

May 2011

CHRISTIAN
Missions
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**Bringing the GOSPEL,
Jobs and Good Food
to MEXICO**

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Thinking It Through

ALLAN WILKS

Spiritual Entropy

Scientists tell us that an important property of any physical system is its entropy, which measures disorganization. A beautiful vase is a highly organized arrangement of glass molecules and therefore has low entropy. Drop the vase on a tile floor and in short order its entropy shoots up, as glass shards skitter away in all directions. The vase has gone from a state of orderliness to one of chaos; entropy measures the degree of that chaos.

One of the most important, fundamental properties of entropy is that it is always increasing. The total orderliness of any closed system will inexorably decrease and there is simply nothing anyone can do to stop that. This property of entropy is often referred to as the second law of thermodynamics, but despite that fancy sounding rubric, the idea is simple and familiar: things break, bedrooms get messy, dishes pile up, wood turns to ashes in the fireplace, and so on.

In the spiritual realm there seems to be a similar phenomenon. We have all observed how that which is good and right and true gets mixed with that which is not, to the point of syncretistic blandness, or how the body of Christ fragments itself as the doctrinal purity of the Bible is shattered into the chaos of thousands of denominational fragments.

In fact, there is apparently a spiritual second law of thermodynamics. Over time it seems that spiritual entropy inevitably increases, with dissension and apathy leading to a sort of spiritual chaotic malaise.

In Romans 8:19 the apostle Paul says that the groaning creation will find relief only at the end of time, with “the revealing of the sons of God”—this hints at the spiritual second law of thermodynamics in that, short of God’s final intervention, increasing spiritual decay and chaos are unavoidable.

But this does not tell the whole story of entropy. In fact, local decreases of entropy are possible; the statement of the second law is only about the total entropy. With a little effort it is possible to clean the mess in my bedroom or wash up the dishes. By injecting energy into my home “system” I can observe an increase in orderliness, however temporary.

An excellent biblical example of this is the king Josiah. When he took the throne at age eight the spiritual entropy in

the land of Judah was at an all-time high, to the point that when the book of the law was dug out of the mess in the temple, the spiritual leader of God’s people was taken by surprise that such a document even existed!

But king Josiah was undeterred. We read that his heart was tuned to God, in spite of the spiritual darkness that had descended on the land. And so, convicted by what he read in that unearthed copy of the law, he embarked on an astonishing series of reforms throughout the land, beautifully described in 2 Kings 23.

God’s light shone brightly in those days of Josiah. For a time God was worshipped as in the days of David. Unfortunately however, this local entropy reversal lasted only until Josiah’s death. His successors, the last four kings of Judah, quickly allowed spiritual chaos to creep back into the land. Without the spiritual energy of a true servant of God, the spiritual second law of thermodynamics did its work.

This ancient incident ought to speak strongly to us. Jesus said that his followers are the light of the world. It is interesting that in the physical world all of the local entropy reversals we see are ultimately traceable to the energy we get from the sun. And so it is in the spiritual world, apparently! It is from Christians alone, fueled by the indwelling of God himself in the person of the Holy Spirit, that the spiritual energy comes to stay the devastating and inevitable consequences of that second law.

The aftermath of Josiah’s reforms shows us that apathy and complacency are not just neutral in the life of a Christian; they actually have the negative effect of allowing the creation to decay a little more. This seems to be especially important for spiritual leaders, as evidenced by what Josiah, in his leadership position, was able to accomplish, and what his successors were able to reverse.

Lord, may we be constantly aware that we are, by your grace, your means of preserving this decaying world until your return. May we be your instruments of entropy reversal; may we fight, like Josiah, for the orderly righteousness of your Son. ❧

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Bringing the GOSPEL, JOBS and GOOD FOOD to MEXICO

The Unique Story of a Missionary Entrepreneur

by Brad Sturm

IN OCTOBER OF 2008, the Lord began building His church in our colonia in San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato, Mexico when we started meeting as a family on Sunday mornings for worship. Within a few months the Lord had worked in the lives of several families and we were meeting as a small body of believers in our home. Ministry was as I had expected it to be, discipling and shepherding those who the Lord had brought to Himself, and looking for opportunities to share the gospel with those with whom I had become acquainted.

Outside our ministry, yet having a direct bearing on the members of the Church, was and continues to be the same economic crisis that has affected much of the world. We felt the consequences in different ways. One head of a family, desperately needing work, stood in endless lines of men waiting for a handful of underpaid, overworked, and temporary jobs. Another man, longing to grow in his new relationship with the Lord Jesus and his new family in Christ, was constrained by his work load. His eighteen hour work days interfered with his ability to fulfill his responsibilities as a father, husband and Christian. In fact, few, if any brothers and sisters in our congregation did not, to some extent, feel the effects of a struggling economy.

We often pondered the idea of trying to start some sort of business. Prayerfully weighing the options and seeking counsel from our elders, it did not seem to be a wise move. That changed in March of 2010. Through a set of extenuating circumstances, our commending church in McKinney, Texas sent us a 28-year-old Mexican man who had come to know the Lord about two years prior. Upon arriving, Juan Antonio, began the wearisome process of looking for work

to provide for his family. Having spent years working in different restaurants and attending a culinary school in the United States, he was a chef, and a good one.

It did not take long for us to come up with the idea of starting a small restaurant. It seemed a good idea so we pursued it. Our elders gave us the go ahead and two churches in Texas—one in McKinney and the other in San Gabriel—along with several families, graciously asked if they could offer their financial support for this project. From our perspective the Lord was giving us the go ahead with the support of our church, godly counsel, and the necessary funds.

One major advantage to living outside of the United States, though admittedly having its disadvantages, is that it is much easier and less expensive to start a business. With a modest amount of money we were able to rent a storefront, as well as build, decorate, equip and staff a small restaurant we called *Chicago Style*. The idea was based on the fact that our town has a large foreign population, filled with people that would enjoy typical American and Chicago style foods. Juan had worked for six years in Chicago restaurants and as a native Chicago family, we had recipes.

During the three months of planning, purchasing, constructing, traveling, and practicing for the restaurant to be opened, Juan and I prayed nearly every morning that God would take our plans and prosper them for His glory. We prayed this would enable His children to use the business as a tool for His kingdom and a means for members of the church here to provide for their families without being enslaved to their jobs and taken advantage of by their

We want to do our best to show people truly believe that God is the owner.

employers. We prayed this fervently alongside our brothers and supporters a country away in Texas. The Lord listened to our petitions and responded.

The three months prior to the opening of the restaurant, completed on July 27, 2010, were a great strain on the ministry and my family. There is no doubt that, to a certain extent, it was a sacrifice. The longer we postponed the opening, the more money was spent and the more time Juan, among others, went without work. We were robbed of a dog, a vehicle, and nearly all our tools during construction. There were setbacks and unforeseen expenses, but we saw the Lord provide in unexpected ways and use those events for good. So we pressed on. I can remember on one occasion asking the congregation's forgiveness for what I saw as neglect on my part. My gracious and forgiving brothers and sisters were overly understanding and even helpful in seeing the project come to fruition.

On July 27th, we had our grand opening. Customers flooded into *Chicago Style* and pleasantly surprised our staff of three. Business has been good since. Our doors, by God's grace, are still open. However, the exciting reality has been seeing God answer our heart's desires. Today, the restaurant employs four men aside from myself (I am not employed). Three of them are a part of our church and two of them came to know the Lord while working with Juan. We have a daily Bible study with everyone, which has proved very profitable in the lives of the men and their families. Juan has been able to share the gospel with a countless number of providers, vendors, customers and employees, as well as the owners and employees of the other eight stores in the plaza where our restaurant is located.

Aside from the obvious blessing of new contacts and spiritual influence in the lives of people associated with *Chicago Style*, we are grateful to the Lord for the testimony we are able to be for Him as ambassadors for Christ. One simple aspect of the restaurant that brings glory to God is the fact that it is successful. Despite our good food, friendly staff and fair prices, we were told repeatedly that we would not succeed. We believe the Lord has not only equipped us personally with the skills needed and provided the means for starting, but He is responsible for our ongoing success.

Without a doubt, the most exciting way we have seen God's name honored in this undertaking has been through our business practices. We were told things like: "You'll have to lie about your taxes if you want to make a profit," or "You can't afford to pay your employees well and follow all the labor laws." We also heard: "Sundays are a restaurant's biggest days, [*Chicago Style* is closed Sundays] are you looking to fail?" and "Forget about it, guys. If you won't serve alcohol you won't survive." Not serving alcohol is a decision we made by our own convictions based on our personal and cultural situation. To the dismay of our critics, (which after eating here are few and far between) God proves them wrong, blesses our desire to honor Him, and has made *Chicago Style* a family favorite in the city.

Our prayers for the business remain the same. As we hire new employees we do so knowing that we are offering that person something much more valuable than a stable job. As we seek to grow and change we do so remembering that we are to use even a restaurant as



a lighthouse in a very dark place. As days of abundance and days of scarcity come and go, we take hold of those opportunities to show those around us that our confidence and trust is in the Lord. We want to do our best to show people what it looks like for a business to be run by people who truly believe that God is the owner.

Please pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ serving around the world whether missionaries or simply Christians who are faced with these same types of difficulties. Pray for wisdom for missionaries who need to deal with these issues and counsel those in their congregation. Pray for those struggling to survive and fulfill their duties before God—that they would trust in His faithfulness, persevere, and find His provision. Pray for the day when these trials will end, when our King will come again and restore all things. Finally

praise the Lord for His steadfast faithfulness. That in His wisdom and sovereignty He has orchestrated all things to work out for His glory and the good of those who are called according to His purpose. ☞



Brad and Lindsay Sturm were commended to the Lord's work by McKinney Bible Church in McKinney, Texas in 2009. They have served four years as church planters in Michoacan and Guanajuato, Mexico. They have three (almost four) children: Eaden, Judah and Gabriel. They originally lived just outside of Chicago, Illinois before going to Costa Rica in 2006 for language training and then ultimately Mexico.

Page 3: Juan Antonio with our Deep Dish Pizza - background graphic ©iStockPhoto.com/art12321. **Page 4 (from top):** Chicago Style; Chicago Style being used for a ladies' Christmas Tea outreach; Chicago Style under construction; Juan with more food.

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STUDENTS IMPACTED AT SAKEJI MISSION SCHOOL

by Jill Avery

*“Only fear the Lord and serve Him in truth with all your heart,
for consider what great things He has done for you!”*

1 Samuel 12:24



YES He has done great things and is doing great things!

Since coming to Sakeji Mission School in 2003, I have seen the Lord's hand in so many ways:

■ He has given the missionaries the opportunity and privilege to teach missionary and Zambian children about Him. *"We will not conceal them from their children, but tell to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and His strength and His wondrous works that He has done...that they should put their confidence in God and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments."* Ps. 78:4, 7

■ He has brought us through difficult times, tragedies and illnesses, and has given us strength to love and teach the children He's given us. *"And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."* 2 Cor. 12:9

■ He has protected us from dangers like snakes, rabid dogs, lightning, bad roads and thieves. *"You alone O Lord make me to dwell in safety."* Ps. 4:8

■ He has provided so fully for our daily needs. *"Bless the Lord, O my soul and all that is within me bless His holy name, bless the Lord, O my soul and forget not all His benefits."* Ps.103:1-2

■ He has encouraged us in our work with these children by allowing us to witness His growth in them. *"All your sons will be taught by the Lord."* Is. 54:13a One of our ex-students wrote to us last year and said: *"Thank you for laying a good foundation for me. I am a big boy doing grade eight and am 13-years-old. Every time we write tests, I am always on top. I thank God for giving me all the knowledge that has made me reach where I am, and knowing to always put Him first and goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. Even if I left Sakeji when I was small, I still can't forget what you told me..."* Another wrote: *"Last year I wrote my grade nine exams and I scored the highest mark in my grade! I also got the certificate for the best performance and behavior in my class...Don't worry, I am still reading my Bible and praying every single day and I have actually led one or two other people to Christ this year..."* We also were so encouraged last year to hear that some of our ex-students took a step of obedience to the Lord and were baptized. When asked what was one of the most important things they've learned at Sakeji, one of our grade seven students wrote: *"God loves me. God is a father to the fatherless and a friend to the friendless. I love God."* I have a very vivid memory of the girl who wrote that. She was terribly upset when her father hadn't come in time to see the student production at the end of term. After the show, he still hadn't arrived and as I walked through the dorm, I saw her, on her bed, tears running down her cheeks, reading words from her Heavenly Father. It brought me to tears too, seeing her there with her Bible open, and realizing that she was looking to Him who said, *"I will never leave you nor forsake you."* Heb. 13:5 Another of our students wrote, *"I have learned that in life, we may have troubles but this is all part of God's plan. Through hard times, we should take it to the Lord in prayer and read His word so that He may guide us day by day."* And another wrote, *"I have learned that God keeps His promises. You can always trust Him."*



In the mornings, before breakfast, I meet with different students who want to come and pray together. In these times of prayer, I've come to realize that many of our students have very real concerns about what is going on back at home with their families. Recently, one girl's father who is a Zambian missionary in Angola, had to take a child who lost his arm and eye in a land mine, to the nearest hospital. Apparently, the mother of the child has run away for fear of being accused of witchcraft (others will say that she is the one who did this to her son). The father and two small daughters are left to care for the boy. Stories like these make me realize how important it is to keep on praying!

Thank you so much for your prayers! I have been humbled and amazed to see His answers over and over again as I serve him here. Just this past week, the Lord made the way for a large truck to come from the Copper Belt with supplies for the school. We were very concerned about the state of the road, but the truck came through safely and the Lord held off the rain while it was being

“My favorite thing about Sakeji is that we are privileged to know about Jesus every day and also that we have teachers who love and care for us.”

unloaded. That in itself was an answer, as it's been raining almost every day here for the last few months.

“Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion: says my soul, therefore I hope in Him!” Lam. 3: 22-24

At the moment, the Lord has given us 70 students to teach and train in His ways, and care for in a boarding school environment. The students range in age from five to 14-years-old, and they are what makes Sakeji! I tend to notice this when the children leave to go home for a holiday. The place always feels so empty without them!

Eighty-six years ago, the school began as a means to educate missionary children. Now the majority are Zambian

children who come from a wide range of backgrounds. While we desire to provide these children with quality education, they are told right from the beginning that this isn't the most important thing in life. One student writes: *“My favorite thing about Sakeji is that we are privileged to know about Jesus every day and also that we have teachers who love and care for us. I really love Sakeji food! Yum!”* And another writes: *“My parents sent me to Sakeji so that I could have a good education and learn about God...”*

Our prayer is that each child here would come to know our Saviour while they are still young. A number of the older children have come to know Him here! One student in grade six writes, *“I would like people to pray for me to stay close to my Savior no matter what happens in my life.”* We pray these children would go on to become people who influence their families (some are from non-Christian homes), their communities, and their country for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Another student writes, *“I would like prayer for God to send more teachers to help out at Sakeji.”* This is a need that the 11 missionaries here and the children often pray about. Please pray for this need with us. The Lord has been so gracious to send short-term help term by term, and He has carried us through times when it seemed like there were too few of us to really do what He'd called us to do well. Sometimes I think about Gideon and how the Lord worked through him and a small number of people. The Lord reminded Gideon that He was paring down the numbers, *“lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me.’” Judges 7:2* The Lord reminds us too that it's *“Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit.” Zech. 4:6* This is His school. This is His work. We are praying that His will be done, and that in His perfect time, He would bring the ones He desires to work for Him here. *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Eph. 2:10*

Our motto here at the school is “Tu Vero Permane,” based on the following verse, *“But you must continue in the things which you have learned and have been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” 2 Tim. 3:14-15* As we continue here as He wills, and as we teach these children, may He receive the glory and may it be true of us, that we let the little children come to Him, and didn't forbid them; because of such is the kingdom of God. ❧



Page 6: Sakeji student body - background graphic ©iStockPhoto.com/binkski. **Page 7 (from top):** Some Sakeji smiles; Boys enjoying an afternoon snack. **Page 8 (from top, L-R):** A typical scene on the air strip – air travel during the rainy season is often easier than road travel; Student at desk; Our first attempt at firing clay in a kiln; Fun in guitar class; Sakeji staff; Some of the grade two students.



Jill Avery first came to Sakeji in 2003, and was commended in 2005 by Nipissing Junction Gospel Hall in North Bay, Ontario. Among other things, she teaches the children at Sakeji art and also about The Artist Himself.

SERBIA:

a Land of

ROCKY SPIRITUAL SOIL

by Steve Luibrand



HISTORY

Welcome to Serbia, a land of flat fertile farmland and hills covered with hardwood forests. The 7.4 million people who live here have been molded and shaped by their difficult history of war and being ruled by foreign empires. The capital city of Belgrade has been destroyed and rebuilt over 40 times in its history. This beautiful land was first settled by the Serbs in the seventh century. In the ninth century this tribe of pagan Slavs was “Christianized” by the work of Greek missionaries, Cyril and Methodius, who introduced them to Orthodoxy.

Providentially, another movement of Christianity came here about the same time. Bogomils (beloved of God) as they were called, preferred to be known simply as “Christians.” They were descendants of refugee believers from Turkey who were driven into the Balkan region because of persecution by the Byzantine church. As Orthodoxy gained strength in Serbia with the conversion of key princes, the Bogomils were persecuted and driven farther west into modern-day Bosnia where they flourished for the next few centuries. After the Bogomils diminished here, the spiritual life of the Serbian people was totally dominated by Orthodoxy until the mid 19th century. At this time a spiritual fire was started that would capture tens of thousands of people in this dark land. Nazarenes, as they are called, are a group that is similar to Mennonites in belief and practice. They made such an impact that Orthodox priests nervously reported that whole villages were being converted. They were also harshly persecuted and many fled the country. Today their numbers have diminished to a mere fraction of what they were and they tend to be closed to outsiders.

Around the same time as the Nazarenes, the Baptists came to Serbia, and later, Brethren assemblies and Pentecostals. All of these groups are small so that today, the number of evangelical believers including all groups is estimated at around

10,000. If you do your math with the population of Serbia, you have .135%. That is one person out of every 740. Most of these 10,000 believers are from one of the minority groups — Slovak, Hungarian or Gypsy. So the percentage among ethnic Serbs is much smaller.

ORTHODOXY

There is a big difference between Orthodoxy according to the theologians and Orthodoxy as understood and practiced by the common man. In general, Orthodox theology is very similar to Roman Catholic teaching. One significant difference would be their view of the atonement. They do not believe that Jesus died FOR our sins, in our place. Instead, they teach that Jesus died as an example of how we should be obedient to God even to death. Jesus showed us how to live in order to merit life in paradise. This belief shatters the foundation of the gospel. Generally, salvation is attained by baptism, membership in the Orthodox Church, regularly receiving the Holy Eucharist, obedience to the church commandments, and the final rights after one’s death. Prominent features, both in Orthodox churches and in their homes, are icons (pictures of the saints). They reject images such as you would find in a Catholic church, but they both venerate and pray to their icons, just as Catholics would to their images. Theologians teach that an icon is a window into the spiritual world where the saint now dwells. Monks will spend hours and days meditating before icons hoping to be drawn into a mystical spiritual experience. Much Orthodox theology was formed from revelations gained during such experiences.

The main feature of Orthodoxy, as concerns the common man, is the family’s patron saint. A saint has been assigned to each family name. An icon of the patron saint will be prominently displayed in their home and another carried with them in their purse or car as a charm. On the saint’s birthday,



the family has what is called a Krsna Slava. This is a large celebration made in honor of the saint. The celebration includes special bread, wine, the burning of incense, the lighting of candles, and the veneration of the saint's icon. Prayers are made to the saint seeking his blessing and protection for the coming year. For Serbs, the Slava is the central event of their religion. They know little about the Bible, but they do know their saint. For other Serbs, who are more secular, the Slava is a chance to have a big party. Serbs are now being re-educated in Orthodoxy after several decades of communism. The public schools have included a religion class in their curriculum, and these are almost exclusively taught by Orthodox priests.

LAY OF THE LAND TODAY

In spite of the revival of Orthodoxy in Serbian culture and thought, the society is rapidly deteriorating and people are empty, disillusioned, and angry. Many people rely on the use of tranquilizers and sedatives to calm their nerves. There is a large problem with drug use and alcoholism. Pornography, divorce, and abortion are huge problems in this society. A few years ago we heard a statistic, that two thirds of all conceived babies the previous year were aborted. Abortion and birth control methods have all led to a negative birth rate that is causing Serbia's population to shrink. Most of these problems are ones that we have in America too, but the difference between Serbia and America is that there are so few who bear the light. A drug addict in Serbia is far less likely to meet a person who can tell him about the Savior who can save him from his slavery to the drug idol. A pregnant teenager will be almost sure to hear nothing about the Creator of her baby and her need to trust Him. Once we were visiting a neighbor during the Christmas season and her little toddler tried to touch an icon of Jesus on the wall. She said, "Oh no dear,

God needs to stay on the wall." Though not meant in that way, this statement struck us as being just the reason for the problems of Serbian society today. God is on the wall, but not in their hearts.

Serbs are a friendly and hospitable people. They love children and always take time to ooh and ahh over babies. There are many things to be appreciated about their culture and way of life. The pace of life here is slower and people have much more time to visit and talk than in Western countries. Chivalry is still a value that can be seen in action on buses or in other public places. Yet they have been through much trauma in recent years because of the wars and prolonged economic woes. Many Serbs look to the West for hope, thinking that more money will fill the emptiness in them. Others resent the West and blame it for their problems.

There are many barriers blocking access to the minds and hearts of the Serbian people. They have a great fear of any religious idea that is not "Orthodox." This is mostly because, feeling threatened by evangelicals, the priests have spread all sorts of false information about "sects" and what they want to do to you. Even nominally religious Serbs are reluctant to discuss religious things with you if you are not "Orthodox" because of this fear that has been inculcated in them.





Religion is seen to be a part of your ethnic identity. To be Serb is to be Orthodox. It distinguishes you from Croats or Bosnians. To leave Orthodoxy is to betray your people. The wars of the 90's have created an extra resistance to evangelical groups because of their perceived connection with the West. Serbs generally feel that the whole world is arrayed against them trying to take away their land.

These barriers make it difficult to have a conversation about the gospel. What people really need is a living example of the gospel in action in someone's life, something that is so obviously supernatural, that they can't deny it, nor be afraid of it.

OUR WORK

We moved out of the city to a village over three years ago. Shortly after the move God brought us into contact with a group of Gypsies and opened the door to having a Bible study with them. One couple has been saved and through the great changes in their lives, opportunities are arising to teach other Gypsies in other villages also. We also have a Bible class for their kids. Gypsies are the one group in Serbia that is quite open to the gospel at this time. We also have a desire to reach the Serbs and we are trying in our village to get to know our neighbors and praying for God to open the doors of their hearts to His message. I am involved with a Bible school training students to reach their own people for Christ. I both teach there and take students out on practical outreach activities. We distribute cards in villages that offer a free Emmaus course and New Testament. There is a lack of solid Christian books in Serbian, so we have been facilitating the translation, correction, and publishing of good literature.

God has made a lot of changes in our thinking about missionary work and methods after living here for several years. We are learning to rely less on our knowledge, education, or methods, and more on the Holy Spirit to build the character

of Christ into our lives and family. We are learning about the indispensability of prayer in our daily work.

Though Serbia is a country blessed with very fertile farmland, the spiritual soil is rocky and dry. There are very few missionaries here in comparison with neighboring countries. Serbia needs your fervent prayers first and foremost. Serbia needs people who are willing to commit their life to patiently living among the people, loving them sacrificially and perhaps some day, Lord willing, seeing results. ☺



Steve and Jenny Luibrand were commended to the Lord's work in Serbia by Stevensville Bible Chapel in Montana in 2004. They have four children, Davey (8), Willie (6), Joey (4), and Katie (1).

Page 10-11 (from top): Rural beauty found throughout the central part of Serbia; St. Sava's Temple, Belgrade - the largest functioning Orthodox church in the world. **This page (from top, L-R):** Orthodox chapel in the hills of the south; Typical village street in Farkazdin; Camp for Gypsy kids in 2009; Saying prayers before the icons (Photo by Mitch Roth); The main square in Novi Sad (Photo by Mitch Roth).



Blessings in Bolivia

by Helmut & Shirley Haltrich

*“That you may become blameless and harmless children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.”
Philippians 2:15*

This verse was the theme of the second annual youth conference held in our first assembly in Tarija, Bolivia in the fall of 2010. It was a real privilege to be there with nearly 600 youth who came from all over the country and even northern Argentina.

Tarija is a beautiful, friendly city with a population of 300,000 surrounded by mountains at an altitude of 6,000 feet above sea level. It is very pleasant.

It was thrilling to see how the three local assemblies worked together in order to make the conference possible. All the meetings were held in the nicely decorated auditorium behind the church building and was packed at the evening sessions. More than 300 people who came from other cities slept in the Sunday school rooms and in the church room. They had all their meals there and even though the water was rationed and had to be stored at 4:00 a.m. in large barrels, they made out somehow with all the showers and washing dishes.

Two Argentinean speakers were invited and they gave relevant messages for everyone present and it was very practical. What a blessing it was to see more than 30 make professions of faith and many more were restored to the Lord. It was thrilling to see some of our former Bible school alumni going on for the Lord.

We pray for the new Christians, that they be discipled and grow spiritually so they can serve the Lord. Pray for the plans for the next conference to happen sometime in 2011.

The false cults are very active in Tarija. There are 12 Mormon temples in the city where we have only four assemblies which include the newest one in a place called Florida. Yolanda began this work with some children and through them won the parents. Pray for a blessing, as several will soon be baptized.

What a blessing it was for us to be back again in Bolivia. Much of our time was spent in counseling,

encouraging, teaching, and visitation of the believers in their homes.

There was another blessing being with the Quechua brethren in their new work of five years. This was started by our second church and at the moment they are constructing their own church building. Pray for the Lord's provision for this and for the leadership. Helmut was able to have a couple of classes with the men there.

In the city of Tarija, 42% of the children are under 15 years of age, while almost 50% are undernourished. It was encouraging to see so many children and youth in the meetings. Camps for children and youth are held throughout the year. Pray for the preparation of the future leadership for these local assemblies.

Some of the poorer believers are not able to read their Bibles for lack of eye glasses but it was a real joy for us to provide this in the form of the glasses we brought from here.

Shirley had meetings with the sisters at the three assemblies while Helmut had studies with the men in two of the assemblies regarding the importance of preparing good leaders and they are continuing these classes to prepare the next



Clockwise from top: Quechua believers; Breaking of bread; Assembly believers.



REFOCUSED MINISTRIES

leaders. Praise God!

There is a real concern for the 12 commended national full-time Bolivian workers. They are very gifted men but are very poorly supported. A committee has been formed to guide the assemblies in the support of these servants. Pray that they will be adequately cared for.

We are most grateful for the prayers and fellowship of so many to make this trip possible. And for the safety we had there. Thank you ever so much!

The first assembly prepared a program and nice meal for our farewell. During the program they asked us how the

Lord had led us into the ministry. This was to help the youth understand the Lord's possible call on their lives.

Please pray that the Lord will raise up more workers to serve Him as the harvest truly is great but the laborers are few. Pray for the Lord's guidance for future visits in His will. ☞

Helmut & Shirley Haltrich were commended to the work of the Lord in Bolivia in 1971 by Rosemount Bible Church in Montreal, Quebec. They are "Refocused" in their work, making frequent trips back to Bolivia.

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Update on Japan

by Jay & Ruth Kraai

At our Annual Missionary Prayer Conference on March 24 and 25 (scheduled prior to the disasters), there was much discussion about the relief efforts in the Tohoku area and how it should be done and who should do it or who to do it through.

Tim & Christiane Marcy (*Missionary Prayer Handbook Day 8*) were anxious to get some “hands on” relief work and we were burdened to do some practical help as well, so we decided to work together.

However, we needed:

1. A good contact in the area who would receive the aid.
2. Money to purchase the items to take.
3. A truck to get the goods in.
4. Money to cover the tolls on the expressway.

This is how the Lord met those needs:

1. We were able to get Mrs. Takigawa’s help through Marion and Stuart Caldwell (Missionaries serving in Japan with Global Connections in Mission—New Zealand). Mrs. Takigawa is the widow of an evangelist in the Tohoku area, and the Christians there really respect and appreciate her. Through her, we had an open door to the three assemblies that we delivered aid to. Marion also sent the information for another contact which we will use when we go again.

2. CMML sent money from the Japan Relief Fund to purchase the goods that had been requested, plus some other necessities. Some of the items were purchased locally, but about half was purchased at Costco near Tokyo. Above that, the local Christians, friends and neighbors came with other food, water, clothing, etc.

3. When Jay went to rent a truck, he was told that there was not a truck or large van available until April 13. That was long after we wanted to go and could go. The next four places all said there was no truck/van available. The very last place had one truck available but the price of the rental was double the other places! So Jay showed the man at the counter the brochure from the first rental place, and he made a phone call and said that his price was correct. We decided to pray about it. Jay went back and the man charged us the lower price because we were taking supplies to the stricken area.

4. Tim heard that it might be possible to not have to pay tolls since we were taking relief up to Tohoku. So, Jay went to the local police box and asked. They said that they were not giving any more passes, but to tell the man at the toll booth the purpose and he would let us through. That sounded too easy in a country that runs on “red tape.”

So our neighbor phoned the city hall on Sunday after-

noon. It was closed of course, but there is always one person on duty to record births & deaths, and she was told that there wasn’t such a thing. However, she persisted and was able to get the information we needed, and then wrote out by hand the eight forms for us to show at the toll booths. Lest you think this was just a small amount of money, the toll for each vehicle from here to the Hachinohe exit was 17,400 yen — \$217.50 —and that is one way! The return trip was a bit more because we were getting off and on as we made the other deliveries! So that “little bit” of information saved a lot of money—\$217.50 times two vehicles times two ways= \$870.00. Then we spent 2.5 hours at city hall getting the official forms to mail to the various places to make it “legal.” Since the Marcys are staying up there for about two weeks, and will be getting on and off the expressway as they visit other assemblies to deliver the rest of the aid, those forms will actually save even more than that!

Trusting that it would actually work out like that, we took the toll money that we had kept out, and went shopping again for more stuff to take. By the time we were finished, the truck was pretty full.

A few days later the Christians here came and helped divide the goods, packaged them in boxes, labeled them for the various places and loaded the truck. It was wonderful to see their joy at working together to help their fellow Christians and whoever else might receive the aid. Also their generous offering to take with us to those local believers was a joy!

That was the way this trip took shape. The Christians in the three local churches were thrilled to get the goods. Their joy was full. We told them that if there was something they could not use to please pass it on to their unsaved friends. They said they would.

The devastation caused by the earthquake will take years to set right. Spiritual effects will be emerging over time as well. People are questioning why this happened. Their thoughts have turned to God and to their own mortality. Just one example: One of Tim’s teachers now has a deeper desire to know God and has started a two-year Bible reading plan. Tim got to share the gospel with her unsaved mother the week after the quake. She said that she has many more questions, and wants to know more about what it means to be a Christian.

We are willing to go again, but do not yet have a date. Thank you for your prayers. Please pray for us as we continue to evaluate how, where and when to help. ☺

