

# Transforming

Stories of making disciples in the way of Christ

Winter 2018  
VOLUME 3 • ISSUE 4



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 **VMissions**

## A culture of encouragement

BY AARON KAUFFMAN  
PRESIDENT

*"I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands."*

—2 Timothy 1:5-6



I never aspired to be a church leader. As a child, I remember pondering the question of what I would be when I grew up. A doctor? A teacher, like my dad? My only prayer was, "Lord, just don't ask me to be a preacher."

A seminary degree and a hundred sermons later, I am convinced that God has a sense of humor.

Or perhaps God sees past our fears to the hidden potential each of us has but can only become aware of through the encouragement of others.

That encouragement happened for me as leaders recognized and called forth my gifts. My conference youth minister, Curt Weaver, invited me as a teenager to serve on the "youth cabinet" that planned youth events for Lancaster Mennonite Conference. My high school Bible teacher, Myron Dietz, welcomed a group of students, including myself, to accompany him to Mennonite World Conference Assembly in India. With the help of campus pastor Bruce Martin, I developed Bible study and pastoral care skills as a student at Eastern Mennonite University. When I was a mission intern in Ethiopia at the Meserete Kristos College, the college dean, Hailu Cherenet, deepened my theological awareness and honed my preaching abilities. Later on, when I served in mission in Colombia with my family, the local pastor, Martín González, gave me opportunities to lead youth ministry and be part of a church planting team. The list could go on.

The point is that my call to leadership emerged not through a flashy recruiting campaign or a job fair in a school gym. It developed over time through real friendships with mature believers who saw the sparks of ministry potential in my life and helped me fan them into flame.

That's precisely what we hope to do as we "cultivate the next generation of global missional leaders," one of the strategic priorities the Board of VM Missions adopted last year. We want to build genuine relationships with youth and young adults and encourage them to consider a lifetime call to kingdom living and leadership. That's why we're launching E<sup>3</sup>COLLECTIVE, a fresh way for teams of Jesus-followers to embark on short-term journeys of faith, encouragement, and global engagement.

But it takes more than one program or one agency to develop a culture of leadership formation. We need the whole church, working together with our varied gifts, to "grow to become in every respect the mature body of ... Christ" (Eph. 4:15).

Will you join us in handing on the radical faith of our ancestors to the next generation of leaders?

## Features

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## Financial Report

Reporting: 9/1/16 to 12/31/17

Special Projects \$ 390,139	Special Projects \$436,204
Mission Fund \$ 239,564	Mission Fund \$246,557
<b>Revenue</b> Total \$629,702	<b>Expenses</b> Total \$682,761

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

## Transforming

**Content Editor:** Carol Tobin  
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**Cover photo:** Mark Schoenhals and Witthaya Phechkmok chat outside the Det Udom Church Center, Thailand. Photo by Sarah Schoenhals

## Staff

### Mindy Schwartz joins VMissions staff



On January 1, Mindy Schwartz began employment with VMissions as the Event Coordinator and Ministry Support Team Coach. She

is also a part of the Development Team.

In her new roles, she takes over event responsibilities previously held by Steve Leaman and Ministry Support Team coaching previously held by Martin Rhodes. Steve will now focus on development as Ken Horst is retiring on April 30, 2018, and Martin will now focus solely on our short-term programs.

Originally from Wooster, Ohio, Mindy came to Harrisonburg to study at James Madison University where she earned degrees in Middle School Education and Spanish Language and Literature. While in college she spent a summer serving at Stansberry's Children's Home in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, and another studying in Salamanca, Spain. She has taught in the Harrisonburg City Schools and worked with events in Sunnyside Retirement Community's Wellness Department.

Mindy and her husband Matt Schwartz, along with their daughters Katie Grace and Hattie, helped to plant Eastside in 2010. As an active member of Eastside Church, Mindy organizes the women's discipleship partners and is a leader on the hospitality team. In the community, she enjoys discipling young women at JMU and leading women's Bible studies with students at Eastern Mennonite University and Turner Ashby High School.

**Correction:** In the Fall 2017 issue, we did not acknowledge the photographer of the large cover image and all of the images in the "Local mission on the map" article (pages 4-5). They were taken by Trina Trotter Nussbaum and provided to us by Phil Kniss. We regret the error.

## Concert

### Shenandoah Valley Men's Chorus performs Feb. 25

The Shenandoah Valley Men's Chorus, directed by Jared Stutzman, will perform in a public concert at 3 p.m. on Sunday, February 25, in the Eastern Mennonite School Auditorium. The concert is free. An offering will be collected for VMissions' workers serving in South Asia.

## Ministry Support

### Annual auction is May 11

# Auction

Support the workers and ministries of VMissions at our annual fundraising dinner and auction on Friday, May 11, at Eastern Mennonite School, 801 Parkwood Drive, Harrisonburg, Va.

Auction items will benefit workers and the Mission Fund. Both a live and silent auction will be held. The Mennonite Hispanic Initiative benefit dinner and the silent auction begins at 5:00; the live auction begins at 6:00 p.m. Browse items at [biddingowl.com/vmissions](http://biddingowl.com/vmissions). If you have items to donate, contact Mindy at [mindy.schwartz@vmissions.org](mailto:mindy.schwartz@vmissions.org) or (540) 434-9727.

## Bike Shenandoah Spring Metric Century Ride is Saturday, May 19

Bicycle enthusiasts are invited to participate in Bike Shenandoah's Spring Metric Century Ride, a 62 mile route through the beautiful Shenandoah Valley, on Saturday, May 19. This is the second annual spring ride (separate from the regular Bike Shenandoah September rides.) Mole Hill Bikes will provide two rest stops. Proceeds will benefit VMissions and other agencies. The cost of registration is \$50. Register at [bikeshenandoah.org](http://bikeshenandoah.org)

## Service

### Martins serve with SWAP



Lee and Peg Martin are serving with Mennonite Central Committee as location coordinators of SWAP (Sharing with Appalachian

People) in Kimball, W.Va. SWAP addresses substandard housing in eastern Kentucky and West Virginia. As location coordinators, Lee and Peg care for and facilitate volunteer groups who typically come for week-long service opportunities. They are serving as Associated Workers with VMissions.

## Service

### VMissions announces new short-term teams

VMissions is excited to announce a new way for teams to grow and serve through what we are calling:

## E<sup>3</sup> COLLECTIVE

Embark. Encourage. Engage.

E<sup>3</sup>COLLECTIVE offers opportunities for persons ages 18 and above to participate in healthy and holistic short-term mission experiences, from two weeks to one month in length.

Collectives will focus on being, rather than simply doing. They will challenge a works-based approach to faith and re-orient participants to a gospel-centered, Spirit-empowered way of being and building the body of Christ. Collectives will explore what it means to embark on a journey of faith, encourage the global church, and engage contemporary issues—following Jesus across the boundaries of geography and culture.

This year, E<sup>3</sup>COLLECTIVE will focus on the global refugee crisis. Check out the article by Martin Rhodes (p. 6-7) and the back page to learn more about upcoming opportunities to encounter the refugee reality in Jordan, Greece and beyond.

# ● A growing disciple, a timely chat

One of the most important ways that Mark and Sarah Schoenhals serve the Life Enrichment Church in Northeast Thailand is by providing timely encouragement and affirmation when they see that God is at work.



BY MARK SCHOENHALS

That day in November 2016 started like most other days. There was the usual quiet time, breakfast and rushing around to get everyone ready for school and work. Then I loaded the girls on the motorcycle and delivered them to their respective schools. Songkran was selling barbequed chicken along the main road in front of Heidi's school, so I stopped to chat as I often did.

Songkran had moved to Det Udom about six months earlier. I had known little about him, except that he and his wife had worked in Bangkok and he had a lifestyle that made his elderly father, a key church leader, very sad. Over those months that I had been chatting with him, I recognized a growing young disciple. He was eager to learn and recognized in himself a desire to share the Gospel.

On that November morning, Songkran did much of the talking, like usual. He shared his frustrations with his current living situation and his thoughts of moving his

chicken business to another town, closer to his parents. Without much thought at all, I asked if perhaps he might move his business to Nam Yuen. The Life Enrichment Church had a vision for planting house churches in that area and had just made an intentional prayer trip there. Might God be calling Songkran to be part of the answer to this prayer? Could he and his family move to Nam Yuen with the purpose of sharing the gospel?

Little did I know, that morning God was prepared to launch Songkran on a catapult of leadership and mission. He and his father had both had dreams that night concerning God's call on Songkran's life, and another local church leader shared a scripture with him, which seemed to be pointing in the same direction. All of this, together with the idea I had shared of moving to Nam Yuen, brought him to one of those life-moments, when God changes everything. A few hours later I got a phone

call saying, "Songkran is going to Nam Yuen!" I couldn't believe my ears. Having made the decision, he moved quickly and within three weeks he was sharing the gospel and selling barbequed chicken in Nam Yuen. Now a year later, a core group of about ten people is worshiping God regularly as disciples of Jesus. Praise God!

In our context—perhaps in most contexts—leaders are not usually raised up so clearly or quickly. I hesitated to write this article, because I feel like I had nothing to do with Songkran's rise to missional leadership. I didn't have a method and I had no plan for speaking into Songkran's life that morning. It was God's work, and I can't take credit for it! I was gently reminded however, that of course it was God's work and even when we have methods and plans, it's still God's work!

Reflecting on the story of Songkran, I recognize a number of key things that God was doing for



Bethany Tobin (serving jointly with VMissions and Eastern Mennonite Missions) and Songkran's wife, Loht. Bethany, her husband Steve and family recently moved to Nam Yuen to work specifically with Songkran, Loht, and other new leaders. Courtesy of Steve Horst



He mentioned one day that perhaps God was wanting him to be a leader, like his father. Maybe, he said, God was preparing him to lead the group in his father's village, if his father was no longer able to lead. We talked together about what it means to lead and how God was growing this in him. Through his and others' testimony, another chicken seller came to faith and was baptized. Songkran was the one who taught her the pre-baptismal lessons. I happened to pass by and saw him preaching at her between their stands. Sure, he had much to learn, but he was practicing and God was at work.

As I stopped to chat with him during those months and as others invested time and energy as well, Songkran was drawn by God, closer and closer to the day of his launch. But the learning is not over. In the year since, the learning curve has been steep. Yet, he gives testimony repeatedly, of God's grace and provision. He shared recently how his day is just not complete if he hasn't had the chance to share Jesus with someone.

As we seek to raise up leaders, whether in the United States or around the world, let us pray and pay attention to what God is doing. As we do so, let us not be afraid to speak into the lives of those in whom God is working. There are disappointments along the way, to be sure. But, when God is at work, there is no telling what effect our words and actions may have.

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*Mark Schoenhals serves with his wife Sarah and daughters Heidi and Hannah in Det Udom, Thailand, in partnership with Eastern Mennonite Missions.*

Mark Schoenhals and Songkran Chuaguu. A growing young disciple with a desire to share the gospel in his new town of Nam Yuen, Songkran has been nurtured in faith by workers Mark and his wife Sarah.

Courtesy of Mark Schoenhals

a long time prior to that November morning. Songkran had seen the example of his father and many others, of sacrificing time, energy and finances, to lead people in following Jesus. He saw the joy that comes from sacrifice, and he had seen God's provision. As Songkran turned from the things that had drawn him away from God, he found the freedom and life his father and others had been praying for him to experience. As he lived into that new life, he found a special joy in sharing this good news with others.

He learned the power of prayer. One day as he was selling his chicken, he noticed a woman across the street reading a small book. He prayed simply, "God, if you want me to share with her, bring her across the street." Within a minute, she came to buy chicken. She had been reading a Gideon Bible she had just received, and Songkran was able to talk with her about what she was reading.



Songkran's job is cooking and selling barbequed chicken in a stand, through which he has also shared his faith.

Courtesy of Mark Schoenhals

# ● Mobilizing millennials in mission

Martin Rhodes, Discipleship Ministries Coach for VMissions, is passionately hopeful about ways to engage millennials for the glory of God and the good of the world through new short-term service opportunities.

BY MARTIN RHODES

Over the past few years, much ink has been spilt and many blog posts have been written concerning the phenomenon of millennials pouring into the American workforce. Sometimes they are dismally described as distracted multi-taskers, egoistic and in need of frequent praise and encouragement, demanding flexibility in scheduling and work requirements.

Happily, as Discipleship Ministries Coach at VMissions, I have found these concerns to be wildly overblown. Time and time again, I experience these young people as confident, eager learners who have a drive to cultivate and deepen their relationships with Jesus and the church. They are intensely aware of the world around them and sober-minded regarding both the challenges and opportunities facing the modern world. They are ready to engage changing environments with creativity and flexibility; they are deeply appreciative of the mentoring relationship I offer them.

This past fall, I attended a seminar at Missio Nexus, a conference that draws mission personnel from all over the world. The focus of the seminar was training for millennials. The speaker mentioned that millennials have an acute ability to detect anything phony or false! But thankfully, they also have a high capacity for seeking out and tuning in to authentic persons and relationships. Millennials have little use for religious institutions or programs that are not meeting the needs of real people, and they are asking the church to engage on behalf of a world adrift and hurting. This demand from millennials bodes well for the church and for the world that needs to experience the love of Christ in real ways through vital relationships.

The word is out that millennials are less risk averse and more entrepreneurially creative than previous generations. They are willing to venture more for the sake of the gospel. As we work toward offering missional training, coaching and mentoring to young leaders in a global context, we are helping to ensure that with their creative and adventurous spirits, the gospel will continue to bring impact and transformation to neighbors near and far.

VMissions has identified “cultivating the next generation of global missional leaders” as one of our primary strategic priorities for this coming season. This is exciting to me! For the past twelve years through our short-term discipleship programs we have called, trained, and equipped young people to serve in emerging missional contexts both locally and abroad. But now we are taking some new steps.

For one thing, we created a tranSend role for a bright young millennial to work with us to create new partnerships and opportunities in an arena of engagement that has relevance both locally and globally, namely, the worldwide refugee crisis. The UN Refugee Agency estimates that there are over 65 million displaced persons worldwide.<sup>1</sup> Nearly one out of every 100 people are displaced.<sup>2</sup> Twenty people every minute are forced to flee. These numbers are unprecedented and staggering to consider. Presently, on an annual basis, less than 1% of displaced persons are able to be resettled. The vast majority of the remaining 99% end up in UN run refugee camps, where the average stay is 10 years.<sup>3</sup> Camps offer little if any access to employment or education. Living conditions are deplorable. In this context of



The VMissions Global Team meets to work together on desired priorities and outcomes for the overseas programs. VMissions established a new short-term program, E<sup>3</sup>COLLECTIVE, to send small teams to locations that are grappling with the ongoing refugee crisis. Photo by Jon Trotter



Top: Inside a refugee camp in Greece, a tent blocks the wind as women gather for an English conversation class each evening. Photo courtesy of Taryn Zander

Left: Children play in a refugee camp for Syrians in Greece. Their families may stay in this camp for years. Photo courtesy of Taryn Zander

Spray painted on a wall near a refugee camp in Athens, Greece: a welcoming message for those desperate to find safety.

Photo by Claire Van Der Eems

confusion and hopelessness, self-harm, substance abuse, mental illness and suicide become huge concerns.

With her passion for Jesus and the gospel, recent JMU political science graduate Taryn Zander has jumped on the opportunities this assignment affords her. Her heart for refugees, love of travel and vision for building cross-cultural relationships are a great gift to us.

Taryn is also helping us in our commitment to scrupulously subscribe to best practices in short-term missions, as defined by the US Standards of Excellence in Short-term Missions ([www.soe.org](http://www.soe.org)), an accrediting and resourcing body. With the guidance of SOE standards such as mutual design, qualified leadership, and appropriate training, we have been able to create partnerships with churches in Europe and the Middle East that are ministering in inspiring ways to refugees in camps on their borders. Day in and day out they are being a light where we know the Light shines brightest. We are discovering that many of these entities feel neglected and forgotten by the Western church. Taryn's experiences have already given us a taste of just how invaluable the encouragement, prayer and friendship we offer really are. These are effects that last long after a short-term trip concludes.

And here is the real news alert: We are ready to launch short-term teams—of all ages—this summer through this new initiative entitled E<sup>3</sup>COLLECTIVE. Taryn is working hard to recruit and plan specialized training for persons

from our constituency to serve within these refugee contexts.

Whether you are a Millennial, Gen Xer, Boomer, or something in between, VM Missions invites you to respond to God's call. You too can be part of this good work and good way to share the good news of Jesus with the whole world. How can we not be excited for what lies ahead? We look forward to hearing from you!

*Martin Rhodes is  
Discipleship Ministries  
Coach for Virginia  
Mennonite Missions.*



Sources: <sup>1</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/08/03/nearly-1-in-100-worldwide-are-now-displaced-from-their-homes/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/whats-so-hard-about-refugee-crisis-making-displacement-development-problem>

# One generation mentors the next

BY JANET BLOSSER

God's command to his disciples to "go and make disciples" takes work. In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul told his disciple Timothy to *teach those who will teach others*. In this way, the gospel moves from one generation to the next.

Recently my husband Floyd and I walked into the meeting place of Shalom Church in Brancaccio, Italy. What a joy to see this group of persons growing in faith and in number since we left it twenty years ago! What has happened in the years since? How has the 2 Timothy 2:2 principle been at work?

Brancaccio was the second congregation that we planted on the outskirts of Palermo, Italy, birthed in 1994. Upon our departure from Italy three years later, we left the new group in the hands of Pino Arena. He had been our neighbor in Capaci and had been a believer and elder for three years in the Capaci congregation. Floyd's message before we left was this key principle: *"And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others."* Pino and his wife Rosanna showed themselves to be reliable. They moved to Brancaccio and began pastoring the fledgling congregation.

The members gathering could not afford to pay a local pastor. Pino's job was hit-and-miss. For a while, he traveled back to Capaci to work part-time, barely making enough to pay gas, much less cover his living expenses. With unemployment at 42%, jobs were hard to come by. He tried some other part-time jobs, but they were not very successful. The congregation decided to pay him a part-time salary; however, with a downturn in the economy, there were times when the congregation could afford little more than to pay the rent. With many struggling in their jobs, even the tithe yielded so little. The group would pay Pino his salary, but he would put the money back into the offering plate, knowing that they didn't have enough to pay the rent for their meeting place. Nevertheless, they moved to a larger facility to accommodate the growing group. Pino and

Rosanna freely share how God took care of them throughout this time.

Amidst many hardships, the congregation continued to grow as each shared the gospel with relatives, neighbors and friends. Pino recognized the need for new leaders and began calling those from the congregation to step forward. Dario and his wife Daniela began to work with youth. Pino and Rosanna mentored and nurtured them. Then Dario was called as an elder to serve the congregation.

Dario's job was not very stable. However, he looked around to see what gifts God had placed in his hands. He came from four generations of making and performing historical stories with marionettes. His father had a puppet stage, and they would perform historic vignettes with the marionettes. But that did not put money for food on the table. So Dario worked at other part-time jobs to make a living. With the desire to share the gospel burning in their veins, Dario and Daniela envisioned using the marionettes for this purpose. They are in the process of writing Bible stories and making the characters to add biblical vignettes to their program for children in the schools.

At the annual Italian Mennonite Church conference last month, Dario led worship at the first session! What a joy to see him and Daniela flourishing spiritually and leading the church as they have been mentored by Pino and Rosanna. As they work with youth, with children in the schools, and serve the Shalom congregation, they too are now cultivating the next generation of leaders.

In the meantime, following the leading of the Spirit, Pino and Rosanna have most recently moved outside the city to Termini Imerese, and have begun sharing the gospel.

A new house group is emerging in their home of persons wanting to be disciples. The process of cultivating the next generation continues!



Dario Argento holds a marionette puppet at the Shalom congregation in Brancaccio, Italy. Dario's family had performed with marionettes for four generations, and now the gospel is being shared through his work. Photo by Aaron Kauffman

A new house group is emerging in their home of persons wanting to be disciples. The process of cultivating the next generation continues!

Janet Blosser is Mediterranean Regional Director for Virginia Mennonite Missions.

## Hispanic immigrants: a new breed of leaders

BY LIZZETTE HERNANDEZ

God has entrusted Mennonite Hispanic Initiative (MHI) with a new breed of committed Hispanic leaders. Providing guidance, mentorship and encouragement to this group is a challenge: most of them are first generation immigrants, from more than 10 different countries.

Many are young couples, navigating difficult roles as parents of US-born “third culture” children. They face language barriers and the heavy load of working long hours in physically demanding jobs. They are intimately acquainted with night shifts, low incomes and vulnerability due to complex immigration issues.

Yet, the Holy Spirit is at work. These leaders prove each day that in the face of a very difficult life, passion for God’s mission can burn brightly. They have courage to reach out in their communities and proclaim the good news of Jesus. VMMissions worker Marvin Lorenzana and I believe that these are the leaders of the future that God wants us to invest into.

How do we help to provide an environment for growth? One way is through an annual MHI leaders’ retreat which is serving to create a space for knowing and bonding with one another. This is a family-oriented event for the leadership teams of the churches related with MHI, and persons those leaders discern as having leadership potential. Imagine 54 persons (including 13 children) attending this year’s retreat at Highland Retreat!

It was a blessing to me to see the beautiful reflection of diversity at the retreat, and the warm camaraderie amid that diversity.

I loved seeing Maria, a Honduran worship leader from Iglesia Discipular Anabaptista, help lead worship while Alfonso, a Salvadorian pastor from Iglesia Menonita Monte Moriah, shared devotions. I loved seeing José, a Mexican from Enciende Una Luz, in animated conversation with



Hispanic leaders gather at a Mennonite Hispanic Initiative leaders’ retreat at Highland Retreat. Fifty-four persons, representing many nationalities, participated.

Photos courtesy of Lizzette Hernandez

Andrés, a Colombian, about how to share the gospel in the poultry plant where they work!

As Marvin and I work to develop leaders within a community so disenfranchised in the larger society, and used to the feeling of powerlessness, it is especially meaningful to have the opportunity to encourage leaders to embrace the spiritual authority they’ve been given by Jesus to make disciples. We want to help them understand they have everything they need to carry on the mission because they have the promise of his presence to help them along the way.

The topic for this year’s retreat was simply “Jesus.” Our goal was to elevate our Christology, understand the nature of Jesus, the relevance of his life, ministry, teachings, death and resurrection for all of us who follow him in the 21st century. Luis, a leader of Enciende Una Luz, told me that the teaching challenged him to deconstruct the faulty images he had of Jesus and to re-discover the Jesus of Scripture.

Leaders spent time reflecting on how to build relationships in their communities, offering hope for the loneliness and despair that most immigrants face as they move to the US. Ana, a retreat participant, engaged the conversation passionately and shared her burden for women who suffer abuse from their husbands, and felt challenged to take action in some way.

It is thrilling for me to see that the Holy Spirit is at work in our midst, enabling and equipping these Hispanic leaders to face the contextual realities of their community with a vibrant gospel that can be passed from one generation to the next.

*Lizzette Hernandez is Latino Ministries Coach for Virginia Mennonite Missions.*



Marvin Lorenzana at his ordination. His wife Mariana is at right. Also pictured are Lizzette Hernandez and Gordon Zook, VMC Interim Conference Minister. Photo by Aaron Kauffman

# Call to Prayer: A transformed prayer life

BY SARAH SHOWALTER

**G**rowing up in church, my husband Austin had tried hard to apply himself to his youth pastor's advice: "Try praying for at least two minutes a day." Austin struggled to get past thirty seconds; he just wasn't sure what to say!

But after graduating from high school, he joined the YES program (Youth Evangelism Service) with Eastern Mennonite Missions and completed three months of intensive discipleship training in Harrisburg, PA, and then nine months of outreach in India and Nepal. I asked him how his time in YES shaped his prayer life, and his response was that it didn't just shape it: "it made it."

While in India, the YES team worked alongside a local church in which the women gathered daily for four hours to pray. Austin thought that it was some kind of strange gathering with people "going crazy in prayer." "They invited us to join them, and we were really nervous. But we went and it was just really normal. They just talked about things and then they prayed for them, and they asked us about our families and they prayed for them. It's not this weird thing that you have to do in a certain way, it's really just having normal conversation with God. That was really powerful to understand."

## *There's something significant that happens in corporate prayer.*

VMMissions Associate workers Alisha and Brent Justice serve in Uganda with SERGE at a clinic addressing issues of malnutrition among children in the region. Alisha and Brent reflected that their worldview has been broadened through their work, as they are exposed to pain and suffering in ways that they hadn't experienced before. They have seen their prayer life shift to a more outward focus with a greater



Austin Showalter and the 2008 India-Nepal YES team with a prayer group from the Indian church. Photo courtesy of Sarah Showalter

dependence on God. "We see the desperation and suffering of mothers, children, and even nations. Being exposed to such brokenness draws us to the feet of Jesus, knowing that our help is only temporary but Jesus' is eternal and everlasting." They go on to say, "Our prayers are transformed from our own personal comforts to pouring out our hearts for Christ to intercede for the church and for our friends; for hope, for God's power to be revealed in their lives, and for the Spirit to transform their hearts. Christ's love, grace, and salvation are no longer things we hold onto for ourselves, but desire for the whole world to know."

Austin also reflected on the understanding of spiritual warfare that he observed in the prayers of Indian and Nepali Christians saying, "Spiritual warfare informed their prayer life and even drove it in some cases." During my own time serving with VMMissions in Thailand with the Life Enrichment Church, I learned to pray with new eyes for the spiritual realm as well. Being part of a prayer gathering where spiritual warfare was the focus felt like gearing up for a battle. Often times in the Western world, we just ignore the spiritual realm, but there's a

lot of victory that can come when you invite God's Spirit to be at work in those spiritual realities.

One of the biggest shifts that came from my time in Thailand was value of corporate prayer. The Life Enrichment Church gathered monthly for prayer meetings and more often in smaller groups as well. Some prayer gatherings even turned into all night prayer times. It was powerful in bringing unity of purpose and understanding of how God was moving. It was also powerful in breaking through physical and spiritual strongholds. Before living in Thailand, I would have said that prayer was a personal practice. But now I believe that praying together is an integral piece of being church together - there's something significant that happens in corporate prayer.

What a gift for us as young persons to be able to partake in these mission experiences and learn from our international brothers and sisters. I am confident that our prayer lives will never be the same.



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



(Above:) Kitembo Robert (left), Bahati, and Alisha Justice work with the BundiNutrition program. (Upper right:) Brent and Alisha Justice. (Lower right:) Brent Justice with Ahebwa Johnson. Photos courtesy of Brent Justice

## Worker profile: Brent and Alisha Justice

**Service program:** Long-term  
(in partnership with Serge)

### Assignment:

Alisha manages a malnutrition program in the local health center for moderate to severely malnourished children aged six months to five years. BundiNutrition is a ten week outpatient program that provides nutritional supplements, education, and a Bible study for the mothers of these children. Brent is the properties manager, responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the land, buildings, and houses that he and his teammates occupy in Bundibugyo. He oversees and works with nine local Ugandan men.

### Biggest challenges:

Bundibugyo is a severely impoverished region - home to a lot of pain, suffering, and despair. To be constantly

surrounded by such immense poverty and have people daily coming to our door with needs and requests, yet not always knowing which needs and requests are legitimate and which ones are manipulative is a heavy burden to carry. We want to always be most loving. Sometimes that means saying yes to requests; sometimes that means saying no. Although we always want to direct our friends and neighbors to the ultimate Provider, many times, those who come to us only want immediate care for their physical needs. A "no" from the Spirit at such times can be a heavy burden.

### Biggest joy:

To see children graduate from BundiNutrition, having gained enough weight to not have to be re-enrolled. The smiles, and tears of joy, from the mothers at seeing their children become healthy is a tremendous blessing. Being able to direct this gratitude to the Father in praise is why we are here.

### A typical day:

There aren't many typical days! Although each day brings new and different challenges, most days begin with a few hours of quiet and solitude to prepare for the many interactions we have throughout the day. We usually spend an hour or two every day greeting neighbors who come to the door or visiting friends in the community. Preparation, administration, and overseeing the nutrition program and compound management takes a large amount of time, as well as simple everyday tasks such as laundry, housework, going to the market and food preparation. We really enjoy having neighbors and teammates in our home for meals and conversations, but this takes a lot of work. Even cooking a simple meal, which in the United States would take 30 minutes, can take 3-4 hours to prepare in Bundibugyo!



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# E<sup>3</sup> COLLECTIVE

Embark. Encourage. Engage.



**Nearly 1 out of 100 people in the world are displaced.  
How can followers of Jesus respond?**

**This year, our international partners have invited  
teams to serve the needs of refugees.**

**Consider leading or joining one of these collectives:**

**Mafraq, Jordan: May 15-31** (General service)

**Amman, Jordan: Late June** (Education and health care)

**Amman, Jordan: Early July** (Education and athletics)

**Lesvos, Greece: Early August** (Work in refugee camp)



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