



The Bruce Rice Family IN THE PHILIPPINES

Field Address

P.O. Box 157
Dipolog City 7100
Zamboanga del Norte
Philippines
63-917-577-4610

Sending Church

Higher Plain Baptist Church
6810 N.W. 122nd Street
Oklahoma City, OK 73142
USA
405-702-7715

Mission Board

Baptist International Missions, Inc.
P.O. Box 9
Harrison, TN 37341
USA
423-344-5050

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Dear Friends:

The itinerary that the apostle Paul outlined in First Corinthians 16:2-8 explained his ministry plans for the next 10-12 months. This passage shows how detailed and purposeful Paul was in his planning. But he made a statement in verse seven, which revealed a **controlling principle** for all he did in life, **"if the Lord permit."** Paul recognized that **God rules and over-rules in the kingdom of men**, and a wise man plans accordingly.

We left the Philippines heading to the United States in June of last year to take care of some personal things related to Jeanne's family. When we departed, **I had already laid out my ministry plans** for when we returned. I had decided to **postpone** starting a fourth church for a couple of years, so I could concentrate on **helping** our Bible College graduates and the churches they had started. In addition to that, I intended to invest time **promoting** foreign missions in churches across Mindanao Island. Still, I knew these plans would become a reality only **"if the Lord permit."**

However, while we were in the States, **some extremely serious issues erupted** in the first church we had started in Cagayan de Oro City. I was the missionary pastor there from 1986 until stepping down in August of 2000. The church called one of my assistant pastors to become the pastor. The next year we moved to Dipolog City, where we have based our ministry for the last twenty-four years. As the years passed, the philosophy, principles, goals, and direction of ministry of the man who replaced me, gradually deviated from what these had been originally. His relationship with me became distant and my influence was essentially non-existent.

These **incremental changes** eventually began to cause unrest and discontent in the church and among the alumni of the Bible College. Some members transferred to other churches and others just stopped going to church altogether. Sincere staff members quietly left the ministry. The Bible College that had trained so many people for the work of the Lord declined to the point where no students remained.

Then in October last year, when we were in the States, the many-faceted issues relating to the pastor came to a head. Over the next few weeks, the issues were not dealt with properly. Consequently, a large number of members, who could no longer support the leadership of the church, **separated from the church** and began having services in a rented facility. The eruption and the unresolved consequences deeply hurt people on both sides.

Those who separated continued gathering every Sunday, with the deacons and faithful men leading the services. When we finally arrived home in Dipolog City in February, about forty people from that group of believers drove seven hours from Cagayan de Oro City **to ask for my advice and my help.**

The following week, I made my first trip to Cagayan de Oro City to assess for myself the possibility of dealing with the issues properly and bringing about reconciliation between the two groups. After four weeks, it was clear that the leadership of the church and the members who remained, were content with how things were being handled. Because of that, reconciliation between the two groups was impossible. But thankfully, there has been much personal reconciliation between individual Christians. It was **mutually agreed** that the group who separated would begin a new church on the other side of the city, and I would lead them in doing that.

Now to return to my point in the opening paragraphs of this letter - all the plans I made last year have been swept aside, at least for the foreseeable future. **God is sovereign, He rules and over-rules in the affairs of men.** We are now in the process of **establishing our fourth church**, much sooner than I thought, and in a place I did not anticipate. There is still plenty of room for a new church in this booming coastal city of well over 800,000 people, on an island of over twenty-seven million people.

When we first began meeting with this group seven weeks ago, they were averaging about 140 persons on Sunday mornings. We are now over 200 in the mornings and almost 150 in the afternoons. We are having visitors each week. Believers who fell away years ago are coming back to the Lord. For the meantime, we are meeting in a hotel downtown. The new congregation will be named "**West CDO Baptist Church.**" We need to buy property, but with our financial situation, that looks like it will not be possible for a good while.

Our family will have to **move back to Cagayan de Oro City.** Last week we found a duplex to rent, ironically, across the street from the house we lived in twenty-four years ago. Our move-in date is May 22. Please pray for Emily, these changes in plans and this transition have been really difficult for her. Emily's heart is in Dipolog City. At the same time, Jeanne is thrilled about reuniting with people we have known and loved for many years.

I realize this is a long letter, but I wanted you to understand where we are at this point in our lives and in our ministry. This is not where we expected to be, but where the Lord has directed us. We greatly desire your prayer for our family and for this new work. May God bless you and keep you by His grace.

Sincerely in Christ,

Bruce, Jeanne, and Emily Rice