

Letters from Overseas

Karen and Bill Butt Write from Mozambique

April 2009

Let us make a small roof chamber with walls, and put there for him a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp... 2 Kings 4:10



The wealthy Shunemite woman and her husband arrange a guest room for Elisha to use when he travels their way. A secure closed space, and the most essential simple furnishings. A way for them to honour the prophet. Later in the chapter, in turn, Elisha arranges for her and her husband to conceive a much-wanted child, and later in the chapter miraculously resurrects that son when he dies.

Here in Mozambique when we visit at people's homes, always the best seat—sometimes the only seat—is for the honoured guest. The hierarchy of seating is clear: a chair with a back, if there is one, before a plain stool; a stool before a block of wood or a stone; a block or stone before a reed mat; a mat before the bare ground. As well as being functional, furniture affirms and validates a person's worth.

Recently we took part in the formal delivery of a school built by CCM, to the district government and to the community. In the photo, you see the handover assembly underneath the mango tree in the schoolyard: the 200 students of the morning session (200 more have classes in the afternoons) seated on their rocks, trunks, or ground, and the uniformed traditional chiefs in the white plastic chairs. That's the new school in the background.



Two rooms plus a teachers' office. Not much for 400 students. But there was great excitement. The former school was of mud, sticks, thatch and a dirt floor. Now they have concrete block walls, corrugated metal roof, and a concrete floor elevated above the wet.

What they didn't have yet is desks. Something to sit on, with a horizontal surface where a student can place workbooks and texts, and write. Working at a desk is more convenient and efficient than working seated on a log, like the three young girls in the other website photo with their UNICEF schoolbags. Perhaps even more important—like the table and chair for Elisha—furnishings show respect for the pupil and her or his work. Desks state that education is esteemed and important. The community's respect for the building and the work that

goes on within it rises. Parents are more inclined to send their children to a place of such stature. Children are more motivated to go, and to learn.

That's why Mozambique's government is doing its best to furnish schools as they are built, and why organizations like the Christian Council want to help. At this moment, carpenters in Zambezia are building desks for Namirere, as one Old Testament carpenter must have done for the woman of Shunem. Jesus' father also was a carpenter, a practical and useful occupation, building practical and useful items like schooldesks that dignify the person who uses them.

In mission and service, Karen and Bill Butt

To see more photos, visit www.stpaulsunitedchurch.com.

Karen and Bill Butt are United Church of Canada Overseas Personnel serving with Conselho Cristao de Mocambique in Mozambique. The work of this ecumenical partner and the work of overseas personnel are made possible through your gifts to the Mission and Service Fund of The United Church of Canada.

