

February 2021

MISSIONS

AUSTRIA Serving the Lord through Music

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South Pacific
Update on the
Fiji Deaf Ministry



THINKING IT THROUGH

BY NATE BRAMSEN

7 Lessons from the Construction Zone

When thinking of construction zones, words quickly come to mind: inconvenience, interruption, impediment. Philippians 1:6 tells us: “Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” (NIV) Friends, we are in a construction zone. God could have chosen to make sanctification instantaneous, but instead, He uses the construction zone called life. When we feel frustrated with circumstances, others, and ourselves, perhaps we are neglecting to recognize this reality.

On a recent road trip, I traversed more than a few construction zones, which taught me seven lessons that enlarged my vision, enhanced my perspective, and exchanged my frustration for focus.

1. There is an end in mind.

A construction site might seem chaotic and confusing. But be confident. Someone began the work with the big picture in mind. No road construction starts without a plan and a blueprint. When God started His work in you, His blueprint included the design to conform you into the image of His Son: “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” (1 John 3:2)

2. There will be numerous warning signs.

Construction sites include road signs warning of danger. We face many hazards as we pass through the construction zone of life. But with the warnings come instructions and promises: “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)

3. The road may be bumpy.

Ultimately, construction zones are intended to make things smoother and more efficient, though they may temporarily require road shoulders and detours to accomplish the work. Do not be alarmed when life seems rough and bumpy. Be encouraged. God must break us of our comfort and complacency. He is doing a great work in you and me: “Therefore we do not lose

heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” (2 Corinthians 4:16–17)

4. Expect delays.

Do not be surprised when you need to slow down and patiently proceed. God is not on your clock. In His perfect time and way, He will complete the work, as promised in Philippians 1:6.

5. Things can get dirty.

You may have just washed your vehicle, and then, you find yourself driving through an unexpected construction zone. Now, your work feels like a waste. Similarly, others around you may be worn, exhausted, or just plain dirty. Don’t be deceived by the enemy, who wants you to be critical of your fellow believers passing through life’s construction zones. Rather than reacting in frustration, may we respond with the patience that God demonstrates toward us.

6. It will not last forever.

No one drives through a construction zone saying, “I hope it stays like this forever.” As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:18, “We do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” The last phase for the believer is “with the Lord forever.” (1 Thessalonians 4:17, NIV)

7. We quickly forget the construction took place.

When driving on a smooth road, how quickly we forget the work, time, delays, pain, and frustration that went into making the road what it is. In our lives, how rarely we recall the work God has done to mold our character, opportunities, and talents. Take a moment to thank God for His patient work in your life and in the lives of those around you.

One day we will be able to echo the epitaph displayed on Ruth Graham’s gravestone: “End of construction. Thank you for your patience.” ■

Nate Bramsen serves in Other Overseas Service (MPH Day 28).

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FRONT COVER: The Salzach Valley in Austria—Raitis Cukurs

BACK COVER: Amazon Rain Forest, Ecuador—©iStockPhoto.com/SL_Photography





The Hills Are Alive

CALLED TO SERVE IN AUSTRIA

BY MICHAEL & MARTINA POTTS

“The hills are alive with the sound of music.” For many of us, this sentence brings to mind the opening scene of the film *The Sound of Music*. With arms outstretched and spinning circles, Maria (Julie Andrews), the central character, sings amid a stunning alpine panorama perhaps the most famous first line of a movie. If you can imagine this scene, you will have an excellent picture of our magnificent local landscape in the Salzach Valley in Pinzgau, Salzburg.

Our region

The province of Salzburg connects east and west Austria, and our town, Mittersill, is located in Pinzgau, the largest district in Salzburg, at a significant European north-south crossing point. Because of this, historically, Mittersill has been a meeting place for tradespeople and travelers from around Europe. The Salzach valley has the highest mountains and the narrowest valleys in our province and a strong local dialect.

Pinzgau’s spiritual climate, as in much of Europe, is Christian and post-Christian. There is a widespread remnant of cultural Christianity. Although 61 percent of the population are members of the Roman Catholic Church, the majority live their lives with a post-Christian worldview, believing the Bible to be outdated and irrelevant.

A survey conducted a few years ago by the *Salzburger Nachrichten*, the most respected newspaper in the province, indicated that more than half of registered Catholics in Salzburg do not believe in God. This nominal Christianity has inoculated people against the Gospel; they think they have already tried Christianity, and it has failed them. Our valley is one of the three in Austria with the fewest Christians. Including Catholics, Christians evidencing a living faith comprise less than 0.01 percent of the population.

Above: The Salzach Valley, where the Potts serve, is filled with breathtaking sights. (Photo by Raitis Cukurs)



Winter Psalm¹

It's not yet time for reaping.
It's not yet time for sowing.
It has been given to us, in a wintry time,
to gather closely around the fire
and tend the frozen earth in
patient faithfulness.
Others have sown before us;
others will reap after us.
It is our task, in the cold and dark,
to stay with one another and,
while it is snowing,
steadfastly to hold out hope.
This is what we have been given to do
in a wintry time.

A faith heritage

Pinzgau has enjoyed a rich Christian heritage. Initially reached with the Gospel through Roman soldiers between the second and third centuries, Pinzgau experienced a revival as a result of the Reformation from the mid-sixteenth to the late eighteenth century. As copies of the German Bible and Reformation literature made their way through trade routes into Pinzgau, people began embracing living faith.

When Rome's influence was in decline, people in every town—in some, as many as 90 percent of the population—began meeting, often daily, to read the Bible, pray, and worship. As this practice was forbidden without the presence of a priest, they petitioned Rome for permission to do three things: read the Scriptures in German, share Communion without a priest, and drink wine as part of the Communion celebration.

The Great Emigration

What happened next is perhaps a key to understanding the present spiritual hardness of this area. Rome refused the petitioners' requests, and as part of the Great Emigration between November 1731 and March 1732, 16,288 Christians who refused to recant were stripped of their farms and possessions and sent to Prussia for their "crimes." Due to a harsh winter, more than half of them died while traveling.

Since then, upper Pinzgau has had virtually no living witness for Christ. To our knowledge, the district has only two established evangelical churches: ours in Mittersill and another in Utendorf, a town about four miles east of us. Most are without "hope and without God in the world." (Ephesians 2:12) This reality is evidenced by the fact that the suicide rate in Pinzgau is 70 percent higher than the national average.

Believing friends who grew up in Pinzgau and whose parents are from the area shared the following poem, written by a German priest, to describe how they have experienced life and ministry here:

A foundation of prayer

What does one do in such a "wintry time"? Besides waiting and holding on to hope, one learns to pray. Michael and the leaders of the two churches in upper Pinzgau meet every day to pray for it to "thaw." We pray daily for conversions, for blessing on our valley, and for the Lord to send workers into the harvest and reveal how we should be working.

As one result of our prayers, the Lord sent us Raitis and Gita, from Lithuania. Raitis is a talented choir director, who led one of Lithuania's top choirs, and a believer who wants to use his gifts for God's glory. Raitis and Gita moved to Mittersill for a vocational change, but we didn't meet them until more than a year later. However, we quickly decided to form a choir that would seek excellence and exclusively sing spiritual music to God's glory.

Gospelchor Mittersill

What does this have to do with *The Sound of Music*? What we failed to realize is how compelling music and singing are to the Austrian soul. Out of all European countries, Austria ranks second in the number of choirs per capita after Lithuania. And, of course, Austria was the home of musical greats Mozart, Schubert, Strauss, and Schönberg, to name a few. The term "gospel choir" is well known and liked in Austria, so we decided to call ourselves Gospelchor Mittersill.

Until founding the choir six years ago, we had done everything one typically does in a rural pioneering mission setting: evangelistic Bible studies, friendship evangelism, local service, prayer, Sunday meetings, and believers' Bible studies. What was missing was a platform to spread the seed widely in a way that would not alienate our friends and neighbors, for whom anything not intrinsic to their culture is highly suspect. The gospel choir is what we had been looking for.

The choir has performed more than 70 times in the past six years, mostly within a radius of 62 miles—the same area where

so many believers had once been forced to leave their land. Gospelchor Mittersill performs full-length concerts but also in special church services, such as Easter and Thanksgiving. We sing American gospel music, contemporary worship songs, and original compositions and arrangements.

It is incredible how people will more willingly accept a message that is sung than if someone simply told them. A neighbor, who is not a believer, frequently tells me how much she loves the choir. She attends every concert she can, even though the words to our songs contradict her beliefs.

Usually, the choir has between 25 and 35 members. Since Raitis is an excellent choir director, gifted singers and musicians want to work with us. Fewer than half are believers, and we see this as a fantastic opportunity. They are our first line of ministry. We pray and read Scripture before every practice and regularly give testimony.

Our pianist, a young man from Mittersill, recently gave his life to Christ. Two years ago, a member asked me (Michael) to perform her mountaintop wedding. She had married in civil court a year earlier, but because of her newly found faith, she said a wedding before God was more important to her than her legally binding civil ceremony.

A year and a half ago, some members of the choir formed a worship band, and they meet regularly to practice and perform original songs that Michael and Raitis wrote. Two members of this group are not yet believers, but they are on their way. Our music is available on our YouTube channels, Chospelchor Mittersill and MyChoice.Worship. Michael is starting another YouTube channel, Sandbox Worship Piano, with videos that teach people how to improve their worship piano skills.

His song in our hearts

We are thankful that God is using the choir and music to encourage us and allow us to spread widely the good news of Jesus Christ in a way that people who desperately need it can understand. Pray that the seeds that have been planted will bear fruit and that our choir members who are not yet believers will come to faith in Christ and fellowship with us. Pray for revival in the Salzach Valley, that its people will know the Lord's song in their hearts. ■



Opposite page: Michael performs a choir member's mountaintop wedding.

This page (from top): Gospelchor Mittersill's choir director, Raitis, uses his talents to serve the Lord; Choir members practice for a performance. The choir performs in a variety of locations, including churches.



Michael and Martina Potts are commended from University Chapel in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

¹ Lothar Zenetti, *In Seiner Nähe: Texte des Vertrauens* (Ostfildern, Germany: Matthias Grünewald Verlag, 2012), 16. Translated from German by Michael Potts.

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Education in the South Pacific

AN UPDATE ON THE FIJI DEAF MINISTRY

BY JAMES & MARILYN COONEY



Across Fiji and the South Pacific, people who are deaf are often marginalized and deprived of an education. Fiji Deaf Ministry's mission is to find them, give them an education and a community, and teach them about God's love. The ministry includes Gospel School for the Deaf (GSD), Christian Fellowship for the Deaf, and a Fiji Sign Language Bible team.

NEW LEADERSHIP AND GROWTH

In February 2019, we stepped down after 19 years of serving as Fiji Deaf Ministry's ministry director and curriculum director. While we are no longer involved in the day-to-day activities, Jim still serves as a trustee. Soon after, we welcomed the new director and his wife, Russell and Sue Neate, from Christchurch, New Zealand.

For several years, Russell has served as an active trustee for the Fiji Deaf Ministry. He is a teacher, preacher, and now, an elder at Suva Street Assembly in Suva, Fiji. Sue has helped train the office workers and is a spiritual mentor to the hostel staff.



When we started working with the Fiji Deaf Ministry, it had only one hostel and 21 students. Now, we have three hostel buildings, an apartment for the director and his wife, and a teachers' residence. The hostels house 41 children. The caretakers have more than 100 years of combined experience with the hostels.

God also blessed us with new projects and a new faculty member. Russell, Sue, and the hostel staff created a Hostel Market Day to support the ministry. The students grew a vegetable garden and sold the produce. They achieved their goal and will use the profits to build a covered walkway at the hostel. Our newest teacher, Bola, is a deaf man from Nigeria, and he will be with us for at least three years.





Opposite page (from top): GSD students celebrate the semester's end; In 2019, Russell and Sue Neate began leading the Fiji Deaf Ministry; Several students tend to a vegetable garden. **This page above (from left):** Forty-one children live in the ministry's hostel buildings; GSD helps deaf students achieve bright futures. **This page below (from top):** Children at the school become family to each other, learning, playing, and growing together; Children thrive spiritually, educationally, and socially in GSD's caring atmosphere; A team of Fijians and Americans are translating the Bible into Fiji Sign Language.



DEAF EDUCATION IN VANUATU

Some 500 miles west lies a chain of islands known as Vanuatu. In 2018, while visiting Vanuatu, one of our trustees met a deaf boy named Michael and arranged for him to travel to Fiji with his teacher, Edikiel. GSD partnered with Michael's school and agreed to train Edikiel in sign language and deaf teaching methods.

In 2020, Michael returned with Edikiel and three boys, ages 7 to 13, who had not received much education before coming to GSD. They learned sign language quickly, and the boys have advanced educationally, spiritually, and personally in the school and hostel's caring community. In December 2020, they returned to their families in Vanuatu. The students and Edikiel will not return to Fiji this year. Instead, the Vanuatu school will start its own deaf education program. At least five more deaf students will join Michael and the three other boys. We will continue to assist them.

DEAF MINISTRY IN KIRIBATI

In the independent republic of Kiribati, a high percentage of people are deaf. More than 20 deaf children have come to Fiji to attend GSD. Most have completed their educations, returned to their home country, and now contribute to Kiribati's deaf community. One GSD and Gospel High School graduate, Iotebwa, established and leads the Kiribati Deaf Association. Iacabo, Temoua, and Raken are teachers working with young deaf students. We hope to eventually start a deaf Bible study there; meanwhile, we send Bibles to the deaf people who request them.

PRAYER REQUESTS

Recently, as part of Fiji Deaf Ministry's partnership with Wycliffe Associates, nine Fijian deaf Christians and three American deaf Christians gathered in Fiji to translate Mark into Fiji Sign Language. Using a 12-step process, they summarized a passage, recorded their summary, critiqued each other, and then created a final video. They completed the project in two weeks. The process was not easy, but they persevered in their work. Now, the challenge is to continue translating the entire Bible into a Fiji Sign Language video and to train other Fijian deaf Christians to do the work.

Please pray for this project, for the new deaf program in Vanuatu, and for a deaf Bible study in Kiribati. Pray, too, for the many more unschooled deaf in Fiji and across the South Pacific. May the Lord protect them and bring them to us.

We also appreciate your prayers for spiritual growth among our young adults, for spiritual maturity and leadership in the Christian Fellowship for the Deaf, and for continued prayer and financial support so that we never need to turn away a student. ■

James and Marilyn Cooney are commended from Bethany Gospel Chapel in Swansea, Massachusetts.



Ask a Missionary

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

QUESTION: What verses encourage you while on the field and why?

OTHER OVERSEAS SERVICE

Paul Howland



In 1 Samuel 30:6, we read, “David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.” David was alone. Since my wife, Faith, went home to be with the Lord more than eight years ago, the Lord and I can face anything. The personal relationship with the Lord gives me strength. 1 Thessalonians 2:2 (ESV) says, “We had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.” Others may not like what we have to offer. It’s good to know the Lord does! Many more verses, like Joshua 1:9, keep me going in the mission the Lord has given me. Thank you, Lord!

OTHER OVERSEAS SERVICE

Mark Swaim



Psalm 107:23–24: “Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do business on great waters, they see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep.” When we launch out into the deep, away from the support that the shoreline can bring, we are forced to rely on the Lord, and often, we enjoy the wonders of His faithfulness. Daniel 2:22: “He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with Him.” The way forward is often unseen. Yet the Lord knows our futures, which seem so dark to us. He lights the way. We must stay close to Him. These verses bless us in our service for the Lord.

FRANCE

Maureen Crow



Philippians 4:19 says, “My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” Several times since I’ve been working as a missionary in France, I found myself with bills to pay and a shortage of money. I remember crying out to the Lord and leaning on this promise and others regarding God’s provision for His children. He provided, and I rejoiced and thanked Him.

OTHER OVERSEAS SERVICE

Karl Peterson



“And surely I am with you always.” (Matthew 28:20, NIV) On one of my exploratory trips to Mozambique in 1992, I realized how difficult a mission field I was preparing for: extreme poverty, recent civil war, harsh climate. One night in bed, when the realization was pounding in my head, the Lord reminded me of this promise. What a comfort to me then and to us all!

SOUTH KOREA

Douglas Neiswender



Psalm 73:25–26 (KJV) says: “Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever.” As I get older (I’m 82 now), I pray this “prayer” often, knowing my weakness and need of the Lord. It encourages me knowing that He is my all, the strength of my heart, and my portion forever!

PERU

Pablo Cenepo-Torres



Matthew 16:18 (NIV) says: “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” No matter where we are and what we do, our commitment ought to be expanding and equipping the church. Christ gave His life for it. Anyone who commits to it has the assurance of God’s approval and ultimate victory. No matter how dark the horizon looks, I am on the winning side!

GREECE

Margaret DeHart



Ephesians 2:10 (NLT) encourages me: "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago." I was first drawn to the part about the good things God has prepared for us to do, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, when there seems to be more waiting than working. These days, the Lord is teaching me to refocus on the fact that He is sovereign and that He created us. He knows us intimately and personally. The greatest commandment is to love Him and to nurture a closer relationship with Him. The good works will flow from that relationship.

PARAGUAY

Robin Wagar



"But I said, 'I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my right is with the Lord, and my recompense with my God.'" (Isaiah 49:4, ESV) It is easy to become discouraged when I don't see the response to my efforts that I want to see. God reminds me that He sees the big picture, so I can't stop serving just because I don't see the point. To me, it might seem that I'm ineffective, but if I'm following God's leading, then I can relax and leave the results to Him. That's very liberating! Plus, He recognizes and acknowledges my service even if others don't. He will reward my efforts when and how He chooses. That's amazing!

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

June 4-11, 2021

CMML100 MSC

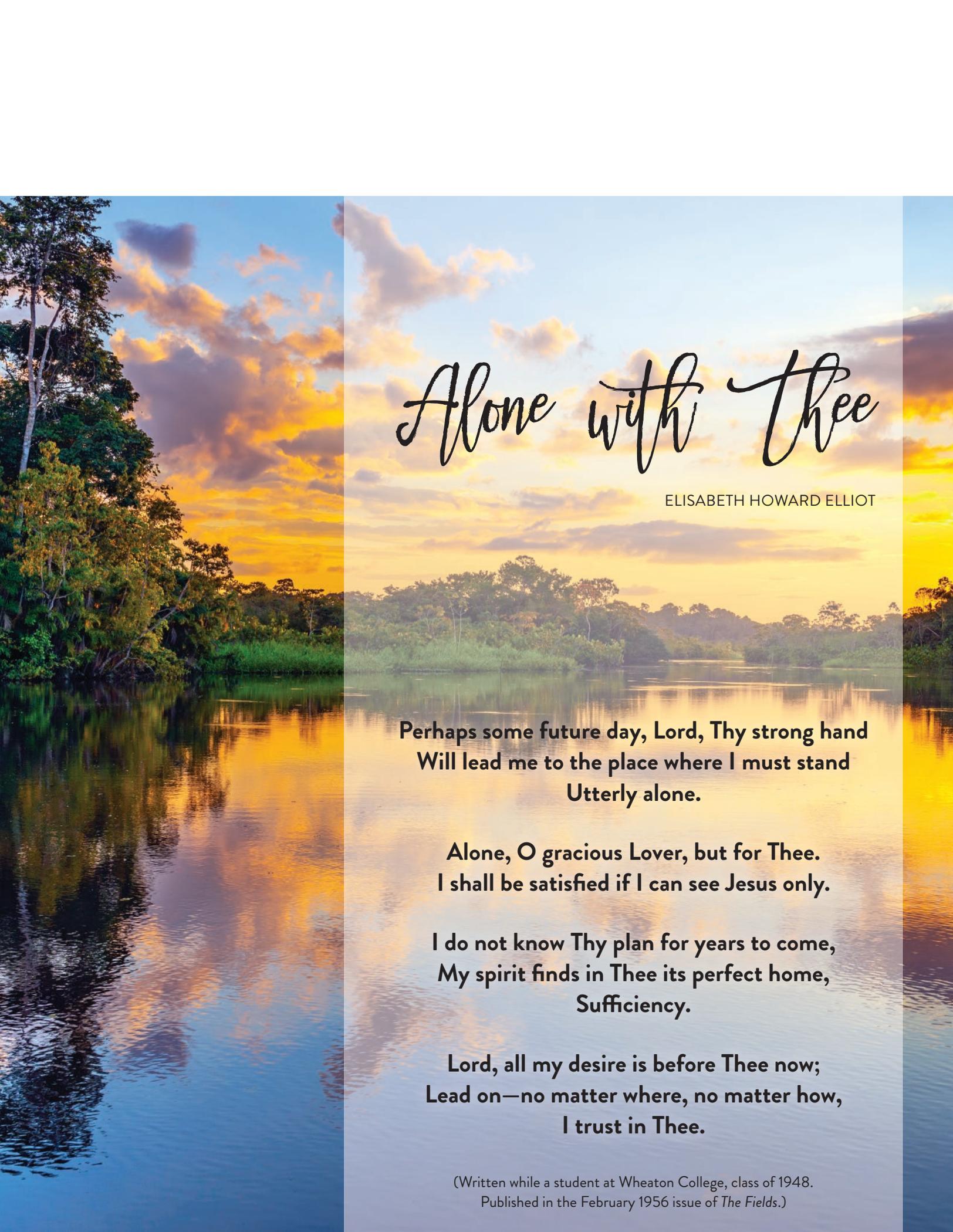
M O P

Missionary Orientation Program

Helping prepare those considering missions to be effective on the mission field.

The graphic is a white rectangular card with a red border and a red and white striped bottom edge. It features a globe with a red airplane flying over it, and the letters 'M O P' in large, blue, textured font. The text 'Missionary Orientation Program' is written below the letters. The date 'June 4-11, 2021' is written vertically on the left side. The logos for 'CMML100' and 'MSC' (with a maple leaf) are in the top right corner. A tagline at the bottom reads 'Helping prepare those considering missions to be effective on the mission field.'

Visit www.cmml.us/mop for more information and to register.



Alone with Thee

ELISABETH HOWARD ELLIOT

Perhaps some future day, Lord, Thy strong hand
Will lead me to the place where I must stand
Utterly alone.

Alone, O gracious Lover, but for Thee.
I shall be satisfied if I can see Jesus only.

I do not know Thy plan for years to come,
My spirit finds in Thee its perfect home,
Sufficiency.

Lord, all my desire is before Thee now;
Lead on—no matter where, no matter how,
I trust in Thee.

(Written while a student at Wheaton College, class of 1948.
Published in the February 1956 issue of *The Fields*.)