

Missions

CENTRAL AMERICA

A Short-term Trip to Help and Encourage

Rebuilding the Lord's Work in Liberia

A Return Visit to French Guiana

Practical Steps
for New Missionaries and
Commending Assemblies





Thinking It Through

BY ALAN PARKS

Support Your Elders with Prayer

I have a vivid memory from years ago of speaking at a conference in California with Dr. Dave Reid. During an afternoon question and answer time, the first question was: "What do you feel is the greatest need in the assemblies today?" I tried to defer to Dave, but, in his humorous way, he made me answer first. My answer then is still the same today. I believe our greatest need is for godly elders: men of discernment and discretion with a shepherd's heart, kindness, compassion, and a willingness to teach and train, men of humility who will lead without partiality or prejudice.

I was seven years old when my dad was recognized as an elder. I grew up watching him exhibit all the above qualities, and more, and saw that he cared for the local church. Many times, when we'd come down to kiss our parents at night, Dad would be on his knees by their bed, praying. We'd lean in to kiss his cheek, sometimes finding it wet with tears. This Father's Day month, my memories of my dad—as a father and an elder—are overwhelmingly precious.

Our God is a God of inescapable order; this includes church order. He is the Chief Shepherd, under Him are the local shepherds, and all of the flock are to be under their leadership. Violating this divine order creates chaos. To be an elder is a daunting task, knowing that one day he'll give account for his service. The apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 gives us direction on how church leaders' lives should be lived, while not being specific to their work. They must be men of high character, who are mature, well rounded, balanced, and well respected from within and without. Frankly, almost every requirement of leadership listed (for elders and deacons) should be true of all of us! A man should not be constrained to do a work that he has no desire to do. And, in my experience, a man who feels that an assembly will never function properly until he's an elder is already disqualified from leadership. Pride has no place in that service. These are men who must lead without partiality or prejudice—they walk a fine line of not showing partiality in dealing with

good friends and must not act in prejudice against a member who has caused them trouble. And, all this responsibility is usually uncompensated financially. It's truly a labor of love.

The New Testament pattern, which our assemblies endeavor to follow, states that church leadership falls to the elders, plural. We generally don't have a salaried pastor who acts as the point man. All these factors combine to show the critical importance of a sound team of godly elders. Elders were so important that the apostle Paul (who had certain discernment and powers that we don't today) and Barnabas appointed elders in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch as they returned to cities where they'd preached the Gospel and seen souls saved for the Master. Paul instructed Titus to appoint elders in the churches of Crete, to settle "unfinished business" in the churches. Today, men who will be elders are separated by the Holy Spirit for this critical work.

Elders will answer to the Chief Shepherd, and the flock will answer for their obedience to their elders. At times, it may be easy to criticize elders, but it's far more Christlike to pray for them! Do you pray for your elders every day? Do you pray that the Lord will give them supernatural help as they seek to lead the local church? If not, there's no better time to start than now! Do you pray for our missionaries, who will often need great help and guidance in recognizing newer believers who show promise as those perhaps being prepared by the Spirit to serve as elders? If not, please add this to your prayer list.

While all true believers are to do that which is our "reasonable service," the wonder is that, at the *bema*, we'll receive rewards to lay at our Savior's feet. We're told in 1 Peter 5:4 that those who did the work of an elder well will receive a special reward. And no wonder! Thank God for our elders! We value, respect, and pray for them, in a work that is often hard, discouraging at times, but vitally necessary. ■

Alan Parks is a commended worker based in South Carolina.

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CENTRAL AMERICA

A Short-term Trip to Help and Encourage

BY CONRAD & BECKY LECHLT



We recently shifted from missions work overseas to joining the MSC Canada WorkerCare team (*Missionary Prayer Handbook*

Day 31). After being on the mission field in Asia, we learned how encouraging it is to have people visit and show interest in our work and lives. We also learned how supportive a team of believers can be to

a national or foreign worker who needs an injection of enthusiastic assistance with a building project. So, with this in mind, the objective was set for our recent trip: join a TeamWorkers group that would spend two weeks in Nicaragua helping with building projects at two locations and then use an additional two weeks to visit eight missionary families in four Central American countries (MPH Days 16 and 19).

Nicaragua: work team

After a long flight and making our acquaintance with the Canadian TeamWorkers group at the Managua airport, we were met by Ted Windle and Tony Flett, who then drove us two hours to Esteli, arriving around midnight. We spent our week assisting



ing a Honduran missionary to Nicaragua, Israel Ramos, with finishing a house on the property of a new church plant and also constructing a perimeter fence. Despite it being the cool season, laboring in the hot sun was not for the faint of heart. However, the camaraderie and fellowship gained with the local Nicaraguan believers as we mixed cement, made forms, dug holes, welded poles, strung chain link, hung



drywall, and constructed staircases made it all worthwhile. The bonds formed among the men, women, and the Ramos family will not soon be forgotten. The week flew by as the project took

shape. Saying goodbye to the saints in Esteli was memorable.

A four-hour drive took us to northern Nicaragua where we pulled into a beautiful church camp nestled in the higher elevations surrounded by pine trees waving in cool breezes. The goal here was to work with American missionary Tony Flett and a group of Nicaraguan believers to conduct finishing work on the dorms and to use donated telephone poles to construct a 100-foot bridge that would span a gorge between camp buildings. The dorm work looked manageable but the bridge building appeared daunting. However, Tony and the local men were optimistic and that became contagious. In Canada or the United States it would have required cement trucks, pumper trucks, a crane, a few safety supervisors, an ecological impact survey, and an orientation course. With Tony, Ted, Israel, and Jeff Reid at the helm, we all jumped in and went at it with nothing more than some hand and electric tools, ropes, strength, willpower, and teamwork. The impossible became possible and within a few days the bridge structure was up, and the work in the dorms was done as far as we could go. After saying goodbye to the local believers, the team headed back to Managua for a day of rest. We bid the Canadian team farewell as we continued on with the second part of our trip—our missionary visits.

From top: The 2018 Nicaragua TeamWorkers group; Tony and Danelle Flett with their children; Ted Windle (second from the right) and Israel Ramos (left) with our Esteli hosts.



Left: Team members installing the perimeter fencing. **Middle (from top):** Eric Chaland installing flooring; Jeff, Bonares, Conrad, and Eric displaying friendship between nations. **Right:** A sister, Wendy, cooking over an open fire.

Nicaragua: missionary visits

Our first stop was to spend time with Mark and Brenda Bachert and their four children in the Nicaraguan capital city of Managua. Serving in Nicaragua for 14 years, the Bacherts have been involved with a few church plants and, most recently,



they're investing themselves in Central Managua Gospel Hall. Mark and Brenda have hosted three discipleship teams that have assisted with each new church plant. The teams were made

up of men who sought to grow in Christ as they served in a cross-cultural experience for 11 months (a number, such as Kyle Wilson and Kory Crawford, have gone into full-time ministry). They also oversee the NicaHome and NicaChild programs, both geared to help local children and families thrive as they learn about Christ and grow in their relationship with Him.

Next it was off to Jinotepe, a small city about one hour south. After recovering from getting lost en route, we made it to our rendezvous point with Mitch and Lori Parent. Mitch and Lori are serving at the local gospel hall for their ninth year. Their three adult daughters also serve alongside them in this ministry while procuring a post-secondary education. The Parents have invested a lot of time into the local church and now see fruit. The men's study and children's ministry, both held at their home, are thriving. Mitch and Lori and their daughter Kearta see potential for new ministry initiatives in their neighborhood.

Leaving the Parents, it was back to Managua to visit one



more family. Kyle and Allison Wilson and their three young children live in Managua after spending seven years in El Valle with a small group of believers. The Wilsons serve at Central Managua Gospel Hall through discipleship, speaking, evangelization, children's ministry, and so on. Part of the Bacherts' and Wilsons' vision is to purchase land along a major route in the university area, construct a building, and stop renting their current location. This would be a big step for future efforts into the community and provide a reachable destination for current congregants.



El Salvador

The next stop was El Salvador. Helen Griffin is in her 26th year of ministry in San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador. Helen operates an orphanage now situated in a gated community, which fortunately doesn't see the same amount of gang violence as most other communities. Over the years, Helen has cared for about 60 babies, children, or teenagers at the orphanage. She provided them with a stable caring environment and shared the love and knowledge of Christ with them. One of the biggest challenges for the now older teenagers and adults who are still with Helen is finding employment within a country facing an extreme shortage of jobs. Helen is in the process of closing the orphanage and is praying to know what the



Left, from top: Breakfast with Mark, Brenda, Micah, Elisabeth, Elena Bachert (Matthew not pictured); Mitch and Lori Parent with their daughters. **Right, from top:** Kyle and Allison Wilson with their children; Helen Griffin with her orphanage family.



From left: Team members hard at work mixing cement, using just the right ratio of rock, sand, cement, and water; Dan Shepherd working on the bridge.

next steps are in the near future for her and her "kids."

Alan and Diana Clark also reside in San Salvador. The Clarks have served in El Salvador for 14 years, first with a bus ministry that provided maintenance and driving of buses that were brought from Canada for assembly work in the country. Now they serve in a few assemblies near the coastal city of Acajutla and also through a hospital ministry in Sonsonate. They use a high level of caution as they spread the Gospel in Salvadoran communities.



Costa Rica

We were met at the airport by the very enthusiastic and energetic Kathleen Reid. Doug and Kathleen Reid have served in San Jose for more than 40 years, having been commended by assemblies in Vancouver in 1956 and 1970. More recently, Doug has experienced some health issues that have significantly diminished his mobility. He also suffers from blindness but is still able to contribute to the gospel hall he attends. It was a pleasure to experience his sense of humor.



Kory and Rebecca Crawford have been in San Jose, Cuidad Colón, since September 2017. Their call was to come to Costa



Rica and continue to plant new works in the regions where there are none. Kory and Rebecca, along with toddler Matias, were the youngest and newest missionaries we visited. They're adjusting well to the many new cross-cultural

experiences. Teams are beginning to visit and help the Crawfords offer programs in communities other than Cuidad Colón.

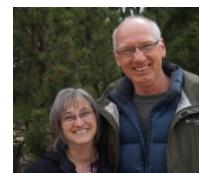
Belize

Two short flights later we were warmly greeted by Sean O'Byrne in Belize. Belize had a very Caribbean feel to it—very different from the other countries we visited. Sean offered us amazing hospitality. Unfortunately we missed his wife, Vera, who was temporarily back in Canada with health-related issues. Sean and Vera were commended to Belize in 2016 but had previously served in short-term capacities. They serve many assemblies in the area but are trying to prioritize the work at Western Paradise Bible Chapel. Their work with a youth ministry called Overflow is yielding fruit and is one of their great joys.



Conclusions

This trip helped us capture a feel for life in Central America. We contributed in a meaningful way to the nationals from Central America before we met the missionaries who, through their ministry, are also investing themselves into some of those same people. We believe it helped us to better identify with what the missionaries shared with us. Our interest and love for what was on their hearts grew, and the entire experience, we hope, has shown them we are willing to invest in them and their work. ■



Conrad and Becky Lechelt served in Asia and are now new members of MSC's WorkerCare Team.

Going Home

A Return Visit to Beloved
FRENCH GUIANA



BY WILLI AND BEATRICE GYGER

Following our trip in 2017 to visit the saints and various assemblies in French Guiana, where we served for 43 years, we took some time to reflect on the area's history and the missions work that many have carried out over nearly 90 years. Seeing what the Lord continues to do in French Guiana brings us immense joy, and we praise Him for it. French Guiana is always on our hearts, and it is the place we call "home."

THE HISTORY

French Guiana, an overseas department of France, is the smallest country in South America and is located on the continent's northern coast, a few degrees north of the equator. French Guiana is bordered by Surinam to the west, the Atlantic Ocean to the north, and Brazil to the east and south. With an area of about 35,000 square miles, it is slightly smaller than the state of Maine. Cayenne is the capital city of French Guiana, and French is the official language though the Creole dialect is used widely. About 90 percent of Guianese people are of a mixed African and Caucasian descent, known as Creole. Several Amerindian tribes are spread throughout the area. The Maroons live in the interior of the land, mainly along the Maroni River, and they are descendants of escaped slaves who fled into the forest and lived an African tribal form of life. Today, the Amerindians and the Maroons are well integrated into the Guianese population.

French Guiana's notorious penal colony was established in 1852 and finally closed in 1947. The *Armée du Salut* of France, or The Salvation Army of the United States, contributed significantly to this closing. The *Salutists*, or Salvationists, evangelized in the hospitals and prisons and worked to rehabilitate the ex-convicts.

In the early 1960s, France built its famous Guiana Space Cen-

ter in Kourou, French Guiana. From there, the European Space Agency successfully launched many satellites into space. This center has put French Guiana on the map and brings it into international news often.

THE WORK

In 1928, the first evangelical missionaries, Mr. and Mrs. Large from England, arrived in French Guiana and settled in Saint-Laurent du Maroni, the site of a large prison and the headquarters of the Guianese penal colonies. In 1932, Miss A. M. Lanicca from Switzerland joined the Larges in their work. A few months later, the clergy and prison administration wrongfully accused Mr. Large of helping prisoners escape. Officials expelled Mr. Large from the town of Saint-Laurent, and later, he felt it was best to leave French Guiana altogether. For safety reasons, Miss Lanicca moved to Cayenne where a small group of believers met. Later, she built an orphanage, La Maison Emmanuel.

In 1947, Mr. and Mrs. Willy Moret from French-speaking Switzerland arrived to help and work with Miss Lanicca in Cayenne. They restarted the assembly since the one Mr. Large founded some years earlier had dwindled away. Then, some short-term missionaries, Miss Bates, Mr. and Mrs. Blunier, and Miss M. Schmid, came to help with the ministry but, for various reasons, could not stay permanently.

We, Willi and Beatrice Gyger and our one-year-old daughter Ruth, arrived in May 1956 and helped with the existing work. At that time, a small assembly with 12 people in fellowship met at La Maison Emmanuel, the orphanage which was no longer in operation. Our early years involved pioneer work, with trips to coastal and interior villages for personal evangelism, Bible studies, prison and children's ministries, and open-air meetings. These trips required travel by car, canoe, or, at times, small

planes since no roads existed in the interior. In our later years on the field, we focused more on Bible teaching since the assemblies had grown by then.

In 1969, Henk Kreuger from the Netherlands joined us. He was located in Saint-Laurent and sold religious books in the streets of the towns and villages in French Guiana. At the age of 92, he went to glory and is buried in Saint-Laurent.

Barend and Diny Bloem from the Netherlands arrived in French Guiana in 1986, and after 18 months in Cayenne, they moved to Saint-Laurent to work with Henk Kreuger. Now they are back in the Netherlands with their family; however, Barend and Diny make periodic visits to teach in French Guiana and Surinam.

In 1977, the French government relocated about 1,000 political refugees from Laos to two villages in French Guiana. Some of the Hmong refugees who were Christians formed a church, which is still very active today, in Cacao. Presently, they have other well-established churches also.

A CHANGE

When we arrived in French Guiana in 1956, the region had a total population of 32,000 inhabitants. As far as we knew, not more than 20 born-again believers lived in the area. From the beginning of evangelical missions work in 1928 until about 1958, the assembly missionaries were the only evangelicals in French Guiana. Today, the population has grown to more than 300,000, and many immigrant churches of various denominations are active, with some doing very good work. Now Protestants of various denominations make up eight to 10 percent of the Guianese population, and three groups of Brethren assemblies in French Guiana represent more than 20 communities.

At the end of 1999, when we left Cayenne, the Guianese brethren took on the leadership of their assemblies. Over the years, we have visited our former mission field four times to encourage the believers and to see how they are prospering. Our last visit was from October 19 to November 8, 2017.

OUR RETURN

On October 19, Bea and I and three of our daughters, Ruth, Susanna, and Beatrice, embarked on Air France for a visit to French Guiana. Many friends warmly received our family at the airport in Cayenne where our three-week journey began.

On our first Sunday in Guiana, we fellowshiped with the Cayenne assembly. What a joyous reunion! We were glad to see more than 200 loved ones whom we have missed for some years and meet many new young people and children. I minis-

tered on Psalm 11:3, particularly posing the question, "Are we standing firm on the Word of God, not conforming to our surroundings?" After the meeting, a delicious welcome-home meal was served to all present, which gave us the opportunity to visit old friends and get acquainted with new believers. It was nice to see growth in the number of young people and children. But, of course, growth also comes with challenges. Desiring wisdom in addressing the assembly's unique needs, the elders asked me to meet with them for scriptural counseling.

During our time in Cayenne, several families invited us for meals and times of fellowship and sharing, often asking us for counseling. Bea and I also visited those who are shut-in, sick, and elderly in Cayenne and surrounding villages to encourage them. We read the Word, sang hymns, and prayed with them.

On the second week, we traveled to Saint-Laurent. On the way, we stopped in Iracoubo to visit a dear sister named Alice, who is shut-in, and spent time with her. Her joy in the Lord is contagious.



Clockwise from top left: In Cacao, the Hmong people adopt the Gyger family into their community; In Iracoubo, Willi and Bea share a sweet visit with sister Alice; Willi and Bea rejoin the 200 believers at the Cayenne assembly for a joyful morning of worship.

Once in Saint-Laurent, we met with the believers of the local assembly. Here the saints have quite diverse backgrounds, ranging from Creole and Maroon to Amerindian and French. Years ago, on the same property, spiritism was practiced, but today a Bible chapel where the Gospel is preached stands in place. Over the past few years, this assembly underwent some stressful times and is now in need of encouragement and exhortation.

During our third week, we visited the Hmong church in Cacao, started by the refugees from Laos. In the assembly's early years, we helped the believers with Bible teaching. They celebrated the 40th anniversary of their arrival in French Guiana with a five-day Bible conference. Hmong preachers from France, the United States, Thailand, and Switzerland ministered to the 200 people in attendance, and the Hmong assembly asked me to be the opening speaker. This was a time of celebrating God's faithfulness. Male and female choirs and young people's groups provided special music, and believers shared interesting testimonies.

Early Sunday morning before the breaking of bread meeting, the congregation met by a river for the baptism of seven people. What a blessing! One among them was a woman, Caroline, whom I dedicated to the Lord as a baby 23 years ago.

OUR DEPARTURE

On November 8, 2017, we left French Guiana and returned to the States. We were very tired but satisfied and happy in our hearts. Through emails and phone calls, we recently learned that the brethren in French Guiana, following our exhortations, made several adjustments for which we are very happy. The elders have taken over the leadership of the assemblies again, and they want to follow New Testament teaching more closely. The midweek Bible studies, which had stopped, have resumed, and the "entertainment gospel," with its loud music, will return to more traditional worship. As a result of these adjustments, two gifted men who left the assemblies are willing to return and help with the teaching again.

As we reflect on the work in French Guiana over the years, we praise the Lord for these wonderful results—all the glory belongs to God. We know the Lord still has much in store for French Guiana, and we pray for, as Matthew 9:38 reads, "the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." ■



Willi and Beatrice Gyger were commended by Bethel Gospel Chapel in Union City, New Jersey, in 1956.



Clockwise from top: The Eglise Protestante Evangélique Hmong Church in Cacao does much for Christ in French Guiana; Willi and several Hmong brothers talk together; Willi speaks in French at the 40th anniversary conference as a believer interprets into the Hmong language.

Prayer needs:

- 1 Praise God for the spreading of the Gospel in French Guiana.
- 2 Pray for more brethren to capably and faithfully teach God's Word, especially in the Saint-Laurent assembly. The need for systematic teaching for edification is great.
- 3 French Guiana is still a mission field. Pray for teaching missionaries who are willing to work under and with the local elders.
- 4 Please pray that the elders in the Cayenne assembly will use discernment and seek God's will for the assembly through their roles as leaders and shepherds.

REACHING HIGHER

Moving Forward with Christ

BY ANNIE ELLIOTT

In its eighth year, Reaching Higher is a time of encouragement and refreshment for young adults in their 20s and 30s. Held yearly at CMML's Guest Home in Wall Township, New Jersey, this three-day conference draws men and women, single and married, from all over the US and even Canada. This year's conference, held March 16–18, had 50 participants from as close as just a few miles away to as far as California.

This year's topic, "Moving Forward with Christ," was led by Scott DeGroff, a commended worker based in Kansas, as well as Micah Williams, who serves at Turkey Hill Ranch Bible Camp in Missouri. Scott and Micah focused on the need for prayer, both personal and corporate, in the believer's life. Scott encouraged listeners to not glorify service above a truly personal relationship with the Lord. Dan Williams, commended from Texas, also shared his testimony of his revived relationship with the Lord. He encouraged the conference attendees to have God-honoring priorities in their lives.

A question and answer time as well as three breakout sessions added to the ministry. Micah Williams led a session on "Learning Intimacy with God," where he encouraged the young people to develop their daily time with the Lord. Mike and Melinda Dilione (*Missionary Prayer Handbook Day 17*) shared in a conversational style how the Lord called them to missions, the process of going, and some of the difficulties and joys from their two years of service. A first for Reaching Higher, the final breakout session was dedicated to communal prayer.

Additional photos from this year's Reaching Higher can be viewed at Facebook.com/cmmlus. Lord willing, next year's Reaching Higher will take place February 8–10, 2019. ■

