

# Transforming

Stories of making disciples in the way of Christ

Spring 2021  
VOLUME 7 • ISSUE 1



## Faithful to the call



● **An invitation  
that leads to life** PAGE 4



● **Called out  
of the fire** PAGE 6



# From the President

## The costly call of Christ



BY AARON M. KAUFFMAN

*"Truly I tell you," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life."*  
Mark 10:29-30

**M**y daughter likes to tell this story from her middle school days. During a discussion in history class, her friend disclosed a family secret: "One of my great-grandfathers was a bootlegger." Our daughter replied, "Wow. One of my great-grandfathers was Amish."

I grew up knowing that only one generation ago, my father's parents had made the difficult decision to leave the Amish. As the story goes, my grandparents Henry and Alma came to a new understanding of faith through the preaching of an evangelist in their community. The preacher's invitation to know Jesus personally and have assurance of salvation was an invitation they wanted to accept. But doing so would have consequences. They would face shunning—complete cutoff of relationship—from their Amish community, even from their relatives.

Through a series of events, including experiences that can only be understood as signs from the Lord, they decided to choose Jesus over family ties. The pain of that decision still reverberates through my family today. And yet I am forever grateful for their obedience to God's call.

Decades later, my wife Laura and I heard our own costly call from Jesus. We wanted to serve cross-culturally and had applied to several mission agencies. But the doors we hoped would be open stayed shut. Then the invitation came to serve in a small town in Colombia. There was a Mennonite school there where I could teach and Laura could serve as a nurse.

I remember searching the internet for news of Colombia. Violence, drug trafficking and kidnapping topped the list of headlines from mainstream news outlets. No way, I thought. We are not taking our newborn daughter to a place like that.

Yet we couldn't shake the sense of call. We met with mentors of ours, Linford and Janet Stutzman, to seek their advice. They were leading student cross-cultural trips to the Middle East at the time. "Do you know what part of the three-month trip is the riskiest, statistically?" they asked. "The drive to the airport."

A few weeks later during a church service, our pastor asked, "What risks are worth taking for the kingdom?" Laura and I looked at each other with tears in our eyes. We would follow God's call to Colombia.

When we heed the Lord's call, we never know where we'll end up. There will be sacrifice and hardship. But there will also be unspeakable joy. Like countless generations of sojourners before us, may we have the courage to say yes to God's call.

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## Financial Report

Reporting: 09/01/20 to 02/28/21

Special Projects \$916,771	Special Projects \$665,557
Mission Fund \$543,673	Mission Fund \$402,511
<b>Revenue</b> Total \$1,460,444	<b>Expenses</b> Total \$1,068,068

**Mission Fund:** undesignated giving by households and churches, **Special Projects:** giving to specific workers or ministries. The above figures do not include investment income.

## Transforming

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**Cover photo:** At dusk on a mountain peak in North Africa, worker Raleigh\* prays for Jesus to be made known among his indigenous neighbors. His wife Opal\* shares her story on page 4.  
(\*Not their real names) Photo by Opal



# ● News+Events

## VMissions to host virtual 5K for Missions



Through the month of April, VMissions is hosting a virtual 5K for Missions, which allows runners and walkers of all ages and skill levels to get outside and show their support for VMissions. The event is open to competitors, or those who would like to participate for fun.

Registration is open now through April 30th. Register by April 15th to receive a t-shirt. Learn more and register at [vmmissions.org/5k-for-missions](https://vmmissions.org/5k-for-missions)

## Motorcycle for Missions to hit the road June 18-19



Hit the open road in June as Motorcycle for Missions gears up for this year's annual fundraiser for VMissions.

Enjoy the fresh air and beautiful Virginia scenery of the Shenandoah Valley and Piedmont regions. Learn more at [vmmissions.org/motorcycle-for-missions](https://vmmissions.org/motorcycle-for-missions)

## VMissions launches fundraising campaign for new ministries

VMissions is pleased to report that a comprehensive fundraising campaign, *A Church of Many Cultures*, has been launched, starting with a "silent" leadership gifts phase. In just four months, a team of volunteers and staff has raised \$1.4 million from 35 donors.

Dave Yutzy (Timberville, Va.) and Phyllis Miller (Arlington, Va.) serve as Campaign Co-Chairs, and playing a role as Honorary Co-Chairs are Ike and Sue Martin (Poquoson, Va.) and Marvin and Sarah Ellen Slabaugh (Harrisonburg, Va.). Besides these officers, the Campaign Cabinet also includes Teresa Anders, Willard Eberly, Jim Hershberger, Ken Horst, Vernon Moyer, Glen Stoltzfus, Lynn Suter, and Russell and Casey De Young.

The final goal has not yet been set, but the effort is expected to raise at least \$2.7 million. Funds will seed two programs with immediate support and long-term endowments: Business for Transformation (B4T), which launches for-profit enterprises as an expression of Christian witness; and Global Church Planting, which multiplies churches in the immigrant and global diaspora communities. In addition, a renovation project is slated to turn the existing barn on the VMissions property into a Mission Training Center.

In the near future, VMissions expects to announce the campaign more broadly and extend an invitation to all VMissions supporters to participate. Future issues of *Transforming* will provide updates on the campaign.

## Todd Van Patter hired as Director of Operations



VMissions is pleased to announce the hiring of Todd Van Patter as Director of Operations, beginning March 31.

In this key role, Todd leads the Support Services Team and serves on the Leadership Council. His background is in organizational design and culture: the systems and practices that lead to vibrant and effective organizations.

Todd studied Communication Science in his undergrad at Penn State University, and more recently earned a Master of Arts degree in Organizational Leadership at Eastern Mennonite University, where he has since spent several years working in Institutional Research and Effectiveness. He has worked alongside a variety of organizations, with a particular passion for bringing out the best in those workplaces and their people.

Todd has been involved in Christian ministry throughout his life, including music and worship, youth programming, short-term missions, and communications work for a large Bible agency.

Todd, Rachel and their two boys live in Harrisonburg, Virginia, and attend Church of the Incarnation.

"I am deeply grateful that God has called Todd to join our staff," noted Aaron Kauffman, President of VMissions. "He is a gifted person of sincere faith in Christ who has a range of experiences in both business and nonprofit organizations, and an eye for how our work together can be both life-giving and effective."

# ● An invitation that leads to life

For Raleigh and Opal\*, serving among an indigenous people group in North Africa, parenting a special needs child seemed like an obstacle to embracing God's call, but God has shown them otherwise.

BY OPAL

A long-term worker held our first born son. "He has all ten toes and ten fingers!" our friend exclaimed delightedly. A few moments later we realized this friend hadn't yet realized that our baby son also had Down syndrome. As we shared the news, he wasn't shaken but quickly shared stories of other overseas workers he had known who not only welcomed children with special needs into their lives but continued to work in missions abroad. During our son Robbie's\* first weeks, we heard similar stories from other retired overseas workers. Our hopes for working in God's kingdom around the world rose and grew again in our uncertain hearts.

As long as I can remember, I have known God's invitation to participate in kingdom work in marginalized settings. As a twelve year old, I thought I'd go to South America. As a teenager I accepted an invitation to work in the inner city. At 18, I soaked up an exploratory year in the Middle East. Later I led a short-term team to South Africa. And Raleigh and I were VMissions tranSenders in Israel/Palestine for a year.

I wondered if waiting to feel God's lightning bolt directive would be preferable to this string of short-term ventures. It all seemed so choppy. So varied! So vague! How helpful to receive encouragement and teaching from veteran missionary and sailor, Linford Stutzman. I knew that what he said was true: God can move a ship that is sailing, not one tied to the pier.

As believers, all of us have heard the call of Jesus to follow him. Within this call to follow him in any situation, we are each invited to specific work. Most of the time, that invitation is simply to take the next step—whether that be all the little moments of raising a child, loving a spouse, telling the truth, doing a job, or finishing a class. This is the invitation: be faithful.

Upon meeting an older worker in our early days in North Africa, I was proud to hear him say, "God called a lot of talented, intelligent people to do this work." I was then stunned as he finished, "...but they said no. So here we are." The real invitation does not often feel glamorous. The real invitation looks like faithfulness.

After hearing how our lives continued to be a series of answers to kingdom invitations, our sister and brother-in-law extended their own invitation: to work among an indigenous very under-reached people group in the mountains of North Africa. Having no other immediate invitation, we prepared to move. When I say prepared, I mean that we packed clothing, art supplies, and books in suitcases. We read about culture shock, cultivated relationships while fundraising, and one day boarded a plane. Were we prepared for such a move? Perhaps not. But we were prepared to continue accepting an invitation to faithfulness.

Some say, "Wow, you have to be a special person to raise a child with special needs, to leave your community and family to do kingdom work in the world." I would counter with a rewording of our friend's humbling response, "No, you don't have to be special, you have to be willing. You have to be faithful."

For three years, we studied culture and two of the languages we would need in our work. We lived in a city, outside the lives of the indigenous people group among whom we came to work. I did not have a vision for the ultimate work our team was doing. There was struggle and suffering involved in placing ourselves so far from friends and family and support. The same chord of suffering was played out in the struggle and vulnerability of raising a special needs child. I found myself wearily asking, "Lord, is this what you meant it to look like when you sent your followers into all the world?"

Finally, after carrying and birthing our third and fourth children, we







Three of Raleigh and Opal's children walk through their neighborhood in North Africa. Photo by Opal

moved to a town in the mountains. Suddenly, I had neighbors who were welcoming. The illiterate mountain women from this people group to whom I was devoting my life suddenly had individual faces. I saw a glimpse of the direction the ship had been headed all these years

In the first month of moving to our new town in the mountains, a young man watching his father's small neighborhood shop became friends with our son, Robbie. Every time one of us walked by with Robbie, the man would invite Robbie into the space behind the counter. Robbie also had a special love and care for the young man, never passing his shop without greeting the man with genuine, wordless love.

One day around Christmas, as Robbie and my husband left the shop, the young man closed up shop to walk with them! When they arrived back at our house, he came in for coffee. The young man saw the nativity picture we draw every year taped to the wall. He asked about it. Instead of telling him, my husband invited the man to read the story in his own language. As he read, he got so excited. He began to retell the story to my husband. "Do you know what this says?" Soon after, the young man moved away, but he will always remain the first person our family invited to read the good news. Robbie invited him.

And so, we find that the invitation, once accepted, stuns us with its beauty. That which sounds like suffering—leaving our families, accepting a child with a disability—surprises us with an unexpected joy difficult to fathom. In fact, unless you have said yes to the invitation, it is difficult to describe the gift. But believe me, the adventure, the gain, far exceeds a life lived at the pier.

I'm still on the open sea. I'm still moving at the invitation of Jesus. But this same wind that turns my sails, teaches me the steady journey of faithfulness. I can see now that God—who never wastes lives but only redeems—is gently leading through every event in my life.

Like C.S. Lewis' Aslan in the form of an albatross in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, who speaks through the darkness of the living nightmare, "Courage, dear heart," so we are given the comfort we need to remain and continue answering the invitation that leads to life.

*\*For security reasons, names have been changed.*

*Opal serves in North Africa with her husband Raleigh and children Robbie, Anna, Beth, and Gem. They serve with Rosedale International, in partnership with VMissions.*

# ● Called out of the fire

A devastating fire in a slum community led to a call that changed Yosiah's life.

BY YOSIAH RAHMA (NAME CHANGED)

I was born and raised in a Javanese family. My parents had migrated to our city from smaller rural villages. But my siblings and I were city kids. We attended public schools, were comfortable navigating megacity transportation, riding motorcycles, and constantly being surrounded by people and noise.

My parents raised me as a Christian in the Mennonite church community, and we attended faithfully. Because of my church attendance, I thought that I deserved to be called a follower of Jesus. I was extremely active with church activities: I served on the music team, I was a key part of the young adult group, and the list could go on.

In order to afford college, I had to balance work and studying. I worked full time at a Christian networking ministry helping with all sorts of multimedia. In 2010 I graduated from my university with an economics degree. After graduating, a question started forming in my mind: "What does the Lord want me to do with my life?" I kept asking God this question, but there was no clear answer.

One day, however, I met two young women from the United States; Anita and Mary\* were visiting my church. They were given a chance to share a bit of their stories, how the Lord had called them to come live and serve in a slum community in the city of my birth.

When I heard their life testimonies, my heart was broken—and it made me cry. The Lord had called these young people—the same age as me—from a faraway country to come and live with the poor. It was a turning point for me, for I knew the Lord wanted to do something with my life too. But I had no idea what I needed to do.



Anita and Yosiah serve with their sons Josh and Simon.

Photo courtesy of Yosiah Rahma



From that point on, I prayed my question more intensely: "What do you want me to do with my life, Lord?" Again there was no clear answer. However, I began to feel the Lord leading my life in a very different direction, changing my understanding and expectations about what it meant to be a follower of Jesus.

There was a large fire in the slum community where Anita and Mary lived. I decided to skip work for a week and help with the fire response. I invited a few friends from church to help with the fire relief. I felt so energized to be helping. It was invigorating to see myself as a person with strength who could help the "weak."

Before I came to the slum community, I had a lot of pride in my heart. But when I arrived I saw so many people who were suffering and had lost all their possessions. Again, my heart was broken. I found myself crying out for them.

This became a spiritual experience for me: the Lord Jesus gave me a clear picture that he was sitting with those that were suffering, and he was inviting me to come and sit with him.

After that experience, I prayed and fasted. I asked for signs and strength to understand what the invitation was and how I could join in following the call. I began to take courage and come by myself to the slum community.

The Lord gave me a sense of peace when I was in the slum, especially when I was interacting with the children there. Even though this was a very tiring time, I felt like I was walking on the path that the Lord wanted for my life.

Surprisingly, the Lord also opened the door for my relationship with Anita. I had not ever thought of dating or marrying a "bule" (foreigner). At first, we did not want to admit our feelings for each other; we wanted our motivation to be purified and focus only on service in the slum. However, it felt like the Lord Jesus was leading us into a more serious relationship with each other. We decided to get married and serve together as husband and wife.

Our wedding was a beautiful day; a mix of Muslim neighbors and Christian church friends celebrated with us. We feel unspeakable gratitude and joy that God has given us each other, and pray that the Lord uses our marriage and family as a powerful embodied message of love in the slum.

The hardest decision that I had to make was to leave my day job, to stop pursuing my dream to work at a bank and to decline good job offers with their tempting salaries.

To make matters worse, my parents did not agree or support my decision. My parents and family members thought I was crazy to leave my dreams for the future and





Yosiah (second from right) with youth in the community. He has connected with young people in various ways, including a futsal club before the pandemic hit. All photos courtesy of Yosiah Rahma



Yosiah with House of Hope students. House of Hope is a free kindergarten and afterschool program for children in the community.



Yosiah and sons Josh and Simon enjoying the fresh air that is not to be found in their own neighborhood.



A view from a nearby highway of the community where Yosiah and Anita serve.

to choose to live in a slum with poor people. In the midst of this difficult process, the Lord Jesus reminded me of a verse from 2 Timothy 2:3-4: "Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him."

The invitation to follow was not a comfortable invitation, but an invitation to come and suffer with Jesus. And for the past nine years, the Lord has continued to teach me to follow him in the slum. Of course, there are many hard things but there is also joy. Jesus has been faithful to me and my family.

The Lord has entrusted us with House of Hope, the free kindergarten and after school program we opened for children in the community. Hundreds of students over the years have challenged and taught us in so many ways.

A friend from high school and I also enjoyed coaching and working with youth from our neighborhood by starting a futsal club. Sadly, after one year, we had to stop the club because COVID-19 closed the futsal courts, and my friend got a new job. The needs here are so immense. Often we feel so limited in how we can contribute. However, we remind ourselves that we are not the savior. Jesus is.

One surprising blessing during the past five years was

the opportunity for me to attend seminary. The Lord led us to a Bible school that offered Masters level courses in month-long blocks. It was a gift for our whole family to retreat to the mountains two times a year. Having time and space to learn from professors, read books, and fellowship with other believers was wonderful. Now that I have graduated, this degree opens up doors for sharing with other Bible schools and churches about God's heart for the poor.

The Lord has led our family and been faithful through many team transitions. From a team of all foreigners, for the past three and a half years the team has now shifted to being entirely local Christians. We are grateful for God's provision and grace throughout it all.

We continue to trudge through mud, teach kids to read, and wrestle with what it means to love our neighbors and raise our family here. We stand in awe of all the Lord has done and continues to do.

*\*Names have been changed.*

*Yosiah Rahma serves with his wife Anita (pseudonyms) and their two sons in Southeast Asia with Servants USA, in partnership with VMissions.*

# ● Celebrating God's faithfulness

Alfonso Alvarado and his wife Milagro have planted one of Virginia Mennonite Conference's newest congregations, Iglesia Menonita Monte Moriah in Lacey Spring, Virginia. Here, he tells the story of his call to his VMissions coach, Lizzette Hernandez.

BY ALFONSO ALVARADO

I was six or seven years old when I first sensed that God was calling me. I lived in the small town of San Sebastian, El Salvador, with my parents and seven siblings. Life was not easy. We were very poor, but we enjoyed a peaceful life. My grandfather would teach me about God, telling me over and over that God loved me and that I ought to likewise share this message of love with others. These words stuck in my young heart and an intense sense of call started to take shape within me. One day I went to the Catholic priest in my town and told him, "I want to be a priest." My father, however, was opposed to it.

Time went by. I have many memories of helping my father harvest our corn fields under the scorching sun. I loved

to lay down and rest under the shade of an amate tree. I would look up at the clouds and see the trail of planes crossing the sky. I sensed that one day I would travel on a plane to share the gospel. How could God speak something so unlikely?

When I was 14, my uncle invited me to attend a Pentecostal church. This is when I committed my life to Jesus. But in the coming years, like many young people, I struggled. It was a time of rebellion



Alfonso (right) baptizes a new believer alongside other Monte Moriah leaders.

Courtesy of Alfonso Alvarado

and lack of faith.

Soon, civil war broke out in El Salvador, bringing years of suffering and fear for me and my family. Caught up in crossfires in our own town, we endured brutal violence. I saw loved ones, friends and neighbors die or go missing. On three occasions I felt bullets passing near me but my life was spared. I cried out to God, praying Psalms 91 and 23 as I ran for my life. I knew that God was preserving my life for a purpose.

In the midst of this traumatic time, I clung to God's call on my life, and instead of engaging in the war as did many of my peers, I chose to follow Jesus' gospel of peace. One day I had a vision. I heard the words of my grandfather telling me that God had called me to serve him. I saw a field



Milagro and Alfonso Alvarado with their daughters Sofía and Mariana. Photo by Carol Tobin

of green beautiful pastures like I'd never seen before. I kept this picture in my heart.

Survival in a devastated country became almost impossible. In 2000, I finally made the hard choice to leave my wife and two daughters to come alone to the U.S. With \$17 in my pocket, I arrived in New York City and started a life-changing journey as an immigrant. I planned to work hard, help my family get back on their feet, and then go back to El Salvador. I moved to Winchester, Virginia, and started working long hours. I continued to struggle with culture shock, loneliness and financial hardships. My faith in God sustained me and soon I started attending a church.

My call was rekindled by the Spirit. I wondered, "How can I give priority to my call in the midst of my difficult circumstances?" I didn't know how, but decided to trust God.

Meanwhile, my wife Milagro was able to come to the United States and we began serving within the church. In 2007, our calling as church planters was confirmed and we were sent to Harrisonburg to plant a church. God led in our connections with Latino Mennonites and VMissions.

Despite an onslaught of health setbacks, and thanks to the generosity of the Virginia Mennonite community, I praise the Lord that Iglesia Menonita Monte Moriah has been born. Every time I see the green fields of the Shenandoah Valley, I am reminded of God's great faithfulness!



# ● God says, “You are adequate”

John David Thacker, VMissions’ most recently appointed church planter, has heard God’s call to plant an Anabaptist peace church in Charleston, W.Va. A particular word of affirmation from the Lord has been a significant encouragement to him during this challenging season of relocation.

BY JOHN DAVID THACKER

In June 2020, I loaded my Honda Fit with everything I owned, drove to Charleston, West Virginia, and moved into an apartment along the banks of the Kanawha River. I did not know a single person in the city. I didn’t have a new job waiting for me. And I didn’t have a church family in my new home. I was following a call to plant a church: to reach people who are not yet followers of Jesus, to reach people who are drawn to Jesus but wary of the church.

My calling grew slowly over many years. I was a pastor for 14 years, and when I left that congregation, I sensed that I was being called to do something different. Reading Alan Hirsch’s *The Forgotten Ways* helped me identify in myself an apostolic gifting that would be best expressed in creating something new.

It took several more years for me to further discern that calling. In 2019-2020, I participated in Mennonite Mission Network’s Sent program. The study and online discussions helped me process that call and commit to planting a new church. Starting something new is not easy, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. There have been many times of frustration and loneliness when I question my calling or my competency.

But then I think back to the summer of 2019. I was sitting by the creek at Rocky Mountain Mennonite Camp, asking God for more wisdom, more compassion, more direction in life, more ... something. As I listened to the water cascading down the mountainside, the words that came to me were, “You are adequate.”

I smiled when I heard that. It was an inside joke. Earlier that summer, the camp staff had watched a documentary about a rock climber. In one scene, he is shopping for a new refrigerator. When he finds one he likes, with great



John David Thacker. Courtesy photo

enthusiasm he exclaims, “Oh! This is so adequate!” We laughed when we heard that. His excitement seemed incongruent with his choice of the word “adequate.” Who gets excited about something that is merely adequate?

And who among us would be pleased to be described by someone we love and admire as “adequate?” I don’t want to be adequate! I want to be awesome! I want to be the best. To be called adequate is a back-handed affirmation. Next Valentine’s Day try giving your beloved a card that proclaims “You are adequate.” Just don’t blame me for the consequences.

Yet, “adequate” was the word God spoke and the word I needed to hear. On some days, my spiritual pride has me feeling superior to others; on other days, I feel wholly deficient. The message, “You are adequate,” keeps me centered. I am enough, no more and no less, for the work to which God has called me. I don’t have to be a superhero to serve God and love my neighbor. When God is responsible for the outcome, it is sufficient for me to be adequate. This word from God liberates me from the self-imposed burden of always trying to improve myself, always feeling that I am somehow lacking and never quite ready. It reminds me that I do not have to be exceptional to be useful.

I received that message as an affirmation. And I want to offer that affirmation to you as well. If God has called you to do something and you have been putting it off because you don’t believe you have the necessary skills or spiritual gifts or authority, listen to what the Lord may be saying to you. “You are adequate.”



Downtown Charleston, West Virginia. Photo: Wikimedia

# Call to Prayer: Life Lessons

BY CAROL TOBIN

**Y**ears ago, my mother's active prayer life was aided by what you did to dry your hair after a shower. There was a spacesuit-like helmet with an attached hose that you put over your head so that you could be immersed in a warm whirring. She relished that quiet zone, as a time to devote her prayers to the Lord. One day, with particular intensity, she found her heart joined with Jesus' plea, "The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:37-38).

Not many days hence, my husband Skip and I shared with my parents that God was calling us to be goers, ones who could be available to serve—somewhere—among people who had little opportunity to know a Christian, let alone experience the transforming power of God's good news in their own lives.

We shared with a bit of trepidation. We were a part of each other's lives; our three daughters were the only grandchildren close at hand. My mother, however, was not saddened or surprised. She understood that God was answering her prayers in sending us. **Lesson one:** Calling and sending are not an individualized matter. There is influence and impact mediated from one member of the body to the other, according to the movement of the Spirit. Her prayers played a part!

Our call was not specific. Our step was simply to make ourselves available. We processed with the people God was using to open our eyes to the needs beyond our local neighborhood where we'd been investing deeply. "Where might you send us?"

The choices given us were Burkina Faso or Thailand. I felt more affinity with Thailand, having spent years walking with Cambodian friends my parents had helped to sponsor in the early 1970s. Kim Piet had even taught me how to count to ten in Thai!

God smoothed us through the preparatory process. With our two-month-old fourth daughter in arms, we went through our training. It was all a blur, with the exception of one so very important word that God spoke to me while I was fetching something from our parked car. It stopped me in my tracks. "You think you are doing this for me. No, I am doing this for you." **Lesson two:** We don't relate to God in terms of sacrifice. We obey, and there is growth and good. I felt comforted. Assured.

But getting to Thailand didn't feel good. We were plunged into a disorienting world where we had the competencies of kindergartners. With the tropical heat bearing down on me like a knife as I pedaled my laden bicycle back from the market, I loathed every inch of clothing that had the nerve to inflict itself upon me. I felt sorry for the birds who had to live in such a sweat-box. Besides that, my identity was hammered. We were stripped of all of the things that helped us to feel good about ourselves. We even looked lame to each other. **Lesson three:** God's call, despite being good for me, did not



Today Steve Horst and Bethany Tobin serve in Nam Yuen, Thailand, with their children Anjali, Emmanuel, and Tierzah. Courtesy photo



revolve around my definition of myself and what would feel fulfilling.

That was 1989. Twenty years and two additional daughters later, we returned from Thailand. Lives had been transformed: ours and our many rice-farming friends. A church had emerged. They were worshipping and bearing vigorous witness in far-flung villages where there had been no witness to Jesus.

The story God is writing in Thailand continues as our daughter Bethany and son-in-law Steve Horst are investing their lives into partnering with the leaders that we watched become followers of Jesus. **Lesson four:** As Paul says, in II Corinthians 4:16, participation in God's grace being spread causes the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God. We are thankful!

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*Carol Tobin is Mission Advocate and Content Editor of Transforming for Virginia Mennonite Missions.*





**Service program:** tranSend  
**Serving since:** 2019

## Worker profile: **Anna Renfro**

### **Assignment:**

My assignment here in Mannheim, Germany, is to support the ministries of Dave and Rebekka Stutzman as well as to serve at a local refugee center called Friedenshaus. Most of my time is spent in the afterschool youth program Kinderreich in nearby Heidelberg. We typically serve about a dozen children between the ages of seven and 16. Our goal is to provide a safe and structured place for youth who don't have that at home. My duties include preparing food, engaging the kids in activities (sports, crafts, games), and helping them practice English.

I also support the Emmaus Gemeinschaft church plant, where I have led lessons for the children and devotionals for the adults. I'm also helping the Stutzmans build a new ministry in Mannheim. Once the lockdown is over, we will open up a family/board game café which will serve as a gathering space for folks seeking community.

### **Biggest challenge:**

Excluding the pandemic, I think the biggest challenge has been working with middle schoolers who are tenaciously working on their individuality. The fact that many come from difficult family situations does not make this stage of life easier. With their instinct to distrust authority, it's hard to give them the structure they need. Ultimately, I've learned how to work better within this context and allow time for the kids to start trusting me.

### **Biggest joy:**

My biggest joy is seeing how the youth have been resilient during the pandemic. Online school has been a challenge for them academically and socially. However, even though there have been difficult moments, they find new ways to stay motivated and to connect with us. Though children are often the most vulnerable in society, they're also the most resilient. Reflecting on this inspires me and gives me peace in our current situation.

### **A typical day:**

Most days, I work with Kinderreich, so I will outline what these days look like. I wake up and eat breakfast around 9 a.m. and then take the train from Mannheim to Heidelberg. Around 11 a.m. we start preparing lunch for the youth program. Around 1 p.m., most of the kids are already there so we begin our lunch as the other kids trickle in after class. After lunch, we go outside for at least 10 minutes of fresh air. We typically play hide and seek or volleyball. Then the kids do their homework. When they're finished, we all play games together or start a craft. Then we clean-up to finish the day around 5 p.m. and I head back to Mannheim. My evening is spent meeting with friends, reading, or watching Netflix.



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