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Thinking It Through

BY PHIL BARNES

Should We Be Thankful?

The word “should” sits heavy on my shoulders. Just say that word and a large tonnage of obligation lands with a thud. My mind easily fills in the rest. I *should* stay in touch with people better, fix those things around the house, do more for the Lord, be a better person in a hundred ways, visit more, do more, help more, try harder, read more. I *should* be more like Christ. I feel like I’ve heard a lifetime of sermons carefully explaining to me what I *should* do, be, or know. But most of the time I already knew what I should do, be, or know, and so I didn’t find the sermons very helpful. In fact, they seemed to add to my burden. Jesus warned religious people against binding heavy burdens on people and not lifting a finger to help them.

In spite of all this, let me start with a “should”—we should be more thankful. Hard to argue with, but at the same time, not very helpful, is it? And I would like to be helpful.

Thankfulness is the type of thing, like loving your spouse, you don’t want to do because you *should*, or worse because you were *told* you *should*, but rather a thing that flows freely, naturally, and spontaneously from our hearts. So now, I’ve not only said we *should* be more thankful, but that it *should* be spontaneous and natural.

So maybe we can get to the heart of thankfulness in a way that avoids “should.” Paul exhorts the Ephesians, “Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.” (Ephesians 5:18)

Drunkenness is a powerful object lesson showing us that a person’s usual thoughts, behavior, decisions, and priorities can all be radically changed by an outside influence taking over. It makes calm, cautious people dance on wobbly tables wearing lampshades on their heads, get behind the wheel of a car, or say things that are completely out of character. We teach and believe that every true believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God, an influence much more powerful than alcohol. The experts tell us that the grammar is clear—that this filling is not a one-time event, but a continuous, daily surrendering of control. Don’t be controlled by alcohol; be controlled by the Holy

Spirit. Scary stuff, not being in control, which is why a lot of us hold back, sometimes *proud* of the fact that we hold back from drunkenness *but not being ashamed* that we also hold back from surrendering control to the Spirit.

Some of us are uneasy when we talk about the control of the Spirit, wary of tongues and ecstatic experiences and so forth, but Scripture goes on to tell us what it looks like, and it’s not like that at all. People controlled by the Spirit act differently, not because they *should*, but because they are not being controlled by their old selves. The passage tells us that being controlled by the Spirit will result, first, in speaking to one another in spiritually encouraging ways, second, in singing songs of praise to God in our hearts, and third, in “giving thanks always and for everything to God.” (Ephesians 5:20, ESV) We might wrestle with the idea of “giving thanks always for everything.” But this is because it is foreign to our old nature, and we just can’t do it by simply trying to remember that we *should*. Only when we are surrendered to the Spirit’s control will such thankfulness flow.

Only when we are surrendered to the Spirit’s control will such thankfulness flow.

So, instead of thanksgiving being something I *should* be *doing*, it may be seen as a byproduct of me relinquishing control of my life, thoughts, priorities, and worldview to the Holy Spirit, and at the same time it serves as a barometer to help me gauge to what extent I am doing just that.

This Thanksgiving holiday, let’s be done with *should*. Let’s not just remember that we *should* mumble appropriate words of thanks, or try hard to work up some evidence of thankfulness because we *should*. Let’s open ourselves to the control of the Holy Spirit who will, by His power, cause us to “give thanks always and for everything to God” in a way we never could or would just because we *should*. ■

Phil Barnes, MSC executive director.

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COVER PHOTO: Natural Bridges, Oregon—©iStockPhoto.com/michaelschober





Cross-Cultural Ministry in Oregon

How Old-World Hospitality Opens New Doors

BY BARD PILLETTE

Our life in southern Oregon is a strange mix of living in our native country but working and socializing, almost entirely, in a world where the foods, customs, and language are “foreign.” In a sense, my present situation is similar to my early years of life on the island of Guam, where there was a slow-moving transition from the ways of the “old world” to the new. The Guamanians had recently received American citizenship, but their customs and language were a unique blend of Spanish and native Chamorro with a little bit of American. There, people were never quite sure where they were or who they were.

The same applies to cross-cultural work for Christ. We are never sure where “home” is, and we can easily feel like foreigners in our own country. And, of course, this feeling can be a good thing because we are ever aware of being strangers in this land that is passing away.

Leaving Mexico

In 1994, Pam and I, along with our three children, came to Oregon from Mexico, where we were planting churches. We thought we would be in Oregon for only a short time while getting our children into college. But, 23 years later, we are still here evangelizing among the Hispanic community. We first worked among Mexicans who were drawn to Medford, Oregon, because of jobs in the pear orchards. Then, we moved some 30 miles to the west to start another assembly in Grants Pass. We are presently on the Pacific Coast in Brookings, which lies about 90 miles west of Grants Pass. Our work covers a sparsely populated area that includes four small coastal towns along the Oregon-California border.

Working in the US

Although we have worked with people from El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Colombia, almost all of those who have come to believe in Christ are from very small ranchos or villages in Mexico. Few of them have finished high school, and even fewer have gone to college in Mexico. On average, they have a sixth-grade education. They came to the United States not with the intention of staying permanently but with the goal of sending money home to Mexico for building houses, buying vehicles, or acquiring capital for starting businesses in their home country. With very strong work ethics, they took jobs in orchards,



From top: Joyful believers worship together at the Brookings church; Three church leaders and their families serve the Lord together in Grants Pass; Pictured with their families, Alex Marin (left) and Cesar Mendez (right) lead the Medford assembly.

construction, yard maintenance, restaurants, hotels, dairy farms, pine tree planting, commercial fishing, and lumber mills. With both the husbands and wives working, the families' living standards improved immensely, but their new buying power and their children's education in a foreign language and culture has wreaked havoc on their old-world customs and values.

Reaching Hispanics

We sought to reach these Spanish-speaking people by striking up conversations with them in local parks, stores, and in their workplaces. They were often intrigued by our knowledge of their homeland and their language. Doors were also opened for us by Christians who introduced us to their Hispanic neighbors, employees, or coworkers. As a result of the disturbing cultural upheaval in their families, couples would often accept invitations to a home Bible study. Some would come to our home on Sundays for family devotional time. It was a great advantage for us to have previously lived in Mexico since we knew how to offer them old-world hospitality, which made them feel at home. After three or four couples trusted Christ, we brought them together for a weekly Sunday meeting.

Working together

We have not been alone in our endeavor to reach Hispanics in Oregon. In 2003, we invited Alejandro and Adriana Chávez (*Missionary Prayer Handbook* Day 30), along with their two young daughters, to help us with the work in Medford and then in Grants Pass. Our friendship began when Pam and I lived in



Irapuato, Mexico, where Alejandro and Adriana, as teenagers, believed in Christ. After recognizing elders in Grants Pass, the Chávezes moved to Eugene, Oregon, which is 100 miles north of Grants Pass, to begin another Hispanic work. Monica Sernatinger (*MPH* Day 30), a longtime friend whose husband, Jamie, passed away while planting churches in Puruándiro, Mexico, has also gone to Eugene



to work alongside the Chávezes. Then, in 2008, Denny and Arlene Norris (*MPH* Day 30) left their church-planting work in Morelia, Mexico, to do evangelism among Hispanics in Cannon Beach on the northwest coast of Oregon. As a result, we now have five Spanish-speaking congregations in Oregon.



Because we all are friends and coworkers from Mexico, we have created close ties among our churches in Oregon, which has led to an exchange of elders and missionaries, who visit and teach, between the works. This common bond even extends back into Mexico, where the assemblies feel ties to the new believers here in Oregon. In fact, numerous leaders from Mexico have come to Oregon to teach and encourage the new believers here.

Bridging the gap

Another unforeseen blessing has grown out of the Oregon Hispanic outreach. When we travel back to Mexico to visit our former church plants, we set aside time to visit the relatives of the believers who are now located in Oregon. Some of the relatives' ranchos or villages are so small and isolated, such as Hills of Saint Gertrude, that they cannot be found on a map.

We visit these relatives with gifts and hugs from their family members in Oregon, and we chat with them about Christ while eating meals they have cooked over mesquite firewood. After they take us to see their livestock and crops, we offer to sing their sons or daughters' favorite hymns and explain why they are special to their children. And, almost always, we tell them how thankful we are that Christ rescued us from ruined lives and gave us good friends like their sons and daughters in Oregon, who have become like family to us.

Even here in Oregon, we find ourselves with rather unique opportunities to give the Gospel to unbelieving relatives from Mexico who are visiting their children. For example, Apolonio, who is a commercial salmon and crab fisherman, grew up speaking a Misteco language at home in Oaxaca, Mexico, and only learned Spanish in grade school. When his parents, who speak very little Spanish, came to visit him in Oregon, we gave the Gospel in Spanish while Apolonio interpreted into Misteco.

Right: Denny and Arlene Norris fellowship with two families that help in the work in Cannon Beach. **Left (from top):** Alejandro and Adriana Chavez encourage two couples whom they feel have great potential to be church leaders; Monica Sernatinger meets with a women's group in Eugene.

Praying for Hispanic believers

The difficulty with cross-cultural ministry is that the young people are in transition and tend to be more at home in English than their native languages. You can pray for us as we attempt to encourage the young adults to keep their languages and to use them to participate in Hispanic works. Also, we face the ever-present tendency of some potential leaders to consider



returning to Mexico, even when that possibility is very slim since their children and grandchildren are settled here. This impermanence can create a sense of

insecurity in the young churches. So please pray for leadership that offers stability to these new believers.

Witnessing to Hispanics

Some Christians speak no Spanish but have an interest in helping to reach Hispanics with the Gospel. Maybe you are one of those believers, but you feel like your inability to speak Spanish is an insurmountable barrier. Most Hispanics know enough English to carry on a simple conversation, especially if you speak slowly and use plain vocabulary. You can develop friendships by tutoring Hispanic students who are taking English classes. Or you might open doors by inviting your child's Hispanic classmates and their parents to a birthday party that you're hosting. Such an event would allow you to share your testimony with the parents in an easy-going atmosphere. Then, you can give the parents a Spanish Bible or a Bible story book that they can read to their children. If they show some interest, you can then contact a person involved in Hispanic outreach and introduce him or her to the unbelieving family. We were very encouraged when a Hispanic family in Grants Pass came to believe in Christ after a neighbor in the apartment next door took the initiative to introduce us to the family. Remember, showing old-world hospitality to strangers can overcome all sorts of barriers and make hard hearts receptive to the message of Christ. ■



Bard and Pam Pillette were commended by McKinney Bible Chapel in McKinney, Texas, in 1991 and then by Willamette Bible Chapel in Eugene, Oregon, in 2016.



Left: In Brookings, Oregon, Bard Pillette works with several men on becoming future leaders in their church. **Above:** The Norrises and believers from a church in Green Bay, Wisconsin, host a vacation Bible school in Cannon Beach. **Below (from top):** Denny Norris, three of his children, and several local teenagers pose for a photo during youth group in Cannon Beach; Pam enjoys teaching a group of women and children in Brookings, Oregon.





A Bright Future in Burundi

Building a New School for the Deaf

BY DANIEL JOHNSON

When Anne and I first moved to the rural town of Gisuru on the eastern side of Burundi, one thing we became aware of quickly was the many deaf children who live within a 20-mile radius of our home. In light of this, we began conducting research to find and identify these children. For several weeks, our friend Abel and several other Burundian coworkers traveled around by motorcycle visiting surrounding communities to document all the children who are deaf and could, potentially, attend a school for the deaf. We were amazed to find and register 45 children within that time.

One boy's story

I want to tell you about one young boy in particular. His name is Roger, and he is 12 years old. Roger was both deaf and blind when we met him, and we believe he was born with these impairments. When we came into contact with Roger, he was, understandably, a fearful child who was scared to do things and

rarely went outside of his mud-brick home because he couldn't hear or see anything.

As we got to know Roger and his family, we suspected that Roger had a condition called congenital cataracts, meaning that he was born with clouded lenses that keep him from seeing.

This condition is often recognized quickly with proper medical attention and, normally, would be fixed at an early age through surgery. But Roger lived with this condition for 12 years.

We were able to get Roger checked out at an eye clinic in Bujumbura, where the medical professionals confirmed his condition and scheduled him for surgery. We praise the Lord that, as a result of the surgery, Roger can now see!

It is amazing to see the resulting change in his life. He can now play happily with other children, and he qualifies to attend a school for the deaf because, with his sight, he will be able to learn sign language!

Left (from top): Abel is one of the Johnson's key co-laborers; The children and their families gather at the school to visit the grounds before the school year begins. **Right (from top):** Kanani is one of the older children registered for the school for the deaf; Now, after successful cataract surgery, Roger and his parents are happy that he can see and that he is able to attend the school for the deaf.



An existing work

Roger is just one of the many children whom we were able to identify and help. The deaf children in our area have no opportunity to attend school because the government school teachers are not trained to teach deaf children.

The Burundian assemblies that we partner with already run a school for the deaf in Bujumbura, the capital city. My dad, Harry Johnson (*Missionary Prayer Handbook* Day 3), was instrumental in starting this school in 1983. However, Bujumbura is about a five-hour drive from where we live. This distance makes it impractical for us to send these children so far from their families. Also, the school in Bujumbura is currently functioning at full capacity and has a long waiting list.

In light of this, our vision is to begin a branch, connected to the existing school, that will serve the deaf children in Gisuru and the eastern side of the country. Because the children are scattered far around the region, the school will be a boarding school.

A new vision

Associating with the existing deaf school in Bujumbura has helped immensely in getting the new school registered with the government and in training new teachers for the branch here in Gisuru. Every day, I thank the Lord for the amazing partnership we, as CMML missionaries, continue to share with the assemblies in Burundi and their various ministries, after my grandparents and parents fostered the relationships during their service in the country.

In order to start the school at the end of this year, we are in the process of building two classrooms, a dorm for the girls and a dorm for the boys, two shower and toilet blocks, housing for the teachers, a kitchen and dining hall, and a soccer field.

Once these projects are complete, we will begin phase two of construction, which includes an office for the administration personnel, a school chapel building, a library, and a trade-skills building.

We plan to offer classes through ninth grade with the goal of adding a grade every year, so the school will need a total of nine classrooms eventually. Please pray that the Lord would supply the needs for the ongoing construction.

Burundi is one of the poorest countries in the world, and we live in the poorest area of Burundi, so it is difficult for families in this region to contribute much toward school fees, especially for a deaf child. Often, a family will scrape together everything they have to educate one child with the hope that he or she will be able to get a good job and better the family's living conditions. A deaf child is least likely to receive that education, so our plan is to cover the costs of feeding and educating these deaf children through sponsorship. If you are interested in sponsoring one of these deaf children, please contact us.



Top: Lord willing, the Johnsons and their co-laborers plan to build an area for academics on the property, in addition to a dining hall and kitchen. **Middle (L-R):** While an illness early in life left her deaf, Florence is now preparing to attend the deaf school; Despite losing her hearing early in childhood, Edine loves to smile; Each of the boys' and girls' dorms features built-in concrete cabinets for the students' belongings; Several men build the first two classrooms out of fired clay bricks and reinforced concrete beams and columns. **Bottom:** Although he is able to hear, Desire cannot speak.

Photos by Sean MacDonald and Daniel Johnson.



The children's futures

After ninth grade, few education options are available for deaf students since no secondary school for deaf children exists in Burundi. But some of the deaf children who have completed their studies with the Bujumbura school have continued their educations in other countries. The assemblies in Burundi have preliminary plans to build a high school for deaf and blind children in Bujumbura, but those plans have not been finalized yet.

These children are an unreached people group.

The age range among the deaf children we identified is huge. Some of them are older teenagers, and some are as young as four or five years old. Since the oldest children will only be able to attend a few years of primary school, we hope to teach them a trade, like carpentry or sewing or farming, once they learn the basics of reading and communicating.

These children are an unreached people group because they

have no ability to communicate clearly or understand communication. They have never learned sign language and, therefore, have no common language through which they can hear the good news of Jesus. Please pray that these children will quickly and adequately learn American Sign Language, which is the version used at the deaf school in Bujumbura, so that they can have a language through which to hear the good news. Pray that they will learn to read, so that they can explore God's Word for themselves. And pray that, through learning to communicate, they can witness to other people who are deaf. Thank you for praying for the work that the Lord has set before us! ■



Daniel and Anne Johnson were commended from Oak Lawn Bible Chapel in Oak Lawn, Illinois, in 2012.

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CHRIST OR CULTURE—WHICH WILL YOU CHOOSE?

SPEAKER: NATE BRAMSEN

May We Introduce

Peter & Melanie Mead

Serving in the United Kingdom



Melanie's testimony

I was blessed to be raised in a US-based missionary family and was privileged to hear the Gospel from a young age. Although I trusted Christ as my Savior when I was about five years old, it wasn't until my teens that my faith became something that was personal and real to me. While studying at Emmaus Bible College, I was impacted by learning about the tremendous spiritual needs of the world around me. In 1996, Emmaus held special events to commemorate the 40th anniversary of Jim Elliot and the other missionaries being martyred in Ecuador. God used this powerful story to stir my heart and to challenge me to give my life 100 percent to serve Him. Shortly after that I met Peter and a whole new chapter of my life unfolded.

Peter's testimony

My parents were assembly missionaries from the United Kingdom to Italy. I grew up in Italy and England and was saved at an early age. While I loved the Italian food we would receive in the homes of Italian believers, I was always resistant to the frequently asked question, "Do you want to be a missionary preacher like your dad?" After some years of my riding the fence spiritually, the Lord grabbed hold of my life in my late teens. From that point I knew that I wanted to serve God in whatever ministry and location He wanted me to. During university, I spent a year serving on the Operation Mobilization ship Logos II and in the process met Melanie. After university and my first year at seminary in the US, we were married in 1999.

Together

Even before the Lord brought us together, we each had a strong desire to serve the Lord in missions. After we were married, we lived in the UK and the US while Peter worked and continued studying, including three years at Multnomah Biblical Seminary. During those three years, we also served in our local church, Westside Bible Fellowship, in Hillsboro, Oregon. We always thought we would end up as missionaries outside of our home countries. But God has a sense of humor! After much prayer and seeking the Lord, a door opened for us to work with Operation Mobilization based in the UK, but travel to other parts of the world.

Since 2004, we have served in a variety of ministries both in the UK and in various other countries. The common theme tying them together is our passion to teach the Bible and build up believers in their faith. In 2013 we were part of a team that planted a church in our spiritually needy town of Chippenham, England. Peter is an elder here and Melanie and the children are also heavily involved. It is exciting to see God transform people's lives. Peter also trains preachers through the European Leadership Forum and Union School of Theology (based in Wales) and is involved in Bible teaching, conference speaking, and writing. We have been blessed with six wonderful children: Hannah (17), Aliyah (15), Mariah (13), Joel (11), Kaylah (6), and Jessah (3). Our family has grown over the years, but our passion remains the same—we want to equip believers for biblical ministry and see lives transformed by the glorious love of our God! ■

We want to *equip believers*
and see lives *transformed.*

A DAY AT THE FAIR

Witnessing for Christ at the Michoacán State Festival

BY TED & PRISCILLA CLARK

Throughout our many years living near Morelia, the capital of the sizeable Mexican state Michoacán, we had wondered about renting a booth at the state fair for the purpose of sharing the Gospel with thousands of visitors from across the state.

Several years ago, the Lord allowed us to begin a ministry, which we call AMOR Divino, for our troubled state of Michoacán. Our goal is to, eventually, offer a Gospel of John to each resident of the million plus homes in the state or, at least, leave a gospel tract at each residence when no one is home. We have been amazed to see the Lord provide the literature and the volunteers needed to work toward this goal, little by little. Through His help, we are close to having covered 200,000 homes; we have seen several people saved; and currently, numerous evangelistic Bible studies are held for contacts made through this door-to-door ministry.

This year, when we realized the annual state fair, scheduled for May, was approaching again, we asked the Lord to open a door for it to be an extension of our AMOR Divino project, if He desired to use us in this way.

THE BOOTH

Renting the booth was not an easy undertaking and was quite expensive. But the Lord provided all that was needed for the rental, and our dear sister in Christ Alma Roa helped us with the red tape and many long lines. A young widow, Alma persisted until we successfully rented a 10x10-foot booth.

The fair ran every day for three weeks. Alma and her children, along with an elder from one of our churches in Morelia, took turns tending the booth with us. Other believers also participated.

At the booth, we offered Gospel of John booklets and tracts to those who would take them, as well as a gospel coin with John 3:16 engraved on one side and the question "Where will you spend eternity?" on the other. We used this question to try to engage people in conversation, and we could see many confronting their spiritual needs, perhaps for the first time. We also like these coins because they tend to be tokens people keep and, hopefully, remember.

ACTIVITIES

Another major part of our booth involved a station where children made Wordless Book bracelets and heard an explanation of the book's colors as they relate to God's offer of salvation and forgiveness through Jesus. Most kids loved this activity, and many listened attentively to the message. As they left, we could hear some children telling their parents the meaning of each color. We sent each child home with a card stating the colors' meanings and a small *Wordless Book* of their own, along with their bracelet. Many times, the parents stood behind the children and listened to the message as well. We calculate that approximately 1,000 children made bracelets over the course of the three weeks. A few parents and grandparents made bracelets for themselves too!

Another great tool that we got a lot of use from is Living Water's pocket "lie detector." The front of the lie detector reads, "Are you a good person?" The metal wand they use to point to either yes or no is forcefully drawn to "no" due to a strong internal magnet, so they cannot respond yes. Usually, people relax and have fun with this gadget though some take it quite seriously. The point is to start a conversation with them about their sin and need of a Savior. Our team was able to follow up with many people using a questionnaire based on the Ten Commandments, and the Lord provided us with an abundant supply of a complementary tract entitled *Bad News for Good People and Good News for Bad People*.

REACTIONS

It was fun to watch the responses of those who took the lie detector test. Some were quite dramatic when the wand was unexpectedly pulled down to the no option. Before taking the test, they had confidently assured us all that they were definitely good people, and when the test



said otherwise, they expressed incredulity that the lie detector had not picked this up! One older woman, after seeing her no response, quickly interjected that she was left handed and had been unable to hold the wand correctly. She promptly moved her shoulder bags to her other side and tried again—with the same result, of course.

But, by far, our favorite moments involved the deeper, spiritually satisfying joys of seeing God at work in people's hearts. What a joy to see some sensitive and thoughtful responses from various people. One father said he wanted to make a bracelet for himself so that he would not forget the message. A boy commented, while making a bracelet, that this activity was better than the fair games. Many people remarked on the beauty of the message that we were sharing with them. Two fathers, one young and one middle aged, expressed a desire to lead their families in the knowledge of God. The older one purchased a Bible to read to his family and asked many questions about how to read the Bible. One lady said that hearing this message was the best thing that could have happened to her at the fair. A young girl was deeply convicted of her sins upon hearing the Ten Commandments. Fabian, a relatively new believer from our

church, had the joy of leading to salvation don Luis, a vendor who expressed interest from the first day as he gazed at our gospel banners for long periods of time. We also had the privilege of giving the booklet *Is God Really my Father?* to a sweet young boy who had recently lost his dad. Many Christians were delighted to find our stand because we sold Bibles and other materials at good prices. The believers who helped at our booth—some young Christians themselves—had the opportunity to boldly share their faith, and we were overjoyed to see their pleasure in being part of the work. We also found numerous vendors reading our Gospel of John booklets during the festival. One older lady, Martha, read it through quite quickly and was open to further conversation about the Gospel with our son, Nathan.

Due to these wonderful stories, we can truly say, "the Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad!" (Psalm 126:3) ■



Ted and Priscilla Clark were commended from Eastfield Bible Church in Mesquite, Texas, in 1992.



Far left: Alma Roa and two of her children tend to the booth. **Top (L-R):** Annie Clark uses a lie detector to talk to a family; Almira Roa explains the *Wordless Book* to some children while Olivia helps making bracelets; Don Luis, whom Fabian led to Christ, attended the local assembly before leaving for his home city. **Bottom (L-R):** Katie Clark shares the Gospel with an interested woman; Olivia and two little girls show off their bracelets; A group of people express amusement when their companions are exposed by the lie detector!

41st European Christian Workers' Conference

Missionaries Take Time to be Refreshed

BY PHILIP C. PARSONS

Many can attest that a lifestyle characterized by the “tyranny of the urgent” leads to harmful stress and hectic, often less effective, activities. The thought of a purposeful time for rest is quickly dismissed. The guilt associated with being unproductive fuels the cycle that can lead to an unhealthy balance.

Years ago, workers in Europe recognized the value of setting aside time to break the cycle. Since 1977, missionaries serving in Europe have gathered in a conference-like setting to relax, rejuvenate, and be spiritually refreshed.

This year, 103 people, including missionaries, their children, and support staff, assembled for six days near Annecy, France. Located in the foothills of the French Alps, the retreat center is just minutes away from one of the cleanest lakes in Europe. Against the backdrop of rugged mountains, it was refreshing for us to watch hot air balloons in the calm of the morning and, later, to cool off with an afternoon swim in Lake Annecy.

Encouraging sessions

The mornings began with a time of prayer and devotion. Philip and Mary Parsons of CMML led the men and women respectively. Dr. Paul Rabideau, a counselor and elder from Cedarcroft Bible Chapel (New Jersey) gave special seminars on burn-out and personality types. His wife, Rita, led exercise sessions for women. A well-known worker gave a presentation called “Israel’s Redemption,” taken from Isaiah 19, and Christopher Zito (Italy) gave a challenging talk titled “An Unfortunate Divorce: When the Lordship of the Spirit is Severed From the Authority of the Bible.”

Enriching children’s ministry

A spiritually enriched time for missionary kids is an essential aspect of the retreat. The program for children ages seven to 12 was led by Judy Gallagher (New Jersey) and Marina Virgalla (Connecticut). Each morning, lessons centered on the theme “Go.” Children were taught how God used men and women to reveal His plan to redeem sinners and reconcile people to Himself by calling them to “Go.” In the evenings, selections from a video series showcased the lives of people who experienced God’s call. Sharon Luibrand (Montana) and Emily McLaughlin (New Jersey) helped with younger children while Artur and Lauren Zapater (Belgium) worked with the teenagers.

Challenging ministry

Dr. George Murray taught the main ministry sessions. Dr. Murray and his wife, Annette, were missionaries in Perugia, Italy, with Bible Christian Union. They served in Italy for 13 years and had good fellowship with the Brethren missionaries. More recently, George is better known as the former president and chancellor of Columbia International University in South Carolina. Now retired, George and Annette travel the world preaching, teaching, and doing what they can to support the Great Commission.

His ministry topic for the conference was “Jesus is God—So What?” From this, George developed four compelling and powerful Scripture-based truths: because Jesus is God He is worthy of our worship; by His death on Calvary He has provided the only way of salvation for the whole world; He has the absolute right to Lordship over our lives; and He gives us everything we need to do anything He asks us to do. The Murrays also led sessions titled, “Church Planting in Post-Christian Europe” and “Marriage and Family in Ministry.”

Refreshing fellowship

Many afternoon activities were available to all. Dr. Tom Marinello (Netherlands) led the annual hike up a nearby hill, while Matt Glock (France) led a more challenging hike up *La Tournette*, a mountain across the lake. Trips to nearby museums, medieval chateaus, and walks by the lake added to the restoration of the mind and soul. Remembering the Lord in a breaking of bread service was held on the last full day of the retreat.

Unifying prayer

The evening sessions were devoted to reports from each missionary, followed by prayer. Many expressed the blessing that resulted from hearing about joys and challenges in the Lord’s work. Praying for one another draws people together, strengthens relationships, and stimulates the discipline to pray.

The psalmist writes, “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!” (Psalm 46:10) A retreat for workers in Europe is one helpful way to be still and know God. May we all take time to rest, refresh, and reflect on what God is doing around the world and, in so doing, be encouraged to diligently pray for one another. ■

Philip Parsons oversees assembly relations and missionary care for CMML.



Left to right from top: Volunteers share their musical talents; Missionaries and their families appreciate this yearly time of refreshment; Located in the foothills of the Alps, the camp facilities is an ideal location to relax; Mission workers listen intently as they are taught from the Word; John Pickbourne, Brenda Landrum, Edwin Risnes, and Craig Landrum enjoy an afternoon visit to a nearby town; Fiona Wilks and Annette Murray enjoy fellowship with one another; Ron and Robin Hampton share about their ministry with MSC; Dr. Murray challenges the listeners during each message; Dr. Paul Rabideau and Ron Hampton chat between meetings.



Asher (5) and Annabelle (6)

Interview with Annabelle & Asher Dilione—Day 17, Jamaica

BY ANNIE ELLIOTT

Annabelle and Asher Dilione, along with their parents, Mike and Melinda, and their younger brother, Aiden, call both Jamaica and New Jersey home. In January 2016, the Diliones moved to Trelawny, Jamaica, to work among five assemblies. There, Aiden was born, and Annabelle and Asher made friends, attended school, and acquired Jamaican accents. After returning to New Jersey for seven months following the completion of their two-year commitment, the Diliones were commended to Clarendon, Jamaica—a two-hour drive from their old home—for Mike to serve at Midland Bible Institute. Annabelle and Asher are now making friends at their new school. Friendly and joyful, the Dilione children adapt well to change. However, your prayers for their transition is greatly appreciated.

Tell me what Jamaica is like.

Annabelle: It's really cool and you eat a lot of different stuff. The people are nice, and they're very different than us.

Asher: We eat different food and there are different games.

Why do you live in Jamaica?

Annabelle: Because we are missionaries there.

What do your parents do?

Annabelle: My dad preaches there and I don't know what my mom does there.

Asher, what does your mom do in Jamaica?

Asher: She speaks with Daddy. She helps us do stuff we need to do.

Annabelle: She teaches Sunday school.

Asher: And she teaches us how to exercise.

Tell me what church is like.

Annabelle: It's really long.

Asher: We do "Jesus Loves Me" and we do different songs. We clap our hands.

Can you tell me about your friends?

Asher: In Jamaica I have a friend, Matthew. He's three.

Annabelle: I have a best friend named Halie. She's seven.

What is your school like?

Asher: My school is made out of blue seats and blue tables. My mom waits outside for me at school.

Annabelle: I have to wear a uniform. At primary school, I had a friend named Shamoya.

What is your favorite thing to learn about in school?

Asher: My favorite thing is to write.

Annabelle: My favorite subject is math.

What activities do you like to do?

Asher: I like to play with my bike and play baseball.

Annabelle: There's this weird dance I like doing: the Hokey Pokey.

Annabelle and Asher: We like to color.

What are some of your favorite Jamaican foods?

Asher: Fried chicken.

Annabelle: We like Jamaican beef patties.

How is Jamaica different from the US?

Annabelle: The people talk different.

What do you love most about Jamaica?

Annabelle: Seeing my friends and going to school.

Asher: I like playing with my friends.

Is anything hard about living in Jamaica?

Annabelle: Yeah. Going to church for a long time.

What do you want to be when you grow up, and where do you want to live?

Asher: I want to live in New Jersey.

Annabelle: I want to be a teacher, and I want to live in America, in Connecticut, where Mommy used to live.

Asher: I want to be like my dad.

And what does your dad do?

Asher: Preach.

What should people pray about for you?

Asher: Pray to God for my whole family.

Annabelle: That I would do good work at school and in gymnastics. ■