

Transforming

Stories of making disciples in the way of Christ

Spring 2019
VOLUME 5 • ISSUE 1



Engaging more than academics



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 **VMMissions**
1919 Celebrating 100 Years 2019

The school of obedience



BY AARON KAUFFMAN
PRESIDENT

I love school. I've been a student for most of my life. If all goes well, this spring I will graduate from a doctoral program. Learning is a way of life for me. Discipleship is about the most important kind of learning possible, learning to follow after Jesus. Yet too often, we see it as an add-on rather than an essential part of Christian faith.

Perhaps if discipleship were only a matter of acquiring information, we would be less inclined to neglect it. But it's more than that. To truly know Jesus, we must walk in obedience to his ways. In the words of the early Anabaptist Hans Denck, "No one can truly know Christ unless they follow after him in daily life, and no one can follow Christ in daily life unless they truly know him."

You might call this kind of discipleship obedience-oriented education. A story from Thailand illustrates the concept well.

For the better part of two decades Skip and Carol Tobin helped spark a movement of disciples among rice farmers in northeastern Thailand. Early on, Skip and his teammate Andre decided to minister as itinerant teachers, since teachers are revered in that Buddhist context. They would visit villages, offering to teach a "Life Enrichment Course for Buddhists" based on the life and teachings of Jesus.

One day, in the course of one of these visits, Skip and Andre were invited to pray for an elderly blind woman. God answered their prayers for healing in a different way than they expected. The woman did not recover her sight. Instead, she experienced freedom from night terrors when, to the shock of the watching village, Skip and Andre removed the spirit shelf from her home and prayed for her.

When Skip and Andre visited again, the whole village gathered at the woman's home and announced, "We want you to teach us your life enrichment lessons." Skip and Andre responded, "We can't speak your language very well, and we can't teach all of you at once. Choose one person from the village, someone you trust, and we will teach that person. Then, that person can teach you." So the village chose a young man known as Uncle Skinny.

The course began with something completely unknown within the Buddhist worldview: the account of God's actions in human history as recorded in the Bible. Uncle Skinny obediently shared the stories with his neighbors after studying each lesson.

They moved on to stories of Jesus. Again, each lesson prompted a personal response, this time to the authoritative Lord Jesus Christ, who invited and enabled everyone he encountered to follow him. Over time, Uncle Skinny and his neighbors obeyed their way into a living relationship with Jesus Christ.

Today, Life Enrichment Church is a network of village-based churches made up of hundreds of believers whose lives have been changed by Christ. And Uncle Skinny, also known as Pastor Joi, continues to teach Buddhist rice farmers in his own country and beyond what it means to know and follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

What might happen in our churches if we all enrolled in Jesus' school of obedience?

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Financial Report

Reporting: 09/01/18 to 02/28/19

Special Projects \$686,253	Special Projects \$654,980
Mission Fund \$406,272	Mission Fund \$421,549
Revenue Total \$1,092,525	Expenses Total \$1,076,529

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

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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 5, NUMBER 1

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

Cover photo: Mita, Dinut and Rini (with Yugo accompanying on guitar) lead singing with members of the Rumah Harapan morning class. *Read article on page 6.*

● News+Events



Putt Fore Missions mini-golf tournament is May 23

VMMissions invites you to a new mini-golf tournament fundraiser to support the ministries of VMMissions. This family-friendly event will be held at Sandy Bottom Park in Bridgewater, Va. Even if you are not a golfer, come for the meal and enjoy a spring evening supporting missions! See the back page ad for more details and registration information.



Annual Motorcycle for Missions ride is June 14-15

Motorcycle riders are invited to join the 7th annual Motorcycles for Missions ride, starting from one of three possible gathering locations/times: an 8:00 a.m. Harrisonburg group from VMMissions' office; a (TBD) group leaving from Greensboro, N.C.; and a tentative 6:00 p.m. group leaving after work from VMMissions' office.

Motorcycles for Missions continues to be the one of the largest fundraising events for VMMissions. We would like to see this year be the most successful yet! Learn more about the itinerary, route, sponsors, and safety information at vmmissions.org/motorcycle-for-missions/

VMMissions to celebrate centennial at Virginia Mennonite Conference Assembly, July 18-20

VMMissions is celebrating 100-year history of being called and sent to neighbors near and far. Our Virginia Mennonite Conference Assembly centennial celebrations will include a worker commissioning on Thursday, July 18, stories of transformation from workers on home assignment, and displays that highlight our history.

VMMissions unveils new Centennial website

VMMissions now has a website to tell the story of our history beginning in 1919. Browse photos from our first 100 years and see our centennial events planned for this year, as well as other features at 100.vmmissions.org

Bike Shenandoah Fall Ride is September 14

Plan to ride in Bike Shenandoah's Fall Ride on September 14, beginning and ending at Eastern Mennonite School, 801 Parkwood Dr., Harrisonburg, Va.

- 7:30 am – 62 mile
- 9:00 am – 30 mile
- 10:00 am – 15 mile
- 11:00 am – 5 mile family ride

This is a family-friendly and healthy way to support six local agencies: Mennonite Central Committee, Virginia Mennonite Missions, MennoMedia, Our Community Place, Roberta Webb Child Care Center, and NewBridges Immigrant Resource Center. Learn more at bikeshenandoah.org



Learn more about our current opportunities in the field of education

Albania: Lezha Academic Center — Multiple teaching assignments are open at LAC, a Christian school in Lezhë, at both elementary and high school levels. Contact: Janet (janet.blosser@vmmissions.org)

Albania: Joshua Center — Serve for 1-2 years as a teacher's assistant for the Joshua Center preschool, working with the Roma population of Lezhë. Contact: Janet (janet.blosser@vmmissions.org)

Indonesia: Rumah Harapan — Serve at a learning center offering pre-school supplemental classes and tutoring for elementary level children in a trash pickers community. Short-term or internship available. Contact: Carol (carol.tobin@vmmissions.org)

China: English Teacher—Teach English with Mennonite Partners in China, with assignments at various sites across the country. Contact: Carol (carol.tobin@vmmissions.org)

Bangkok, Thailand — Teach alongside Filipino directors of a small learning center which exists to serve refugee teens and adults. Short-term or internship. Contact: Carol (carol.tobin@vmmissions.org)

Turkey: An English medium school, offering both American and British standard education for K-12 students from expat cross-cultural worker families has a variety of openings for the 2019-2020 school year. Contact: Carol (carol.tobin@vmmissions.org)

Learn more about these and other mission service opportunities:
vmmissions.org/opportunities-to-serve/

● Seeds of transformation

Investment in the lives of students at Lezha Academic Center is yielding the fruit of changed lives.

BY JIM BEACHY

I remember clearly my thoughts as we locked our front door, loaded our suitcases in the van, and stood praying in our driveway. We were leaving for a one year assignment in Albania, teaching at Lezha Academic Center (LAC). We had little idea then of the impact that those months would have on us—the lasting friendships and deep heart connections with these young disciples, our students. In fact, little did we know then what we would be doing now: selling our farm and preparing to move back to Albania as long-term workers!

The school was prayerfully conceived and purposefully brought to life by Klementina and Dini Shahini, native Albanians, then living in the United States. Klementina and two other teachers opened LAC in 2011 with seven summer school students. They ended the year with 31 students.

Now in its eighth year, the 28 members of the faculty and staff provide education from Grades 1 through 12. Although the majority of the 164 students are Albanian, the school has an international feel due to the presence of American teachers and a variety of non-Albanian students. Lower grades are taught in Albanian; most high school classes are taught in English.

By design, rigorous academics that open opportunity for further education are a key component of the mission at LAC. The rigor is balanced with care, as teachers regularly volunteer their time to help students who are struggling. The fact that LAC students are doing well in gaining college entrance has drawn national attention. On the basis of the success that they have observed, Albanian education officials have begun to mandate LAC's block schedule in all

public schools and Klementina is having opportunities to present education workshops throughout the country!

The key, however, is not block scheduling! The key is that these non-Christian secular students are being immersed in a world full of Christians.

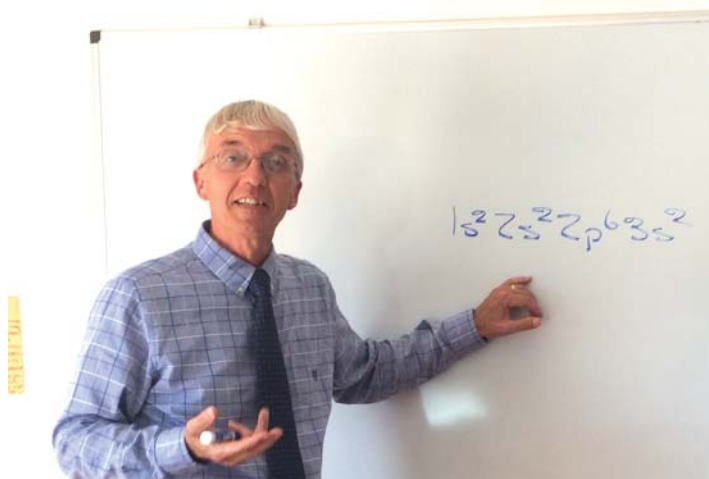
I soon came to realize that my primary purpose for being at LAC was to build relationships. Teaching my subject area well was important; but the real substance of our time there was in the one-on-one conversations with students, other teachers, and persons in the community. Students would come to school early and spend time before classes talking and asking us questions about our home, our children, our church and our faith. Students watched us closely and asked deep questions, trying to understand our faith and our relationship with God.

Early in the year, a sophomore boy with a reputation as a troublemaker was sent to my room for a time-out. Frederik (name changed) and I began talking. That day was the beginning of a relationship that I deeply treasure. A few days after returning to the US, I received an email from him:

"Hi sir. I wanted to tell you on your last day a couple of things but my friends were waiting for me and I would have gotten emotional too. But I just want to tell you it has been a wonderful year with you. I hope we will meet again someday because you have been a great help to me and I would like to keep getting your wonderful advices. Sir, I can't express the amount of respect I have for you because you are a positive person." I have been able to challenge him to allow Christ to change his heart and to then lead out of that relationship with Christ.

Another one of my students has her heart set on becoming a lawyer. She referenced Matthew 5:6 in her college application essay: *God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied.* She wrote, "I do not want to pay money to get a diploma without studying and working hard. I want that one day I will be a professional lawyer to change the justice system of my country and try to eliminate these issues that is keeping Albania away from European Union. My generation and I can make my country and these world a better place to live."

Jim Beachy teaches chemistry for high school grades at LAC. Photo courtesy of Jim and Pam Beachy





Students attend chapel at Lezha Academic Center, where many seeds of faith have been planted. VMissions worker Dan Hess (top right, with microphone) shares with students about his faith and service in Albania. His wife Mary Hess is standing second from left in the photo at right.) Photos courtesy of Jim and Pam Beachy

Klementina shares another story of a Roma girl who began attending LAC when she was in 8th grade. She was a challenge and there was a lot of conflict between her and Klementina. But this beautiful young woman's grades began to improve. She started attending church and then requested baptism. She publicly asked forgiveness of Klementina for her former bad attitude and credited the school, the church and a loving community for changing her life. She will be

graduating from Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, M.B., this year and has requested that the scholarship she was eligible to receive be given to another needy student.

Meanwhile, back in Albania, her siblings are attending the school and the whole family is slowly finding their place within the church family.

LAC students distribute supplies to families in Lezhë as part of a service project. Courtesy of Jim and Pam Beachy

Chapel services, now happening weekly, are functioning as a springboard into faith discussions as students intent on going deeper bring up chapel topics in the classroom. Even simple things like prayer before beginning classes or before tests touch the students.

Klementina is noticing a particular seed of the kingdom of God sprouting within the student body. From early on, she and her staff made a point of voluntarily engaging tasks that would be considered "beneath" them. Initially, the students were shocked to see her picking up trash; instead of helping, they took pictures!

Even more radical was the thought of sharing time and resources with poorer members of the community. Klementina has insisted that service be part of the Christian formation of LAC students. Her first attempt to plan a service initiative four years ago was not the success she hoped for. The students did not want to be involved or bring contributions.

A lot has changed in four years. Now, older students meet for Bible club during the week, and help to plan service projects on Saturdays. A special project this past winter to bring gifts to families living on the grounds of a former concentration camp was a huge success. Parents of students had suggested the location. City Hall contributed vehicles to transport the many boxes. "When we ran out of parcels of rice," Klementina shares, "It was Frederik who joyfully responded, 'Wait, wait! I have money! How much do we need?'"

What a privilege to play a role in encouraging these beautiful young people to respond to the call of Jesus on their lives! Our hearts are there; we are going back!

Jim and Pam Beachy served with VMissions at Lezha Academic Center as a teacher and librarian, respectively, during the 2017-2018 school year.

Watch a video about the LAC service project:
youtube.com/watch?v=3mN1jskUOkM

● Behind the beautiful bamboo

As families endure the challenges and hazards of eking out a living from urban trash, their children are being formed by the love of Jesus at Rumah Harapan.

BY GRACE

A toll road runs along the edge of our slum. The cars that zoom past the community have to slow down long enough to get their tickets, before speeding off again. Mostly, our slum is invisible—hidden behind tall bamboo; but there are portions where bamboo has not grown—leaving the sprawling slum vulnerable for all to see it. A hill of smoldering trash is only a stone's throw from the guardrail of the toll road.

But the bamboo does more than simply hide our community from sight; it also reveals a truth about our ministry here.

I learned recently about “Chinese miracle bamboo.” After the initial planting, this type of bamboo takes five years of fertilizing and watering before starting to grow above ground! The farmer must have faith that her work is not in vain! She must continue daily watering and caring for the crop that is not yet seen. But after five years, when the bamboo starts to grow, it can grow up to 80 feet in just six weeks!

My husband and I can relate to this story. We have been in our slum for the past seven years. We followed Jesus here because we believe God has called us to learn from him here, and he has called us to share the good news of the kingdom of God here. We long to see transformation, not only of the physical dimension of people's lives (healthcare, living conditions, education, etc.) but also in the spiritual dimension.



The sign for Rumah Harapan painted above the center's entrance. Photos by Skip Tobin unless specified

We long to see people encounter Jesus and choose to follow him.

Our doorway into the community has been Rumah Harapan [House of Hope], which has allowed us to meet and become part of hundreds of children's lives. Kindergarten level children come in the morning; elementary school kids come in the afternoon. These precious children literally live on top of garbage (or at least nearby it), and their parents make their livelihood from this garbage. Every day, we welcome these beautiful children into our lives. We teach them to read, help them with math, do arts and crafts together, and learn basic health lessons. Through Rumah Harapan we have gotten to know many, many families in our neighborhood.

Other things have grown too. Running a weekly prenatal education group has become a passion of mine—another beautiful way to get to know families. And this year my husband Yugo has started a soccer club, as a way to reach preteen boys. Over the years we have also helped many people who were sick with tuberculosis.

We share stories about Jesus whenever we discern it to be appropriate. Over the course of the past years, I have had the opportunity to study stories from the Bible with groups



Teachers (from left) Rini, Grace (with son Jeremiah), Dinut, and Mita meet to plan the next day's curriculum.

(Photo at right) A Sudanese Muslim mother leads her son to Rumah Harapan. They wear boots to traverse the trash heaps.

of moms from Rumah Harapan. This has been a real highlight for me, and our times hearing the word together have helped me read the Bible with new eyes. There is nothing like sharing the stories with people who have never heard them before! We also share stories with our students, and Yugo ends weekly soccer practice with Bible stories too.

These things all seem like the “watering” and the “fertilizing” in the story of bamboo. Yes, we see children learning to read! Yes, it is wonderful that our students have a better chance in school because of this. Yes, we love seeing sick people get the treatment they need. Yes, we love the growing mentoring relationship Yugo has with his 12 young soccer players on the team. But do we dare to hope for more? Is it right to long for more? Where is the growth? Where are the transformed lives?

Like the bamboo, we trust that the growth throughout these years is underground. We pray and believe that the labor of these years has created a complex network of roots, despite the fact that the shoots have yet to appear above ground. We continue to water and tend and pray for the day when the first of our neighbors will put their trust in Jesus. And we believe that God can bring about growth of his church that will make the miracle of 80 feet in six weeks pale in comparison. May it be so!

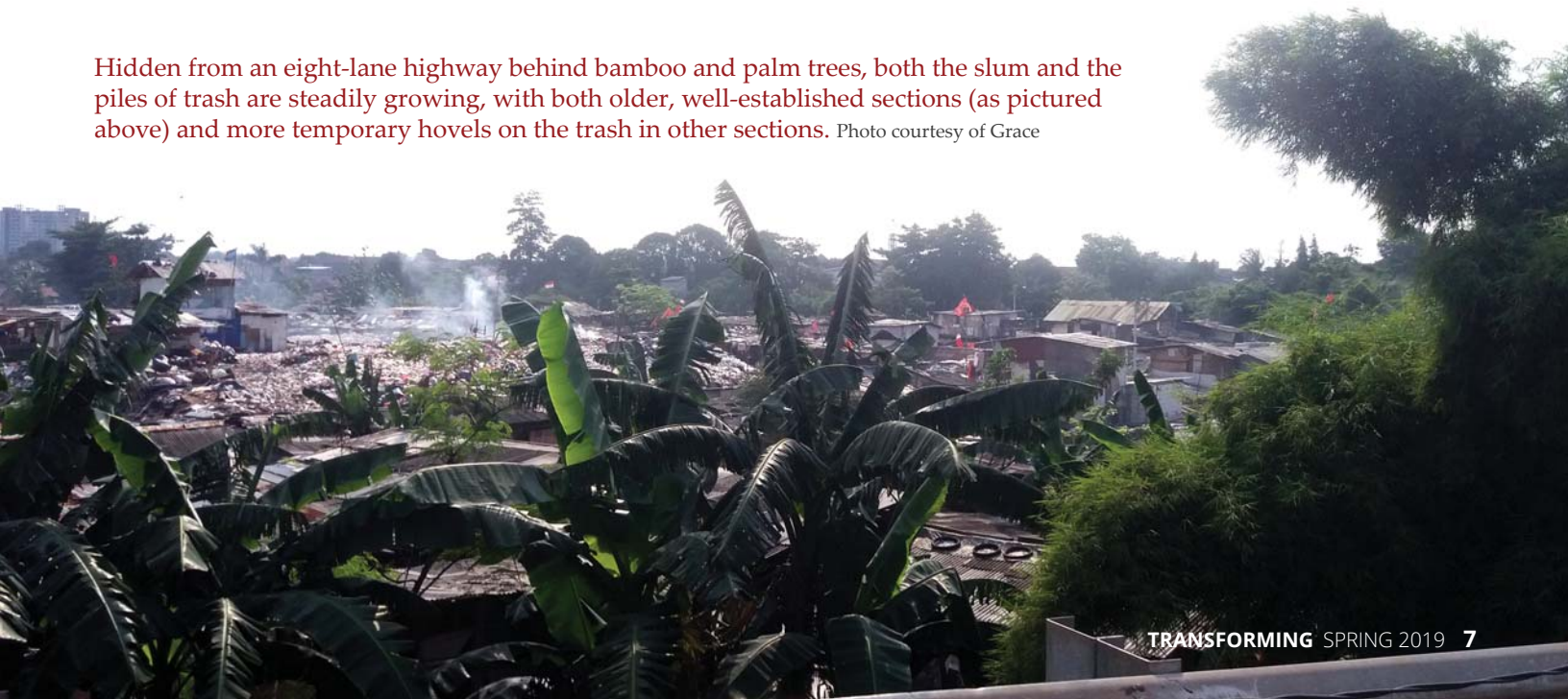
This all reminds me of a passage from Scripture, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth... For we are God’s servants, working together; you are God’s field, God’s building.” (1 Corinthians 3.6-9 NRSV).

Lord, thank you that we may work together with you. May we never cease to hope—as we wait for you to bring the growth.

Grace serves in Southeast Asia with her husband Yugo and their two children, in partnership with Servants to Asia’s Urban Poor.



Hidden from an eight-lane highway behind bamboo and palm trees, both the slum and the piles of trash are steadily growing, with both older, well-established sections (as pictured above) and more temporary hovels on the trash in other sections. Photo courtesy of Grace



Nurturing the faith of college students

BY RACHEL YODER

A small chat began as I nursed my latte and did some work in a downtown coffee shop. The student with whom I chatted eventually asked what my job was. I shared that I am on staff at a church in Harrisonburg and work with college students and young adults in the area. She was so excited!

Apparently, she has been having questions about faith, but works out of town on the weekends and hasn't been able to find a church. I told her that a group of students gathers on Thursday nights at my house and we read scripture and talk about it together. She said that she would love to come. I got her phone number and she and her friend showed up at my house the next night!

When I first felt called to work with college students, I was a student myself. I was in my fifth year of undergrad - deeply involved in a campus ministry and also deeply committed to being a part of a local, off-campus church family.



College students worship in the living room of 264 OSH, a hospitality ministry called Eastside College that invites students into a growing relationship with God.

But I was dissatisfied; something was missing. I noticed that my church family wasn't offering anything to help us as students to shift out of specific campus and/or ministry affiliations that we brought with us into the church context. We sat in our seemingly prescribed clumps and never ventured out. I sensed that there was a role for the local church in helping us students to experience being a part of the body. We wanted to be known, cared for, and encouraged in ministry by folks who were in a different stage of life.

God began to awaken in me a dream for the dividing walls to be broken down and for all of us—university students and local members of congregations—to see each other as brothers and sisters in Christ and for the unique gifts of



Rachel Yoder (center) provides leadership for a weekly prayer time on the campus of Eastern Mennonite University.

Photos courtesy of Rachel Yoder

these students to be nurtured for the sake of God's kingdom. Being a VMissions tranSender has allowed this dream to become reality. I get to see God move through the ministry of Eastside College through a house, 264 OSH. Eastside College is becoming a place where grads and undergrads from both JMU and EMU can come together to grow in relationship with Jesus through praying, learning, serving and worshipping together.

Living life together happens in different ways. For some students, it's getting together regularly for coffee and fellowship. Currently, there are two groups of women who meet together each week. We study the Bible together and invite one another into our lives. Other times, I am simply there with students as they wrestle with struggles and doubts in their faith: "What does it look like to have a personal relationship with Jesus? How do I balance freedom from legalism with discipline? Where does a relationship with Christ fit into my college experience? Next fall, students will be moving into the house with me and "life together" will take on a whole new meaning!

Belonging is a huge issue for these students, and I am offering them a chance to belong. Social media has brought about an ever-present measuring system of comparison. If students see something or someone on social media with the "perfect" life, they will most likely try to figure out why they don't have it, or how they can obtain it. They try to fill a void, which I believe can only be satisfied by Jesus, with the temporary satisfaction of a certain number of "likes" or the group of friends they have.

After my new coffee shop friend's visit to 264 OSH, she sent a text message, reflecting on our discussion that night. "Showing Jesus/having a relationship with Jesus won't look the same in everyone...Sharing Jesus' love doesn't always have to be big; it can be simple, small, and yet still effective. It's beautiful." I am humbled and honored to be able to champion students like her as they live into their dreams and develop their unique gifts for the glory of God.

Rachel Yoder is a tranSender at 264 OSH in Harrisonburg, Va.

Teachers: God's love in the community

BY SETH CRISSMAN

Let's go!" Zippers zipped and flashlights in hand, a few adults make their way out of the church building's doors into the cold night with 15 kids walking between them. The kids are laughing and singing songs as the "walking bus" winds its way through the neighborhood on the way home from Kids Club. It is 7:25 p.m., and these adults are teachers. After almost 12 hours with children, they are still going strong.

There are teachers at almost every Kids Club who choose to weekly care for students in both academic and congregational settings. We wanted to take a few minutes to hear from them, so we asked some of them a few questions:

Why do Kids Club after teaching all day?

- The more I throw myself into school, the more deeply I yearn to be throwing myself into the work of God's Kingdom.
- Kids Club gives me the opportunity to spend time with kids in their home community and meet their parents and grandparents.
- The joy I see from the children in our community when they discover a place where they belong and are loved unconditionally becomes the motivating factor that brings me back each week.
- I want to help create an opportunity for the kids living near our church to have a safe and fun place to come to and learn about God.

What is your favorite part of Kids Club?

- The fact that they are NOT my students is a huge draw. I love being able to interact with them on a different level, playing, singing and learning with them. I love that they know me by name and are excited to see me. I love that I can connect with students at school and then also see them at Kids Club. I love being asked almost daily how many more days until Kids Club!

Snack time is a wonderful opportunity for Kids Club volunteers to interact with the kids and show God's love.



Kids Club volunteer Elizabeth Ochoa interacts with Emily at Park View Mennonite Church. Photos courtesy of Seth Crissman

- I love those "a-ha moments" during a song, story line, or circle time where you can see on a kid's face that they get it...they are loved! In those moments I feel the Spirit of God seeming to say..."these are my children, love them well as I do!"
- As a teacher, it is easy to get caught up in the content and the assignments and the tests. At Kids Club, I get to focus on my favorite part of teaching which is building relationships.
- The walking bus!

What are your hopes for your congregation and the kids who come to Kids Club?

- My hope for the church is that they would support the ministry of Kids Club not only with their prayers and financial support, but also with their time. These kids have such a deep need and yearning to be loved by many different types of people. Everyone can serve!
- My hope for these kids is that they will feel loved and also connected to God through Kids Club and come to realize that my love for them and my time spent with them at Kids Club is because I want them to have their own relationship with God and with a church family.
- I hope that the church will wake up to the deep importance of authentic children's ministries within the community....where we see each other as one family and not so different.
- That they see the value in community involvement and service to others.

All Kids Club volunteers love the children who come, and there is something special about teachers who choose to be at Kids Club each week. They are experts at giving and receiving the love of God in our local communities who are competently leading both at school and at Kids Club. We hope that churches can continue to recognize how uniquely equipped teachers are to lead the church as it reimagines how to give and receive love in the neighborhood.

Seth and Theresa Crissman are VMissions workers serving as directors of Kids Clubs. They are preparing to start their third term in June (2019-2021).



Call to Prayer: Can prayer make *your* family unique?

BY MICHAEL AND RUTHY HERSHEY

Recently we were doing a family activity of identifying the three words that make our family unique. Along with other words such as India and adventure, our 7-year old contributed that “we pray about where to go.”

Growing in prayer is one of the most significant things that defines our past ten years of life and ministry. Our experiences in prayer have changed us and marked us in ways that will impact us for the rest of our lives. We want to teach and train our children how to live a life of prayer, where the default in every situation and circumstance is to draw near to God and listen and watch for his words of comfort, discipline and guidance.

Our priority on prayer is guided by clear biblical principles. We emphasize the fact that God hears our prayers and that we can hear from him. We read in 2 Chronicles 20:12, “We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on You.” In listening to the Holy Spirit we are connecting with the one who is always faithful and good, full of grace and truth.

But principles are not enough; we need to practice. We realize that obedience is required. The obedience of praying: listening, asking and believing for the things God shows us. And the obedience of action: doing what God tells us to do.

We are spurred on as we hear the stories of others who have lived lives

of prayer and as we hear testimonies of God’s answers to prayers for physical and emotional healing, financial provision, relational reconciliation and guidance from the Holy Spirit. Here are a few family-friendly prayer ideas that we have used to develop our family prayer life:

Pray using a map

Wall or floor maps are great, the bigger the better! Prayers can be written on sticky notes and placed on or around the map. Alternately, toys or objects (readily available in a basket) can also be placed on the map as prompts for prayer.

Draw pictures

Use a poster board and allow every child to add their picture/prayer. Pictures make it easy to go back and review things for which you have been praying.

Use starter prayers

Have some kind of short phrase that is the beginning of a prayer, i.e. “Lord, I bless ___ with ...” Let the kids fill in the rest.

Set times to only praise/bless

Such specific parameters can help children to understand that prayer is more than asking. Blessing prayers also underscore the issue of our authority in Jesus as we pray.

Gather and distribute prayer requests

Choose a means of gathering requests. Write them out, mix them up and pass them out. Every individual or cluster then prays for the request they have received. Additionally, if prayers pertained to a particular person, short follow up notes of encouragement can be sent.

Research and pray

Have children do some research on a specific social reality or people, and pray out of what has been learned.



Steve Horst leads his children in expressive prayer practices that he and his wife Bethany have used to develop the family’s prayer life.

Make it an everyone plays ball game

Identify a prayer topic. Allow one person holding a ball to pray and then toss the ball to the next person, etc. This is a great way to get the introverts speaking out loud!

Act out prayers

Physical acts can help us to focus, and can bring a prophetic dimension to our praying. Examples: pour out perfume or water, construct or break things (with Legos), do actions with your body, walk to certain places...

Sing and dance

Prayer and physical expressions of worship are intimately linked. Emphasize freedom of voice and movement.

Adapted from: Children Can You Hear Me: How to Hear and See God by Brad Jersak and Eyes that See and Ears that Hear by Jennifer Toledo

Having completed ten years of service in South Asia, in partnership with EMM, the Hersheys are discerning future ministry.





Crystal Lehman teaches third grade at Buenos Aires International Christian Academy in Argentina. Photos: Crystal Lehman

Worker profile: **Crystal Lehman**

Service program:
Partners in Mission

Assignment:

I teach third grade at Buenos Aires International Christian Academy (BAICA), located in the northern part of Buenos Aires, Argentina. I have been working here since July 2016, as a worker with Virginia Mennonite Missions. Each year, I receive 13-15 students from a wide variety of cultures and backgrounds: South Korea, Ghana, Azerbaijan, the United States, Argentina, Columbia, Peru, and Venezuela.

Biggest challenge:

I work in a small school that is still experiencing growing pains. However, the most difficult part is deciding how to help my students with special needs. During the past two years, half of my students have had special needs. Policies regarding what is allowable and how students receive help in the school setting are not as clear as they are in Virginia. Most of the therapy work or special assistance is done outside the school and is parent-funded. In the school, there is a specialist who advises teachers on ideas they could use and assists when she can; but

planning and implementation mostly falls on the teacher's shoulders. There is always more that I could do; so many times I wonder if I am doing enough.

Biggest joy:

My biggest joy is seeing the kids learn and understand new concepts. It is so fun to blow them away with something they never realized or didn't expect. I love building up the excitement for a new activity or topic with the kids! Whether it is making ice cream or "sedimentary rock" cake, telling a funny story from my childhood, drawing connections between Ancient Rome and Jerusalem in Bible times, answering students' curious questions, or putting on a reader's theatre for the first grade class, my life never gets boring or old as I help them open their eyes to the wonders of the world around them.

A typical day:

I start with a ten-minute walk down the street to the main road, sometimes racing to catch a bus that will move as soon as the light at the intersection turns green. On a good day, the bus driver drops me off right in front of the school, and I can scan in to work before 8:05. Unless I have a staff meeting, I head to my room before going down to the cafeteria for a cup of cinnamon

tea and chat with the cooks. I enter the gym and greet my students arriving for morning prayer and flag raising. Our day begins with our chant, "Here at BAICA, we make choices that change the world."

In the classroom, our schedule includes the core subjects of reading, writing, grammar and math, supplemented by social studies, science, Spanish, art, music, P.E., and 2 hours/week of Bible. A group of us rotate the two responsibilities of lunch and recess each week so we are able to have some extra time at lunch twice a week.

After parents arrive for pickup and each child is dismissed, I go downstairs to grab copies and supplies for the next day. On the way, I chat with other teachers. We debrief on our days, discuss afterschool plans, and share joys and frustrations.

Depending on what needs to be done, I stay to work on planning or write emails. Usually I try to leave at 6:30 p.m., but it is sometimes earlier or later. Arriving at home, I connect with my roommates as we cook, eat, and talk. We often watch a movie or TV show together before heading to bed around 10 p.m.



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