

## **MATA (Written several years ago - updates in parentheses)**

Pastor Mike Crowell was a pilot, a mechanic, a pastor, a husband, a father, and a dear friend. He had a heart for missions and lost souls. He loved the Lord and people. While working on a doctorate program at Faith Evangelical Lutheran Seminary, Mike began to do research on aviation training schools in the United States. He discovered there was a great need to train missionary aviation pilots in a reasonable and timely manner. God laid a burden on his heart for this need. In October 1998, nearly fifteen years ago, Mission Aviation Training Academy, MATA, was birthed and incorporated in Washington state. MATA was founded in faith without any major sponsors but upon a strong assurance that this was the Lord's leading and His will. Pastor Mike and Lori Crowell resigned from their pastorate at Elim Free Lutheran, in Lake Stevens, WA, and took a *flight of faith* to launch MATA at the Arlington airport, in Arlington, WA.

In that modest and humble start, God sent in students, airplanes, godly board members, volunteers, and prayer warriors. Policies and manuals were developed and implemented. There were many struggles and hardships but yet great victories and joys.

The last week of July 2005 was to change the future of MATA and challenged its existence. Director Mike Crowell flew his last flight on earth into the arms of His Savior at the EAA airshow in Wisconsin. That same day, Chuck Martindale, a MATA board member, also went home to be with the Lord.

What happened then is quite a journey! God had brought in Gordon and Elaine Bakke, retired pilot missionaries who served in Africa for 22 years, living near Arlington to help work part-time with MATA. Gordon willingly stepped in as Director (now retired). Gordon is a very gifted and creative director. He has been used mightily by the Lord to help encourage God's people through the donation of airplanes and personal resources to keep the ministry moving ahead. Next God provided pilot missionaries Gary and Stacie Elliott who had served with New Tribes in the Philippines for 8 years. They have been such a gift from the Lord as Gary serves as MATA's chief flight instructor and works with the students while Stacie helps run the office. Recently Dary and Anna Finck, Missionary Kid, pilot, and military veteran, came on board as staff.

MATA has grown to be a highly respected aviation academy with former alumni serving in many countries throughout the world. The office and hangar are now located at 19002 -59<sup>th</sup> Dr. NE on the northeast side of Arlington Municipal Airport. The fleet of airplanes has grown to five and they presently are able to house all of the airplanes in the spacious 11,000-square-foot facilities. The hangar has adequate office space, classrooms, and even a break room where fellowship is always in order. Dary Finck, their maintenance specialist (now Executive Director), has been working to bring computers into every workstation and believes they are now ready to receive double the number of students. These students are being trained for the challenging task of being missionary pilots.

How is it in these days of economic stress that an aviation ministry can continue to grow and thrive? I believe there are several reasons for this:

1. MATA has many Christians, wonderful senior citizens, and dedicated prayer warriors, that pray for MATA 's leaders, finances, students, training flights, and alumni who serve the Lord out in their fields.
2. MATA's commitment to the Word of God – Each Friday night a Bible study is held at the hangar where staff and students spend time in the Word and prayer. This has built a strong sense of family within the organization and its alumni.
3. The Lord continues to be faithful as He nudges people to share their resources, airplanes, and finances with MATA.
4. God's faithful stewards continue to support and respond to the ministry needs at MATA. They have had many friends who have given of their time and talents to this part of the Kingdom's work. One such example is a young widow, Barb, who is allowing MATA to base their operations at a reduced price in the wonderful facility that they presently occupy.

It has been a privilege to look back over the past (history of MATA since 1998) and see the hand of God work and move through the MATA ministry. He has provided, protected, and directed. He has allowed MATA to impact world missions. Without air support, many missionaries would be unable to continue their work in remote areas. So as our alumni serve and support these faithful missionaries all over the world, souls are brought into the Kingdom of God. This was Pastor Crowell's vision as He sought to fulfill the Lord's Great Commission of "Go ye into all the world."