

Alpha in Angola

Norm & Audrey Henderson

Easter 2012

*"Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him."
Colossians 3:10 (New Living Translation)*

Breaking from our past style, in this newsletter we want to share something that we've been doing **other than our full-time (and more) roles** at the CEML hospital (Centro Evangélico de Medicina do Lubango). **We are rejoicing** and want to thank God for a successful first **Alpha** course ever held – as far as we know - in Lubango, Angola!

We are so grateful for the constant support of Pastor André. Norm hooked up the computer to the car battery to show the videos, because city power is unreliable. The only time this didn't work was the celebration dinner at the end, when heavy rain forced him to disconnect his (outdoor) devices.



Watching an Alpha video

We ran the 10-week course on Saturdays at 8:00 (or 8:30 or 9!) with "mata-bicho" ('kill the beast') which is local slang for breakfast - a simple meal with bread, margarine and drinks. We added jam, although apparently that isn't usual.

Those of you who have taken an Alpha course know that we try to have fun, but we discovered humour does not translate well. A very careful translation of a joke was received with polite stares. One of the older fellows finally got it and retold it, to more puzzled stares. People love to laugh and joke here, but apparently it will be a while before we can tell jokes!

It was also a challenge to get people to share their thoughts. The education system is mostly one-way teaching with rote repetition and people don't have

much experience in expressing original ideas and personal emotions.



Lunchtime during our Alpha weekend



Youth crushing garlic

The highlight of the course was our weekend away. Most of them got only a few hours of sleep over the Friday night so we asked if they always stayed up late during retreats. They responded that they'd never had a retreat before! Women and babies slept on one classroom floor and the men on the other.

One of the youth had brought some lively worship music, getting the tired women up to dance with smiles on their faces.

Meal planning for the weekend began with a live goat and several flapping chickens, unceremoniously dumped in the back of our truck leading us to wonder if supper would escape before being prepared! We brought most everything we needed, including the kitchen sink (we washed dishes in basins) and a stove – which was too small for all the cooking, so the "funge" (a stiff mixture of corn and cassava porridge, a staple) was cooked outdoors over charcoal. Lack of consistent power, running water and refrigeration didn't faze anyone, as many live all the time in similar circumstances. By the way, the goat was excellent, and the piece of chicken gizzard Audrey got was the best she'd ever eaten. (Norm says: keep them! ☺)

The Holy Spirit worked in a wonderful way on the Saturday afternoon, filling us with joy and ministering in a powerful way. On Sunday morning, the 30 enthusiastic participants trooped back to the church in

various trucks and minivan 'taxis', and we had a truly God-inspired service together.



"The Truck" in front of the rather run-down seminary that served as our Alpha weekend retreat centre

There were many absences during the 10 week period, often due to deaths in the family. One participant had 3 funerals in one week—two nephews, aged 1 and 5, and the third was his fifty year old brother-in-law, all due to illnesses. This was a vivid illustration of the high mortality rates in Angola. As well as at the hospital and in this kind of contact, we see it when we pass the coffin-maker's shop on our daily drive home. He's always busy, all sizes.

Here are some translated comments from our course participants: *"The Alpha course brought many good things to my spiritual and personal life, also to my home"; "taught me how to share Jesus", "marvellous"; "I'm no longer the same person I was"; "I learned that God wants to communicate with us".*

About "The Truck": we are thankful every day for this ministry-enabling tool as we bump through 2-foot deep potholes - even on city streets - that most cars can't handle. At last report \$15,000 of the \$41,000 total cost (delivered and "Angola-proofed") has been funded by specific donations to the MAF Canada Vehicle Fund for this ministry.

With our love, in the Risen, Transforming Christ,

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