

Date: Saturday, October 30, 2010, 11:16 AM

Dear Praying Partner --

Here's a final accounting of the trip home:

While still in Bangui Wednesday, our housekeepers Rosalie and Ann asked me to deliver greetings to the missionary nurse who attended them in childhood: Miss Marian Thurston, who resides in Legrand, IA, near our hometown.

Mboi Andre stopped by for a last visit and prayer. Ngoumape Francois joined us shortly thereafter for a debriefing on our seminary classes. Mike Yoder came in on the Wednesday plane -- he's there doing research on youth ministry in CAR -- so we spent some time catching up on our respective families.

Francois and Andre came together Thursday morning to transport us to the airport. (It was a little like being served by royalty.) There were emotional goodbyes, and we boarded our plane in the early morning mist. I had an empty seat next to me, so Dan came back to chat with me for a while. That was good, since his connecting link in Paris was so short that there would be no time for lingering farewells. Shortly after our conversation, I discovered that Chuck was sitting next to our old friend Bob Belohlavek, who has been in Bangui all this time working with ICDI (a company established by former missionaries to help rebuild infrastructure in CAR by digging wells, etc.)!

Landing in Paris, Dan ran to catch his next flight while Chuck and I trudged at least a mile through the terminal to find our gate. On the way, we caught up with Dan just as he was about to board. So there was enough time for one more hug and "bon voyage."

Chuck and I had a long layover before our flight to Frankfurt, Germany. So we talked of home and family and ministry and (of course) Africa. It was a short flight to Frankfurt. It was pleasant to see autumn colors and to feel crisp, cool air when we landed. A shuttle took us to the Holiday Inn Express, where we registered and found our room -- a small room, but with comfortable twin beds and cozy comforters. We walked a short distance to a quaint German restaurant. I ordered pork sauerbraten and coffee. It was fabulous (and not too expensive). Back at the hotel, we arranged a 4:00am wake-up call.

I decided to accompany Chuck to the airport for his early flight rather than stay behind alone in the hotel room. We said goodbye inside the terminal, and suddenly our "three amigos" fellowship was ended. I sat out the morning near my departure gate, having a little breakfast while I journaled.

I got an aisle seat for the 9-hour flight to Detroit. I rested, prayed, wrote, watched a couple of in-flight movies ... actually the time went pretty fast. Our flight path took us over England and Scotland, skirted just south of Iceland and across the southern tip of Greenland. I thanked God as we touched down in the good ol' USA. There was the normal hassle of getting through customs. I didn't waste time looking for my check-thru bag. Why bother? It was probably lost in transit anyway!

During the 5-hour layover in Detroit, I called Jane and each of our kids to let them know I was almost home. The commuter flight to Dayton was short. I found my sweetheart waiting for me, collected my check-thru bag (it actually arrived with me!!), and we drove home. I kept dozing off on the way because I'd been up 24 hours.

It was so good to get home! I climbed into bed and slept a sound and peaceful sleep.

Now comes the difficult question: What next? Whenever you think of me, please pray that God will give clear direction for the days ahead. I know I'm attached to the CAR now; I just don't know the level or nature of involvement God has in mind. Again, I deeply appreciate your prayers, support, and encouragement during this mission. God was there with me. So were you. I remain His servant and yours --

Greg Ryerson

Date: Wednesday, October 27, 2010, 1:07 PM

Dear Prayer Partner –

This will be my last email from Bangui ! Hard to believe that our time here is nearing an end.

Yesterday morning was our final ½ day of class. After chapel, I gave my students their final exam. After a short break, we re-convened to try to catch up on the notes we missed because of my 2-day illness. By the time we heard the final school bell, I was just a few paragraphs away from the end. I can send the remainder to Dr. Ngoumape to pass along to the students.

I saved the last 10 minutes of class time for a personal challenge to my 9 guys: Faithfully teach to others what you have learned, remolding the presentation into something you can call your own. Remain faithful to Christ and pure in your walk with Him. Boldly confront immorality or inappropriate behavior wherever you find it, always calling on God's Word as your foundation. Love your people and be patient with them.

My final goodbye was emotional. These men have so much potential for leading the Central African churches into a new era of service to God. I got pretty choked up as I addressed these wonderful brothers. One man has especially touched my heart. Borguere Immel-Aggee was named for my friend Howard Immel who disciplined his father years ago. Immel-Aggee has been an outstanding student. He was weeping openly as I embraced him. "You are my father," he said. I totally lost it then.

There was a formal closing ceremony that included the whole student body. Each class presented a gift to its professor: a new African shirt. Cool! There were short speeches, some light refreshment, a benediction from Dr. Ngoumape, and then group photos outside. And then we drove away, one last bumpy ride down from the hilltop, picturesque mountains in the distance, the river below us, then back into the city.

Yesterday afternoon we graded the final exams. We had team worship together after supper. I got to bed about 9:30pm.

This morning we made a short trip to the Air France baggage office. The procedure here is to check bags and receive boarding passes at the Air France office in the city, the day prior to departure. This is because the airport terminal is quite small and crowded; there's no room for check-in there. Later, we'll drive out to the Project Hope and Charity Orphan Center to witness one of the most exciting new ministries of our denomination. This afternoon we'll meet one last time with Dr. Ngoumape to hand over our students' grades and to discuss future ideas for the curriculum. All 3 of us are eager to know if God wants us to come back and do it again; we'll try to gauge Francois' assessment of our work.

We need to be leave for the airport at 4:00am tomorrow. Our plane departs at 6:40. Arriving in Paris at 2:25pm, Dan will fly to Berlin to spend a few days with old friends; Chuck and I will fly to Frankfort . Friday morning, Chuck will leave for an early flight, then I'll follow later. My 10:50am flight will be from Frankfort to Detroit (no, there's no layover for me in Paris as I previously thought). It's a 9 hr. flight to Detroit , so I've already got an aisle seat picked out! After a layover in Detroit (2:00-7:35pm -- where finally my cell phone will work again – call me!), I'll fly home to Dayton and arrive at 8:40pm to the waiting arms of my beautiful bride Jane.

So once again I'm asking you to pray for safe travel and smooth connections; for wisdom in telling about the trip; for a lasting impact on my students; and for clear direction regarding any similar trips in the future. Thanks for coming along on this journey with me! You've been great company! Let's do it again sometime, God willing! Au revoir! Duti nzoni!

Your Representative in Republique Centrafricaine –

Greg Ryerson

Date: Sunday, October 24, 2010, 7:25 AM

Dear CAR Partner –

Sorry I haven't written for a couple of days, but I've been in bed since Wednesday. I woke up Wednesday with a fever and a pretty good case of "traveler's disease." I taught my class, but couldn't wait to get back here at the end of the day. I went right to bed. About 9:00pm I took my temperature and it was over 101. By yesterday morning it was 103. The missionaries speculate that maybe I picked up a nasty flu bug while I was on the way here. Regardless, it's been a bit discouraging. I missed classes all of yesterday and again this morning. I feel much better this morning but am still weak because I haven't eaten much for 48 hours. I plan to teach the afternoon session. I'll have to make some adjustments in my teaching schedule in order to finish on time. (They want us to finish everything, including the final exam, by Tuesday noon.)

I know you are praying, and I'm very grateful. Dr. Ngoumape, the dean of the seminary, has been very sympathetic. He came to pray with me last evening. My coworkers, too, have prayed with me on several occasions. More than anyone else, my old friend Chuck Thornton has hovered over me, making sure my needs were met. He is as he has been for 30 years – one of my very best brothers.

There seems to be a general attitude in this country that setbacks are a constant occurrence so there's no point in getting concerned about unpleasant surprises. It's an attitude that we Americans would do well to copy.

On Wednesday we welcomed 2 more residents to the mission station: Barb Wooler, who lives here most of the time but makes 2-3 trips to the USA each year (Chris, Barb says "Hi"); and Ed Trenner, an old friend from Orange, CA, who is now fulltime with Grace Brethren International Missions. Then the construction team from Myerstown, PA, left yesterday morning.

I'll try to write again tomorrow. There won't be any classes, so we're planning a day trip to Mbaiki (one hour south), to visit the Institut Biblique du Frere (Brethren Bible Institute). I arranged this primarily for the benefit of Chuck and Dan. I want them to meet the students there, including 6 pygmies currently preparing to plant churches in their forest villages.

Thanks again for praying. God is listening!

In Christ,

Greg

Date: Wednesday, October 20, 2010, 12:03 AM

Dear CAR Partner –

Monday and Tuesday classes are now behind us. It's been a good couple of days. It's rained HARD several times, so the air is cooler but very humid; and there's a lot of mud on the seminary campus because it's still under construction.

The construction team from Myerstown PA took a day off and rode to a town about 90 minutes away where their church is sponsoring a school for orphan children. (To my FGBC readers: You should check out the "Hand-in-Hand" program through Grace Brethren International Missions. It's awesome. We have over 40 schools in the CAR now, but could use another 120. More of our churches should get involved!) The construction team will take their check-thru baggage to the Air France office tomorrow in preparation for their departure on Thursday morning. It will get pretty quiet around here after that.

I spoke in chapel this morning on "The Toolbox." Some of you will recognize the term as a counseling metaphor I've used many times. I've been asked to speak again on Monday.

We've been taking an extended break for lunch every day – 12:00-2:30. Today we got a ride back to the mission station with Pastor Nadjilao Simone-Pierre, the Executive Secretary of the Union d'Egises Evangelistique du Freres – the conference of Grace Brethren Churches in the CAR. On my previous trip, I rode to Berberati and back with Simone-Pierre in the back seat of Mboi Andre's SUV. I rode in that same SUV to Bambari and back. Between the 2 trips I spent 44 hours in that vehicle in 3 weeks. Guess what vehicle Simone-Pierre drives now!

Speaking of lunch ... Someone gave me \$20 recently and said, "Give this to someone in Africa who needs it." Obviously, there are too many ways to stretch \$20. But God found a way: Dr. Ngoumape is going to use the money to buy food for the students' lunch. It's too far for them to walk from campus into town for food and return in time for afternoon classes. The students will be grateful, and the money will be well invested.

This Saturday we have a day off from teaching. So we've arranged to drive down to M'baiki so Dan and Chuck can see the Bible institute. I'm looking forward to it, too.

As we drive through this crowded city several times a day, I am overwhelmed by the 1 million people clogging the streets, the colorful clothing contrasting with the drab huts in which they live, the constant smell of smoke from cooking fires, the beautiful people mingling with beggars and cripples, the signs of superstition and European wannabes. This is a fascinating, intoxicating, heart-breaking place. Let me say what I've said before: If I could come here, ANYBODY could come. And you SHOULD come. If you do, you'll never be the same. God is at work here. I'm privileged to be an instrument in His hands for just a little while.

Thanks for your prayers. Keep it up! My supply of bite-size Snickers is dwindling.

Gratefully,

Greg Ryerson

Date: Monday, October 18, 2010, 1:06 AM

Dear CAR Partner –

It's Sunday afternoon and another thunderstorm is brewing. We've had storms almost every day since our arrival. By God's grace, the rain hasn't affected our schedule. When it's not raining, the heat and humidity are oppressive. I said to someone last night, "The frustrating thing is that we can't wait to get back to air-conditioning, yet by the time we return to the States it will be almost November and we won't need it."

Yesterday there were some minor frustrations due to lack of communication. We waited for someone to pick us up and take us to the seminary, but 45 minutes after the pickup time we discovered that our vehicle was here all the time and the driver simply hadn't made his presence known. OK, no big deal. Then we got to the campus and I found that no one was there to translate for me. Professor Namkoderana made some quick calls but no one ever came. I was prepared to hand out the first of 4 quizzes that day, so that killed about an hour. Then we exchanged info on each other's families. Of my 8 students, 3 are a bit older with large families and pastoral experience. I got each of their names and asked them to tell me the meaning of their African surname. That was fun. One student's first name, by the way, is "Immel." He's named for Howard Immel who was a missionary here some years ago and who discipled this man's father.

During the break, something really great happened. The 3 or 4 guys who speak a bit of English began to ask questions about the churches in the USA, about pastoral ministry in general, and about specific matters of Christian conduct. We stumbled through the conversation, and I noticed that the non-English-speaking guys began to gather around and (through translation) join in the discussion. It was very rewarding.

At about 10:30 Professor Namkoderana came into our class. He had decided to let Dan Jackson fend for himself for the remainder of the morning while the Professor translated for me. We finished the session with some good discussions of the material, and I came away feeling that the morning was well spent. We covered important material, and we learned valuable lessons about planning ahead.

On that note, by the way, we discovered late in the day that we would NOT be preaching today because of another breakdown in planning. Dr. Ngoumape asked us which church we'd like to attend. I recommended that we visit the Castors Church – the 1st Grace Brethren Church established in Bangui (1952). Francois and his wife Claire picked us up this morning at 7:00 to attend the French service at Castors. It's near the mission complex, so was only a short drive. About 2/3 of the auditorium was filled when we arrived, and the congregation was singing "How Great Thou Art" in French. As we sat down, the pews (hard benches, but at least they had backs, unlike the benches in most churches here) behind us filled up. Within minutes we were worshiping with about 1,500 other people. The choir, children's choir, band, and congregation singing were awesome! Even without knowing French, we were moved by the great joy and energy of the worshipers. The pastor of Castors is Ndomali Joseph, who helped translate for me on the previous trip in January 2009. But Ndomali was away for the weekend, and the preacher was a deacon of the church – a young man whom Francois mentored. Couldn't understand the sermon, but read the Bible text in First Samuel while he preached. At the end he apparently asked if any worshiper wished to respond to the message from God's Word by making any sort of personal recommitment to Christ. About 20 or 25 hands went up around the room. Then the preacher asked if they would be willing to stand to make their recommitment more visible. As far as I could see, they all stood.

Then it was time to recognize visitors. Several people rose and introduced themselves. Most were white missionaries. Francois stood with us and formally introduced us to the church. As the choir sang another stirring song, it was time to give our offerings. In the typical Central African way, we filed to the front row by row and dropped our offerings into a box. I dropped mine into the hole marked "L'hommes" (men). After the service was dismissed we chatted outside with missionaries from Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Canada and England. Then we were ushered to a reception just for

pastors, where we met Emil, a worker with the Gideons International (yes, the guys who give out the Bibles). His English is pretty good because he's been in the States several times.

We've been resting this afternoon. Shortly the construction team and seminary teachers will drive over to the Ngoumapes' for dinner with their family of 18. If the rain holds off, we'll be eating in the courtyard of their fenced-in home. It will be dark long before we finish. I hope Francois will talk his kids into singing for us. They have a band and sing in churches all over the area.

I'm so thankful for your prayers. God is blessing me, and I feel like I'm accomplishing something useful. The comradie with the construction team has been a great encouragement. It's so cool to be here with a bunch of other people who actually speak English! By the way, I'm more convinced than ever: If I can do this, anyone can! There are 1,001 things a Christian can do for God in this place, and it's easy to come. I want to come back. Maybe you'll come next time?

By the way, Jane has forwarded several emails from supporting friends. Thanks! You can email me directly at banguivisitors@gbim.org. Type "Greg Ryerson" in the subject line, because there are 10 of us using the same email address. (Internet access is expensive here; this is the cheapest way to communicate.)

More later! Yours in Christ,

Greg Ryerson

Date: Friday, October 15, 2010, 12:49 PM

Good evening, prayer partners!

Just got back from our first day of teaching. Got home just before another big thunderstorm began.

It's been a good day. We left here about 7:30. Francois made a couple of stops for food for the students. We got to the school while chapel was in session. Francois introduced us to the students, then we headed off to classes. There aren't really any classrooms on the campus yet. They've built 3 duplexes for student housing – nice brick buildings with tin roofs, actual ceilings to hide the rafters and keep the heat out, concrete floors, 2 bedrooms – probably the best housing these students have ever had. Of course, the students bring their families with them to live at the school. Some students are from faraway sections of the country; one or two are from neighboring countries. Anyway, in the absence of classroom buildings, they're using the duplexes for classes. Chuck, Dan, and I each have 5-8 students. Chuck is teaching 1st year students, Dan has the 2nd year students, I have the 3rd and 4th year guys. Many of the students have pastoral experience, so they're really attentive and ask insightful questions.

Typically, we'll teach 8:00-9:00am, 10:00-12:00, and 2:30-4:30. We quit at that time because several students must walk several miles to get home, and of course the sun goes down abruptly at 6:00.

I thought things went well this first day. I'm tired but feel like I'm accomplishing some good. Ready for some dinner and relaxation before bed.

Thanks for your prayers! Obviously, God has been listening!

Gratefully,

Greg Ryerson

Date: Thursday, October 14, 2010, 1:47 PM

Good afternoon! It's my 2nd day in Africa . Here's an update: I already wrote about our arrival last night. A couple more details: Missionary Tim Hock met us at the airport and helped us load our luggage. On the way out , I saw Pastor Andre Mboi (my host for the 2009 trip). I greeted him warmly , and he showed me his right hand – completely recovered from the motorcycle accident of 2008! He had just returned from a week in France where he participated in a meeting of Brethren leaders from all over the world.

It was dark by the time we drove out of the airport , but we could see the usual vendors lining the street with small shacks and tables , selling everything from bananas to bottled gasoline to phone cards. I'd forgotten that Bangui is a sprawling city of 1 million people , most of them living in poverty. The streets are in poor shape , and consequently the vehicles take a beating. The drivers are crazy , or at least foolhardy; and so are the pedestrians. We arrived at the mission compound after 7:00. I met the construction crew from the Myerstown , PA , Grace Brethren Church (where my partner Dan Jackson is the assoc. pastor). I ate a bit , then excused myself because of the exhaustion. I was asleep by 8:30.

I woke up at 6:30 , had a shower and breakfast , then chatted with missionary Janet Varner for a while. Her career here intersected with the now-retired Marian Thurston from our hometown in Garwin , IA. At 8:30 , the 3 of us visiting pastors rode with Ginger Hock out to Yengbe Trois GBC to visit a school for orphans sponsored through the Grace Brethren Hand-to-Hand program. We were introduced to about 80 beautiful kids whose education is provided by churches in America . There are 42 such schools in the CAR , and many more are needed.

After that we drove out to the Gribble Center , the new educational facility where we will be teaching. The buildings are still under construction – the men from Myerstown are busy digging ditches and laying conduit and building roofs. We returned to the mission complex in time for lunch and a rest. Andre stopped by to catch up on the news for a while. His team of evangelists has successfully planted 10 new churches , and are about to be deployed to 10 new locations. They're taking the Gospel to people who live in poverty , in the shadow of Muslim invaders , and without much hope. It's an amazing story of how the story of Jesus is still changing lives.

Whoa! A thunderstorm is brewing! We were hoping Francois Ngoumape would come by today and give us last-minute instructions , but he hasn't come. I still don't know for sure which group I'm teaching , or if I'm preaching in chapel tomorrow. Oh , well. It's an exciting thing for an American to come to this culture where details and plans seem so unnecessary.

Thanks for your prayers! I'll write again as soon as I can!

In Christ ,

Greg Ryerson

Date: Wednesday, October 13, 2010, 2:19 PM

We're here! We arrived safely in Bangui at 5:00pm today (Noon EDT). There was the usual panic at the airport as everyone scrambled to get their luggage. It was beginning to look like my 2 bags had been lost again , but they were the very last ones that came through on the carousel. (Figures. First bags in , last bags off.)

I'll write more later. We're eager to eat a bite then hit the sack. No responsibilities till Friday. Thanks for praying , everyone!

Love in Christ ,

Greg