

The Vilella Family

In their hearts humans
plan their course, but the
Lord establishes their
steps.

Proverbs 16:9



Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding and he will direct your paths.

Dear Friends,

We hope this letter finds you well. It seems only recently we wrote our last blog, and yet we are already approaching Easter!

Since last writing, Efraim has been 'commuting' to Africa. He is involved principally with two projects at the moment:

Tanzania: Where he is helping set up a new low cost branchless banking scheme to help over 3000 farmers. He is setting up project management systems and up skilling local Opportunity International staff in Project Management. Farmers often cannot pay for the seed and fertilizer they need until after the harvest, which involves expensive loans direct from the supplier. This project brings farmers together to buy seed and fertilizer in bulk and pay for it upfront with a loan from Opportunity International, which they can then repay at a lower price after the harvest.

Contacts

Email

thevilellafamily@hotmail.com

Blog

<http://thevilellafamily.weebly.com/>

Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/TheVilellaFamily>

Landline

+44 1920 318149

Mobile

+44 7972 069233

+44 7972 068862



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Rwanda: Efraim is helping streamline the existing project management systems and providing in-house training for Opportunity staff with a DFID funded project, which hopes to benefit over 20,000 school-age children. The project aims to provide loans for 24 schools to carry out the renovations necessary to increase their student capacity, it includes providing financial literacy/savings courses within the schools. This project also involves a loan system to help parents pay for school fees. In 2001 Ruth spent two weeks on a SOMA mission trip in Uganda running a seminar on HIV/AIDS at an Anglican Youth Camp. It was just 90 minutes' drive over the border from where Efraim has been based in Rwanda. She recalls several children and youths coming to her after the seminars, sharing their dilemma of how to pay school fees and some having resorted to or been pressured into prostitution. It was such a tragic situation; it is so exciting now to be a part of something, which can provide a dignified way forward for these children and their families. We so take education for granted here in the UK.

Please pray for Efraim, the travelling is tiring and when he is back in the UK, he finds with his extrovert personality, that working remotely and not going into an office is difficult. Please pray for his health and ability to communicate well in English with folks using a large range of accents. Please also pray for us as a family as we get used to this lifestyle of Efraim coming and going, especially little Max. We are trying to avoid Efraim being away at weekends as much as possible, as we have found that is the hardest time to not be together as a family.

Ruth is at an exciting but challenging phase in her MA. She feels like after climbing an insurmountable mountain the summit has been reached, but now there is a very long and challenging climb back down! She is formulating the subject of her dissertation at the moment, and has submitted her preliminary draft proposal, which may change and be tweaked somewhat. At present the plan is to look

from a development perspective, at how the Anglican Church can support and encourage nursing mothers as part of its integral mission. To give you some background; whilst 80% of mothers start breastfeeding the figure drops to 48% at six weeks, and 9 out of 10 of these women stop before they want to. If this level at six weeks could be maintained for a longer period of just four months in the UK for example the NHS would save £40m a year through fewer hospital admissions, and GP consultations. Despite the significant benefits of breastfeeding, the formula business is booming and very influential. In some ways the situation resembles the culture of smoking in the UK decades ago. Research has shown that peer support is key in helping women on this journey and the issue is a very complex socio-cultural construct. The breastfeeding charity Le Leche League where Ruth is a breastfeeding counselor was actually originally founded in the 1950s by a group of mothers on a church picnic in the US. Ruth would like to explore ways the church can support and encourage mothers as part of their outreach to families in the local community.

We will be leaving All Nations Christian college at the end of March and moving to Thame in Oxfordshire to be nearer the Opportunity International office. We have been bowled over by God's grace and provision and perfect timing. He has provided us with a lovely house to rent thanks to a family friend, and a nursery place for Max just two minutes' walk from our front door! We were a bit overwhelmed with the prospect of having to completely furnish a house for just one year. Yet Ruth's Dad and step-mother have finally managed to sell their home and will be downsizing... the same week we move!! So we now have several of the larger items of furniture. We would appreciate your prayers with getting the remaining items necessary to have a functional home.

Max had a wonderful train themed third Birthday party in January. He is still an avid train enthusiast, a variety of toy locomotives even share his bed each night! It seems to be his way of making sense of the world in amongst all the change and transition. He has recently entered the world of spectacles, which has been challenging for him but he has coped really well and they look very cute! Please pray for him over this next period of transition, and that he makes some good friends in his new nursery.



Thank you so much for your support and prayers.

With love and God Bless,

Efraim, Ruth and Max

Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own
understanding;
in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.
Proverbs 3:5-6

Efraim, Ruth e Max Vilella

3 Oak Tree Cottages
Ware, Hertfordshire, SG12 8LY



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