

Transforming

Stories of making disciples in the way of Christ

Summer 2018
VOLUME 4 • ISSUE 2



From anywhere to anyone



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purpose PAGE 4



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 **VMissions**

● Editorial

From anywhere to anyone

BY CAROL TOBIN

ASIA REGIONAL DIRECTOR AND MISSION ADVOCATE



I am fascinated with the idea of multi-directional mission—this picture of gospel messengers crisscrossing the globe, everyone trying to be somewhere other than where they are. At first glance, the idea of all of us “going” sounds like a perfect recipe for chaos! But, somehow, this is what the Holy Spirit does when he gets a hold of us. Our hearts enlarge. Our vision expands. We go beyond our culturally comfortable borders.

Chaos aside, I see some counter-intuitive brilliance in this multi-directional madness. In the exchange of both giving and receiving across cultural borders, our cultures are inadvertently critiqued and marginalized and more facets of the gospel are able to shine out.

One thing is so obvious that it hardly needs to be stated: There are lively churches in the Global South! The Center for the Study of Global Christianity reports that “of the ten countries sending the most missionaries in 2010, three were in the Global South: Brazil, South Korea, and India.”¹ Norma Teles is one of Brazil’s 34,000 missionaries. She brings a stalwart faith in God to do what would seem to be humanly impossible; we have the privilege of helping her to be fruitful in her calling to serve among the Roma in Albania.

Another very obvious fact is that God is bringing vibrant, faith-filled believers into our community. Through the “diaspora,” God is accomplishing the literal meaning of the word: he is scattering seeds! Francisco and Juanita Machado, for example, have brought to us a vibrant faith that was nurtured in the hostile context of Honduras. The threat to their lives that led to asylum here in the US has become a wonderful blessing - both to us, and to the lives they are impacting as church planters in Spain.

Likewise, we realize that one of the most vibrant congregations in our conference is pastored by Carlos and Wendy Malvaez, coming to us from Honduras and Mexico. There is much that we can learn from their lives of prayer and through their faith that the Holy Spirit is at work through them in healing and deliverance. Statistics identify 70% of the diaspora communities coming to the US as “Christian,” many of whom bring lively faith and energy for the formation of new faith communities. So, we might ask, “Why has God brought these people to us?”

Perhaps because we need them! A shift has occurred. The mission mantle is being picked up by those who have the faith to carry it, and laid down by those who don’t. Can we humbly realize that while we Westerners were the ones to go out in mission, we are increasingly the recipients of the missional impulses carried by others? I pray that we rejoice in this scattering of seed, gratefully embracing the gifts that come. May new confidence in what God has done through Jesus Christ take root in us as we relate together. May we figure out the means by which our financial, intellectual, and relational resources can be gifts among these others. In other words, let the multi-directional madness begin!

¹ Christianity Today, July 24, 2013

Cover photo: Norma Teles, VMissions worker in Albania, with children in her after-school program (left to right): Desara, Enkela, Desjoni, Leo, Jonuz, Pranvera, Emanuel, Afterdita, and Nikael.
Read Norma’s article on pages 6-7.

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Financial Report

Reporting: 09/01/17 to 05/31/18

Special Projects \$1,129,924	Special Projects \$1,098,269
Mission Fund \$539,226	Mission Fund \$625,027
Revenue Total \$1,669,149	Expenses Total \$1,723,296

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

Transforming

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Worker Commissioning service is 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 God's people, 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.

Join us on Wednesday, July 18, at 6:00 p.m. at On Sunny Slope Farm, 1825 Sunny Slope Lane, Harrisonburg, Va. See back page.

E³ COLLECTIVE

Embark. Encourage. Engage.

Stories and Sweets to raise funds for E³ Collective

Short-term teams doing Syrian refugee ministry in Jordan through E³ Collective will share stories of faith and hope at a dessert fundraiser called *Stories and Sweets*, July 26 at Harrisonburg Mennonite Church's Fellowship Hall (1552 South High St., Harrisonburg, Va.) from 7:00 to 8:30 pm. Donations will be accepted to benefit the E³ Collective program.



Global Disciples®

Small Business Development Training of Trainers

Already used to equip over 2,200 church planters in 18 countries, this training will help you learn to equip emerging leaders to start businesses that sustain and extend ministry with this interactive, proven course.

Wednesday, August 1, to Friday, August 3

Eastern Mennonite School Dining Room Foyer
801 Parkwood Drive, Harrisonburg, Virginia

(Sessions begin at 8:30a and end at 5:00p Wednesday and Thursday; ends at 2:00p on Friday). Approximate cost is \$275 per person.

Register at vmmissions.org/small-business-training/

Workers based in North Africa and Central Asia provide rare glimpses of life in their contexts

J. and M. W., serving in Central Asia, will share at 6:00 p.m. on Sunday, August 19, at Shady Oak (Weavers Mennonite Church, 2501 Rawley Pike, Harrisonburg, Va.) Hear their stories and enjoy your fill of ice cream and toppings.

Raleigh and Opal* will share "Tea and Stories from North Africa" 6:00-8:00 p.m. on Friday, September 7, at the Hersberger Barn (5647 Wengers Mill Rd, Linville, Va.) *pseudonyms

These events are significant given the fact that these workers have few opportunities to share transparently about all that they see God doing in their contexts. Come prepared to support them by listening and contributing financially as you are able.

Save the Date: Bike Shenandoah's Fall ride is Saturday September 15



Bike Shenandoah is a family friendly and healthy way to support six local agencies: Mennonite Central Committee, VMissions,

MennoMedia, Our Community Place, Roberta Webb Child Care Center, and NewBridges Immigrant Resource Center. Bike Shenandoah draws more than 100 riders each year, featuring four rides ranging from a five mile family ride to a metric century. Learn more and register at bikeshenandoah.org/

● Preserved for a purpose

Francisco and Juanita came to the U.S. as asylum seekers from Honduras. Now God is using them as church planters in Madrid, Spain.

BY FRANCISCO MACHADO

We gave our lives to Christ in 1982, and were active members of the Mennonite Church in Honduras for over 20 years. Seeing the realities of excessive corruption and injustice, we were led to confront these issues. It came at a price: in 2008, we received death threats. Knowing we had to leave, we escaped with our four children. Friends in Harrisonburg, Va., received us; we obtained asylum and citizenship.

It took seven years for us to become comfortable in our new setting, to study and develop the ministry gifts God has given us. We finally felt security and peace. But, we have learned that if Jesus is Lord, he can change our plans if he wants to. We are his servants!

So we began to ask, "God, where will you send us next?" In 2014, Mennonite Mission Network invited us to

consider an international church planting assignment, but I didn't want to move again. But later they sent me another email about an opportunity to serve in Spain. I remember that early morning well. I was still in bed. As soon as I read the word "Spain" my heart started beating faster. I thought of my ancestors and their Spanish descendants who possibly didn't know the good news of Jesus Christ. I woke my wife up and asked if she would be open to going to Spain. She responded (maybe more asleep than awake), "I will go wherever our Lord takes us," and then kept sleeping!

Another confirmation came as Pastor Wendy Malvaez shared a dream with us in which she was at a Catholic mass. The congregants were all asleep! After the priest stepped down from behind the pulpit, Wendy took his place. She boldly preached Jesus to the sleeping congregants. "Where am I?" she asked the Holy Spirit. "You are in Guadalajara, Spain." Inwardly, I thought, "This is wrong!" I knew that Guadalajara was in Mexico. I went home and looked at Google Maps. Sure enough, there, outside of Madrid, was Guadalajara! After these experiences, our hearts were set on going to Spain!

We have been here now since last fall. And we are finally able to see how God's grace is at work. Both our Latino origin and our command of the Spanish language are great advantages to us. In fact, we are often asked, "Where is your home town?" Through our experiences of persecution and exile, God has made us strong in Christ to adapt to the cosmopolitan culture of Spain, even as we struggle in our bodies with the pollution. Another challenge is the public transportation system. We have to walk to and from the various stations in all kinds of weather. However, we are resilient. Like Paul, we know well how to be abased and how to abound.

We have been led, like the apostles in Acts. We originally expected to work in Burgos city. However, we were not accepted as students in the university there. The open door came at the Autonomous University of Madrid. We were introduced to Pastor Antonio Gonzales who pastors a Brethren in Christ church on the outskirts of the city. It is very clear that God has put us together. God had given this humble PhD philosophy professor and ex-Jesuit priest a vision for street evangelism. But he felt very alone in it. He is thankful that God sent us to help him!

After moving into the city community of Collado Villalba I wanted to connect with local church planters. I was given the phone number for someone connected with the El Faro [Lighthouse] Church. I called, to no avail. I searched online, and with the help of GPS, arrived at the address. There was no sign of a church! However, I noticed some people entering a house nearby. As I drew closer, I was invited to come into the home. God had brought me to a house church led by a Dominican brother, Angel Daniel Vargas! Like Pastor Antonio Gonzales, Angel has welcomed us as an answer to his prayers.

We feel in both of these church settings as if we have been known for a long time, as if we were born among them.



Juanita Machado travels to classes at Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. Photo by Francisco Machado





The Machados enjoy a lunch of pupusas and chicken with fellow Hondurans from the home group which meets on Saturdays. From left is María Elena, Francisco and Juanita Machado, Arely, Francisca, and Martha, a girl from Spain.

Courtesy of Francisco Machado

They open their hearts. They seek out our counsel. We pray together, and God responds and gives an answer. And so, their faith grows. New people are attracted, and the church grows. In this, I see the moving of the Holy Spirit - God's divine plan - because the only thing that we have done is to make ourselves available and dedicate time! These leaders have been praying for a revival in their communities, and they want us to be a part. Pastor Wendy's dream is becoming a reality!

With Pastor Antonio and members of our church family, we began a group called "Pioneros Callejeros" [Street Pioneers]. We walk prayerfully through the streets in busy commercial centers of the city, allowing the Holy Spirit to lead us. Most of the people we meet are Spanish; some are Latinos, Romanians, and North Africans. We find that it is easy for us to engage people in conversation. Often, we simply ask if we can pray for them. While the hearts of older people have been damaged because of religion, we are so blessed to find that younger people are very open. Many times, young people with whom we converse on the city trains continue past their stations, just so they can continue to talk with us. It is not true that Spaniards don't like the gospel!

Many times, people have experienced being healed. This gives us more opportunity to invite them to meet Jesus. I will tell you what happened on Friday, May 18. While we were in a busy business area, we saw a young Romanian immigrant. He was alone and smoking. We approached him to ask if he had any pain. Immediately he threw down and

crushed his cigarette, saying, "I was riding in the car with my boss. I told him, 'Drop me off here because I want an encounter with God,' and you came to pray for me. I want to cry." He continued, "I think of my grandfather who is a pastor in Romania and I am a disaster. I could have died already because I was stealing copper cables and I got an electrical shock."

With tears in his eyes he told me, "Pray for me, because I want to change." I joyfully led him in a prayer of repentance and commitment to follow the Lord. In the end, I asked him if he had family. "Yes, I have my wife and two sons." I then told him, "When you get to your house, hug them and kiss them and tell your wife that you have found the Lord and from today forward you are all going to follow him."

God has preserved us for his sovereign purposes. We did not understand God's purpose for us, but now we do. Our commitment is to work with the support of the local Anabaptist Christians towards the goal of helping people here in Madrid discover simple and genuine ways to follow Christ. And in so doing, we will begin to plant the seed of a church with Mennonite principles and values in this city. We ask for your finances so that we can continue to serve. We ask you to carry us in prayer that God would touch the hearts of those who will be a part of this new work.

Francisco Machado Levia and his wife, Juanita, are serving with Mennonite Mission Network and VMissions as church planters in Spain. If you would like to give to their ministry, go to vmmissions.org/worker/francisco-juanita-machado/

● Called to go: Norma's story

Norma Teles is a Brazilian VMissions worker in Lezhë, Albania, working with Roma children at the school she has founded, the Joshua Center.



BY NORMA TELES

I grew up in a Christian family with nine siblings in Salvadore, Brazil. I was expected to be on my best behavior at all times. However, I was not an easy child and I had a lot of trouble obeying. One day I prayed to God and asked him to help me be good or let me die in one of my asthma attacks. Instead, God saved and changed me. I was 16 when I first felt called to serve God. At first, I thought my call was to spend time in prayer, but God showed me that he also wanted me to go!

I began working with the children from the streets in Brazil. We had participated in some outreach evangelism.

We realized that though Jesus wanted us to tell others about him, the children also needed to be off the streets to be able to change.

Along with two other youth from my church, we decided to open a home to rescue these abandoned children. Although our church supported us in this endeavor, we had no official training -

Norma Teles at the Joshua Center.

Courtesy of Janet Blosser

just a call from God that everything would be possible if we totally depended on him. Our church became excited about what God was doing in our work; they loved to hear the stories of the children. Little did I know how much this would prepare me for my work in Albania.

A number of year later, in 1996, I decided to accept a call to serve God in Albania. I began working with the VMissions team in Lezhë in 1999. The Brazilian Mennonite Church became my sending team, and VMissions began providing me with additional spiritual and financial support, as well as guidance for the work here. This partnership positions me for success in doing what God has called me to do.

In my heart, I have always had the desire to work with children, those who are most vulnerable. In Lezhë, it was Roma children who were always on the streets begging

for money and food. The Roma (widely known in English as Gypsies, which is sometimes considered pejorative) are historically a nomadic people group originating from South Asia. They often face widespread discrimination.¹

With the opening of the Joshua Center in 2007, I was able to begin working with the Roma people. We began with 25 students and four staff persons. Our work is to prepare the Roma children for enrollment in school. What began as a pre-school now includes an after-school program three days a week, a weekly girls' Bible club (ages 7-17), and a monthly mothers' meeting. We gather as staff each morning to pray for the students and their families.

I continue to be astonished at God's power to transform lives. The most exciting part of work with children in pre-school is watching children's personalities come alive. Geraldo, a child with Down syndrome came to the day care center. He couldn't walk; he would scoot across the floor. For more than a year, he didn't speak a word. He understood everything but refused to reach out to others. We smothered him with love and attention and encouragement. We prayed earnestly for him.

Within a year, Geraldo began walking. Gradually he learned to trust his teachers and friends and began to open up. Prayers, home visits and personal loving care have helped Geraldo to blossom. Each time that we see him participating in the morning circle or playing with other children, we rejoice with him.

Superstitions and



Joshua Center staff member Lily leads an activity time. Geraldo is standing to her right in blue. Courtesy of Janet Blosser



Play time at the Joshua Center is an important part of the day. Courtesy of Janet Blosser

occult practices are common in the Roma community. One day one of the grandmothers took her granddaughter to the local imam to pray against some spells because the child's behavior was putting her own life in danger. The imam said that the girl had bad blood and that she needed a psychiatrist. Later he asked the mother if she took the girl to the psychiatrist. The mother told him, "You wouldn't recognize my granddaughter any more. I took her to Norma! They loved her and she is a new person!"

The girls love to come to Bible club; there are usually 30-35 girls participating. We teach them songs and stories about Jesus, and help them learn Bible verses. After a story about Jesus loving all people, Lorenca asked how she could meet Jesus. Another child stood up and said, "Don't you know who Jesus is? He is the Son of God." She answered, "I know that, but I want to meet with him!"

I explained that she could pray and invite him into her heart, and then she could meet with him every day. And so she did! When her mother came to pick her up, she told her that she had met Jesus!

The girls also are learning to pray. Nine year old Ledina is learning to know Jesus. Her mother must go out at night to collect garbage for recycling. Ledina is afraid to be left alone caring for her little sisters. She said to me, "Do you know what? When my mother leaves home, Jesus comes to stay with us. I put a chair out for him and he sits and stays with me!"

The mothers also love to gather each month. Sometimes I teach them about cleanliness; sometimes we talk about parenting, or about healthy, loving relationships.

Last February I decided to do a meal with them for Valentine's Day. I asked each one to bring something. "What can we bring?" they asked. One said, "I have some rice." Another responded, "I have some spinach." And in the end each one brought what they could.

We had a delicious meal! We laughed, we cried, we danced, we prayed, we ate! The mothers have decided now that they want to eat together every other month or on special occasions. One of the mothers said, "Why don't we do this more often? Here, we do not fight one another, we don't get drunk. We get hope for tomorrow!" Some of the mothers are learning how to be followers of Jesus!

It is amazing to see what God is doing in Lezhë! I am a Brazilian, working with Roma children and an Albanian staff. Lily, one of my staff, just got married to a man from Switzerland. They are planning to go to Kosovo to live, and Lily wants to start a Joshua Center in Kosovo!

My support comes from Brazil, from America, and from Mennonites in Europe who have caught the vision for what God is doing among the Roma children and families of the Joshua Center. So whether we're American, Brazilian, Albanian, Kosovar or Roma, God uses us all! And what makes us most effective as workers is our total dependence on God, our loving Father, the God of all nations.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romani_people

Norma Teles is director of the Joshua Center, an early childhood learning center for Roma children in Lezhë, Albania. She serves in partnership with Junta Menonita de Missões Internacionais, Brazil.

Faith grows in a home away from home

BY KRIS HANGE

I was drawn to go to Germany mainly because of my family background. My mother is from Germany and I wanted to go there to learn more about the culture. I wanted to learn German fluently in order to connect with my extended family.

Before I came to Germany I set the goal to better myself and to get out of my comfort zone to try new things. I think I have achieved those goals and become more mature through the journey of achieving them. I've started to learn guitar and I have become more self-aware about what I eat and how to stay healthy and active. I have a completely different outlook on food and have become a pretty good cook. I have also learned how to manage money and how to live on my own.

I also wanted to learn more about what it means to be a Mennonite— how to live out my faith in Christ.

At the beginning I was still learning and it was tough to see other people having these moments with God or hear God talk to them so clearly when I wasn't experiencing any of that. Then one day I was talking about this frustration with my roommate Micah.

He said that faith is like a tree. You can't just plant the tree and expect there to be fruit the next day. You have to build a relationship with God and pray and communicate with him and then you can reap the fruits of the Spirit. I have learned to be patient about faith and have learned to

pray more and have more faith that God has a plan for me. I also wanted to learn how I can show this faith in Christ to other people. One way we did this was during the German holiday in early December called St. Nikolaus Day. As part of the celebration, we made around 500 little stockings by hand. We put a piece of chocolate and a Bible verse in each and handed them out to people in the city.

Some were skeptical of what we were doing. They said no before we could even say a few words. But most people accepted them and said that it made their day or something nice like that. It felt really good to just give to people!

One of the biggest things I've learned is just to do whatever you're doing with a good attitude and, no matter what, it will always be more fun and you'll just have a better experience. The attitude you put into what you're doing rubs off onto other people.

It was not very hard to get used to the cultural differences in Germany, mainly because it was not my first time in Germany. I realize that Germans tend to be more direct. They do not small talk as much as in the States. The kids are drawn to me because I am an American. They think it is cool to use English slang. They like to ask me what it's "really" like to be an American. Almost everyone asks me "What do you think about Trump?" They ask me how he became president. To them it seems like a joke.

I have had a lot of fun over this year getting to know a lot of people and going on a lot of fun adventures with the team here. I got to see a German national team soccer game in person which is one thing I've always wanted to do.

We went to Moldova for three weeks for our outreach assignment. Our team spent a lot of time together which really brought us closer to one another.

Micah and I have been leading a youth group from the Baptist church down the road. We have planned a lot of fun activities. We've had a picnic in the park and have gone rock climbing. In June, we are planning to do an overnight lock-in.

The best thing so far this year has been being able to visit and develop my relationship with my grandparents. Now I can talk to them both easily. I can tell them more about my life and how things are going. I can learn more about them.

I have always felt like Germany was a home away from home, but now after ten months, I have realized how much I can see myself doing something long-term here.



The team that went to Moldova on an outreach assignment (left to right): Mike Lotvola, Micah Martin, Johanna Stangl, Maren Herm, Felicitas Alexi, and Kris Hange. Courtesy of Kris Hange

Kris Hange is completing a tranSend term, with a desire to extend his service in Mannheim, Germany.

Let's do what Jesus wants us to do!

Takeaways from a Community Church Planting training, June 7-8

BY SKIP TOBIN

Our church gatherings are often not very diverse. But this was different, as Italians, Jamaicans, Trinidadians, Latinos, experienced and newly-appointed church planters gathered to be challenged by Bruce Bennett, the South African founder of Community Church Planting.

His years of being on mission with Jesus, his unique African perspective and his unshakeable confidence in Jesus' way of equipping and sending brought "wake-ups" all around.

"This is a specific call to obedience. Rather than merely, 'You do what's good for you and I'll do what's good for me,' this is 'Let's do what Jesus wants us to do,'" said Kendra Yoder, a worker appointed for church planting in Richmond.

Dameon Hines, pastor of Ocho Rios Mennonite Church and director of missions for Jamaica Mennonite Church commented, "This refocusing on the task that God calls us to do is a refreshing reminder that the task is not impossible. Many times we look at hindrances. We want to do outreach and the question arises, 'Where are we going to get the money?' But I am seeing that we just need to go. God is with us; we will work with God's plan. Then we will see the success."

Another Jamaican leader, Ansel Smith, was struck by Bruce's insistence that disciple-making church planting doesn't take resources; on the contrary, it generates resources! He reflected, "I think we are lacking in faith. We want to see something before we go. If we don't see it, we are not going to step out. But God is expecting us to step forward in faith."

The "wake-up" for Navin Benny, Pastor of the Hope Church in Trinidad and chair of the Pastoral Team for the Mennonite Conference of Trinidad and Tobago, had to do with Bruce's admonition from II Timothy 2:2 to focus on "reliable people" who will be able to train others.

"It's like a lightbulb that tells me to shift my focus a little bit to reliable people. Unreliable people take a lot of your time and drain you." He left with new thoughts about the need to mobilize members to reproduce and develop a larger pool of prospective leaders. "The last church plant was Hope Mennonite, and that was ten years ago. So, we are due to be pregnant!"

Bruce's life, example, stories, and simple insistence on our obedient response to the example of disciple-making that Jesus provided to us were all radically unsettling. Peter Eberly acknowledged, "What I have a hard time with is that it is so different from what I see anyone doing in this



Community Church Planting founder Bruce Bennett answers questions at the Harrisonburg training.

Photo by Jon Trotter

American context. I would love to see anyone do anything like this so I could just watch."

Chris Scott, a church planter in Winchester, Va., affirmed the importance of this emphasis by commenting, "If the church is going to survive, we need to get real and intentional about discipleship."

Matt Cordella-Bontrager, a recent Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary graduate and newly-appointed VM Missions worker for Kosovo commented, "Though you might need to contextualize it, the value of this model is that it is a disciplined way of holding the church to account for sharing the gospel and making disciples, which is a Mennonite priority."

It brought to mind for him Dwight L. Moody's famous quip to those inclined to criticize his methods of sharing the gospel, "It is clear you don't like my way of doing evangelism...I sometimes do not like my way of doing evangelism. But I like my way of doing it better than your way of not doing it."

Matt Cordella-Bontrager contributed another quote in his comments, this one from G.K. Chesterton: "Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried." The surprise for everyone present was that Bruce was stirring up the energy to try!

Skip Tobin is Director of USA Ministries for Virginia Mennonite Missions.

Call to Prayer: A Ministry of Healing and Deliverance

BY SARAH SHOWALTER

Based on an interview with Wendy Malvaez, co-pastor of Manantial de Vida in Harrisonburg, Va.

The Lord's voice resounded audibly through Wendy Malvaez's bedroom, "You have been given an assignment. By my stripes you have been healed, now you will heal and deliver." A vision of a spring flowing out of the rocks on a mountain top accompanied these words.

Wendy and Carlos Malvaez, originally from Honduras and Mexico, felt called to plant a Hispanic church in Harrisonburg in 2004. By 2011 they had 70 members but felt stagnant and weary in their ministry. That was when Wendy turned to prayer. "It's not that my faith was super high," Wendy recalls, "But I needed an answer." Wendy developed the daily discipline of early morning prayer, pleading with the Lord for direction. One morning, after months of not hearing anything, she told the Lord, "I don't even know if you hear me." It was as she crawled back into bed, that she heard God's voice speaking in her bedroom, giving her the direction and vision for their ministry that has been so meaningful. Wendy recalls this powerful experience as one that changed her life forever.

Today over 200 people attend the Sunday afternoon Manantial de Vida service held at Ridgeway Mennonite Church. Wendy calls prayer their number one priority, citing Ephesians 6:10-20, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." Wendy insists, "If we are to be a kingdom of priests then we have to recognize the spiritual reality of battle we are in. The only way we can rule effectively is through prayer."

In listening to Wendy share what God has been teaching the Manantial de Vida congregation, I am struck by several key components of prayer:

- **Praise and worship** of God should be the starting point for prayer. When we worship, we align our soul, mind and spirit with God, bringing our focus to the Lord rather than our own tiredness or worries.
- **Applying the truth of God** is a simple yet powerful form of prayer. This means claiming the promises that God has already given, aligning our prayers with the word of God, reminding God of his word and promises.
- As Wendy's testimony shows, prayer sometimes requires **persistence**. Wendy recalls her months of prayer, "I'd tell God the same thing I told him yesterday." Jesus also encouraged his disciples to keep praying without giving up in the parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18.
- When we pray we should have an **expectation** that God will respond. Our faith may waver, but that expectation is an act of faith. As our prayers come from a burning desire to see God move and answer, we will see God begin to reveal himself.
- Prayer needs to be **empowered by the Holy Spirit**. Wendy explains, "God begins to reveal what is happening and how we should be praying through impressions, dreams, visions, and words of knowledge. The Holy Spirit labors through us, giving us a burden of something God wants to do on earth."
- Corporate prayer provides **community** for believers who are seeking the Lord. When we come together to prayer we can feel supported, knowing that others are joining with us. Praying in community also helps us better hear from God and our brothers and sisters around us share what they are hearing through the Holy Spirit.

Each week there are multiple different groups within Manantial de Vida that gather for prayer. Corporate prayer meetings on Tuesday evenings are used as an opportunity to model, teach and motivate the church towards prayer. Each week the leaders listen for how the Holy Spirit is guiding and then choose a theme to prayer over, for example rebellious children or physical sickness. They speak truth from Scripture and pray for God's kingdom to come in those situations. There is also a group of twelve intercessors who are committed to pray for the ministry, vision, and events of the church, for new believers, and for the presence of the Holy Spirit to move. They meet all together weekly and in smaller segments on a daily basis. This is a congregation soaked in prayer!

Prayer sometimes requires persistence. Wendy recalls her months of prayer, "I'd tell God the same thing I told him yesterday."

I experienced a breakthrough of my own when I attended one of the Tuesday evening prayer times, curious to see what it was like. I had been laying a specific request before God for nearly two years and was still waiting for God to answer. Before I even arrived that evening, the Holy Spirit had laid me and my request on Wendy's heart. As she prayed for me, I was blessed to know that the Lord knew my desires and cared deeply about them. Just one month later I began to see the fruit of God's response to those prayers.

May we be encouraged and inspired by the testimony of prayer at Manantial de Vida. Let's join in praying to see God's will fulfilled on earth as it is in heaven.



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



Raleigh and Opal (standing, not pictured) with children Anna, Robbie, Gem, and Beth. Photo courtesy of Raleigh and Opal

Worker profile: **Raleigh and Opal family**

Service program: transForm

Assignment:

We are committed long-term to reaching an unreached people group in a rural setting. Opal is mother to our four small children, interacting with other women and children in our neighborhood while doing the everyday tasks all mothers share. She also coordinates the education of our son Robbie, who has Down Syndrome and autism. Raleigh is co-director of a business that utilizes traditional building materials such as earthen block and other environmentally-friendly building methods.

Biggest challenge:

One of our biggest challenges is that of walking in the way of Jesus in a land where one may go to jail if seen eating or drinking in public during the month-long fast of Ramadan. Although we have become more at home

in this place, we still look like foreigners and our commitment to Jesus' way is directly challenged weekly, even by some of our best friends. A second challenge has been raising a son with special needs here. As we look back on our three years here, we stand amazed at how God has provided for him. He could not walk when we arrived; now he walks, runs, climbs, hops, and almost swims.

We have been greatly blessed by our co-worker, who came to help with the children while we studied language but has found a great passion for teaching Robbie. She will return for two more years to focus on holistic education for him, praise God! We continue to need deep trust in God's provision for him, and for our other children, in a place sometimes incredibly friendly towards children and at other times harsh.

Biggest joy:

One of our greatest joys is the opportunity to reach an unreached people group. We are 15 workers trying to

reach more than 4 million people in this region who speak the languages we are learning. Most of them have never heard the good news or met a Christian. Other joys are going deep with local friends and other workers here, enjoying nature, and engaging and teaching our growing children.

A typical day:

After breakfast, Raleigh takes the two oldest kids to school on his way to work. Opal cares for the two smaller girls, talks with neighbors, shops at the local open-air market, and visits neighbors with our colleague in town. Some days these visits take them to another small mountain village, and sometimes to a party for a new mother or a bride-to-be. Raleigh and the school kids return home for lunch, then two more hours of school in the afternoon. In the evening Raleigh plays guitar and sings on the little street in front of the house or chats with neighbors and plays basketball with local guys.



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