on the 9<sup>th</sup> of January. It didn't happen at all like we expected it to. There were many things that took us by surprise and even disappointed us. But in the end, the two men were ordained, and the deacons were appointed. We are grateful to have that behind us. A huge amount of work was put in to get ready for this. Now it is done. And for that we are grateful. For those of you who gave money for a pig, I will enclose a picture of one of the pigs who gave his all for this ordination.

A few months past we did not anticipate that Akim would not be ordained as an elder. We didn't anticipate that his wife would not be appointed as a deaconess. We also didn't anticipate the level of his anger at not being ordained. But in truth, the reason he was not ordained is that he doesn't control his anger. And truly his anger does not achieve the righteousness of God. At Christmas, Akim forbade his family from taking any part in the festivities. When his wife and daughter filled in to play volleyball with the women he reacted with anger and strong (and loud) words. I have been waiting for him to calm down before talking to him again. But that just never happened.

On Monday I awoke with certain things in mind that I was going to do. But in the middle of my devotions one of the deacons came to our house. He had just spoken to Akim and was told that he was withdrawing his family from our fellowship and would be going to a church down the hill that is led by a man who likely doesn't know the Lord. The man who brought me the news said we needed to go talk to Akim. I asked for a little time to pray and read my Bible. Even my prayers that morning were not the ones I anticipated praying. We did go talk to Akim. He is still full of anger. In addition to leaving our church, he is inviting a local pastor to come and hold services in his area on Sundays. At the time when we should really be rejoicing that we have newly appointed leadership, our hearts are heavy to be losing this family, and at the possibility that there will be a church split here. I must say I am very thankful I didn't know any of this was coming. But God is still sovereign. His promises to us are still secure. Bad things happen. Our responsibility is to be faithful to do what God gives us to do. And this is what we want to do.

Bella and I are planning on going on a 6-month home assignment in early March. We plan to try to get some medical work done at the beginning of that time. This includes me (Paul) having surgery on my foot. I am hoping to have one of the joints in my big toe replaced. Also both Bella and I are very aware that we do not have good hearing anymore. We plan to be getting hearing aids. After the medical work, we plan to see friends and supporters.

In the translation work, I have one more book (Galatians) to finish drafting. I expect to be able to finish that before we leave here. Three of the books that have been drafted have not been checked through with our native language helpers here. That won't happen until we return from home assignment. Around 35% of the New Testament has yet to be checked with one of our mission's translation checkers. Covid has complicated that somewhat. We do hope that we can check the remaining books during the first two years we are back.

Thank you very much for your prayers for us and for the people here. In the midst of the heart break here, it has been very encouraging to see the believers here stepping up and ministering to the body here. Thank you very much for the \$100 that you sent to us in December and for the extra \$200 for Christmas.

In Christ,

Paul and Bella

Prayer requests;

1. Praise God that the ordination is over.
2. For the situation with Akim and his family. I have no idea how all of this will play out. It is clear though that neither Akim nor his wife will be involved with the church here or with Bella and I as we translate.
3. Pray that we will be able to finish well what we need to do in the last few weeks before home assignment.
4. Still no covid (or masks or social distancing except at the ordination) here in our village. But we are heading back to the States where covid seems to be rampant. That will be an adjustment for us.



The pictures are, 1. The ordination of the two elders (in the jackets and ties). 2. One of the pigs for the meal. 3. Some folks eating after the ordination.





