

Transforming

Stories of making disciples in the way of Christ

Fall 2016
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Church is the primary instrument for God's mission



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**Virginia
Mennonite
Missions**

Called. Sent. Transformed.

Editorial

Setting sail with Jesus

BY AARON KAUFFMAN
PRESIDENT



We live in an age when it's popular to be spiritual but not religious. Many view the church with indifference or even suspicion, though they may still admire Jesus. So we at VM Missions know we are going against the grain when we say *church is the primary instrument for God's mission*.

Why make that claim? It seems to be what Jesus himself is saying, when he announces things like these to his followers:

- "You are the light of the world. ... let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:14, 16, all quotes NIV).
- "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).
- "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21).

In other words, Jesus has a high view of the calling he bestows on his disciples. They participate in Jesus' own mission of demonstrating life under the reign of God. Amazingly, Jesus didn't leave an instruction manual or an institution to perpetuate this movement. He left a small band of women and men whose lives were indelibly marked by his words and deeds, which were eventually recorded in Scripture. And he left his Holy Spirit, the very Breath of God who brought back Jesus from the dead. A kingdom community of Scripture and Spirit—it's a beautifully simple strategy. And incredibly risky.

And it hasn't always worked out. Over the last two millennia, we as the church have often failed to represent the one we proclaim as Lord. We've fallen in love with the power of the State. We've turned worship into dead ritual, and discipleship into the vocation of professionals. And we've imposed religion on other people, sometimes violently, rather than inviting them to relationship with the Prince of Peace.

Yet Jesus has been faithful to his promise, "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Matt. 16:18). Time and again, the Holy Spirit has renewed authentic witness to the gospel: St. Patrick's courageous, nonviolent outreach among the Celts in the 5th century; St. Francis and St. Clare's peaceable communities of prayer and outreach in the 13th; the Anabaptist recovery of radical discipleship in the 16th; and William Seymour and the Pentecostal movement in the 20th.

More recently in our increasingly post-Christian culture, the church has been tempted either to conform to the world's mold in order to be "relevant," or to circle up the wagons in a posture of defense.

What would happen if instead we saw church as a ship, courageously headed into uncharted waters? Can we follow the compass of the Word of God, while hoisting our sails for the Wind of the Spirit? Can we stand shoulder to shoulder with crewmates of all races and cultures who name Jesus as their Captain? Can we cast our nets far and wide to draw others to the kingdom life we've been given?

Spirit of Christ, help us sail with you!

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Financial Report

Reporting: Sept. 1, 2015 to August 31, 2016*

Budget	\$1,971,492
Expenses	\$ 2,000,025
Contributions & Other Income	\$2,377,958
Investments	\$266,916

*All figures are pre-audit.

Note: More information about this report is on page 3.

Transforming

Editor and Designer: Jon Trotter

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Finances

A year of abundance

VMMissions is celebrating a record year financially. Total revenue was up by nearly half



a million over last year, thanks in part to some major bequests. Investment income also rebounded considerably after a slump in 2014-2015. God continues to provide, and the board and staff are committed to being grateful and wise stewards.

VMMissions saw the highest level in two decades of undesignated giving to the Mission Fund, which undergirds all ministry efforts, locally and globally. The growth came in giving from households, up 14% over last year. Congregational giving to the Mission Fund was down by 6%. Staff are making efforts to equip mission communicators in congregations to bolster awareness and support.

Several new developments have been made possible by this abundant provision. New church planting efforts are underway in the US, Europe and Asia. Mission workers are increasingly diverse; countries of origin include Albania, Brazil, Germany, Honduras, Indonesia, Mexico, Ukraine and the US. Assignments have also been added in business for transformation, combatting human trafficking, and prison ministry.



Christmas

Alternative Christmas Gifts: a way to bless people around the world through VMMissions

Virginia Mennonite Missions is pleased again to offer Alternative Christmas Gifts for the 2016 holiday season. These mission “alternatives” to the usual consumerism of Christmas enable VMMissions workers around the world to meet special needs and enhance their ministries. These projects range in scope and are ideal for individuals, families, Sunday School classes, small groups or entire congregations to consider.

Steve & Laura Campbell, Montenegro

- \$8 Samaritan's Purse per child
- \$10 Children's Bible

Steve Horst & Bethany Tobin, Thailand

- \$10 A week of fruits and vegetables for refugee family
- \$20 Pizza party for Isaan workers

Seth & Theresa Crissman, Virginia

- \$10 Bible
- \$10 Soccer ball or basketball
- \$25 Grocery gift card for family

Mitchell & Lauren Yoder, Nicaragua

- \$5-15 Children's shirt, underwear, socks, pants or shoes
- \$25 Month of tuition per child
- \$54 Books, uniforms, and supplies per child

Caitlin Tice, Harrisonburg, Va.

- \$10 Education per student about human trafficking
- \$25 Outreach bag for at-risk girls
- \$50 Equip school and community leaders about trafficking

Dave & Rebekka Stutzman, Germany

- \$20 Song book for small groups
- \$25 Board game for community meetups with families

Shawn & Laura Green, Italy

- \$8-15 Chair, ball, or riding toy for neighborhood playground
- \$20-30 Table and swing for playground
- \$150 Playhouse for playground

Mark & Sarah Schoenhals, Thailand

- \$30 Audio Bible and device for blind persons or those not able to read

Norma Teles, Albania

- \$12 One day of food for children at the Joshua Center
- \$10 Carpet for Joshua Center p/m²

Yugo & Grace Prasetyo, Southeast Asia

- \$3 Book for library
- \$15 Week of vitamins and milk for prenatal group
- \$25 Children's vitamins per month at Ramah Harapan
- \$40 Children's milk per month at Ramah Harapan

Give by check or donate online:

vmmissions.org/how-to-help/giving-projects/alternative-christmas-gifts/

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● Mission and the church in a post-Christian context



In Mannheim, Germany, Dave and Rebekka and their three children serve in a context where churches have experienced decline, but opportunities for mission abound.

BY DAVE STUTZMAN

One of the things that interested me about studying missiology was that context was something that was taken seriously. Context is integral in shaping our world view, our theological views, the nature and expression of church, and how the Gospel is transmitted and encountered. Understanding context is essential for mission.

A number of years ago while living in Germany, I attended an assembly of church leaders from the Mennonite church where the main speaker was going to give a presentation about the emerging church and to share about new expressions of Christianity in a post-Christian context. As a way of setting the stage, the moderators prepared a skit, where they unloaded heavy bricks from a backpack, with labels on them such as “finances,” “attendance,” “young people,” all things that represented the burdens and the challenges facing our churches. They unloaded the bricks and symbolically urged us to leave our burdens and worries at the door and to not dwell on the negative or return to familiar doubts. We were to exercise a hopeful outlook.

I don't remember much about the presentation, but afterwards the discussion at the table sticks out in my mind. Within moments of being released to talk at our tables, the conversation quickly turned skeptical and gloomy.

Dave and Rebekka Stutzman with children Immanuel (left), Nathanael and Liana.

Photo courtesy of author

The participants started going through each of the issues of why this and that wouldn't work, in large part because of all the pressing matters that made ministry and church life difficult. Furthermore, in the plenum session that followed, I discovered that our table was not alone in its pessimistic tone. I couldn't believe it. Here we were gathered to learn about new expressions of church and how to engage a post-Christian context and all we could do was talk about our problems. I am not sure if everyone was excited about talking about the emerging church, but I am pretty sure that people didn't realize the reflexes they were exercising.

This experience taught me a lot about the state of the church and the experience of the church in a post-Christian context. The experience of many churches has been difficult. And for many it is hard to look beyond, partly because it remains unseen. Much has been written about the state of the church in the West, of its decline, marginalization, and woe-filled outlook. Yet, when I talk about mission in the Western context, I am often surprised about how the post-Christian reality doesn't catalyze much change within the church. It is as if there is an awareness of the tremendous change going on, but it doesn't lead to much action. Churches and leaders are certainly aware that things are changing, that things are not the same, stagnating and declining. It is obvious in the absence of young people, the overrepresentation of gray-haired people, the dwindling church budget, the steady increase in beseeching requests from denominational institutions for financial support. Yet, this has not translated into a sustained response in the way churches or denominations prioritize resources, make decisions, or shape structures.

Much of how church is done in the West is a continuation of what was. The experience for many churches is one of yearning for better times, floundering in knowing what to do or even despairing about the future. Indeed, the experience of church in a post-Christian context is paralyzing. For me, figuring out what it means to be church means doing so within a post-Christian reality. But knowing a way forward and appropriate responses or adjustments is difficult and certainly confounding. I have found that talking about mission in a post-Christian context quickly brings forth well-practiced reflexes and assumptions. Here are a few key points of reference to consider with regard to mission and the church in a post-Christian context.





A new retirement home is being built right next to the Protestant church (center) that Dave and Rebekka Stutzman partner with in their ministry in the multicultural urban context of Mannheim, Germany. Photo courtesy of author

Post-Christianity is a mission field. Recognizing this context as a mission field is crucial here for me. It has the potential to be a galvanizing factor, to release leaders and to transform the church's self-understanding as being sent into its own context. Yet, while mission comes to the fore as a concept and activity to consider anew, efforts toward bringing mission into the established church culture can easily be characterized as meeting reluctance, resistance or outright rejection. Or where there might be support, I have seen how there is a culture of carefulness, rightfully so, but it can easily be indistinguishable from a culture of restraint and aversion to risk-taking. This leaves those who are yearning for renewal and missional forms of church, to become exhausted from swimming upstream or impatient, and end up frustrated or leaving. It leads to a situation that many established churches and denominations find themselves in, in that the visionaries and risk-takers become a scarcity. If we are not willing to take risks, how can we begin to appreciate, equip and send pioneers?

Mission in the post-Christian context means doing mission alongside the church. Mission in the West is in the former backyard of the church. In post-Christian Europe, mission and church converge. This is different than how many mission agencies and para-church organizations are used to thinking and operating. Mission and church planting in denominational structures still tend to be underfunded and peripheral. In fact, the binary of church structures and mission agencies of yesteryear leads to a certain ambiguity of who takes leadership and initiative. Mission structures are going to find more relevance for supporting and developing ministry in their own context. But the challenges can be complex because of that proximity. How do we

encourage and release leadership that has a pioneering vision for engaging culture?

Mission in post-Christianity must navigate the tenuous relationship between rebuilding the church and creating the church anew. There is tension between placing energy and resources within the church or releasing and encouraging new initiatives. There is a tension between renewal and mission. In my experience, the pull is pretty strong toward inward, wanting to invest in renewal rather than to try new things out. So a lot of missional talk gets put into this dynamic as well. Rather than start with something completely new, effort is placed in transforming existing structures and approaches. It plays itself out in the expectations for the next generation of leaders, where the implicit desire is for them to stay and sustain what exists already. While the impulse for renewal might be present it is easily confused with the desire to want to restore what once was. How can churches learn to send and not see it as a loss? What place does mission have in a church focused on renewal?

Context matters. Taking the post-Christian context seriously is crucial. Without coming to terms with this reality, the church is left yearning for yesteryear, desiring an implicit restoration of what once was. It is paralyzing. It results in confusion of identity and vocation. It is not a church in mission. I believe the more we talk about the post-Christian context, the more church will be able to find its bearing. Knowing our context enables us for mission.

Dave serves with his wife Rebekka and three children in Mannheim, Germany, with Virginia Mennonite Missions, in partnership with Mennonite Mission Network.

● What is church?

Living in an under-reached nation, with no church in their community, Vince and LaVonne Ramella and their children seek to embody the gospel in their daily lives as a picture of church where it is not yet present.

BY VINCE RAMELLA

Church. *What is it? Where is it? When is it? Who is it?* For the majority of us hearing these questions, a prompt picture or answer might come to mind. But what if you are considering this outside of the comfort of your community, and attempting to insert some of those same answers into a different setting?

Within the Muslim population of Istog, Kosovo, clarity toward some answers to these questions can only come when we let go of what we've always known, controlled and expected, and let the Spirit's will be the true guide and definition setter.

When I am considering *how* to reach out to those I live among, there is rarely any concern toward initiation; as long as engaging others is culturally appropriate, so many of those we live among are eager to have a connection with us – simply because we are American.

Yet, I have come to recognize that this desire for connection is often with the hopes that some of my happiness and or peace might just “rub off” with the connection. Within the throes of the information age, so much of the media's projected picture of the US is often misleading, creating false hope and expectations.

So as I live where there is currently no church that meets the needs of this community's people, I have been called to

be an extension of what I have previously known church to be. “Church” may simply occur on the fly, in and around common or routine actions, and more often than not, have no pre-set schedule in my calendar.

A recent experience truly shows how the Spirit can lead through an opportunity, and make the most of a common circumstance.

Recently, I have been attending a new fitness center in our village. As typical of many gyms, there are members of various fitness levels, but the one common denominator is that all those present have a purpose, and have financially prioritized their time to be there. This has helped me to overcome the potential for complacency which so often squelches any attempts to venture beyond the mundane.

One of the differences I have recognized between the others and me in training is that I have a set of notes containing my schedule, routines and progress – an invaluable tool for tracking my goals. Others there have noticed this difference as well.

There have been a number of occasions where I have been asked, “What is that?” My initial response was that it was a training schedule, but that answer only prompted another, “What's that?” It was at this point that perhaps the first glimmers of church began.

I said, “Well, it's like a map. Have you ever been to Hungary? No? And if you wanted to go to someone's house there for a visit, it might be wise to use a map, yes?”

The response which followed not only let me know that he understood the comparison, but that a connection was made. It was the kind of connection you might hope for within a church setting. His response included two questions, with a sparkle of strong interest in his eyes.

The new fitness center in Vince's village, where he has recently started training.

Photo courtesy of author





(From left) Granit, Bledor, Bek, Valdet and author Vince at the fitness center. Vince is holding his training schedule.

Photo courtesy of author

"Where did you get that map?" And then, "Can I use it with you?"

This brief encounter has allowed me to be able to work out alongside some of the other guys, interjecting pillars of nutrition, leadership, and goal setting with potential dreams of discipleship in the future.

Another aspect of this non-traditional church experience has been taking a small step toward worship.

Many establishments here in Kosovo play music, and on constant rotation. However, the music selection is often American rap with highly explicit lyrics.

When I tried to share how offensive some of the lyrics are, I was told, "Nobody knows what it means anyway." But my question in response really made some headway.

"If you don't know the nutritional makeup of some food you eat, does your desire to eat healthily no longer matter?"



Egzone, a trainer at the gym. She changed the gym's playlist at Vince's request.

Photo courtesy of author

The music was immediately changed.

With the help of my oldest son Sid, the next day I took a selection of Christian hip-hop music from our collection. I shared that this music has a positive impact toward strength and energy. Could we try it?

After the first day's trial, it was requested that the music be left for the second shift as well. Among some of the guys I'm working with, they have really liked my choice, and now any time I enter the gym, I can regularly hear Christian hip-hop blasting over the sound system.

Is this "church?" It might not be what I've previously known or been comfortable with, but I'd certainly say it's the seed of the Spirit being sown.

Vince serves with his wife LaVonne and three sons Sid, Bradie and Justin in Istog, Kosovo.

Finding church, forgiveness and joy on the soccer field

BY ALEX RUBEL

Talking about the Holy Spirit's work in the church, the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:5: "There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord." It made me think of different kinds of service, not in terms of denominational differences, but in terms of our occupation.

There are a lot of Christians who don't get much spotlight in the church, because they are not leading home study groups, nor organizing charities or mission trips. They are just good nurses, teachers, construction workers, CEOs, plumbers, custodians, or other everyday laborers.

C.S. Lewis once said that the perfect church service would be the one we were almost unaware of. I believe it truly represents our mission, as the church.

Moving to Albania was a difficult decision for me, but I was entirely sure that God wanted me to be here, and that became the only motivation that kept me going. I had a lot of questions I couldn't answer. I had to trust God and let him do his work through me. It's God's mission after all, not mine.

Being thrown into an unfamiliar culture, with language and customs I don't know, was challenging, but I quickly realized that there are other ways to connect with people and bring the church there.

Lots of guys here are obsessed with soccer, known here as football. They follow all the major leagues, they know all the players, and they play the game quite often themselves.

From the very first week, I connected with young people from the church, and later on with Lezha Academic Center (LAC) students, and we just started playing

Alex proctors Richard Bowman's physics class.

Photo courtesy of author



football weekly. This was a big deal for me. It was the first common ground where I could connect with them. No language was needed. No cultural or social knowledge was required. You just had to know the rules of the game. That's it.

After some time, I started seeing how the football field has more than enough room for the church, where help, assistance, forgiveness and joy take place.

It might be one of the first small, childish achievements for me, but I pray and hope that God keeps working in bringing his church even into unexpected places like the football field. I see my role is simply in making myself available for him to use. Yes, even on the football field.

I have been proctoring Richard Bowman's physics class, serving in the classroom as he teaches over video calls from the United States. Many of my other roles at Lezha Academic Center and at the Guri I Themelit church involve listening, guiding and discipling young people.

We recently had an LAC student invite three of her friends, who are not LAC students, to church. Pastor Rafael Tartari preached a powerful message about the four men who brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus. Dini Shahini was so moved that after the service he went to meet and welcome the four young women. After talking awhile, he asked them, "Who are you bringing to Jesus?"

The LAC student described one of the friends with tears in her eyes as she pondered this question. They plan to continue attending the church, so I hope to walk with them in their faith journeys. Walking with other young people in faith is my passion.

I'll conclude with these words of Jesus. "Nor will people say, 'Look, here it is,' or 'There it is.' For you see, the kingdom of God is in your midst." (Luke 17:23)



Alex Rubel (right) with Dini Shahini. Dini is the project manager for LAC and is an elder at the local Mennonite church.

Photo courtesy of author

Alex serves as a youth mentor and in discipleship development at Lezha Academic Center and in the local church. He is from Ukraine and studied at LCC International University, Lithuania.

Kids Clubs: an expression of church

BY CAROL AND SKIP TOBIN

The word on the street is out: Kids Clubs are happening, thanks in large measure to the vision and initiative of Seth and Theresa Crissman, now serving as long-term workers with Virginia Mennonite Missions, with credentials through Virginia Mennonite Conference.

We might start looking excitedly for fruit in the lives of the children attending, or try to measure “success” by the number of new persons attending our services. As pertinent as these measures might be, there is another measure that might be ignored: our own change.

This is the question that Skip brought to some folks who are investing deeply in this ministry. “What changes have you noticed at the congregational level in the life of the church?”

It is a topic that unleashes a passionate response from Seth. “Kids Club is *not* about just giving God’s love. It’s about giving *and* receiving God’s love and about how that changes us together,” he said.

This is happening at Immanuel Mennonite Church, according to pastor Matthew Bucher. “We have folks who, in their vocation, are living out their Christian call. But this is a common ministry for the congregation.”

Immanuel club leader Jenna Martin-Trinka is excited about the transformation she’s experienced. “Our core group includes neighborhood children, a mixed group of adults from different congregations and volunteer students. Collaborating together, we have discovered how to follow Jesus in new ways.”

Theresa Crissman adds, “I’ve seen the outward changes as communities are engaged, but the surprising thing that I wasn’t necessarily expecting is the way the volunteer relationships have deepened as they embrace working together. It’s mission that can happen because of this relationship.”

Seth has repeatedly observed the struggle to launch. “There are a lot of perceived risks—fears that we are going to do it wrong, or that it will fizzle, or that God won’t actually change us in the ways that we need to be changed. But we believe that the good news is worth sharing and we experience how perfect love casts out fear.”

Theresa notes, “We’ve practiced relying on the Holy Spirit so much more in these couple of years. We make plans and try new things—and it’s all under the Spirit’s leading. I realize so clearly that it’s not by our own hands that any of this has happened.”



Children at Kids Club participate in a circle activity.

Photo courtesy of Seth and Theresa Crissman

Pastor Howard Miller excitedly recalls the energy and willingness that he discovered within his Waynesboro congregation as they began.

“There was no hesitation! After years of teaching about what it means to be sent on mission, we knew that we *must* do this.”

Now, they face more significant opportunities for growth. “We’ve been asking ourselves, ‘What would happen if parents with children would show up for Sunday School?’ We basically said that we would not be ready,” Miller says.

As a result of this realization, they have begun to reconfigure their Sunday morning program in order to flexibly allow for friendly conversation during the time traditionally devoted exclusively to Bible Study.

“It is a huge step for us to have this conversation, to hear us talking about ‘when parents come.’ I love it! It signals a step toward mission when we are willing to adapt what we are doing to be responsive to people. The reality is if we can’t touch people’s lives with the gospel and help them to find wholeness through Christ, what is our call?”

Seth Crissman’s emphatic words provide a good conclusion. “Kids Club is not about ‘fixing things,’ as if a program could fix the church. Rather, it’s about listening to God and listening to neighbors and listening to each other. Then God does the inner working. It’s about growth and change within us, and us being an expression of church.”

If you are interested in the possibility of launching Kids Club in your congregational context, contact Seth and Theresa at seth.theresa@vmmissions.org

Carol Tobin is the Asia Regional Director at Virginia Mennonite Missions. Skip Tobin is Director of USA Ministries at Virginia Mennonite Missions.

Call to Prayer: A Kingdom Community

BY SARAH SHOWALTER

What's more beneficial to a neighborhood, a laundromat or a church? This was a question posed by Ben Risser, pastor of Ridgeway Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, Va., where I am a member.

Ridgeway was started as a church plant in a low income neighborhood off of Reservoir Street almost 70 years ago. However, over the years the neighborhood changed and the congregation changed. Eventually there was very little connection between the church and the people who lived around it. But Pastor Ben and others in the congregation knew that the church is called to be "Good News" and they began to cast a vision for making the church an even greater blessing to the community than the laundromat.

How exactly do you go about becoming "Good News" to a community? An integral first step is prayer. Henri Nouwen said, "If prayer leads us into a deeper unity with the compassionate Christ, it will always give rise to concrete acts of service." Prayer draws us into the person of Christ. As we listen for his voice, we become aware of the doors he is wanting to open so that his love and his Spirit may be poured out.

The Ridgeway congregation experienced this as they dedicated time to prayer as a church. Pastor Ben led the congregation in praying, "Lord, help us to be about your mission. Help us to hear, see, and grasp the vision for what you want to have happen with us."

Through a series of monthly prayers meetings, a Sunday school class focused on prayer, and many individuals praying for a revival of the missional DNA of our church, a foundation was laid. There wasn't a lot of "strategy" involved as Ridgeway began building bridges with the neighborhood. Things happened rather organically—there were prayers for open doors and when the Holy Spirit moved, the church followed. When the youth group decided to spend their summer



Kids Club children at play at Ridgeway Mennonite Church. Photo: Andrew Gascho

service week in the church neighborhood, they were amazed at the number of kids who showed up for the games and activities they had planned. The church recognized the opportunity to share God's love and started a weekly Kids Club, which is now four years in. About 60 children, from the two blocks around the church, attend the weekly program, making crafts, playing games, learning about God, and experiencing the love of a church that cares about them. The kids have a beautiful ownership of Kids Club, which they refer to as their church.

There's also been a move of the Spirit to have members of our congregation move in to the neighborhood. Rather than just driving in to minister to the community, we have several families that have made the community their home. My husband and I joined the neighborhood a few months ago when we moved into the house next door to the church. Its amazing how many opportunities we have on a daily basis to share God's love in both word and deed with our neighbors.

These aren't things that we as a church could have ever planned for. We simply opened ourselves to the Holy Spirit through prayer, and joined in when we saw what God was doing.

As Ridgeway continues to minister in the community, prayer is still a key component. Between Ridgeway and Manantial de Vida, the Hispanic congregation that shares our church building, there are groups meeting to pray at the church almost every day of the week. This is huge! There are also many older folks in our congregation who can't get out there and walk the streets or play on the playground, but they are praying. Associate Pastor Tom Martin says, "You can't quantify it, we don't know all the prayer that's going on. But that's where the spiritual power comes from, anything that happens is because there is a foundation of prayer. Prayer is what opens the dam and lets the Holy Spirit flow."

Our churches are called to be kingdom communities, to be Good News. That means that churches should be imitating the kingdom of God not only within their walls, but in the neighborhoods around them as well. Together we pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."



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



Steve Horst and Bethany Tobin and their children Emmanuel, Tierzah (in sling) and Anjali, serve in Bangkok, Thailand.
Photo courtesy of Steve Horst

Worker profile: Steve Horst & Bethany Tobin

Home: Harrisonburg (VA)
Mennonite Church

Service program: Long-term

Assignment:

To see a discipleship movement spread among Isaan migrant workers in Bangkok, Thailand, leaving behind a church that is authentic, can sustain itself and owns its mission, but without many monetary resources. It should be contextualized and about life-change, disciples-making-disciples in a simple church with empowered leaders. Our next step is to find the people who are longing for God's redemption, and lead them through basic discipleship lessons. We are present to over-worked Isaan people and other destitute refugees, living in a city that boasts ostentatious luxury. We connect with so many diverse classes; it's rather dizzying, but whether it's the emptiness of wealth or the pressure-cooker of poverty, there's good news to hear!

Biggest challenge:

The biggest challenge is ourselves. Our faith is often small and faltering. Bangkok can be an intimidating, fatiguing place to be. Thai people are historically impervious to the gospel. Relationships are complicated by dynamics of wildly different classes and cultures. In particular, friendships in our neighborhood have been slow to grow. Our challenge in the last three years has been having hope and faith. We simply cannot do this alone. There are demonic strongholds that whisper words of condemnation and inadequacy to see us full of doubt and self-pity. The challenge is to put on the armor of God and rise up with hope that God is really going to do a miracle in bringing forth fruit from our lives here in Bangkok.

Biggest joys:

We love seeing delight on our children's faces, and seeing their joy when we have a chance to see close friends. When our friends and neighbors drop in unannounced. When we hear and

share testimonies with our Isaan brothers and sisters of what God is doing. Fresh, delicious fruit. The growing relationship with our Isaan house-helper, Pa Wan, who has been such a joy and helpful resource to have around.

A typical day:

We're not sure there is such a thing. But a day at home generally includes a combination of housework, drop-in visits by friends and neighbors, correspondence, homeschooling, coffee, market run, prayer and Bible-study and laundry, lots of laundry. If we have an "out day" it will involve hours of commuting across the city (by foot, subway, bus, foot, motorcycle, boat, taxi, bike, and *lots* of walking) and meeting people whether in a small room or in a massive mall, finding food to eat, and negotiating naps and travel home. These sorts of days are "come what may." It's always an adventure living in Bangkok!



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