

# Missions

## ASIA

A Time of Renewal

**South America**  
Helping Venezuelan  
Refugees Find Hope

**Dominican Republic**  
God Changes Lives  
through Education

**Bolivia**  
A Novel Way to  
Share the Gospel



# Thinking It Through

BY KEITH R. KEYSER

## The Heart-Expanding Worldwide Gospel

Unless a dramatic event like a natural disaster or war occurs, your average person seldom thinks about far-flung regions of the world. Why should an Iowa farmer care about Bolivia? What connection do eastern European nations have with coffee-drinking hipsters in Seattle? For unbelievers the answer is “probably not much”—the worldwide economy notwithstanding! By contrast, believers regularly concern themselves with global disciple-making. Otherwise unconnected places and people are linked through the building of Christ’s church. Paul’s letters manifest the Christian heart that concerns itself with different areas for the sake of evangelism, edification, and mutual encouragement.

### A future perspective of others

First Thessalonians displays this global perspective: “But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire. For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy.”<sup>1</sup> Why should a Jew raised in Turkey care about Greeks? The answer is because they were won to Christ through his efforts. Paul envisioned the future day when he arrives at the Lord’s judgment seat, and the Thessalonian believers are present, representing the fruit of his spiritual service.

Like Paul’s ministry toward them, God uses our actions to edify others who will eventually stand before Him in glory. Imagine what it would do for relationships among saints if we viewed each other this way! As Chapman puts it: “If we would so love all saints as to please God, we must bear in mind that their names are written in heaven and on Christ’s heart; otherwise we shall love some because they are lovely, and dislike others because of their blemishes.”<sup>2</sup> Such a perspective will motivate us to serve our fellow saints in the homeland and on foreign fields.

### Loving strangers

Someone may argue, “Of course Paul feels that way about

his own converts! They are his spiritual children. What about believers whom he has never met?” Romans furnishes an excellent answer: “I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established—that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles.”<sup>3</sup> Though personally unknown to him, he earnestly desired to minister to these Roman strangers, who were now his brothers and sisters. Like Paul, modern believers faithfully pray, give, and go to develop God’s work internationally. Accordingly, supplication is regularly made for places like Nyankunde (DR Congo), Chavuma (Zambia), Ica (Peru), and countless other sites by western saints who will probably never visit them.

### Open hearts for an international family

The church is a large, varied family, composed of redeemed people from every racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic group. As F. F. Bruce wrote: “Diversity, not uniformity, is the mark of God’s handiwork. It is so in nature; it is equally so in grace, and nowhere more so than in the Christian community. Here are many men and women with the most diverse kinds of parentage, environment, temperament, and capacity. Not only so, but since they became Christians they have been endowed by God with a wide variety of spiritual gifts as well. Yet because and by means of that diversity, all can cooperate for the good of the whole.”<sup>4</sup>

In keeping with God’s love for all people everywhere, we love the entire planet, seeking to help His people in every nation. We look forward to being united with all the saints in God’s glorious future reign.<sup>5</sup> ■

*Keith Keyser is a commended worker based in Pennsylvania.*

<sup>1</sup> 1 Thessalonians 2:17, 19–20; <sup>2</sup> Robert Cleaver Chapman, *Choice Sayings*. (London: Morgan & Scott, 1883), 128; <sup>3</sup> Romans 1:9–13; <sup>4</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Romans*. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1985), 225; <sup>5</sup> Revelation 21 and 22.

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COVER PHOTO: Bajau community in Davao City, Philippines—Philip Parsons





“I Was a Stranger and You Took Me In”

# HELPING VENEZUELAN REFUGEES FIND HOPE

Jesus taught His disciples that when we give practical help to those in need, it is as if we are directly helping the Lord Himself. Matthew 25:34–36, 40 says, “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me. . . . Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.”

Today, Christians in South America are following this teach-

ing by reaching out to Venezuelan refugees in need. Venezuela has undergone great turmoil. Hyperinflation has made their currency practically worthless. Food is rationed. Employment is difficult to find. Daily life has become desperate. With few options left, many people make the difficult decision to leave their homes and find a new life in a different country. When they arrive, sometimes with just the clothes on their backs, they often have no job, place to stay, or friends to look out for them. That is when the Lord’s people step in. The following are a few ways that CMML and MSC missionaries are partnering with local believers to help Venezuelans.

## Dennis & Gloria Hanna CHILE

We, along with most of the workers in Chile, have been involved this year with the arrival of many believers from Venezuela. More than 150 Venezuelan Brethren believers have immigrated to Chile and are settling into new lives, fleeing from the terrible political and economic woes of their country, and more are coming all the time. They have settled in different areas—Chile, and they are spread around most of the 52 assemblies from the north to the south of the country. More than 40 Venezuelans are in fellowship in one of the Santiago assemblies. The Chilean Christians have received them into the assemblies; we spend many hours helping them find suitable accommodations, accompanying them to do paperwork for their immigrant visas, pursuing possible job openings, and assisting them in many other areas, so that their transition won’t be as traumatic. Please pray for these families that they will be a blessing to the assemblies here, many of which are small and struggling.

The first week in January 2018, a 36-year-old Venezuelan brother, Carlos, arrived at our house and continued to live with us in Los Angeles, Chile, until August. We then adapted a room



for him in the second floor of the chapel, and he is now living there. He is quite happy and grateful for this arrangement. He found work in town and is slowly getting back on his feet.

In July, a couple arrived at our house to look for employment in our area. They are in their late 30s and have no children. Both of them lost their jobs in Venezuela and, out of extreme need to survive, left their country, assembly, and home.

In November, another couple wrote to us, wanting to come to Chile. They have two daughters, who are 12 and six years old. They did not have enough money to cover travel costs and asked if an assembly in our area would support them in this way. Also, a couple and their two daughters from Venezuela, all of whom are in Peru and are having a hard time, wrote with a desire to come to this area. So Venezuelans keep coming, and it’s a burden for us here to know how best to help them.

**Top:** Venezuela—©iStockPhoto.com/fcolella. **Middle (L-R):** The Hannas seek God’s wisdom in how to meet the many, growing needs of the Venezuelan refugees in Chile; The assemblies in Chile are expanding rapidly as more and more Venezuelan believers join the congregations.

## David & Ruth Ann Rodgers CHILE

Since August 2017, we have received six families from Venezuela. We have provided temporary homes for them with ourselves and other Christian families and will do so until they are able to complete their paperwork toward residency and procure suitable employment. Some are still in the process of formalizing their visas and bringing over other immediate family members, including spouses and children. They are all integrated into the local assemblies and participating in service and worship. We have also been able to send aid back to needy family members in Venezuela through their contacts. The refugees have suffered considerably with the cold winters here.

## Bayardo & Melissa Arroyo ECUADOR

In recent years, a new area of ministry for us in Ecuador has been to help and support Venezuelan refugees. We show these individuals and families hospitality in our home and at Maranata church, where, so far, two families have lived for a short time until they are able to get on their feet economically. When they find long-term housing, we help the refugees set up house in their new country by collecting household items, clothing, and food for them. We also help them get medical help, give them work opportunities as the Lord provides, or assist them to find jobs or start businesses. Another focus of our ministry to these refugees is offering counseling and discipleship, as well as holding Bible studies.

M. and D. are refugees that attended Maranata church. While they were in Ecuador, we did a Bible study and some counseling with them, and we were able to give them part-time employment. D. came to know the Lord during that time. They moved on to Peru after being here for about a year.

A couple, D. and E., come from very rough backgrounds and were heavily involved in gangs, drugs, violence, and witchcraft. They both came to know the Lord while studying the Bible with us. They have since moved to Peru and are attending a Bible-believing church and growing spiritually. We are in regular contact with them.

Currently, we are studying with M. and D., another Venezuelan couple. The Holy Spirit is working strongly in their lives. One Venezuelan woman, M., is a strong believer, faithfully attends Maranata, and is very involved in the ministry there. She has a heart for evangelism, especially among other Venezuelans.

E. and Y. and their son, L., stayed with us for a week while they were recuperating from their horrific trip from Venezuela. After living at Maranata for a few months, they have moved on and we pray that their relationship with Christ will deepen as they settle in a new country.



**From top:** By helping to meet M. and D.'s physical needs, the Arroyos were also able to share the Gospel with them; The Arroyos reach the Venezuelan refugees in their area through Bible studies and counseling, as well as practical help; The refugees' needs include housing, which the Arroyos were able to provide for E. and Y.'s family.



## David & Renee Easter COLOMBIA

We are involved in a growing ministry through the local church fellowship. We have a weekly Bible study in our home with between 15 and 20 Venezuelans. We are currently involved with about 30 Venezuelans as they struggle to bring their spouses and families into the country of Colombia, find work, and adjust to living in a different culture that, many times, takes advantage of them. They earn typically 60 percent of what a Colombian would earn in the same job and do so gladly. A number of our Venezuelan friends live close to us, and many come daily to our house. We offer counseling, food, transportation, and medical assistance. Venezuelan families will stay at our house during our furlough. We've rented an apartment for others near our house, and we hope to rent another house for married couples next year.

**Clockwise from top:** Each week, Venezuelan refugees gather for fellowship and Bible study with the Easters; The local assembly also opens its doors to the many refugees, helping them with spiritual and practical needs; David Easter disciples several young Venezuelan men, such as these two.



## Sam Killins COLOMBIA

In Bogota, I've had the privilege of connecting with a lot of Venezuelan immigrants, and on Sundays, one of our services hosts about 40 Venezuelan men and women who are trying to figure out life in Colombia. After our meeting, we give out free lunches to many of our friends, and with whatever is left over we go out into the streets searching for more immigrants who are eager to receive the warm meals.

Of the Venezuelans who attend our church, I've been able to host two families with children in my apartment for more than a month at a time as they get on their feet and find long-term housing solutions. For the past several months, I've also been traveling to and trying to start a church in Cúcuta, Colombia's border city with Venezuela.

After meeting various immigrants on the streets and being invited into the crowded homes where they live, I started a Bible study where we've had more than 50 Venezuelans in attendance. On a few occasions, we've shared meals together, but the main thing I want to do is share the Gospel. I want to share it in such a way that my friends can clearly understand it and sincerely accept it. Some have accepted it, and many have gone on to other cities or countries in hopes of finding better opportunities while, along the way, they sing some of the gospel songs that I've taught them. Please pray that my friends would cling to Jesus and grow in Him.

Recently, I connected with a group of immigrant street musicians, and we've been singing together on the streets to the people in cars who give my friends a few coins in return. It's kind of fun to be honest, though sad at the same time, and I think that showing my friends that I care about them and that I identify with them is what makes the Gospel that much more powerful. ■



**From top:** On Sundays, Sam and the church give warm meals to hungry refugees; Sam bonds with a group of Venezuelans over their shared love of music.

# A TIME OF RENEWAL

## Visiting the Asia Workers Retreat and the Philippines

BY PHILIP & MARY PARSONS

Years ago, in an effort to encourage workers who labor for the Lord in tension-filled regions throughout Asia, the assembly missionary service organizations agreed to treat them to a retreat. The first such retreat was held in Hong Kong, and Sheldon and Nisa Crutchfield (MPH Day 7) were the key organizers. With this, they began what has become an event that is convened every four or five years.

From October 1 to 5, 2018, a total of 47 workers from many regions of Asia gathered in Thailand for this retreat, and we, the Parsons, were among those gathered. Thailand has been the country of choice for the last four retreats because it is a convenient destination and is budget friendly for both food and accommodations. This year, Echoes International (UK) took the lead in organizing the retreat with input provided by CMML and MSC Canada. From year to year, the retreat's purpose remains unchanged: encourage cross-cultural workers who cope with extraordinary hardships by providing an opportunity for refreshment, fellowship, and networking.

### Refreshing the spirit

Each morning of the conference, following breakfast, teams formed to pray for countries in Asia. Those in attendance were asked to provide specific prayer points and then the groups spent time praying for those needs. Each evening, some workers were invited to give more detailed reports of their ministry. Some were interviewed, while others used audiovisual means to describe their work. It was encouraging to hear and see what God is doing in countries where little is known about the spread of the Gospel and the growth of the church.

Graham Poland, a former MK from South America, provided a daily study from God's Word and chose selections from the "Songs of Ascents," or Psalms 120–134. While history reveals these songs were sung as worshippers ascended the hill toward Jerusalem for special festivals, they served to remind us of powerful truths like God's presence in times of distress and the joy that follows when things are done God's way. Each day ended with a short devotional given by invited workers.

### Restoring the body

Afternoons were purposely unscheduled to give freedom for families to enjoy the area's amenities, like swimming, shopping, and sightseeing. For others, an afternoon nap or a leisurely walk on the retreat center's premises naturally followed tasty lunch-time meals. Many availed themselves of opportunities to network and seek advice for solving common problems encountered on the field.

### Strengthening the mind

Each morning, specialized topics were presented in seminar and workshop formats. Topics like maintaining spiritual vitality, risk and security, communication and accountability, and the challenges of missions were led by representatives of the three mission service groups. Often, times of fellowship were characterized by further discussion of these and other topics. Dr. Paul Rabideau, one of the workshop presenters, highlighted the reality of burnout. Interest was piqued, so Paul convened an additional session for those desiring to know more about burnout and how to avoid it.



Clockwise from top left: Phil and Marilyn Barnes of MSC shared with the conference attendees; Workers benefited from Paul Rabideau's sessions on preventing burnout; Workers from around Asia enjoyed a week to recharge in a beautiful surrounding; Attendees, such as Rupert and Dan, enjoyed getting to know each other better.



**Top (L-R):** David and Ruth Harvey; Phil and Mary Parsons with Stephen and Dorothy St. Clair; Phil and Mary at Faith Academy; Todd and Miriam Eichenauer; **Below:** Daniel Minnella.

## Revisiting the Philippines

Following our time at the Asia Workers Retreat, we, Mary and Phil, decided to make a visit to the Philippines. Due to having served in the Philippines for 20 years (1985–2006), we wanted to reconnect with former coworkers and meet a few new workers. Veteran workers David and Ruth Harvey (MPH Day 8) in Manila and Stephen and Dorothy St. Clair (MPH Day 9) in Davao City continue to serve faithfully in their respective ministries. Both couples raised families in the Philippines and have served for more than 50 years. One of the ministries occupying the Harveys' time is the four Christian primary schools they have started. Schools and education have shown to be one of the most effective evangelistic tools for reaching families with the Gospel.

Before relocating to Davao City, Steve and Dottie St. Clair began their tenure in the Philippines with Literature Crusades. Their involvement led them to Faith Academy, a school for the children of missionaries, where they served as boarding home parents, and Steve taught in the middle school. Now, in Davao City, Steve teaches and coaches at Faith International Academy while Dottie never misses an opportunity to share the Gospel or help young men and women grow in their walks with the Lord.

Todd and Miriam Eichenauer (MPH Day 8) and Larry and Kim Keating (MPH Day 8) are also engaged in the ministry at Faith Academy. The school faced a serious teacher shortage this year. Miriam is helping in the middle school, and Kim is helping in the elementary school.

## Meeting new workers

Some years ago while on a furlough, Steve and Dottie met a young man, Daniel Minnella (MPH Day 9), who showed unusual interest in their work. This interest only grew over time, and a few years ago, Daniel was invited to scope out opportunities for possible missionary service in the Philippines. Committing this to the Lord in prayer, Daniel took a step of faith and spent time with the St. Clairs in Davao City. That trip expanded into a full-time ministry.

Commended by Marble Hill Bible Chapel in Missouri in 2017,

Daniel's heart was drawn to a people group known as the Sama Bajau. These "sea gypsies" make their living off the sea. Some are boat dwellers while others live in homes built on stilts over the water. Daniel's living among the Sama Bajau and learning their language have cultivated trust and given him an open door to share the Gospel with them. He also has been of invaluable help to the St. Clairs and has ministries with the youth among the assemblies in Davao City.



Emil and Doreen Kwick (MPH Day 8), formerly workers in Austria, have been in the Philippines for three years. Evangelism and discipleship are their primary focuses, and they are enhanced by Emil's teaching woodworking and Doreen's prenatal care in a nearby squatter community.



**Right (from top):** The Bajau live in houses built on stilts; A Bajau mother and her children.



**Left (from top):** Phil enjoyed visiting a Bajau community Bible study; Davao youth conference attendees benefited from a wide selection of literature; **Right:** A 5 a.m. Bible study in Davao allows people to study God's Word before their day starts.



## Praying for Asia

More than four billion people live in Asia, and the need to evangelize remains a great task. Your prayers for workers serving on this continent are vital. Resistance to the Gospel, natural calamities, isolation, and loneliness are some of the struggles workers constantly face. Retreats and visits are a great help and encouragement to the workers, but they can only achieve what God does through the fervent prayer of His people. They are counting on us! Will you pray? ■



*Philip and Mary Parsons work together in CMML's assembly relations and missionary care program.*



# Home with the Lord

## Kenneth Sheldon Brooks

May 1, 1926 – October 10, 2018 • Missionary to the Philippines

Dad was born to missionary parents, Cyril and Anna (Carson) Brooks, on May 1, 1926, in Manila, Philippines. He grew up as the second of three children, attended school in the Philippines and high school in Buffalo, New York, after WWII. As a young boy, Dad realized his need for salvation and accepted Jesus as his Savior. The Brooks family was living in the Philippines during WWII and was interned by the Japanese in a prisoner of war camp, from which they were later rescued. Dad rededicated his life to the Lord at Buffalo Bible Conference in 1945.

In 1948, he married Elaine Goldia Peterson. They attended Emmaus Bible School in Toronto, Ontario. Dad and Mom served as missionaries in the Philippines from 1952 until they refocused in 1994 to Florida, where Dad ministered in many assemblies and served as a teacher at Hampden DuBose Academy in Mount Dora, Florida. Dad's ministry included preaching, teaching, church planting, leading Christian Service Brigade boys' club, and ministering at Christian camps both in the Philippines and in the US.

Dad is survived by his wife, Elaine (MPH Day 9); his son, Dale; his daughters Beverly Smits, Joyce Hardisty (MPH Day 9), and Marilyn Cole; and his 15 grandchildren and 22 great-grandchildren. He is preceded in death by his daughter Sandra; his parents, Cyril and Anna; his brother, Leonard; his sister, Rose; and two great-grandchildren.

One of our strongest memories of Dad is him on his knees in the mornings either in our living room or in his office. In his final wishes that he wrote a few years ago, Dad was adamant that there not be a long eulogy glorifying him—"give God the glory," he said.

Two of his grandchildren recently shared comments that together captured the essence of Dad's life and ministry. Dale's

daughter Diane said: "My earliest memories are of a man with a ready laugh and mischief dancing in his eyes. I remember the passion in his voice while sharing a message from the Lord at the pulpit. I remember the stories about their time in the Philippines, the way his eyes would light up in the telling and the random Filipino phrases that would pop out and delight my ears in their beauty. But most of all, I remember listening for hours while he and my dad discussed what they both loved so dearly: the Lord and His Word. In many ways, I didn't know my grandfather well but for the best possible reason. He loved his Lord and the Filipino people passionately and longed for every one of them to know the Lord and love Him as well. And so he lived most of his life there, serving both."

Tony Blish, Beverly's son-in-law, also shared: "It's hard to mourn the passing of a man who loved the Lord his God with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his mind and with all his strength and dedicated his life to serving Him. It's hard because we know that there is a celebration going on in heaven at his homecoming. And yet we are saddened by the hole left in our lives at his departure. He had an inner glow that I can only attribute to that joy that surpasses the understanding that comes from the blessed assurance of salvation through Christ Jesus. And he did have a secret to tell: the story of the love of Christ and His plan for salvation. He spent his life dedicated to making that secret known to all. Ken Brooks will surely be missed. He leaves behind a legacy of loving and serving the Lord like few men whom I have known or will know in this life. I'm blessed to have known him and to have him as an example of what it means to be a man after God's own heart."



DALE BROOKS



# THE CHILDREN NOW HAVE DREAMS

God Changes Lives through  
Education

BY SHARYN BRANSON

When God sent us to the Dominican Republic more than 22 years ago, one thing that we noticed was that children there did not have dreams. We would ask the kids what they wanted to be when they grew up, and they would give us blank looks, indicating they had no idea what we were asking. Through the years of living and ministering in the Dominican Republic, we learned that many of the people do not think much into the future. If they are born into poverty, they will die in poverty—that is the mentality. This mindset made us very sad, and we prayed that God would use us to change it while reaching the people with the Gospel.

## Our ministry's roots

God was working in a village called Pedregal when we arrived in the Dominican Republic, and He called us to come alongside Him and minister to the local people. One of our desires was to help the children of Pedregal find dreams. But we weren't sure how to start doing this. Thankfully, though, we did not have to because God did! And He chose to use us in many ways to accomplish His goals then and now still.

God quickly showed us that education is one key way that a child born into poverty can have his or her future changed. And when one child's future is changed, an entire family's future is changed. But developing relationships with the local people was, and still is, an essential first step before they would earnestly listen to what we had to share. As we got to know those in the village, relationships grew, and as they grew, we were able to point the people to Christ and assist them with their practical needs.

## Anny's dream

One of our early relationships was with a family who lived right across the street from our clinic. The family was headed by a grandfather who drank all the time and a grandmother who was tired yet raising several grandchildren whose parents abandoned them. One of these grandchildren, Anny, started to hang out at our clinic, helping as she could and just wanting to be loved.

Something about Anny grabbed our attention. She was a smart young girl who was in fifth grade in the public school at the time and showed a lot of potential. Like her siblings, she lacked love, attention, and parenting in her life. We decided to see if we could help Anny with her English, and then, we hoped she could attend the English mission school in town. Her grandmother agreed, and we developed a plan.

At this time, God opened our eyes to the lack of education that the children were receiving through the public school. God placed on our hearts a burden to help the children with their educations. We could not afford to pay the tuition for Anny to attend the English school, but God led us to reach out to oth-

ers to find sponsors for Anny's education. That is how our school sponsorship program began.

Today, Anny is 26 years old, a believer, married and raising a five-year-old daughter, and has a dream to work with youth. Anny is attending a Bible college in Canada and is working toward a three-year youth ministry degree.

## Smerling's dream

We saw another child come to Christ and gain a dream when we formed a relationship with Smerling. Smerling is one of eight children born to loving parents, and he has lived in Pedregal his entire life. His mom cleans a camp and his dad is a night watchman. Since the public school in Pedregal only goes up to eighth grade, Smerling's mom applied to our sponsorship ministry so that he could attend ninth grade. God provided a sponsor for Smerling, and he was able to graduate high school.



parents and for youth and young adults.

On a more informal basis, we meet with families in their homes to get to know them better. We have found that the meetings and conferences spark conversations that continue at the home visits. It is usually during these more personal times in homes that we have deep conversations, and the family members grow closer to God. Some of the families are already believers who want to build their relationships with God and grow closer to Him. Other families are not believers, and we are blessed to be with them as they learn more about God and come closer to the point of praying to ask God into their hearts and lives.



After completing high school, Smerling dreamed of becoming a civil engineer. When he first talked about this dream, he had no hope as he thought that it was impossible for him, a kid from this poor village, to attend university. Smerling's sponsor decided to continue supporting Smerling's education through university. In August 2018, Smerling became the first student in our school sponsorship program to start university and graduate with a degree.

Now that Smerling is a civil engineer, he has told us that, once he has a job, he will come back to the ministry to sponsor two students from first grade all the way through university.

## Our ministry today

We continue to work hard to develop relationships with every student and family. Three to four times a year, we hold parent meetings and meetings for students from seventh grade through university. At these meetings, we share the Word of God and the Gospel with the parents and students. We also teach on various topics, such as using the internet and social media, from the Christian perspective. Every July, we host a biblical conference at which we have workshops designed for

members grow closer to God. Some of the families are already believers who want to build their relationships with God and grow closer to Him. Other families are not believers, and we are blessed to be with them as they learn more about God and come closer to the point of praying to ask God into their hearts and lives.

We now have 120 students receiving sponsorship for the 2018–2019 school year. We have 92 students in kindergarten through 12th grade and 28 students in university. More than 100 students have applied for sponsorship and are waiting to be selected by a sponsor.

Today, if you ask the children in Pedregal what their dreams are, they will tell you what they want to be when they grow up. They now believe that university and careers are possibilities for them and that they can have futures. We thank God for the many people in the program who are growing closer to Him and have made lifelong decisions to follow Jesus. ■



*Sharyn and Paul Branson were commended from Saanichton Bible Fellowship in Saanichton, British Columbia, in 2008.*

**Top (L-R)** A sponsor program graduate, Anny has traveled to Canada to continue her education at a Bible college; In Canada, Anny and her family are now close to achieving her dream of serving in youth ministry.

**Bottom (L-R)** As the program's first university graduate, Smerling represents what the students of Pedregal can accomplish; Having benefitted from the sponsorship program, Smerling now plans to give back to it.

# A NOVEL WAY TO SHARE THE GOSPEL

Reaching Students for Christ through a Historical Fiction Book

BY CHRISTOPHER MATTIX

The auditorium was filled with more than 200 students at a public high school in Bogotá, Colombia. My wife, Genesis, and I were about to present our Spanish-language novel *Confesiones de un inquisidor* to the students, who had used this book in their curriculum that semester. Since the book of historical fiction tells the story of an inquisitor who comes to Christ during the Reformation, I was dressed in a monastic tunic, preparing to enter the room. As Genesis manned the PowerPoint and played the book trailer, I slowly entered with my face shrouded. I wasn't sure what to expect from these students—disinterest or rejection? Suddenly, I heard clapping and the sound of excitement filling the air. During the 30-minute presentation, there was silence, showing the students' concentration. And, when we opened up for questions, half the students raised their hands.

## God paved a way

This was the first of six schools we visited; four were public, one Adventist, and another an all-girls Catholic school. Throughout this trip, we were consistently amazed to see the ways in which God was working through this book. On the large scale, we saw how God opened the door into the schools when the secular company that published the school edition said it is one of their most sold books and when we were told that this is the only Christian book in circulation for secular schools in Colombia.

## God opened hearts

As we went from school to school, the genuine interest of the curious teens who attended the presentations thrilled us. Although the book is presented as history, philosophy, and literature, nearly all the students' questions were about the Bible, religion, and Jesus. The promoter told us that she had never seen such enthusiasm from students.

We also saw God's hand in the responses of the students and teachers. One teacher commented, "It's so refreshing to see such a powerful and interesting book that reaches to the soul of the students with something wholesome." Another teacher told her students, "Thanks to this book, I found hope again." We were encouraged to meet one student who said, "I was so captivated by this book I spent hours every night researching the things the book talked about. I think I've finally found God."

## God impacted lives

As we left Bogotá, one of the public schools gave Genesis and me an envelope with notes from the students telling how the book had impacted them. I wept as I read how God used the book to change lives. One student said, "You touched my soul and that of many others with this book," and another noted, "I love how you say the truth without covering anything up."

In January 2017, this journey began when one of the largest Spanish publishers asked to publish *Confesiones de un inquisidor*. Since then, God has allowed the book to sell widely, even internationally; He has opened the door for the novel to be reprinted for use in school curriculums and to be published in English (*Confessions of an Inquisitor*); He has provided two proposals for publication in other languages. God is good! ■



**From top:** The Mattixes' book table enables them to meet readers and share the Gospel one-on-one; At the presentations, students can learn more about the book and ask spiritual questions; God has provided many opportunities to share this book with the Christian and secular world, including on the radio.



Christopher Mattix was commended by North Lynnwood Bible Chapel in Lynnwood, Washington, in 2013 and serves in Bolivia with his wife, Genesis.