

the
Pierce Report 
 A Newsletter from Jason and Devan Pierce

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Bula from Fiji! I hope that this newsletter finds everyone doing well. I know that it is a difficult time for many of you in the U.S. right now. Even here in Fiji, we are currently in the midst of a lockdown that has made life and work challenging. But we trust that God is great, and He can continue to do good things through His people.

With that thought in mind, I am thankful for the opportunity to share some positive news with you from the work in Fiji. I must apologize for the lengthy absence of a newsletter. But, as I hope you will be able to see from this report, the last few months have been extremely busy with the work here. Truthfully, more has happened than I have space to report! Thankfully, the work has been largely going well, and there is plenty of good news to report.



2 TIMOTHY 2:2

“...what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men.”



Meet Our 2020 Class!

In February, we resumed classes at the Bible Institute at Raiwaqa. We are pleased to announce that our program is growing. This term, we have five returning full-time students (Lesio Saurara, Jacinta Saurara, Etika Mesulama, Nancy Sailo, and Moira Lee). In addition to these, we have added several new students to the program. In the last week of January, Petelo and Moana Tulaga moved to Fiji to enroll in BIR. The Tulaga family comes from Samoa. They are joined by their five-year-old son, Jimi. Brother Petelo (who goes by Peter) helps with the preaching responsibilities at the Vaimoso congregation in Apia, Samoa. Brother Petelo is such an encouraging person. He is always smiling and greeting everyone, and he takes his studies very seriously. While he struggles with the English at times, he is working hard to study and learn so that he can be more effective at preaching and teaching. His wife has also joined him in the classes and is doing well. We have also been joined by two of the (grown) daughters of one of our 2019 graduates, brother Kitone. Brother Kiti wants his daughters to have a deeper understanding of the word of God.

The new year has also brought us a returning face. Brother Movono Roko was enrolled in BIR as a full-time student in 2017-2018. Brother Movono comes to us from the Dalaidamanu congregation. By car, the trip out to his village takes an hour and a half each way. This was a real challenge for him, but he continued to make the trip four-days a week (five days a week during short courses). Unfortunately, the distance and other obligations prevented him from finishing some of the courses needed to graduate. Thankfully, Brother Movono has returned this year to complete the missing courses. Not only that, but he did not come alone! He brought with him Brother Tupou, who is also from his village. Brother Tupou enrolled a couple of weeks late, so we are having to work to catch him up. But we are thankful to have him as part of our program.

We did lose one student this term. Sister Tupou Sasalu (the wife of one of our 2018 graduates, Semi Sasalu) has been unable to attend classes this term. Sister Tupou was having some health problems that required surgery during the term. We are grateful to be able to report that she is recovering well from the surgery. However, we are uncertain if she will be able to return to classes this year or not.



A New Year Begins...

This is Year Two of our two-year program, which means it is actually the tougher year. This is particularly true, because we introduce our students to Biblical Greek. Lord willing, the students will have three courses in the Greek language this year. While we can only introduce the students to an elementary understanding of the language, our goal is to give them enough tools that they will be able to use advanced commentaries and reference materials to improve their personal study of the New Testament. In the first term, we introduce the students to the Greek alphabet and the Greek noun system. While it has certainly been a challenge for our students, they have risen to the occasion. Most of them are doing quite well. In addition to teaching the course on Greek, I am teaching two other courses. The first course is Old Testament Prophets I, which focuses on the Major Prophets (Isaiah-Daniel). Because the material is so lengthy, we are unable to do a verse-by-verse study. Instead, we are using a survey approach which introduces the students to the author, key themes, and the overall structure of each book. In the course, we study sample passages from each book which give a representation of the type of material in the book. Each unit also includes a section called, "Finding Christ" which focuses upon Messianic prophecies within the book. The final course I am teaching this term is New Testament Foundation of Missions. In this course, we focus on the Biblical call for Christians to be evangelistic.

Our students are taking three other courses this term. Rocco Pierce has already completed one course on the Sermon on the Mount. He is currently teaching a course on Expository Preaching/Teaching. In this course, the students will learn how to develop and deliver an expository lesson. Lord willing, the male students will deliver their lessons in front of the entire class, and the female students will deliver their lessons separately in front of my mother (Debbie) and my wife (Devan). The final course of the term is Writings of John. This year, we were blessed to have Tony Duncan (from the Brushy congregation in Middle Tennessee) to teach the first two weeks of the course. Brother Tony taught the section on the epistles of John (1-3 John). After he left, Brother Emosi Sailo taught the section on the gospel of John.



The Coronavirus... Yes, it's here, too!

Like many of you, our lives have been impacted by the global outbreak of the coronavirus. On Thursday, March 19, the government announced the first confirmed case of the coronavirus in Fiji. This person was a flight attendant with Fiji Airways. Unfortunately, this person did not follow the government's quarantine guidelines after showing symptoms. The result was that the government completely shut down the town of Lautoka (where the man was staying), cutting off all traffic in and out of the town. In addition to this, the government banned all gatherings of more than twenty individuals (including churches) and shut down all public schools for all of Fiji.



Over that weekend, the number rose to five, with three of the cases related to direct contact with the infected flight attendant. The lone exception was a person who had become infected in New Zealand but had remained isolated. Currently, the number remains at five with no fatalities. However, the government has now shut down all of the airports, stopped all international travel into and out of Fiji, and restricted all travel even between the various islands of Fiji. Initially, we had hoped to be able to keep the school operational, since our total numbers were below the twenty-person limit. However, it began presenting a problem because several of our students have children who have been dismissed from school. Some of them were having a hard time finding a place for their children to go. We could not allow the children to come to the school, because it would have placed us over the twenty-person limit. Then, following the fifth person diagnosed with the illness (this time in Suva, where we are located), the government then advised that all non-essential businesses shut down for a period of two weeks. Based upon the guidelines of the government and the concerns expressed by our students, we made the decision to take a three-week break from the school – which will carry us up through the Easter weekend.

The initial meeting ban is in place for two-weeks, although it may be extended beyond that. At this time, we are hoping that we will be able to resume our normal operations after Easter. However, in the event that Fiji follows the examples of other nations in the world and extends the guidelines indefinitely, Dad and I are working on finding a solution that will allow us to continue teaching remotely. Please pray that we will be able to resume our program soon.

Suspending school for three weeks is not the only challenge this virus has brought to the work here. Due to travel restrictions, we have had to cancel four short courses that were scheduled for April and May. We are hoping it will be possible to reschedule some or all of them later in the year. We have also had to cancel a planned trip for the students to attend the Fiji workshop in Savusavu, where several of our students were scheduled to speak (as well as Dad, Cory, and myself). Due to the ban on large assemblies, we have had to divide our congregation into six meeting groups spread throughout the city – keeping each group to under twenty. Devan and I are hosting one of the groups for Sunday worship in our home. Our group includes four families who all live in our neighborhood and one single woman who lives not far from us. Like many of you, we are eagerly awaiting the day when we can once again meet together with the full congregation to worship.

Night School!

One of the highlights of the last few months has been the launching of our new Congregational Leadership Certificate Program. As I mentioned in my previous report, this program was launched as a night program to help train local Fijian Christians who are unable to attend our full-time program due to work. This is a three-year, twelve-course program that is held one night a week. Each year, we will offer four courses that last for eight weeks. Each course will include a total of 24 in class hours plus homework assignments. At the end of three years, students will receive a certificate of completion. Plus, if they choose to enroll in the full-time program in the future, the course credits will transfer.

I am excited to say that this program is off to a great start. We have already completed the first two courses in the program. The first course was *Life of Christ*. Nine students completed that course. The second course was *1-2 Peter and Jude*. We had seven students to participate in it. Both of these courses were taught by Brother Emosi Sailo. The next course on the schedule is *Preparation and Delivery of a Sermon*. Lord willing, Dad will be teaching that course when classes resume.



Special Guests: Tony and Cathy Duncan

One of the blessings we have received this year was to have a visit from Tony and Cathy Duncan. Tony and Cathy are members of the Brushy Church of Christ in Brushy, Tennessee. This is Tony's third visit to the Fiji work. As mentioned earlier, Tony taught in our program for two weeks on the Epistles of John. In addition to teaching in the school, Tony also taught several Bible classes for the Raiwaqa Church of Christ. As always, Tony did an outstanding job with everything.

While they were here, Cathy also helped teach a children's Saturday Bible School at the Raiwaqa congregation for all of the children ages 4-12. In total, we had around 35 children to participate in the program. Cathy taught the classes, Devan and Mom (along with help from Cory and Caleb) did the crafts that sister Cathy had prepared, and I led the children in some songs. The event was a huge success, and the children loved it. We are so grateful to Tony and Cathy for all that they do to encourage our work here in Fiji.

Teaching and Youth Coordinator

One of the reasons that I have fallen behind in my reporting recently is that I have taken on some new responsibilities with the Raiwaqa congregation. This year, I have been asked to take on the responsibilities of coordinating the teaching and youth programs. This means that I am the one who is responsible for coordinating all of our teaching programs for the year for all of the age groups. It is my responsibility to make sure that we have teachers in all classes, to make sure we have budgets to get supplies for the classes, to oversee the selection of curriculum, and to communicate the needs of the teachers to the parents. Thankfully, we have a committee of teachers who all work together to share the load. We have regular meetings to discuss any needs the teachers have, which I am then responsible for reporting during the monthly men's meetings.

In addition to coordinating the teaching ministry, I have also been placed over the youth program for this year. As a part of this ministry, we have youth gatherings for our older youth (13 years and up) on two Friday nights each month. For the first meeting of the year, we had a special gathering for the youth. Devan cooked nachos for the kids, we had a short devotional, and then we watched the movie, *Paul, An Apostle of Christ*. Since then, we have had two other gatherings (the rest have been canceled due to government restrictions on gatherings). My son, Cory, delivered the message for one of them. Paul, who is attending our night program, spoke at the other. It was Paul's first time publicly teaching. He did a great job!

One of the new things that we have added to our youth program is a Pew Packers program. Each Sunday, we have the young kids (ages 4-12) come to the front of the auditorium fifteen minutes before the start of our evening worship service. I sing a couple of songs with the kids, and then I ask them trivia questions from the Bible. On the first Sunday, we had just five kids. However, the program has continued to grow. On the last Sunday night that we were able to meet, it took two pews to hold all of the kids!

Bob McKenzie

On a sad note, I want to report on the passing of Brother Bob McKenzie. Brother Bob was one of the oldest members in the congregation. He has been a stronger leader and support in the Raiwaqa congregation. He was also one of the strongest advocates for bringing the BIR program to Fiji. At the end of last year, brother Bob suffered from a major stroke which left him bedridden. Sadly, he died at his home on Sunday, March 15. Brother Bob greeted me every single service with a smile and a handshake. He was one of the most encouraging men I have known. We will all miss him greatly.

Austin Is Off to FHU!

On a positive note, Devan and I were blessed to have Austin be able to come home and visit us in Fiji during the Christmas holidays! He was able to spend five weeks with us. It was such a wonderful gift! This was made possible by the generosity of several members of the Henderson (TN) Church of Christ. I cannot begin to express the joy that we experienced having our full family together for the holidays. Thank