

# Transforming

Stories of making disciples in the way of Christ

Winter 2022  
VOLUME 7 • ISSUE 4



## Experience + Reflection = Wisdom



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 **VMMissions**



# From the President

## Gentle Boldness

BY AARON M. KAUFFMAN

A key mentor of mine has been the Anabaptist missiologist, David W. Shenk. David and his wife Grace were missionaries in East Africa in the 1960s and 70s before returning to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where they helped to revitalize my home congregation. David encouraged me to explore my own call to mission as an adolescent. Even after I moved away, he made it a priority to meet with me for breakfast whenever I was back in town. When I got a copy of his memoir, *A Gentle Boldness*, I could hardly put it down. The book is a gift to me and to all who would follow his example.



Several themes from David's journey with Jesus stand out. First, David and Grace together have exemplified costly yet joyful obedience. As a young couple, they sensed a call to Somalia to replace another missionary couple after the husband had been martyred and the wife badly injured by jihadists. Later in life, they embarked on a four-year teaching assignment in Lithuania even though they felt a strong pull to stay close to grandchildren. Despite the sacrifices, they look back on those years of service with great fondness. Whenever they have sensed God's call, they have sought to answer with a joyful yes.

Another theme of David's life is missional innovation. As a young adult, he pushed the boundaries of the dress code expected of Mennonite ministers at the time in order to remove unnecessary barriers to witness among his neighbors in New York City. Years later, he also encouraged the writing of the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* in order to reach an audience beyond "cradle" Mennonites. The point was never to change the unchanging good news of Jesus, but to make it more accessible to those who have yet to hear it.

As the title of the book suggests, the central theme is David's gentle boldness in sharing the gospel. David spent years witnessing among Muslims, eventually making Christian-Muslim engagement his focus for two decades. In one vignette, he describes a visit of fifty Christians to a mosque in Philadelphia where some one hundred Muslims are gathered for dialogue. After hearing the Muslim prayers recited at the end of Ramadan, David inquires, "How many prayers are enough?" The imam responds, "We never know. We only hope our good deeds will outweigh our bad deeds on Allah's judgment scales." With his host's permission, David then proceeds to share the Christian view, that in Jesus the Messiah, the judge of the universe has decided to take our place so that we might be forgiven and enjoy right fellowship with God forever. The imam replies, "This is too deep, too deep for tonight." "Please, hear this good news," David pleads, as the gathering ends.

I thank God for David's commitment, creativity and courageous witness to Jesus, and I pray for a new generation of leaders who will follow in his footsteps.

**Cover photo:** Willard and Eva Eberly and their children Maurita, Andy, and Mike, enjoy a family outing in 1976 to explore an ancient temple near Menfi, Sicily, built by the Greeks (approx. 500 BC). See article on page 4. Photo courtesy of Willard and Eva Eberly.

## Features

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## Financial Report

Reporting: 09/01/21 to 12/31/21

Special Projects \$588,709	Special Projects \$511,654
Mission Fund \$329,061	Mission Fund \$280,654
<b>Income</b> Total \$917,770	<b>Expenses</b> Total \$792,308

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

## Transforming

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**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 7, NUMBER 4**

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

## End of Year Mission Fund Goal Exceeded



Christmas is about kindness, God's kindness toward us in Jesus Christ. In a world where kindness is in short supply, this is good news.

VMMissions is grateful to God for the donations received by December 31 for the end of calendar year campaign, which exceeded the goal of \$160,000 to total \$166,783, or 104%!

These donations will help train and support more gospel workers as they plant churches, lead businesses, serve the community, and minister to those in need. Thank you for giving the gift of kindness to a world that desperately needs it.

## E<sup>3</sup> Collective Trips Resuming in 2022

After a long season of cancelled short-term mission experiences called E<sup>3</sup> Collectives, VMMissions is excited to announce the following trips planned in 2022:

- **Nazareth/Bethlehem:** May 13–30 (No open spots)
- **Wayfarers:** May 22–June 1 (6 spots open: learn more at [vmmissions.org/wayfarers](https://vmmissions.org/wayfarers))
- **Border Perspective:** Dates in Fall 2022 TBD (Sept./Oct.): learn more at [borderperspective.org/mission-trips](https://borderperspective.org/mission-trips)
- **Thailand Prayer Trip:** Dates TBD

Learn more about E<sup>3</sup> Collective at [vmmissions.org/e3-collective](https://vmmissions.org/e3-collective)

## A Church of Many Cultures Campaign at \$2.4M

Following the public launch last fall of **A Church of Many Cultures**, a comprehensive VMMissions fundraising campaign, donors so far have committed a total of \$2.43 million, or 81% of the \$3 million campaign goal.

The campaign enables VMMissions to position itself to catch the wave of what God is doing as the agency moves into its second century of ministry.

At the launch event, VMMissions President Aaron Kauffman cited two significant trends: "First, we see global migration relocating Christians from all over the world, many of whom sense God's call to reach their new neighbors for Christ. Second, our international workers are discovering that some countries resistant to traditional mission work are wide open for business ventures."

The Church of Many Cultures campaign addresses these realities and enables programs to support both Global Church Planting and Business for Transformation, as well as the renovation of a barn on the VMMissions property to become a fully accessible meeting space designated for prayer, training, and community events, with a capacity for 50 people.

## VMMissions Announces Fundraising Events in 2022

In addition to E<sup>3</sup> Collective trips resuming, VMMissions will be hosting fundraising events this spring and summer:

- **5K For Missions** (April 1-30)
- **Motorcycle for Missions** (June 3-4)
- **Putt Fore Missions** (June 23). This is a fun and family-friendly mini-golf tournament with teams and prizes. A new feature this year is a driving range competition!

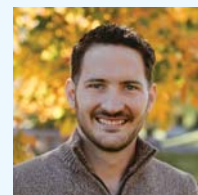
See the back page for more details.

## VMMissions Hires Two New Staff Members

In Fall 2021, VMMissions welcomed two staff members to help VMMissions prepare for a greater ministry impact through enhanced church partnerships and events and more intentional mission worker recruitment and equipping.



As Church Relations Associate, **David Gingerich** helps to strengthen and expand church partnerships and to plan VMMissions events alongside the Advancement Team. David is a graduate of Eastern Mennonite University and Eastern Mennonite Seminary, and he has served in ministry in Ghana, Spain and Ecuador, and as an associate pastor at Grace Mennonite Fellowship. He also served on the VMMissions board as Northern District Representative from 2020-2021. David is married to Ericka, and they have two children, Lili and Josiah.



**Kierston Kreider** serves as Mission Mobilizer. He partners with Discipleship Ministries Coach Martin Rhodes and

the VMMissions Equipping and Global Teams to recruit, train, send and encourage new mission workers. Kierston grew up as a "missionary kid" in Peru and has degrees from Eastern Mennonite University and Fuller Theological Seminary. He is fluent in English, Spanish and Portuguese, and he and his wife Maria recently returned to the States after two years in Maria's home country of Brazil.

# ● Eight Lessons from a Lifetime in Mission

Fifty-two years after Willard and Eva Eberly were called to serve in Italy, they look back on key lessons they learned.

BY WILLARD AND EVA EBERLY

Our initial 18 years of missionary service with VMissions (1969-1987) took us to Palermo, capital city of the Italian island of Sicily. Through every conceivable method, we were meant to share the good news and work towards the development of churches. Several years later, after our three children were established as young adults in the US, Willard accepted a position with VMissions as Mediterranean Regional Director, with Eva serving as his assistant. From a home base most of that time in Bari, Italy, we served in this way for 20 years (1991-2011), expanding the work to include Albania, Kosovo, and Montenegro.

What we've learned about engaging cross-culturally could fill a book! Here are a few of those lessons:

## Invest in learning language

What could be more important than seriously concentrating on language study and learning to speak well! Good communication is essential in establishing meaningful, trusting relationships and for effective Bible teaching and ministry into people's lives. All of this is made easier if we are willing to purposely detach from "back home," limiting social media connections and relinquishing emotional ties to the sending culture.



Willard and Eva study the Italian language upon arrival.



Willard and Eva Eberly with baby Maurita in 1969, the year they were first sent to Italy.

## Be flexible

Frequently new workers begin with their own preconceived ideas, personal expectations, hopes, and visions for what they want to accomplish. What happens when these never materialize due to changing circumstances and factors? Responding with frustration and discouragement can threaten to derail commitment. This is precisely the moment to wait and listen to God's plans and follow him by faith. Engaging in cross-cultural missions means learning to walk by faith, not by sight—because, humanly speaking, it is an impossible, daunting task!

## Extend hospitality

Early in our missionary experience when our children were small, God nudged us to consecrate our home for hospitality and ministry. Almost as soon as we did so, God began bringing people to our door. The doorbell rang so frequently that sometimes we felt overwhelmed! Although requiring much sacrifice, making our lives and home available for the Spirit's use yielded rich rewards.

We found the home setting conducive to deep sharing, listening, and praying with new believers, many of whom came to Christ from broken backgrounds. Without this support, they easily return to old defeating life-patterns.

Although mass media has its place in communicating the gospel, we soon learned that the majority come to faith in Jesus Christ through the consistent example and loving witness of Christian friends and family. We observe that mission workers who guard their homes as their own private space tend to experience a less fruitful ministry.

## Focus on equipping others

Our basic mission philosophy and methodology was modeling, discipling and equipping believers in every aspect of Christian living. As soon as possible, we attempted to involve others in everything we did—as observers, active participants, and later delegating responsibility to them.





Throughout their years in Italy, home Bible studies such as this one were a central feature of Willard and Eva's ministry. Photos courtesy of Willard and Eva Eberly.

### Don't expect immediate results

A difficult lesson to learn was that "sowing the seed" is an act of faith. Although not always reaping where we've sown, we may reap where others have sown! We might be only a link in the chain of witnesses that brings someone to faith! Understanding this biblical principle prevents discouragement in the absence of immediate results.

This story can serve to illustrate: a casual contact in Sicily to whom we'd witnessed called us twenty years later. In amazement, we listened to her story. She told us how she had cried out to God in a moment of deep despondency. "Lord, I want to know you like Willard and Eva do." Soon after praying that prayer, she "happened" to meet evangelical Christians there in Northern Italy where she was then living. They led her to experience new life in Christ! Now her husband and daughter are also believers! We must persevere faithfully with long-term vision, firmly believing that "we will reap if we faint not" (Gal 6:9).

### Understand the reality of spiritual warfare

Doubtlessly, spiritual warfare was the most life-changing reality confronting us on the "frontlines." God opened our eyes to its reality when we became aware of the presence of a powerful sorcerer in the church Willard was pastoring. He posed as a believer with "many spiritual gifts"—divination, healing, discerning spirits, etc.—but there was no evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in his life. We spent months in prayer and discernment, consulting with other leaders. We devoured helpful books.

God miraculously revealed who this man was and what action was needed to free the church from the enemy's infiltration. This process incited a tremendously hostile reaction. We began receiving anonymous telephone calls threatening our lives if we continued working with the church. Following this spiritual liberation, our little church began radiating an atmosphere of joy. New persons were drawn into relationship with Jesus.

This painful trial alerted us to the battle raging in the spiritual world against God's kingdom and to the barriers that hinder faith in Jesus. We soon discovered that nearly every Sicilian family we knew had been involved in spiritism, superstitions, or some kind of occult practice. Spiritual

oppression and bondage manifested in various ways and victory came only through intercessory prayer, dependence on God's word and on his Spirit.

Understanding the dynamics of authentic freedom in Christ transformed our personal lives, as well as our perspectives on evangelism, discipleship, and soul care. The good news took on fresh meaning as we witnessed the kingdom of God breaking through spiritual barriers. We believe this is a key to the formation of disciples that flourish and to establishing churches that thrive.

### Realize you will have regrets

We would have certainly done some things differently, if we would have known then what we learned through experience, like giving prayer higher priority. We regret having neglected teaching the principles of tithing and generous giving, so that the church could move forward and multiply. Our sensitivity to their poverty due to economic oppression of the mafia and high unemployment made us reticent to teach financial stewardship.

### Stay available when the "assignment" is over

Upon re-entry to Virginia six years ago, we were surprised to discover the large population of immigrants living in this area. How astonishing that the nations have come to us. Our passion for missions was immediately re-ignited. When we make ourselves available, God uses us!

Willard's diversion of meeting people as an Uber driver has opened doors for friendship and sharing the gospel with some of these international people. We've been able to connect in significant ways to people from Afghanistan, China, Lebanon, and Iran. God recently surprised us by bringing several of our Kurdish friends to faith in Jesus! Eva serves on the Ministry Support Team of a missionary in Cambodia and is missions coordinator at our church. Instead of retiring, we continue to apply what God taught us in cross-cultural missions right here in the Shenandoah Valley.

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*Willard and Eva served as longtime mission workers in Italy and later as staff members of VMissions. They reside in Broadway, Va., and continue to engage in mission with global neighbors.*

# Rearview Reflections

**Beginning as a teacher among the Deaf and later becoming a church planter, Nancy Marshall sees how God guided her in both roles as she served in Belize.**

BY NANCY MARSHALL

I went to Orange Walk, Belize, in 2005 with a clear call from God to start a church among the Deaf. The only problem was that I had no idea how to do that. Yes, I was a seminary graduate and probably should have known! So when I hit the ground I just expected God to tell me what to do. I wasn't worried about failing or disappointing anyone because I knew God was telling me to trust him. Somehow this would work out. I was sure.

The same day that my plane touched down in Belize, a deaf child and her brother from Orange Walk were killed in a car accident. Their mother had been teaching the only deaf class in the area. As I was unpacking my suitcase I got a call from the school principal. "Nancy, we need you to teach the deaf class, 11 children, ages 6-21. We start school in a week."

Quite honestly I did not seek God's advice in that moment. I just thought, "Maybe this is a God coincidence: a certified teacher arrives the same day another teacher leaves." I told the principal that I would do it. It was actually a relief to me: I knew how to teach. I did not know how to plant a new church. Somewhere in the back of my mind was the question, "Is this from God? Is this part of the plan?"

So how did it turn out with the teaching job? It clearly demonstrated that God is a genius. Teaching school gave me a role in the community. When the pastor of the Mennonite Church in town picked me up at the airport that first day he said, "We don't need more missionaries in Belize. There are already too many." I found out later that this was a common understanding. But teaching gave me an immediate "in" with the deaf community. Everywhere I went in town I was greeted with, "Hello Teacher!" Missionaries were not greeted so warmly.

Yet throughout those early times, I kept hearing a persistent word from God, "Don't forget your call." Three weeks into the school year I was leading devotions on the Ten Commandments. The day we focused on the fourth commandment to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy, the 18-year-olds spoke out. "But how do we do that? There is no deaf church here. We can't understand the priest in the Catholic church." I swallowed hard and asked God, "Is this it? Is this how we start a church...with children?"

The next day I went on to the fifth commandment and reviewed the first four. This time the whole class was chanting: "How? How do we worship God?" I finally said, "OK, I will drive around and pick you all up. We will have church at my house at 9 a.m. on Sunday." And that's how Jesus' Deaf Church started. So my first lesson was to let God lead; God knows what he is doing.



In this 2012 photo, Nancy Marshall teaches a deaf boy using American Sign Language (ASL) in Orange Walk Town, Belize. Photo courtesy of Nancy Marshall.

My second lesson was harder. As a teacher, I lead the class, I decide the lessons and I assign the work. As a pastor it took me a long time to learn that letting go of the lead is the best way to mentor the flock. When they are leading, they are learning how to disciple. When they are leading, they are learning to trust God to walk with them. To new missionaries I would say, let go of the basket of "knowledge" as soon as you can and instead become an encourager. Let those you are working with make mistakes and figure out how to grow from those errors.

I bring these lessons to my post missionary life—sometimes successfully and sometimes not so. I recently was on the planning team for a Christmas program for our Deaf church and our sister hearing church. But when we started, I failed to encourage the leader. I couldn't see where he was going; I sowed seeds of doubt in the others. This is exactly the opposite of what God had taught me in Belize. God said, "Trust me. Walk with them, encourage them, and let them have the reins." Many of the lessons learned in Belize are still lessons I am trying to re-learn in my stateside mission field. It's all for the glory of God.

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*Nancy Marshall is a former VM Missions worker in Belize from 2005 to 2017, serving as a Deaf educator and church planter.*



## Pastor and VMissions board member Clair Good reflects on lessons learned and unlearned in over a decade of ministering among the Maasai in Kenya.

BY CLAIR GOOD

**A**s a young missionary, I was full of zeal to save the “unreached” Maasai of Kenya. I assumed they knew nothing of God. With great conviction and enthusiasm, I offered answers to questions the people I was trying to reach were not even asking. I was met with resistance and had little success in convincing people to follow my religious views.

I was surprised to learn that the Maasai people already knew God and had a deep spirituality. They were asking different questions than the ones I assumed they would have. I came with a message of freedom from their sins. Yet, they informed me of their deep cultural and religious longing to reconnect with God. They grieved the pervading sense of alienation from their creator.

While studying the language of the Maasai host community I was forced to listen. I needed to learn their words, their meanings and the way they put their thoughts together linguistically. I was surprised to discover that they had thought patterns and word descriptions that I found to be superior to my mother tongue. Imagine my surprise when my language helper informed me that there was no past tense for the word “love” in the Maasai language. This had huge positive implications theologically.



Hannah and Esther Good (center) are blessed by Mrs. Naimodo and David Shunkur from Olepolos Mennonite Church as part of an alternative blessings ceremony hosted by the Olepolos Community. This filled a void the author sees within North American culture. Photo courtesy of Clair Good

Likewise, the more I observed, the more I became convinced that the local social system was superior to that within my culture. I noticed beautiful examples of reciprocity. Elders received care while offering child care. At the same time, they passed their knowledge and wisdom on to the next generation. There came a day when I wondered if I was from the lost community, and they were the people with answers to my culture’s challenges.

As a foreigner, I was perplexed by some cultural practices. The practice of polygamy and female genital mutilation (FGM) seemed reprehensible in my worldview. As the good news began to take root within the community, the new believers began to ask themselves questions about their cultural practices. Surprisingly, men with more than one wife began to give advice to the next generation about loving their wives as themselves. The practice of multiple wives decreased drastically in one generation. Their understanding and wisdom in dealing with this issue left me in awe. Though I thought I knew why Paul wrote Timothy, encouraging him to choose elders who had one wife, I realized that their understanding was deeper than mine.

My respect swelled as I watched the women reflecting on their FGM “cutting” ceremony. Women were typically devalued in this very patriarchal society. But this ceremony had aspects of honoring the young woman, something they saw mirrored in Jesus’ honor of women. So, instead of abandoning their ceremony completely, they enhanced the honoring, but stopped the cutting. Today many Maasai women go through a modified blessing ceremony honoring the girl child.

Today I am a pastor in the United States. There are many challenges I face in my culture and community. Can I behave like a missionary in this setting and listen and ask questions? My Maasai brothers and sisters hungered for relationship with God. They embraced the good news that Jesus made a way for them to reconnect and have fellowship with God again. Am I listening well enough to hear the relevant questions of my community here? Am I able to hear God’s response to questions that may seem unanswerable in my limited theological mind? How do I continue to be a missionary listener?

More of this story can be read in [\*Is Your Pastor Saved Yet?\*](#) by Clair Good and Esther Good, Masthof Press.

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*Clair Good is pastor of Waynesboro Mennonite Church, Waynesboro, Va., and serves on the VMissions board as Southern District Representative.*

# ● A Change of Focus, Not of Call

After years of fruitful ministry in the U.S., Diomedes Franco and his wife Victoria are now back in their home country, following the call to care for those in crisis.

BY DIOMEDES FRANCO

Ever since I can remember, I have been very inclined to serve others. This conviction was reinforced after I gave my life to Christ. Early on, my pastor nurtured my desire to serve by inviting me to preach, teach and serve in different contexts in the church. Later, he encouraged me to go to seminary.

At the time, I sensed that something was missing in the church. I admired Billy Graham as a great evangelist but also Martin Luther King as a great social advocate. Was it possible to do both things? So, while attending seminary during the week, I studied clinical psychology and family therapy on the weekends. I believe that if you don't have the knowledge you can't offer proposals for solutions. In 1990, I graduated from both seminary and college. My wife Victoria finished her medical studies and we were married. We started serving together and planted our first church in the Dominican Republic.

In 1993, God opened doors for us to move to the US to continue my studies. We had the privilege of planting a number of churches in Northern Illinois. These were urban and multicultural churches, with members from many different Spanish speaking countries. We learned that people from Central America were different from people from South America, or North America or the Caribbean. This helped us to grow in our sensitivity to the different subcultures within our society.

This was a time of intense work and sacrifice, because we generally started a church on our own, as a family, without a team or a mentor behind us. We felt the demand of reaching certain goals but didn't have anyone to walk alongside us through this journey, and that was not healthy. But God was faithful and sustained us and made the churches thrive.

In 2010, eighteen years after moving to the U.S., we felt that we had to return the Dominican Republic. This calling to go back to the D.R. started as a conflict within us. We had everything we needed: a house, a good church, and good jobs. I was a counselor in a hospital and my wife was an elementary school teacher. Our children attended private schools.

Yet such comfort started to make us feel uncomfortable. We felt we were in debt with God's calling upon us in some way, that we had to go and start a community project that would serve the marginalized people in La Vega. God led us to go with just a few resources and we obeyed. We thought, "If we can do this in a country with such limited resources, then it can be done in other countries."



Diomedes Franco (foreground) meets with men in the community of La Vega. Photo courtesy of Diomedes Franco

In 2011, we started a social project in La Vega, DR, called "Building Healthy Families." In this ministry we offer service to abused people and abusers. We work with children on the street and have a teenage pregnancy prevention program. We offer outpatient services for addicts and help marriages in crisis.

For nine years, we only focused on serving through this ministry, so when people came to Christ we referred them to the church closest to that person to be nurtured. But we realized that this was not a good plan: churches were not ready to disciple people with such brokenness. Finally, we felt that God was challenging us to refocus on pastoral work, discipling and equipping the people God had given us to care for.

This is not a change of calling but of focus. Through all those years, my pastoral "fire" was never extinguished! We are extremely grateful to God for making us part of VMMissions. We dream that the church planted will be a model from which many more will emerge in the region and the country.

Struggles and deserts haven't been enough to discourage us. Actually, these are what confirm our calling. There are difficult seasons and lots of suffering, but we've seen fruit in the lives of people. We've seen our own children embracing our ministry and that gives us hope. God has always provided and has never forsaken us. This keeps us going.

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*Diomedes Franco serves with his wife Victoria in La Vega, Dominican Republic as a discipler, pastor, and church planter.*



# ● Sentness is a Life Sentence

The assignments have changed over the years, but Lee and Peg Martin have made God's mission the center of their life together.

BY LEE AND PEG MARTIN

When we were married in 1988, we were committed to discovering and following God on a lifelong journey into mission. This was to be a life sentence, not just a series of short-term stints where “real life” gets put on back burner. As a registered nurse, Peg brought skills and a passion for healing what is broken in people's bodies and lives. Lee brought a growing sense of call to pastoral ministry, and a heart for those who feel overlooked or looked down upon.

Our first 11 years of married life were as camp managers at Highland Retreat. We discovered that we enjoyed working closely together and hosting “temporary community” experiences that helped to build a kingdom bigger than us. During these years, we were part of Gospel Hill Mennonite Church, with Lee serving as a marginal time youth pastor/associate pastor. This mountain congregation and community taught us much about being salt and light for Jesus amidst our world's brokenness.

Lee was then called by Mt. Clinton Mennonite Church into a full time pastoral role. Throughout that time, Peg served in various nursing roles. Mt. Clinton congregation became our family—loving and blessing us richly. In a time when church involvement nationwide began to decline, we grew in our commitment to keep the church at the core of our lives and service, knowing Jesus' promise to build the church and assure its endurance (Mt. 16:18). After 17 years, we sensed the Holy Spirit was moving us again. Scripture is

full of stories of people called by God from places of familiarity and settledness into the unfamiliar and new.

During a season of prayer and discernment we reaffirmed our desire to bring

our limited faith and abilities to Jesus' grand call to lose one's life in order to find it. We took to heart God's promise that no one who leaves home and family for the sake of the kingdom will fail to receive many times as much in this life and in the age to come (Lk. 18:29-30). Thus, in June, 2017 we began our current assignment with MCC's SWAP program (Sharing with Appalachian People).

Our love for people as the high point of God's creation, and for rural Appalachia, coupled with a dose of administrative and construction experience, has given us the feeling of again finding our niche as we serve in this economically depressed rural community in southern West Virginia. Though thoughts of coasting into retirement in our previous callings certainly crossed our minds, instead, we are rejoicing in this season of once again working together in a community that has truly come to feel like home.

When considering a term with MCC SWAP, we felt called to serve “the least of these,” but we have realized that we do not think of our neighbors in these terms. Though many are financially disadvantaged, we find them rich in faith and life experiences; we are inspired as we walk beside them.

We've learned to pay attention when a God-given “holy restlessness” emerges within us. During these times, we pray for alertness to new doors God might be opening, while seeking to be steady and faithful in our present calling. Experiences of God's faithfulness in the past have given us courage and trust when God leads us out of our comfort zone into new places of service. We don't know what the future holds, but are confident that our God who has guided us together for the past 33 years on this varied path in mission will be there every step of the way.



Peg and Lee Martin enjoy an outing at Breaks Interstate Park, Kentucky and Virginia, in October, 2021. Photo by Stephanie Broersma



Lee Martin sits with homeowner Billie Joe McPeak during a work break. SWAP staff were improving Billie Joe's stairs going down to the street level. July 2020. Photo by Peg Martin

Lee and Peg Martin serve with the SWAP program of Mennonite Central Committee in McDowell County, West Virginia, in partnership with VMissions.

# Call to Prayer: Discovering Parallels with the Past

BY RUTHY HERSHEY

**W**e were a young, newly-married couple with a toddler in tow, heading to the unreached frontier of northern India. We moved to a “small” city of two million people.

Along with one other family—our teammates—we were the only foreigners in the city. It felt like an impossible task, way too huge for us, but not for God. So, we started praying.

The more we listened in prayer, the more excited we became as we heard God’s dreams for that place. They were much larger than what we could dream up on our own, and we felt honored that God called us to come and be part of his work. A central feature of that work was, in fact, to pray: to know what God wanted to accomplish and to fervently invite him to be at work.

We affectionately referred to our city as “Metal City” because it is a center for the export of brass handi-crafts. But in addition to the export of brass, handicrafts from all over northern India are received and then shipped across the globe. We sensed God speaking to us that he had destined Metal City to be an exporting city in the spiritual sense as well. He desired to raise up kingdom workers from that place and send them all over India and the world! This realization helped to infuse our daily interactions in our kingdom business with much hope and joy.

Being the only foreigners there, we didn’t think much about missionaries who may have been there before us until an Indian believer gave us a church history book describing work that had happened across North India over a century before. We read about the first workers who came to Metal City in the late 1800s and dedicated the majority of their lives to serving there. What a gift to read their prayer list for Metal City! It was amazing to see the way that their prayers lined up with the



After a decade of ministry in northern India, Ruthy Hershey marvels at God’s faithfulness in answering the prayers of previous generations.

Photo courtesy of Ruthy Hershey.

prayers the Holy Spirit was continuing to prompt us to pray!

There was a story in the book about the first men who came to faith in Metal City and how they grew and quickly became ones who took the good news to many other places. In fact, much of the kingdom work in the North could be traced back to these men. Wow! Metal City was exporting from the beginning.

This amazing experience humbled me as a young adult. We thought we were the first believers coming to that city. But, in the Body of Christ, there had been hundreds of years of dedicated prayer and service in that place before us. And God had spoken the same things to them as he was speaking to us now.

When God showed us it was time to move on from Metal City, we visited the same Indian believer and passed on the notes of the promises that God had spoken to us in our years of living and praying there.

And now, as we serve in a new location, we are aware of the work that God has been doing here in generations past. We are intentionally seeking out those who served before us in order to hear the promises that God whispered to them. We want to hear the things that they have longed and hoped for. Some of them have been realized, and others have not yet come to fruition. We join in with those prayers and sense the promises ready to continue springing up from the ground.

It is a freeing truth when we realize and embrace that we are reaping where others have sown and that others will reap where we have sown. God is the Alpha and the Omega. He knows the end from the beginning. He is the Author and the Finisher. All over the earth, the God of yesterday, today and forever will complete what he has begun.

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*Ruthy Hershey is a VMissions worker serving with Immerse International in Millersville, Pa.*



## Worker profile: Nathan Carr

Service program: tranSend

Serving since: 2021

### Assignment:

I am serving in prison ministry alongside VMissions long-term worker, Jason Wagner. I am involved in reaching out to men like myself—helping to draw them out of addiction towards Christ.

### Biggest challenge:

My biggest challenge is getting the guys that I work with to realize that if they would surrender all to God, their lives could be changed and new! So I guess building their faith when they're not ready or when they don't totally surrender their all to the Lord is a challenge. I can totally relate to not being ready to surrender. There was a time when I wasn't willing to let go of everything and let God take control. I want these men to see that by surrendering control of their lives to Christ and being willing to go through recovery, God will provide them with the life that they deserve to live—just as he has done for me. I have seen that instead of a life of fear and depression and anxiety and addiction, we can live lives of joy and peace and love through Christ. All things are possible!

### Biggest joy:

What gives me the most joy is when the men I am relating with listen to the Lord when he speaks to them! I can see the joy in them when they surrender and that brings joy to me because I know the new life that lies ahead for them. Seeing the chains break as mine did is such a wonderful thing. When I was brought out of my addiction I found joy through the support I received from the church, my family, the jail chaplain, and the Celebrate Recovery community. But most of all: glory be to God!

### A typical day:

The way I describe a typical day would be waking up and immediately jumping into prayer, getting ready for the day. If it is a Monday, I meet with Jason Wagner for intensive prayer and weekly accountability. He is guiding me in Bible study and journaling, which are helping my faith to grow. On Monday and Thursday evenings I help with

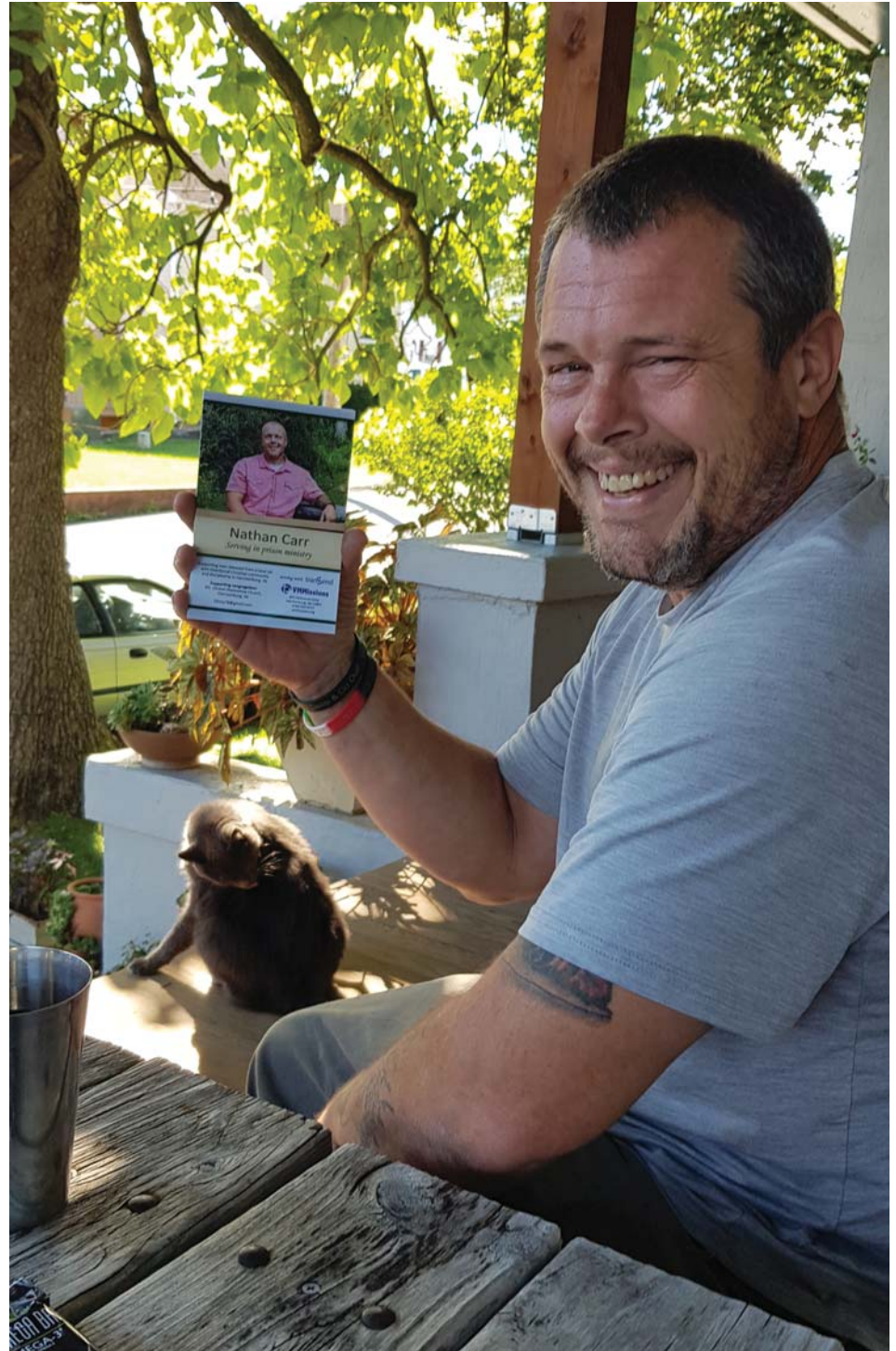


Photo: Skip Tobin


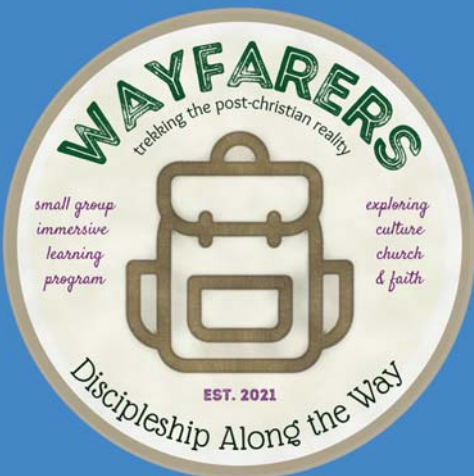
two different Celebrate Recovery programs. In particular, I oversee the men and women going into the jail on behalf of Celebrate Recovery and co-lead a class for Celebrate Recovery newcomers. Tuesday through Thursday is mostly devoted to my part-time building and remodeling job. In between, I write letters to inmates and work hard as a sponsor for an inmate at Middle

River regional jail, helping him find a home plan and work. I plan to walk alongside him as everyone did for me when I was released. The rest of my spare time is spent with my girlfriend Leah and her three year old daughter Nevaeh. I love how God has brought us together and has allowed our life to grow.






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