

# Missions



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# Thinking It Through

BY ALLAN WILKS

## Resurrection

The commutation of a death sentence brings with it a deep appreciation for the sweetness of life. It is a transition from dark to light, from despair to hope, from bleak to bright. Each Christian has experienced this, having been “delivered . . . from the domain of darkness and transferred . . . to the kingdom of His beloved Son.” (Colossians 1:13)<sup>1</sup> And yet, the memory of this breathtaking transfer seems to fade over time as the groaning creation incessantly whispers despair and death to us.

Martha’s world was darkened when her brother, Lazarus, died. Her grief was sharpened in knowing that her friend Jesus had the power to prevent that death but was not present when it happened, even though He had been informed in time.

As she sat shivah with her sister, Mary, and many other relatives and friends, she was informed that Jesus had been spotted. We can imagine her slipping away from the crowd in the living room and, once outside, running toward her Lord, tears of relief, anger, and grief streaming down her face. Her emotion is evident as she says, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask from God, God will give You.” (John 11:21–22)

What did she expect when she said those words? She seems reluctant to come right out and ask for a reversal of her brother’s death, yet that seems to be hinted. Jesus knew what she was asking for, but He also knew what she really needed. His response was ambiguous: “Your brother will rise again.” (John 11:23) Martha responded the way she thought she should, yet again not verbally revealing her deepest wish: “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” (John 11:24)

Jesus then gave her the words that would be the ultimate salve to her wounds, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25–26) It was in that moment that Martha’s eyes were opened as she realized that not only did her Lord have

the power to raise her brother to life again but that He was Life itself. He was the “Author of life,” as Peter was later to call Him in Acts 3:15, whose glorious, bright, unquenchable, brilliant life would swallow up all pain, all decay, all death—not just what touched her. In that moment, her life was complete in Christ’s life and all pain was bearable.

We see this in her response, focused completely on her Lord and not her brother: “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.” (John 11:27) Her heart was at rest. She could bear whatever was to transpire, knowing that her life was hid in Christ’s. John tells us that she went back to the house and quietly whispered to Mary, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” (John 11:28) We see the repose in her demeanor in that moment.

A short time later, Jesus granted her the wish of her heart and raised her brother back to life. But this wonderful gift now meant much more to her—it was faith-deepening evidence of the lesson she had just learned that all death is swallowed up in His life. The prophet Isaiah said, “He will swallow up death forever,” and later Paul would quote this to encourage the Corinthians.<sup>2</sup>

In one of the greatest English sonnets ever written, “Death Be Not Proud,” John Donne begins:

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee  
Mighty and dreadful, for thou are not so;  
For those whom thou think’st thou dost overthrow  
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.

Donne ends with this echo of Isaiah:

One short sleep past, we wake eternally  
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.<sup>3</sup>

Lord, help us daily to see what Martha saw. Keep alive in us the transformative power of knowing that all that is good and sweet and wonderful about life is but a shadow of the true Life, in which our lives must be hid. Sharpen our longing for Your return, we pray. ■

*Allan Wilks, CMML vice president, technology.*

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture is quoted from the English Standard Version; <sup>2</sup> Isaiah 25:8; 1 Corinthians 15:54; <sup>3</sup> Donne, John. “Sonnet X,” Holy Sonnets, lines 1–4 and 13–14.



# Madagascar

## PEARL OF THE INDIAN OCEAN OR A COUNTRY IN CRISIS?

BY COLIN CROW

Since 2004, I have been visiting churches in Madagascar affiliated with *Communautés Évangéliques Indépendantes de Madagascar* (CEIM), (Independent Evangelical Churches of Madagascar). Last year, while visiting this beautiful island, I learned that gold is to be found in almost every area of the country. Yet, the sad truth is that Madagascar is socially and economically one of the poorest nations in Africa and has progressively been sinking into chaos. The presence of corruption, at all levels of society, exists in the face of poverty for the majority, which has resulted in considerable lawlessness and violence.

Groups of men called *Dahalo* steal *zebu* (Malagasy cows) and kill the owners in the process. Possessing *zebu* is a sign of wealth. People despair at the authorities' incapacity to establish justice and are tempted to take the law into their own hands, killing the thieves. Recently, the weather has combined with other problems to complicate things. Rains normally fall between December and February. However, last year drought occurred until March, which caused the loss of the rice crop. Rice is the staple food, and rising prices and insufficient supplies have increased poverty.

The Malagasy people remain very open to the Gospel. However, more recently, Middle Eastern countries have been making considerable efforts to introduce Islam. Representatives from these countries come with money and promises of social programs, such as medical clinics, schools, and other services, which are difficult for people to resist. Rumor has it that the government has signed a contract to grant plots of land for the

building of 2,000 mosques. Christians are concerned for the future of their land.

### PARTNERSHIP, PROGRESS, AND PROBLEMS

French Brethren churches have collaborated with the CEIM assemblies since 2005. This work continues to advance and more than 100 churches have been established in just over 25 years. Progress is slow in Madagascar's capital, Antananarivo, and its surroundings, but is rapid in the south of the country. CEIM has a Bible school in Antananarivo and a discipleship training center in the southern city of Toliara. Headway has been made in training leaders, but, with the rapid multiplication of churches, leadership training still remains an urgent need. In 2016 a new summer course was started in Antananarivo: a collaboration between Geneva Bible Institute and the CEIM Bible school. The goal is to give concentrated teaching to young people who have at least a high-school-level education.

Another area of weakness is the high level of financial dependence on churches in France and Switzerland. The CEIM national committee is aware of this and of the need to develop the means of subsistence for the local churches and their leaders. However, progress is slow and poverty remains an obstacle in remote rural areas.

A major challenge for the government and for the church in Madagascar is the six million children in the country. The educa-

**Above:** A church in the remote countryside.



**From top:** Some of the orphanage children at play; A new building for the orphanage; The scout troop in Ambohimangakely.

tion system is weak; public schools are lacking and classes overloaded, with 80 or more children in a class. Moreover, teachers' salaries are not always paid on time. Many children are absent from school as they either help their parents work or beg on the streets. Often, parents are unable to pay the cost of school enrollment and materials. Private schools exist in the bigger cities for those who can afford them.

## DEDICATION, DEVOTION, AND DILIGENCE

Since 2008, my ministry in Madagascar has been mainly concentrated in the town of Ambohimangakely, a suburb seven miles from the center of Antananarivo. The CEIM Bible school is situated in Ambohimangakely, along with a local church led by Rosa Zafimaroavy (national worker). Rosa and his wife, Pauline, began their ministry on Madagascar's east coast before moving to this small town. They have worked with amazing dedication and diligence. In many ways their ministry is a model of what is needed in other parts of Madagascar. The most remarkable aspect of their work is the combination of their spiritual ministry and their social involvement in the community.

Alongside the ministry of the local church, Rosa and Pauline run a family-style orphanage called *Tanjona* (Purpose). They carried this over from their previous ministry with poor children and twins in particular, who are abandoned at birth because certain ethnic groups consider twins to be under a curse. When I met them, in 2008, they had just over 20 children at *Tanjona*. The family has grown to 38 children in addition to helpers. Despite their very limited means, they have built their work into one big family, all caring for each other. Through God's grace, and as a result of sponsorship programs—mainly funded by French assemblies—we have been able to provide for the daily needs of the children. In amazing ways, the Lord provided the means to buy a plot of land, then to build a temporary house for the family. The goal has always been to provide a home with basic education, clothes, food, medical care, and the teaching of God's Word. In the last four years, the Lord has enabled the construction of a building large enough to accommodate the family in relative comfort, as the children grow up. Today there are 48 people living together.

Thanks to the presence of the children, the local church has a thriving Sunday school run by the older girls. Recently, Bienvenue, one of their girls, started a scout group for teenagers. This endeavor has been a great success with their own children at *Tanjona* and with many friends from surrounding families. These two groups are reaching increasing numbers of people in the area with the Gospel.



**Left:** Children waiting for their parents after school. **Right (from top):** The Akany Salama class with toys sent by French children; Colin, Joel, and Sahondra with the Akany Salama teachers.

## AKANY SALAMA (PEACEFUL NEST)

Another aspect of the social work in the last five years has been the development of a nursery school through the devotion and dedication of Joel, a deacon in the local church, and his wife, Sahondra. A middle-school physics teacher, Sahondra had a burden for the young children of poor families, who often spent all day at home on their own while the parents tried to earn what money they could. With her husband, Joel, she started the nursery school, *Akany Salama*. Her goal was to teach the children five days a week, provide a nourishing midday meal and a snack, and to share the Gospel with them. They started with 18 children across two classes, meeting in the outbuildings of their modest home. The families were expected to contribute something toward the schooling and meals, according to their means, but in reality more than half of them could not afford to do so.

When I first visited their work, they had no money to pay the teachers' salaries. With the help of friends in the UK, we were able to find funds for salaries for three years. At the end of each school term, a celebration takes place in the church where the children put on a program of Christian dance, skits, and songs, after which they receive their term reports. All the parents are invited and the Gospel is shared.

Today the number of pupils has reached 148, which covers the whole range from preschool to primary education. In 2014 we built an extra dining room/classroom; however, by 2016, every corner of the property was filled and a new class was expected in September 2017! The only solution was to pull down some old buildings and construct two new classrooms and one room large enough for all the children. But where would the funds come from?

In faith they started demolishing the old buildings and digging the new foundations. The Lord graciously provided financially in several amazing ways. The most unexpected source was a legacy from a UK sister, who stipulated in her will that a certain sum should be used for children's work.

Today, all the private schools in the area are envious and wonder why so many families want to send their children to *Akany Salama* School. The first children will finish the primary program this summer, and some parents have started asking when the secondary school will open! The fact that the syllabus is based on the Bible brings great joy to the children and assurance to the parents.

We believe that what God has done in Ambohimangakely, through the devotion and diligence of these believers, provides a model for building Christ's church in such a needy environment. A lively, vibrant church—that reaches out to the whole family, and is linked with social and humanitarian involvement that answers the needs of the people and manifests Christ's love—has a powerful impact. ■



*Colin and Maureen Crow, commended from assemblies in Pennsylvania, serve the Lord in France.*

*Originally published by Echoes International Mission Magazine, December 2017. Used with permission.*

## Pray:

- for the new president and committee for CEIM churches
- for an increased intake of students for the Bible school
- for new teachers at the discipleship school, in the south of the country
- for job opportunities for young people from the orphanage as they finish high school
- for committed Christian spouses for the girls in the orphanage
- for a strong witness against the spread of Islam

# Return to Ecuador

## A Refocused Missionary Visits Her South American Home

BY IRENE RIDGEWAY

Oh, I must be dreaming. I opened my eyes again. No, I'm not dreaming. I can hear the roar of the engines and, according to the sun, we're heading south. We're on our way. We're on our way to Ecuador!

### Plans

My late husband, Bill, and I served in Ecuador for many years, and now our daughter Cookie and I were headed back for a weeklong visit. We had some doubts about me

taking the trip at 85 years old, and we wondered how my heart would respond as I stepped into the 10,000-foot Andean altitude once again. Our prayer was that God would go before us and prepare us physically and spiritually for this much-anticipated trip. We also prayed

that we would be a blessing to the believers and friends in San Antonio.

We began talking almost a year ago about a promise we had made to go back for a visit. Cookie had five vacation days available and thought we should plan our whirlwind visit. Ron and Esther Borman (*Missionary Prayer*

*Handbook* Day 23) kindly loaned us their downstairs apartment, which Bill and I had set up years ago for our children and visitors.

While Bill and I ministered at Maranata, it was our joy to teach and train elders and deacons to serve and help nurture the believers. Now it was time to visit them and see how they were doing. Patricio, who is married to Moraima, and Bayardo, who is married to Melissa, (MPH Day 23) are the two elders currently serving at Maranata.

### Visit

Arriving in Quito's airport late Friday afternoon, we first passed through immigration and customs. The official checked our passports and then waved us through customs. I was wheeled out through the doors and into the cool Quito air amidst a waiting crowd of Maranata believers calling my name and then smothering me with love and greetings. Cookie leaned over and asked how I was doing. My answer was, "My cup is full and running over!"

**My cup is full and running over.**

As I took it all in, my mind slipped back to a similar scene in 1958. It was midnight at the Philadelphia airport. A group of believers from four New Jersey churches brought their voices and guitars and sang and prayed with us as they sent our family of four to a small spot on the equator called Ecuador. This was the place to which God called us for more than 40 years.

Sleep that night was difficult since it had been such an emotional day. The next day, we ate a quick breakfast and



Arrival in Quito



*Awana group*



*Awana leaders*

were on our way to the Oansa (Awana) club meeting on the soccer field. The children enjoyed reciting Bible verses, singing, and playing sports. We then went for lunch with the two elders and their families. We arrived back at the Borman's home just in time to receive more visitors. It was another late night before we crawled into bed. In order to see as many believers as possible in the short time we were visiting, Melissa gave us a calendar where folks signed up to come, pray, and spend time together in the basement apartment where we stayed.

It just so happened that the joint yearly service for several of the area churches was planned for the Sunday we were in San Antonio, so bright and early Sunday morning we joined with other believers from all over Ecuador to remember the Lord. That afternoon, after lunch and a short rest, we gathered in the chapel with the Maranata believers for a special meeting and welcome home for me. This brought back so many beautiful memories of

**[ I wept openly  
with tears of joy. ]**

years together in that place. I heard testimonies of adults who came to Maranata as children and received Christ at the Oansa clubs. It was amazing to hear how many of their parents had come to know Christ through them. I definitely struggled as I "placed the face" of parents, now adults, whom I had last seen as either grade school or high school students. All gave testimonies of God's faithfulness and I wept openly with tears of joy.

The week continued with more wonderful events and



*Maranata Young People*

visiting families in their homes. Thursday, we joined the ladies' Bible study and had a special treat of humitas and quimbolitos, a typical Ecuadorian treat. The ladies sent us on our way with leftovers to take on our return journey north.

## *Thanks*

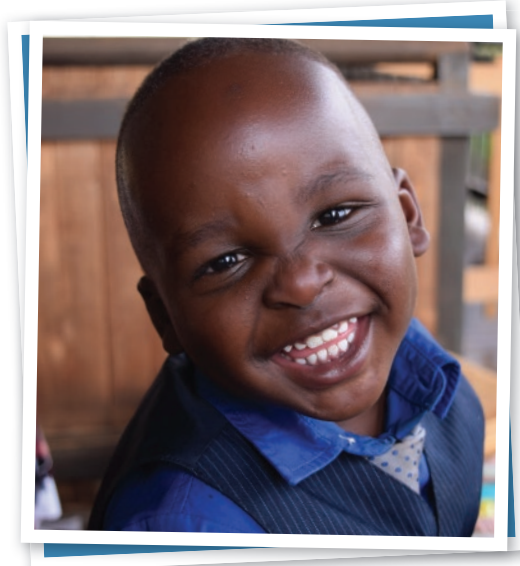
A special thank you for your prayers, love, and gifts, without which this reunion would not have been possible. We praise His name together with you. ■



*Irene Ridgeway is commended by Community Gospel Chapel in Voorhees, New Jersey.*

# DANIEL'S Story

## A Little Boy Thrives Despite Trials



BY MINDY SEEMAN

God writes good stories. Through the ups and downs, triumphs and tragedies, God is there, weaving it all together into something more amazing than I could ever dream. Lately, I have been trying to pay attention to those stories, to see God's goodness in the midst of the brokenness. One that really stands out is the story of one of my foster babies, Daniel.

### A God-led rescue

Unlike the other foster babies I have taken into my home, Daniel was not a true orphan. In fact, he came into my life through his aunt, Dorcas, who works on the compound where I lived in Nairobi, Kenya. She received a phone call one day that would change many lives: her sister, unmarried, had died in childbirth. Dorcas didn't even know her sister was pregnant. Right after hearing her sister died and left a baby, she was asked to raise this baby. Dorcas struggled to put food on the table for her husband and son, and she definitely didn't have the resources to take

care of a sickly, three-pound, clubfooted baby. But she couldn't just forget about him either. What a dilemma! God prompted her to ask my friend for help. He came to me, knowing I had connections with a local orphanage that helps babies who still have families as well. After hearing about him, the director sent a staff mem-

ber to accompany Dorcas on the four-hour bus trip to rescue Daniel. When they arrived at the hospital, they discovered that some people with connections to the hospital were trying to steal Daniel to sell him. God protected Daniel in the form of his great-grandma and her neighbor, who traveled many hours to the hospital and saved him from being taken. If his mom had not passed away, he probably would have been taken, as the staff would have told her the baby died. Even in the midst of sorrow, God saved Daniel. He provided a way for him to stay with his family.

### God's provision and care

Daniel was taken to the orphanage where they immediately started working on what to do with his two severe clubfeet. If he had stayed in a village, he probably never would have walked. But the orphanage found a doctor who was willing to fix his feet—for free. This involved months of stretching, doctor's appointments, casting, and more. But shortly after his first birthday, Daniel took steps on straight feet. Now, as a three year old, Daniel loves to run, jump, play, ride his bike, and keep up with the chickens in his neighborhood. You would never know he was born severely clubfooted.

Not only was this sweet boy born with clubfeet, he was tiny! He weighed three pounds when taken to the orphanage. His great-grandma, after saying goodbye to him at the hospital, thought she would never see him again. For this family, purchasing the needed formula to help Daniel grow was not possible. But God again provided for this sweet boy. I was able to take him into my home at six weeks old and still only four pounds! He wore newborn-sized clothes for the first three months of his life. After not gaining much weight, I switched his formula. He started putting on weight—and fast! At six months, you would



**Above:** Daniel is now a happy and healthy boy. **Left:** Daniel held by his rescuer, his great-grandma.



never have guessed that he was the same tiny baby from a few months before. In fact, many people thought he was a different foster baby.

Since Dorcas worked on the compound where I lived, she was able to visit Daniel almost every day. We knew she would one day take him to live with her, though at times she worried about providing for him. We spent many days talking about how God had so clearly provided for Daniel up to this point and that He would continue to provide for him. One of the clearest examples of this for me was when his great-grandma came to visit him. She lives eight hours away by bus. She came to see him when he was four months old and growing like a weed. I will never forget her walking into my house and dancing, praising God for how He provided for her sweet great-grandson. The baby she thought would never make it was before her, healthy and happy. Our God provides!



**Above, clockwise from top left:** Mindy and Daniel, bonded forever; Daniel's feet improving with casts; Daniel with Dorcas. **Right, clockwise from top:** Daniel and his family at his first birthday party; Daniel with Edwin; Daniel loves to play and ride his bike.

## A loving family

Daniel stayed with me full-time until he was 14 months old. He knew his aunt, who is now "Mama," as she visited often. He was also able to occasionally see his uncle (now dad—"Baba"), and cousin (now brother) Edwin. At 14 months he started to stay with them on the weekends. Though Dorcas was not sure how she would feed another mouth, they accepted him into their hearts and home with open arms. And what a testimony that was to their friends, neighbors, and church. They were able to see firsthand living proof that God writes good stories. A few months later, Daniel transitioned to living with them full-time. He loves his Mama, Baba, and brother a lot, and they love him right back.

If you were to go to his village now, you would find a healthy, active, silly three year old. He loves riding his little bike around, playing with cars, and eating! God has provided for him every step of the way. He will start school soon, and we know that God will provide for that. Though some days are difficult, Dorcas knows without a doubt that this boy is meant to be hers. I know that God has already used him in big ways in many lives and will continue to do so. I am excited to see the story God continues to write for this sweet boy. May he follow God wholeheartedly, like the godly man for whom he was named. ■



*Mindy Seeman was commended in 2011 by Des Moines Gospel Chapel in Des Moines, Washington.*

# May We Introduce

## John & Jennifer Kinlaw

*Serving in Tanzania*



### John's Testimony

I grew up in a family that did not know the Lord but thankfully loved me and gave me wonderful childhood memories. In high school I started to go down the wrong path. My parents divorced at the end of my senior year, and for the next 10 years I lived a life full of crime and drugs. The Lord started to work in my family when, halfway through that 10-year period, my father got saved. Several years later he was diagnosed with stomach cancer and after a nine-month battle with cancer, he died in the summer of 2000.

Shortly after my father's death, my past caught up with me; I was arrested and put in jail. I hit rock bottom! Ashamed, broken, and in despair, I came to a fork in the road of life. Either God was real or He was not, and I was finally ready to find out. I began reading books on various religions but also started reading my father's Bible. While reading the Gospel of John, I believed on the Lord Jesus and was saved. The Lord led me to North Ridge Bible Chapel where a friend from high school attended. These dear saints took me in, loved me, mentored me, and gave me many opportunities to grow as the Lord began to clean up my life. Since then I have never looked back and have committed my life to serving the Lord wherever He may lead.

### Jennifer's Testimony

I grew up in a home where my parents loved the Lord with all their hearts and sought to teach us to do the same. From the time I can remember, I knew that I was a sinner in need of a Savior. Around the age of six, I asked the Lord Jesus to save me from my sins and be my personal Savior.

Growing up, I always enjoyed hearing missionary reports of what God was doing around the world, but it was in high school when the Lord planted in my heart the desire to one

day serve Him in a foreign country. During high school and college, I had the opportunity to go on short-term missions trips, which had a big impact on my life. After finishing college, I began work as a nurse in the local hospital.

### Together

We first saw each other at a conference at Jennifer's assembly, but not wanting to get off track or get ahead of the Lord, John prayed, "Lord, if You want us to meet, bring her to North Ridge Bible Chapel." Two days later Jennifer showed up at North Ridge Bible Chapel (which was more than an hour away) to hear her brother-in-law speak. One year later, we were married in 2005. The Lord is amazing!

Our desire in marriage has been to serve the Lord together. Throughout our marriage the Lord has given us many opportunities to learn, grow, and serve Him. John has been in full-time ministry at North Ridge for eight years, involved in adult Bible teaching, youth ministry, evangelism, and camp work.

**Our desire in marriage has been to serve the Lord together.**

About eight years ago, the Lord opened the door for our chapel to work with refugees that live in a nearby apartment complex. It has been wonderful to see the chapel family serve together and love those the Lord has sent us. The Lord gave us the desire to move into the apartment complex to live among the refugees, and that became a reality in October 2016. While living there, He began to burden us for the foreign field and point us to Tanzania. We are excited about the journey ahead and covet your prayers for our family as we serve the Lord in Kigoma, Tanzania.

# Home with the Lord

## Berta Foster

April 30, 1939 – January 27, 2018 • Missionary to Nigeria



The oldest of three children, Berta was born to Friedrich and Ilse Zuther in Berlin, Germany, at the beginning of World War II. Four years later, she lost her hearing due to measles.

Since childhood, Berta loved God and wanted to please Him. Though her parents did not require her to attend church, she chose to be confirmed in the Lutheran church at age 13. In her teens, she wanted to become a missionary to the deaf or deaf-blind in less-fortunate places.

In 1959, she met Andrew Foster at a World Federation for the Deaf conference, which was held in Germany. She had read in a German magazine for the deaf that he was a deaf missionary and educator to the deaf in West Africa. She recognized him and, since she already taught herself English, introduced herself and told him of her desire to be a missionary. Andrew was skeptical of her beliefs and if they aligned with that of his mission organization. She eagerly accepted his offer to study the Bible, in English, through Emmaus Correspondence School. Over the next year she grew in her understanding of God and of salvation through Christ alone and put her trust in Him.

In August 1960 Berta moved to Nigeria to work for Andrew's mission organization. Soon a romance developed and they married in Nigeria in January 1961. Throughout the next decade, Andrew and Berta had five children: Andrew Jr., Johannes, Faith, Timothy, and Daniel.

The Fosters moved between the States and Nigeria in the early 1970s. They returned to the States in 1975 for a one-year furlough, but in the next year Berta was diagnosed with ovarian cancer and her medical needs lengthened their furlough. Through Berta's encouragement and insistence that "the Lord's work must continue," Andrew made annual months-long trips to countries throughout Africa. It was hard for him to leave Berta in her illness, but they were dedicated to do the work God called them to do. For the next dozen years, they endured long separations, considering it their personal sacrifice to minister to the deaf in Africa.

Berta's cancer went into remission just a couple of years after her diagnosis, but she was not yet strong enough to return to tropical life. She worked faithfully as the administrator

of Christian Mission for the Deaf while Andrew was busy on his missions trips. Over the years, her strength gradually increased so they discussed the possibility of Berta returning to Africa with Andrew in 1987. They decided not to proceed with those plans; instead, Andrew went back alone. It turned out to be his final expedition—he died in a plane crash in Rwanda in December 1987.

After Andrew's death, Berta cheerfully took on as much of Andrew's executive load as she could, in addition to her administrative load. After all, the work "had to be done." In 1989 she visited Africa for the first time since the mid-1970s. She spent half a year in 10 countries, visiting some of the schools and churches for the deaf that Andrew had founded. After returning to the States, she continued to work in the mission office, supporting her African colleagues overseas. The hard work and long hours took a toll on her health. At the age of 55, she suffered her first heart attack and had quadruple-bypass surgery. Berta was forced to slow down for her health's sake; meanwhile, the work piled up. So, with gusto, she resumed working in the mission office as soon as possible.

During her 60s, Berta experienced occasional heart attacks. They were not as severe as her first one, so she returned to work soon after each incident. In 2006, she visited the DR Congo (formerly Zaire)—her first time back to Africa since 1989. It was also her last visit to her beloved adopted continent.

Shortly before turning 70, Berta went to the hospital following a mild heart attack. She suffered a major stroke during a routine medical procedure. This stroke was much more devastating to her than her heart attacks, and she was forced to retire a few months later. On January 27, 2018, God called Berta into heaven. The first voice she heard since early childhood was the Savior's voice saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of the Lord."

Faith Haynes



# Pray for Us

## How to Organize a Missions Prayer Meeting

BY CRAIG FRITCHEY

*P*rayer is the lifeblood of missions. Every missionary knows this, but sometimes those back home forget how important prayer is to God's work around the world.

During the peak of assembly missionary activity, in the mid-20th century, most regions of North America had a structured missionary meeting.<sup>1,2</sup> There, individuals read missionary letters, missionaries on furlough gave reports of their work, and the believers held long seasons of prayer on behalf of missionaries across the globe. Today, we hear less about these types of meetings. However, the need for prayer still remains.

Throughout my travels as conference coordinator for CMML, I have seen a renewed interest in prayer, particularly among the younger generation. I believe that now is the time to revive widespread missions prayer meetings among God's people. Below are several helpful steps for organizing a missions prayer meeting.

### *Logistics*

The first step in arranging a missions prayer meeting involves answering a series of basic questions: Who? When? Where? And how? Since you already know the "what" and the "why," just focus on these four.

#### **Who**

Begin by finding a core group of prayer warriors. Just like

Daniel gathered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego for prayer in Daniel 2:17–18, a core group of men and women hold together a well-established missions prayer meeting. These individuals are committed to prayer and to inviting and inspiring others to join them.

#### **When and where**

Next, determine dates and times that work for your core group. Some groups meet monthly, some once a quarter, and others host a 24-hour event once a year. The key is to do what works for your group.

Then, find a consistent location, or a rotation of locations, to meet at. Choose somewhere that is free from distractions and interruptions. Also, a place that has access to Wi-Fi and other technology may be beneficial.

#### **How**

Finally, set a schedule or outline for the meeting. For example, you may begin with singing to calm the hearts and prepare the minds of those in the group; continue with listening to what God is doing around the world; focus on fervent prayer, which should be the main portion of your schedule; and possibly conclude with a meal. Sharing a meal is a great way to build deeper fellowship with missions-minded believers and to discuss the things God has put on your heart.

“Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you.”

## Content

Once you have answered the logistical questions, begin considering the content of your meeting. An organized, balanced flow of content is essential to a successful prayer meeting.

### Reports

The first aspect of the content is obtaining information that will fuel your prayers, which is usually found in missionary reports. If you hear of a missionary on furlough in your area, ask that person to share at your prayer meeting. Visit [CMML.us](http://CMML.us) or call the CMML office to find missionaries on furlough.

Another great source for reports is newsletters. You can read or print out missionary newsletters received via email. Remember, you will need to trim down most letters to only the key items due to time restraints. Be sure to assign someone to this important task.

If missionaries are not available to speak in person, you can Skype a missionary from almost anywhere in the world. Be sure to arrange this in advance, keeping in mind time differences and missionaries' busy schedules.

Other helpful resources include CMML's one-to-three minute "Missions Update" videos, which feature a different missionary each month, and the "Connections" section of *Missions* magazine, which presents recent updates from a wide variety of missionaries. You can show or read these brief updates at your meetings. The internet offers many resources that promote prayer for missions. The Joshua Project ([JoshuaProject.net](http://JoshuaProject.net)), Operation World ([OperationWorld.org](http://OperationWorld.org)), Voice of the Martyrs ([Persecution.com](http://Persecution.com)), and Missions Catalyst ([MissionsCatalyst.net](http://MissionsCatalyst.net)) are all excellent additions to your prayer meetings.

### Prayer

The second aspect of content is prayer. No single way of organizing prayer is better than another; some groups focus on corporate prayer while others prefer to break into small groups for maximum prayer time. Whichever way you pray, be sure to choose a plan for facilitating prayer. In itemized prayer, the group spends a period of time praying for specific requests after each report or letter is shared. In rotational prayer, everyone divides into small groups after all reports are read, and each group prays for a different need for a set period of time. Then, the groups rotate so that every group prays for each item.

In list-based prayer, one person shares a list of missionaries or needs, either on a big screen or in printed handouts, and various

believers offer up prayers for the list as the Lord leads. Lastly, in burden-based prayer, everyone gathers together and prays for whatever the Lord has put on their hearts in regard to missions.

### Finances

The final aspect of content is finances. Often, when we pray or learn about what God is doing, we want to give to the work. One option involves giving to all missionaries listed in the *Missionary Prayer Handbook*. Take an offering at each meeting and divide the amount received by a set amount designated for each missionary (e.g. \$50 per missionary). The amount of missionaries with whom you share each month will depend on the size of the offering, but eventually, you can work your way through the entire list of missionaries.

In contrast, give to those missionaries whom you highlight at your meeting. Whether they are the featured speaker (in person, via Skype, or over video) or ones whose newsletters were read, it is a blessing to share practically with those whom you have prayed for and learned about.

Two other options for financial support include regularly giving to the missionaries commended from your local assembly, and creating a missions project, in which you find a particular ministry your group is passionate about and raise funds to help that group with a project. However, be sure to contact CMML or MSC about how to best send gifts to missionaries.

## Vision

Remember the key is prayer! As you go into your own prayer closet or gather with a small group in your home or local church, allow the Lord to lead and develop a vision for an effective missions prayer meeting in your area. We desire that many missions prayer groups would spring up across North America and that a new wave of Spirit-led missionaries would go out to reach this generation for Christ. May the Lord bless you as you lift up His people and His work around the world!

“Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you.” (2 Thessalonians 3:1) ■

*Craig Fritchey is CMML's security and conference coordinator.*

<sup>1</sup> R. E. Harlow, "The Scope of Assembly Missionary Work," in *Global Strategy: The Biblical Plan of Mission, Revised ed.* (Spring Lake, NJ: Christian Missions in Many Lands, 1999), 150.

<sup>2</sup> "Missionary Prayer Meeting List," *The Fields*, December 1955, 309–310.