

Transforming

Stories of making disciples in the way of Christ

Spring 2018
VOLUME 4 • ISSUE 1



Engaging work as witness



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niche

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welcome

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 **VMMissions**

Work as witness

BY AARON KAUFFMAN
PRESIDENT



I've had a number of jobs over the years. As an kid I mowed lawns and delivered newspapers. In high school I stocked shelves at a hardware store, and in the summers I helped install pipes in new houses. One summer I even worked the night shift five days a week cleaning the floors at K-mart.

I'm thankful for the skills and work ethic I gained through those early jobs. But I must confess that I mainly saw them as a means to one end: earning money. And like many Christians, I made little connection between my faith and my work.

This began to change as I entered adulthood. After college, I taught English to non-native speakers for about ten years. Contexts varied greatly: a public high school in Virginia, a Christian school in Colombia, a program for aspiring students at Eastern Mennonite University. But no matter where or whom I taught, I tried to view my work as having meaning and purpose beyond the paycheck I would receive. I wanted to teach with passion and creativity both out of respect for the art of teaching and in order to provide students with a tool that could improve their lives and open doors of opportunity. Most of all—at least on my better days—I wanted my work to give witness to my faith in Jesus Christ.

Too often we as Christians have adopted our culture's divide between the spiritual and the secular. We designate what we do at church or in our personal devotional life as "spiritual," and the rest of life as "secular." Except for paid ministry, we rarely think of work as spiritual.

The Bible makes no such distinction between spiritual and secular. In fact, the creation account in Genesis tells us that work is a divine and therefore supremely spiritual activity. Work is so good that God decides to share it with human beings, placing us on earth "to work it and take care of it" (Gen. 2:15). As we do so, we reflect the glory to God, whose image we bear.

In his book, *The Missional Entrepreneur*, Mark Russell identifies seven principles about work from the first two chapters of Genesis, paraphrased below:

1. Work is part of stewarding God's creation.
2. Using and making tools is an integral part of work.
3. Creation is a gift, but it takes work to tend and enjoy it.
4. We are meant to appreciate the beauty and goodness that work produces.
5. Work is something we are meant to do together.
6. Work is about partnering with our Creator.
7. Work brings satisfaction and makes rest enjoyable.

Yes, on this side of the Fall (Gen. 3), work can be toilsome or even oppressive. But it doesn't have to be. As heralds of the new creation ushered in through Jesus Christ, let us recover the inherent goodness of work. Work becomes witness when we do it for the Lord.

"Whatever you do,
do it from the heart for the
Lord and not for people"
Colossians 3:23
Common English Bible

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Financial Report

Reporting: 09/01/17 to 03/31/18

Special Projects \$ 807,064	Special Projects \$876,057
Mission Fund \$ 432,695	Mission Fund \$445,242
Revenue Total \$1,239,760	Expenses Total \$1,321,299

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

Transforming

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Cover photo: LaVonne Ramella (left) and Serbeze Bujupaj at Lady Latte, a new coffee shop ministry in Istog, Kosovo, that engages work as witness. "Work that spells WELCOME" (page 6) author J.W. is on the Lady Latte board and provides business and ministry expertise. Photo by Lynn Suter

Ken Horst honored for a lifetime of service with VMissions



Kenneth R. Horst retired at the end of April after serving many years, first as a mission worker with his wife Sue and children for 13

years in Italy, then as a VMissions staff member for 18 years.

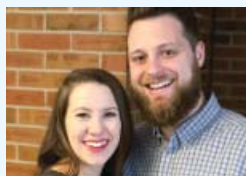
His responsibilities over the years included directing the Partners in Mission program during its heyday, deploying over a hundred persons a year on teams to various parts of the world; developing and serving as the first director of the tranSend program, which has since prepared dozens of persons for long-term ministry; assisting and then directing our work in the Mediterranean as we launched new ministries in Albania, Montenegro, and Kosovo; and finally using his considerable relational capital to cultivate donor support for our ministries as a development officer.

The VMissions board honored Ken for his service on April 14 during their spring meeting. A retirement celebration dinner with staff was held on April 26.

Join a Community Church Planting Local Training, June 7-8

CCP founder Bruce Bennett will lead a local training June 7-8 at Harrisonburg Mennonite Church. Attend one or both days of this two-day training: June 7 is on "Principles of Community Church Planting;" June 8 is on "Mobilizing Disciplemakers." Sessions will be 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. both days. \$15 per day covers lunch and snacks. Register at vmmissions.org/ccp-local-training.

Meet the people newly appointed for service



Matthew and Rachel Cordella-Bontrager have been appointed to serve long-

term in Kosovo as cultural and language learners, hoping to build relationships and a community of faith.



Dan and Mary Hess have been appointed for long-term service in Albania, working with

the Guri I Themelit church in discipleship and community church planting movements, in Lezhë and beyond.



Luis Martinez has been appointed to serve as a Spanish-language chaplain in Virginia-

based contexts, and as church planter and pastor within Iglesia Discipular Anabaptista.



Armando and Veronica Sanchez are appointed to plant a new Spanish-speaking church

in the city of Waynesboro, Va. Armando will continue to pastor at Enciende una Luz while they start this new church.



Rachel Yoder is appointed to serve with tranSend as a resident at 264 OSH, a discipleship

ministry of VMissions and Eastside Church, hosting Bible studies, meals, and other ministries through Eastside.



Melody Zimmerman will serve with tranSend in Harrisonburg, Va., partnering

with churches to share the good news of Jesus through Kids Club in the Shenandoah Valley in a half-time position.

E³ Collectives launching into refugee settings

Move quickly if you would like to be part of these well-designed two-week mission experiences, connecting you with the everyday reality of refugee populations in:

Amman, Jordan: June 28-July 14

Nairobi, Kenya: July 11-26

Lesvos, Greece: August 1-14

Parents of missionaries fellowship meal: May 17

Resourced by Ann Hershberger, our meal and fellowship will center on the topic "How to be Present when Absent." Join us from 6:00 to 7:30 p.m. at the VMissions office, 601 Parkwood Drive, Harrisonburg, Va. RSVP by emailing melanie.sherer@vmmissions.org

Save the Date: Worker Commissioning, July 18 at On Sunny Slope Farm

"Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off." (Acts 3:3) As a people of God, we are at our best when we are setting apart and sending persons out in mission. You are invited to imbibe the energy, contribute your prayers, and be part of this beautiful commissioning celebration for our workers on Wednesday, July 18, at On Sunny Slope Farm, 1825 Sunny Slope Lane, Harrisonburg, Va. Watch the VMissions website for details to come.

● A tailor-made niche

Worker J.T. shares about the multiple benefits and blessings of being a graphic designer in his South Asian context.



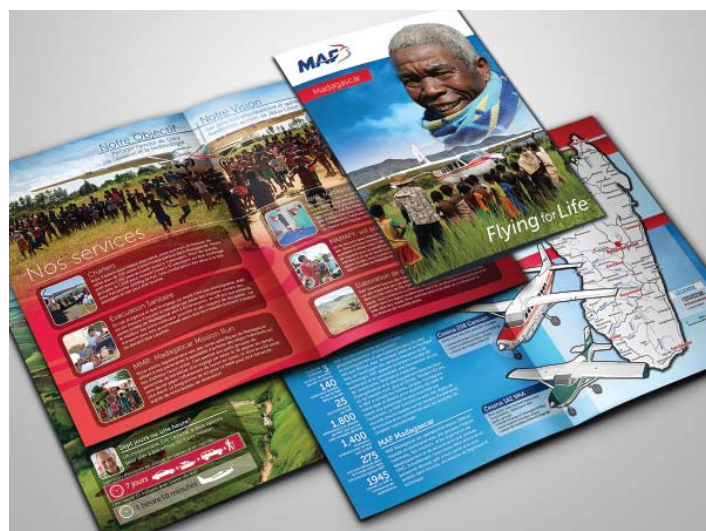
BY J.T.

Almost twenty years ago as a university graphic design major, I was eager to get my degree finished so I could move on to full-time ministry. As much as I enjoyed graphic design, I saw it as a consumeristic tool for convincing people to buy junk they didn't need with money they didn't have, and I was ready to leave it far behind on the mission field. I wanted to live by faith among the unreached instead.

Five years of immersion into language, culture and ministry challenged a lot of my ideas. I saw that one of the biggest things hindering the growth of the church in this unreached country was an unhealthy dependence on foreign funding. Out of thousands of believers and dozens of churches, I didn't know any that weren't heavily reliant on foreign funding for their ministry activities.

There were so few examples of believers working a regular job and volunteering time on the side in ministry while contributing funds to the church, which I see as a core part of a healthy church. But had missionaries modeled how to work a normal job while serving the church simultaneously? Not really.

I realized that I can bless the church and the country by putting my professional skills to work, modeling a theology of work alongside active ministry, and training believers professionally as well. This puts me into natural workplace relationships with Muslim peers.



A sample of J.T.'s professional work in graphic design. This is a French-language brochure for Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF) in Madagascar. Courtesy of author

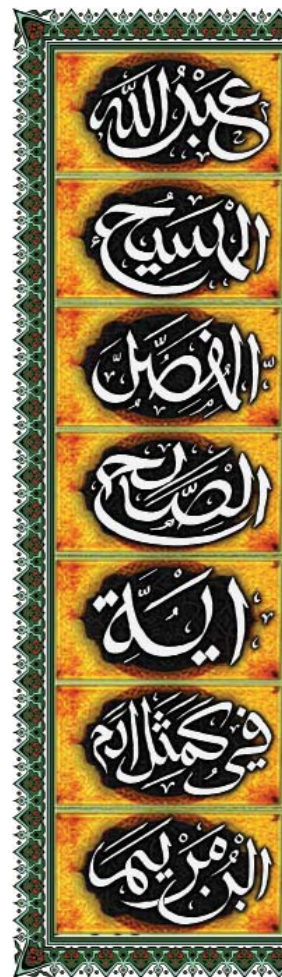
At the same time, I need a long-term visa in this restricted-access country where being a missionary among the majority population is not allowed. I teamed up with a friend who started a media business in a job role that seems to be a tailor-made niche for me. I get to have an employment visa in a restricted-access country with only a 20 hrs/week work requirement. As an employee in this business, I spend roughly half my time working on Christian media projects to broadcast the gospel, and half my time with secular projects for Muslim clients.

It takes an unusual amount of self-discipline to be effectively bi-vocational. I get absorbed in projects, and often my family gets the short end of the stick. Likewise, in the balance between 'work' and 'ministry', ministry often gets sidelined because it's not as strictly policed. I find it helpful to keep track of my business-related work time with time-tracking software so I can better understand and evaluate how I am spending my time.

It has been a real joy for me to be involved in discipling youth holistically in both career skills and spiritual maturity and service to the church. Ten years ago a high school student I was mentoring had dropped out of school and was not doing much of anything. After teaching him graphic design skills, I mentored him in operating a successful multimedia business.

He's still doing great professionally, but more than that, I'm overjoyed to see him continue to serve the church sacrificially with time and money. My bi-vocational ministry allows me to model this sort of lifestyle to believers and empathize in a deeper way with the everyday challenges of doing this.

In our home, I often help with the bread making, especially with getting the yeast the right temperature. Yesterday, I got it just right and the bread rose to a record height. Jesus used yeast as a metaphor for the kingdom, a slow and inconspicuous ferment that gradually permeates society. Is it this slow and inconspicuous influence that business people are in a position to bring?



One little-known hero of mine who had this kind of “yeasty” impact on Japan was William Merrell Vories. Vories was trained as an architect, and went to Japan, intending to win people to Christ in the remotest parts “too inconspicuous to appeal to any other missionary.”

He got a job teaching English in the Shiga Prefecture, and in his off-hours led a Bible study and made converts among young men. This lost him his job, so to earn an income, he started an architectural company with the ostracized converts as his apprentices.

Within a short time, Vories and his band were running the most influential design firm in Japan. He discovered how to build buildings that could withstand Japan’s frequent earthquakes. By the 1950s, his firm had built around 1,600 buildings.



Vories and his apprentice-disciples formed the “Omi Brotherhood,” and even though they were making substantial money as architects, they pledged to live on an average of \$62 per month, regardless of their role in the company. They poured the remainder into evangelistic and humanitarian initiatives. They put dozens of pastors through seminary, established churches and preaching points, founded schools, and preached in villages on evenings and weekends. Vories focused on demonstrating practical “Christianized economics” in his time.

This is something that inspires me as I work professionally with script and design. It is deeply satisfying to “put to work” these gifts God has given me! The people

we live among passionately love their language, and while Islam suppresses it and considers it unfit for spiritual matters, Christianity has a unique legacy of encouraging and developing languages. Two hundred years ago, Christians started the first schools that used the local language, and pi-

oneered printing with the first vernacular books and newspapers. According to current non-Western missiologists, this local-language missionary effort sparked a cultural renaissance that eventually overthrew colonialism.

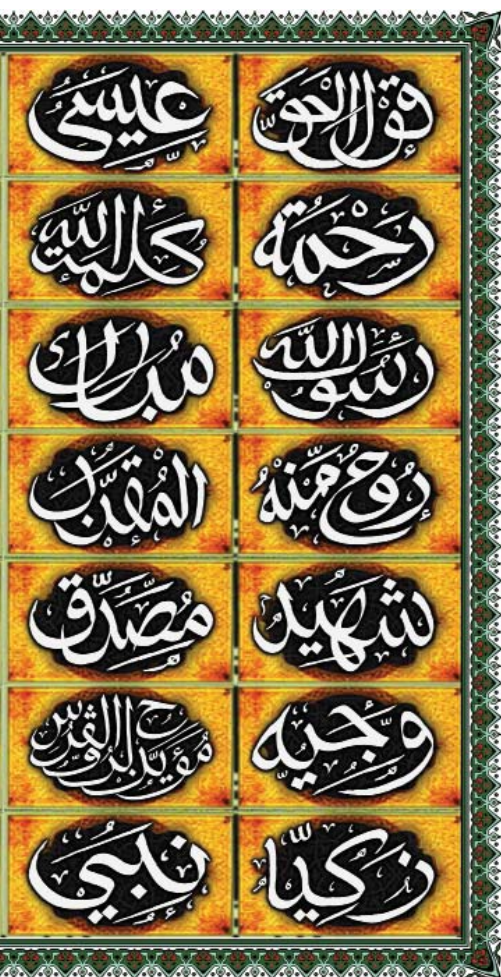
With my type of design work, I get to continue in this “cultural mandate” of developing this language and while doing it, share with my Muslim colleagues this beautiful heritage of how Christianity uniquely uplifts languages.



William Merrell Vories in 1905. Wikipedia

God has called me to devote my life to this vastly under-reached people group. He is calling others as well. The process of discerning the particular niche that matches gifts, needs, and opportunities can feel prohibitive and scary, especially when engaged from a distance. If you feel God nudging you to an unreached people group, the best option is often to just dive in first as a cultural learner. Far and away the largest factor correlated with tentmaker effectiveness is linguistic competency. We’ve seen time and again that those who put their career plans and preferences on hold in order to prioritize language and culture study under a temporary visa option for a couple years come out on the other end with a surprisingly good niche fit they wouldn’t have known about if they had come and expected to immediately implement a business plan.

VMMissions worker J.T. serves in bivocational business for transformation ministry with his family in a major city in South Asia.



J.T.’s calligraphic presentation of the 21 names attributable to Jesus in the Quran, such as Word, Blessed, Miracle, Messiah, Righteous, Prophet, God’s Messenger, etc. Courtesy of author

● Work that spells WELCOME

The experience of launching two businesses in Central Asia has given worker J.W. a passion for seeing God do more through business in this hard-to-reach area of the world.

BY J.W.

Who are you? Why did you come here? Who is paying for you to be here? What are your *real* goals? These are the questions—voiced or merely insinuated—that often form a barrier to traditional full-time workers being known and for people being open to hear the message that these workers long to share.

Thankfully, my neighbors and local friends can easily give an answer about who I am. I am a businessman. The benefits in four arenas to which we are committed - financial, environmental, social and spiritual - have led neighbors, employees, tax officials, and community leaders to advocate for me in many situations. As my presence is valued, I am free to share about Jesus and to pray for people wherever I go. I have the potential of becoming a community insider.

As a young pastor in New Jersey, I was encouraged on this journey to value my business identity by an older pastor and mentor, who was also the owner of a farmer's market. He told me that he had more opportunity to share Jesus in transformational ways in the marketplace than at church. This, too, has been my story as I invest my life in behalf of the unreached Muslims of Central Asia.

Early on in our time in Central Asia, I was teaching English at a regional university. Because I was studying a minority language at the same time, I was befriended by a student in my class who wanted me to visit his home and village. His family found an empty house for us on their street. We moved in and began to experience lavish hospitality: Half of the evenings of our first month in the village were spent in our neighbors' homes as we were invited to share their iftar (fast-breaking) meals. One evening, the local imam said that I was a disciple of Satan because I held my spoon in my left hand. My hosts and their guests defended me as a teacher there to bless the community.

Eventually, I was able to start two businesses in this community—an education business and a computer programming business. Our success rests in part on the collegial relationships that are open to me as a businessman. Over the years, we have often joined neighbors in their homes on New Year's Eve. It is in this kind of context that I have been in personal contact with the mayor and various tax officials. They drink and always try to get me to drink with them but respect my "no" after a few jokes at my expense. I recall how after six months of not being allowed to

legally open a business in my name, the tax collector went to the capital city, had some drinks with the assistant to the national head of taxes, and then called me late at night to ask me to speak to this drunk official in his minority language. Within the month, my business was opened.

These are the leaders who cover for me when the KGB investigates me or false articles are published accusing me of teaching religion to students. My friend who had been the head accountant for the collective farm now asks me every month if his son can marry my daughter.

Working in communities where corruption and bribes are routine, I have especially enjoyed the opportunity to mentor my management team, unbelievers and new believers alike. We struggle together with questions of how we can glorify God in our business relationships with employees and clients, despite the pressures from corruption.

When our computer programming office was broken into, and the police and building owner were ranting about what they would do when they found the culprits, I gathered the employees and police together. I prayed for God's blessing on the thieves, that they would find healing economically, relationally, and spiritually. This story of the strange American who prayed blessings on those who stole from him spread quickly throughout the community.

While the higher profile of being a business owner gives lots of opportunities to share and to influence, there is a concern that my position also makes it hard to have open conversations with seekers without them feeling pressured because of my position. At times, younger teammates have been able to have healthier conversations than I can. It is also important for me to communicate frequently with my



Winding through the rugged mountains of Central Asia. Courtesy photo





A typical fruit and vegetable market in Central Asia. Business is one of the ways that followers of Jesus can make meaningful connections and earn the trust of people in otherwise closed Muslim contexts. Photo: Melody Zimmerman

local leadership team that while I am the boss, they, as the local partners, better understand the cultural nuances. It is important for me to continually have the humble attitude of a learner, realizing how much I misunderstand, even after twelve years.

We pray that many of the community leaders with whom we relate will accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. However, even if they don't, I believe that this group will offer grace to new believers and keep the door open for them to live openly for Christ in their communities.

Best practices

I've learned a few best practices for business for transformation from being part of a network of Christian business persons working throughout the Muslim world.

- **Two-pronged training:** Traditionally, mission organizations have sent international workers primarily with Bible training. However, it is important to send more skilled professionals who are seen by their local hosts as having valuable skills to contribute. At the same time, these professionals need to invest in learning about cross-cultural and disciple making effectiveness.
- **Attentiveness to learning language and culture:** Young professionals going overseas need to invest their first two or three years overseas in learning their target language well, before they immerse themselves in business activities. Many who have eagerly established businesses have gone on to lament that while

the business opens doors to many relationships and opportunities to share Jesus, their language capacity isn't deep enough for sharing about heart issues.

- **Solid integration of business and missional vision:** Strive for effective ministry integrated throughout the business, expressed through both bearing witness to Jesus with clients and employees, and through the product and end goals of the business itself. Businesses should never be mere "platforms."
- **Strong accountability:** Strong accountability to a team of advisors that hold together accountability for ministry and business goals in healthy balance. This goes for Christian business people and professionals in the US as well.
- **Real financial sustainability:** Strive for establishing a healthy business that can pay its expenses without support from donations. The business should pay at least a local wage to the bi-vocational missionaries and cover their local living expenses.
- **Patience:** Ministry fruit is sometimes a long time in coming. In Muslim communities, it often takes eight to ten years before we start the things that we have been praying for years to see!

J.W. is a business developer in Central Asia. He and his wife are Associate Workers with VMissions. He serves on the board for Lady Latte (see cover), and offers consultation to VMissions as we seek to wisely engage business as mission.



Growing in the small things

BY CHRIS BECK

Looking back on my former career serving as a police officer, I am truly amazed at how God was working in my life during that time. While serving as a police officer, I had the opportunity to touch the lives of many people who were experiencing difficult situations in their lives. I learned very early on that walking in the fruits of the Spirit played a critical role in the resolution of these situations.



Chris Beck, the policeman.

Photos courtesy of Chris Beck

Our witness for Christ is truly reflected through our actions; many of my encounters just required a listening ear and a level of calmness and gentleness.

My faith had a positive influence on my co-workers. One particular situation that has impacted my life involved a younger police officer stopping by my office one afternoon several years ago. The officer had experienced a significant event in his career which resulted in some disciplinary action. The young man began to share his struggles with me. During that conversation, I was able to share a godly perspective with him on his situation. As the conversation came to a close, he commented, "I heard you were a Christian. I'm so glad I came by to speak with



Volunteers and neighbors in need join a prayer circle before a meal at the Loving Your Neighbor Program.

you today." I then prayed with him and we parted ways. I left the police department about a year after that encounter and never had a chance to follow up with the young officer.

But then in January of this year, the young officer contacted my wife through Facebook and wrote: "I worked with Chris for many years and he was one of my first supervisors at ACPD. I have a lot of respect for you. I think it is honorable and admirable that you are now in the ministry field, doing God's work. I also wanted to thank you for the time you took to encourage me and pray for me. God is doing amazing things in my life, and I will always remember the kindness you showed me."

This was such an encouragement to me! When we simply claim our faith and are willing to listen and pray with others, God is able to impact and change lives!

I am now serving as the volunteer coordinator for a non-profit called Love In the Name of Christ (Love INC), which serves the area of Augusta County, Va., and the cities of Staunton and Waynesboro. My role requires me to share with new volunteers and churches in our community about the mission, values and opportunities to serve. Although my role in serving has changed, I'm building upon the same attributes that God developed in me during my police career.

As I share with people what God is doing through this ministry in our community, I often find myself in similar situations with individuals who are just looking for someone to listen to their story and pray with them. As I continue to serve, I have discovered that it is in the small things we grow the most, by just listening and encouraging one another in our journey.

Editor's note: While VMissions respects different views about whether Christians can serve in jobs that require the use of force, we believe God calls us to follow Jesus in the way of nonviolence.



Chris Beck speaks with Love INC volunteer Patty Lam at the Loving Your Neighbor Program.

Chris Beck is serving with Virginia Mennonite Missions at Love INC (In the Name of Christ) in Augusta County, Va.

Burden or blessing?

BY LIZZETTE HERNANDEZ

Armando Sanchez, pastor of Enciende una Luz, reflects on his journey as a bi-vocational leader. He has recently been appointed through VM Missions to plant a new church in Waynesboro, Va.

Do you see being bi-vocational as an asset or as a hindrance in your ministry?

I see it as both, but often it is more a hindrance. I have limited personal time especially for preparing sermons and teachings. I end up sacrificing my personal time as I try to balance my job and my ministry. Many times I have to stop my carpentry work because someone in the church has a pressing need. These unexpected situations affect my finances.

Do you see your employment/work outside of the church context as ministry?

I do see my work outside the church as an opportunity to witness to Christ. Many times people ask why I behave or even talk differently; many times I am asked, "Are you a Christian?" Some people have invited me to drink alcohol, since "all Mexicans are alcohol drinkers." When I answer that I don't drink, they get surprised! This can open an opportunity to share my faith.

One Hispanic man I worked with used to say that all pastors were thieves and lazy people, living off of others. After working with me, he changed his mind...about me at least! Some people I have worked with have ended up joining church. For example, I became friends with one of my Mexican co-workers. I invited him to eat at our house. He was deeply touched by my invitation and offer of friendship, saying that he had never been invited to anyone's home before. He became a believer and was baptized.

Tell us how you came to be a pastor of this church.

I started as a youth pastor at my church and was invited to preach to the congregation once in a while. After three years, the church split and fell into a crisis; we were all left wondering what to do. It was very sad. So I felt the call to start a gathering, a place where we could continue worshipping together. With the help of three other families, we decided to start a new church, which I've had the privilege of pastoring for fifteen years now.

What life experiences have been most significant in shaping your leadership?

The most significant experiences in shaping my leadership have been sometimes the most difficult ones. The crisis within my previous church and the lack of accountability

from my former leader helped me to deeply reflect on the kind of leader I wanted to be. I wanted to stand firm on biblical principles.

Also, being called as a pastor at the age of thirty was a challenge for me. Some would belittle my leadership because of my age. But this situation was more of an invitation from God to strive to develop Christ-like character and authority.

Over the years, I have worked hard to educate myself, but I knew that my lack of formal training was a limitation and was seeking something to meet this need. Then I found the Anabaptist Biblical Institute (IBA). I studied for several years and then graduated in 2017. I acquired a more sound and well-rounded theological education.

I have also learned a lot from my family. My children regretted the little time I could spend with them. This helped me realize that I was trying to do too much myself; there were others who loved God's mission and I needed to give space for them to lead. Both IBA training and the opportunity through Mennonite Hispanic Initiative to participate in a discipleship huddle have helped me with the task of empowering and nurturing new leaders within my church. These principles are what give me confidence, even as a bi-vocational leader, to take on the challenge of planting a new church in Waynesboro.



Armando Sanchez at work in his second vocation. Courtesy of Skip Tobin

Lizzette Hernandez is Latino Ministries Coach for Virginia Mennonite Missions.

Call to Prayer: Looking for God in the workplace

BY SARAH SHOWALTER

What do you do?" "Where do you work?" "What's your job?" In our North American culture, it's the first question people ask and often is one of the more significant ways we define our identity.

Maybe you've already landed your dream job, or maybe you struggle to find purpose and energy from your work. Maybe you get along great with your co-workers, or maybe you find your patience and grace reaching their limits. Maybe you work for an organization whose explicit goal is to share God's love, or maybe you find yourself in a secular workplace that isn't concerned about kingdom values. In this world of "work," where is God?

The possibilities are limitless when you begin to see every aspect of life through the eyes of God.

We so often categorize the various pieces of our lives—work, home, church, etc. We may even find that we take on different personas or identities depending of what activity we are engaging in. Our "work-self" may be different from our "home-self" or our "church-self."

Our culture teaches us that there is a divide between the secular and the sacred - but what are the possibilities if we lived as if there were no divide?

God is inviting us to see the world—and the workplace—through his eyes. This requires a shift—taking a step back from the secular/sacred divide and beginning to look for what God is doing; to look for the sacred within the secular. This "God consciousness," which Jon W. Quinn defines as a "constant awareness of God's divine presence throughout the various routines of daily life," will shape the way we interact with the world around us. Developing a "God



consciousness" is a bit like learning to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Want to open yourself up to what God is doing in your workplace? Here are some suggestions to get started:

- Pray for your co-workers. Pray for their families. Ask God to be revealing himself more and more in their lives.
- Pray for clients/customers, whether you work with them on a regular basis or cross paths for just a few minutes. Pray that your interactions with them will be a source of encouragement.
- Pray for your managers and organization leaders. Pray that they will lead with wisdom, compassion, and the courage to do what is right.
- Ask God to reveal what the "good news" for your workplace is. What is it about Jesus and the gospel that would meet the deepest needs in your specific workplace?
- Invite God to give you opportunities to be a witness to that good news.

The possibilities are limitless when you begin to see every aspect of

life through the eyes of God. As Henri Nouwen reminds us, "Only prayer allows us to hear another voice, to respond to the larger possibilities."

And so, to the teachers, the lawyers, the social workers, the electricians, the nurses, the farmers, the computer technicians, the stay-at-home moms, the politicians, the grocery store clerks, the counselors, the entrepreneurs, the retail associates, the designers, the mechanics, the secretaries, and all who engage this work-driven world:

- May you open yourself to bringing the sacred into the secular.
- May you listen and look for the ways God is moving in your workplace.
- May you be moved by the ways God is wanting to heal and transform people, circumstances, and structures.
- May you carry the hope of Christ.
- May you engage your work as a witness to the good news.



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



Dini and Klementina in their home in Lezhë, Albania. Photo by Lynn Suter

Worker profile: **Dini and Klementina Shahini**

Service program: Long-term

Assignment:

We returned to our home country of Albania in 2011 to begin the Lezha Academic Center (LAC), which is now a grades 1-12 school. We each have a lot on our hands. Klementina serves as principal of the school and oversees its development. Dini wears many hats. He serves as the executive director for the Albanian Mennonite Mission Foundation, works as project manager for the school, serves as an elder at the Guri I Themelit church and is the team leader for our VM Missions workers in Lezhë.

Biggest challenge:

When we came back to our own culture, we realized that everything was new and different, so we had to learn to shift into a new culture, even though

we were from Albania. We also realize that we are building a new culture at the Lezha Academic Center. Things change, and every year is different. Two cultures are merging together with local and international teachers. We are becoming known in the city for our integrity and for our high standards of excellence. Everything we do, whether at school or in the town, is an example to our local people of what it means to live as Christians, in both word and action.

Biggest joy:

Our biggest joy is to see the fruit that comes from our work. This year the first Roma girl will graduate from college. Attending LAC brings hope to students as a whole new world opens up for them. It is such a joy to see the students' lives changed and transformed and to see them coming to Christ. The school opens up doors of opportunity for us to relate to their families too. Recently two

students have asked to be baptized. One of the girls is bringing her parents to church this Sunday for the first time.

A typical day:

There are no typical days. We both start the day at the school: Klementina welcomes the students. Dini makes sure everything is up and running. We plan, but we hardly ever get to follow through with the plans as there are many interruptions—parent conversations, students' needs, government representatives who show up unannounced! Students bring their own issues with them and that impacts the school too. While Klementina attends to school needs, Dini goes to his office at the church to check on email correspondence and bills that may need to be paid and to connect with pastor Rafael. Or it might be prayer group, Sunday service preparations, or hosting out-of-town guests. Each day we are grateful for the impact the gospel is having in our country!



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