



Network

MISSION TO THE WORLD • PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA • WWW.MTW.ORG • SPRING 2009



LIFE ON THE GROUND

By Amy Glass

Jonathan and Katherine Taylor were new MTW missionaries in Sofia, Bulgaria—still unable to converse in their new language—when Jonathan got a chance to share the gospel with one of the locals. He was taking a taxi to language lessons when he got a call from his wife, Katherine. They had just had a misunderstanding and he had left angry. When Katherine called, they apologized

to each other. The taxi driver overheard and he happened to speak English—and pretty well.

"You Americans treat your wives differently than Bulgarians do," Mitko* observed.

"What do you mean?" Jonathan asked.

"Well, I overheard you speaking to your wife, and you spoke very gently to her."

Chagrined that such an observation would come when Jonathan felt he was at his worst, he said, "You know, Mitko, I have to be honest with you. I was pretty upset. If you noticed something good in how I was treating my wife, I'm really pleased with that but it's not something that's in me naturally. It's what God has done by changing my heart with His love."

*not his real name



LIFE ON TH

Mitko was intrigued. They both agreed that he would pick up Jonathan regularly for his language lesson. Thus began a friendship, and they began to have lunch together after Jonathan's class.

Culture Shock, and Beyond

What is "life on the ground" really like for missionaries? A group of MTW missionaries was surveyed recently to tell us honestly what it's like. Most missionaries who are new to the language and culture would give their right arm to make a national friend so quickly, like Jonathan, and he acknowledges that his experience is not typical—especially among Bulgarians, who often take time getting to know new people.

This friendship may have come easily, but it didn't do much to mitigate his family's deep culture shock. "Absolutely every cultural norm or rule we were familiar with was knocked out

from under us," said Jonathan. "There was just no way, really, to prepare for how hard it was going to be. The good thing is that we learned that God is our strength and refuge."

Like the Taylors, Sarah Ingram, former missionary to the Czech Republic, had a difficult transition. "Culture shock hit hard, and the energy and time it required to have simple conversations and perform the most mundane tasks was more challenging and humbling than anything I have ever experienced," she wrote.

For others, leaving loved ones was hardest. Brad Wos in Cape Town, South Africa, said, "Leaving family members and having my dad die of cancer was one of the hardest things I have ever had to do, and I thought it would be easier."

Sometimes, though, staying in touch is not so hard. Doug and Masha Shepherd in Lviv, Ukraine, had a pleasant surprise: "Due to ease of

communication we actually talk more [with family] now than when we were in the States. My parents get to video conference with my kids, so it makes it easier to stay connected. My son actually thinks my parents live in the computer somewhere!"

Most worry about transplanting their kids across the globe. Ed and Emily Hartman in Romania worried, "Are we going to ruin our kids?" But they realized, "The Lord loves them far more than we." Instead, they found that their kids loved learning a new language and culture. "It's taught them humility, dependence, and a respect for others. They would all say that though it's really difficult and they miss people dearly, they wouldn't trade it for anything."

Ministering in the Real World

A recurring theme was also the importance of team unity—and anguish in its absence.



THE GROUND

Jonathan explained why it can be hard: "You're forced to be very close to a small group of people—it's not that you're unwilling to be, it's just that you have to be—and there's nowhere, really, to dilute it. You have to love each other, you have to work together, you have to bear one another's burdens, you have to forgive and confess—all those wonderful biblical things we talk about, but often aren't forced to practice in America. Because, [in the U.S.] if you offend me, I don't necessarily have to run into you ever again."

But back to Mitko. He had an accident in his taxi that really shook him, and it was then that he prayed with Jonathan to receive Christ. He became involved in the church's ministry, met a believing girl, and got engaged. The groom and bride asked Jonathan and Katherine to be their *koumove*. The closest comparison in the U.S. is a man and matron of honor, but a *koumove*

has a much more significant role in the couple's wedding and future. They have a position of greater honor than even the parents in the wedding.

As exciting as these kinds of events are, however, the painful reality is that Mitko has fallen away from his profession and has not continued to walk with the Lord. Jonathan and Katherine maintain close ties with Mitko and his family and are praying for the Holy Spirit's work in Mitko's life.

Life on the ground as a missionary can be difficult and rewarding, lonely and triumphant, humbling and joyful. Sarah said, "The rewards are immense and transforming, but they come attached to suffering and to the acknowledgment of your own weakness and inability to love others without the love of Jesus Christ and His refining work in your life." ■

To read an extended Q&A with MTW missionaries about life on the field, visit www.mtw.org.



Missions Up Close:

Life in Asia

by Melissa Morgan

We careen around yet another corner, and mid-swerve, our taxi driver spins around in his seat to debate my seatmate's last instruction. Apparently, he didn't agree with the route she gave him. He barks out a few more phrases, then looks up just in time to jerk out of the way of a city bus—missing it by several inches.

Whew.

We certainly aren't in the U.S. anymore. Here in central Asia, in a squat yellow taxi throbbing with syntho-pop music, our driver speeds ahead, casually drifting back and forth across crowded highway lanes. Many cars are close enough to reach out and touch.

"My one consolation is that this car is our driver's livelihood," Sarah jokes. "He may not care about us, but he'll protect this asset at all costs."

But Sarah perseveres in her conversation with the driver, and something interesting happens during our 30-minute ride. I can't understand the words they are saying, but the tone shifts dramatically, from confrontational to conversational to ... musical.

"Ah, this is life in my city," Sarah laughs afterwards. "The taxi driver who is yelling at you at the beginning of the ride is singing songs to you by the end."

Welcome to missions on the other side of the world.

Sarah and a team of seven others are teaching English at a government university in this city of 10 million, trying to share the love of Christ, one encounter at a time. Their days

are filled with these kinds of conversations. Sometimes they end well, and sometimes they seem fruitless.

"It can be hard to live here," says Sarah. "The city is crowded and polluted, our team is geographically scattered, and we don't always see the fruit of our labors right away."

Encounters like these remind me of the cost of the call to the mission field. So often we romanticize missions—living in a foreign land, learning a new language, exploring a new culture. But seeing Sarah's humble apartment brings me back to reality. Her exposed pipes and cement floors seem primitive by American standards.

Yet she is sure of her call to this field. "God is at work, and I know I'm here for a reason. These people are precious in His sight."

The next day we learn that two students at her school have come to Christ in recent weeks.

Soon there will be times to meet with these new believers and to begin discipling them. But for now, Sarah goes about her daily life, befriending the shopkeepers and street vendors who cross her path. And the song-singing taxi driver? He may become a regular driver for the team here. God works in mysterious ways. ■



MAKING A DIFFERENCE



THROUGH MEDICINE

by Paul Schwarz

Thomas was a typical 14-year-old boy in many ways—except that he couldn't walk. And in the rural African village where he lived, medical care wasn't available.

"Thomas lived most of his life on the floor," said David Daniel, a physical therapist from Augusta, Ga., who traveled to Thomas' village on an MTW medical mission. "But we were able to diagnose him with probable muscular dystrophy, take his measurements, and fit him for a wheelchair. Now he is able to get around and his quality of life is greatly improved."

The help provided by the MTW team is not only changing Thomas' physical life, but his spiritual life as well. "Thomas is from a Muslim region, and MTW has a church plant there and is now actively ministering to him and his family," said David.

These are the kinds of stories that have motivated David to gather and lead a team of 11 medical professionals preparing for an MTW mission field assignment. This 11-person medical team is the first of its kind in MTW history.

"We've never sent out a long-term team to do medical missions together before," said Dr. Ted Kuhn, who directs MTW's Medical Missions Department along with his wife, Dr. Sharon Kuhn. "Their goal is to not only provide medical care to nationals, but also to minister to medical students and medical professionals in the area."

"We're seeking to train the next generation of health care providers [for mission service]," says David. "We're trying to catch them before the world does."

David identifies medical missions as a "wedge ministry" that enables the gospel to penetrate individuals and cultures that would otherwise be resistant to church-planting efforts. "People in health

care have avenues into the hearts of people like perhaps no other profession," he explains. "If you can train people to be disciples of Christ in the clinic and to bring physical and spiritual healing, then you're going to [influence] the whole nation."

The 11-person medical team is part of MTW's partnership with Medical Campus Outreach (MCO), an organization that helps train medical professionals for gospel ministry at the Medical College of Georgia. Besides David and his wife, who is also a physical therapist, the other missions team members include an ophthalmologist, pediatrician, orthodontist, physician assistant (David's twin brother), two nurses, and a nurse practitioner. They all graduated from the Augusta campus of the Medical College of Georgia.

The team of 11 is still in the preparation stage for their mission, which is expected to last five years or more in a yet-to-be-specified location. According to Ted, the upcoming work of these 11 is simply an extension of what they have already been doing in the States.

"They are all heavily invested in mentoring health care students already," he says, "and they all have a proven record of evangelism. What they'll be doing will augment church planting and church growth. Based on their track

record, I expect them to be successful in doing that." ■



For more information about MTW medical missions, visit www.mtw.org.



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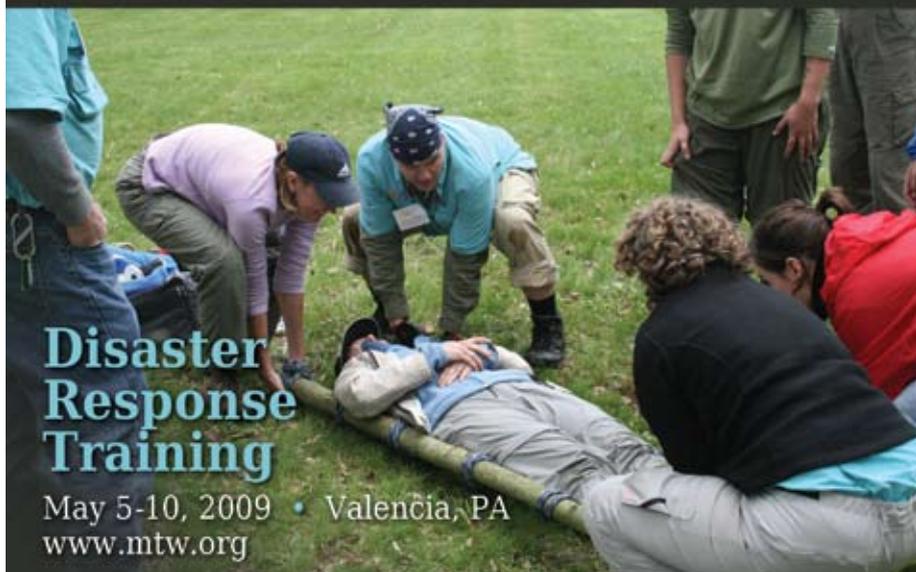
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A shrill, cacophonous female voice called loudly from the ground level of our high-rise apartment. We had just arrived earlier that day in Africa—myself, my wife, and our six children—the first of a team of MTW workers sent to plant churches among the large Muslim population in that city of five million.

“A-che-ké chaud! A-che-ké chaud!” There it was again—the cry of the woman below. It was just after dusk on our first day in Africa, and we wondered what her exclamation meant. As it turned out, *acheké* is a favorite African dinner dish, a local staple in the region, and *chaud* is the word for hot.

In the next weeks, our senses would be inundated with sights, sounds, smells (oh, the smells), encounters, experiences, and so on. Mysteries abounded: locks of braided hair cut off and gathered together in piles—I assumed it was some sort of voodoo ritual, but it was just a local outdoor beauty salon; fist-sized plastic bags strewn about, covering the ground everywhere (clean water was sold in them, the corner was bit off and the containers discarded after use).

But it wasn’t the externals that presented the greatest hurdle to acculturation. The more challenging aspects of culture were the nuances of communication—the levels of relationship and how to recognize them, the expressions of various character traits.

COURTESY OF STOCK.XCHING

THE SHOCK of crossing cultures

HELPING MISSIONARIES TRANSITION

by Keith Bucklen



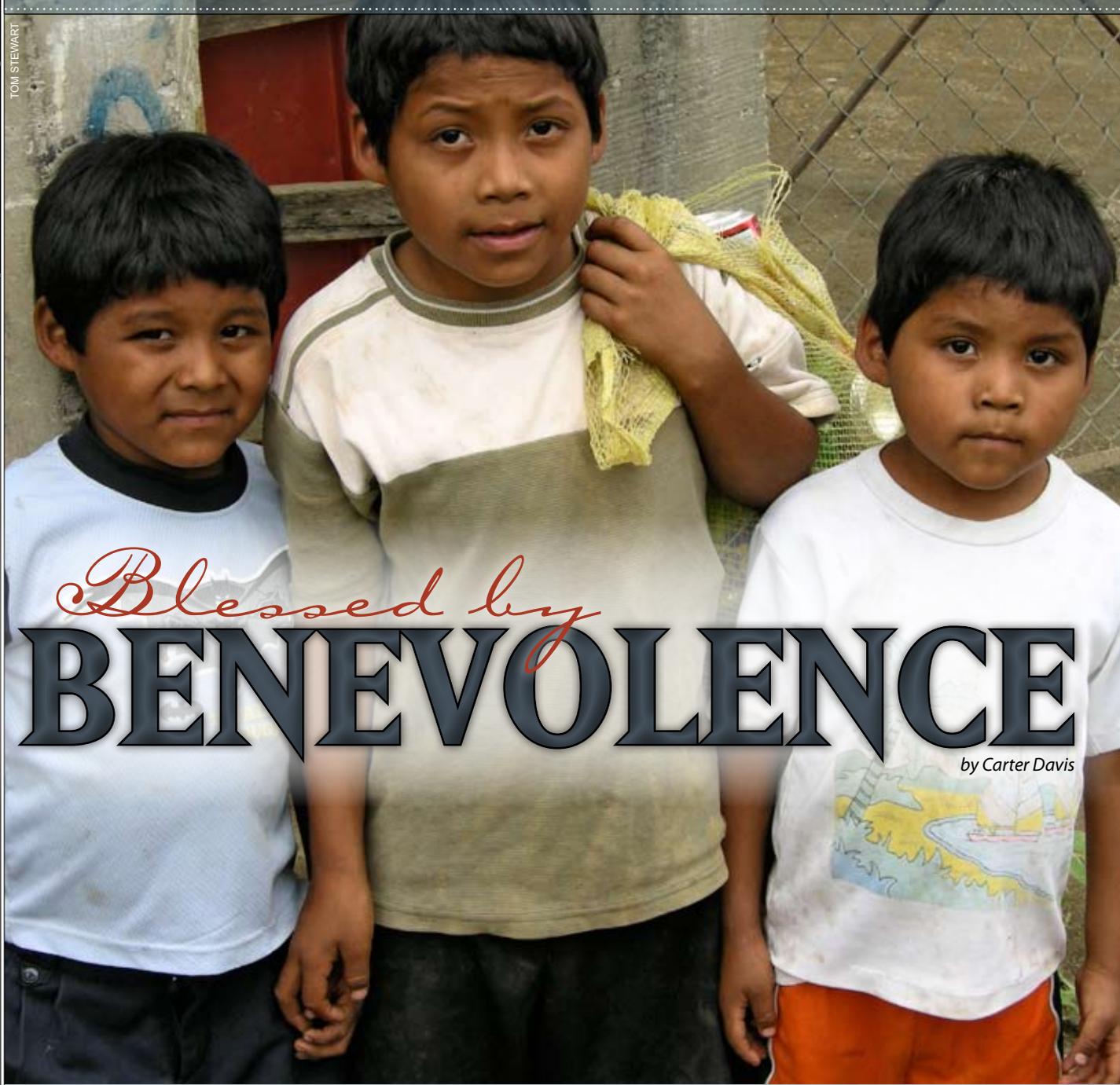
At first, we were caught up in the wonder of it all. But you can only tolerate being culturally inappropriate for so long. Our best efforts to fit into the society around us were met with laughter, sometimes mocking, anger, disdain, and all too often, silence.

How does one make sense of this overwhelming strangeness and move beyond the constant pain of not belonging? Our approach was to become students of the culture. We would take “observation walks” around the neighborhood, making mental notes of what seemed foreign. As the leader of a team of church-planting workers, I kept a notebook of our unexplained observations to discuss at our group meetings.

Understanding the culture is key to presenting the gospel in an understandable and relevant way; and failing this can lead to disastrous consequences—cultural blunders that cause offense and result in a lastingly-poor reputation for the worker and team.

Our newer teammates are in “culture shock” right now—whether they realize it or not. Know that they need your prayers and your support. While they are going through the pain of being weaned from their comfortable culture, they need to know that they are only out of sight, not out of mind. They need a retreat back to something familiar—your voice, your email, your letter or card, your care package. Most of all, they need the ministry of the Holy Spirit in and through their lives. Thank you for your faithful prayers in this process. ■

Keith previously served with MTW in West Africa, and currently serves on the “Committee on Mission to the World.”



Blessed by
BENEVOLENCE

by Carter Davis



Praise time at the Acapulco drop-in center for street children.

There's a lot more to a church plant than good intentions, and there is certainly more involved than mere good deeds. Yet mercy ministry often speaks the gospel better than words.

In an effort to help support the work of church planting, MTW sends out mercy ministry teams, invited by church leaders, pastors, and organizers across the globe, to help in communities with a specific need. The teams are given a chance to witness God's work and share His grace firsthand. The work is difficult, much of it accomplished by the nationals who remain long after the teams have returned home, but the fruit that the teams often yield is well worth the journey.

Mobilizing Mercy

Until September 2008, many of the mercy ministry teams sent out from MTW had little coordination with each other, but under the watch of the recently consolidated Mercy Ministries Program, MTW has taken a more active role in coordinating the efforts of these teams—which include street child ministries, medical missions, and disaster-response teams.

As conventional wisdom goes, there is strength in numbers, but it's a strength that must first be built and leveraged.

"Not all the churches in the PCA even know we do mercy ministry," said Oscar Aylor, MTW's director of mercy ministries. "We are working to make these ministries more strategic in their approach and more visible."

Under the newly-created Mercy Ministries Program, the various teams now operate under one umbrella—sharing resources, ideas, and motivation. Oscar and the rest of the program's leadership coordinate with U.S. churches to send teams to far-flung areas across the globe in the name of service to spread God's Word.

"One of my commitments is to come and build a mercy ministries team, set a strategy together, understand who we are, and develop a vision," Oscar said. "Most importantly we want to build a prayer foundation, because we have to realize that it's God doing this work; it's not based on good deeds. Everything has to reflect the distinctives of MTW, and that is to help build the church."

Joy through Service

Tom Stewart, director of MTW's StreetChild International, offered his vision for his department.

"We want to provide what every child should have," he said. "Education, care, a home. We go out and minister

to at-risk children who have been abused and abandoned. We want to show them that God loves them, too."

Connie Walker, a senior research scientist at Duke University, has taken part in two MTW medical missions teams—both of which allowed her to use her French language skills as a translator while working triage for a medical team.

"These projects are expensive in both time and money," she said. "When we're there we face heat, fatigue, and primitive conditions at the clinic."

Despite these circumstances, she recalled, there is something that continually draws the team members back.

"For many of us," she said, "the greatest factor ... is the sheer joy of being used by God to make a small but real difference in individual lives in a region of great spiritual darkness."

Catherine Williams, a member of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Durham, N.C., is another recent participant in two mercy ministry teams, both focused on medical missions.

"I saw the importance of taking time to pray with patients, no matter how many were waiting," she recalled. "No one ever seemed to refuse prayer; they were always very receptive and grateful. I was overwhelmed by the needs of the people," she recalled, "but I knew that I was leaving behind my prayers for them and the local church to continue to reach out and build relationships."

Doug Mallow, director of MTW's Disaster Response Department, offered a simple summary of its goals: "We want to provide an opportunity for future ministry," he said.

Through village-building projects in Nicaragua and hurricane-restoration endeavors in Honduras and Haiti, for example, Doug said that through tragedy, God's name has been glorified.

"You certainly don't want disaster to strike anywhere, but that's a fact of life," he said. "We have been able to take those events and use them to spread the gospel."

As the Mercy Ministries Program continues to grow and more teams are sent out—MTW's Medical Department has plans to send anywhere from 50 to 100 medical teams in 2009, for example—Oscar is hopeful about its future impact on MTW and church planting as a whole.

"I think when people see MTW, they need to see what we do in mercy," said Oscar. "Our deeds are motivated by the Word and by Jesus' command to help the poor, widowed, and orphaned." ■



A TALE OF THREE CHURCHES

by Susan Fikse

Little did they know when they joined a West Virginia short-term missions project as strangers in 2001 that the Lord would use them to respond to a tragedy nearly 1,000 miles away five years later. An unlikely collaboration of members from Mt. Airy Church in Maryland, Christ Community Church in Fairmont, W.Va., and Covenant Presbyterian Church in Holland, Mich., coalesced out of that initial gathering—though none of them can fully explain it.

"I've thought about it many times," says team member Wayne VanderHulst from Holland, Mich. "But I'm not sure." Ken Scheffter, Mt. Airy's missions coordinator, says, "I can't really explain it, other than the Lord was working."

Bonding through Service

Whatever attracted them, it started with able bodies and willing hearts. In 2001, teams from Mt. Airy, Covenant Presbyterian, and Christ Community Church all served at an ongoing MTW short-term project in Fairmont, W.Va., during the third week in July. The church members enjoyed the experience so much that they made a tradition of it—for most of the next five years, all three churches served alongside one another during that same week of July, doing home repairs and VBS ministry for locals in need.

"The work at Fairmont is one way MTW seeks to be a resource for equipping churches in the vital area of outreach," said Doug Mallow, MTW's senior project administrator for the Fairmont program.

This goal became reality in 2006 in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. When Ken Scheffter realized another

into hurricane relief. After five trips back to Mississippi—the most recent in January 2009—Wayne knows the Lord assembled this team for a reason, "The Church is worldwide ... we can come from different congregations and join together to serve as the Church universal."

This response is exactly what MTW

seeks to facilitate, according to Doug. "We're thrilled that the shared experience in Fairmont propelled these teams to serve elsewhere. That overall sense of purpose and unity is a natural outgrowth of working together and serving together year after year."

Ken agrees. "As we worked in the unity of the Spirit, the people around us saw the



church his team had worked with in Fairmont was in the middle of Katrina's destruction—First Presbyterian in Biloxi, Miss.—he was determined to help. In May 2006, during orientation for the summer project at Fairmont, Ken sought out his friends from Michigan and West Virginia and said, "Guys, here's what's on my heart."

Touched by Katrina

So in the summer of 2006, this unique collection of people from three churches spent their usual third week in July working in Fairmont, and two weeks later convened in Bay St. Louis, Miss., for their first foray

team displaying the love of Christ," he explained. "God used our team unity to show all the people what it's like to work together, and to show them encouragement even in the midst of extreme hardship."

That level of unity leaves an impression not only on the community, but on each member of the team, says Wayne. "It was tough to leave because you feel like you've known these people all your life after working with them for a week and sharing your lives with each other." But it won't be long before they're together again. On the calendar for 2009: Fairmont, W.Va., the third week of July. ■



Welcome to Thailand

by Rihanna Mills

“Sawatdee kha, yindee donrap.” Hello and welcome to Thailand! As you step out into Bangkok, you’ll first notice the heat, and then the smells: a truck parked nearby loaded with the notoriously odorous Thai fruit *durian*, the smoky smells of food being prepared on the carts of street vendors, incense burning on a nearby Buddhist altar. As we drive through the city you’ll see an abundance of roaming street dogs, carts, bicycles, and pedestrians.

We’re going to take you straight to the Thai neighborhood in which our team lives, works, and worships. Turning the corner, we arrive at New Community, the Christian foundation run by the MTW Thailand team. Here, our Thai staff labors diligently alongside foreign teammates in the work of church planting, with zeal for bringing the gospel to their people and sharing the light that has permeated their own lives.

On any given weeknight, we might find American missionaries teaching the much sought-after English language to an assortment of people from the area. On Monday night, we’ll find a group of artists assembled in the upper room, painting or sketching, and sharing their lives. On Thursday night, you can sit in on the study of the book of John, as those who do not yet believe gather to learn more about Jesus and His teachings. If you travel to the local slum, you’ll observe our teammates discipling young women who are new to the faith, telling stories to and coloring with the little children, and sitting with and bringing food and company to the adults who are starved for hope.

And please stay for Sunday morning, when all of this activity culminates in a vibrant Thai worship service. Watch as seekers trickle in and find a seat—the woman who cooks at the market who has become a friend of our team, the family from the slum who is intrigued by the difference in the Christians they have met, the university student who is studying English and has an interest in the arts.

Chairs assembled on the lower level of the office turn this space into a church, and the truth is proclaimed here every week in both song and teaching, followed by a meal together. We all affirm that this time of worship is the central hub giving purpose to every ministry activity we engage in during the week. Would we describe this work as easy? No. Slow-going? Yes, quite. But the same God who invites us to worship and fills us with joy as we follow Him gives us strength and purpose daily as we seek to make His name known here in the kingdom of Thailand. To God be the glory. ■

Rihanna Mills and her husband, Tim, serve as MTW missionaries in Thailand.

VIEW FROM THE CHURCH:

MISSIONS AS A MINDSET

by David Sarafolean

*When we started our church in 2003, we made a conscious decision to be involved with world missions. Part of our reasoning had to do with the criticism often leveled against conservative Reformed churches: *You're so concerned with doctrine that you don't care for the lost.* Of course that is a caricature, but unless our theology moves us to actively seek and save the lost, those doctrines are misunderstood and misapplied. That leads to a second reason for our emphasis on missions: the sheer number of people who do not know the Savior both in the U.S. and around the world.*

Even before we became a particular church, we supported two MTW families serving in very different parts of the world—

southern Africa and central Mexico. The missionaries to Africa are assisting pastors and churches in the wake of the AIDS crisis. And the missionaries in central Mexico are teaching and training pastors.

During the last year we began supporting another MTW missionary, and we have two other families we plan to support soon. One of them became foster parents to twin boys, one of whom was severely handicapped. When we learned that this child needed emergency surgery (the couple had already depleted their savings to provide for an earlier operation) our session was moved to pray and make the need known to our congregation. In a scene reminiscent of the Macedonians as described in 2 Corinthians 8 our congregation gave

five times more than what I thought would be collected.

On another occasion, the women of our church took it upon themselves to contact our missionaries to see if there were any special things that could be sent for their children at Christmas. One missionary wrote back and thanked us profusely because the gifts we sent were all they had to share that year.

Our church is not large. As yet we do not have a formal missions policy, nor do we have a missions committee. But we have discovered that being missions-minded is an intentional choice. By God's grace we hope to build on what has been started. ■

David Sarafolean is the pastor of Christ Covenant Church (PCA) in Midland, Mich.



2010 PCA Global Missions Conference Travels to Chattanooga



MISSION
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The 2010 PCA Global Missions Conference will have a new venue next year—traveling outside of Atlanta for the first time since 2002.

"Next year's conference will be held at the Chattanooga

Convention Center, November 5-7, 2010," said Jack Beall, MTW's director of church resourcing. "This will also be the first year that Covenant College is partnering with MTW to co-sponsor the event."

The PCA Global Missions Conference, held every three years, is an opportunity to focus exclusively on missions. "It's a time when representatives from across the PCA and Mission to the World come together for worship and encouragement," said Jack. "It's also a great opportunity for MTW to communicate all that we do."

The 2010 PCA Global Missions Conference will cover a variety of topics of interest to church missions committees, students, missionaries, and laypeople through both the plenary sessions—featuring Paul Kooistra and Joe Novenson—and dozens of individualized seminars. "It's an equipping event and people always leave encouraged," Jack said.

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MTW Rolls Out New Web Tool for Team Leaders

Mission to the World is streamlining its approach to two-week missions with a new Web site designed specifically for team leaders. "The purpose of the site is to better equip our team leaders

for ministry, and to get information in and out smoothly," said Mitch Gindlesperger, director of MTW's Two-Week Department.

Currently, team leaders are using the site to get information about their project, communicate with office staff, and enter details about their team members. Phase two of the Web site development process plans to help leaders communicate directly with their team and facilitate discussions leading up to the project. The site will house instructional documents, travel info, marketing materials, and even MP3 sermons about missions.

It will not only help team leaders and participants, but also administrative personnel by enabling team members to fill out forms directly on the site. "Everything will be done online," Mitch said. "This will allow us to focus on relationships, not paperwork."

Saying Goodbye in Taiwan

by Joel Linton

Recently, Joel and Judy Linton, MTW missionaries to Taiwan, attended a Taiwanese funeral for Judy's uncle. Below is a first-person account from their prayer letter exploring the sadness of death without the hope of the gospel, and urging supporters to pray for opportunities to share this hope with the people they serve.

What I witnessed today made me feel desperately sad. The immediate family and friends seemed to greatly love this man who had died. They were trying to do many rituals to make sure the deceased makes it smoothly to the next world.

The funeral consists of worship rituals, where the immediate family comes and bows down and burns incense to their relative who has passed away. I saw the teenage children with eyes and noses raw from crying, and I wondered what was going on in their hearts.

Many in Taiwan try to carefully follow these rites for the dead out of fear, to prevent the ghost from haunting them or bringing them bad luck. But I can tell that this family is trying through their grief to do the right rituals for the sake of their loved one whom they want to make sure is okay and doing well in the afterlife.

Judy's cousin blogged about facing his father's death:

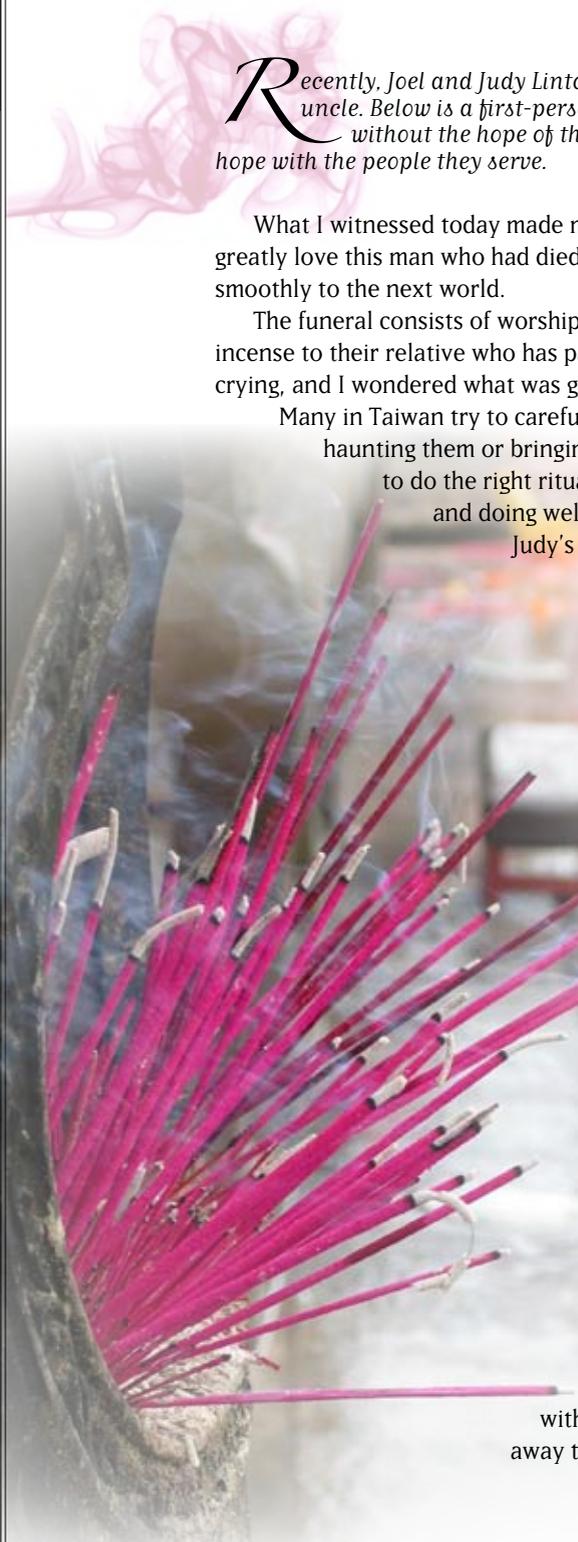
"Now all your pain is gone, father. Do tell us what you want to eat—we will do our best to prepare the delicacies for you. Get your stomach full so that you will have enough strength to walk all the way to the World of Extreme Happiness."

"After offering simple worship to grandma, the land god, and the mountain god, we placed your urn of ashes next to grandma's. We believe that with grandma's company, you will not feel lonely."

In America's world of convenience and sanitized hospitals, we try to ignore death's presence. But you cannot get away from it very easily in Taiwan. People with no hope put their hope in human rites and in Buddhist and Taoist priests and their words of comfort.

They are fervent with fear and yet committed to what they believe. Only the power of the Holy Spirit can help them let go of their beliefs, because letting go feels like turning away from their parents and ancestors. But only by letting go will they ever be able to consider Jesus Christ and the message of the gospel.

We desperately need you to pray for the Taiwanese people who are without God and without a real hope in the world. Only Jesus Christ takes away the vanity of life and the sting of death. ■



Mission to the World is the mission-sending agency of the PCA, helping to fulfill the Great Commission by advancing Reformed and covenantal church-planting movements through word and deed in strategic areas worldwide.

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PCA Global Missions Conference
Chattanooga, TN
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Dr. Paul Kooistra

GIVING AS AN ACT OF WORSHIP

The Bible is God's inerrant word. Therefore, we know that every word it contains is included for our edification. As our nation and the whole world, for that matter, goes through one of the most significant financial upheavals in recent memory, I believe God is speaking to His people out of the eighth chapter of 2 Corinthians. It is there that Paul holds up the Macedonian church as an example of Christian stewardship. He writes, "We want you to know about the grace of God given to the Macedonian churches. Out of great trial and extreme poverty they gave with overflowing joy in extra generosity."

Clearly, Paul believes there is much we need to learn from the churches in Macedonia. First, that stewardship for the Christian is never first and foremost about how much money we have. Jesus taught the same thing when He contrasted the widow and her mite with the large contributions of the Pharisees. Giving is primarily an act of worship. It certainly was for the Macedonians.

They had great needs and their giving out of this need was an expression of their faith.

Giving that grows out of faith produces praise and honor to God. It affirms that everything we have is a gift from God. It acknowledges that God's care for us is perfect. Such faith declares that we lack nothing we need. Recently, a woman related how God provided for her to pay off a medical bill. She said, "I prayed, and when I received the money I simply broke down and cried for joy." I thought this was a beautiful expression of gratitude and worship. Then I thought, "Should not all of God's people experience such feelings almost daily? After all, God supplies what we need in the same fashion through our jobs, our health, the food we eat, His Word, and hundreds of ways that we don't even recognize."

Paul writes in his letter to the Philippian Christians that he has learned how to worship God when he

has more than he needs and when he has less than he needs. He is able to do this through the strength he receives from his Savior (Philippians 4:13). Paul teaches us something very important about giving. It is a gift of divine grace (Romans 12:8), but Paul tells us it is a cultivated gift. The gift of giving as an act of worship is, as he puts it, one that he "learned" (Philippians 4:11). I believe that God uses the times when we have less far more than the times when we have plenty, to grow the gift of giving. He did it with the Macedonians and He will do it in us.

Paul then tells us that it is through the power of Christ in his life that he is able to give out of faith rather than simply out of surplus (Philippians 4:13).

Why is this important? Because where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:21). We give to honor and worship God. If this is true, and it is, then you can see how important it is to get it right.

Paul D. Kooistra



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