



February 2018

In a nutshell: After a good Christmas break, we are into another busy semester with lots of discipleship opportunities.

Christmas and New Year

December is a very quiet month at the seminary – exams happen early in December and then everyone goes home for a month. It was nice to have a quieter month, as last semester was very busy, and this semester will also be busy. Over the Christmas break we have had some building going on in the house. One result of this is that Asha now has her own bedroom, rather than having to share with the boys. She is getting quite grown-up and enjoying having her own space. We got a cabin bed made for Conor's birthday, with a desk underneath, which he is also delighted with. We enjoyed attending the SIM conference at Miango in early January. The kids enjoyed the kids' programme and there was plenty of free time.

Family life

School is going well. For the past couple of months we have employed a teaching assistant, Auntie Nyella, to help cover the variety of subjects we want to learn at the different levels. This is also enabling us to allow Talatu to join us in classes. Talatu is one of the older girls from Girls Brigade. She has been going to school, but has not been able to read a single word, in spite of copying pages of writing off the blackboard. She will be in Kagoro for the next few months and I (Alanna) am hoping that we can teach her a basic level of reading before she goes back to stay with her dad in May, and returns to school. Over Christmas I intended to do some planning for the semester ahead, but found that I was busier than ever in spite of the seminary being quite empty. I know that time invested in planning will make other aspects of life more efficient, so I hope to be able to make some good progress. I've also been trying to introduce more healthy eating and exercise patterns for me and the kids, with some success, but I'm aware of how often good habits break down after a while, so I want to remain committed to that.



Asha, Conor and Jack out and about with one of the students (Ezekiel)

Teaching and Preaching

The semester here always gets off to a slightly slow start. Students are under pressure to pay in at least a reasonable percentage of the school fees they owe, before they are allowed to register for the semester. That means the first couple of weeks are a bit scattered. However that is all now finished, and semester is underway properly. I (Rick) am teaching a couple of discipleship courses, and also several theology courses. One of the discipleship courses (called 'Spiritual Life') is the one we run for brand new students who are just starting at the seminary. This semester there are about 50 people, but it has been going particularly well. The first hour is all together, then in the second hour the class splits into small groups, which are led by the older students. In Chapel we are doing a series on Hebrews, but I'm doing a little less preaching (roughly every other week).

The Seminary generally

This semester the seminary also has a new Provost (i.e. principal). This is a major change for the seminary because the Provost sets the tone for so many things, and is in charge of a lot of policy decisions. So far, things are going well – relationships are good and the transition has gone smoothly.

Counselling and Mentoring

As before, many of the new students are coming with a range of personal issues (including pornography use, alcohol and drug abuse, sexual immorality and theft). The number of people keen to open up about problems and start to tackle them is encouraging – but it is a big task. I've had important conversations with over 200 students – it is difficult to follow up properly! As a way of beginning to tackle this, I am running a couple of 'experimental' small practical classes this semester, in addition to my normal classes, to do with 'mentoring'. I will be mentoring four MA-level students. They will each mentor about four third- or fourth-year BA students, and the BA students will mentor about four new (first year) students. So this should provide a way of offering some level of follow-up to 50 or 60 new students. That doesn't solve the whole problem, but it is a good step in the right direction. I am also hopeful that the seminary may, in due course, be able to take on some extra staff to help in this area.

Car

Over the past several weeks we have had more trouble than normal with our car - a few breakdowns and lots of repairs. We have recently replaced a number of items - brake pads and drums, various steering components, shocks, etc. Hopefully that will mean things are now sorted out for a while with no more breakdowns in the near future!

Give thanks for:

- Teaching, preaching and counselling all going really well
- Continued safety (including travel) and health
- God's provision of money for the building work - the blessing that has been both for us, and financially for the students who we were able to employ to do the work
- Auntie Nyella's enthusiasm to help Alanna teach the kids

Please pray for:

- The students who have begun to change for the better will continue in what they have started
- Increasing culture of discipleship among the seminary community
- God's provision - students struggle to pay their school fees, and sometimes struggle even to have food to eat (economically things are still very hard)
- Talatu to pick up reading skills quickly so she can make meaningful progress at school
- Good rest, and for Alanna to make wise decisions about weekly patterns for the family and then successfully implement them
- Peace and stability - there is still unrest in many parts of the country
- Continued safety in travel

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