

Do We Dare? by Gene Shelburne

Namikango Mission has always been tops on my list of worthy Christian causes. Since my oldest brother helped to found it well over half a century ago, and since I've known and loved all the Mission families since that beginning, Namikango has always held a special charm for me.

Because of this, I've encouraged all the congregations I have served to be generous in supporting this good work. At least, that's what I thought I was doing. Back in the 1960s, at a time when our congregation sometimes struggled to pay our light bill, still the Mission's bulletin listed us as one of the \$100-a-month donors. We were serious backers of the Malawi work. Only one or two congregations out-gave us.

Fast-forward into the late 1990s. Nothing had diluted our enthusiasm for Namikango. We were still faithfully writing our monthly check and mailing it to South Houston. The same \$100 every month. Without stopping to calculate that in that thirty-year span inflation had swelled our light bill eight to ten times. Likewise we were paying our local preacher seven times more than we did in the 60s. Every item in our church budget had ballooned *except Namikango*.

Mark Thiesen came along about that time. In his preparation to move to Malawi, he came to Anna Street in Amarillo and asked us if we would consider becoming his sponsoring church. We gasped and alibied that our church budget would never allow it. We told Mark that we thought our church was doing about all we could afford at that moment.

Finally we elders asked our membership about this and how much extra they could provide if we told Mark yes. We expected two or three hundred dollars tops. Imagine our dismay and shame when the members of our small congregation told us they would foot \$1,000 a month. Overnight we caught up with inflation. And we elders heard the Lord chiding us, "Oh, you of little faith!"

During the past decade, every time we have increased our commitment to Namikango, our congregation has out-given the targeted amount. Today we send \$2,400 per month to support this good work, and we find ourselves with more budget slack—not less—every time

we increase our level of support. God's people just keep out-giving us.

I tell you this story not to boast but to dare you also to think bigger about what you and your people can do to help Namikango's ministries reach an entirely new level. The Mission's board soon will be announcing exciting new vistas for this work all of us have learned to love. We hope you will be challenged to dream new dreams with us and to reach for new heights in the role you and your congregation can play in the next generation of work at Namikango.



End of Semester Celebration for Namikango Students

by Ryan Hayes

Last week was the final week of the second semester for this year's Namikango students. Our celebration together consisted of much singing, several speakers and an enjoyable time of handing out awards to the students. Each student receives their certificate of completion and "grade" for each course taken, and several students receive other awards such as "Most improved", "Most well-dressed", "Most punctual", and "Most outstanding student".

Each of these additional awards allow the students a small congratulatory gift. In all, the students had a great semester, and we are grateful for another fulfilling year learning together what it means to be the church *in* and *for* the communities around us at Namikango.



Brick-making in Malawi

by B Shelburne

I will describe our first experience with brickmaking in Malawi. We arrived at Namikango knowing nothing at all on the subject. We needed to build a block of offices on the Mission and we hired a local crew who was led by an experienced Malawian brick-maker in our area. We told him we would need 35,000 bricks and we contracted with him for the job.

The termites in Malawi build tall anthills, 10 or 15 feet high. The clay from an anthill is the best soil there is for making bricks. It has been digested and deposited by millions of busy termites. The brick-maker selected an ant hill near the Namikango Stream so water for mixing clay would be close by. "Namikango" means "Place of Lions" but the lions were gone before our time there. The brick-maker brought a number of men who began cutting trees for firewood in the area where the brick would be made.

After firewood had been stacked and allowed to dry for a while, the day came to begin work. The brick-maker had a hole dug two feet wide and waist deep in the ground. They took a two-foot section of a tree trunk, and placed it in the hole. This made a work table for the brick-maker on which to do the molding.

Some of the crew with African style hoes began to dig up the clay of the anthill and carry it to the hole. Women carried buckets of water which they poured into the hole. Men trampled the clay by foot until it mixed with the water and reached the right consistency. The brick-maker laid a wooden mold on the flat tree surface, plopped a wad of clay into it, then scraped across the top of the mold with a straight stick to remove excess clay. Several children waited in turn to snatch up the clay-filled mold and take it to a cleared area and empty the moist brick out onto the drying area, then head back to the brick-maker with the empty mold and another trip. The newly molded bricks would lie in rows to dry in the sun. It was amazing how efficiently the water carriers, clay carriers, brick carriers, and the brick-maker worked together. They kept a rhythm by singing a brick making song as



Painting by Sidney Vaughn – "Brick Making in Malawi"

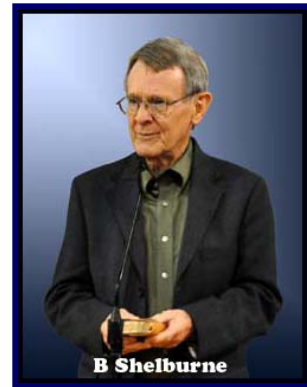
they worked.

It took several days to mold all the brick and several more days for the bricks to dry into adobe out in the sun. Obviously brick making had to be done in the dryer season of the year. Once the brick was dry enough, the next task was to stack the sun-dried adobe-brick into the shape of a kiln with long parallel tunnels where fire would later be kindled. When all the adobe brick was stacked onto the kiln, the workers plastered the outside and top of the kiln with mud to keep the heat in. They then placed a layer of dry elephant grass on the flat top of the kiln. They told us when the pile of brick was hot enough for the grass to catch fire, the brick would be "done".

The long tunnels under the kiln were stacked full of firewood and the wood was set ablaze. Once the fire was going well, some of the workers stayed at the site 24 hours a day continuously feeding the fires with more wood. Someone advised us that we would need to check on the workers during the night to make sure they were awake and feeding the fire. Should the fire go out prematurely the bricks would be ruined. So Ruth and I set an alarm at 2am, took a kerosene lamp for light and walked the quarter mile path from our house to the brick site in order to rouse the workers as needed. The nights were very dark, the lantern lighted only a small circle, plus, we were new to Africa, so, this was a bit of an adventure.

It took a solid week of feeding the fire for the heat to make it all the way to the top layer of bricks and set the elephant grass to burning. It took another week for the kiln to cool down enough for us to handle the bricks and move them to the construction site.

This is a very efficient and economical way for people in a third-world country to have high quality bricks for home building. We used cement mortar for sturdy construction of our offices, but sadly, many of the local people cannot afford cement so they use mud to hold these beautiful brick together, and after several rainy seasons the walls can collapse.





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Ben addresses the Mission Board

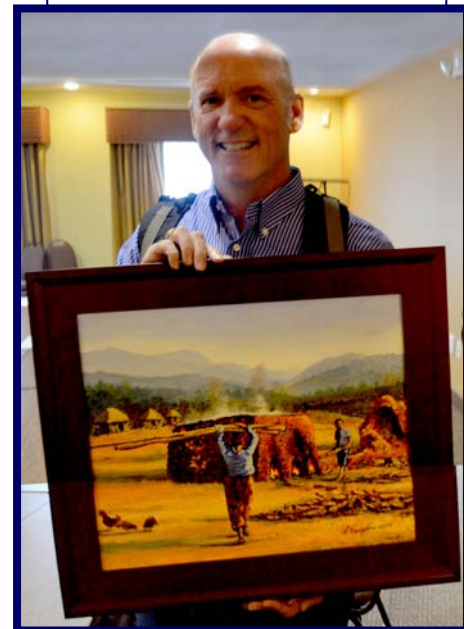


The Mission Board meets

We had a good and forward-thinking meeting of the Namikango Mission Board members the weekend of September 5th and 6th in Houston.

Pictured here at the meeting are: B Shelburne, Shawn Tyler, Mark Thiesen, Dave Langford, Gene Shelburne, Ben Hayes, and Robert Lee. Present but not in the photo are Sidney Vaughn and Frank Devine.

Shawn Tyler won the drawing for Sidney's painting of the Brick-Making Oven.



Scribe for the day
Mark Thiesen takes the minutes of the meeting.