

# Transforming

Stories of making disciples in the way of Christ

Winter 2019  
VOLUME 4 • ISSUE 4



## Following Jesus into the harvest



● **A harvest in the hard places** PAGE 4



● **For such a time as this** PAGE 6

 **VMissions**

## Expect a harvest

BY AARON KAUFFMAN  
PRESIDENT



Last year I read through the New Testament with two of my children. When we finished the final chapter of Revelation, with its depiction of the holy city, where God will dwell with humanity, and of the tree of life planted at its center that will bring healing to the nations, my daughter exclaimed, “I want to live in that city!”

Me too! Of course, that means waiting for the return of the One who says, “Surely I am coming soon” (Rev. 22:20).

But we do more than wait. We live with expectancy, anticipating the day of Christ’s return by joining what he is doing now by his Spirit. Jesus is gathering people from every nation, tribe, and language into one global family under his lordship.

Or to use a different image, we join Jesus in seeing with hope-filled eyes that “the fields are ripe for harvesting” (John 4:35). And with fervent expectation, we “ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matt. 9:38).

Sometimes, however, our eyes stay fixed on the field we’re currently cultivating. We don’t see the new opportunities on the horizon.

Thankfully, Jesus knows how to lift our gaze to other fields ready for harvest.

One example comes in the Gospel of John. The text says that Jesus “had to go through Samaria” (4:4). He sees an impending harvest, but it’s clear his reluctant disciples do not. They see Jesus—tired, hungry and thirsty. And they see Samaritans—a kindred people whose lineage and worship are tainted by foreign influence. No opportunity for God’s kingdom to break through here.

Yet Jesus sees a harvest. He uses his vulnerable state to engage a Samaritan woman in conversation. His request for water and his gentle yet piercing insights disarm her questions, opening her heart to the good news that he is the Messiah. She eagerly shares her experience with her neighbors, who discover for themselves that Jesus “is truly the Savior of the world” (John 4:42).

Meanwhile, the disciples, shocked to see Jesus talking with a Samaritan woman, can think of nothing to say except, “Rabbi, eat something” (John 4:31). Their preoccupation with earthly provision blinds them to the spiritual feast right in front of them. “My food,” Jesus declares, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. ... I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest” (John 4:34-35).

Like the disciples, we can get so preoccupied with our own needs that we can’t see the bounty in God’s global harvest. What if we allowed our hunger to drive us into the grainfields of the world? Can we trust that Jesus is already there, beckoning us to reap with joy what others have sown?

May the stories in this issue of *Transforming* reignite our faith to pray, give and go, expecting a harvest.

## Features

- 4 A harvest in the hard places — Sowing seeds in difficult soil but seeing promise
- 6 For such a time as this Business for transformation opens doors for the gospel
- 8 “Hello, my friend” Reflections on an E<sup>3</sup> Collective trip to a refugee camp in Greece
- 9 Sowing seeds close to home — God is transforming lives through local ministries
- 10 Call to prayer
- 11 Worker profile

## Financial Report

Reporting: 09/01/18 to 12/31/18

Special Projects \$388,984	Special Projects \$405,606
Mission Fund \$240,009	Mission Fund \$269,067
<b>Revenue</b> Total \$628,993	<b>Expenses</b> Total \$674,673

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

## Transforming

**Content Editor:** Carol Tobin  
**Design Editor:** Jon Trotter

© 2019 by Virginia Mennonite Missions.  
All rights reserved.

*Transforming* (USPS-15280) is published quarterly to tell stories of our participation in God’s mission and is distributed free. To subscribe, contact: Transforming circulation: (540) 434-9727 (800) 707-5535 • info@vmmissions.org

Our offices are located at:  
601 Parkwood Drive  
Harrisonburg, VA 22802  
Website: vmmissions.org

VOLUME 4, NUMBER 4

POSTMASTER Send address changes to:  
601 Parkwood Dr., Harrisonburg, VA 22802.  
Periodical postage paid at Harrisonburg, VA 22801.

**Cover photo:** Maia, daughter of VM Missions workers Jacob and Hosanna, walks through thick mud with her family to reach the home of a Rohingya family that had fled Myanmar. *Read vignette on page 4.*

## Women Encouraging Women...Through Prayer event is February 21

All women of Virginia Mennonite Conference are invited to attend “Women Encouraging Women ... through Prayer,” a Mennonite Women of Virginia event on Thursday, Feb. 21, 2019, 6:00 p.m. (inclement weather date: Feb. 28), hosted by the women of Ridgeway Mennonite Church, 546 Franklin St., Harrisonburg.

This meaningful time together—shared in English and Spanish—includes a time of guided prayer for sisters around the world and lifting up the ministries of VMissions workers as they serve God and touch lives around them. Then the ‘fun’ of raising funds begins—individuals and women’s groups ‘take’ an item to cover with funds, and those gifts are sent to the workers as an expression of love and care for them.

Enjoy a cross-cultural buffet as each congregation brings a bountiful dish to share with their sisters. As women gather for encouraging women in word, song and prayer, Grazia Hernandez will lead songs in English and Spanish. (She teaches Spanish at Eastern Mennonite School.)

Two women will share stories: Veronica Sanchez and her husband, Armando, are pastors of Enciende una Luz church in Harrisonburg and are planting a Hispanic church in Waynesboro. She will talk about her journey. Angelina Pardini will share her story and experiences in Amman, Jordan, where she was part of a 2018 E<sup>3</sup> Collective team. (She attends Eastside church.)

If coming from a distance to this gathering in Harrisonburg and in need of overnight lodging, please contact Gloria Lehman, President, at (540) 421-2122.

## New spring fundraiser: Mini-golf tournament at Sandy Bottom Park



VMissions invites you to save the date for “Putt Fore Missions,” **Thursday, May 23 at 5:30 p.m.** This family-friendly

event will support the ministries of VMissions and feature a mini-golf tournament and pig roast at Sandy Bottom Park, Bridgewater, Va. Mini-golfers are encouraged to form teams and raise funds by sponsorships. Although not required, there will be various incentives for teams that raise more! This friendly competition is for all ages and teams can be intergenerational. Non-golfers are also encouraged to enjoy the meal and a silent auction. More details will follow.



**MOTORCYCLE  
for missions**

## Motorcycle for Missions ride is Fri.-Sat., June 14-15

Save the dates for Motorcycle for Missions, a fun two-day ride through the beautiful Shenandoah Valley and Piedmont regions on scenic byways. Enjoy great fellowship while raising funds for the work of VMissions. Contact Mindy Schwartz with any questions or to express interest in registration information at [mindy.schwartz@vmmissions.org](mailto:mindy.schwartz@vmmissions.org) or (540) 434-9727 for details. For the most current information, visit: [vmmissions.org/motorcycle-for-missions/](http://vmmissions.org/motorcycle-for-missions/)



Fabrizio and Ilaria Perfetti

## tranSend goes to Italy

VMissions’ tranSend program invites disciples of Jesus to live out the Great Commission calling of sharing the good news with neighbors near and far (Matthew 28:16-20). tranSend has launched over 100 persons—individuals and couples of all ages—into one to two years of discipleship and service, growing their capacity to disciple others, church plant, and invite others into God’s family.

Why not share tranSend with our international church partners so they can launch national believers in the same way? Next month, the Italian Mennonite Church will release an Italian couple, Fabrizio and Ilaria Perfetti, to serve as “Italy tranSend” workers at the Valenzano congregation in Bari, Italy for a two-year term.

Fabrizio’s role will be as lead pastor: preaching, teaching, evangelism, building relationships with the believers and developing new relationships outside the congregation. Ilaria is gifted as an evangelist and will use her gifts to support the growth of the congregation.

The Valenzano congregation has been without a resident pastor since VMissions’ workers Chris and Melody Riddle left Italy three years ago.

# ● A harvest in the hard places

Workers in Asia and Europe share stories of potential harvests in difficult soil, and of immense needs. Is God inviting you to serve?

**T**wo million persecuted, stateless souls: opportunities among the Rohingya

By Ann\*, a worker in South Asia (*name changed*)

Jesus exhorted his disciples to open their eyes and see the fields! I found it hard to look up and see the fields as I plowed through deep yellow mud on my way to visit a Rohingya family. They had found haven in a neighboring country some years ago. They settled, bought land, and tried to become Bengali. Their situation is far brighter than those who have come more recently as a result of the brazen and brutal ethnic cleansing going on across the border in Myanmar. Villages burned, women raped, two million people sent scrambling.

With one hand I held my toddler, with the other, my flip-flops. My bag was slung heavily over my shoulder. I wondered, "If I slip in the mud, will my hosts give me new clothes to wear or will I go home wet?" My worries suddenly evaporated in the hot sun; the giggles got me. Our hosts stood at their gate, cheering us on, saying that the worst of the mud was almost over!

After a good wash off, greetings, and a tour of their brick home, our hosts set to making coconut noodles for us. My older son took his camera to look for birds in their garden. "Lord, what is your desire for this lovely family?" Aware of the vulnerability of their situation, they don't even say the word Rohingya. To do so would land them into the refugee camps just three miles away.

After enjoying the sweets, the ladies asked me questions and naturally conversation turned to the gospel. "Why does being good not get us to heaven? Is anyone ever good enough? What does it mean that God is just and loving? And why did Jesus have to die on the cross?" The women came closer, spoke more animatedly; they followed my words with sighs and questions. The conversation took all my years of language study, knowledge of the Quran, and insights of other wiser workers. It was utterly fulfilling to share of Jesus. We left with promises to return.

## Invitation:

**Pray:** Ask the Lord to send workers to devote themselves to the two million Rohingya, who have yet to access to the scriptures in their own language.

**Go:** Teachers, medical workers, and community development workers are all needed. Consider if your skills enable God to use you in this context.

The ladies said that they would read and think about all that was said.

Squashing through mud on the way back, I looked about at the tiny valley between the hills, the fields so very fertile. "Who will come harvest here? Who will put in the years of work necessary to communicate the gospel in way that woos their hearts? These two million state-less people are looking for a place to belong. Who will show them what that belonging looks like and tell them about the King who welcomes them as beloved citizens in his forever Kingdom?"

**G**limmers from the land of rice

By Mark Schoenhals and Bethany Horst, workers in Thailand

Last week an elderly believer told Mark of a dream in which she saw the rice fields ripe with a bountiful harvest. The harvest was so good that even though there were many workers, the work was just too much. This grandmother's back ached and her heart was pained as she stood and looked at the fields, wishing that more of the harvest could be brought in. We and others in this region can testify that we have been seeing sparks of the reality of this vision. The harvest truly is plentiful. There just are not enough workers to reach the more than 99% of the population who do not yet know Jesus.

The needs here in Thailand, as with every place in the world, are intimidating. Thailand was just rated the number one place in the world for wealth inequality. Sexual brokenness, alcohol abuse, drug addiction and neglect are things we see around us in the lives of families every day. To see stable leaders with the character to sustain ministry emerging from this context of profound dysfunction is no small thing. We see many falter and fail.

But the harvest is indeed ripe. Last week, a neighbor, a woman whose husband recently found us and proclaimed his desire for freedom from alcohol, said to Bethany, weeping, "If you hadn't come, nothing would ever have changed for me."

Specifically, Life Enrichment Church is asking for workers to come and help develop teachers and programs to reach the lost generation of children, youth, and young

**"If there is a lesson to learn, it is that we must ask God for the eyes of faith when looking at bleak circumstances. We must pray for and expect miracles."**

—Bethany Tobin





A muddy dirt track leads to a Rohingya family's home. They are a stateless people in Myanmar who have been persecuted, with many escaping into refugee camps in a neighboring country. Photo courtesy of Ann

adults. This involves breaking into the muddiness of dysfunctional family and social structures; it means working to unmask injustice. It requires spiritual eyes and stamina to see God's Kingdom coming, transforming a people, one person at a time.

Looking out of our windows on these warm afternoon, we see the stubble of rice fields and drying stalks under a blue sky. While harvesting rice, our town residents also pulled in another kind of harvest - locust-like bugs that were spawning and enjoying the ripening grain. We were surprised to find that the toasted or fried bugs paired perfectly with spicy papaya salad and sticky rice!

As we think about Isaan people harvesting the very bugs that were eating their rice crop, we can't but ask, *"Lord, is this a picture of what you are doing here? Will you turn our wounds into testimony and this brokenness into bread that tells of your power and presence? Lord, who will you call to come and join in the harvest in Isaan, Thailand?"*

## Seeds sprouting on rocky ground

By Steve and Laura Campbell, workers in Montenegro

In a prayer meeting recently, one person had a vision of harvest coming, of the gospel about to break loose; and yet, there was a lack of disciple-makers. Evidently, the Lord is answering our prayers, by not only sending workers, but by moving Montenegrins to encounter Jesus, despite having no one to connect with them! We have heard—since September—five separate accounts of evangelicals coming across a Montenegrin who is a believer in Jesus, but who has not known that there are options other than the Orthodox Church.

The testimonies sound similarly fantastic, something along these lines: "I started to think about God and found a Bible. I started to read and got more interested, so I made searches on the internet and found sermons. Then I read more of the Bible, and now I know Jesus as my Lord and Savior."

### Invitation:

**Pray:** Ask God to call people to step forward into this long-term call.

**Give:** Invest in long-term workers who are already serving here.

**Go:** Explore a call by participating in a short-term assignment:

**Serve in Bangkok**—immerse yourself in a 9-12 month team experience, language and cultural learning, missional discipleship and community engagement on the city outskirts. (This can be preparation for longer-term assignment with the young adults of Life Enrichment Church.)

**Serve as a child care/homeschool helper** in the home of a worker family. (Up to one year; 2 positions open)

### Invitation:

**Pray:** Join Steve and Laura in praying that workers would meet up with these "people of peace" within whom God has already been working.

Learn more about these service opportunities:  
[vmmissions.org/opportunities-to-serve/](http://vmmissions.org/opportunities-to-serve/)

# ● For such a time as this

**Business for transformation (B4T) is a way of opening doors for the gospel in areas that might otherwise be closed. A few examples:**

## **B**usiness opportunities in Central Asia

By J. W., a worker in Central Asia

In 2005, Uzbekistan, closed its doors to over one hundred Christian worker families. Now the doors are opening again to workers with legitimate skills in business and education. A church exists in the main cities with some fledgling churches in many regions. Now is the time for God to send workers with such skills to come alongside church leaders and encourage them, and reach out into new areas.

For almost twenty years, one of our present Central Asia workers has carried this call to the Uzbek people. God has given him the opportunity to hone his skills and gain experience in business and education in three other countries where there are many Uzbeks. Recently, he was approached by a construction company in the region, involved in renovating five or six school buildings in anticipation of the creation of international schools. They are looking for private investors to

### **Invitation:**

**Pray: Ask God to call people** to serve in Uzbekistan with their business and educational skills.

**Give: Invest** through worker support, or with funds to enable these businesses to be launched.

**Go: Serve through business or teaching.** Is God calling you to use your skills in this least-reached location?

run them and conversations with our worker are in process. This worker will meet in Tashkent with other workers who would like to see the launch of a private international school run for kingdom purposes. God has done the work of preparation. Are we ready to discern and do our part?

## **W**ater filter production in Southeast Asia opens doors of opportunity

By Carol Tobin, Asia Regional Director

“There was this loud noise and then the water came... we’ve never heard such a sound before in our lives. So loud; it was terrifying! The water came so fast and we tried to climb up to our roofs and into trees.”

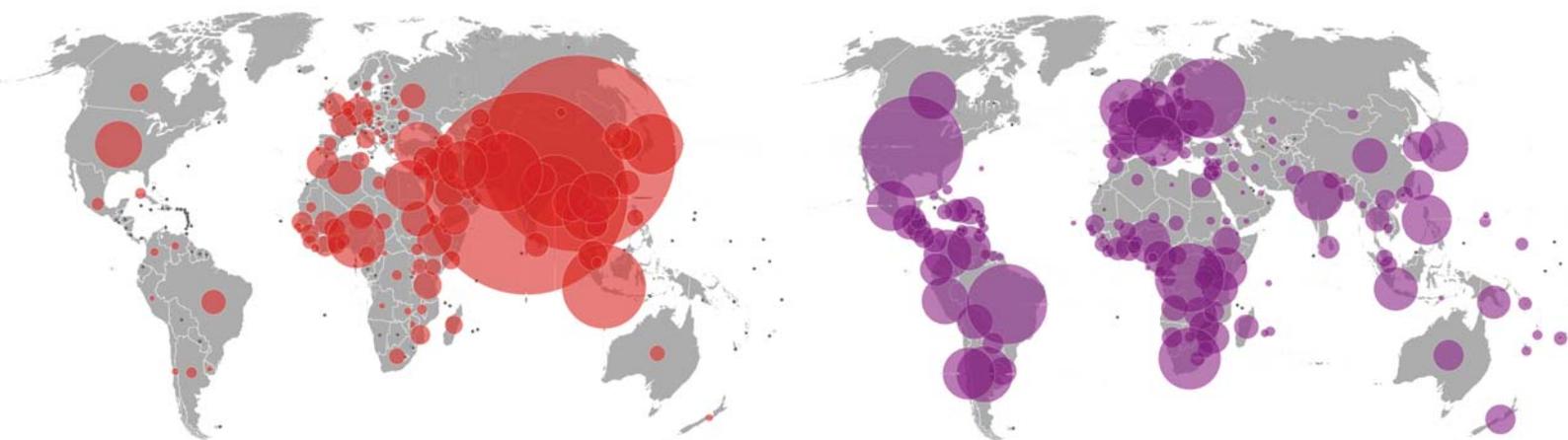
So wrote friends living and working in this region of Southeast Asia when a large hydroelectric dam on a tributary of the Mekong River broke at the end of July, leaving thousands of villagers bereft of family members, homes, rice fields, and livelihoods.

Major flooding in this region has opened even wider the doorways for impact that have been created by a water filter factory that has been in operation now

### **Invitation:**

**Pray: Ask God to call the right people** into this ripe harvest field.

**Go: Engineers, accountants, and marketing professionals** who bring maturity and passion for Jesus, can thrive in this dynamic team setting.



A map of unreached and under-reached people groups (left) shows vast numbers throughout Asia and the Middle East. But the distribution of Christian mission workers (right) shows an imbalance favoring the Americas, Europe, and Africa.

Courtesy of Carol Tobin



LaVonne and Vince Ramella overlook and pray for Istog, Kosovo, where they serve. Photo courtesy of Vince Ramella



Rows of ceramic water filters at the plant in Southeast Asia. Courtesy of Carol Tobin

for ten years. Gospel witness has flourished both among the staff of the factory and through the witness of sales representatives who are engaging relationships with customers in far-flung villages across the region.

## Lady Latte opens doors for women

By Vince Ramella, a worker in Kosovo

In the small town of Istog, where there are no known Kosovar believers, my family and I serve as pioneer church planters with VM Missions. Part of planting a church is planting seeds of the gospel that we nurture. It often involves finding an opening or a need to address. We

sensed a real need in this community for a space catered to women where they can gather socially. Many social spaces are dominated by men, and women often feel unwelcome. So we decided to create “Lady Latte,” a coffee shop catered to women.

Since it opened, it has opened up opportunities to show God’s love through our interactions and to build relationships within this Muslim community. The business allows another place to sow good gospel seed among a needy people. We see that the Holy Spirit is working on our mindset, and continually preparing us for his purpose amidst the culture into which we have been transplanted. Finally, after four years, we are sincerely seeing, not just from another vantage point, but seeing through the eyes of the members of our community. We are seeing beauty in what originally caused us frustration.

### Invitation:

**Pray:** Ask God for spiritual breakthrough in Kosovo and workers for this particular harvest field.

**Go:** Consider joining this team and being a part of a sustained presence that will lead to breakthrough in this community.

Learn more about these service opportunities:  
[vmmissions.org/opportunities-to-serve/](http://vmmissions.org/opportunities-to-serve/)

# ● “Hello, my friend”

E<sup>3</sup> Collective team member Melissa Lapp reflects on her service in the notorious Moria refugee camp in Lesvos, Greece, in August 2018.

**O**range safety-vests, sweaty faces of children, adults, volunteers -some happy, many angry. All tired. Tents, dust, sleeping people. Cigarettes, empty water-bottles. Broken windows and gates. Dirty children’s hands. Squat toilets, dogs, flies and garbage. Fights, riots, theft, fear. Throw rocks. Bite. Hit. Scream. Hug. Kiss. Comfort.

It’s 10:30 am. We hear the sound of an engine. A bus has just pulled up, filled with men, women, children, infants, adolescents and the elderly, people who have just dodged threats of hypothermia and drowning. They have crossed



The sprawling Moria refugee camp in Lesvos. Photo: UNHCR

the 4.1 miles to Greece in inflatable dinghies loaded well beyond capacity, hugging lifejackets that only look like lifejackets. Smugglers fill these vests with cardboard and scraps of clothing. Some people are staring into space and some are crying; others are just grateful to finally be at camp Moria. But often, that gratitude turns to despair. The camp, designed as a short-term processing center for 3,000 “persons of concern,” has become a humanitarian disaster for the over 8,000 who find themselves trapped there in their trauma, with no clear options for their future.

Most days I am asked the same questions. “Why do you do this?” “You don’t get paid, do you?” I tell them: “I’ve been given so much and the Bible tells us that to whom much is given, much will be required. I’m happy to give my time and come here to help people like you.”

But, my motives for wanting to come to Greece changed soon after I arrived. I came because I thought that I could do something for God. But I soon realized that God brought me to Greece so that he could do something in me.

The stories of bravery and courage I heard have impacted me and changed the way that I see the world. No matter how far we are from the crisis, we can engage with it and dig deep, reflecting on the ways we can resist it, so that refugees can receive the life of dignity they deserve.

It was not until my first night, upon arriving back home that I finally cried. I cried for all the parents who would ask me and my team if they were ever going to find a safe place for their children, if they were ever going to leave the camp. I cried for the Gambian woman who watched her husband, siblings and parents get brutally murdered. She wonders why she survived and the rest of her family didn’t. Saying “I’m sorry” didn’t seem good enough. As I sat in silence beside her, I heard myself telling her that Jesus was with her that day that her family got murdered, that he was weeping with her as she wept. She asked, “Do you believe this?” and I responded “Yes, I do.” Later she told me that it brought her peace knowing Jesus was with her that day.

I cried for the children who are desperate for love. I remembered the little girl on my first day at camp who broke into a sprint upon seeing me. She locked eyes with me, opened her arms, and leapt up to hug me as she neared. I caught her mid-leap, and felt her press her heart to my chest and lay her head on my shoulder. “Hello,” she said. “Hello,” I said. She held onto me like she was never going to let go. “I am your friend,” she said. I smiled, “Yes you are.” She held my hand and walked with me for another minute, then ran back into the sea of tents.

Jesus was willing to sit with people in the middle of their need. He wept with them. He gave them living water from a well that wouldn’t run dry. Though I still hold many questions, I know that God’s love flowing through us always bears fruit. Yesterday I found out that since our team left Greece, forty people have accepted Christ.

## Invitation:

**Pray: Ask God to meet the immense needs of refugees**

by calling workers into this painful context as the hands and feet of Jesus, for supplies to winterize the camp, and for resettlement openings.

**Go: Serve on the next E<sup>3</sup> team to Lesvos, August 24 - Sept. 14.**

Learn more about E<sup>3</sup> Collective service opportunities:  
See back page and [vmissions.org/e3collective/](http://vmissions.org/e3collective/)

# ● Sowing seeds close to home

Workers in the U.S. are seeing transformation firsthand as God’s activity permeates local communities among people of every background.

## Sowing among our Hispanic neighbors

By Lizzette Hernandez

God has invited us to see a plentiful harvest among the thousands of immigrant families who live and work in our communities. Very few of them are active followers of Jesus or part of a church family. This is the time and place for abundant gospel sowing just as the sower did in the parable of the sower, who copiously scattered the seed even on the most unexpected fields, like rocky places, along the road or among thorns. The seed was generously offered and made available to all kinds of soil equally. He trusted that it was the work of the Holy Spirit to prepare the field and grow the seed, so he focused on faithfully and lavishly sowing and scattering.

In the same way, within these early stages of church planting, the Alvarado, Sanchez, and Lagos families are starting to prayerfully scatter and abundantly sow the seed of the gospel among Hispanics - in trailer parks, on busy streets, at Latino markets, in prisons, as high school volunteer counselors and simply through their own workplace opportunities. As obedient laborers they have responded to the Lord of the harvest’s call to go and join him in the harvest fields, where fruit will be plentiful.

## Seeds of faith among inmates in the Rockingham-Harrisonburg Regional Jail

By Jason Wagner

In my work at the Rockingham-Harrisonburg Regional Jail, I have often wanted to be like the sower, who sows the gospel generously and doesn’t care where the seed is falling; but I am reminded to look expectantly for the seeds I sow to take root and produce a harvest.

In my Friday Bible study at the jail I know everyone present isn’t interested in studying the Bible. For some of the men, the class is just an opportunity to get out of their pods and see inmates from different areas of the jail. On a recent Friday, I was teaching on the healing of the woman with a bleeding condition in Mark 5. Most of the time, I kept my eyes focused on the back of the class, attempting to engage the men who were passing notes and making side comments. When I finally looked directly in front of me I saw an inmate whose eyes were filled with tears. I stopped momentarily and asked if he was OK. The gentleman just said, “Please keep going.” After the class he came up to me and asked for a personal visit.

The next week I met this inmate “one-on-one.” He described feeling that every word I was sharing at the Bible study was meant for him, stirring deep conviction in his heart and a longing to know Jesus. I was honored to see the fruit of God’s beautiful word, as this brother—with tears flowing freely—received the forgiveness and love of God known in Christ. As I walked away from that time I praised God for allowing me to witness the birth of a new creation.

## Engaging middle schoolers in our neighborhoods through Kids Club

By Melody Zimmerman

Through the Kids Clubs with which I work, the good news of Jesus Christ is being shared with children who have not had an opportunity to hear it before. Children have a unique capacity to receive this news. The big question lingers: How do we disciple these people that God has brought into our lives? We need our programs infused with life brought by adults who are willing to give time, energy, and heart to do this long-term discipling work.

From my vantage point, I see a huge need for churches to engage with the middle schoolers, many of whom came to Kids Club when they were younger and keep returning. I see a need for individuals in churches to walk with these young persons and disciple them—to ask good questions, listen well, and study scripture with them. The middle school and high school years are not easy for anyone, let alone youth without healthy support networks. Who will walk with them?



College students pray at a prayer and worship service at 264 OSH, a ministry of worker Rachel Yoder.

Courtesy Facebook

### Invitation:

**Pray: Ask God to call out more workers** into these close-at-hand harvest fields.

**Give your finances and your time.**

Contact these workers and ask how you can help!

# Call to Prayer: Seeing the harvest that Jesus sees

BY CAROL TOBIN

I regularly insist that plants talk to my husband. Evidently, they tell him what they need and then he simply obliges them—a little less sun, an adjustment in the soil, some extraneous shoots removed. It couldn't be easier.

Likewise, when he looks out of the dining room window to survey the garden, he sees a lot more than I do. He distinguishes the spinach seedlings from the crabgrass. He ruthlessly pronounces judgment on the Swiss chard and counts weeks forward to determine whether there is time to replace the chard with cauliflowers.

With one sweep of his eye, he sees past investment, present challenges, and future promise. I learn a lot when I ask him to show me what he sees.

This is what we do when we pray. Rather than feeling overwhelmed by the enormity of the challenges or exasperated by the complexities—"What do we do? Where do we start?"—we ask, "Lord, what do you see?"

Rather than petulantly insisting on knowing "why" before we venture to do anything more than nurse our own despair, we humbly ask for our Lord's perspective. Amazingly, our Lord sees a harvest: rich potential, glorious promise. God sees a bountiful yield amidst the weedy tangle of pain, injustice and dysfunction.

Jesus joyfully invites us (who are not unlike those befuddled disciples questioning why he was talking to a Samaritan woman) to "look at the fields. They are ripe for harvest!"

Prayer is this lifting of our eyes; it is me standing next to God at the dining room window, allowing him to instruct me before I go running out to try to do something based on my limited perspective.

God sees past investment, present challenges, and future promise. God sees it all. The Lord of the harvest turns our eyes toward the ways and places where he is at work.

Recently, we invited Michael and Ruthy H. to share insights about



Michael H. prays for workers at a resource event for Ministry Support Teams. Workers in South Asia, he and his wife Ruthy practiced organized prayer as a foundational aspect of their ministry in a large Muslim city. They are currently exploring future ministry assignments. Photo: Carol Tobin

prayer with members of Ministry Support Teams who have embraced the call to pray regularly for our workers.

With the aid of a simple sketch of a triangle on the whiteboard, Michael and Ruthy helped us see that prayer is not a matter of looking "over" at the problems and lifting them—often anxiously—to God.

Rather, we first look up at God and then pray "down," based on what God has shown us from his perspective. We are guided by what is revealed in scripture. We delight in fresh insights given by the Holy Spirit. Our prayers can be infused with joy - based on the faithfulness of God's past investment, God's presence in present challenges, and a God's promise of future glory.

My 92-year-old mother still relishes telling a particular prayer story. She remembers how thirty years ago, after a church mission conference, she was led to pray about "the harvest." Jesus' words took on a new weightiness. "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field."

She asked; and as she asked, a fervency caught her. She wept as the intensity of this God-given imperative that there be workers came crashing into her heart.

The next day, Skip and I came to divulge what was on our hearts: We sensed a call to go to Thailand. This was not an easy thing for her to hear, as any parent can understand; yet, sustaining her underneath the clamoring protests of personal loss was the wonderment of knowing that this was birthed out of her own prayer connection with the Lord of the harvest. She was more than ready to bless us to go!

May we likewise respond to God's invitation to look up and out and see what he sees! In particular, may we be led to pray for workers to be sent out into the fields, ripe for harvest!



Carol Tobin is Asia Regional Director and Mission Advocate for VMissions.



Solange, Paulo, Sofia, and Rafael Tartari. Photo: Dan Hess

## Worker profile: **Rafael and Solange Tartari**

**Service program:** transForm  
(in partnership with Brazilian Mennonite churches)

### **Assignment:**

Rafael pastors the local church in Lezhe by sharing the good news, teaching discipleship, and training local people to be future leaders in the church. Rafael and Solange help assist in church worship. They regularly make contact with people who have not yet heard the good news of the gospel, most recently by visiting prisoners.

### **Biggest challenge:**

It has been hard to sometimes see young people who have made a decision to follow Jesus actually being prevented from coming to church by their parents. Also, a number of young believers in our church have left our city of Lezhe, and sometimes even the country, in search of employment.

### **Biggest joy:**

Our greatest joy is to plant the seeds of the gospel and see it grow and multiply in the hearts of those who accept, or “knowing Jesus and making him known.” It fills our hearts with gladness to see new believers with a desire to follow Jesus.



Staff and volunteers at Guri I Themelit church planned a Christmas program as community outreach for children and their families. Courtesy of Solange Tartari

### **A typical day:**

On a typical weekday, our routine is to get up and get our children ready for school in the morning. Afterwards, Rafael goes to the church and usually meets believers for discipleship and conversation and often with non-believers to share the good news with them. In the afternoon, we have meetings of ministries in the church, such as prayer meetings, women’s or men’s meetings, etc. On Sundays we have our main church service, inviting everyone to worship God and embrace a life of faith in Jesus.



Transforming (USPS-15280)  
Virginia Mennonite Missions  
601 Parkwood Drive  
Harrisonburg, VA 22802-2498

# E<sup>3</sup> COLLECTIVE

## 2019 Trips

Embark. Encourage. Engage.

**May 16-26: Bundibugyo, Uganda:** Mutual learning and leadership development

**June 7-21: Amman, Jordan:** Refugee ministry with the Marka Church, including encouragement, visitation, and ministry to women

**July 5-21: Amman Jordan:** Teachers and soccer players needed to assist with soccer camp for children and youth

**July: Trinidad:** Community outreach and Vacation Bible School with the Mennonite churches of Trinidad

**August 2-16: Amman, Jordan:** Medical clinic with refugees in Amman

**August 24-Sept. 14: Lesvos, Greece:** Serving refugees in the Moria camp

**(Tentative) Summer: Bangkok, Thailand:** Refugee ministry with a local NGO

