

## Letters from Overseas

### Karen and Bill Butt Write on Home Assignment from Mozambique

April 28, 2011

*We have seen his star in the east...*  
—Matthew 2:2



This month we returned from speaking in eastern Canada, throughout Maritime Conference (which we'd travelled to in a VIA Rail overnight berth from Montreal). Though we didn't see guiding stars, we watched the sun rise at the mouth of the Miramichi, and from Portuguese Cove across Halifax harbour, and watched it set at sea beyond Yarmouth. At Tatamagouche, we also enjoyed our first-ever sightings of seal and grouse, and near Summerside PEI watched lambs being born—all signs of spirit visits, as our Aboriginal friends would say.

In Matthew's gospel the east is the site of new energy and vision. That was the case for us throughout the Maritimes. Compared perhaps to more-secular and less-traditional regions of Canada, United Churches remain strong. The ones we saw keep an innovative sense of mission at the level of Conference, presbyteries, and congregations. Some congregational examples:

St. Andrew's in Miramichi rebuilt as a modern facility after destruction by fire; a charred cross from the original sanctuary hangs in the new one.

First United in Bathurst hosts an adult education centre, and invited its students—who mostly are not churchgoers—to our presentation; many came.

Members of five different pastoral charges joined to meet and hear us at the rural St. Andrew's Kirk United Church near Saint John.

The thriving youth group at Westfield United Church near Saint John has five active adult leaders, and with the youth prepared a spaghetti dinner for our visit.

On the weekend of our visit, Beacon United Church in Yarmouth raised over \$6,000 for congregational expenses by auctioning members' donated goods and talents.

The youth group at Woodlawn United Church in Dartmouth have a project to support an orphanage in Bolivia, and five of them have just returned from working there.

St. John's United Church in Wallace, NS, is holding its 2011 summer children and youth vacation Bible school on the theme of Mission and Service.

At Trinity-St. Stephen's in Amherst, the Bible study group invited us; the theme was The Feeding of the Five Thousand—doing God's work with minimal resources, as so often is done by the United Church's impoverished overseas partners.

Sackville United Church has an active mission to students at adjacent Mount Allison University.

Partnering with other community organizations, Central United Church in Moncton is building a Peace Centre architecturally attached to its 19th-century building.

Five small rural congregations in PEI amalgamated to form Central Queens United Church in a large new purpose-built church building.

Trinity United Church in Charlottetown takes part in an ecumenical breakfast feeding program for children at a nearby core-area public school.

On the Sunday of our visit, the youth group at Park Royal United Church in Charlottetown held a fundraiser luncheon for their project in Nicaragua.

Trinity United Church in Summerside, PEI, held an innovative mission education event where we shared the time with a mostly Pentecostal group who support and work at an evangelistic orphanage project in northern Mozambique. A chance to compare two very different ways of international mission. A dedicated group from Trinity United Church works in Kenya through Free the Children.

In this, the United Church's largest Conference—three entire provinces and part of a fourth—we worked 19 venues and events, a grand logistical achievement by all who came through with rides like that series of four in one day to get us from near Saint John to Halifax, plane and bus tickets, billets, promotion, and driving tours of local sites from Bathurst to Truro to Summerside.

All through Maritime Conference we met enthusiastic M&S supporters in vibrant congregations; photos of costumes and dances at St. Andrew's in Halifax and at Truro Presbyterial show the spirit. Many people said they felt encouraged at seeing how M&S dollars are put to work in Mozambique. We ended our home assignment mission-education tour—six Conferences over nine months—encouraged and inspired at what United Churches in eastern Canada are achieving.



This being Letter 250—a quarter-thousand Mozambique Letters we've written since 1999—it's a fitting time to end our personal series of epistles on international mission. For now, we're not returning to overseas posting. But we do look forward to continuing service with our United Church of Canada. We thank God for a total of 12 years based in Mozambique, with all its challenges and blessings, and thank all those who read and especially those who shared our Mission and Service letters through the years.

In Mission and Service,  
Karen and Bill Butt

Visit our global partnership photo site (<http://unitedchurch.smugmug.com>) to see Karen and Bill's photos.

To see more letters, and more photos accompanying this letter, visit [www.stpaulsunitedchurch.com](http://www.stpaulsunitedchurch.com).

**Karen and Bill Butt** are United Church of Canada overseas personnel who served with Conselho Cristao de Mocambique in Mozambique, and are currently in Canada on home assignment. 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.

