

the
Pierce Report 

A Newsletter from Jason and Devan Pierce

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2 TIMOTHY 2:2

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

Greetings!

Bula from Fiji! I hope that this newsletter finds everyone doing well. We are doing well here in Fiji. Like most of the world, this year has been filled with plenty of ups and downs. On the positive side, Fiji has remained largely untouched by the Covid-19 virus which has wreaked havoc on so many nations in the world. During the initial surge of cases, Fiji had around 18 positive cases of the virus among the local population. All of these patients have been discharged with no deaths. The country has remained Covid-free among the general population for over 200 days. During that time, the only active cases of Covid-19 have been among Fijians being repatriated back to Fiji from other countries. Due to strict isolation protocols, the people with the virus have never come into contact with the general population. This means that we are able to largely move around freely on a daily basis with no need to wear a mask at this time. There are still some bans on large gatherings, but most activities have resumed back to normal. On the negative side, the way that Fiji has been able to keep the virus out of the country is by shutting itself down from all outside travel (with the exception of occasional repatriation flights). This means that there is no more travel in or out of the country. This isolation from the world has been a big blow against the Fijian economy which relies heavily upon tourism to bring money into the country. Numerous people have lost jobs with the closing of resorts and the airlines. The situation has reached a point where government officials have recently announced that the country must reopen or face complete economic collapse. Please pray for the government and people of Fiji as they face some difficult decisions in the coming days.

* Cancelled Travel Plans

Due to the cost of international travel for our family, Devan and I made the decision when we began this work that we would only come home every other year to report to our supporters and visit with our families. Normally, that would mean that we would be on an airplane this week headed back to see many of you in person. Unfortunately, the coronavirus outbreak has changed that! Fiji has shut down nearly all flights out of the country (the only exceptions being the occasional repatriation flights to get stranded citizens back home). If we were to find a way back to the U.S., there is no guarantee that we would be able to return to Fiji to continue our work before the start of the next school year. On top of that, there is the simple fact that there is the possibility that we would not actually be able to meet with many of our supporting congregations due to lockdowns in various parts of the U.S.

Therefore, we have made the decision in coordination with our overseeing elders that we will not be coming home to report this year. This has not been an easy decision for our family. We were looking forward to seeing you all and sharing our work with you in person. It is especially hard knowing that we will not be able to see our oldest son, Austin, or visit with parents, grandparents, siblings, and the rest of our family during the holidays this year. However, we believe that this is the best decision for our work. We ask that all of our supporters please be patient and continue to support our work through this difficult time.

Missing Our Short Course Teachers!

One of the biggest challenges that we have faced this year has been the loss of our short course teachers. Each year we typically offer six short courses which are taught by teachers from outside of Fiji. These courses give our students a break from hearing the same teachers all of the time, and they give them a different perspective. They also are a time of great encouragement to us.

This year, we were only able to have one visiting teacher (Brother Tony Duncan) who came in February. He was actually coming in addition to our normal six teachers that we had scheduled. Due to the travel restrictions to Fiji, we ended up having to cancel all of our regularly scheduled short course teachers. This means that Dad, Emosi, and I have had to work together to develop a plan for covering those courses.

I would like to give my thanks to brothers Terry Pafford and Tim Ashley for sending audio recordings to teach their classes. Brother Pafford is an elder in Midland, Texas. He taught our class on Psalms and Job. Brother Ashley is a medical doctor and elder in Killen, Alabama. He taught a class on the Minister's Health. Dad was able to present the recordings to the class, cover the in-class discussion, and proctor the exams. We appreciate these men for their hard work in difficult circumstances.

The rest of the courses were covered by our full-time teaching staff. This meant we all ended up teaching some extra courses along the way. I ended up teaching an extra session of Greek Grammar. I also ended up teaching short courses on Survey of the Bible and New Testament Worship. I would like to apologize for missing my last newsletter (which generally goes out in late August or early September). During the time I would normally have written that report, I was busy trying to write two new courses in time to teach them. I thank you for your patience!

On to the Good News...!

The truth is, I generally prefer to keep my newsletters positive and focus upon the blessings of the work that we are doing. While it is true that this year has presented many challenges to our work, it has also brought many blessings. With the remainder of this newsletter, I want to share with you some of the positive things that are going on with our work here in Fiji.

Changing Schedules

It is true that the coronavirus forced us to make some radical changes to our schedule this year. In February, we never would have imagined a five-week break while we were on total lockdown. Nor would we have imagined having to teach classes through video recordings loaded on tablets. We certainly could not have foreseen the possibility of not being able to finish all of our courses in time for graduation. Yet, God continued to provide a way for us to teach and grow. Many of those things have turned out to be blessings. We even managed to finish up in time for our graduation date!

One of the biggest changes to our program was in how we approached our schedule. In the past, we have divided our courses into three terms with students taking four to six classes at a time. In order to get all of our courses completed in time for graduation, we had to scrap that schedule. Instead, we went to a model where we offered just two courses at a time (one in the morning and one in the evening) for a period of two or three weeks. What we learned is that our students actually did better in many of the courses, because they were able to concentrate on just two subjects at a time - rather than four, five, or six. The students liked the model so well that we have decided to implement that model in the future. Starting in 2021, we hope to schedule two classes at a time for three weeks each for the entire program. The exception will be short courses, which will continue to be offered for two-weeks to accommodate the needs of our teachers visiting from overseas.

Another unexpected twist to 2020 was the fact that we ended up teaching more classes and some different courses than our regular schedule in order to complete the year on-time. This year, I ended up teaching four sessions of Greek Grammar, Old Testament Prophets 1 and 2, New Testament Missions, Christian Evidences, Survey of the Bible, and New Testament Worship. I can honestly say that I enjoyed teaching all of them.



Rocco Pierce teaching at BIR.



BIR Students taking an exam.

2020 Graduation @ BIR

The biggest news for this report is that we made it to graduation on October 31, 2020! Like everything else, graduation did not go exactly as planned. Normally, we end the school calendar with two weeks of short courses and graduation. This has two benefits. The first is that it frees Dad and I up from teaching to work on getting everything together for graduation. The second is that the short course teachers generally stay and deliver the speeches for the graduation. Unfortunately, this year we were unable to have any visiting teachers. However, the Lord continued to provide for our needs. I want to express my sincere thanks to Terry Pafford (elder at the Westside congregation in Midland, Texas), Denny Petrillo (President of Bear Valley Bible Institute), and Keith Kasarjian (Director of Extensions for Bear Valley Bible Institute). Each of these men recorded a short video message which we were able to share during our graduation ceremonies. The speeches were outstanding and well-received. I also want to thank Lesio Saurara who gave a speech representing the graduates. He did an excellent job!

This year, we had six students to graduate. They are Moira Lee, Etika Mesulama, Movono Roko, Nancy Sailo, Jacinta Saurara, and Lesio Saurara. Moira is the wife of Peter Lee, a 2018 graduate and the school’s financial officer. Nancy is the wife of Emosi Sailo, a 2018 graduate and an instructor at BIR. Jacinta is the wife of fellow 2020 graduate Lesio Saurara. All three of these ladies are heavily involved in teaching children’s classes and ladies’ classes at the Raiwaqa church of Christ. Lesio is involved in teaching adult Bible classes and preaching at the Raiwaqa congregation. In the past, he has done a great deal of work with the youth in the congregation. This year, he has served as the church treasurer. He has also been considered as a potential elder of the congregation. Etika is involved with leading singing and taking part in the preaching rotation at the Raiwaqa congregation. He is our oldest graduate from the program. Movono does most of the preaching for the Delaidamanu congregation. He had been enrolled in our program during the first two years, but some family commitments had prevented him from completing all of his classes. This year, he came back to finish up his remaining courses. We are so proud of all of our graduates this year!



Moira Lee



Etika Mesulama



Movono Roko



Nancy Sailo



Jacinta Saurara



Lesio Saurara



2020 BIR Graduates and Faculty.



Graduation Banquet & Trivia Night



Graduation Cake (Donated by John & Sharon Nakabea)

A New Saturday Program in the West

There is an old saying, “When life hands you lemons, make lemonade.” The lemon of 2020 has been the fact that we cannot come home for reporting as planned. The lemonade has been that God has opened up a door for us to start some classes on the other side of the island. Dad and I have long wanted to do something to help the congregations on the western side of the island in Nadi, Lautoka, and Ba. My first trip into Fiji was in 2005, when I taught a PIBC course at Lautoka. The brethren of these congregations have always held a special place in my heart.

With the economic problems caused by Covid-19, rental prices have dropped significantly in Fiji. This allowed us to rent a small two-bedroom apartment in Nadi. We share the apartment (and cost) with my parents. It allows us to make regular trips to the West at a much cheaper cost than staying in hotels.

We have now started a Saturday program in the West. We travel to Nadi every other weekend. Dad and I each teach a class on Saturday (Dad teaches in the morning, and I teach in the afternoon). We have students who come from all three congregations. The congregations are working together to share the burden. The first four sessions were hosted by the Lautoka congregation, and the next four sessions are being hosted by the Nadi congregation. The host congregation provides the lunch and tea for everyone, while the other congregations are responsible for travel.

The classes have been great so far. Dad taught four sessions on principles of leadership from the book of Nehemiah. Currently, he is teaching a four-session course on Hermeneutics (how to interpret the Bible). I am teaching an eight-session course on Backgrounds of Early Christianity. We have been averaging 10 men attending each class. They have been very enthusiastic and engaged in the courses.

In addition to the men, Devan and Mom taught a children’s class one Saturday and invited the women to come and observe the class. They plan on teaching a women’s class the last two Saturdays of this cycle on how to teach children’s Bible classes.

In addition to teaching the Saturday classes, we also rotate visiting the Nadi and Lautoka congregations on Sundays. They often ask us to teach class or preach. We also enjoy those occasions when we get to hear the local brethren preach. We enjoy having the opportunity to encourage them, and they are certainly a big encouragement to us!



Rocco Pierce teaching in Lautoka.



Jason Pierce teaching in Lautoka.



Christian ladies in Lautoka.



Worshipping with some of the Christians in Nadi.

Night Program in Suva

All year, we have been reporting on our new night program. We are offering a shortened program that involves taking four classes a year over three years. This program is designed to target working Christians who cannot enroll in the full-time program but want to increase their Bible knowledge. The program meets for three hours on Monday nights for eight weeks for each class.

We continue to see tremendous growth from this program. Since the last newsletter, we have offered two more classes. Dad taught a class on Preparation and Delivery of a Sermon. This class was especially well-attended. We actually had three men from the Nadi congregation to make the four-hour drive every Monday in order to attend the class! They would drive up on Monday afternoon (sometimes after working that morning), take the class Monday evening, and then drive back to Nadi on Tuesday morning. A couple of them even had to use up their vacation time from work in order to attend the classes. Their efforts seem to be paying off! We are seeing more men sharing in the preaching responsibilities at the Nadi congregation, and they are improving in their preaching. In addition to the Nadi brothers, one of the other night students from Suva has begun participating in the preaching rotation at Raiwaqa - something he had never done before getting involved in the night classes. Currently, Emosi Sailo is teaching the final class of the year, which is Denominational Doctrines. Brother Emosi continues to do a wonderful job teaching classes in both the full-time and night programs, as well as directing the night program.

Family News

The Covid-19 restrictions have created problems with congregations meeting for worship here in Fiji just like the rest of the world. For a long period of time, we had to meet in small groups in homes. Even now, the Raiwaqa congregation has to meet in two different worship service times due to numerical restrictions on meeting in the building. However, God has used even this as a blessing. One such blessing with the smaller groups is that it has required more people to get involved in leading the assemblies. This has given opportunities for my boys to become more involved in leading in worship. Cory has even been asked to preach a couple of times. He has fallen in love with preaching and is currently looking at attending Bear Valley Bible Institute in Denver after graduating from high school. Cory and Caleb both regularly give devotional messages for the Lord's Supper and contribution during worship. I am thankful for these opportunities for my sons to grow in their love and service to the Lord.

With the easing of some of the restrictions on meetings, we have also been able to resume our Friday night youth gatherings. We are limiting them to just one Friday night a month. But so far we have had good attendance. Cory and Caleb continue to be heavily involved in the youth program. Cory taught our first youth devotional after the break. I taught the most recent one this past weekend. Caleb and Cory have both helped with leading singing. Lord willing, I will be directing one more youth meeting in December. After that, the responsibilities for the youth will be passed on to one of the other men for the new year. I am thankful for the time that I have been given to work with the youth at Raiwaqa this year.

Austin continues to do well in Tennessee. We really miss being with him, but we are grateful for modern technology which allows us to stay in touch with him. He is still a student at Freed-Hardeman University. He has had to face his own challenges with the ever-changing Covid-19 situation. We ask that you please keep him in your prayers, especially during the holidays. It has been very difficult for him knowing that this will be the first time that we will not be able to spend the Christmas holidays together as a family.

More Pictures!



Emosi Sailo, one of our instructors, baptizing Ella. Ella is a young lady from the Raiwaqa community. Emosi and Nancy have been studying with her at her request.



Debbie Pierce and Devan Pierce teaching a Wednesday night children's class. They had to take a short break from teaching because of Covid-19, but they are excited to be back teaching again!



Cory teaching a youth devotional.



Jason with youth at Youth Night.



Caleb leading singing at youth devotional.



2020 BIR Students and Staff.



Study groups in Greek.



Graduation cake.