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MESSAGE

abwe

Hardship & Harvest: New Missionaries in a Changing World

From the Underground to
the Unreached

Not Forgotten:
Serving Ukrainians From the
Borderland and Beyond



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abwe.org**WHO IS ABWE?**

ABWE was founded in 1927 as an independent Baptist mission. Supported by a network of 400 like-minded churches, we are a global family of ministries, dedicated to fulfilling the Great Commission by multiplying leaders, churches, and missions movements among every people. Currently, more than 1,000 ABWE missionaries are reaching the lost in 84 countries through evangelism, discipleship, church planting, leadership development, and national partnerships.

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Sending Missionaries Backwards

BY PAUL L. DAVIS | ABWE PRESIDENT

In many ways, the way we send missionaries is backwards.

By “backwards,” I don’t mean primitive or old-fashioned. I actually mean that the “old” way of commissioning gospel workers—Scripture’s way—is in one sense the opposite of our method today.

Today, when a pastor preaches on missions, the church waits for someone in the pew to “feel” called. Sometimes they do, and gifted, faithful, godly laborers are sent off as a result.

But in Acts 13, when the local church in Antioch gathered for prayer and worship, the Holy Spirit spoke to the leaders first and said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (v. 2). The church took the initiative to identify those whom God was setting apart, and Saul and Barnabas obeyed.

Of course, the Holy Spirit is free to work in a variety of ways. He is sovereign. But I can’t help but think that there’s something beautiful and frankly better about the sending process starting with the local church and not only an individual’s personal calling.

That’s why it’s such a joy to see a new crop of faithful new missionaries and their home churches mobilize as one for the work of missions.

Since our last new missionary issue, we’ve seen an astounding 43 churches set apart 84 new workers for the harvest. God is still at work like he was in Acts 13.

And because the first missionary movement started with prayer in Acts 13, let me challenge you and your church to pray this prayer with us:

Heavenly Father,

You are the Lord of the harvest. Your Son died and rose to purchase a people from every nation. We stand in awe of your love for our world. We ask you, by your Spirit, to set aside these 84 missionaries in a special way. Empower their churches to support them well. Call generous givers to partner with them. And keep them rooted in Christ, growing in grace, and committed to this task. Do all of this for your glory. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Our time in this world is short, and nothing matters more than the eternal destiny of human souls. May our powerful God continue to set apart workers to proclaim the good news.

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Corrections to "A Boy Named 'Joseph-God-Saved'"

In our last issue, we told the story of a Southeast Asian boy named Joseph-God-Saved who was adopted by a national believer identified as Kyaw. The article supplied a few artistic details ("growling of his stomach," "hand shaking from age, the woman turned the key in the lock") that were not accurate, although the narrative itself was correct. The online version of the story has been updated and can be read at abwe.org/blog/boy-named-joseph-god-saved. We apologize for any confusion and inaccuracy.

Serving Ukrainians From the Borderland and Beyond

ABWE missionaries and national partners work tirelessly to bring physical and spiritual aid to Ukraine and assist refugees displaced by war.

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Connections



TRACI WARNER
Nicaragua

“The first group of teenagers from the Impacto de Vida evangelism program went with me to train a new group in my Niquinohomo church, and now they too are ready to share the gospel with kids in and beyond their own community!”



Abundant Harvest in the Philippines

BY RANDY SOUTHWELL
LOCATION: PHILIPPINES



TODD & JEN JANES
Thailand

“One of Todd’s favorite ways to share the gospel is in conversations with taxi drivers. He habitually brings an ‘Honoring Parents’ gospel booklet to leave with the driver. One driver was excited to read it, saying, ‘Oh, thank you! I have a friend who is a Christian too.’”

In the Philippines, the birthplace of ABWE, Filipino believers continue to grow in their zeal for evangelism.

Missionary Steve Deal and Filipino Pastor Ariel Abadiano have been using chronological Bible study resources from ABWE’s Good Soil ministry and witnessing astounding fruit. Steve’s ministry helped launch 38 weekly home Bible studies, averaging 420 in attendance.

“The reason our home Bible studies are so successful is we teach from Genesis to Revelation,” Steve shared.

One Filipino woman, saved through Steve’s church plant in Calumpang, began witnessing to her husband, Arnell. He too came to faith. Now, serving as a pastor, Arnell himself teaches 14 of the 38 weekly home Bible studies and shares biblical truth with more than 150 people.

Another local, Noel, is a high school teacher who has led several students to faith in Christ, and they too are becoming eager to share their faith.

“They boldly share their faith teaching Bible studies during the week,” Steve explained. “God [is] using young adults who have surrendered their lives for his service during these difficult days.”

Pastor Ariel recently translated Good Soil’s *The Story of Hope* resource into Tagalog, and translation efforts are underway for Cebuano, the two most common native languages in the Philippines. ■

Learn more about Good Soil resources at goodsoil.com

Martin's Reformation

BY STEVE WENDEL

LOCATION: CZECH REPUBLIC

Martin, a Roman Catholic in the Czech Republic, was deeply troubled. If he couldn't attend mass, how could he be sure he would go to heaven if he died from COVID?

When COVID restrictions prohibited regular mass, Martin's priest assured him that they had a special dispensation during the pandemic and that it wouldn't jeopardize his salvation. But how could he be sure this dispensation aligned with God's requirements? Could he trust the priest as the final authority?

In his distress, Martin began reading the Bible for the first time in his life. With each chapter arose more questions. Why pray to Mary? Why not confess sins directly to God?

When Martin approached his priest again with his concerns, the priest sharply told him to stop reading the Bible and to trust the Church to interpret God's Word. This only intensified Martin's apprehensions, and he deepened his Scripture study.

He believed what he read, and he finally called out to Christ directly for true salvation.

Martin gradually left the Roman Catholic church, losing lifelong friends and community.

Now, each Sunday he drives an hour to Ceske Budejovice, where ABWE missionaries Steve and Cari Wendel labored for nearly a decade to revitalize a small Baptist church plant, the only one in this entire region of the Czech Republic.

That church, once closed off to outsiders, wants to receive more new members like Martin. "We need to find a pastor who will treat this church like a missionary," one of their leaders said. "Someone who is going to go out and meet people and bring them to church."

Praise God for this isolated and beleaguered church plant that is now on mission, and pray for Martin's growth in the faith. ■



CHRIS & DEBBIE JOHNSON
EveryEthne

"Chris took his new English students to Charlotte for halal meat shopping and a meal at a Pakistani-Indian restaurant. These men are Muslim and fled their countries due to war, terrorism, and threats on their lives. Pray for gospel conversations with them."



ODIR & CYNTHIA BRANDÃO
Brazil

"God has given us many opportunities to counsel couples in various stages of life. A big highlight for Odir was providing pre-marital counseling for a young couple and the privilege for him to officiate their wedding. We are now joint counseling couples every Thursday night."



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Great Joy in Heaven

BY KATELYN HAWKINS

LOCATION: PARAGUAY

Lives are saved physically and spiritually through the partnership between an ABWE Launch Point team and a Paraguayan church.



his wife regularly share Christ through kids' clubs in their home and are preparing to open a soup kitchen in their impoverished neighborhood. Local pastors are assisting him with the goal of planting a church.

Gustavo is one of many Paraguayan church leaders passionate about reaching their nation for Christ. To support their work, ABWE partners with local pastors in Paraguay through Launch Point short-term mission teams.

"We continue to connect with local pastors and partners in Paraguay to encourage and empower them in their ministries," explained Steve Douglas, ABWE regional director for Spanish South America.

ABWE has partnered with La Florida Church in San Lorenzo since the initial short-term trip in 2015. Committed to their mission to glorify God and grow, serve, and multiply, this host church actively trains youth for ministry and develops outreaches for children and at-risk families in the community. La Florida Church grows by planting new churches.

"It is in these new church communities that we focus our efforts," said short-term team leader Jeff Robinson, M.D. "Compassionate, free medical care allows us to bring acts of love to

Gustavo glanced around furtively, noting the position of the guards around him as he crossed the prison yard to the appointed meeting place. In just a few hours, his escape would be complete.

Life had not been easy for Gustavo. Seeking opportunities in the lucrative drug trade, he began trafficking narcotics in a network spanning South American borders. After being imprisoned four years in Argentina, Gustavo returned to trafficking, only to be captured again in his native Paraguay and sentenced to another four-year term.

It was during this incarceration that Gustavo and his fellow traffickers decided to escape. The plan was to meet in the pavilion where the Christians held their meetings in order not to arouse the guards' suspicion. That night, Gustavo was the only one who showed up at the rendezvous point. As he anxiously sat through the meeting, he listened as the Christians presented the gospel. Enthralled by the idea that God could save him, a criminal, Gustavo placed his trust in Christ.

Now, years after his salvation, Gustavo met with an ABWE medical short-term team as a man transformed. He and



individuals, opening an opportunity to share Christ.”

‘Now the Work Begins’

One of the communities served by the spring 2022 team was an indigenous Guarani village, located a six-hour bus ride from Paraguay’s capital, Asuncion. The Guarani, one of the largest ethnic groups in south-central South America, adhere to Roman Catholicism or traditional animistic beliefs. With only eight percent evangelical believers, many Guarani have yet to hear the gospel.

The chief of this local community invited the ABWE team after experiencing the testimony of believers from La Florida Church. The chief shared that in the 22 years of his leadership, no one had come to care for his people’s medical needs.

As the ABWE medical team treated illness and injury, over 30 Paraguayan Christians sat one on one with patients arriving to the clinic and shared the hope of Christ. Pastor Alcides publicly preached the gospel in the Guarani language—and many expressed faith in Christ.

Pastor Alcides later shared his initial skepticism of the effort required to conduct a medical clinic for a community so remote from the capital. He was

then reminded of the passage in Luke 15 that describes the immense joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. He likened this to the thrill in a soccer stadium when a goal is scored.

“I look at the numbers from the clinics thinking of the great joy in heaven,” Dr. Robinson conveyed.

The numbers are astounding. During the five clinic days conducted in Paraguay, the medical team treated 906 patients—671 adults and 235 children—and saw 179 professions of faith. An additional 188 people expressed interest in receiving gospel resources.

In the words of local church leader, Pastor Koki, “Now the work begins.”

The Paraguayan church is committed to discipling these new believers and visiting those interested in the gospel. Building on inroads created through the medical clinics, they continue to extend spiritual care into these new areas.

The members of La Florida Church, together with the ABWE medical team, praise God for what he accomplished through their partnership.

“Realizing that God works through you—in spite of you—and in a more artful way than any of us could imagine, is the beautiful picture of his love that is being painted. This is the joy in service, seeing that God is revealing his individual love

for you, while allowing you to see his love for others,” Dr. Robinson reflected.

“The architecture of the team that God brings together and the partnership with a church that is so passionate about reaching its community for Christ is just a glimpse of God’s grand design.”

All Skills Are Needed

God continues to draw believers to use their training and talents to reach communities for Christ through Launch Point short-term missions teams. As they meet specific needs identified by ministry partners like La Florida Church, Launch Point teams support, encourage, and advance the global church—extending spiritual impact long past the end of the trip.

All skill sets are needed in the global church. Is God calling you to use your giftings on a Launch Point team? ■

To learn more about short-term missions trips, visit launchpointmissions.org



Editor’s Note: Gustavo’s name has been changed for security.

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**THE AFGHAN
INITIATIVE**



From the Underground to the Unreached

BY KATELYN HAWKINS

Violence and desperate prayers for help led Muslim families in Afghanistan to find salvation in Christ—and a new life mission.

Dangerous Questions

For the first two decades of his life, Awad's identity was defined by Islam.

Each time the *azaan* sounded from the loudspeakers of the local mosque, calling the community to their five daily prayers, Awad spread his prayer mat toward Mecca and raised his hands, declaring the greatness of Allah. Awad's devotion stood out—even in fundamentalist Afghanistan.

When Awad began university studies in a larger city, he found himself surrounded by new ideas. His friends in the dorm shared perspectives from different regions of Afghanistan. Intrigued, he spent his free hours immersed in books on a wide range of subjects.

In his new city, Awad was no longer sheltered from the iron hand of extremism. He witnessed near-constant brutalities committed in the streets by those claiming to uphold true Islam. Reports came that in the rural provinces, the Taliban stoned women for perceived crimes without evidence. Girls were prohibited from attending school.

Then, one tragic day, two of Awad's best friends were killed in a suicide bombing.

Awad was filled with grief and plagued with questions. *How can people so brutal think they are going to heaven? Does Allah truly accept violence and killing? Why are women not equal to men in our country when Allah created them both?*

He took his questions to the mullahs at the mosque—but none of these religious leaders could provide any answers.

When Afghanistan fell to the Taliban in August 2021, news outlets told stories of violent repression and of Afghans' desperate attempts to escape. But few ever told the stories of the Afghan Christian community—a growing underground church network with as many as 20,000 men, women, and children.

ABWE has connected with several Afghan Christian families through Live Global and EveryEthne missionaries. Through the Afghan Initiative, these families are being rescued from life-threatening situations and relocated to cities in the US, where they will remobilize to share the gospel with unreached Afghan communities.

Each of these families turned from Islam to Christ and have faithfully served in underground churches even through persecution. Their stories testify of God's power.

After finishing university, Awad remained in the city to work. The more he immersed himself in his business, the more corruption he exposed in Afghan society. His questions only increased. Disillusioned, Awad returned to his hometown.

As he settled into life with his family, Awad's brother-in-law invited him to help distribute aid to impoverished families. He and Awad's sister, Farzana, were involved in community development through a food bank and educational center for young girls. As Awad joined them, he observed how lovingly they treated those around them, and how they had begun praying before meals. Awad's sister, in turn, noticed his tormented thoughts and growing apathy toward Islam, no longer participating in daily prayers.

One day as they worked, she asked him, "If you could choose any religion to follow, what would you choose?" Awad answered bitterly, "I don't want any religion."

Turning toward him, Farzana explained, "To bring peace to your mind and heart, you need to worship your creator. The peace you are searching for comes from a true relationship with God, and nothing else."

Awad later heard Farzana discussing the Bible and praying for him in an online meeting. He confronted her angrily: "Why are you talking about Christianity?"

Despite his discomfort, that night he began thinking. Pulling out his computer, he searched for answers about Christianity and secretly began watching Christian videos produced in

a neighboring country. Awad didn't want to endanger his family—living, after all, in a 99.8 percent Muslim country in which many who were deemed apostates had been killed.

Farzana and her husband Ghulam invited him to join an underground church meeting, where the believers gave him

a Bible. For the first time, Awad realized he could choose for himself what to believe. With each chapter of the Bible he read, he discovered answers to his questions. He was fascinated to find that Christians prayed for their enemies and treated men and women as equals.

After a few months of patient guiding from Farzana, Ghulam, and an underground church leader, Awad publicly placed his trust in Christ and was baptized.

"I started feeling safe and free in Jesus and had peace," he proclaimed.

When the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan in August 2021, Awad was growing in his faith at the underground church led by Ghulam and Far-

zana. Before Taliban forces even reached their city, word came that their church had been betrayed by an informant.

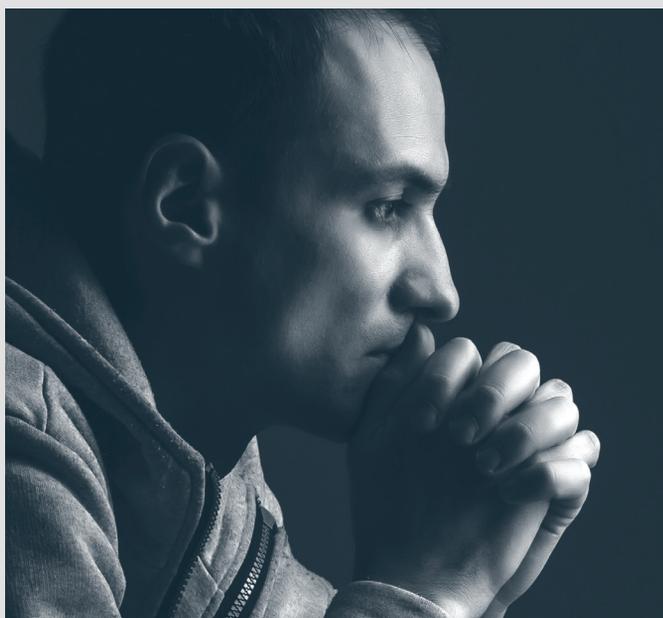
"Taliban members were checking our church alley every day," Ghulam reported. "We were living in constant fear not knowing when the Taliban were going to find all of us."

Awad and his sister's family were forced to flee. They eventually reached a refugee camp, where they awaited visas to relocate to North America. Their difficult circumstances did not change their passion for sharing the gospel with fellow Afghans.

"I want to help people, and if I cannot help, I want to pray for them. I want to share the gospel any way I can," explained Awad.

"I want to help people, and if I cannot help, I want to pray for them. I want to share the gospel any way I can."

Afghan Christian

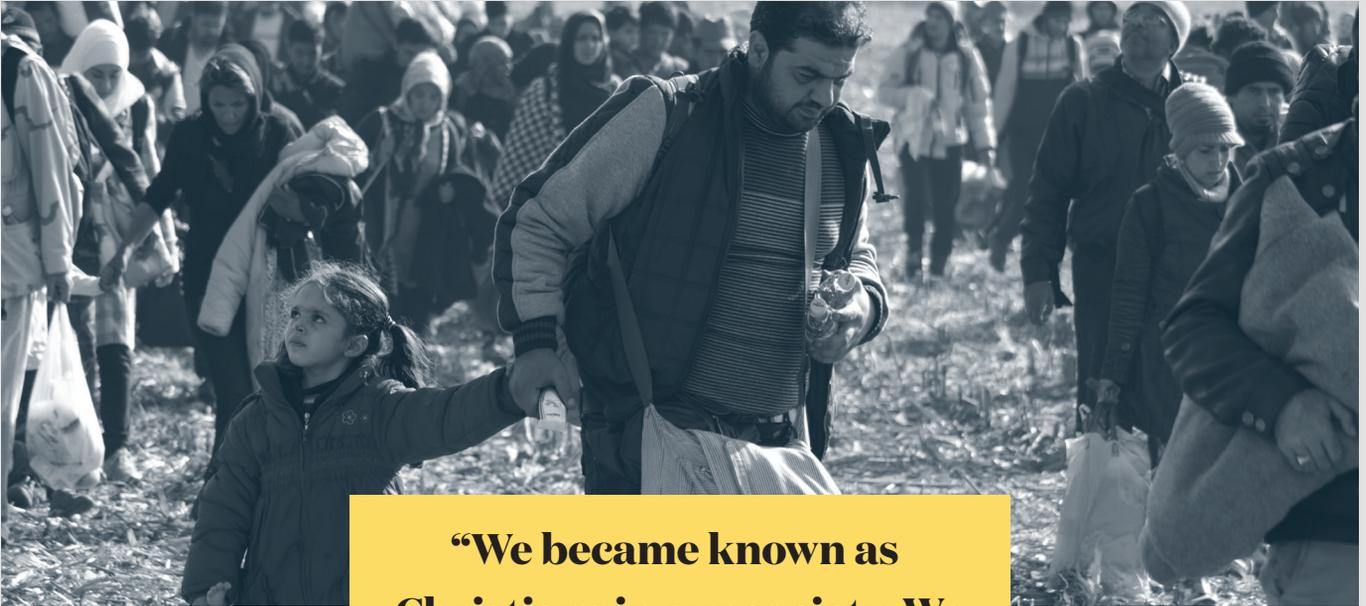


'Show Me the Truth'

Nasima's husband had just announced that he intended to marry a second wife—his divine right as a Muslim man in Afghanistan.

Life had brought nothing but disappointment for Nasima. As a girl born into a strict Islamic family, she was forbidden from attending school. The only activity she was permitted outside household chores was to go to the mosque and listen to the Qur'an—provided she kept her hijab wrapped tightly around her head to conceal her face.

When Nasima was still a teenager, her parents arranged to marry her to Mahmoud. In accordance with Afghan custom, she moved into her in-laws' home, where she lived as a servant without rights. The family elders advised Mahmoud



“We became known as Christians in our society. We are afraid of the Taliban, our relatives, and the community in which we lived, because no matter which corner of Afghanistan we hide in, they will find us and kill us.”

Afghan Christian

and Nasima to have as many children as possible to submit to Allah’s command and increase the followers of the prophet Muhammad.

Nasima gave birth to five children—but after suffering complications from multiple pregnancies in quick succession, her health was compromised. Already weakened physically, her distress increased when Mahmoud decided he wanted additional wives.

Kept hidden from Nasima was the internal struggle growing within Mahmoud. He loved Nasima, and seeing her incapacitated stirred up anger at the mullahs, his family, and Islam itself that commanded her to continue having children.

While Mahmoud was fasting during the month of Ramadan, he became ill and took medicine to relieve the pain. The mullah angrily informed Mahmoud that he had sinned by breaking the fast and would need to fast another 60 days to fulfill his obligation. Mahmoud began to doubt, *Surely God is not this cruel.*

Determined to seek the true God, Mahmoud remembered seeing the name of Christ in the Qur’an and decided to learn about Christianity. Kneeling on the floor, he cried out, “God, show me the truth!”

When Ramadan ended, he searched Facebook to find a Christian. He got in touch with a man in the underground

church who gave him a Bible and generously answered all his questions. “I read the Bible for four months and found the true and living God in Christianity,” Mahmoud shared.

Nasima immediately noticed a change in her husband’s behavior. He discarded his plans for polygamy and apologized for his hurtful actions in the past. His life became full of mercy, love, and encouragement. Curious about this radical change, Nasima asked him for the reason.

“Christ changed my behavior,” he replied.

Mahmoud shared the gospel with Nasima and introduced her to a Christian woman who communicated with her online. Soon, Nasima also trusted Christ. Her disappointment in life was replaced with great joy. Embracing their new freedom in Christ, Mahmoud allowed Nasima to attend literacy classes, and she became the first female in her family able to read.

Mahmoud’s extended family also noticed this change in behavior—and grew suspicious. One day, Mahmoud’s sister snuck into his room and found his Bible. Furious, Mahmoud’s family began forcibly dragging him to the mosque for prayer. They continually monitored his actions. Mahmoud and Nasima were forced to flee to a different city—but even there, they had



to move often from house to house as neighbors discovered their Christian beliefs and threatened their lives.

“We became known as Christians in our society. We are afraid of the Taliban, our relatives, and the community in which we lived, because no matter which corner of Afghanistan we hide in, they will find us and kill us,” Mahmoud explained. “They would kill us because if you kill apostates in Islam, you receive a reward in paradise.”

Despite persecution, Mahmoud and Nasima desire to serve the Lord. “I love to evangelize and disciple my people,” said Mahmoud. “Jesus says to reach all the nations, and I want to do that too!”

A New Calling

When Afghanistan fell to the Taliban in August 2021, these members of the underground church were placed in grave danger.

As the Taliban hunted Christians, these believers were forced to flee their country. Providentially, ABWE was able to connect with several families—including Awad, Ghulam and Farzana, and Mahmoud and Nasima—and is excited to provide a pathway for them to continue serving Christ here in the US.

Through the Afghan Initiative, these families will be strategically relocated to cities in the US with significant Afghan

populations so they can reach the lost for Christ. Serving in their own languages and cultures, these Afghan believers will be able to relate to fellow refugees in ways American missionaries cannot.

“This has been my desire and dream, that God would bring a strong organization so I can serve and learn more [about] Christ to serve other believers,” said another Afghan believer associated with the cohort. “I have prayed for this day for many years, and I know God is answering that prayer.”

These Afghan believers have remained faithful through persecution and danger. Please join us in praying for the families in the Afghan Initiative as they begin their new ministries in the US—and that many more Muslims will be drawn to know the true God. ■



Partner with the Afghan Initiative and help bring these Afghan Christians from the underground church to the unreached.

liveglobal.org/afghan

Editor's Note: Names have been changed for security.



Ukrainians wait outside a Kyiv church to receive humanitarian aid.

Not Forgotten:

Serving Ukrainians From the Borderland and Beyond

BY KATELYN HAWKINS

ABWE missionaries and national partners work tirelessly to bring physical and spiritual aid to Ukraine and assist refugees displaced by war.



Above: God's Design Church in Kyiv baptized 19 new believers this summer.

Right: Ukrainian families received New Testaments at a church outreach.



The first barrage of missiles broke the early dawn silence on February 24, 2022.

As the Russian military offensive battered cities across Ukraine, countless Ukrainians faced an excruciating choice: to stay in their current cities under threat of destruction, or to leave families, homes, and the lives they knew to flee to safer cities in western Ukraine or other European nations.

After the first six months of war, a staggering 6.8 million Ukrainians were dispersed throughout Europe, with an additional 6.6 million internally displaced, according to UN reports.

Among them were eight ABWE missionaries serving in Kyiv and Odesa—some for decades.

With the first air raid sirens still ringing on the morning of the invasion, ABWE missionary Rich D. drove from his home in Moldova to the Ukrainian border to receive the ABWE colleagues evacuating from Odesa. Amid grief, shock, and turmoil, they jumped into ministry alongside Moldovan national partners to assist the Ukrainian women

and children flooding across the border. In addition to Ukrainians, they provided transit housing for hundreds of evacuating international students from India, Africa, and the Middle East.

Their ministry later continued in Romania and is echoed throughout Europe as ABWE missionaries and national partners work tirelessly to serve those enduring war within Ukraine and those escaping as refugees into surrounding European nations.

“It’s an emotional roller coaster,” explains Mike G., ABWE Ukraine team leader. “The reality is that we’re in the middle of a war. But spiritually speaking, it’s been very fruitful. Churches are full like they never were before. God is saving people.”

ABWE missionaries are employing creative means to show the compassion of Christ in wartime conditions—and Ukrainians are responding.

“People are looking for community. People are looking for fellowship. They’re looking for people to pray with them and just listen to what’s going on in their heart and head.”

Mike G.

Ukraine: Not Forgotten by the Church

Even while evacuated, the ABWE Ukraine team has remained focused on equipping and encouraging national partners.

One of these partners is Pastor Zhenya, of Bible and Life Church in Kyiv, Ukraine. Saved after watching the Jesus film as a youth and raised in Bible and Life Church soon after its founding by an ABWE missionary, Zhenya had recently graduated seminary when the war began. He was required to remain in Ukraine, like most men ages 18 to 60 able to contribute to the war effort, but made the difficult decision to evacuate his wife and small daughter.

As Russian forces withdrew from Kyiv in mid-April, Zhenya and church leadership strategized how they could help the thousands of internally-displaced Ukrainians who resettled in Kyiv after fleeing Mariupol, Kharkiv, Kherson, and other areas devastated by shelling. Bible and Life Church began holding an outdoor service on Thursdays that included a children’s program and distributing food packets. With widespread unemployment due to the war, attendance soon reached 300 each week—a total of over 4,100 during the first six months.

“People are looking for community. People are looking for fellowship.

They’re looking for people to pray with them and just listen to what’s going on in their heart and head,” Mike G. says.

Through outreach by Bible and Life Church, many have turned to Christ—including Zhenya’s mother, whose resistance to the gospel softened through the hardships of COVID and war. She was baptized by Zhenya in August.

Other Ukrainian churches report a similar response. God’s Design Church began meeting daily on the street to sing, share the gospel, and pass out food and hygiene items. This summer they baptized 19 new believers, with another baptism planned before winter. When their congregation doubled in size, they searched for a larger, underground facil-

ity that would accommodate everyone even during air raid sirens.

Crossroads Church in Odesa also recently baptized 13 people as community members found hope in Christ through evangelistic services, hot meals, and Bible studies. “The church is full every Sunday,” notes ABWE Ukraine missionary Holly F. “It is a joy to begin seeing lasting fruit coming from the ministry to physical needs.”

Meeting physical needs remains a crucial way of demonstrating Christ’s love as necessities are scarce and devastation continues. The Ukraine Crisis Fund undergirds national partners, helping supply food, fuel, ministry vehicles, rent for church facilities, and shipments of medical supplies. “These brothers and sisters are so thankful that the church has not forgotten them and is helping them. They’re daily facing strangers and giving them hugs and showing the love of Christ, and we’re able to help make that possible,” says Mike G.

At the same time, Ukrainian believers need prayer as the heartbreak of war drags on. As voiced by one national partner displaced from a city now under occupation: “[Pray] that God would give us peace in our hearts, strength to keep living, show us himself and how to find what we need, help us survive this grief.”



Ministry partners in Romania send convoys of humanitarian aid into Ukraine.



Refugees in Bucharest share a meal prepared and served by UBC22 volunteers in a church humanitarian center.

Photo: Nathan Jones

Romania: ‘The Lord Provided All the Way’

In Bucharest, Romania, a group of six churches and two organizations, including ABWE, combined staff and resources to unite as Ukrainian Bucharest Churches ‘22 (UBC22).

“On February 27, we held a Zoom meeting to figure out what to do if we saw refugees coming here to Bucharest. And refugees arrived on our doorstep that Monday morning,” recalls Chris Guess, ABWE missionary to Romania.

UBC22 quickly set up humanitarian centers in their churches, using every available space to install beds, showers, washers and dryers, and kitchen facilities. From the beginning, they had a rush of volunteers—over 900 people served with UBC22 during the first six months, helping accommodate 3,500 refugees. Volunteers sacrificed time and even jobs to fill roles as receptionists, cooks, or translators, or to provide counseling or help with transportation and legal paperwork.

“For the church to say as one voice, ‘Yes, this is important, this is what we’re doing’—it’s good to see some walls break down and the church be unified in honoring Christ by serving refugees,” says Chris.

Volunteers seek to make personal connections with each Ukrainian guest, listening to the heartbreak and needs of many who have lost everything. All are invited for prayer and worship services. Romanian pastor Sorin Deac explains, “The gospel is the engine of what we do. From day one we realized that we get to . . . embody the gospel by serving these people.”

Knowing that God’s Word does not return void, UBC22 staff imported Russian-language Bibles and children’s Bibles for Ukrainians to take with them on their journey. “People that never touched the Word will accept it because it’s a gift, and then you see them reading it later,” says Chris.

The ministry of UBC22 goes beyond hosting short- and long-term refugees, extending into Ukraine through convoys delivering food and critical supplies. UBC22 identified churches in Ukraine with whom they could partner, drawing on existing relationships through ABWE and a Romanian network.

“We’re thinking long-term,” explains Chris. “The desire is that we would not just deliver food but build relationships.”

Each convoy of vans carries 10 tons of food staples and water, along with containers of fuel and supplies requested by Ukrainian churches—often water filters, first-aid kits, or tourniquets. Once in Ukraine, local ministries transport the supplies farther into active war zones in the east or south. On the return trip, UBC22 convoys pick up Ukrainians waiting to evacuate to Romania. After six months, UBC22 had made 27 convoy trips.

“It’s been neat to see the Lord provide all the way,” Chris shares.

“The gospel is the engine of what we do. From day one we realized that we get to . . . embody the gospel by serving these people.”

Pastor Sorin Deac

UBC22 pastors and volunteers comfort Ukrainian refugees.



Photo: Nathan Jones



With help from the Ukraine Crisis Fund, Erd-Parkvarosi Baptist Church rented a shower container to increase their capacity for hosting refugees.



Hungary: A Window of Opportunity

Other Ukrainians crossed the border into Hungary, pouring into the Budapest train station where masses waited in freezing cold to buy tickets onward to Western Europe—without anywhere to stay overnight.

“The war started on Thursday. On Sunday, some people gathered at the front of our church to organize what resources we had and who could help,” recalls Beth Hafer, ABWE Hungary missionary and member of Erd-Parkvarosi Baptist Church.

The church collected mattresses to furnish a makeshift living space in the basement of the church, while the city offered use of a community center across the street for additional housing. Find-

ing that capacity was limited due to a lack of showers in the community center, they had the idea to rent a shower container, with help from the Ukraine Crisis Fund. Once set up beside the church building, the container provided six showers, sinks, and hot water boilers. The church later rented another container to use as an apartment.

Volunteers from the church and community were on call 24/7 to receive refugees, prepare food and bedding, and purchase tickets for those in transit to other nations.

“Everything changed minute by minute,” explains Beth.

Most refugees passed through for a night or two, while others stayed longer to apply for visas. Many carried belongings hastily packed in bags and, through

tears, showed photos on their phones of houses destroyed and loved ones killed or left behind. One grandmother arrived with three other ladies from her family. She had left seven sons and two grandsons in Ukraine.

“When I showed her the fridge full of food, she just grabbed me and hugged me,” shares Beth.

Another young lady who stayed at the center for several days marveled, “I’ve never seen people love like this: people loving and caring for us who don’t have a reason to.”

“We have this one little window of opportunity to share with people,” Beth continues. “We want to put hands and feet to the love of Christ and pray that wherever we send people on to, God will use this.”

Bulgaria: Hope in Transit

In Bulgaria, a church stepped in to provide transit housing that government centers could not.

“We would sometimes get a call at 11:30 at night, ‘Hey, there’s a mom and baby with nowhere to go—can you come get them?’” describe Phil and Angela Flowers, ABWE Bulgaria missionaries. As their coastal city of Varna became the entry point for Ukrainian arrivals in Bulgaria, Varna’s population swelled with a 10 percent increase, overwhelming city resources. In response, the Flowers and Christian Evangelical Baptist Church converted space in the church building into a center that slept 17, with additional housing in apartments and the Flowers’ office.

Trains arrived daily at 8:00 p.m. The refugee center would record new arrivals, then call the church. “We were the

city refugee center for those staying one night. If we didn’t put them up, they slept on the floor at the sports hall,” Phil explains.

Other Ukrainians settled into Varna for longer periods. To assist them, the church provided school supplies for children, free Bulgarian lessons, and medical supplies—along with outreach movie nights showing Pilgrim’s Progress dubbed into Ukrainian. “There’s no way our church could do refugee ministry without the Ukraine Crisis Fund,” conveys Angela.

One Saturday night, while picking up a van load of Ukrainians at the train station, a lady shared through a translator that her nine-year-old son had a physical disability. Phil contacted a Bulgarian physical therapist in the church, who agreed to examine the boy after Sunday services.

When the therapist reported that the boy would lose movement in his arms and back if he could not continue physical therapy, the church responded. The family moved in with the pastor and his wife so their son could receive extended care. Overwhelmed with thankfulness, the family attended an evangelical Russian-speaking church the next Sunday.

“I have a question,” the mother asked after the service. “We’ve been going to Orthodox church our entire lives. Why is it we come to this church one time and we understand the Bible for the first time?” She requested a Bible so her family could start reading for themselves.

Even in meeting basic human needs, God is working. “We keep hearing, can you help us find a church like your church once we’re back in Ukraine?” the Flowers add.



With the city refugee center overcrowded, a church in Varna, Bulgaria converted space in their building to house refugees.

Poland, Slovakia, and Beyond

ABWE launched a new team to Poland this spring to minister to Ukrainians in Gdansk. Poland has received more Ukrainian refugees than any other nation, with 1.3 million applying for residency, according to UN reports.

ABWE team leader Ron Davis works directly with a Ukrainian national partner, Pastor Maksym, in a church with a Ukrainian-majority congregation. Some of the church members fled to Gdansk during the 2014 invasion and were perfectly poised to serve their fellow Ukrainians in 2022. The church rented an office space to use as a ministry hub for evangelistic outreaches, English classes, and food distribution. With the influx of refugees searching for hope, attendance at their 40-member church has jumped to 200.

In Slovakia, as soon as Jerry and Susan Hamann received word from their local church that the invasion had begun and Ukrainians were on the way, they prepared beds and purchased groceries to host Ukrainian families in their own home. Some families stayed multiple weeks.

“We look for opportunities to encourage Ukrainians that, even in the midst of great tragedy and total insecurity, we can hope in the God who never changes and who takes evil and uses it for good,” they share.

As the Ukraine crisis continues, the network of ABWE ministries serving refugees remains committed to practically demonstrating Christ’s love. These efforts are mirrored in other locations throughout Europe: Moldova, Bosnia, Germany, Spain, and more. Missionaries and local churches daily exemplify Paul’s instruction to “rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15). They pray for peace and changed lives despite chaos, often echoing, “We hate the reason for it and still rejoice at what God is doing.” ■

Through the Ukraine Crisis Fund, ABWE missionaries and partners have:



Served more than **25,000** refugees



Purchased more than **800** beds



Equipped **28** convoy trips into Ukraine



Provided more than **60,000** meals



Given more than **1,200** gospel presentations



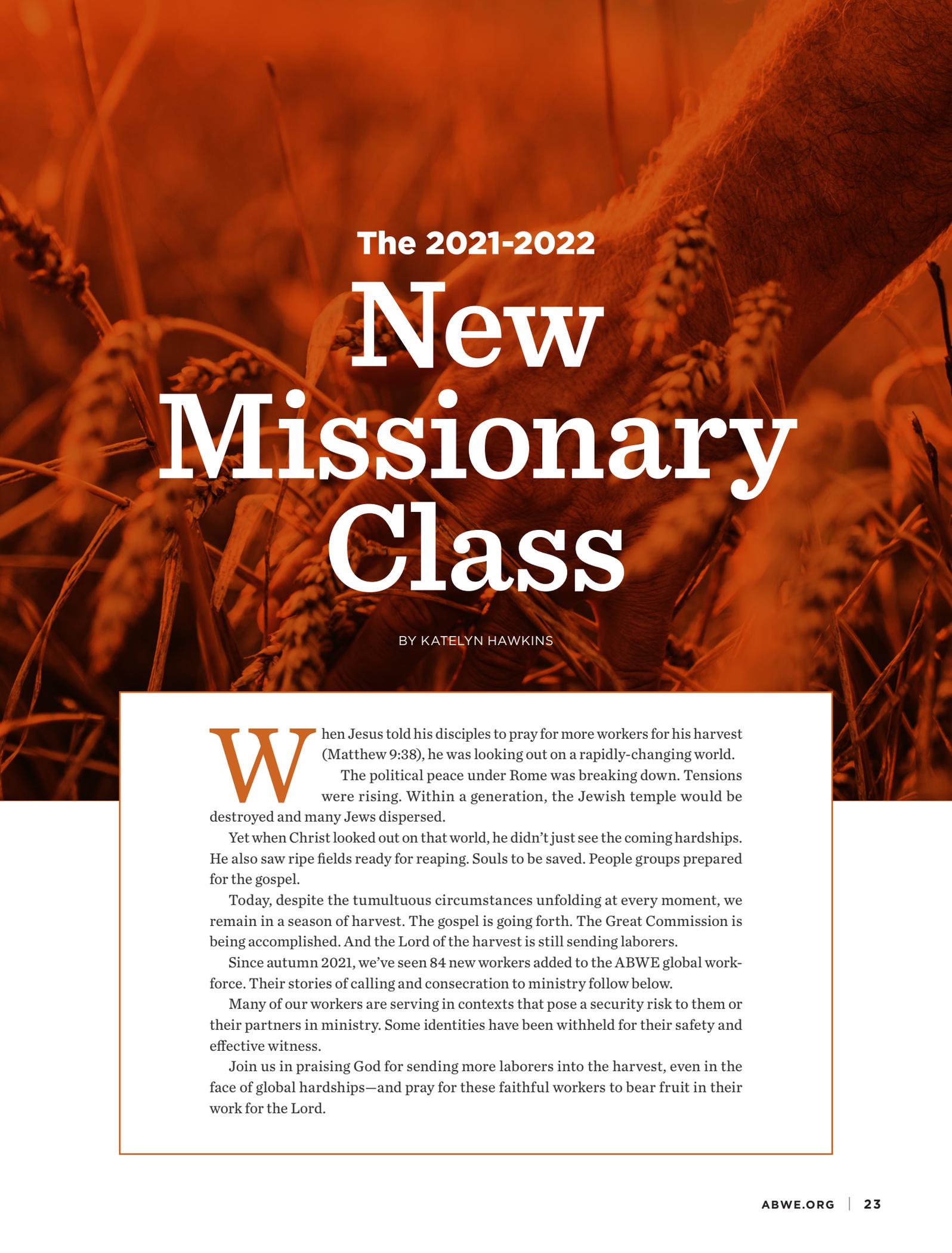
Supplied more than **4,500** liters of fuel for national partners



Distributed **3,500** books and pieces of gospel literature



Support the Ukraine Crisis Fund:
abwe.org/m/ukraine



The 2021-2022

New Missionary Class

BY KATELYN HAWKINS

When Jesus told his disciples to pray for more workers for his harvest (Matthew 9:38), he was looking out on a rapidly-changing world. The political peace under Rome was breaking down. Tensions were rising. Within a generation, the Jewish temple would be destroyed and many Jews dispersed.

Yet when Christ looked out on that world, he didn't just see the coming hardships. He also saw ripe fields ready for reaping. Souls to be saved. People groups prepared for the gospel.

Today, despite the tumultuous circumstances unfolding at every moment, we remain in a season of harvest. The gospel is going forth. The Great Commission is being accomplished. And the Lord of the harvest is still sending laborers.

Since autumn 2021, we've seen 84 new workers added to the ABWE global workforce. Their stories of calling and consecration to ministry follow below.

Many of our workers are serving in contexts that pose a security risk to them or their partners in ministry. Some identities have been withheld for their safety and effective witness.

Join us in praising God for sending more laborers into the harvest, even in the face of global hardships—and pray for these faithful workers to bear fruit in their work for the Lord.

Africa

Jordan & Jessica *Bird*

ABWE GO - Long Term

BENIN



Jordan was attending a missions conference when a missionary declared he was praying that one person would go to the mission field. Jordan immediately sensed God was prompting him: *It's you.*

Each time that Jordan, saved at age five, had heard missionaries speak at church, he believed God was calling him. As he grew older, he chose to pursue his own life plans instead.

“Finally,” Jordan recounts, he sensed God burdening him with the question, “Are you going to obey me or not?” “Yes,” Jordan prayed, and told his wife Jessica that God was calling them to missions.

Jessica had also grown up in a Christian home, hearing stories from her missionary grandparents. Interested in youth ministry, she attended Bible college before marrying Jordan.

When Jordan approached her about missions, she already knew it was God’s plan for them. They decided to attend a missions training school but would first have to sell their house.

While visiting the missionary who had spoken at the conference, the missionary prayed that when they returned home, God would bring someone to buy their house. Jordan and Jessica returned home to a text message from a cousin asking if their house was for sale. Amazed at God’s provision, they attended the training program.

Jordan, Jessica, and their daughter are now preparing to serve with first-generation believers in Benin to plant churches and mentor women who have been trafficked.



abwe.org/m/bird





Caleb & Hannah *Johansson*

ABWE GO - Long Term

SOUTH AFRICA



Hannah's prayer was to return to Guatemala as a missionary. She had been adopted from Guatemala at age five and placed into a Christian family with 12 siblings. At age seven, while Hannah was helping her mother sort through Sunday school materials, Hannah asked how to become a Christian. After coming to Christ, she told God that she wanted to work in an orphanage and teach English in Guatemala. Her prayer was answered at age 19 through a short-term trip.

Caleb also grew up in a Christian family, but his faith didn't become real until a high school missions trip to New Zealand. Though originally he simply wanted to see the place where "The Lord of the Rings" was filmed, as God worked in his heart, his passion for the lost deepened. He returned and enrolled in a Bible school program, where he met Hannah.

Caleb and Hannah plan to help local churches in South Africa develop and strengthen youth ministries.

abwe.org/m/johansson



Timothée & Myriam *Déglon*

ABWE GO - Long Term



TOGO

Timothée and Myriam, along with their four children, are French nationals serving in Togo. Timothée grew up in a Christian family living near Paris, and, at age 16, rededicated his life to the Lord and committed to full-time ministry. As he entered university, his family received a brochure from a French missions agency seeking agriculturalists, inspiring Timothée to pursue a degree in agriculture.

Myriam was born to a French father and Canadian mother serving as missionaries in France. She grew up hearing missionary stories at church, and at age six decided she would follow in the footsteps of female missionaries like Mary Slessor and Amy Carmichael. Aspiring to become a physician, she assumed she'd remain single, unable to balance medical ministry and marriage. Her plans changed at the beginning of medical school, however, when she met Timothée.

A friend told the couple about the ABWE hospital in northern Togo. But to get there, the Déglons had to find a French agency to partner with ABWE and raise financial support in a country where churches often face difficulties supporting their own pastors. They prayed that if God really wanted them there, he would open the doors.

God provided, and the Déglons arrived in Togo in 2013. In addition to serving at the Hospital of Hope and in agricultural development, they are involved in church planting, discipleship, and leadership training to further the ministry in West Africa. Timothée and Myriam also serve as team leaders for the Togo North team. They joined ABWE as associate missionaries in 2022 to formalize their partnership with ABWE.

abwe.org/m/degлон





Aaron & Amanda *Langworthy*

ABWE GO - Long Term



UGANDA

Aaron and Amanda both counted to three. On three, they would each say where they believed God was leading their family. They both exclaimed, "Uganda!"

Aaron and Amanda had already experienced God's provision for the tasks he assigns his people. When they were a young couple, God called Aaron into ministry as a youth pastor, despite his shy personality, and then he called their family from their home in the South to a church in the Midwest.

Years later, Aaron and Amanda became burdened for places overseas not already saturated with the gospel. They planned to open a nonprofit sandwich shop to support ministry organizations. One day, as Aaron studied Scripture, he sensed that God had not called him to business but to missions. Aaron began researching countries, and he and Amanda both developed a heart for Uganda.

Aaron and Amanda will work with a team in Uganda training rural pastors, working with refugees, and bringing the gospel to an unreached people group.

abwe.org/m/langworthy



Ben & Sara *Pryce*

ABWE GO - Long Term



UGANDA

Ben and Sara first contemplated missions while reading an autobiography their oldest daughter received from a friend. Inspired by the author's account of serving children as a missionary in Africa, Sara passed the book to Ben, who read each page growing more convicted to grow in his passion for God and for unreached people.

Ben had already been called to church ministry and served in a church bi-vocationally. When he approached his wife about taking a missions trip to Africa for a couple weeks, she responded, "Why don't we go for a year?"

They moved their family to Uganda, where they served and experienced the Lord's gracious refinement. After returning to the US, Ben found employment at a church and spent four years teaching teenagers about missions and unreached people groups. Ben and Sara realized they were speaking to themselves: they needed to follow God back to Africa. God led them to a team from ABWE, and they will return to Uganda to train pastors, work with refugees, and bring the gospel to the Aringa, an unreached people group.

abwe.org/m/pryce



Europe

Middle East & North Africa

D. & M. G.

Live Global - Long Term

MIDDLE EAST / NORTH AFRICA

D. couldn't imagine people without access to the gospel when he saw a quote in his dad's Bible from a man in Africa who was raised in darkness, never knowing the truth. M. was first burdened for missions while listening to her pastor's daughter report on ministry in Kenya. Now married, D. and M. aim to equip national believers to reach the unreached in their region.



abwe.org/m/0171801

James & Lisa *Atkinson*

ABWE GO - Mid Term



WESTERN EUROPE

James and Lisa are focused on a unique people group: digital nomads. Digital nomads, usually between the ages of 25 to 45, use the flexibility of working remotely to travel for extended periods of time. Moving often between countries, they seek fulfillment through new experiences and an untethered lifestyle, but often battle loneliness and shallow relationships.

James and Lisa were introduced to the digital nomad community while investigating business as missions. They had spent five years assisting with a church plant when James decided to finish his seminary degree. He enrolled in a class on missions and realized that God was preparing them for ministry—and rather than leaving full-time employment, God could use their current business as fine art dealers. Because they work remotely, they were perfectly poised to serve digital nomads. James and Lisa are now preparing to move to Western Europe to share the gospel with English-speaking digital nomads.

abwe.org/m/atkinson



Stefan *Bacioiu*

ABWE GO - Long Term

ROMANIA



Stefan, a Romanian national, was born into a family with a strong Christian heritage—his parents smuggled Bibles under communism. When he was young, missionaries from different nations visited his church, and Stefan thought to himself that someday he should become a missionary. Despite this aspiration, he walked away from the church for 18 years until God convicted him that he needed a personal relationship with him. Stefan's life radically changed, and he left his job as a truck driver to pursue full-time ministry. He spent six months serving as a missionary in Moldova before enrolling in a Bible institute for theological training.

Stefan often prayed that God would give him a wife who also wanted to serve in missions. In 2020, he met Jenny through a local ministry. Jenny had been an ABWE missionary in Romania since 2011, serving in children's ministry in orphanages, villages, and through foster care. They married in 2021 and are preparing to return to Romania as church planters.

abwe.org/m/bacioiu



EUROPE NEEDS MISSIONARIES

Once the thriving seat of Christianity and the birthplace of the Reformation, much of modern Europe has turned away from its roots and become secularized. Today, most Europeans do not find faith important or relevant. Yet as questions about meaning and purpose emerge, ABWE missionaries are there to meet people with the good news of Christ.

While each European country and its people groups are unique in culture, political landscape, and religious beliefs, ABWE teams are growing in creative ways to multiply efforts in evangelism, discipleship, and church planting.



Clarissa *Boden*

ABWE GO - Long Term



WESTERN EUROPE

A question from a co-worker launched Clarissa’s journey into missions: If she could celebrate her birthday anywhere in the world, where would she go? Clarissa decided her birthday was a good opportunity to travel and left for Ireland in March 2020. After only six days, she scrambled to find a flight back to the US as the COVID-19 crisis prompted international lockdowns.

Clarissa returned home to Oklahoma City to find her world turned upside down. Her job working with inner city kids in the public school system was put on hold as in-person learning was canceled for the semester. When she thought back to her trip to Ireland, she realized she had loved interacting with people there and began googling missionaries. She contacted a family serving with ABWE and began praying for the Irish people. Clarissa now plans to return to Ireland to work as a paramedic and serve churches through children’s ministry.

abwe.org/m/boden



Andrea *Davis*

ABWE GO - Long Term



WESTERN EUROPE

Andrea’s missionary journey began at two years old, when her family packed up their home in Idaho and moved to Missouri to work with a missions organization. Growing up surrounded by missionaries and those who supported them, she believed from childhood that God’s plan for her life included overseas service.

“I got to know the trials, triumphs, struggles, and joys of missions, and fell in love at a young age,” she explains.

Seeking preparation, she got involved in children’s ministry at her church and pursued a degree in education. Andrea will be serving in Portugal as a lower elementary teacher at Greater Lisbon Christian Academy.

abwe.org/m/davis





Micah & Emily *Griffith*

ABWE GO - Long Term



POLAND

“Maybe God will call us to Poland,” Micah joked with Ron Davis, ABWE missionary to Poland. Micah had just heard Ron present his ministry to the church where Micah served as youth pastor. Not one to miss an opportunity, Ron asked Micah and Emily if they could meet to discuss the needs in Poland. Ron shared that God could use Micah and Emily in a unique ministry training national pastors to plant churches among Ukrainian refugees.

As they prayed about it, Emily shared that she had always thought God would lead them into missions. Both Micah and Emily had grown up at Shenandoah Baptist Church in Virginia, where even as teenagers they developed relationships with missionaries and participated in faith promise offerings. Both had been saved in the church, and God used experiences of the church pouring into Micah’s family to direct him into pastoral ministry. Micah had served nine years as a youth pastor when Ron extended his invitation. Micah and Emily accepted and are preparing to move to Poland with their four children.

abwe.org/m/griffith



Landon & Chelsea *Stapleton*

ABWE GO - Mid Term



EASTERN EUROPE

Landon’s passion for serving God began during childhood. “I’ve known Jesus and wanted to follow him for as long as I can remember,” he says.

After graduating college, he was teaching at a Christian school when he heard that David Platt was scheduled to speak nearby. When Platt announced that over two billion people were still unreached, Landon was shocked—he’d thought everyone already knew about Jesus through the internet.

Determined to do something, he walked to the Cru ministry office and declared that he was willing to serve on the mission field wherever they could use him. Soon he was on a plane to Central Asia to serve for a year with Athletes in Action.

Landon met Chelsea after returning to the US to complete a master’s degree. Chelsea had also been saved at a young age and was interested in missions, adding a missions minor to her business degree. Landon was upfront about his plans for missions, and he and Chelsea decided they could best serve God together.

They will be serving in Eastern Europe and Central Asia to provide theological education to national pastors.

abwe.org/m/stapleton





Asia

N. W.

Live Global - Long Term



SOUTH ASIA

N. W. grew up as a nominal Christian, serving in the church without knowing its true purpose. She attended a Bible training course while visiting family as a young adult, where she realized she was still following this broken world instead of God and placed her trust in him.

Her husband C. B. grew up in a dysfunctional family with parents addicted to drugs. After their deaths, he kept bad company and landed in jail. He found a Bible and, amazed at the idea of God as father, became a believer.

C. B. wanted to tell everyone he met about Christ and partnered with Live Global. His wife N. W. was appointed in 2021, and they will serve in South Asia.

abwe.org/m/0170631



L. T.

ABWE GO - Long Term

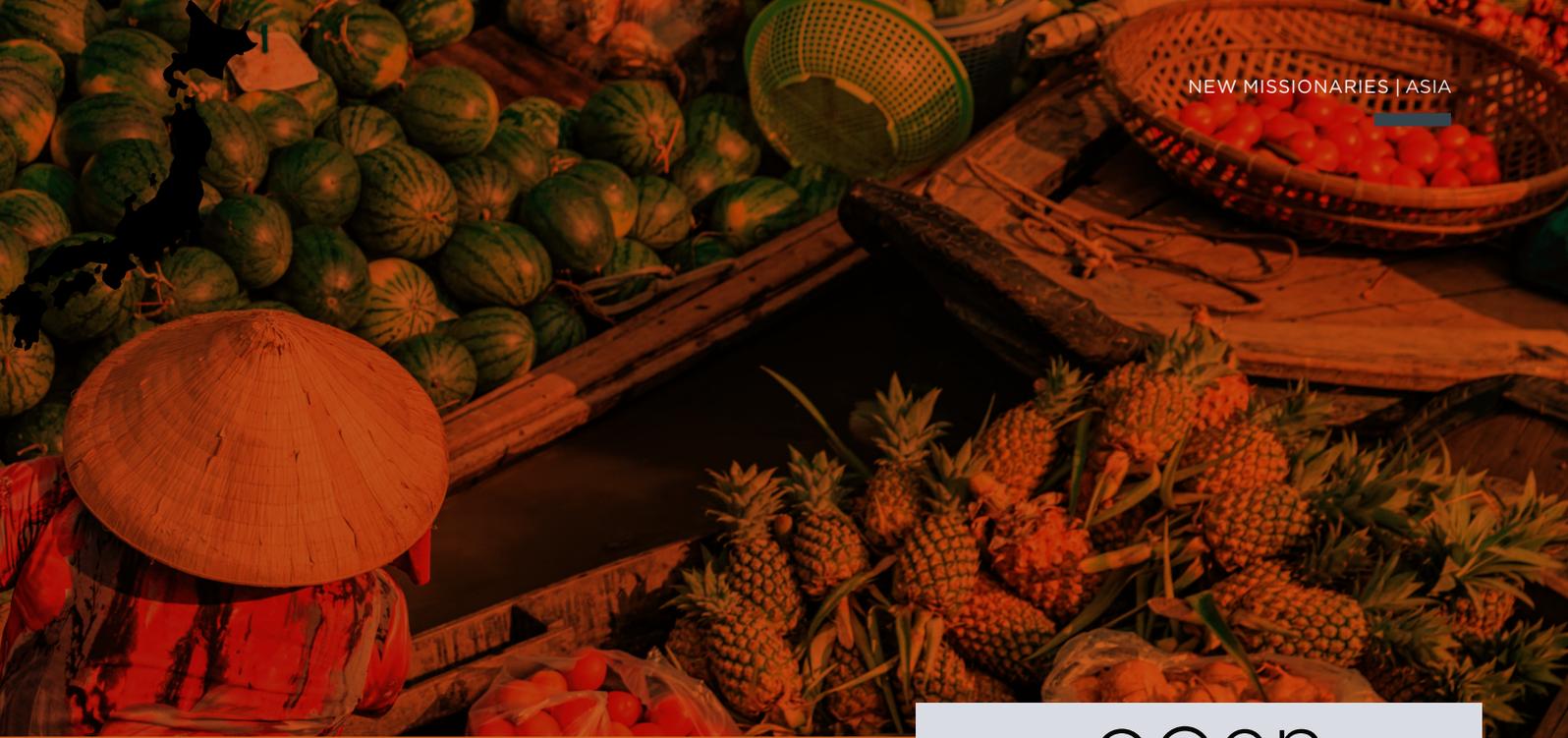


SOUTH ASIA

L. developed a passion for unreached nations while working with international students after college. She prepared for missions through internships in the US and trips to the Middle East and South Asia, where she was confronted with needs: "I saw what felt like this vast sea of people who had no access to the gospel." She plans to return to South Asia to serve in a church plant.

abwe.org/m/0171981





THE OPEN INITIATIVE: OPENING CLOSED COUNTRIES, REACHING UNREACHED PEOPLE GROUPS

We believe that God is raising up a new generation to go to some of the farthest frontiers of missions. Recognizing that time is short and eternity matters, we've launched the Open Initiative to send seven new teams to key unreached people groups:

- The Japanese of Tokyo
- The Fulani of West Africa
- A people group in South Asia
- A people group in Southeast Asia
- Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists in the Caribbean Basin
- Syrian refugees throughout Europe
- Other unreached people groups

One-third of humanity still has never heard the name of Jesus. We want to partner with you to reach them!

To learn more, visit abwe.org/open-initiative



Savannah *Dance*

ABWE GO - Mid Term



JAPAN

One of Savannah's first vivid memories is of the evening she trusted Christ. She was three years old and looking at a picture Bible someone had gifted her infant brother. Every night she was drawn to the picture of Jesus on the cross and asked her mom to read her that story. One night, her mom more fully explained the gospel to Savannah, and she trusted Christ.

As a teenager, Savannah believed God was directing her toward missions. She watched videos on missions and told God she was ready to serve where he directed.

Savannah has been appointed to Japan, where she plans to share the gospel with children.

abwe.org/m/dance



Joel & Misti *Diffenderfer*

ABWE GO - Long Term



JAPAN

Throughout their lives, God has prompted Joel and Misti to serve an unreached people group—the Japanese.

Misti trusted Christ as a young teen after God used hardships to show her his grace. Joel trusted Christ after high school, when his eyes were opened to the holiness of God and his need for Christ through a sermon on Isaiah 6.

God nudged both Joel and Misti toward Japan through friendships with Japanese nationals, and led them to attend a college program in Japan hosted by ABWE missionaries. Burdened by the need for gospel witness, they returned to Japan after college as tentmakers: both worked while they served in a church plant.

Once back in the US, Joel began working for a Japanese company. Through the witness of their church, God showed Joel and Misti the necessity of the local church in reaching a community.

“We are convinced that Christ furthers the gospel by building churches on that gospel,” they explain.

After completing additional training in the US, the Diffenderfers returned to Japan to pastor a church, filling in for ABWE missionaries on furlough. They are now preparing to serve as long-term church planters in Tokyo.

abwe.org/m/diffenderfer



Nathan & Stephanie

Melton

ABWE GO - Long Term

JAPAN



Nathan is a third-generation missionary to Japan. His family's trajectory toward missions began when his grandfather, serving in the Air Force, repeatedly rejected a missionary's attempts to share the gospel. Nathan's grandfather finally agreed to listen if the missionary would stop asking. When he heard the gospel, he trusted Christ and decided to become a missionary to Japan. Nathan's father later followed suit.

From age 16, Nathan has planned to serve in Japan. "I thought I was going to be a pastor just like my dad, but God had another direction," he says.

God refocused Nathan's plans through a friend who shared that she suffered from depression. Not sure what to say, Nathan applauded her bravery in facing the world each day even while depressed.

"Several months later I was sitting with her in the dining hall and she said, 'I really think you should become a biblical counselor.'"

Nathan took her advice to heart and began a master's degree in biblical counseling.

While at the university, Nathan met Stephanie and asked if she was willing to serve in missions. Stephanie had grown up in a Christian home and told her mom at age six that she was going to be a missionary. When Stephanie was a teenager, her parents—both New York City natives of Puerto Rican heritage—moved their family back to the city for ministry. Stephanie went through a time of crisis, which the Lord used to bring her back to himself. She remained committed to missions and completed a degree in music education, which she plans to use in church ministry on the field.

Nathan and Stephanie will serve in Japan with their four children. Their vision is to establish a biblical counseling center—the first of its kind in Japan—to help the Japanese people find hope and healing in Christ.

abwe.org/m/melton



L. & S. C.

ABWE GO - Mid Term



God used a job L. didn't enjoy to introduce him to the gospel and provide him with skills for future ministry in construction and maintenance. S. has always had a vision for serving as a labor and delivery nurse on the mission field. Now uniquely equipped, they are in prefield ministry determining their next steps toward serving the unreached.

abwe.org/m/0172041



M. & C. S.

ABWE GO - Long Term



SOUTH ASIA

C. grew up on the mission field and was planning to go herself, but her husband M. wasn't ready to leave the stability of a job in the US until God brought a series of men into his life to disciple him. As one by one these men left for the field, M. was convicted to follow God in the Great Commission.

M. and C., along with their children, will join a team in South Asia and serve through biblical education.

abwe.org/m/0172001



J. & H. D.

Live Global - Long Term



ASIA PACIFIC

J. and H. use their backgrounds in business to share the gospel and help those in their community gain business skills to help themselves out of poverty.

J. started two companies when he was still in high school. Soon after his salvation, he became burdened for the unreached and planned to support missionaries through his companies. As the Lord worked in his heart, he sold parts of his business and entered youth ministry; then, after leading a short-term trip to Asia, he entered full-time missions.

H. grew up in a strong Christian family in Asia that used their business to fund missionaries. While in college, she felt God calling her to be more intentional in her faith. At the same time, she met J., who had moved to her city as a missionary.

"God orchestrated everything, and from then on, I couldn't fight it anymore. God was prompting me, 'You're going to be a missionary,'" she explains.

After their marriage, H. experienced her first missions trip in Latin America. Although the culture was similar to hers, she felt useless without understanding the language.

"It was then I realized I didn't have to leave my country to be a missionary."

J. and H. returned to Asia. They are partnering with Live Global to serve their community through business programs connected with local churches.

abwe.org/m/0171741



R. K.

Live Global - Long Term



SOUTH ASIA

God used the entire trajectory of R.'s life to direct her into missions. She grew up in a family and church passionate about God's glory and witnessed firsthand his work in South Asia. Trusting God to continue guiding her desires, she pursued a career in nursing. After graduating, God led her to friends serving as church planters in South Asia, who she will be joining in ministry.

abwe.org/m/0171821



K. C.

ABWE GO - Long Term



SOUTHEAST ASIA

K. had become a workaholic, finding her identity in the American dream when God convicted her that this life was not what he had called her to. She left her career and prayerfully explored possibilities in missions. She has committed to serving in an unreached nation in Southeast Asia as part of ABWE's Open Initiative.

abwe.org/m/0171971



E. & K. S.

ABWE GO - Long Term



SOUTHEAST ASIA

E. and K. attended youth group together, listening to a youth pastor's challenge that their greatest desire should be to know God and make him known. This teaching led K. to enroll in a missions class in college and ask God to use her overseas. During her senior year, she planned to complete a summer internship in East Asia, serving among an unreached people group their church had adopted.

At first E. balked at going along. The trip sounded difficult, and he didn't want to leave the US. As he complained to a professor who was discipling him, the professor looked him in the eyes and told him, "Just go!"

During that trip, God got ahold of E.'s heart. He saw the East Asians around him bowing to idols. "These unreached people were worshipping with everything they had, but they were worshipping something false," he explains. "I had the truth, and I thought there had to be something I could do."

As the trip ended, the team leaders asked E. and K. to consider serving in career missions. Their sending church joined them in praying for direction. The Lord brought Southeast Asia to E. and K.'s attention, and they are preparing to serve there with their young son.

abwe.org/m/0172011





The Pacific

Stephen & Elizabeth *Fox*

ABWE GO - Long Term



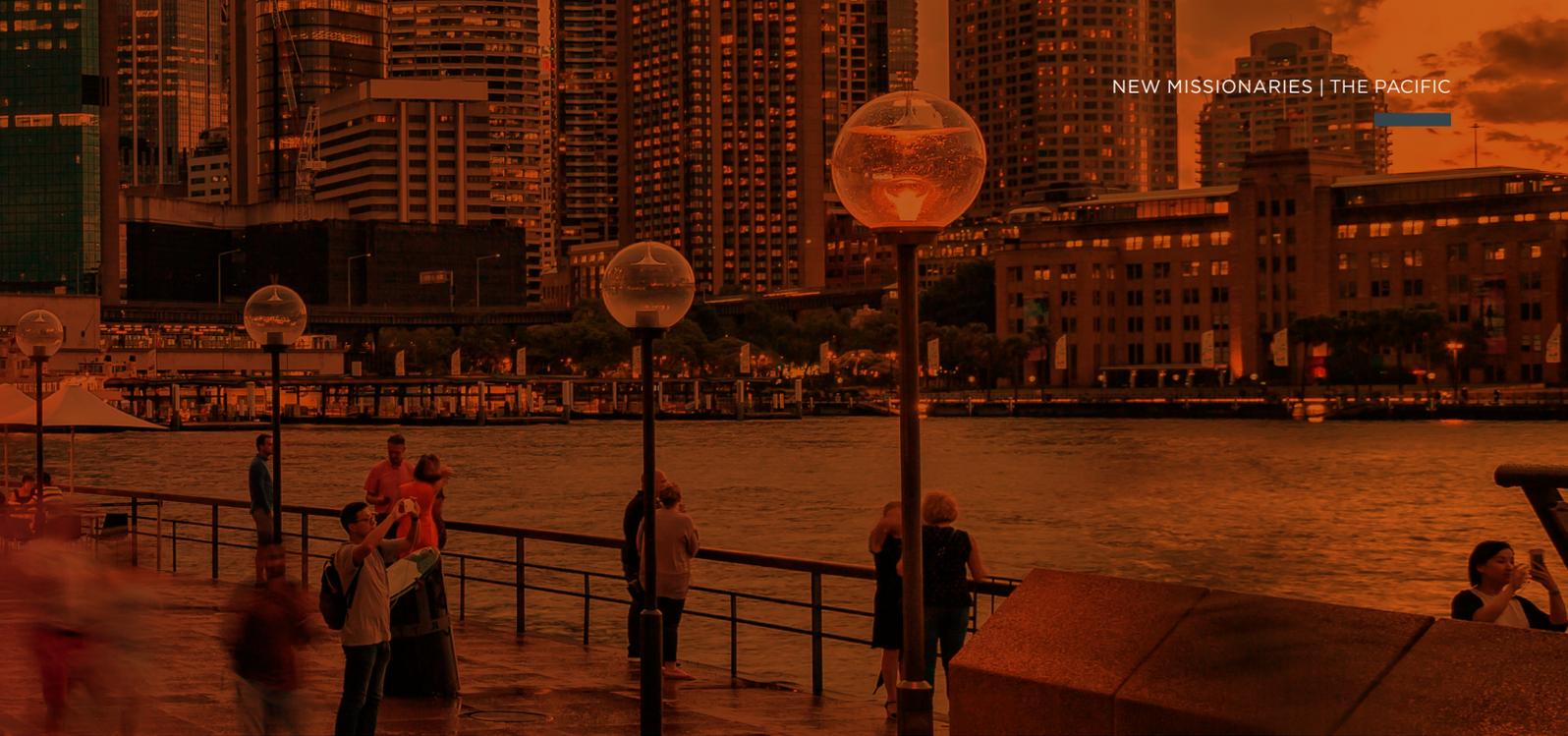
AUSTRALIA/NEW ZEALAND

God called Stephen and Elizabeth into missions the same year—even though they didn’t meet until years later. Stephen was at camp when the Lord used a sermon illustration of a flashlight dispelling the darkness to impress on him the need for missions. Stephen also witnessed the testimony of his grandfather, who served as a missionary to the Philippines before moving to Arizona, where he passed away while still ministering to Native Americans.

Elizabeth became burdened to share the hope of Christ while on a missions trip to a town that lacked clean water. After finishing high school, she followed God’s direction to a three-month internship in New Zealand. Her mom mentioned in a phone conversation that she had met a young man who also wanted to serve in New Zealand—and Stephen and Elizabeth met and married. They are preparing for ministry through a church internship and plan to move to Australia, where they will serve until plans are ready for them to help launch the first ABWE church-planting team to New Zealand.

abwe.org/m/fox





Trenton & Hanna *Shields*

ABWE GO - Mid Term



AUSTRALIA

As Hanna watched the ground speeding below her airplane window, her mom told her to take a good look: this may be the last time she would ever see Australia. Hanna decided that someday she would return, and she would be a missionary.

Hanna grew up competing on the national gymnastics team. Finding her identity in the sport, she struggled with anorexia and depression until she followed the Lord's leading out of gymnastics at age 18. She joined a church where she was discipled and traveled to Brazil on a short-term missions trip. In Brazil, and in Australia with her family the same year, she was burdened for those without Christ. Hanna returned to Australia a year later for a missions internship with ABWE.

Trenton grew up in a pastor's home but moved out to pursue a life apart from God. He felt a growing emptiness until one night he remembered the gospel message and gave his life to Christ. Soon after, Trenton met Hanna at work and noticed she constantly talked about God's love and missions. He felt God prompting him to marry Hanna and to serve him in missions. Trenton and Hanna plan to move to Australia to impact the business world and educational systems for Christ.

abwe.org/m/shields



Latin America

Asa & Suzanna *Bartos*

ABWE GO - Long Term



PERU

As a missionary kid growing up in Chile and Nicaragua, Suzanna recognized that God could one day lead her to serve anywhere in the world. This openness to missions led Suzanna and her husband Asa to move to Canada after their honeymoon, where Asa served as a worship and youth pastor. Even as they packed, they desired for their church to view their leaving as an example of going where God leads you. They later returned to the US and sought God's direction for their next step.

"God was putting a kind of ministry in our hearts," they realized. God led them toward biblical counseling and pregnancy center ministries, alongside church planting—specifically among Spanish-speaking people.

Suzanna witnessed the unique opportunities for ministering to mothers when she was expecting their first child in Canada. "Motherhood is universal," she explained. As mothers talk about their children, they are more willing to discuss deeper issues, opening doors to share the gospel.

Asa and Suzanna began investigating opportunities with ABWE at a 24-Hour Demo. They were introduced to a church plant and pregnancy center in Lima, Peru, where they plan to serve with their children alongside Peruvian believers.

abwe.org/m/bartos





Robert *Blazer*

ABWE GO - Long Term

COLOMBIA



Robert grew up as a missionary kid (MK) in Brazil, raised by parents who were both MKs and met in Brazil. As a young child, Robert had many expectations to meet—including not running in the church building. He disobeyed repeatedly, despite the consequences. One Sunday night after running through the church again, his dad shared the gospel with him: that he was a sinner and needed a Savior, and Jesus could save him. Robert repented and trusted Christ.

Throughout high school, Robert asked his parents how he could get involved in ministry.

“I like the term MK because I was being a missionary there in Brazil—I lived there and wanted to serve,” he notes.

God progressively confirmed that Robert should continue serving in missions as an adult, this time in Colombia. His family had prayed for Colombia while reading stories of the persecuted church, and Robert’s interest grew to a passion. He plans to teach at a Colombian seminary to train local church leaders in theology and character development.

abwe.org/m/blazer



Elijah & Elizabeth *Norris*

ABWE GO - Long Term



ECUADOR

Elijah and Elizabeth plan to use their unique experience as a first responder family to share the gospel with first responder families in Ecuador.

Elijah was working as a paramedic when the Lord called him into ministry. As he pursued an undergraduate degree in ministry, he began investigating medical missions trips, looking for opportunities to use his passion for first responders. Through ABWE, Elijah and Elizabeth were introduced to a police ministry in Ecuador, where Elijah could provide medical training to police officers and firefighters based on his tactical medical background as a navy corpsman.

On an exploratory trip to Ecuador, he presented a medical training course to police departments as an avenue for evangelism. He saw 13 of the 38 officers come to Christ.

“I saw how the fields are ripe for harvest, and also how there is a need for a long-term discipleship process,” he shares.

Elijah and Elizabeth and their three children are studying Spanish in Costa Rica in preparation for moving to Ecuador.

abwe.org/m/norris





Elaina *Southwell*

ABWE GO - Long Term



BRAZIL

Elaina's family has a strong missionary heritage. Her dad was a third-generation missionary and pastor, moving their family to Brazil when Elaina was two years old.

Elaina trusted Christ one Easter Sunday while on furlough in the US.

"What I remember most was the change that God made in my life from that point on," she shares. She returned to Brazil, and at age seven, led one of her friends to Christ.

Growing up, she told her parents that she wanted to stay in Brazil as a missionary and began looking for ministry opportunities. She heard about social work while looking for a college major.

"I realized I could meet people's physical, emotional, and spiritual needs all at once," she says.

Elaina received her bachelor's and master's degrees in social work. She pursued her passion for discipleship through an international student group. She is now preparing to serve in Brazil, where she will help churches develop social work programs in their communities as a means for reaching hurting families with the gospel.

abwe.org/m/southwell



J. & J. R.

Live Global - Long Term



CENTRAL AMERICA

J. and J. live in Central America, where they both served as singles before marrying. J. explored ministries throughout the region before teaching English at an agricultural center and learning to farm alongside locals. He then partnered with other missionaries to plant churches among indigenous people groups in the mountains.

Meanwhile, J. traveled frequently to Central America to teach at a home for children who had experienced abuse and neglect. She was preparing to return as a long-term missionary when she began corresponding with J., and they married two years later. They are partnering with Live Global to continue their ministry in Central America.

abwe.org/m/0171791



North America

J. B.

EveryEthne - Long Term



UNITED STATES

J. was 17 when he felt God prompting him, “Okay, what about you? You’ve heard all about me—when are you going to give me your life?”

J. had been raised in South Asia as a pastor’s son. His parents taught him the Bible, but he was hesitant to give his life to Christ until one day he saw a Hindu man die. J. was concerned about the man’s eternal destination, and his questions soon turned inward: where would he go after he died? J. then trusted Christ.

Evangelism became a primary focus in J.’s life. He served as a pastor and missionary in South Asia and in Europe, where he worked among young people with drug addictions. After returning to South Asia, he noticed that almost every family in his city had someone working in America. Burdened for this unreached people group, J. became a student at a university in the US, where he is completing a D.Min. degree and sharing the gospel with Asian students. He also serves on the design team for the Heart, Mind, and Soul: Hindus seminar to train churches to reach Hindus.

abwe.org/m/0171851





Alberto & Gina *Mayta*

EveryEthne & Live Global - Long Term



UNITED STATES

“I was planning to be a Catholic priest, but the Lord gave me another chance,” testifies Alberto.

Alberto trusted Christ in his native Peru when a friend shared the gospel with him after high school. Alberto’s conversion angered his Catholic family, who forbade him to read the Bible at home or attend an evangelical church. When he reached adulthood, he was baptized, and the Lord called him to be a pastor.

Gina also comes from a devout Catholic family. At age 13, her father abandoned their family, breaking Gina’s heart. A friend invited her to a youth meeting led by a missionary, and she heard the gospel for the first time.

“That began a beautiful journey in Jesus,” she shares.

Alberto and Gina met at church. Alberto worked as an economist while serving as the associate pastor at their church—the first Peruvian to serve in that role. They later pioneered a church plant in Lima before the church sent them as missionaries to Spain for a year to serve unreached Muslim refugees and immigrants.

They returned to Peru and Alberto pastored a church established by ABWE.

“From that church, we could see this opportunity as Hispanics not only to be a mission field but to join a missions force,” explains Alberto.

They moved to Dallas, Texas, to plant a church among Hispanics. They work with EveryEthne to reach Hispanics, connect them with unreached people groups, and work with them to train nationals in South America.



abwe.org/m/mayta



David *Lazeski*

EveryEthne - Long Term



UNITED STATES

After 30 years of living out a gay identity and pursuing the riches of this world, David's life transformed with five words from Scripture.

David had once pictured putting God in a box, placing him on a shelf removed from his life. Although he had grown up in a Christian home and trusted Christ at age nine, he struggled to reconcile God with the same-sex attractions he began experiencing as a teenager. He left the church at age 18 to follow his own desires.

"I pursued the world as hard as anyone could," he says.

For the next 30 years, God allowed his real estate business to flourish. With each new house and car, a hole in David's life grew bigger. In March 2016, he and his partner of 21 years moved into a new home, and he realized that even though he had achieved everything the world lauded for his lifestyle, his life felt empty. He began searching online and stumbled across a video teaching from 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, which lists homosexuals among those who will not inherit the kingdom of God. The next verse changed David's life: "that is who you were."

These words offered freedom from the lie that David had been born this way. If his gay identity could be in the past, then there was a way to be reconciled to God in the present.

"I surrendered my life to Christ that day, and my life has never been the same," he shares.

David left his former life, and, when God reinforced how important his journey was in helping others find freedom in Christ, he followed God's leading into ministry. David serves as a presenter for the EveryEthne Heart, Mind, and Soul: LGBTQ seminar to teach churches how to reach LGBTQ individuals.

abwe.org/m/lazeski



Joe & Kim *Olachea*

EveryEthne - Mid Term

UNITED STATES



Joe's first plan was to coach college basketball. He began his career teaching Bible in a Christian school and coaching junior high and high school sports. Within a couple of years, he realized that God had other plans. Joe desired to follow God—he had trusted Christ at an early age and was raised by parents who daily lived out the gospel—but he battled the Lord's direction toward pastoral ministry. Eventually, he surrendered, left teaching, and accepted a pastorate, later attending seminary. Over the next 35 years, Joe pastored churches in North Carolina, Georgia, and New Jersey.

Kim always wanted to be a pastor's wife. She grew up attending church, despite her upbringing in a dysfunctional family, and trusted Christ at age five. God fulfilled her desire to become a pastor's wife when she married Joe. Kim soon realized that many pastors' wives are lonely and lack resources. She began praying about starting a ministry for these precious women and launched a ministry for them in 2017.

God changed the direction of the Olacheas' ministry through DisciplePath, the North American branch of T-Net International, as their church implemented the DisciplePath training process. Recognizing the value for other churches, Joe joined DisciplePath as a trainer, coaching pastors and churches in whole-church intentional discipleship, while still serving as a pastor. In 2018, he stepped away from local church ministry to serve as the US director of DisciplePath.

Joe and Kim continue training pastors and church leaders in discipleship and serving ministry leaders through soul care and coaching. They partner with EveryEthne as Discipleship Catalyst and with the ABWE Member Care team.

abwe.org/m/olachea



A. & Y. M.

EveryEthne - Long Term



UNITED STATES

A., Y., and their two children come from the Caribbean.

A. grew up absorbing the atheistic culture around him until he began reading the Bible in his late teens. He realized that he had made mistakes in his life and wondered if he could start over. As he read John 1:12, he understood that God was inviting him to be his son. He joyfully trusted Christ that day.

Around the same time, Y. visited a friend who was a new believer. While she was there, her friend's pastor and his wife stopped by and presented the gospel to Y.

"Our lives changed since we met Jesus," A. and Y. share. "It was a conviction for us from the beginning that God was looking for us to follow him."

They began attending a local church and jumped into ministry. After A. graduated from seminary, they moved to another city to start a new church. Later, they became missionaries to South America.

"God allowed us to start two new churches and train a group of indigenous leaders. Some of them are pastors now," they explain.

They are now preparing for their next mission field: a Spanish-speaking community in the midwestern United States. Their vision is to start a church planting movement among Hispanics in the US.

abwe.org/m/0172051



Julie *Redmer*

EveryEthne - Mid Term



UNITED STATES

Julie was 19 years old when she held her first baby, disowned by her parents and abandoned by the baby's father. Overwhelmed, she cried out to God for the first time: "I need you! There's no way I can mother my baby on my own."

Ten weeks later, God answered her prayer through a plumber who arrived to fix a plumbing issue in her apartment. He handed her a Bible and a tract and shared the gospel with her. Julie gave her life to Christ. The next year, she married the plumber.

Several years later, Julie and her husband heard a missionary speak at their church and were inspired to become missionaries. When that door closed, they committed to serving God and supporting his work where they were. They followed the business as mission model, sharing the gospel with employees, vendors, and customers while also serving in church and parachurch ministries, including ABWE. Julie's husband Randy has served on the ABWE Board since 2013.

Julie now serves as director of ABWE's Heart, Mind, and Soul seminars. She provides operational direction to missionaries who train churches to lovingly share the gospel with those from different social and religious backgrounds.

abwe.org/m/redmer



T. & T. F.

Live Global - Long Term

UNITED STATES



T. was struggling during her 20s when her sister began pouring into her life, encouraging her with the gospel. T. realized that she needed Jesus in every part of life and trusted him for salvation. Immediately afterward, her perspective shifted: "I saw the world for what it was, a sinful world, but a world that needed Jesus," she explains.

She met T. when he was trying to fill a void in his life with money, parties, and career success. Her sister shared the gospel with him, along with a coworker who ordered a Bible to be delivered to his hotel during a work trip. T. trusted Christ after reading the book of Matthew.

T. and T. desire a missional lifestyle and advocate for Live Global in churches throughout North America.



abwe.org/m/0171781

G. M.

EveryEthne - Mid Term

UNITED STATES



God led G. to the unreached during her student teaching in college, placing her in an ethnically diverse neighborhood where Muslims, Hindus, and orthodox Jews live side by side. Sensing that God was calling her to stay in her new neighborhood, G. began looking for ways to serve there.

She is now entering full-time ministry to share the gospel with those who don't yet know Jesus and to disciple new believers to grow in their faith and reach their own people.



abwe.org/m/0172021

R. & R. G.

Live Global - Long Term

UNITED STATES



R. and R. became burdened for Christian families while developing a foundation for their own family based on biblical manhood, womanhood, and parental responsibility to disciple their children. They followed the Lord's direction to a leadership position in a new church, Grace Place, where they led, encouraged, and equipped young families to minister first in their homes and then in the world.

God called R. and R.'s oldest two children into missions from an early age. When their daughter began investigating missions agencies, R. joined her in the process as both pastor and dad. Their family attended an ABWE 24-Hour Demo, bringing along the pastoral team of their church. R. and R.'s oldest two children and their spouses partnered with Live Global, and God confirmed to R. and R. that he was also leading them to serve with Live Global ministries and national partners throughout the world.

abwe.org/m/0171811



J. & P. S.

Live Global - Long Term



UNITED STATES

J.'s faith became real at age 17 when he realized that if he believed the gospel was true, it should change everything in his life. P. felt the Lord prompt her at age nine—before she was even a believer—to become a missionary. She committed her life to Christ wholeheartedly in her teens.

J. and P. married and served two years in Southeast Asia. They returned to J.'s hometown to plant a church and serve refugees from unreached and hostile people groups.



abwe.org/m/0171551

J. S.

Live Global - Long Term



UNITED STATES /
CENTRAL AMERICA

J. was traveling on a short-term missions trip during college when the Lord impressed on his heart: “There’s a difference between knowing about me and living for me.”

The Lord opened a door for J. to join a short-term missions organization, where he led 120 trips and expanded the organization into 26 global locations over 16 years. After developing a heart for local pastors in Central America, J. and his wife partnered with Live Global to advocate for, encourage, and resource indigenous pastors from their base in the US.

abwe.org/m/0171771



J. & R. S.

Live Global - Long Term



UNITED STATES /
CARIBBEAN

J. lived a double life as a young adult, acting like a believer on Sundays and at work but acting like the world in the evenings. The Lord convicted him through a special service at church, and J. turned to Christ.

R. was saved at age four after her parents became believers and explained the gospel to her. She became passionate about evangelism through reading books for a college course.

J. and R. met through ministry at church. The Lord brought their hearts together to serve him: J. as a teacher and pastor, and R. as a nurse practitioner. They now work with Live Global national partners in Asia and the Caribbean, helping churches care for orphans.

abwe.org/m/4003199



“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

Matthew 28:19

M. & L. N.

Live Global -
Long Term



UNITED STATES

M. lived in Southeast Asia as a child until his dad, a missionary pilot, suffered a near-fatal plane crash that returned his family to the US. Having witnessed the importance of missionary aviation, M. pursued his dream of becoming a pilot until a health issue in college rendered him ineligible. After a time of feeling disoriented, he found employment in construction and farming until the Lord led him to a Christian camp, where he has served as a maintenance director.

L. lived a wild and broken life as a teen until she understood that Jesus wanted control of her life and she trusted him to save her. She was discipled by her youth pastor and his wife, who immediately assigned her to lead a group of middle school students. Recognizing that she was gifted in Bible teaching, her mentors sent her to Bible college, where she met M. Since then, she has served as a Bible teacher and a communications specialist and has authored two books.

Throughout their marriage, M. and L. have served on church missions committees—even sending missionaries through ABWE—and are now pursuing missions opportunities with Live Global.

abwe.org/m/0171751



Daniel & Amy W.

Member Care - Mid Term



NORTH AMERICA

A heartbreaking goodbye in a parking lot inspired a new ministry for Daniel and Amy. Their daughter's family was leaving for the mission field, and as Daniel and Amy grieved their departure, they realized the need to support parents of missionaries.

As a pastor's daughter, Amy had always been involved in ministry, and Daniel had also developed a strong faith after his salvation as a young adult. Through Daniel's job as a university professor, and Amy's as a school librarian, they taught their three children the importance of doing ministry where you are. They were shocked, however, and unprepared when their oldest daughter and her husband announced they were entering full-time missions.

As Daniel and Amy went through the stages of grief, they found many in the church unable to understand their pain. After many months of searching, they received help through a support program in Dallas and became burdened for other parents. They are partnering with ABWE Member Care to offer support, resources, and events to address the unique challenges faced by parents of missionaries.

abwe.org/m/w



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Thinking About Suffering

BY NAHUM O'BRIEN

Since I was diagnosed with cancer earlier this year, I've been reminded that no missionary—and no Christian—is exempt from suffering.

David Brainerd (1718–1747), the American missionary to the Delaware Indians of New Jersey, dealt with serious bouts of depression before he suffered and died of tuberculosis. Robert Jermain Thomas (1839–1866), a Welsh missionary who lost his wife and child to miscarriage a mere months after arriving in China, was later martyred in Korea. Suffice to say, missionaries experience suffering.

We must be equipped with a biblical theology of suffering. These four reminders have greatly comforted me in my battle with cancer.

1. God has ordained our suffering. He proclaims in Isaiah 46:9-10, "I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose'" (ESV). The Second London Confession of Faith explains: "God hath decreed in himself, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably, all things, whatsoever comes to pass." Suffering is not by accident but is ordained by God.
2. God has a purpose for our suffering. Isaiah 46 again illustrates that everything God decrees is to accomplish his purpose. Sometimes we can recognize that purpose. Joseph, for example, recognized that the evil actions of his brothers were ordained by God to save "many people" (Genesis 50:20). But more often, as was the case with Job, we may never understand God's purpose for our suffering this side of heaven. Yet God always knows the purpose of our suffering. It is never in vain.

3. God comforts us in our suffering. Paul describes God as a compassionate Father who "comforts us in all our troubles" (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). Charles Spurgeon commented, "If there are any comforts to be found by God's people in sickness, in prison, in want, in depression, the God of all comfort will deal them out to you according as you have need of them." God doesn't promise to remove our suffering, but he does promise to comfort us.
4. God has taken the worst of our suffering. Peter writes, "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18a)." Our afflictions are light compared to Jesus' enduring the wrath of God for us on the cross (Romans 5:9). Christ has already rescued us from eternal suffering, and he knows what it's like to suffer, too.

My cancer has taught me that, no matter what, we can trust God in our pain. With Job, may we say: "Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job 2:10b), and, "Though he slay me, I will hope in him" (Job 13:15a). To God be the glory. ■



Nahum O'Brien was appointed as a missionary to Norway with ABWE in 2015. He began serving there with his wife, Arin, in 2020. You can follow him on Twitter at @nahumobrien.



Kossi, a gardener at Hôpital Baptiste Biblique, suffered a debilitating spinal cord injury. His response to severe nerve pain is shaped by his faith in God: he prays.

‘God Is There’: A Gardener’s Painful Prayers

BY DR. JACK KEHL

When our family arrived in Togo in January to begin our missionary service at Hôpital Baptiste Biblique, one of the senior missionaries told me something I’ll never forget: “The greatest beneficiary of your missionary service will be you.”

Although at first I was puzzled by this assertion, after just six months on the field, I am beginning to understand what he meant. Each day I receive special help and encouragement from the Lord.

One way in which I have been blessed through living and working in Togo as an ambassador for Jesus is by witnessing the faith of Togolese believers.

Kossi is a gardener at Hôpital Baptiste Biblique. He works hard all week with his hands to provide for his wife and his four girls. He is a faithful, honest, and industrious Christian.

A few months ago, as he was trimming a tree, he fell to the ground and a heavy branch dropped on top of him, crushing his shoulder. The injury caused major nerves to be shorn off his spinal cord, and so he permanently lost the use of his right hand. All the muscles in his right shoulder, arm, and hand withered away. Even more debilitating is his severe nerve pain felt every day and night.

When I consider how I might respond to devastating circumstances like these, I am humbled by how Kossi has dealt with the situation: Kossi prays.

In the middle of the night, every night, when he is woken from sleep by terrible pain—he prays. In the middle of the day, every day, when he works twice as hard to complete his daily tasks—he prays. Kossi knows that God is with him, and that God hears his prayers. He told me last week: “God is there. He is there! If someone tells me that God isn’t there, I know he is deceiving himself. God is there!”

And because God is there with Kossi during his suffering, he smiles. Oh, what a beautiful smile! Kossi radiates joy which can only come from the Spirit of Christ within him. He smiles and sings praises amid his painful labor.

My family and I are blessed to know Kossi. His tested, genuine faith is more precious than gold. Through his joy amid suffering, the glory of Christ is magnified for all to see.

May Kossi’s example lead us to pray, to trust, and to rejoice in the God who is with us always, even to the end of the age. ■



Dr. Jack Kehl, his wife Taylor, and their four children are missionaries at Hôpital Baptiste Biblique (HBB) in southern Togo. Jack is a general surgeon and Taylor is a teacher.



Broken Vessels: Hindu Rituals in the Caribbean

BY GARY CRAWFORD

When most people think of Hinduism, they don't associate it with the Caribbean. But situated on the western coast of Trinidad is a Hindu place of worship called the Temple in the Sea.

Several raised concrete platforms serve as cremation sites for the deceased. The ashes of the dead are placed into clay pots which are then cast into the sea in an elaborate ceremony, performed in hopes that loved ones will be reincarnated in a higher state of existence. Every day, when the tides recede, clay pots long buried in the sea are revealed—each broken vessel a reminder of a soul that entered eternity without Christ.

Sadly, this story has been repeated across the Caribbean for the last 180 years. Between 1838 and 1917, about a half-million East Indians, predominantly Hindus, were brought into the Caribbean as indentured servants. Many more have migrated into the Caribbean in recent years. Today, close to a million Hindus call the Caribbean their home. They remain separated from Christ by religious, cultural, and linguistic barriers.

Missionaries and churches in the Caribbean are beginning to answer the call to reach these unreached communities. Learn more at abwe.org/open.



Gary Crawford serves as the regional director for the Caribbean. In addition to overseeing missionaries serving in this region, he and his wife Marty are responsible for leading the Open Initiative in the Caribbean Basin.



Stanley Leary is a visual storyteller whose photojournalism has taken him across the world, with images published in TIME, Newsweek, Sports Illustrated, and many more. Stanley is also a gifted communicator and teacher. He works with corporate clients to teach their staffs to become more visually effective.

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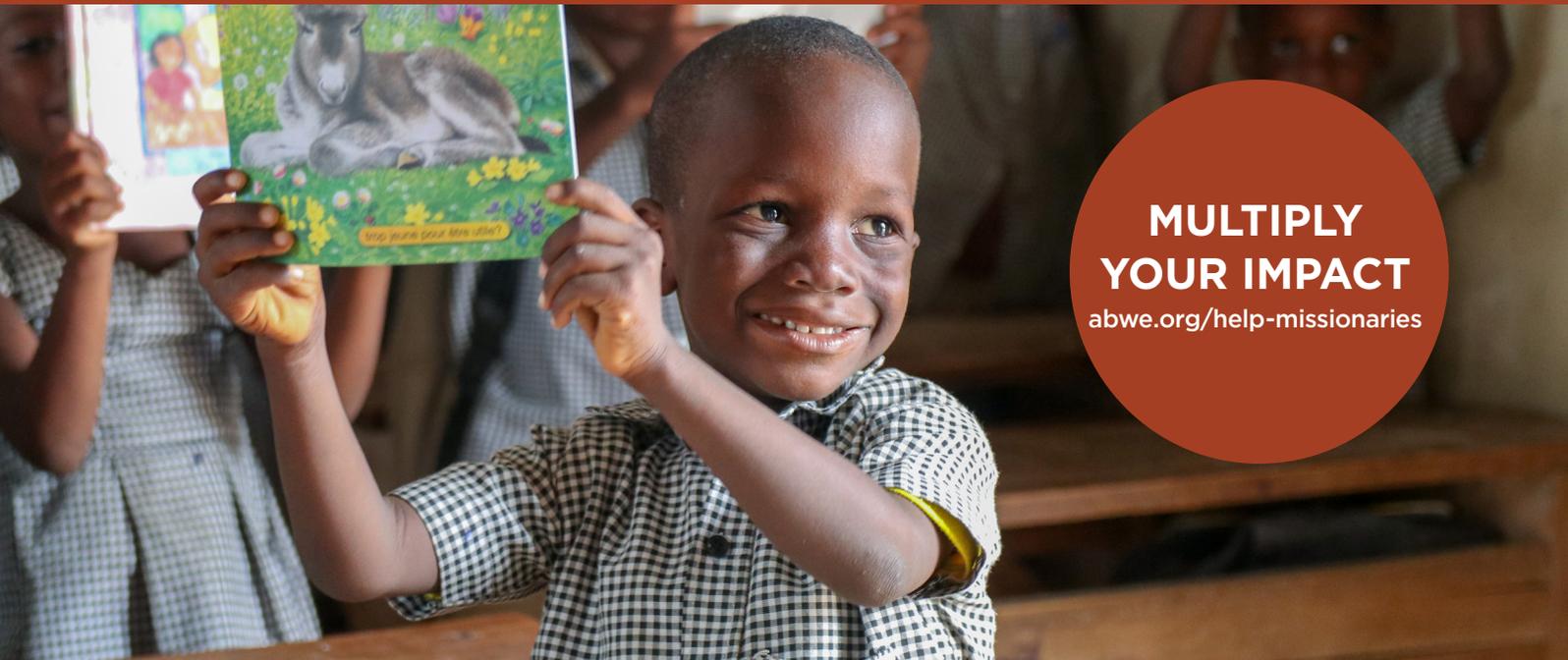




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