

APRIL 25, 2011 – In Mbale, Uganda --- JUST A WEEK BEFORE THE UGANDA 2011 CONFERENCE BEGINS!

I am here in Uganda living at the house of Pastor Oginga – the lead conference organizer. Meetings about the conference are sometime here at the house and those who I am working with daily are all involved in the conference planning in some capacity. From the tidbits of information that I hear I am in awe of the magnitude of the effort involved in making the conference come together – for 20,000 pastors coming from all over east Africa.

When I just presumed this was *simple*, I must have been thinking with my “American” hat on. Years ago when I was in high school there was a Bill Graham crusade in Denver and the choir from my church, including me, went down each night to be part of the Crusade Choir. It was held at the old Mile High Stadium (OK, in the late 1960’s). The people coming likely lived in Denver itself and could take public transportation or just drive over to the stadium. The largest issue for them would be leaving early enough to get a close in parking space. Those coming from out of town would have shared a hotel room and taken meals at Denny’s or Burger King. That simplicity doesn’t exist here...

The Conference in Kenya 3 Weeks Ago – With 5,000:



Few of those attending the Mbale conference will be from Mbale. They must come from all over Uganda and Kenya and some from still further countries. As African pastors, most struggle to have money enough to pay their rent, electricity and feed their families let alone take a 4-day cross-country trip, stay in a hotel and eat meals out. Even if they could, Mbale is a town of 80,000 people that doesn’t begin to have restaurants and hotel rooms sufficient to support 20,000 visitors!!!

So, there are some “challenges” facing the church committee here setting up this conference, like:

TRANSPORTATION: There aren’t enough commercial busses and vans in all of Uganda to get 20,000 to Mbale on Wednesday and back home again on Saturday. Even if all that exist could be used, what would the rest of the country do for transportation on those days?

LODGING: This is a 3-day conference – those attending need to stay Wednesday through Friday nights – housing for 20,000!!!

FOOD: I count 9 meals from Wednesday night through Saturday lunch – 18,000 meals!

FUNDS: so how does all this get paid for – those coming do not have the money???

SETUP: There need to be tents so the attendees are not sitting in the African sun (is typically 90 degrees every day here and bright sun). It is the start of the rainy season with showers now most afternoons. Participants must be able to hear and see the presenters, and they would like seats to sit on!

It is AMAZING to see how resourceful and organized they here are in *making it happen!* It looks to be well in hand with the real issue coming down to be funding. Past conferences have been based on sponsors providing \$15 / pastor to provide everything necessary. This year the number is still \$15 but, as in all the world, fuel prices are soaring daily and the cost of food is edging up as well. So not only have not all the funds come in yet to meet the goal, but it is becoming impossible to keep it at \$15.

SOLUTIONS: I may not be completely accurate but this is what I am overhearing on how they are putting this all together – may God be praised for all He is doing!!

TRANSPORTATION: At the conference last year where approaching 10,000 attended, they used commercial busses/vans but augmented those with open trucks, including dump trucks, that ferried people from key cities. District captains coordinate who will be coming, in what city they should gather and when and what vehicle they will be on. But, the government passed a law in the last year outlawing people from riding long-haul in open trucks -- so the organizers here convinced the local transportation officer of the great need of this conference and he agreed to *lift the law* for the duration of the conference. Notifications have gone out to the officials in all districts in Uganda giving them notice so the pastors will end up at the conference, not in a local jail! Caravans will begin early Wednesday and continue until all are brought in by mid-morning Wednesday; the reverse on Saturday.

FOOD / LODGING: The question of how to feed 20,000 people drives both food preparation *and* the location selected. There is no way to transport 20,000 around the city to get meals so *all must eat within walking distance* of the conference site. Last year the conference was held at the local soccer stadium – great for setting up tents but gave great issues with providing lodging and food. The conference in Kenya 3 weeks ago was a trial at using schools – place the tents on the athletic field and cook the meals in the kitchen already there to provide school lunches. That will be the case here as well. The conference will be at the largest high school in the city. This school is near to other schools within walking distance, and all will be used, as no one school can possibly support this vast number.

Pastors will sleep on mattresses in the auditoriums and in classrooms. Food will be cooked and served from school kitchens supplemented by other cooking areas set up specifically. What great thinking!!

FEEDING the 5,000 at the School for the Kenya 2011 Conference:



As for the food itself, what I heard was that this conference will require 50 bags of rice per day (we are talking SERIOUS bags – 100Kg each – 220 pounds per bag). I have not seen the cooking pots yet but I am told that they can cook an *entire bag at a time*, probably over a fire of sticks (must be HUGE; those rice bags are like 4' tall and 18" around!). There is a corresponding amount of beans. As for beef to top the rice, at the Kenya conference the cooks told me that Kenya was a 3-cow conference - they had to butcher 3 cows a day to feed the 5,000 who attended. If that ratio stays the same, Mbale will be a 13-cow conference; 13 cows A DAY to butcher and prepare!

Cooking in the Kenyan School Kitchen Facilities:



To save costs, the organizing committee is buying raw rice and beans – not fully cleaned or ready to cook. Church volunteers are spending days going through each bag, sorting out small stones and spoiled items by hand; for the rice they are tossing it in the air to clear out the hulls.



SETUP: I happened to meet the pastors who are scouring the countryside to rent tents and chairs. They had just begun and told me their biggest issue is that there is no vendor who has nearly the capacity to support this big an event. So far they were contracting with vendors who could, at best, do 800 – 1000, chairs and tents combined. They feared they would end up needing to contract with maybe 15 different sources, and having to then coordinate with them all for delivery, setup and takedown.

The church here has done several conferences and by now has most of the needed sound equipment as it was cheaper to buy than rent for each new conference. However.... it was damaged at a recent event where the generator powering it all had failed and sent power surges, burning out most of the equipment. There is no money to buy new so they have spent days *finding and replacing each failed component* to get them all working again!



It will be interesting to watch as it all unfolds!!!

...all for the glory of God, that African pastors may learn to study and preach from the Word of God!!

