

# Transforming

Stories of making disciples in the way of Christ

Summer 2017  
VOLUME 3 • ISSUE 2



## Sharing the Good News



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and with power

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● Sowing seeds  
of good news

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Virginia  
Mennonite  
Missions

*Called. Sent. Transformed.*

## Lifestyle evangelism

BY AARON KAUFFMAN  
PRESIDENT

*"People don't go to church on Sundays to support their pastors in their ministry. The pastor goes to church on Sunday to support the people in their ministry. And their ministry, the ministry that really counts as mission, is outside the walls of the church, in the world, being salt and light in the marketplace." —Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God's People**



**A**growing passion of mine is to help the church recover a commitment to training everyday believers to join God's mission in their homes, neighborhoods, and places of work. Or, as our new mission statement puts it, "VMissions equips the church to share new life in Jesus Christ with neighbors near and far."

This mobilization of all believers in mission is how the early church grew from a few thousand believers to roughly ten percent of the Roman Empire in its first three centuries. "According to the evidence at our disposal,"

explains Alan Kreider in his book, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*, "the expansion of the churches was not organized, the product of a mission program; it simply happened."

It's not that they lacked leaders. According to missiologist Dana Robert, "Bishops ran social services, collected money for the poor, solved theological disputes, and were the first to be tortured and executed during waves of persecution." (*Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion*)

But everyone practiced what you might call "lifestyle evangelism." The early Christians stood out from their neighbors because they cared for the poor, rescued abandoned infants, practiced fidelity in marriage, refused to worship the emperor, and followed the Apostle Paul's advice to "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone." (Col. 4:6) And though they suffered for it, the movement grew.

Such courageous witness is also in the DNA of the Anabaptist movement, whose early adherents were incredibly missional. For example, in their book, *Profiles of Anabaptist Women*, Arnold Snyder and Linda Huebert Hecht tell the story of Margaret Hellwart of Beutelsbach. She was interrogated in 1608 for refusing to participate in the state-sponsored Lutheran faith, and instead espousing and promoting Anabaptism. She held fast to her convictions, and was subsequently chained to the floor of her house as punishment. Between 1610 and 1621 she escaped and was chained again no fewer than 21 times. She eventually persuaded her neighbor, Maria Niessmuller, to join the Anabaptist faith, and the two ministered together. Eventually, both were chained, yet the movement continued to grow.

Do we have the courage to live such radical lives of obedience to Jesus that we stand out from our culture, and perhaps even suffer for it? Do we have the humble confidence to bear witness to the gospel among our family members, neighbors, and coworkers? And do we have the patience to keep at it even when we do not immediately see "results"? It is my prayer that we can reclaim these vital missional qualities of our forerunners in the faith.

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Reporting: 9/1/16 to 5/31/17

Special Projects \$909,756	Special Projects \$874,050
Mission Fund \$ 525,589	Mission Fund \$607,320
<b>Revenue</b> Total \$1,435,345	<b>Expenses</b> Total \$1,481,370

**Mission Fund:** undesignated giving by households and churches, **Special Projects:** giving to specific workers or ministries

## Transforming

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## Mission Service New tranSend class

**Jim and Pam Beachy** will be serving at Lezha Academic Center in Albania for a year. Jim will teach high school Chemistry courses. Pam will work in the library. They are also exploring a possible work relationship with Norma Teles and the Joshua Center. They will lend support to the ministries of the local Mennonite church.

**Chris Beck** will serve as a part-time Volunteer Coordinator with Love INC (In the Name of Christ) in Waynesboro, Va. His duties will be to support and implement the vision and mission of the agency and to mobilize and build relationships with volunteers and area churches to promote volunteer opportunities.

**Kris Hange** will be serving for a year in Mannheim, Germany, with VM Missions workers Rebekka and David Stutzman and their family. His assignment will include helping to provide children's ministry, connecting with an existing ministry among refugees, studying German, and engaging with local college students and a Mennonite Voluntary Service team.

**Taryn Zander** will explore ministry locations related to refugee populations around the world, focusing on areas where VM Missions has partner connections. Based locally, she will travel internationally to help VM Missions identify priority placements for short-term engagements with refugee populations. She will also help recruit and train teams.

## Finances Fiscal year end campaign

Thank you for your prayers and financial support! As we near the end of our fiscal year on August 31, we need \$110,000 to reach our goal and cover our operating expenses. Please consider a generous gift to our Mission Fund. (See back page)

## Resourcing Parents of Missionaries gathering on August 19

If you are a parent whose family members are serving internationally, there are others who understand the challenges you face. Join other parents for a potluck meal and sharing time guided by Ken and Sue Horst on August 19 at 6:30 p.m. at the VM Missions offices, 601 Parkwood Dr., Harrisonburg, Va. Contact Melanie Sherer: [melanie.sherer@vmmissions.org](mailto:melanie.sherer@vmmissions.org) or (540) 434-9727 if you plan to attend.



## Festival of Praise Annual *a cappella* benefit concert on November 5

Join us at Eastern Mennonite School's auditorium on November 5 at 4:00 p.m. for the 16th annual Festival of Praise, a worshipful benefit concert of men's *a cappella* singing groups. The groups will combine in a finale. An offering will be taken to benefit the ministries of VM Missions.

## Save the date Appreciation banquet on November 18

As a small token of thanks, Prayer Partners and those who give to the Mission Fund of VM Missions are invited to a banquet on November 18 at the Park View Mennonite Church Fellowship Hall, Harrisonburg, Va. The meal will begin at 6:30 p.m. Afterward, a short presentation will look back over the past year and look forward to what God is doing in the next year for VM Missions.

## Bike Shenandoah 20th annual ride is Saturday, September 16

Bike Shenandoah invites bicyclists of all ages and abilities to enjoy metric century, 30-mile, 15-mile or family-friendly 5-mile rides in a relaxed atmosphere. Proceeds support international and local ministries, including VM Missions. Flanked by the Appalachians and the Blue Ridge mountains, the Shenandoah Valley is ablaze with color during the height of fall. Appreciate the natural beauty while enjoying the company of other riders, and support global and local mission and service. Ride location: Eastern Mennonite School, 801 Parkwood Drive, Harrisonburg, Va. Learn more and register at [bikeshenandoah.org](http://bikeshenandoah.org) or contact [BikeShenCycle4Service@gmail.com](mailto:BikeShenCycle4Service@gmail.com), (540) 908-3933 • (540) 578-3024.

## Relief Sale My Coins Count will help children in need



My Coins Count (MyCC) is a fun way to raise money for projects of Virginia Mennonite Missions (VM Missions)

and Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). Many congregations collect coins and bills in water jug containers that are counted at the Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale, September 29-30. Funds raised will be shared evenly between VM Missions and MCC. VM Missions projects will meet children's basic needs at the Joshua Center in Albania, Maranatha School for the Deaf in Jamaica, Rumah Harapan (House of Hope) in Southeast Asia, and Bundibugyo, Uganda. MCC projects will respond to the refugee crisis in Syria and Iraq, especially helping children that have been affected by the prolonged crisis.

# ● In word and with power



In a slum community in a large Asian city, Grace and Yugo have gained their community's trust through deeds of love. Now they ask, "How do we proclaim the gospel holistically?"

BY GRACE (Last name withheld for security)

As followers of Jesus, we have the "priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God" (a phrase Paul uses in his letter to the Romans 15:16). He continues by saying: *Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done - by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit* (Romans 15: 18-19, emphasis added).

What does it mean to proclaim the gospel, the good news? How do we do so holistically as Paul speaks of—with words, deeds, and power?

Having only been "on the field" for seven years, I still feel very under-qualified to answer this. I am a beginner. This is the irony: the more I learn, I see there is more to learn. Perhaps seven years ago, a fresh graduate from Eastern Mennonite University, I had more answers. Now, after these years of following Jesus among the poor of Asia, I have more questions than answers.

How can I share the good news of the kingdom of God with my Muslim neighbors? They are born into a folk-Islam belief system, complex beyond my comprehension. Fear of evil spirits and ancestral spirits binds them with countless rules about bathing, diet, pregnancy, prayers, and every manner of life. It binds them literally with amulets, coconut brooms, knives, and Arabic prayers placed around their homes for protection. We are encountering not just Qu'ranic Islam here. This is different: Muslims who have never read the Qu'ran, but can chant in Arabic (a language they do not understand). Friends who may or may not adhere to any of the teachings of Islam (such as *sholat* prayer, wearing a head covering, going to a mosque), but who could never imagine being anything other than Muslim. How can we share Jesus with them?

Proclaiming the good news in *deeds* often seems like the easier thing (we Mennonites seem to be expert at this part). Our team has done a reasonable job of sharing God's love by our actions, through our presence and sharing our lives in the slum. Through our daily free school "House of Hope," we have affected 200-300 children's lives over the past five years. Our health program helps many who are sick with tuberculosis. More recently, I began meeting weekly with a community prenatal group.

The neighborhood knows we love them and want to help improve people's lives. People know we live here and do what we do because we are followers of Jesus.

We have gained the trust of the slum. But now God's invitation to us is: How do we move beyond this good foundation laid by *deeds* and



Trash and mud are the daily existence of the people living in the Asian slum community where Grace (pictured) lives. How is the good news proclaimed here?

Photo courtesy of author





Rumah Harapan—“House of Hope”—proclaims the love of Jesus mostly through deeds. Grace and Yugo hear the call of God to also proclaim the good news *in word and with power* with their neighbors. Photo courtesy of author

make sure we are also proclaiming the gospel *in word and with power*? One way we can witness is through offering to pray for people. I see prayer as one way of using *words* and opening the opportunity for God to make himself known with *power*. Over the years, we have prayed for many people. No one has ever rejected our offer to pray for/with them. For many, this is the first time anyone has actually been prayed for in their own language, for their specific needs (as opposed to a memorized rote prayer in Arabic).

I visited Mama Bule in February. Her home is in the flood-prone area of our slum. She was nine months pregnant, expecting her third child to arrive any day. We sat together in her shack, which was still flooded twelve inches at the front and knee deep at the back from recent rain we had (I wore my mud boots). This particular day that I visited I asked if I could pray. Pray for a safe delivery. Pray that the baby would come not during a rain storm. (How would they get to the midwife?) I prayed for protection, health, love, and guidance for their family.



Pregnant women and nursing mothers meet to learn healthy practices. Photo courtesy of author

Another way we proclaim *in word* is by telling stories. We live in a context of people who do not read. Most people are literate, but reading is something one does only when necessary. So how do we share the Bible? Well, the same way it was originally shared: orally. We look for opportunities to tell stories about Jesus throughout our day-to-day life. A few years ago my teammate Lina and I had a weekly women’s gathering, telling stories of women from the Bible. It lasted for six months but eventually stopped due to Lina returning home. Please pray for wisdom and guidance about how to start such a gathering again.

But the most important thing to remember about proclaiming the good news is that we must do so in the *power of the Holy Spirit*. We do not labor on our own strength or according to our own whims. We must be listening to the Spirit. And we pray that the Holy Spirit will make God known through visions, dreams, healings, and other miracles.

Finally, I cannot proclaim the good news if I am not living in it, experiencing God’s grace for myself each and every day. God wants lovers, not workers. A lover will outwork a worker any day. God wants me to follow him, to know him, to love him! And then, out of that relationship, the rest will follow. We must daily soak in Christ’s love for us—and out of that love we can then proclaim the good news of God’s love to the world: in deeds, words, and power.

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*Grace serves in a slum community with her husband Yugo and sons Jeremiah and Simeon. They serve with Servants to Asia’s Urban Poor, in partnership with Virginia Mennonite Missions.*

# ● Sowing seeds of good news

Holy moments right here and now: mission workers and staff share fresh stories of gospel seeds being sown in the course of their everyday lives. “God, may you bring the fruit!”

(At right) A family outing in South Asia.

(Names withheld for security.)  
Photo by Skip Tobin



It was so hot and humid that I couldn't wait to get my frozen mocha once I finished running errands around town. As I left the drive thru, I was holding my ice cold treat, waiting for a red light to come along so I could stop and have a good sip. As I began opening my straw,

I observed a young woman on the curb right next to my car, holding a sign that said: “Hungry, please help! God bless.” Instantly, I knew what I needed to do, but didn't want to.

“Why Lord?” I asked. “Why should I give her my mocha? It won't make a bit of a difference in her life.” Though only seconds passed, the argument within me was intense. Finally, I opened my window and offered her my drink. “God thought you'd like some ice cream today,” I said. She opened her eyes wide with surprise and answered, “Thanks! I've been here all morning. I'm thirsty.” The traffic light turned green and I had to move on. But I couldn't get her image out of my mind all day. Several weeks later, I spotted this woman in another street, still holding her sign. I went to get an ice cream and came back to give it to her in order to continue our conversation. I opened my window and said, “Hi, today is strawberry.” She smiled and eagerly took the offered cup. “I'm happy,” she said. “I'm getting my girl back today!” Her eyes shone, “She's been with some friends for several months, but I get to see her today.” As the traffic started to move I said, “I'm sure you love your girl very much! I'm happy for you!” Glancing at her in the rearview mirror as I left, I wondered, “Did she feel God's love?” I hope she did! I'm looking forward to our next ice cream encounter.

—Lizzette Hernandez, Latino Church Leadership Trainer



We often have our car serviced by a Muslim man. He is very zealous for his faith and knows the need of his people for God. “The people of Montenegro,” he told me, “need to know God, no matter if they learn about him from you or me.” We have friendly discussions.

He is often trying to prove or disprove something from his faith or mine. He commented, “You are a different Christian. You open up the Bible and show where you are talking from, instead of just saying ‘the Bible says.’” He does the same with the Qu'ran for me. Often we are joined by a Muslim friend of his who escaped from Kosovo during the war. One time when we were talking about the mystery of God and faith, this friend said, “It is OK to have mystery in

your faith. We have it with the Qu'ran. Like the Trinity, it can be a mystery.” I responded by saying there is much we accept by faith. I see the Holy Spirit having been present at all times, before Jesus came and promised he would dwell in us. After Jesus left, we had that promise. And I see the Holy Spirit present in the Old Testament like a stage manager at the theater, saying, “All right, Moses, you are on now, do so and so.” The friend said, “I like that. It makes sense to me; no one has described the Holy Spirit being active like that before. It still is a mystery, but I can appreciate that explanation.” I felt like that explanation came from God, and I was filled with praise.

—Steve Campbell, serving in Montenegro



Just a couple of months ago, our neighbor's dog died. When we heard the news, we baked some cookies and made a card, complete with a hand-drawn image of the dog by my daughter. Two of my children then went with me to deliver our gifts. The neighbors invited us in and expressed heartfelt appreciation for thinking of them. Not having chocolate chips on hand, we had made ginger snaps instead. It turned out those were their favorites.

In a later conversation, my neighbor told me they had put their deaf and partially blind dog to sleep because he had fallen down the steps and injured his back. Suddenly he asked, “What do Mennonites think of euthanasia?” I was a bit caught off guard, but quickly replied that putting sick or injured animals to sleep is certainly an understandable act of mercy. But with people, we believe that God is the giver of life and therefore the only one authorized to take life.

Then I told him about my 90-year-old grandmother who had passed away the year before. She lived much longer with health challenges than she probably would have chosen to. Yet she entrusted her life to God's timing, and I admired her courage. My neighbor said he respected that. In fact, it reminded him of Taoism, which emphasizes living in harmony with the universe.

Though the conversation ended there, I sense the door remains open. Bearing witness in a post-Christian culture often takes time. God-talk seems like a fairy tale from a by-gone era. Yet many still long for transcendence. As one author has put it, “I don't believe in God, but I miss him.” Can we wait patiently with the God who stands at the door and knocks?

—Aaron Kauffman, President



“trying out” ten Muslim saints. These people know they need a mediator; they know that keeping the law is not sufficient for salvation. After hearing our driver share, the CNG was stopped at a railroad crossing. So Jacob took a deep breath and shared how he also sees a need for a mediator, but the mediator must be sinless. According to the Qu’ran, Moses, Abraham, and even Muhammed sinned, so who can mediate? Did our friend know that Jesus is called the Savior in the Qu’ran? He can mediate! The driver listened respectfully. Once at our destination, the driver and Jacob exchanged names and shook hands. We pray that he took our challenge to think and read more about this issue.

—Hosanna, serving in South Asia



After years of enduring a rather stale friendship with a neighbor who has since moved away, a personal crisis has brought this friend back into our lives. Jack (not his real name) has told us that he intends to become a Christian, but we realize that he doesn’t really know what

that means on a heart level. Though we’ve tried to make ourselves available to him, it has been frustrating to see him bending over backward in the typical Thai way to avoid putting any demand on our time, politely not allowing Steve to travel the distance out to where he lives. But God gave me an idea. Jack lives near Ikea, so I said to Steve, “Tell him your wife wants to shop at Ikea. You can sit with him in the coffee shop while I shop with the kids.” It worked! On the agreed upon day, we piled into the taxi and headed to the other side of the city. The one-on-one over coffee was a win more than we realized. As it drew to a close, he said, “Steve, you know, it was three years ago that you gave me this Bible. Three years ago to the day, because today is my birthday.” Jack has no family or friends locally, but God allowed Steve to be the special friend on this special day! He and Steve prayed for more work for him as the economic downturn has hit him hard. About a week later, Jack called Steve excitedly reporting that he had a new work opportunity, which he identified as God’s care for him in answer to his prayer. We are so delighted! —Bethany Tobin, serving in Thailand



It was a sweaty Sabbath afternoon, and after haggling the price down, we all got into a CNG, a three-wheeled metal cage of a vehicle. We put the kids on our laps. We all were more than ready for a swim at the Nordic Club! As usual, the driver had ten thousand questions for

us. Jacob asked him questions in return, and found out that he is from a town in the south that is known for its “mazzars” where Muslims pray to a Muslim saint. When Jacob asked the driver whether he went to those temples, he told us that he did. He cut his engine down to limit the noise and shared with us about his faith and why he follows a particular Muslim saint. We had just heard our believing friend Tipu telling us of a relative who has decided to follow Jesus after



I was participating in an Iftar meal (eaten by Muslims after sunset during Ramadan) hosted by a local church here in Harrisonburg. As the guests trickled in, I sat down with some Pakistani girls who, though polite, were busily texting. In nodding a greeting to a group of

Kurdish men sitting at an adjacent table, they conveyed that they wanted me to sit with them. I protested at the impropriety, but they were insistent, and I realized what was obvious to them, “I am a grandmother!” After pleasantries, I commented to the eager fellow on my left, “So, obviously, you are serious about your faith and keeping the fast?” He and his tablemates looked instantly chagrined. “OK, so I can’t make assumptions about you, but I can tell you about me. I am a serious follower of Jesus.” They nodded firmly. Appreciatively! My new friend countered, “Actually, I believe that the world would be better off without religion. It would be better if we all just loved each other.” Well, in that two minute time, we were off and running into a great conversation about faith. Guests kept pouring in, and I needed to relinquish my seat. But, before getting up, I told him where Skip and I lived. He beamed and said, “Oh! My English teacher Jenny invited me to come to your house for a Thanksgiving meal last year, but I couldn’t come.” I marvel at God’s leading! —Carol Tobin, Asia Regional Director



As part of my recent travel in the Gulf region, I was boarding an early morning flight when a 40-year-old Omani woman moved into my empty row. From even a seat away, we managed to strike up a conversation about culture, religion, shame, and Jesus. At

the beginning of the conversation, she commented about how she did not like her culture and the lack of freedom. “What can I do? I was born Muslim and that was how it is.” By the end of the conversation, she was agreeing that people could choose to change religion (I shared about my father, a Jewish man who became a Christian). Her background of growing up in another country, as well as being divorced, likely caused her to be more open. I wrote the name of the movie *Magdalena* (similar to the *Jesus* film) and encouraged her to watch it and learn more about Jesus.

—Sarah K., serving in Harrisonburg, Va.

## Sharing the good news in Switzerland

BY DON CLYMER

**I**took a walk one morning,” stated a woman to me as she was saying good-bye. “I asked Jesus to walk beside me... we spoke with each other. It was very therapeutic.”

I had just helped lead a four-day seminar on my book *A Spacious Heart* at Bienenberg Mennonite Biblical Seminary near Basel, Switzerland. During afternoon sessions I directed guided prayer exercises designed to draw people into a closer relationship with God.

The activity to which she was referring is called active imagination, where we invite people with whom we have a conflict, or people, like Jesus, from whom we need encouragement, to sit with us or to walk with us for a chat.

“Thank you so much for your openness and vulnerability this week,” said a man with tears in his eyes. “I was very encouraged to deal with my shadow side.” He was referring to a session in which I urged the participants to “invite your demons to tea,” while sharing my own proclivities to judgment and projection. My approach was eye opening for many of the 50 in attendance from Germany and Switzerland who seldom hear such personal stories from a church leader.

I wasn’t sure if my writing and work on spirituality in the United States would connect with the people of Europe,



Esther and Don Clymer (right) share coffee time with Swiss friends Walter and Regina. Photo courtesy of author

but the loneliness, brokenness and hunger for a deeper relationship with God is as evident here as at home. Sharing the good news

**Don leads a seminar on *A Spacious Heart*.**

Courtesy of author

here in Europe is helping people develop a closer relationship to God and helping them to return to what God created them to be, rather than what the outer world forced on them.

It is also helping them to believe that they are “beloved of God,” created in God’s image and likeness, not in the image and likeness of the culture that surrounds us.

Esther and I attended numerous Mennonite, Methodist and Reformed churches, speaking in some, and building relationships in all. We connected with hundreds of Swiss and German Christians, interacting with them and their faith journeys.

One of the highlights of our year was translating a gospel play from Swiss-German to English. The play, in the style of Ted Swartz’ “Fish Eyes,” humorously recounts the bewilderment of Jesus’ disciples Thomas and Matthew in hearing Jesus’ hard teachings.

Esther supported our year in Switzerland financially by working half time as a home healthcare nurse.

We are grateful that VMissions has supported us in this interesting, life-giving adventure of getting to know hundreds of wonderful people, and sharing (in our own special way) the good news with them.

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*Don Clymer and his wife Esther served with Partners in Mission in Bienenberg, Switzerland, building relationships and inviting people to a closer walk with God.*

# Cultivate

## A knock on the door, seeking and finding

BY SARAH K.

I was home alone in my apartment when I heard a knock on the door. Schools were out early that day; a Middle Eastern teenage boy had come to visit me. “How do you have so much faith?” asked Yousif (not his real name).

My thoughts instantly ran to 1 Peter 3:15: *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have.*

Thus began the first of many long conversations that I and a Bible Club helper, Abraham, had with this young man.

He began to get in touch with the message of love. I encouraged him to “Keep seeking and you will find.”

A few months later he sought me out after the evening Bible Club. He told me, “I believe that Jesus is God, and I want to be a Jesus follower.”

I couldn’t believe my ears as he prayed a beautiful prayer of repentance, expressing a humble need of Christ.

Joy and laughter accompany Yousif’s new commitment to walk in the way of Jesus. Courtesy photo



The author and Abraham (left) visit for Yousif’s baptism.

Courtesy photo

*How could this be happening? A Muslim young man, coming to faith so quickly?*

Yousif then shared how God had been working in his life the past few months. It was quite humbling to hear how God had used my presence in my neighborhood to impact him. Apparently, he was not too fond of me at first, but when Islam failed to provide the depth he was seeking, he figured that if I could put up with so many “annoying kids,” I could handle him and his questions.

He began to notice a relationship between when he heard and thought about Jesus, and feeling the weight of anxiety he had been experiencing being lifted off of him.

He has since moved across the country. God has used this especially trying time in his life to draw him deeper into relationship with Christ. Many times over the phone, when I’ve asked him how he is, he replies that his ongoing struggle with anxiety is drawing him closer to Jesus through prayer and Bible reading.

God has also ordained the perfect situation for him, connecting him with a youth pastor who has sons his age. He is plugged into a great church and aspiring to be a youth pastor or evangelist.

God is the one who draws people’s hearts to himself. I am grateful that he chooses to use me to share his good news!

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*Sarah K. serves with tranSend in her diverse Harrisonburg, Va., neighborhood, leading Bible Club and sharing the good news with neighbors from all over the world. (Full name withheld for the safety of the community she serves.)*



# Call to Prayer: Teaching children to pray

BY SARAH SHOWALTER

**G**od hears our prayers—this is good news! It is good news worth sharing. As a mission agency, our stories about evangelism and sharing our faith often center on missionaries in far off countries sharing the gospel with the unreached. These are exciting stories! And yet, evangelism also happens within our own homes and communities with our own families and our neighbors. It can be harder to glimpse the excitement of discipleship among the ordinary routines of life, but as Jesus showed us, sometimes the greatest opportunities for discipleship are where we least expect them.

In Mark 10, we see the disciples trying to prevent Jesus from being “bothered” by keeping the children away from him. People were bringing little children to Jesus so that he could pray for them, but in the eyes of the disciples it was not worth Jesus’ time. He had more important things to do. But hear Jesus’ response:

*“Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children. I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn’t receive the kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.” Then he took the children in his arms and placed his hands on their heads and blessed them. (v. 14b-16)*

Jesus not only viewed the children as worth his time, he told the disciples that these children have a gift in the way they receive the kingdom of God.

As believers, we are tasked with the job of bringing the little children to Jesus, whether it’s biological children, nieces and nephews, neighbors, or school children. One of the ways we do this is by encouraging and teaching children to pray. We can spend all the time in the world teaching children about God, but if we don’t teach them how to relate to God, we’re not doing any better than the disciples who tried to shoo the children away.

Here are several suggestions for how to model and encourage prayer in the lives of children:



Photo: Cassidy Lancaster

**Share your own experiences.** Share with children examples of things that you have asked God for, or times that you have heard or seen God’s response to your prayers.

**Pray in the moment.** The best way to teach children how to pray is to pray in their presence. When children approach you with a worry or problem, pray with them on the spot. Model that nothing is too small to take to God in prayer.

**Go on a prayer walk.** Cheri Fuller, author of *When Families Pray* says, “Children are terrific prayer walkers because they enjoy movement and being ‘on site’ makes the prayers more meaningful and concrete. To begin, walk around your neighborhood and ask God’s blessing and salvation on each family. Pray for the children in each home.” [a]

**Pray a blessing.** Pray a daily blessing over your child using Scripture. Numbers 6:24-26, Ephesians 3:16-20, and Colossians 1:9-12 could be used as blessings over children.

**Pray for your children’s prayer life.** As you model prayer in daily life, ask God to draw the children’s hearts to him. Pray that God’s love and presence is made known to them through their prayers, and that they grow in faith

and relationship with God.

Keep in mind that the goal is not just to prepare children to be Christian adults. God often uses children in his plans and he wants to use the children in your life too.

Martin Rhodes, Short-term Missions Coach at VMissions, has begun praying a blessing on his three children each morning before school. One by one, he places his hand on each of their heads and pray, “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace,” from Numbers 6. One morning after he had finished praying for Elliot, Vincent, and Annaliese, the three children wanted to pray for their dad as well. Each one placed their own hand on Martin’s head and prayed the same blessing over him.

Let’s ask God to use us to model a prayer-filled life to the children around us, and let’s pray that we might learn more about the kingdom of God from those to whom Jesus said it belongs.



*Sarah Showalter is a freelance writer and former VMissions staff member.*

[a] Fuller, C. *Teaching Children to Pray*. Retrieved at <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/Parenting-kids-Teaching-children-to-pray>



Marvin speaks at a chapel service at Eastern Mennonite University. As the Mennonite Hispanic Initiative Director, Marvin mentors Hispanic leaders in the areas of leadership development, theological education, and church planting.

Photo courtesy of Marvin Lorenzana

## Worker profile: **Marvin Lorenzana**

**Home:** Iglesia Discipular Anabaptista, Harrisonburg, Va.

**Service program:** Long-term

### Serve among the urban poor of Southeast Asia

Join a team living and working in a major Maritime Southeast Asian city's slum where skills such as nursing, teaching, and/or social work are an asset.

Serve alongside workers Grace and Yugo, study language, live with a host family in the slum, lend a hand with the Rumah Harapan (House of Hope) school and experience the radical lifestyle that is part of this incarnational ministry.

Length of assignment: 1 year

Contact Carol Tobin for more information at (540) 434-9727 or [carol.tobin@vmmissions.org](mailto:carol.tobin@vmmissions.org).

### Assignment:

I lead the Mennonite Hispanic Initiative (MHI) within Virginia Mennonite Conference (VMC) and work to develop ministry among Hispanics with a focus on leadership development, foundational theological training and church planting. We identify potential leaders within our congregations in order to provide them with coaching, mentoring and training in character development and ministry capacity. We hope to identify church planters who will help us plant a network of sister congregations in VMC.

### Biggest challenges:

Our biggest challenge is the fact that we are working with a community of mostly immigrants who tend to be transient in the region. The ones who are rooted in the area tend to be extremely busy with more than just one job, and they find it difficult to engage in church life and training events. Most of our people have very little or no formal education, which can cause them to feel intimidated by our training events.

### Biggest joys:

MHI has been able to provide seminary training for at least five of our leaders. We continue to work with two established congregations and are launching a new church plant in VMC's Northern District, Iglesia Menonita Monte Moriah. Lizzette Hernandez is doing great work leading the local chapter of Anabaptist Biblical Institute (IBA), where a number of students are about to graduate with a diploma in theological studies. Some of our leaders have been invited to resource training events related to Iglesia Menonita Hispana and Mennonite Education Agency.

### A typical day:

Every day can be different since the bulk of my work is being a coach to Hispanic leaders in how to develop discipleship cultures within their local context. I encourage them to explore and develop new leadership skills. I also spend significant time caring for the personal and family lives of our Hispanic leaders.



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Pastor Vladimir Cizmanski baptizes Gordana "Gotza" Deki Sedlak into the family of God. Photo: Lazar Atanasovski