

Rockrohr News and Notes July 2015

Dear Friends,

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Although our LCMS missionary service ended last September, many of you have continued to remember us in prayer during our time of transition to life in the U.S. as well as the year of treatment, healing and recovery for Carl's back injury sustained in Ethiopia a year ago in May. We want to thank you for your prayers and tell you how God is answering them with numerous blessings in life and family.

The "Back"

As Carl and Deborah traveled about in July and August 2014 visiting supporting congregations it became more and more apparent that the back injury Carl sustained in Ethiopia was not going to get better on its own. By the end of August Carl could not stand or walk without pain. Since late August Carl was under the care of a very good back surgeon here



Our eldest son, Paul, was ordained and installed as pastor at St. Luke Lutheran Church in Golden, CO on June 28. Son Ted and our daughter, Rebecca (in Deaconess uniform with her son Eli) attended as well as extended family. Paul's wife Stacy and new son, Andrew, are in center.

in Ft. Wayne, and we have traveled the long route of medication, physical therapy, nerve block, and finally a fusion surgery of the L5-S1 vertebrae in mid-January. As is normal, the post-surgery recovery progress was difficult to observe day by day, but easier to notice week by week. One of the great milestones in all this was that Carl was able to conduct an entire worship service with preaching and Bible study on May 31st. That was exactly one year and a day after the injury, when Carl was alone in Ethiopia without Deborah and was not able to get out of bed because of the intense pain and weakness. On June 3rd, Carl was fully released from doctor's care with no restrictions. We are ceaselessly thankful to God for His healing. We are thankful for God's leading to a doctor, medical team and physical therapist who could diagnose and treat the back injury. There is still strength needed to be regained, but the great nerve pain and weakness Carl experienced are immensely reduced. Common sense in activities and continued exercise are life-long requirements, but Carl is glad to be able to walk again, and even preach, teach and lead worship again.

High School Education *and* Employment

Our decision last summer to settle in Ft. Wayne was strongly influenced by our desire to enroll Ted in a Lutheran high school, especially with football which Ted wanted to try for the first time during his sophomore year. At Concordia Lutheran High School in Ft. Wayne (about 750 students) Ted was involved in the summer sports and football training starting in July 2014 and played defensive end on the reserve team (something like junior-varsity) last fall. His academic studies also proceeded well and he sang in the Men's Chorus during the year. The high school choir and band programs at Concordia are well developed and we enjoyed wonderful Christmas and Spring Concerts. Ted also participated in Track as a spring sport, running the 400m; 4 x 400m relay; and throwing shot-put and discus. This summer Ted's days continue to be filled with sports conditioning, football practices and now also driver's education courses.

The Lord led us to see our family's need to be together during Ted's high school years in early 2014, and He led us to return from Africa to settle in Ft. Wayne. This turn of events we did not anticipate, but even more to our astonishment was that Ted's place of education in 2014-2015 would lead to a full-time call as Deaconess for Deborah in 2015. Deborah has officially started her new work at Concordia Lutheran High School in July and is working on the courses she will teach this coming year, Old Testament and Comparative Religions. In addition, Concordia is reworking their entire theology curriculum so that it will include 8 semesters of courses instead of 5 semesters. So Deborah will also be drawing on her doctoral studies and dissertation (which analyzed LCMS university theology curriculum for Lutheran school teachers) in her work. While an intentional goal of her Ed.D. studies was to prepare her for new avenues of service to the Church, we did not at all anticipate this particular avenue of service. We daily rejoice and are amazed at God's leading.

"Send Me"

In Isaiah 6:8 the prophet Isaiah recorded,

"And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"
Then I said, "Here I am! Send me."

Twice in our church work careers Carl and Deborah have responded "send us" to Africa; to Ghana in 1992-1998 and to South Africa and Ethiopia in 2011-14. We have loved the service and it has formed us and our family to be who we are. The turn of events which brought us back to the U.S. this past year has led us to daily pray and ponder "What now, O Lord?" It has become plainly obvious that we needed to be together with Ted for these high school years. But what has also become clear to us this past year is that the Lord Jesus "sent us back" to the U.S. for several other reasons we did not anticipate: to receive decisive medical treatment for Carl's back injury (the medical care Carl has received could not have been done anywhere in Africa); to care for our older children in a year of great transition; and to assist with Lutheran education in the U.S. at a time when U.S. culture and politics is arguably less tolerant of biblical Christianity than in most of Africa.

Family Transitions

Our eldest son, Paul, received the Master of Divinity degree from Concordia Theological Seminary in Ft. Wayne this May. Paul seriously considered staying for an additional year of graduate studies, but after much prayer and discussion decided against it. In April Paul received a call to be the pastor at St. Luke Lutheran Church in Golden, Colorado (a suburb of Denver). Stacy worked her first full year as a fully licensed pharmacist in the Ft. Wayne area with Walmart. She is making arrangements to continue her work with Walmart in the Denver area. Paul and Stacy moved to Colorado at the end of June with Carl, Deborah and Ted helping (as well as many other helpers!). On June 28th Paul was ordained and installed into the ministry at St. Luke. Carl was privileged to preach for Paul's ordination service.

Of course these changes in Paul and Stacy's life have been further blessed with the birth of a son on April 12, Andrew Edwin Rockrohr. It was a difficult pregnancy, and we were thankful to be living just a few doors away this past year and able to help out in various ways. Andrew was born 5 weeks premature, and his initial condition was such that Paul and Stacy asked Carl to baptize him in the hospital the first night after his birth, with Pastor Mommens of St. John, Columbia City also overseeing the baptism. It was a very moving time as all five, Andrew, Paul, Stacy, Pastor Mommens and Carl were strengthened and encouraged with God's promises in Holy Baptism for little Andrew. Andrew was in neonatal intensive care for 10 days and then was released to go home. His strength and development continue to improve. He now weighs over 11 lbs and is doing well.

Our second son, Jim, has completed his training as an artillery officer for the U.S. Marines. His new wife, Megan, has been apart from him for about 5 months as she lived with her parents in Wisconsin. As Paul and Stacy moved west to Colorado at the end of June, Jim and Megan moved east to Jim's new home base on the east coast. They expect to be there three years, have bought a house, and Megan is hoping to teach again in grade school or middle school. We are proud of Jim's work and accomplishments, but unfortunately these times of insecurity even in the U.S. prevent us from giving more details in this newsletter. Suffice it to say they are a great Christian couple and they are doing well.

Our daughter, Rebecca, is expecting her second child in late August. She and Scott continue to thrive in their calls to St. Paul Lutheran Church in Hillsdale, Michigan. Scott is the Associate Pastor and Rebecca is a Deaconess at the congregation. Their first child, Eli (our first grandchild) turned one year old on June 4. Eli is very friendly, active and inquiring. He crawls all around very fast now, just on the verge of walking by himself – and we expect he will soon be *running* all over!

All of our married children have had many events and changes in their lives during the last year. We have been able to provide physical help with moves and child care, as well as counsel and encouragement as they have thought about and worked through various issues and challenges in their respective lives. So we "were sent back" to the U.S. by the Lord Jesus to attend to these three young couples as well as to be with Ted. The Lord's timing has amazed us; He loves us and cares for our family so very deeply.

Service In and From the U.S.

This of course leaves Carl with the question, “And now, O Lord?” The process of separation from the mission board showed us the challenge of what to do with returning missionaries is not well addressed by LCMS policy. In the 2013 national convention of the LCMS a resolution was passed (Resolution 3-10A) to study the problem and opportunity of integrating returning missionaries and military chaplains back into service in the U.S. Missionaries come back changed people with new knowledge, skills and worldviews that often don’t easily fit back into U.S. culture and ministry.

Despite the human challenges of our denomination’s policies and procedures, we see our Lord Jesus guiding us. Carl has been asked to serve as part-time guest professor for the Ph.D. in Missiology and Doctor of Ministry programs at Concordia Theological Seminary here in Ft. Wayne. In Fall 2014 Carl taught the Ph.D. course “Church Planting and Growth.” He is scheduled to teach another Ph.D. course this fall, “Issues in International Theological Education,” and also in January 2016 “Theology of Mission” for the D.Min. program. A very encouraging factor is that Carl and Deborah have not left Africa entirely, because colleagues and good friends from Africa are coming to study at the seminary in Ft. Wayne. There are Ghanaians, South Africans, Kenyans, Ethiopians and others all taking up studies at Ft. Wayne whom Carl and Deborah first met in Africa. Carl may even end up being an instructor for some of them in his adjunct professor work.

There is another “big project” that Carl has begun to undertake: a Lutheran doctrine book for use in Africa. We have seen in numerous times and settings in Africa the need for a Lutheran doctrine book written specifically for use in Africa. Carl has had opportunity to serve in several African Lutheran churches and has studied African theologians since 1993. We see this present



Rev. John Nkambule (left center) and Rev. Abdi Tadesse (right) recently visited Carl, Deborah and Ted in Ft. Wayne. Rev. John was a colleague from our work in South Africa and Rev. Abdi from Ethiopia. Both men are new students in the Ph.D. in Missiology at Concordia Theological Seminary in Ft. Wayne where Carl is a guest instructor.

period of recovery and part-time work as a time when this writing can take place. A number of Carl’s colleagues have privately encouraged this effort, and some have offered their expertise. This book is not for royalties or profit, but the design is to freely offer the digital copy to African Christian churches and institutions to be printed locally at their own expense. Besides very few Lutheran doctrine materials written specifically for the African setting, another big problem is the cost of materials and transport to Africa. Yet any major city in Africa has businesses that can publish books in a variety of qualities and formats. Copyright issues with printing U.S. published books in Africa are also a challenge. For this book Carl will maintain the copyright, but plans to

give permission for free local printing. Many topics in the doctrine books will be familiar, but specific emphasis on African topics will shape the writing. Carl's dissertation "Jesus' Sacrifice Death in an African Context" will contribute to the project as well. Carl plans to put more details of the project on our website (www.rockrohr.net) in August.

So in effect, we also see our return to the U.S. as an opportunity to continue work for Africa in ways which were not possible before.

Prayer Requests

1. Thanksgiving to God for healing of Carl's back. Thanksgiving for such a good medical team. Petitions that Carl continues to heal well through the coming year.
2. Thanksgiving and petitions for God's blessings upon Ted's studies and Deborah's teaching at Concordia Lutheran High School in Ft. Wayne.
3. Thanksgiving for the blessings upon our family, Paul, Stacy, and Andrew Rockrohr; Jim and Megan Rockrohr; Scott, Rebecca, Eli and yet-to-be-born baby Johnson.
4. Guidance and stamina for Carl to carry out his part-time paid but full-time work of teaching and writing.

Future Newsletters and Communication

We hope this newsletter helps bring closure and transition in the thoughts and prayers of all who supported us during our South African and Ethiopian ministry adventures in 2011-2014. We have sent this letter in paper copies as well as digital to include those whom we believe do not have easy access to the internet. Concerning digital correspondence we continue to be accessible at rockrohrpress@mailbox.org. Those to whom we mailed paper copies can write back at the return address on the envelope.

Deborah and Carl will both continue to teach and write. We are available to speak about the work in Africa. In the coming months we will likely publish writings and other resources. If you are interested to continue receiving newsletters from us we will be sending them automatically. Feel free to "unsubscribe" at the bottom of any newsletter (we use "MailChimp"), or drop us an email. We will no longer send out paper copies of our newsletter unless someone writes or emails us requesting that we send a paper copy.

Stand Upon Jesus and His Word Alone

Our new ministry tasks in the U.S. as well as the ongoing deterioration of general spiritual condition of our population in the U.S. compel us to contemplate how we will continue to witness to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of all people. It is no exaggeration to say that now in many African countries historic Christianity is more welcome by the general population than in the U.S.

Militant Islam is a big problem in some African countries, but in many African countries Christianity is well established if not the majority faith. When talking about Christianity in Africa Prof. John Pless of Concordia Theological Seminary recently said to Carl, "I frequently tell my students that there are now more Lutherans in church on Sunday in Africa than in North

America and Europe combined.” It is the same with many other Christian denominations in Africa. We recently saw a missionary recruiting poster, “Africa needs the Gospel now more than ever.” This phrase does *not* accurately relate the situation in Africa. There are far more active Christians in Africa than in North America; there are far more Lutherans! When one lives in Africa and studies Christianity in Africa for longer periods of time, one gets to see the deep faith of many Christians in Africa. It is not a continent full of unbelieving pagans! The Lord Jesus has richly blessed Africa through centuries of work by both African and foreign missionaries. It is a continent full of active, confessing Christians! Any other statement ignores the reality of God’s mission in Africa. Missionaries are still needed in specific areas of teaching and Christian mercy work in Africa, but the vast majority of these opportunities are in partnership with already well-established Christian churches. Instead, all recent surveys and studies of Christianity in Africa and the U.S. show that it is in the U.S. that the general population is increasingly abandoning Biblical faith and morals – not Africa!

As our U.S. society and even some parts of the “church” continue to abandon the true teachings of Jesus Christ in the Bible, we encourage you to stand fast in your faith in Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Friends and supporters encouraged and supported us to speak of Jesus in Africa, sometimes in very difficult and even dangerous situations. Now it is getting to be such times in the U.S. Don’t be afraid to say, pray and share the name of Jesus and the message of His salvation available to all people. Depend on Jesus Christ, forsaking all others. We are very close to the time, if not probably already there, that missionary efforts to Africa are needed less than our own U.S. congregations reaching out in much more decisive and fearless ways in the U.S. to bear witness to our spiritually rebellious and dying culture.

A recent PEW study showed that now in 2015, 23% -- almost one out of four-- of the U.S. population is either atheist, agnostic or believes nothing religious at all. PEW calls this group of people the “nones” and it has quickly grown from 16% of the U.S. population in 2007. There is no nation in Africa in which a belief in the Creator is denied and ignored by such a large percentage of the population. Faithful witness is greatly needed in the U.S. See <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape>.

"Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."

Jude 24-25

Our love in Christ,

Carl and Deborah Rockrohr
Ft. Wayne, Indiana
rockrohrpress@mailbox.org