

May 13, 2010

A More In-Depth Summary of MMD ministry

I have just finished a great week in Mozambique with the leaders of our African team, More Than a Mile Deep (MMD). Our own Entrust president, David Goodman, and I met with the MMD director to tighten our relational ties to MMD, understand and see what they are doing and how we can better partner with them, and to discuss various critical issues that face the ministry.

Things you should know:

- This program was commissioned by one of the main associations of evangelical churches in Africa.
- The students of the program can earn an accredited Bachelor of Theology degree (recognized by the South African government) once they complete the work.
- The program is designed to see real transformation in lives, in the church, and in the community via courses that address real practical African issues (like Aids, poverty, wholistic ministry etc) while still providing an evangelical and biblical theology. Transformation is also emphasized through required practical assignments which have the students actually do things like interview people in the community or church, and do projects in which they put into practice what they learn.
- The students are already making an impact on their community even after taking one course.
- The fast growing denominations that tend to be less bound by tradition are very excited about this program because it produces pastors who actually can change things, rather than pastors who just know a lot. At the same time, they get a real accredited degree and not a watered down certificate.

Difficulties facing the program:

After only being in existence for 6 years now, we are evaluating several issues as part of normal course correction.

- We need a more stable financial base than that which is dependent on large gifts from foundations. With the global recession, these foundations are less available to make sizeable contributions on an ongoing basis. We are taking several steps to stabilize the financial situation.
- Because the program is offered as an accredited degree, students expect to be able to take several courses a year. However, because the program is new and is still being written, it is hard to provide a succession of courses in a timely manner. We discussed how to do rapidly increase the number of available courses. We now hope to have a program with 8 course by the end of this year (twice the current number), then 8 more by 2011, and 8 more by the end of 2012.
- The training is still being done by a relative small number of teachers. The staff here need more coaching on how to multiply their ministry by training local leaders to be the teachers and trainers. We can provide them more strategic guidance on how to find the best leaders to do this and what they need to do to build those leaders. My experiences in Cameroon may be very helpful here. In Cameroon we have trained 10-12 leaders who have trained other pastors who are training their own church leaders (three generations, four if you include me). In one year that multiplication system went from having 12 students to over 200 students.

One of the real encouraging things here is that the potential of the program is enormous. There are several organizations and countries that are eager to start when the infrastructure and financing is ready to support the growth. But right now we have to concentrate on stabilizing that structure so that we can move forward.

I visited several villages where I met people suffering with poverty and/or HIV/AIDS. These are people who are not taking courses but are being ministered to by people who are taking the courses.

One of our students was helping by working with three families one hour per family every week training them about health issues and helping them plant a vegetable garden and raise chickens. This is something that nearly every family can do but just isn't practiced. As a result of the example that these families had in the community, probably a hundred families in the immediate area also started their own gardens. The gardens are particularly important for people with AIDS because they need good nutrition if they are to be able to use the medicines available to combat the disease.