

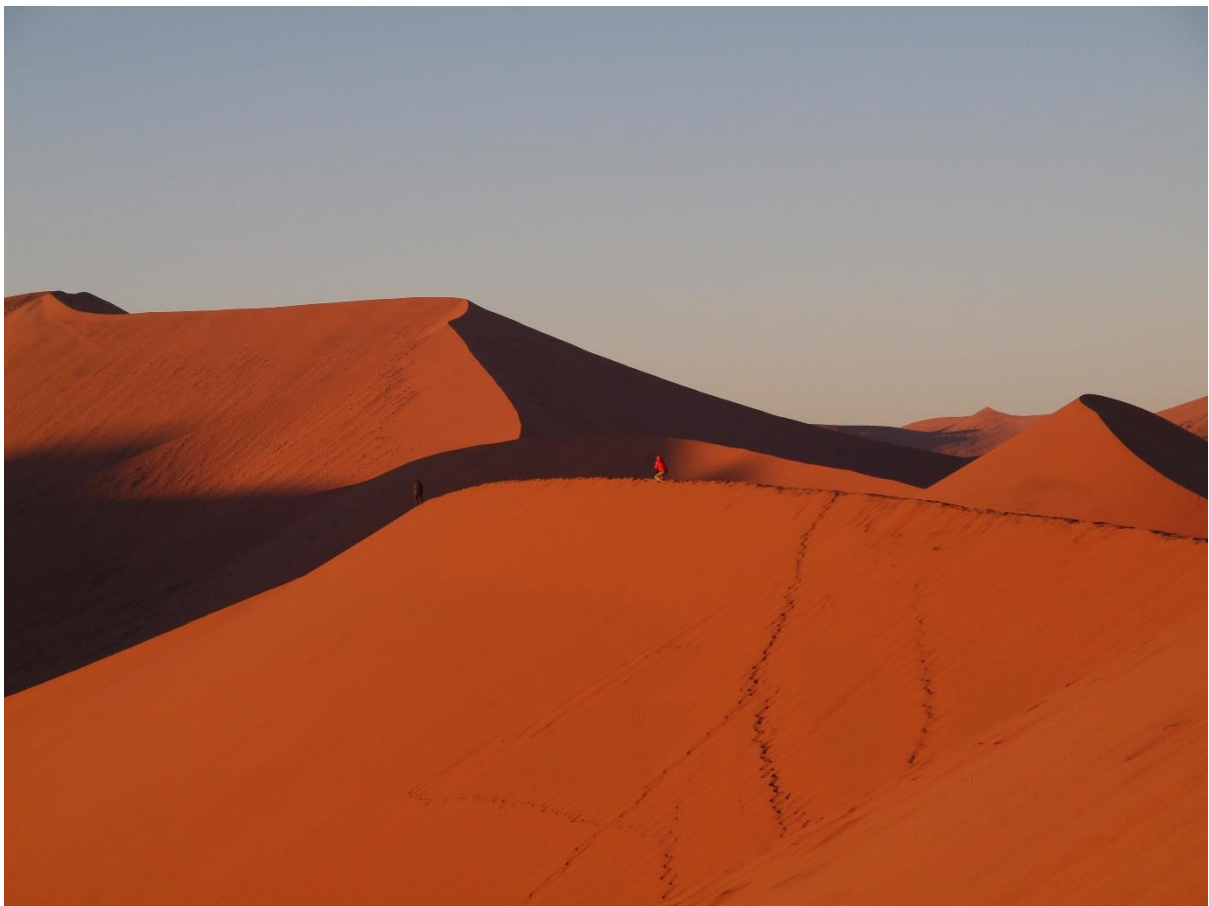
Namibia Church Visit, September 23rd-October 3rd, 2016

Tasmanian pastor Phil Hopwood and his wife Deb, along with long time Adelaide member, Jan Jackowicz visited our GCI congregations in Namibia in September/October this year.

Here is Phil's report.

My wife Deb and I flew into Johannesburg from London after travelling in the UK and Italy ON Tuesday, September 13th, where we met up with Jan Jackowicz who had flown in from Australia. Later in the morning we flew together into Windhoek, the capital of Namibia. We spent the rest of the day and the following morning getting our 4WD Toyota setup and purchasing necessities for the trip. I had contacted the Bible Society of Namibia in Windhoek previously, and found they could supply us with hard cover CEV Youth Bibles for 55 Namibian dollars each (\$US4.20, \$A5) and hardcover NIV Adult bibles for NAD125 (\$US9.50, \$A11.30). We purchased 84 Youth and 20 Adult bibles which the Bible Society delivered free to the Namibian church pastor, Lascan Sikosi, in Katima Mulilo. English Bibles are a great help as most don't own a Bible. The younger members learn English at school and some adults also read some English.

On Wednesday afternoon we drove to Sesriem, (650km south west of Windhoek) and before sunrise on Thursday visited the world famous Sossusvlei in the southern Namib desert with its giant red sand dunes.



Sossusvlei dunes

On Friday we visited the western coastal towns of Walvis Bay and Swakopmund before staying overnight under the spectacular rock formations of Spitzkoppe inland to the north. We spent four

days in Etosha National Park, and experiencing its incredible diversity and density of animals, including giraffes, wildebeest, rhinoceros, lions, elephants, ostriches and a many other bird varieties.

Wednesday, September 21st we drove through undulating rural countryside of north-eastern Namibia to the Zambezi Region (formerly the Caprivi Strip). Namibia is mostly desert and arid land, with poor soil in most areas. There has been a long drought in most of the country in the past two years. The population density is the lowest in Africa, and second to Mongolia in the world (2.5 million with an area of 824,292 sq. km/318,261 sq. m¹) with small rural villages and occasional towns sparsely spread over the country. There is more population in the north than the south, and we started to see many more villages at this stage, including many schools. Namibia has one of the highest rates of literacy in Africa, and compulsory primary school education.²

We spent Thursday exploring the Divundu/Okavango area at the eastern end of the Zambezi region before another long drive to Katima Mulilo on Friday 23rd. We met up with Pastor Lascan Sikosi there, and visited the local church building. It was particularly exciting for me to learn that support for the construction of the building had come from Canada, and that Edmonton pastor Bob Millman had visited some years before. Bob and I pastored together for several years in Alberta in the 80's.



Namibian Pastor, Lascan Sikosi in Singalamwe

Together with Pastor Lascan we then drove to our church in Singalamwe, 110km back to the east. The members present enthusiastically welcomed us with songs and warm handshakes. After being introduced and greeted with songs and dancing, I spoke briefly, expressing our appreciation for the welcome and our desire to get to know them and be of whatever service we could, as well as passing on greetings from members in Australia. Bibles were presented to members who could read English or are in the process of learning to.

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Namibia>

² <https://www.britannica.com/place/Namibia>



Children at Singalamwe with their new Youth Bibles

Time was spent visiting a neighbouring village in the area where the basic beginnings of the planned new church building was inspected. The Tasmanian congregations raised funds for roof and structural materials to enable the buildings completion. The existing church building is now too small, and the congregation is growing. The new building will have a metal roof and a more central location making it easier for the majority of members to access.



Beginnings of the new Singalamwe church building

We returned late afternoon to Katima Mulilo and found a convenient and relaxing campsite overlooking the Zambezi River. Katima is the capital of the region, with a population of nearly 30,000. It is a bustling, usually hot and dusty city with sandy suburban streets, and a modern business district. We joined the Katima congregation for worship that evening. We again received a warm welcome. I was invited to give a message, and spoke on I John 4:16, and the assurance that God loves us as his children, and how he wants us to be confident in and trust in his faithful, unconditional and never ending love. There are a number of historical and current religious influences in the area that push a message of works, Sabbath observance and the need to keep religious rules to be acceptable to God. As with Singalamwe, the singing was joy filled, enthusiastic and inspiring with beautiful African harmonies, movement and dancing. Jan and Lascan presented more Bibles and distributed some of the clothing that the Adelaide, South Australia church had funded.



A combined conference and church service for churches in the region was scheduled for Sunday, with meetings with government representatives so there was no service for us to attend. We spent time with Pastor Lascan later in the day and make plans for the following weekend, and contribute funds for transport and food for members traveling in from surrounding areas.

We were hoping to meet with South African Mission Developer, Tim McGuire, in nearby Botswana early the following week, but his vehicle broke down when he was returning from church meetings in Lusaka, Zambia and he was unable to join us there. Thankfully we were able to catch up with him just over a week later in Johannesburg. Botswana borders Namibia along the Chobe River. Chobe National Park is abundant with wildlife. Botswana was celebrating their 50th year of independence the following weekend, and the local town of Kasane was spruced up for it.

The following Friday we returned to Katima. Members from Singalamwe arrived that evening for the weekend, and stayed in the church hall until Monday morning. The weekend was hot, as it was all the time we were in the region, averaging around 35-39C. Inside the tin roofed church with no windows, just one door and a crowd of members was quite a challenge for Tasmanians used to a cool climate. The training was provided primarily for the local church leaders, but was broadened to encompass all those who were in attendance. Topics covered over the two days included; History of GCI, an Introduction to Trinitarian Theology, Christian Leadership and Pastoring, God's faithfulness and the role and value of marriage, Stewardship and Preaching. The training sessions were interspersed with worship songs, dancing and testimonies. Lunch was maize and chicken. Powdered maize was cooked as is the local custom, mixed with water and stirred and cooked in a large pot over a fire outside the building.



Cooking maize meal for lunch at Katima Mulilo



Children at Katima Mulilo church





Members outside church building in Katima Mulilo

On Sunday afternoon, most of the members were transported to a shallow secluded spot at the side of the Zambezi River for the baptism of 10 new Christians, including four from Singalamwe, two teenagers, young adult men and several older women. The distant sound of hippos and the joyful singing of members on the shore began and ended the ceremony, concluding with a prayer of blessing on those just baptised. We all returned to the church to conclude the weekend with more songs and then the inevitable sad farewells.

That evening at our campsite I met up with a neighbouring camper from South Africa. It turned out he and his wife had been coming to the area for 10 or more years helping local churches. He told me about a local business woman who imports local language bibles from the *Zambian Bible Society* and sells them for around \$A5, (\$US4) half to a third of the normal local cost. Lozi is spoken in south-western Zambia, north-western Zimbabwe and northern Botswana.

Monday, October 3rd, was our last full day in Namibia, and we spent much of it with Pastor Lascan discussing the weekend, and ways that we could be of help into the future. We found and purchased a new drum for the congregation and contributed funds towards other church needs including Lozi Bibles. Lascan's old phone needed replacing, and he didn't have a computer, so we gave him a spare phone we had as well as a small notebook PC. He is currently trying to obtain a better internet service.

Lascan is not employed by the church, and the local members have very little money to contribute. He receives a small stipend from the South African office. He often does contract work for local government, and is hoping to pick up more work soon. He has worked enthusiastically and faithfully in Katima Mulilo where he lives to build the local congregation that was in disarray when the former

pastor moved back to Germany. He has worked tirelessly and patiently to build relationships with people in surrounding communities. Lascan enacts Bible stories for children in the local schools, and teaches them about Jesus and the gospel, as well as conducting evangelistic meetings in local villages. There are now five congregations, including a small congregation of San (Bushmen) people. He has capable and supportive help from other leaders that he has raised up in the five local congregations. He has a small motorcycle provided by GCI South Africa, and also uses local transport to get around the region.

Lascan has received some training from the church in the past and is interested in taking some ACCM classes online. His vision and hope is to move to the capital, Windhoek, and raise up a congregation there, and then do the same in other areas of Namibia. He and the congregation pray constantly for the work of the gospel there, as well as for their brothers and sisters in GCI around the world. They made it very clear how much they value being part GCI, and appreciate the friendship and support they receive from Tim Maguire and the church in South Africa and elsewhere.