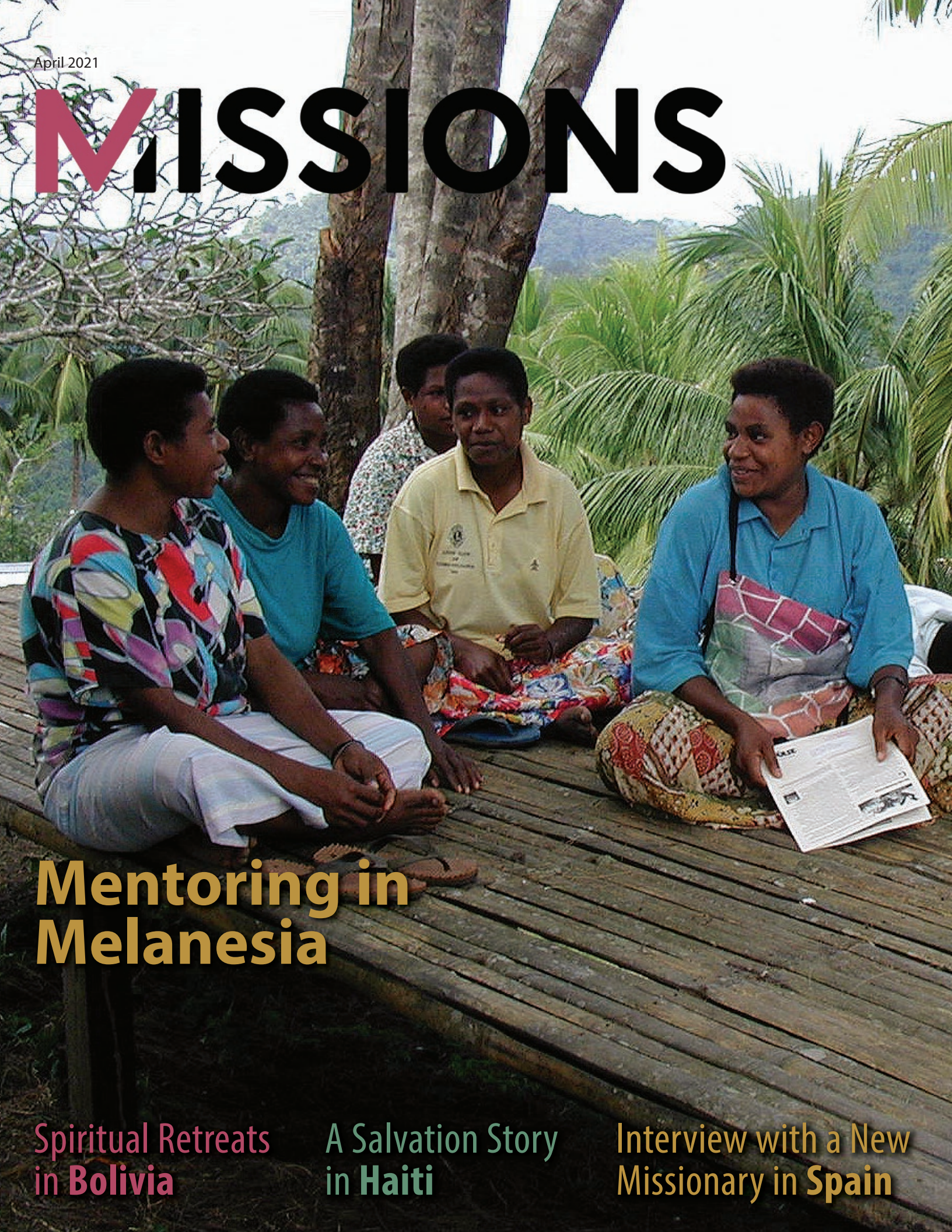


April 2021

MISSIONS



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THINKING IT THROUGH

BY ALAN PARKS

A Season of Renewal

Seasons are inevitable, along with the changes they bring. I think of spring in one word: *renewal*—a time of rebirth after the leaves have fallen and the grass goes dormant. I love this season, as everything becomes green, renewed once again. The metaphor between spring and our hearts is obvious. We all have experienced periods of drought, when the vibrant hues of green turned a dull brown and gray.

Humanity is undergoing a severe test, one from which we as believers are not immune. Underneath the umbrella known as a “pandemic,” we have seen sickness, death of friends and loved ones, job loss with economic uncertainty, and human anxiety over our immediate future. Many believers have been unable to meet and fellowship with their local churches, and ministries have been impacted in unprecedented ways. As I read the pages of *Missions* each month, nearly every article and report have mentioned the COVID-19 pandemic and how it has affected workers around the globe. The pandemic has taken its toll. Have you noticed how it has affected you?

At times, needing encouragement, I’ve found tremendous comfort from the Bible and songs. In 1970, American composer Kurt Kaiser wrote the lyrics of “Bring Back the Springtime,” which have deeply impacted me, both recently and in the past:

When in the spring, the flowers are blooming bright and fair,
After the gray of winter’s gone.
Once again the lark begins its tuning,
Back in the meadows of my home.
Lord, to my heart bring back the springtime.
Take away the cold and dark of sin;
Oh, return to me, sweet Holy Spirit:
May I warm and tender be again.¹

God’s Word is filled with verses of renewal and hope. We’ve all thrilled to the sublime promise from Lamentations 3:22–23: “Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new [renewed] every morning; great is Your faithfulness.”

The longer I live, the more I find that traveling back in my mind to the moment of my salvation wonderfully renews my mind and heart. We should have been consumed—eternally alienated from God—but thanks to His immeasurable mercy and grace, we are His children, reveling in His compassions that will never fail, as He renews them each morning. In a world of turmoil, anxiety, unrest, and hopelessness, our Lord refreshes us daily in a relationship of perfect acceptance and fellowship.

Even as we age, we can rest on the truth of 2 Corinthians 4:16: “Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.” So, rather than being caught up in life’s turmoil, we ought to look to the Lord. As Isaiah assures us, “But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” (Isaiah 40:31)

We can always rely on, trust, and rejoice in the One Who changes not.

God’s children have every tool available for the renewal of mind and heart. We celebrate the salvation He freely gives to us, His daily mercies, and at the end, the certain promise of heaven. Even though this present life is filled with change, our biggest change is yet to come. The last two chapters of Revelation present to us a list of things that will be gloriously absent from heaven: no more death, sorrow, crying, pain, curse, night, sun, moon, or defilement.

And so, dear believer, as the seasons change, we can always rely on, trust, and rejoice in the One Who changes not. He has given us this charge: “Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:9)

Warmth restored, winter’s cold gone, springtime returned to our hearts—it sounds good, doesn’t it? ■

Alan Parks is a commended worker based in South Carolina.

¹ Kurt Kaiser, “Bring Back the Springtime,” hymn #396 in *The Hymnal for Worship and Celebration* (Nashville: Word Music, 1986).

Vol. 50, No. 4. Christian Missions in Many Lands (ISSN 0744-4052) is published eleven times a year by Christian Missions in Many Lands, Inc., Belmar, New Jersey. Periodical postage paid at Belmar, New Jersey, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send United States address changes to Christian Missions in Many Lands, Inc., PO Box 13, Spring Lake, NJ 07762. Send Canadian address changes to MSC Canada, 101 Amber Street, Suite 16, Markham, Ontario L3R 3B2. MSC Canada publication agreement Number 40026478. All correspondence, including address changes, gifts for missionary work, and for expenses should be sent by Canadian readers to MSC Canada, 101 Amber Street, Suite 16, Markham, Ontario L3R 3B2 and by United States readers to Christian Missions in Many Lands, Inc., PO Box 13, Spring Lake, NJ 07762. Copyright © CMML. All rights reserved.

COVER PHOTO: Sepik Bible school students in Melanesia—Dan Anderson



Mentoring in Melanesia

DISCOVERING A CULTURALLY EFFECTIVE WAY TO MAKE DISCIPLES

BY DAN ANDERSON



New Guinea is the second largest island on the planet. Melanesian by race, its inhabitants represent a thousand languages and cultures. Europeans first set foot on the island in 1527, but they did not establish a presence for 300 years. After World War I, Australia accepted responsibility for the eastern half of the island, and it became known as the Territory of Papua and New Guinea. Since 1963, Indonesia has governed the western half of the island. In 1975, the eastern half became independent from Australia, and the nation of Papua New Guinea was born.

A history of mission work

Mission work began along the coast of New Guinea in the 19th century but did not move into the interior until the 20th century. Brethren missionaries from Australia, the United States, and New Zealand arrived in the early 1950s. Together, they registered with the Australian administration under the name Christian Missions in Many Lands (CMML). Mission organizations entered districts at the invitation of the government administration, as it established law and order. CMML missionaries were among the first mission groups to enter the western Sepik interior region during the 1950s and, then, the western region of the New Guinea Highlands in the 1960s.

As missionaries moved into each new area, they studied the language and culture, proclaimed the Christian message, established medical clinics, organized primary schools, and set up and managed other projects to promote holistic development. They also established churches and trained leaders and workers, and national Christians joined the missionaries in proclaiming the Gospel among their own people and neighboring tribal groups.

However, announcing the good news is only part of the God-given task. Jesus's instruction to His followers was to "make disciples," not just converts (Matthew 28:19). Young believers needed to be mentored toward maturity in every area of life. Therefore, missionaries worked hard to ensure the new believers learned in a variety of settings, using several methods.

They emphasized knowledge and practical application, teaching with the use of visuals, including stick figures on a blackboard, flannelgraph, and pictures. Extensive repetition of information was the norm. New believers received teaching on Sunday mornings during church services, in classes before and after baptism, at women's meetings, and in literacy schools.

Traditional New Guinean cultures were strictly oral in communication. However, missionaries considered literacy essential for the ongoing growth of individual believers and churches. Eventually, they held weekend and five-day Bible schools in local churches. To prepare men, and eventually women, for Bible teaching and leadership roles, the missionaries organized formal Bible schools, which used methods of teaching and learning focused on reading and writing. By God's enabling, these efforts produced lasting results.

However, there was a problem. Mentoring of new believers was not being practiced by Melanesians in many churches like evangelism was. As one retired missionary couple pointed out, after a return visit to Papua New Guinea, "The churches are good at evangelism. Every year, there are evangelistic efforts of various types, and fruit is seen. But there is a lack of follow-up afterwards. So many contacts are not nurtured as they need to be."¹ If the churches were going to continue to mature, this problem needed to be addressed.

Above (L-R): The Sepik coast boasts striking sunsets; Wearing traditional dress, Highlands youth participate in a burial ceremony; Sepik Bible school students relax together.



Western-style mentoring

During our years in Papua New Guinea, we have focused on mentoring. It involves developing relationships with people, young and old, and within that relational context, discipling new believers and training leaders, teachers, and other mentors. We emphasize not only mentoring men and women toward maturity but also preparing and encouraging them to mentor the next generation of Melanesians. But that goal was the challenge. How could we encourage mature Christians to be more actively involved in “making disciples” of new believers and preparing them for future leadership and service in the church and community?

In our early years, we set an example for mentoring in the manner with which we were most familiar. Coming from a highly literate culture that emphasized doctrinal content, we assumed that discipleship was largely accomplished by transferring knowledge through literacy. So we organized Bible studies with new Christians who lived near us. These studies required would-be disciples to read essential information about being a follower of Jesus and write responses to carefully designed questions that guided their thinking to “proper conclusions.” Then, they discussed their answers in small group settings.

For those who lived at a distance from us, we distributed workbooks on discipleship. The workbooks included questions that encouraged thoughtful interaction with the written material and, again, solicited the desired response. We monitored our distance students’ progress by having them return their workbooks to us for grading. Those who finished well received a certificate. This method was popular among young people who knew how to read and write, and by God’s grace, it produced lasting results in some lives.

In partnership with local leaders, we conducted weeklong discipleship courses among tribal groups in our region. The courses focused on communicating important doctrinal and practical knowledge, and in some cases, students and teachers followed them up with a week of evangelistic and pastoral visits in the region’s villages.

In 1987, we were invited to move to a regional-level Bible school

to teach and mentor students and Melanesian teachers. We have been involved in teaching and training Bible school principals and teachers ever since. Over the years, in partnership with other missionaries and local leaders, we have conducted many in-service courses for Bible school teachers in the Sepik and Highlands regions. Despite these efforts, making disciples of the next generation was not becoming a strength in many local churches.

Melanesian-style mentoring

Over the years, we have continued to visit areas where we worked in the 1980s and 1990s. Often, we conduct short courses on topics of perceived need. On one such occasion nearly 20 years ago, we met with about 30 Sepik Christians, many of whom we had known since they were children and teenagers. They had since become leaders and pastors in their communities and churches. The week focused on pastoral ministry with an emphasis on mentoring the next generation of Jesus-followers.

At one point during the week, we suggested to the group that we think about their learning experience growing up. Since the group comprised mostly men, we asked them to recall how their fathers had taught them to make bows and arrows. This skill is an essential part of their enculturation, since the Sepik male’s role includes providing protein for the family diet by hunting wild pigs, cassowaries, and other animals.

While the group called out the steps in the learning process, we wrote their words on the blackboard. The training was something they knew well, and their enthusiasm was evident. The following is the process they described:

Our fathers made their own bows and arrows while we sat close to them, watching them intently. As our fathers worked, they explained to us what they were doing. After we had seen them make their own bows and arrows, they gave us the opportunity to try out the skill with our own hands. They watched us closely, monitoring our efforts. When we did not do a part of the process right, they corrected us. As we began to improve, they praised us so that we would be encouraged. This learning process continued until we became proficient at making our own bows and arrows.

Top (L–R): (first two photos) At the heart of discipleship, new believers are trained and strengthened so, eventually, they can mentor the next generation; Sepik men prepare to hunt, using their handmade bows and arrows; In Sepik culture, parents teach their children skills through observation and practice; Sepik men participate in a pastoral ministry course.



“HERE WAS A SKILL THEY KNEW WELL, A METHOD OF MAKING DISCIPLES THAT WAS NOT FOREIGN AND UNNATURAL. IT WAS AN EYE-OPENING EXPERIENCE.”

We will come back to what happened next at the course. First, however, note several basic elements of traditional Sepik mentoring: Sepik mentoring is *informal* and *relational*. It does not happen within a formal, programmatic structure but during the normal course of everyday life and in the context of close, trusting relationships. Sepik mentoring involves *modeling* and *oral explanation*. Mentors demonstrate what needs to be learned and insist that their protégés watch closely. In oral cultures, words have meaning only when they are part of a life event. Therefore, mentors use spoken words to describe what protégés are seeing. In traditional Sepik mentoring, reading and writing are unnecessary.

Sepik mentoring involves *hands-on practice*. Sepiks learn best through activity—not just by being shown and told how. Immediate application ensures that what is taught is understood and retained. Sepik mentoring includes *correction* and *affirmation*. Sepik mentors correct errors, encourage progress, and insist on competence, and for good reason: skill development ensures the community’s survival.

Further examination of Sepik cultures reveals that mentoring is *holistically focused*. The transmission of knowledge and skill development addresses the whole person, including spiritual, physical, mental, emotional, and social elements.

Now, we return to the pastoral ministry course. Once the participants completed their description of the mentoring process

they had experienced growing up, and now practice with their own children, we asked them to compare it with their knowledge of how Jesus mentored His disciples. Was Jesus’s method similar or different?

Together, we worked our way through their process, comparing each step with what we knew about Jesus’s method of mentoring from the Gospel accounts. We watched the men’s faces as they made the connection, as they recognized the similarities. Here was a skill they knew well, a method of making disciples that was not foreign and unnatural. It was an eye-opening experience.

That insight has had an impact on their practice of making disciples. Although they had been employing Melanesian-style mentoring in their family life, now they began doing so with Christ-centered intention and purpose. In subsequent visits to that area, we were encouraged to hear them describe how their “newfound” skill was producing results in the lives of the next generation of Jesus-followers. ■



Dan and Janet Anderson are commended from Emmaus Bible Chapel in St. Louis, Missouri.

¹ D. and B. Thorp, *Christian Brethren Churches in Papua New Guinea 1951–2004: How Did It All Happen?* (Auckland: Dennis and Barbara Thorp, 2005), 46.



Above (L-R): In the Highlands, church leaders baptize two believers; After a Sunday morning service, Dan and a church elder talk; A mentor leads his students to a village church for a Sunday morning service.

ROCA SPIRITUAL RETREATS IN BOLIVIA

An Invitation to Enjoy Solitude with God

BY CARLOS & SHIRLEY VARGAS



Retreat is a commonly used word that's understood in multiple ways—everything from withdrawing troops from action to purposefully entering a quiet, isolated place. Located in Valencia, Bolivia, ROCA is a ministry that facilitates spiritual retreats, intentionally addressing the need to withdraw from the world and busyness of life to give time and space to our spiritual lives.

The need to retreat

Jesus understood that need. The Gospels contain eight references to Jesus withdrawing from the crowds so that He could spend time alone with His Father. He encouraged His disciples to do the same. After they returned from their first preaching assignment, Jesus told them, "Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." (Mark 6:31) Jesus recognized the importance of balancing work and rest, not only to maintain health and stability but also to stay connected to God and others.

We first noticed this need while involved in theological and ministry training among national believers. The work of missionaries, pastors, and church leaders is spiritual, and they spend many hours preparing sermons and Bible studies, praying, and nurturing others in their faith. Yet pouring into others doesn't guarantee a personal refilling of one's cup.

For anyone, an honest, deep look at one's inner life takes time; it is difficult and painful and, thus, sometimes avoided. Years of evading silence, solitude, and stillness before God can lead to spiritual exhaustion and burnout. Teaching truths to others can become a performance rather than an experience.

The pain from personal hurts and losses can manifest in anxiety, depression, anger, or control issues, while resentments distort love and compassion for others.

Soul work is some of the hardest work anyone can do, but God's love and forgiveness is the most transforming power anyone can experience. Spiritual retreat is spending time alone with God, entering solitude, to help us examine the disconnect between our inner and outer lives and walk with God toward healing and wholeness.

ROCA's purpose

Psalm 61:2—"Lead me to the rock that is higher than I"—inspired us to initiate a spiritual retreat ministry in 2010. We derived the name ROCA from that verse (*roca* means "rock" in Spanish), but it is also an acronym for the words *reflection*, *oration* (prayer), *community*, and *art*. Retreatants who arrive at ROCA are invited to use the retreat house, a small chapel, gardens, and surrounding walking paths. Creation's beauty has a way of awakening us to God's presence and softens our senses to "taste and see" the Lord's goodness (Psalm 34:8).

Visitors often refer to ROCA as an oasis in the arid Andes because of the green trees, grasses, and flower gardens behind the property's gate. Prayer walks encourage reflection and response, and the chapel's dome ceiling is an artistic interpretation of the 12 apostles' life and ministries.

Attendees include individuals, families, friends, churches, and nongovernmental organizations, and they vary in age and spiritual maturity. Individuals come to ROCA for a day or more.



God's love and forgiveness is the most transforming power anyone can experience.

Small groups of up to eight can stay overnight, and ROCA can host day groups of up to 20 people. Retreatants choose to use a self-directed booklet for Scripture reflection and response or, as a group, divide their time among solitude, gatherings, and spiritual direction. We serve as hosts, write retreat guides, and maintain ROCA's gardens.

ROCA's focus is to be a resource for living deeply in the heart of the gospel message: a God Who loves, forgives, heals, and invites us to be involved in what He is doing in our fractured world. This time of focusing on God can lead us into a deeper, intimate relationship with the Father and into His heart of compassion for ministering to others.

A time for renewal

Last year, the COVID-19 pandemic prevented us from returning to Bolivia as scheduled. During the lockdown, ROCA was forced to close its doors to outside guests. Two volunteers cared for the property, and now, a family, who needs to maintain isolation due to an autoimmune deficiency, has been living there.

During our prolonged stay in Canada, we had the opportunity to facilitate weekend retreats using a rented facility, organize day events using a beautiful home with property, and provide virtual times of Scripture reflection and prayer. These events encouraged the participants and reinforced their desire to be still and listen and respond to God. We are praying for discernment about when we should return to Bolivia, but meanwhile, we continue to prepare materials and facilitate retreats as social distancing protocols allow.



Left: ROCA retreats include the use of a house and the surrounding property. **Middle (top):** A retreatant enjoys a time of solitude; **(bottom)** ROCA's chapel includes a beautifully painted interior dome. **Right (top):** Attendees gather beneath the chapel's depiction of the 12 apostles; **(bottom)** A group retreat means a special time of fellowship.

The pandemic has forced everyone to adjust their lives and ministries. But we can begin to consider some important questions: What will the new normal be? What have we learned from this experience? What do we want to return to?

We realized that what we take for granted can be lost quickly, but God is present and working even in the middle of pandemics and lockdowns. This time is an opportunity to examine our souls and listen to God for a renewed understanding of His work in a world turned inside out.

The centuries-old words of the prayer “Disturb us Lord,” attributed to Sir Francis Drake, are particularly relevant:

Disturb us, Lord, when
We are too well pleased with ourselves,
When our dreams have come true
Because we have dreamed too little,
When we arrived safely
Because we sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when
With the abundance of things we possess
We have lost our thirst for the waters of life;
Having fallen in love with life,
We have ceased to dream of eternity
And in our efforts to build a new earth,
We have allowed our vision
Of the new heaven to dim.

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly,
To venture on wider seas
Where storms will show your mastery;
Where losing sight of land,
We shall find the stars.
We ask You to push back the horizons of our hopes;
And to push into the future
In strength, courage, hope, and love.

After reading this prayer, consider the challenge that God placed on your heart. May you be fueled with renewed inspiration and grace. ■



Top two: The gardens at ROCA bring beauty to times of reflection.
Bottom: A group prays during their retreat.



Carlos and Shirley Vargas are commended from Oaklands Bible Chapel in Victoria, British Columbia.

A Salvation Story

From Voodoo Practitioner to Child of God

BY TONY JONES

One Saturday during the summer of 2014, I was sitting on my front porch when two men from the mountains approached me. Because we are the only ministry in our area of Haiti that works in the mountains, the people living there come to us for help.

The two men asked if I would visit an elderly woman who was not feeling well. So I got on my motorcycle and went with them. The house was a typical mountain shanty, and when I went inside, I could not believe my eyes. There, lying on the ground, was Joseph Jean Gina Louise. She had been lying on a mat on the ground for one-and-a-half years and had never left the house. She was old and frail, and instantly, our Lord put on my heart the desire to help this dear soul.

A life of unbelief

On Monday, I returned to her place with a new bed and got her off the ground. I then brought a team of American doctors who were in our town on a medical mission trip. They examined her and thought she may be in the early stages of pneumonia. If so, in her condition, she would die.

Joseph Jean could see, hear, and talk, so we started to witness to her. I took her hand and said in Creole that Jesus loves her, but she pulled her hand away from me. The people from the local village told me that Joseph Jean had been a Voodoo practitioner all her life and, therefore, did not believe in God.

The next day, I gave Joseph Jean a Proclaimer (a device containing a recording of the New Testament in Haitian Creole), placed it beside her, and played the recording, which combines the reading of Scripture with soft background music. She really liked it.

A transformed soul

On Thursday, the two people from the mountains returned to my house telling me that Joseph Jean was having trouble breathing. I went to the doctors for help, but they said there was nothing they could do. I jumped on my motorcycle and went to see her immediately.

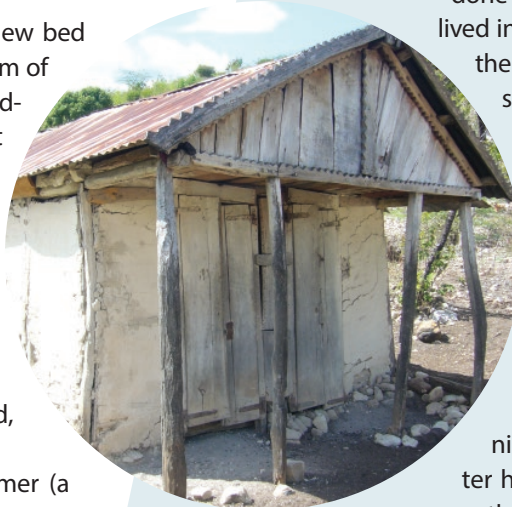


As I approached the house, I could hear someone humming, and I thought it was a villager in the room with Joseph Jean. When I stepped into the room, I felt a peace I had not felt during my previous visits. The people told me they noticed something different about Joseph Jean's demeanor.

They said she had been singing to herself, which she had never done during the one-and-a-half years she lived in that house. When I approached her, there was a glow about her; her face was shining.

This time, when I took her hand and looked at her, she looked up at me and said in Creole, "Jesus loves me; Jesus loves me." I couldn't believe what I heard and started to cry; my tears were running down my arm onto hers as I held her hand.

Joseph Jean Gina Louise died that night and was buried on Saturday. After her funeral, I found out that she was more than 100 years old. God loved her so much that He pursued her for many years and sent me to visit her the last week of her earthly life. Now, she is forever with our Savior. ■



Tony and Edna Jones are commended from River Drive Park Bible Chapel in Bradford, Ontario.



Originally published by Echoes International in "Advent Joy," Day 24: Haiti. Used with permission.

From top: Joseph Jean Gina Louise was more than 100 years old before she trusted Christ; Joseph Jean lived in a mountain shanty; Tony holds newly saved Joseph Jean's hand.

Ask a Missionary

Missions work around the world is unique—different from what friends and family at home encounter day to day. So, to learn about life on the field while getting to know our missionaries better, we asked them to share their firsthand experience or advice.

QUESTION: How do people back home encourage you?

OTHER OVERSEAS SERVICE

Karl Peterson



It might sound small, but having our prayer partners thoughtfully read our prayer letters encourages us so much. They take the time to know our work and respond, even briefly, to our prayer letters. Their thoughtfulness is such an encouragement.

SO. KOREA

Tim Stafford



They encourage us through phone calls, financial support, prayer support, and generally letting us know that they care and understand the hardship associated with foreign mission work.

MEXICO

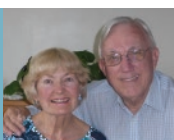
Christine Pillette



One thing that has been a huge blessing to me and to my children is when people send cards in the mail. The mail system is not fast, but when we eventually receive the cards or letters, it is a sweet reminder that people are praying for and thinking of us. The little things lift my spirits. It could be an email, a letter, a text, or a Bible verse—something to show that others are behind you and praying for you.

FRANCE

Maureen Crow



I am encouraged by the emails, prayers, and gifts I receive from people back home.

AUSTRIA

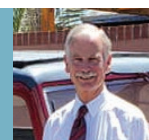
Leslie Walt



I am encouraged when people send me small gift packages made up of things I like and cannot buy locally—books by a favorite author, special tea, magnetic shopping list notepads, Amazon gift cards, thank-you cards.

OTHER OVERSEAS SERVICE

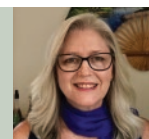
Paul Howland



I am greatly encouraged by emails asking about the Lord's work and reminding me of prayer support. Some people have visited me on the field, and they have created lifelong encouragement.

BRAZIL

Jeanne Lipsi



It is great to know that people are praying for the Lord's work and for me in Brazil. When I send my newsletters, it is wonderful to receive a reply, even if it is short. During the pandemic, it has been so nice to virtually attend meetings, conferences, and prayer meetings. All kinds of communication are encouraging.

PHILIPPINES

Margaret Sutherland



The biggest way that believers back home encourage us is by praying for us. Of course, we appreciate anything they do, but if they are limited in time, we would rather they pray for us than write a letter or send a package.

ASK YOUR QUESTIONS! Visit [CMML.us/askamissionary](https://www.cmml.us/askamissionary) to submit your question—it might be selected for a future issue!