

# Watertown Wanderings

September 4, 2007

Dear Brethren,

Greetings from the North Country. We are well and hope you are also.

Sandy, our daughter Michelle, and I overcame many hindrances (Romans 15:22; 1 Thessalonians 2:18) and finally visited American Samoa after trying to do so for thirty years and taught the Bible there August 16 - 26.

American Samoa is a tiny group of islands 2600 miles south southwest of Hawaii with a population of ca. 60,000 and is an American Territory. The United States claimed this part of Samoa in the late nineteenth century because Pago Pago (pronounced "pahngo pahngo") Harbor on the island of Tutuila was the best deep water harbor for naval use at that time in the Central South Pacific. Most of its residents speak English, and there are significant Samoan communities in America.

I corresponded with Alex Jennings, a dear friend and Christian in American Samoa, earlier this year about visiting American Samoa with Sandy and Michelle for me to preach and for the three of us to teach Bible classes. Several congregations sent us the needed money, and we booked flights to leave New York City August 1st and return the 21<sup>st</sup>. This gave us time to teach a Vacation Bible School for a week for the Nu'uli congregation and do another for a week at Leone.

Delta Airlines oversold our first flight and "bumped" us despite our pleas this would ruin the trip. Since there are only two or three flights a week in and out of American Samoa and these flights are sold out weeks in advance, the situation appeared hopeless. After staying at JFK airport for 24 hours, and trying to work out a schedule, I gave up and just wanted to get the churches' money back. Michelle wouldn't give up, worked another 26 hours nonstop, and worked out a later, shorter trip. This later schedule wound up costing well over a thousand dollars extra, made it impossible to teach morning classes for children, since they had returned to school, and gave us only nine days to teach rather than over two weeks. Meanwhile, Delta did send all our luggage to Pago Pago, and it took us a week to find where it was. Delta never found it, but Alex did. Sandy and I were stuck in New York City with hardly any clothing or toiletries. Delta even refused to honor the new schedule, and we were forced to scramble to get flights back home.

After staying for the funeral of Michelle's dear friend Jovita Ogenio, I drove the 350 miles back to the North Country to preach and teach August 12<sup>th</sup> and then returned to New York City to go to American Samoa.

Alex and American missionary Randy English arranged for me to preach on Sundays at both Leone and Nu'uli, to teach 90 minute classes on week day mornings at Nu'uli, and 90 minute classes week day nights at Leone. Sandy taught a ladies class at Leone one Saturday and at Nu'uli one Saturday. Both on Sunday mornings and week day nights Sandy taught classes for children who were old enough to read, and Michelle taught classes for nonreaders. Michelle and Sandy taught lessons on obedience. At the requests of the two congregations, I taught lessons on the home Monday through Friday. On Sundays I preached on "The Divine Pattern," "The Nature of Authority," and "The Cost of Discipleship" at both congregations. Each of us worked with a Samoan translator. I also recorded 14 radio sermons, covering the lessons in my book "What Must I Do to Be

Saved?", to be broadcast on a radio station run by Randy English which broadcasts all over Tutuila.

Each congregation has its own Samoan preacher. There are three American missionary families on the island, and all three volunteered to assist us. The English family owns a large duplex. They live in the front with their five children and maintain the rear for visiting preachers and teachers. They kept us in the rear apartment, which has four bedrooms, three full baths, laundry facilities, kitchen, work room, a living room, and air conditioning! The Jennings stocked us with food and a rented car, and all four families fed us sumptuous meals!

The only family in American Samoa that knows the full truth on the work and organization of the church are the Jennings. But the Leone congregation quit having common meals as a function of the church due to the Jennings' objection. We were not asked to participate in anything we consider sinful. Randy English specifically asked me to preach on the authority of the Scriptures. All three congregations want us to work with them in the future, and the preacher at Nu'uli wants me to go with him to teach in the nearby independent nation of Samoa, where there are three congregations. I will be sending teaching by e-mail to the preachers on the institutional issues

We hope to go back every year and to gradually work in teaching to the congregations concerning the work, organization, and worship of the church in future trips. All five preachers there have deep vested interests in institutionalism, but they have listened to lessons on the authority of the Scriptures, have asked us to return, and want me to work on other South Pacific islands. I don't know what the future holds, but Satan has powerfully opposed our going to American Samoa for 30 years, the Lord has overcome him, and the opportunities are great.

For the Tri-County church of Christ, our attendance for August averaged 17 for Sunday morning class, 35 for worship assembly, and 10 for midweek, and our contribution total for August was \$2785.59. I sent "Meditate on These Things" to 932 e-mail addresses.

Our support for August was as follows:

North Huntsville Church of Christ -	\$560	Tri-County Church of Christ -	\$817
Roan Ridge Church of Christ -	\$200	Van Dorn Street Church of Christ -	\$200
28 <sup>th</sup> Street Church of Christ -	\$750	Bumby Road Church of Christ -	\$300
Liberty Church of Christ -	\$450	North Beach Street Church of Christ -	\$500
Stallings Drive Church of Christ -	\$200	Dennis Baron -	\$200
Burns Park Church of Christ -	\$250	Galen and Mary Dalton -	\$50
Eastside Church of Christ -	\$250	Terry and Linda Manie -	\$50
		<b>Total</b>	<b>\$4777</b>

Our support presently is \$223 below our budget. Burns Park will have to cease their support after September because their treasury is being depleted.

\$1500 of our monthly support is ear marked as work fund. My office is at home, we buy all our own office supplies, and we travel an average of ca. 1000 miles a week. The \$560 a month from the North Huntsville Church of Christ is for our medical insurance. We thank the Lord for you and your fellowship in our work.

With Brotherly Love,  
Keith Sharp