

On mission

STORIES OF THOSE WHO WENT

Qandah ♦ Fung ♦ Anderson ♦ Finnemore ♦ Frentz
Sohm ♦ Lau ♦ Enns ♦ Brown ♦ Cheung ♦ Woon



VOL. 6

Compiled by Ronald Brown

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Preface

by Ronald Brown

I was reminded during the Lenten season of what Psalm 22 is talking about. The suffering Saviour hung cruelly on a cross. What would it be like to be amongst the crowd that stood looking up? Imagine what emotions would have flowed through me. What thoughts would be going through my head? Would there be second-guessing thoughts, like, “*If only we had.....*”? Yet there He was dying on a cross – the King of the Jews. Kings don’t die this way.

Then I meditated on the second half of the psalm. Is the top half related to the bottom half? Yes, for sure, it is, and that is the point of the cross. Read it:

*27 All the ends of the earth
will remember and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him,*

*28 for dominion belongs to the LORD
and he rules over the nations.*

*29 All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;
all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—
those who cannot keep themselves alive.*

*30 Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord.*

*31 They will proclaim his righteousness,
declaring to a people yet unborn:
He has done it!*

And so the stories in this book show how people at the ends of the earth – Spain, Japan, Poland, Niger, Thailand and various other nations around the globe today have heard of the dying Saviour. Many today gather in groups of various sizes to worship and praise the name of Jesus. Thanks to those workers mentioned in this book who went and those of you who sent us.

Acknowledgements

This book has been a team effort. I am so grateful for the editing expertise of Shelby Keith in taking the original writings from a variety of authors and transforming them into more readable chapters for us all.

My “fellow African” Dan Nel (<https://www.marula.ca>) did the design work for the cover, for which I am grateful.

Gladys Thompson previously worked at The Alliance Canada’s National Ministry Centre in the Communications Department and was the project manager for the trilogy I worked on with Charlie Cook. I am thrilled she agreed to come “out of retirement” to bring her considerable talents and experience to consulting, editing, and formatting the interactive PDF.

Alexis Tjart and I previously worked together for three years. She is behind the organizing and uploading of books in three languages to the [Global Vault Mission Books website](#) and has prepared the printed book’s formatting.

My sincere thanks to Shelby, Dan, Gladys, and Alexis. I love working with you.

Forward: Making Black Things White Again

by David Hearn

“Faithfulness is not holding down the fort until Jesus returns; faithfulness is taking back enemy territory by shining the light in dark places.”

Mark Batterson

“God can make black things completely white again!” – Pastor Samir

She was only 12 years old when ISIS soldiers stormed into her village, killing the men, raping the women, and kidnapping the children. It was a horror beyond belief, but the trauma was just beginning for Suzanna. She was taken along with her sisters and other children from her village to an ISIS camp where they were locked in an underground bunker for days. Eventually, the children were released, only to be divided into various groups by the ISIS soldiers. The young girls were singled out specifically and divided into two groups. The plain girls were designated as domestic slaves, and the pretty girls as objects of sexual exploitation.

Suzanna was a pretty girl. She was moved around to various ISIS families to be repeatedly abused. Her existence was filled with fear, shame, and deep darkness. She was being held in a home in Mosul when the Iraqi Liberation Forces burst through the doors and gunned down all the ISIS soldiers in the room.

Seeing an opportunity to escape, Suzanna ran through a side door and

down the street. Bombs were going off around her, and machine gun fire seemed to come from every side. Miraculously she made it out of the city and found her way to a refugee camp in Duhok. This is where I met Suzanne.

I remember sitting with a group of Alliance leaders and hearing her story of



terror and abuse. I could hardly breathe. Pastor Samir, the leader of the Alliance Church in Duhok, spoke with such tender care as he leaned forward and said to Suzanna and her sister, “Suzanna, you and your sister are not alone. Jesus loves you, and we have been sent because we love you too. All of the black things that you have seen and experienced, God can make completely white again.”

The stories you will read in this volume of *ON MISSION* record the heart cry and passion of men and women who embraced the call to go to the places on our planet where fear, anguish and darkness are pervasive. They go because Jesus wants to declare to those without hope that they are not alone. Jesus loves them, and we love them too. They believe at the very core of their being that Jesus can take “all the black things people have experienced and make them completely white again.”

One such couple is Bill and Diane Finnemore, who, after serving faithfully in Zaire, Poland and Canada, settled into retirement in Cochrane, Alberta. But one afternoon, Bill drove into Cochrane and began praying to the Lord, “Thank you, Father, that we can live here. Thank you that I can go skiing in the winter and camping in the summer and attend a good church each weekend. Father, I am so thankful and really enjoying this retirement. But Father, if you have anything else for me to do, my answer is YES” (page 27). Two months later, Russia invaded Ukraine, and Bill and Diane were called again to push back the darkness in Jesus’ name. Bill writes, “Through our partnership between The Alliance Canada and the churches in Poland, we are reaching thousands of hurting people with both the physical and spiritual food they need” (page 27).

Japan is one of the world’s most resistant places to the Gospel. With a highly secularized population, raging affluence and superficial loyalty to traditional religions, only 0.5% of Japanese identify as Christian. Into this environment, God called Doug and Heather Woon. When the resistance was high and resources limited, Doug and Heather needed a clear confirmation from God that this was the place He wanted them to be. This confirmation came after their first Sunday morning service at Hiroshima Minami Alliance Church. Doug describes it like this,

“...we pulled our chairs in a circle for a *kangeikai* (welcome party) in our honour. As very recent Japanese language school graduates, we were starting a two-year stint serving in the church under Pastor Miyoshi’s direction. With *sembei* rice crackers and cups of green tea on the small plates on our laps, we introduced ourselves to the tiny congregation, typical of the size of most churches in Japan.

I mentioned that fourteen years earlier, when I was in my first year at Canadian Bible College, I and the others in the Far East Prayer

Band prayed for this church being planted by a missionary couple. I was interrupted by Mr. Fujii, a white-haired *hibakusha* atomic bomb survivor. “What did you pray for?” he asked. I told him we prayed for the English and Bible program the church was starting, asking God for people to come to Christ through it.

“Because you prayed, I believed. Thank you very much!” he said, bowing. On his first day in English class, he told Dick Kropp, the missionary working there, “I’m here for the English. I’ll put up with the Bible.” Yet, his spiritual interest was awakened; he came to the point of believing and was baptized. He prayed for over ten years for his wife to come to Christ; she was the organist in the service that morning” (page 71).

Brem and Donna Frentz have travelled the world as apostolic leaders with a pioneer spirit and a pastoral heart. After several years of serving in Indonesia and Penang, Malaysia, I had the joy of inviting them to join my team at the Alliance Ministry Centre to serve as Vice President of Global Ministries. Their ability to create a vision, take risks and lead from the heart radically changed the impact of Alliance missions around the world. Brem writes, “Our incredible privilege has been facilitating, coaching, empowering, and encouraging the release of people and financial resources to ‘bring access to Jesus where few or none have heard’” (page 97).

Brem sat beside me in that refugee camp in Duhok, listening to Suzanna’s story. It was a moment when we together said, “The darkness that has dominated the Yazidis for over 1800 years stops now!” Under Brem and Donna’s amazing leadership, teams were sent to Dohuk, and we are now seeing the first Yazidis in Northern Iraq come to faith! Yes!

These are the stories of ordinary men and women of radical faith who refused to hold down the fort until Jesus returns. Instead, they fiercely entered enemy territory and dared to shine the light of Jesus into the dark places.

Several years after my encounter with Suzanna and her sister, I received a picture and a brief update on her life. She was obviously older, but the change in her was profound. It was the “eyes” that were different. Suzanna had become part of an outreach ministry to young Yazidi



girls led by the pastor's wife from the Alliance Church in Duhok. The girls were taught various life skills in the program, but the genius of this outreach was the unconditional love that the girls were able to experience. It was a place that was safe. A sanctuary where trauma could be healed, shame removed, hope restored and through the power of Jesus, the "black things made completely white again." Suzanna's eyes were no longer dark and vacant but were now bright and full of life. This is why the men and women you will read about in this book were willing to sacrifice everything to "take back enemy territory by shining the light of Jesus in dark places."

As you read, resist the temptation to be an observer, but instead, I dare you to enter in, to allow the story of others to feed your story, expand your vision, and pour fresh courage into your heart.

On the wall of my office is a picture someone painted of Suzanna. I look at it every day as a powerful reminder that the mission is not finished, the darkness has not been vanquished, but the hope stands firm; Jesus "makes the black things completely white again!"

Dr. David Hearn
Past President, The Alliance Canada

Introduction: Standing on the Shoulders of Others

by Ronald Brown



Advancing the Gospel to the nations nowadays includes a significant reality – we are not the first global workers to go. We are standing on the shoulders of those who have gone before us, the international workers who were pioneers, the first to engage and plant the seeds of the Gospel. They planted the seeds while those who follow them water those seeds and eventually help to bring in the harvest.¹

But the cost those pioneers paid was high. When these early workers arrived, they encountered numerous illnesses, such as malaria, which was new to them. As a result, many died, while several others returned to North America and Europe, unable to fulfill their missionary calling. Gravesites are numerous in nations, like those depicted here that I found in the Congo.

Let me briefly share the stories of the first Canadian Alliance missionaries to be sent by Simpson to the first Alliance mission field - the Congo.

Gabriel Maguire

Gabriel Maguire was born in Dublin, Ireland, on December 16, 1871. By the age of seven, he was an orphan. At seventeen, he left for North America, arriving in Toronto on September 13, 1887. According to his own account, Maguire always attended church but never had peace. After a moving evangelistic service, he was filled with the Holy Spirit and felt commanded to “compel sinners to Jesus.” He began by singing and evangelizing on the street corner.

Maguire felt a strong call to Africa, saying, “If I have to sail there in a paraffin oil barrel, I shall go.” He met Dr. Simpson, founder of The Christian and Missionary Alliance, at an Alliance Convention in the Y.M.C.A., and Simpson sent him to the New York college, where young men were being trained

¹ See 1 Corinthians 3:5-7



Rev. Gabriel Reid Maguire with
African artefacts

for the foreign field. Studying proved hard as Maguire felt the Lord kept him busy visiting tenement houses. He continued his street corner preaching while in New York.

In January 1892, Maguire arrived in the Congo and was stationed in Vungu. New recruits needed housing, so he was immediately put to work making bricks and building homes.

Maguire contracted malaria shortly after arriving but recovered with daily doses of quinine. In September, he and Henry Campbell took evangelistic trips into the area, visiting the villages that welcomed them.

On April 22, 1893, Maguire was ordered to a brand-new station in Maduda, where missionaries had only recently received permission to reside. By 1895, Maduda had a running school with 40-50 boys and an average of 85 people attending daily services. Unfortunately, Maguire had to leave Maduda in July 1896 for health reasons.

On April 26, 1897, Maguire married Ruth Burns, and the couple departed for the Congo on May 8. One year later, they were evacuated due to Gabriel's failing health. They resigned from missionary work but continued to speak at conventions. Maguire passed away on June 3, 1931.

Alfred Robb

Alfred Pierce Robb was born in Dundee, Scotland, in 1870. The Robb family immigrated to Canada in 1882. During a farewell gathering for missionaries to China in 1889, Robb felt called to be a missionary, entering the Missionary Training Institute three years later. In July 1893, he specifically felt the calling for Africa.

Robb set out for the Congo from New York on April 11, 1894, aiming to press as far as possible into the interior while awaiting a larger group of recruits to arrive the following year. Upon arrival, he was stationed in Ngangila.

In 1896, Robb was moved to the Yema base. The following year, he sent letters to the Executive Committee saying the Yema Station needed to either be renovated or abandoned. Despite the Home Board forbidding stations to be given up, the committee removed all missionaries from the Yema base.



Alfred Robb

Robb requested a transfer to Vungu. The same year, however, he was forced to return to the United States for health reasons, later reported as malaria. He never returned to Africa, instead becoming a circuit preacher in the Kerrville area.

Thomas Townsend

Manitoba native Thomas Townsend attended the New York Missionary Training Institute. **On May 9, 1894, he sailed for the Congo.** It took him from July to October to reach Mazinga station as he was waylaid in Vungu by fever. Upon arriving in Mazinga, he once again had an attack of fever. Mazinga proved to be “one of the hard places of the mission” because of the scattered population. In October 1896, Townsend attended Alfred Robb’s wedding in Boma.

In July 1898, the Townsends returned to the United States.

William Wallbrook

William Wallbrook was born in Canada in 1864. In 1890, he visited the Christian Alliance branch in Peterborough, Ontario, where on April 17, he reported a dramatic physical healing. That Fall, he enrolled in the Missionary Training Institute in New York.

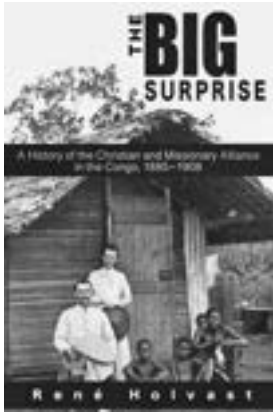
We know from Wallbrook’s diary entry on October 10, 1893, that he was called to mission work in the Congo. On April 30, 1895, there was a farewell meeting for him and his fellow missionaries. **The group landed in Matadi on June 25, 1895.**

By July 8, Wallbrook had reached Vungu and was ill with African fever. He “did not take remedies, expecting to be healed without, as at home.” Eventually, he agreed to “do his best with the means” and take medicine, stating, “God deigned to bless the means immediately, and I began to mend slowly.”

Once recovered, Wallbrook began visiting surrounding towns and telling the good news of Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, he once again became sick with a fever in November 1895. Again, he had to take remedies, and the lack of physical healing was interpreted as a lack of faith. Illness was a daily concern for him and all his fellow missionaries in Vungu. Finally, he received an ultimatum from Congo Mission Superintendent Hunter Reid to either go to the Cabinda health station or return to America.

After three months in Cabinda, Wallbrook and his new wife Martha had not improved and were evacuated. The couple returned to America in 1896. Unfortunately, Wallbrook’s health never fully recovered; he passed away on February 3, 1899.

Rene Dickson



Rene Dickson was part of a group that wanted to open a “chain of missions” into the interior of the Congo. **On May 20, 1896, she sailed from New York with the third shift of this group, arriving in Londe Station on June 30** and appointed to Boma. However, before she could depart for Boma, on her third day in the Congo, she had a fever which was worsening. The same day she was informed of another missionary’s death which had happened on June 19. She said, “I thought I was to lay down my life, and I wanted my mother.”

Still, Dickson recovered. Early in 1897, she was stationed to Kiama. On September 8, 1897, she married E.P. Miller in the Congo with the permission of the Executive Committee. On October 22, 1897, the couple left the Congo for health reasons.

Alvin Stevenson

Alvin Stevenson was a Canadian who **arrived in the Congo on June 1, 1896**, on the same “chain of missions” Rene Dickson was a part of. Just a few days after arriving, Stevenson departed with three others on an exploratory trip of the south bank, which lasted almost three months. The group’s carriers abandoned them in a town where they had no permission to build shelters; additionally, all had contracted “African fever.” The state had issued orders—no one was to gather carriers under penalty of a fine.

Still, after resorting to prayer, fifty men independently presented themselves to the missionaries, and the group departed. They embarked on a hazardous journey ending in a ten-hour walk to Vungu Station. In September 1896, Stevenson was stationed to Maduda. He and his pregnant wife Carrie left Africa for furlough in November 1899, four months before their scheduled departure.

Early 1900 saw Stevenson speaking at conferences in the United States. Four years in the Congo had left the couple in poor health. With a new baby, they were hesitant to return to what they knew would be a fatal climate. Carrie Stevenson ultimately decided to leave her baby in the United States to return to her work in Africa. On November 3, 1901, the couple left New York to return to the Congo and were sent to the new Lolo Station. Alvin went ahead to view the site and construct the station. Carrie joined him in late March. Tragically, she passed away on May 30. Stevenson remained at the Lolo Station even after handing over leadership to

Fred Soderberg in March 1903.

In June 1904, Stevenson married again, to Mathilda Kohm, a missionary who had come to the Congo in 1896. He spent 140 days of 1905 on the road making evangelistic trips, leaving Mathilda alone to run the Lolo Station.

In June 1906, the Stevensons left Lolo for furlough. After speaking at conventions and resting for a year, the couple returned to the Congo in October 1907, bringing the infant child with them. In 1909, Mathilda had the couple's second child. That same year, they had to return to the United States due to Alvin's failing health. At some point, they returned to the Congo, where Stevenson died in 1913.

Charles Iner Wickware

Charles Iner Wickware, son of a saloon owner, was born in Ontario before the dawn of the 20th century. **In 1901 he left for Kinkonzi (Congo)** after being farewelled at Nyack's training school. In Congo, he worked with his ministry partner, Robert Page, doing basic literacy work, but the Congo proved to be a challenging mission field where the people seemed indifferent and quickly wearied of the gospel message.

In 1903, Wickware was put in charge of the Kinkonzi Station but had to be evacuated to Boma due to poor health. In March 1905, he returned to Canada on furlough, where he began a speaking tour of Canada and the U.S. regarding his experience in the Congo and its needs as a mission field. He was evacuated to Canada in 1916 for medical reasons. On May 13, 1945, he passed away.



Graves found at the Sumbi Station

*Books available at [lulu.com/shop](https://www.lulu.com/shop)



Three graves found at the Yema Station



Driving through the forest looking for the Bullerkist grave

Grave photos by Ron Brown (1980s)



Grave of John Bullerkist, who died in November 1892



After the death of his brother John, Peter Scott returned to North America and founded the Africa Inland Mission

Mission work continued in the Congo until near the end of the century. Now the Congolese National Church membership has passed the one million mark, making it the largest Christian and Missionary Alliance national faith community in the world with 657 ordained pastors, 976 churches, and 33 missionaries sent. In addition, they have their own university and several Bible institutes.

Gabriel McGuire, the first Alliance missionary to the Congo, arrived in 1892. My family arrived in 1980, 88 years later, and during our time, we celebrated in 1984 the 100th anniversary of the first Alliance mission field. Dignitaries from far and wide attended, including Mel Sylvester, president of The Alliance Canada at the time. Other Canadian team members of the day included Ruth Stanley, Jim and Dawn Sawatsky, Bruce and Donna Edwards, Cheryl Wilson, Anne Stephens, Ray and Viola Downey, Marion Dicke, Bill and Diane Finnemore, and Lee Embury, all now retired.

But now, at the time of this writing, 131 years later, Congo Alliance leaders and family members are living globally. Several former students of ours at the Boma Seminary (1980s) are today numbered with Congolese Alliance leaders around the world.

The Canadian Alliance family continues to send out international workers; many of them are the first to enter an unreached people group. They are at risk, and some will suffer as the seeds of the Gospel are planted. The strategy is that

they now are planting the seeds, others standing on their shoulders in days to come will water, and eventually, others will bring in the harvest. The Congo faith family stands today as a good example of standing on shoulders.



Chapter 1

Taking Risks for God

by Bill Finnemore

In March 2022, I walked through cavernous halls inside a building designed for trade shows in Warsaw, Poland. But today, no companies filled the halls with their products. Russian forces had invaded Ukraine, the neighbouring country, just three weeks earlier. Thousands of women, children, and older men fleeing for days from the terror of war found themselves housed in this dark, dimly lit place, sleeping on cots, literally inches apart.

As I followed my guide, I was led to a large room set up as a refuge for the many children who found themselves there. Traumatized by the war and having said tearful goodbyes to fathers and older brothers left behind to fight, this was a place where healing could begin.

During that time, as I heard the stories from young mothers and the personal reports of seeing dead bodies at the side of the road while fleeing, tears filled my eyes. I wondered what we could do in this hellish reality. How did I ever end up here?



Massive trade show halls turned to sleeping quarters, March 2022

“Islands of Refuge” for children being housed in the cavernous halls of the trade show facility, March 2022



The Early Years

I was born in Toronto, Ontario. My earliest memories of my family include only my mother and younger brother since my father left us when I was young. I remember attending Sunday school at Avenue Road Church when A.W. Tozer was the pastor. Although he is recognized as a great theologian and prophetic preacher, my recollections are of this old guy talking loudly from the front. Then, as we left the sanctuary, he would slip me a candy from his pocket.

In Sunday school at the age of seven, my teacher, Miss Fern Sheepway, clearly explained the gospel message of the cross and God's gift of eternal life. At the end of the class, a little girl and I stayed behind, and, with the help of Miss Sheepway, I prayed, telling God I was a sinner and needed His forgiveness. I knew I was a Christian from then on and would go to Heaven when I died.

Around the same time, my mother re-married, and this man truly became my father. In a time when grace was in short supply for divorced people, my mom and new dad were able to create a home where I felt safe, secure, and loved.

Encounter With God

Two years after coming to Christ in my Sunday school class, my family moved to the suburbs of Toronto and began attending a church closer to home. By the time I was a teenager, while I knew I was a follower of Christ, I was not very impressed with other young people in the church we were attending. I remember thinking there were three types of young people who attended church: those who were boring, those who were hypocrites, and me.

At this point in my life, my grandmother wanted to pay my way to attend a summer teen camp at an Alliance Bible conference centre called

Glen Rocks in Muskoka, Ontario. However, based on my assessment of church-attending young people, I was not too excited about the idea. But in the end, my mother convinced me to go.

My relationship with God deepened at camp, and my life direction was set. For the first time, I met other young people who truly loved God and were anything but boring. Each evening we would gather in the chapel. Then, about halfway through the week, at the close of the evening meeting, Dan Rinker, the speaker, invited us to go out from the chapel quietly and take some time alone to respond to God.

I remember walking across the grounds until I stood in the darkness among cedar trees. As I silently stood there, I had a longing in my heart for something more. I

I remember thinking there were three types of young people who attended church: those who were boring, those who were hypocrites, and me.

did not know what the “something” was, but I remember praying, “Lord, I know there must be something more to this Christian life, and so whatever it is, I want it.” At that moment, I physically felt the weight of God’s response fall on me. I immediately knew something had changed. I could not articulate it in theological terms, but now looking back, I realize it was an encounter with the Holy Spirit. I was changed.

After this encounter, two things changed in my life. The first was I returned to Avenue Road Church, where many of the youth I had gotten to know at the teen camp attended. The second change was a new purpose in attending my high school.

Returning to my school in the fall, I had a new passion for reaching the lost. My school of 1,600 students became my mission field. There was a small Inter-School Christian Fellowship group made up of ten girls and one lonely guy. They had previously tried to get me to join, but I had always resisted. Since they all came from a very conservative church where guys were told that if they were serious about following Jesus, they would never have long hair, and I had hair down past my shoulders, I think they saw me as a “project.” I remember thinking of them as the “secret society of the saints” as they would gather in a room at lunch for a Bible study. However, having had this encounter with God, I joined the group and challenged them to get out of the little room and have outreach events. By the end of that year, the group had grown to about 80. Seeing others come to Christ became my passion. As a result, I sensed a call in my life to pursue a vocation of Christian ministry. I was unsure in what capacity it would be, but I decided to go to Canadian Bible College (CBC) to prepare for whatever God had for me.

Canadian Bible College

In September 1975, I flew from Toronto to Regina, Saskatchewan, to begin my studies in preparation for future ministry. If Ray Matheson, the dean of men at that time, is reading this now, I am sure he is smiling at the previous sentence containing the word “studies.” During that first year at CBC, I, along with a few friends, pulled off so many practical jokes and stunts that I am sure many of the staff wondered what would ever become of us.

It was during these years that two significant things happened in my life. The first was that God began to guide me to overseas ministry. We were required to attend a missionary meeting each Friday evening. During these meetings, I saw the need for full-time workers in places far away. I did not know where but I knew it would be somewhere beyond North America.

The second thing to happen while at CBC was finding my life partner. I still remember seeing this girl, Diane Jabs, walking down the stairs at the front of the administration building. Upon seeing her, my first thought was, “Wow, wouldn’t she be nice to be with!” My second thought was, “She’s way too nice-looking to

be with a guy like me.” I was like a guy wanting to buy a car. It would be great to have a Mercedes, but he knows he can only afford a Chevy.

So, it was not until the end of the school year that I gained enough courage to ask Diane out for coffee (just coffee, no pie, since I didn’t have the money). It happened through our philosophy class. I really enjoyed this class, but Diane seemed to be struggling with the course. So, one evening in the library, I helped her prepare for the exam. (Funny thing was she got a much higher mark on the exam than I did!) Developing our relationship took a while, and I had to get another guy out of the competition, but eventually, I convinced Diane we should get married. And so, we did.

By the time we finished at CBC, we were convinced we were meant to serve somewhere overseas. The Alliance approved us for missionary service with our status as to where we might go marked as “open.”

Beaverlodge, Alberta

The next chapter in our story took us to Beaverlodge, Alberta. It was there that our first child, Paul, was born. While serving in Beaverlodge, I learned a lot about ministry and working with people from Pastor Ken Schamuhn, who had earlier in my life been my youth pastor. Others, such as the evangelist Neill Foster and Cecil Nichol, a godly farmer, were used by God to speak into my life.

One specific example standing out in my memory is a meeting I was called to one day by Neill Foster. As a young pastor, I was sometimes given the opportunity to preach. When I would stand in the pulpit and speak, I felt nervous and often prefaced my verbal statements with “I know I’m young but ...” and then made the proclamation from the Bible passage.

One day I received a call from Neill Foster asking me to drop by his office. When I arrived, I had no idea what he wanted to talk about. I expected it to be some light, pleasant conversation. However, as I entered his office and he asked me to sit down, I quickly saw from the expression on his face that this was something different. Looking me straight in the eye, addressing me as Pastor Billy, he told me that when I stand in the pulpit and open God’s Word, I was speaking as the Lord’s servant and must do so with authority. He then told me that if he ever heard me preface my statements with “I know I am young but ...” again, he would stand to his feet and publicly rebuke me. Needless to say, I listened because I knew he meant what he said. Having input like this equipped me further for ministry.

...he told me that when I stand in the pulpit and open God’s Word, I was speaking as the Lord’s servant and must do so with authority.

While we were in Beaverlodge, our direction overseas became more specific. During this time, Jim Sawatsky was touring Canada with two young men from Zaire. Together they formed a music group called the Kinshasa Trio. Having heard about his tour, I invited them to Beaverlodge Alliance Church. As we listened to their music and visited with them, Diane and I decided to request that we be sent to Zaire. Once this request was approved, having served in Beaverlodge for two years, it was back to Regina to attend Canadian Theological Seminary (CTS) for one year studying missiology at the Master's level.

Canadian Theological Seminary (CTS)

My first year of studies at CTS was quite different from my first year at CBC. I was now married with one small child. Our focus for future ministry was specific, Zaire. With the love offering we received when we left Beaverlodge, I was able to pay the full tuition for the year. Diane cared for our son Paul while I studied. Our monthly income consisted of eight \$100 postdated cheques, for which \$62.00 went to our low-income rent.

Academically this was the most successful year of my student life. I knew that to get to Zaire, I needed to complete this Master's program. With this in mind, one of my greatest motivators regarding how I spent my time was fear that I wouldn't get it all done. I received a syllabus for each course during the first week of my studies. As I perused the reading and writing requirements, I realized this would require planning and discipline. With this in mind, I created a chart mapping out each day of the week in fifteen-minute increments. The result was that my days were full. Free time including meals, Monday to Saturday, was forty-five minutes in total. However, on Sundays, I took a sabbath rest and did not crack a book. Diane was a fantastic support for me during the year. The result of all of this was that I completed the program with almost straight A's.

Quebec City

Having completed my required studies at CTS and with Diane expecting our second child, we packed up the Volkswagen Rabbit with our one-and-a-half-year-old son and headed east to Quebec City for language study. When we arrived, Jesse and Anne Jespersen, who were serving there, welcomed us and helped us find an apartment and get set up. Our daughter Danielle was born five days before our language courses began at Université Laval. Diane started our language class with this little newborn baby sleeping in a snuggly on her chest.

French was the first foreign language we would learn. Having failed French throughout high school, I knew it would be challenging. But now, the big difference was our motivation. We wanted to communicate. Jesse and Anne had previously

served for many years in Africa, so they were a great encouragement to us. They modelled for us what it meant to be passionate but at the same time not take yourself too seriously and always be willing to laugh at your mistakes. I still remember Jesse's parting words as we left Quebec City for Zaire. He came over to the car window and, with a big smile, said, "Try to have fun!" Oh, how I thought back on those words during the next couple of years when fun would be in very short supply.

Zaire, Central Africa



Our first home at Kinkonzi located in the rain forest of Lower Zaire, 1984

In 1983, having spent six weeks at the Toronto Institute of Linguistics (TIL) learning to learn a language without a language school, Diane and I finally arrived on Zairian soil. After landing in Kinshasa, we were flown to the city of Boma, where we were welcomed by the elderly president of the National Church, Rev. Konde Kuvuna.

After landing on a dirt landing strip, we were taken to the mission guest house with our two small children, where the

president spoke to us in Kikongo through a translator. He told us how thankful he was for us and then said that Zaire was now our country, the people of Zaire were our people, and the work was our work.

The final part of our journey would take us to the Kinkonzi mission station, where we used the techniques we had learned back at TIL to learn Kikongo.

Our third child, Rachael, was born during this time of language study. Unfortunately, these were challenging years due to sickness and lack of support from certain older missionaries who disagreed with our language-learning methods.

I had never been one to get depressed until this time, but I was ready to quit and go home. However, according to mission policy, if we did leave, we would be obligated to repay all the money spent on us, and we needed the funds. So, as time passed, I prayed every day to get sick enough that I would be required to return to Canada but not sick enough to die.

Finally, at the end of two years in Kinkonzi, we moved to the city of Matadi and served with Chris and Marcia Braun. At this point in our missionary experience, we needed something positive to happen in ministry; otherwise, we would not return after our first term. God used Chris and Marcia to give us this positivity.

An example of this was the day Chris and I were driving together to a meeting with pastors. As we drove along, Chris told me he thought I had a lot of *kimfusi*, which is the Kikongo word for enthusiasm. He then said that many older missionaries

don't like younger missionaries with too much *kimfusi*, but he did. He then asked what I wanted to do. I told him I would like to travel to several towns and villages to teach Christian workers Theological Education by Extension (TEE). To this, he responded by saying, "That's great! That's what you should do!" And so, he let me loose to begin teaching every week in five locations. This was one of the positive ministry experiences I needed. However, the story doesn't end there. A few years later, I discovered that when Chris had initially asked me what I would like to do, he himself had been preparing to set up the TEE classes. It was his desire, but he never even mentioned it to me since he wanted me to succeed.

After two years of ministry in Matadi, it was time to return to Canada for home assignment. During the year, I travelled to many churches for missionary conferences. While I was in Ottawa speaking, I received an invitation to have lunch with a Zairian gentleman who was posted to the Zairian embassy. This gentleman also happened to be the younger brother of the current vice president of Zaire. When I met with him over lunch, we had a great visit, and he invited me to come to his home, meet his family, and enjoy some good Zairian food. At the end of our visit, he gave me a sealed envelope along with contact information for his brother. He told me that if I ever needed help, to contact his brother and present this letter to him.

At the end of our home assignment, we returned to Zaire and were assigned to church planting in the capital city, Kinshasa. After we were settled, I thought about the letter to the vice president. I thought, "Wouldn't it sound great in our next prayer letter telling how I met with the vice president and prayed with him!" But God said NO! So, I put the letter away in my study and forgot about it.

One day while driving on the edge of Kinshasa, I discovered a whole new community being developed on the edge of the city. It was called Cité Mama Mobutu. This housing development was being built with three parties involved: The Mama Mobutu Ladies Foundation, a development company, and the construction company. This community was to be for the French-speaking middle class.

As I looked at this community, I observed there were no plans for a church; I became convinced we should plant a French-speaking church there. But we needed a team. With this in mind, I approached my fellow missionary Jim Sawatsky who was older and more experienced than I. I knew Jim well enough to know he tended to take his marching orders directly from God. So, I wasn't sure what his response would be. But God had already been preparing Jim for this.

Just before returning to the field while praying with some family members about future ministry, someone shared with Jim and his wife Dawn a mental picture which had come to mind while they were praying. They said it was the picture of a low-lying white building on top of a hill surrounded by pine trees. At the time, Jim thought, "Pine trees in Zaire? Strange."

When I approached Jim about forming a team to plant a church, I told him I had found a social club with a large meeting room we could rent. Jim agreed to let

me take him to see the place. As we drove up the hill and approached the club, he laughed out loud and said he couldn't believe it! I did not understand why he reacted this way since we had not yet entered the building. But as we approached the club, Jim saw a low-lying white building on top of the hill surrounded by tall pine trees. This was God's confirmation, and so Jim had his marching orders.

Within a very short time, we had a new congregation of 200 meeting every week. The Alliance Canada, due to generous giving that year, was able to make \$80,000 available to purchase land and build a church building. With these funds available to us, I approached the developer of this new community. At our first meeting, he introduced himself by saying his name and telling me he was Polish and an atheist. I responded by telling him my name, that I am Canadian, and a follower of Jesus Christ. This was how our negotiations began. I told him we wanted to buy land and build a 2000-seat church. However, the Polish atheist developer informed me we had to use their construction company, and with the funds we had, they could only construct a building to seat 400 people. This was not going to work for us.

Having hit this roadblock, we looked for any possible pieces of land near the community, allowing us to handle the construction ourselves. But everywhere we looked, there was nothing suitable. We had a growing congregation and money to build but no land. We were at a dead end.

But then I had an idea. I had approached the developer and tried to get through to him with no success. Unfortunately, the construction company had no authority. Therefore, I made an appointment to see the president of the Mama Mobutu Ladies Foundation to see if there was something she could do. After making the appointment, I learned something very significant. She was the wife of the vice president of Zaire! And I remembered the letter I had put away in my study.

On the day of the appointment, I sat in the outer office with about five other people waiting to be called in. As I waited, who should come barging into the office but the assistant of the Polish atheist developer. When I saw him, I tried not to be noticed, knowing he was against us. So, there I was, a white guy in a small office full of Zairians, "hiding" behind a small missions magazine I was pretending to read. As I silently sat there, he forcefully told the secretary he had to be admitted to see Mama President immediately. However, the secretary refused, saying, "You can't go in now because that white guy sitting over there has an appointment before you." As he looked at me, we politely greeted one another, and the room became silent until I was ushered in to meet with Mama President.

As I went in, I thanked her for taking the time to see me. I told her that as a leader, I believed she needed God's wisdom and presented her with a gift of the *JESUS* film on video cassette, for which she was grateful. Then I told her I had visited

and eaten good Zairian food in the home of her brother-in-law, at which point she smiled and seemed quite pleased. Finally, I gave her the letter addressed to her husband. She opened the letter and, after reading it carefully, asked me what she could do for me. I explained how the new Cite Mama Mobutu community had many houses and shops but no church building. I reminded her of the words of Jesus when he asked, “What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet lose their soul?” I told her of the new congregation and our desire to purchase land and build a church, but the developers refused to sell us land.

Having heard my story, she summoned the developer’s assistant and verbally ordered him to sell us the land we wanted and allow us to build. When he sheepishly replied to her, saying he would need more than just her verbal order, she summoned in her secretary and there, on the spot, dictated a written order. From then on, we were able to go on and begin the construction of a 2000-seat church.

Unfortunately, I never got to see the actual completion since, in September 1991, we were evacuated due to civil unrest. But God, in His providence, brought together others who completed the building, and the church grew.



Warsaw North Christian Fellowship
worship centre, March 2022



Worship at the Warsaw North Christian
Fellowship where services are in Polish,
Ukrainian and Russian, March 2022

From Zaire to Poland

When we were evacuated from Zaire in 1991, we fully expected to return to Africa. But God had another plan which could be described by the phrase, “And now for something completely different!”

The Alliance was opening a new field, so starting in 1994, we spent three years in Lublin, Poland, learning the language, developing relationships and researching to develop a plan for us as an Alliance team in this brand-new field.

Following those first three years in Poland, God had a slight detour for us. We were assigned to Black Forest Academy, where I became the pastor of the church attached to the school. While there, God blessed our ministry,

and the church grew from 200 students and 50 adults to 650, with people driving in from Switzerland, France, and the surrounding area in Germany. As much as we enjoyed our ministry, having been away from Canada for six years, it was time for a home assignment. As we returned to Canada, we had no idea God was planning something big to take our ministry to a whole new level of fruitfulness.

Marriage Encounter (ALMA)

During our home assignment, we were invited to attend a Marriage Encounter weekend in Chile. Diane and I had heard of Marriage Encounter but needed to learn more about it, and since some sponsors in the United States would fund the trip, we agreed to go. This was a weekend where we were helped and encouraged in our own marriage. While in Chile, we were introduced to a prayer group which, several years before, heard a former missionary to Poland share in their church. Since then, they had been praying for Poland. Meeting Diane and me was an answer to their prayers.

Following the weekend, both Diane and I were convinced we must, somehow, establish this ministry in Poland. Returning to Warsaw, Poland in August 2000, not knowing anyone other than one key pastor, we joined a group of Poles to help plant a new church that would become the Warsaw North Church. We were convinced



Some of the Marriage Encounter (ALMA) team in the early years, 2007

that the Marriage Encounter would be a good foundation for church planting and leadership development. During the first years, there were huge roadblocks. People in Canada and Poland told us it would never work. We were told it was too expensive and labour-intensive. But we were convinced God was leading us in the right direction. After ten years, we developed a team and trained leaders; some were not even believers when we started.

Looking back, we are thankful to God for what He has done. The Marriage Encounter some said would never work, has been going for twenty years and is now in three cities in Poland. Over 3,000 couples have experienced it. Out of the Marriage Encounter ministry, the Women's Encounter ministry was started and now functions in five locations in Poland and one in London, England.

As we worked with the Marriage Encounter, we were able to have an influence and be an encouragement to the Polish leaders in what would become the Warsaw North Christian Fellowship Church. Today the church has grown to over 1,400 people. They have also sent some of their people out to plant two other congregations, which are growing and reaching their communities.

In 2011, having worked ourselves out of a job, we returned to Canada, where we planted an Alliance church in Ottawa. Leaving Poland was difficult as so many people had become family to us. We felt like half our heart was left there, and our involvement on Polish soil was over.

“Retirement”

In 2020, we officially retired, and in April 2021, we moved to Cochrane, Alberta. Before we retired, I was told that when one retires, there is often a period of adjustment, and it is not always easy switching gears psychologically. So, I was still waiting for the “adjustment” to begin in December 2021. One afternoon as I drove down the hill into Cochrane, looking at the town below and the Rocky Mountains to the west, I was praying to the Lord. It went like this, “Thank you, Father, that we can live here. Thank you that I can go skiing in the winter and camping in the summer and attend a good church each weekend. Father, I am so thankful and really enjoying this retirement. But Father, if you have anything else for me to do, my answer is YES.” And then, I continued my drive home. WARNING! If you ever pray that prayer, be prepared for God to answer!

Just over two months later, Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Within a few days, we began getting messages from our people in Poland telling us of the thousands of women and children fleeing the war. Our partner churches in Poland were opening their churches and homes, taking in what they described as a tsunami of refugees.

In a very short time, The Alliance Canada had put together a project through which funding could be sent to help with this crisis. Having served in Poland and having the language and many contacts, I became the liaison between our churches in Canada and our Polish partner churches. This has meant travelling to Poland and Ukraine several times a year. Through our partnership



Bill (r) in Poland, explains The Alliance Canada response to the growing number of refugees fleeing Ukraine, 2022

between The Alliance Canada and the churches in Poland, we are reaching thousands of hurting people with both the physical and spiritual food they need.¹

As I write this story, the war in Ukraine has no end in sight, so we can only trust God for his direction and guidance going forward. One thing we do know is that He is faithful.

So, while this is the end of my written story, the story of our lives goes on for Diane and me. As I look back on the journey so far, there have been joyful times and some difficult and painful times. But through it all, God has remained faithful.

Over the desk in my study hangs a painting of a sailing ship. Above is a phrase expressing how I have chosen to follow Christ over the years. It says, “A ship in the harbor is safe... but that is not what ships were built for.” Hopefully, as you have read this story, it will encourage you to be willing to take risks for God and leave the safety of the harbour.



Bill and Diane Finnemore,
2023

¹ You can view Bill's video reports from Ukraine [here](#).

Chapter 2

Immigrants, Imaginings, and the Impossible

by Marwan and Inge Qandah

Marwan's Story

A few years ago, one of my daughters was feeling sad. One of her friends asked why? To her surprise, my daughter said she was feeling homesick—not for the place of her birth but for where she lived during her early childhood and teen years. She was homesick for Jordan and Germany.

My daughter's situation is not unique to her. It is the lot of almost all those who live a significant portion of their lives in places other than their passport country.

While living overseas, my son was feeling down, so I told him we were willing to return to Canada instead of living overseas as international workers. His answer struck me. He said, "Baba, it is too late. No matter where we live, we will miss places, and we will miss people."

All of us face difficult questions. For example, some difficult questions for international workers or missionary kids are, "Where do you come from? Where is home?"

Such questions do not have simple answers. In my German class, the teacher asked everyone to share their name, country of origin, and job. The expression on her face, and the faces of other students from Libya, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, were priceless when I said I was a Christian pastor. They all assumed I was a Muslim since many people think everyone from the Middle East is an Arab and all Arabs are Muslims.

One of those difficult questions people ask me is, "Where were you born?" According to my passport, I was born in Der-Scharaf, Jordan. My father was a soldier stationed in the West Bank while it was part of Jordan. Then it became part of Israel. Later it became part of the region controlled by the Palestinian Authority. So, my actual place of birth is the Jordanian military camp next to the village of Der-Scharaf, which is now part of Palestine. But that military camp is now a Jewish settlement belonging to Israel.

My parents were Jordanians, and before immigrating to Canada, I held a Jordanian passport. (I now have a Canadian passport.) Then, to muddy the

situation, my Syriac tribe moved from Damascus to Lebanon in 1650, before it was called Lebanon, after one of my ancestors murdered a man. Then around 1750, my tribe moved and settled down in Jordan when it was not called Jordan. So, what do you call a man whose tribe was Greek Orthodox, some of whom converted to Catholicism, were originally Syriac and lives in Jordan?

If there is one thing we learned working in the Middle East, North Africa (MENA), and Europe for over twenty-six years, it is this, do not assume anything about anyone, ask questions and do not profile.

I also learned that God prepares us for His plans to build His Kingdom throughout our lives in surprising and unexpected ways.

A stranger named Mike Johnson, a student at Cambridge, England came to my language school where I was studying English as a second language and invited me to a Bible study at Tyndale House. Mike and I started meeting every Saturday to study the Bible together. We then joined another Bible study in simple English with other international students also learning English at Cambridge.

Mike invited me to the Round Church, which is literally round. One Sunday, a visiting priest put down a Bible and a glove. He told the glove to pick up the Bible, but the glove never moved. Then he put his hand in the glove and picked up the Bible. The priest explained that the Bible is the only way to God, the glove is you and me dead in sin, and the hand is the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, you cannot follow God. The illustration moved me, so I bought my first Bible, "Good News for Modern Man." I read up to forty chapters daily and finished reading it in six weeks.

Spring break saw me attending a retreat for international students organized by Cambridge Intercollegiate Christian Union (CICCU). The main speaker was Charles Marsh, an English missionary who spent fifty-three years in Chad and Algeria and spoke English, French, Arabic, and Kabili. He preached every night, and we hiked around Wales during the day. One afternoon, I went to his room. He asked, "What brings you to my room?" I replied, "I have a friend. I want to make her a Christian." He asked, "Are you a sinner?" I answered yes. Then we both knelt, and he led me in prayers. I was filled with joy as never before. No sooner had I left the room than I started sharing the Gospel with just about everyone I met before even knowing the term "Gospel." At that moment, I knew I must share the good news of Jesus Christ with all. I knew I must dedicate all of my life to this single purpose. Terms such as evangelist, evangelism, missionary, and calling were all foreign to me. Looking back, I now know the Lord gave me

At that moment,
I knew I must
share the good
news of Jesus
Christ with all.

the gift of evangelism and called me to full-time ministry.

If I ever write an autobiography, I will name each chapter after people who have impacted my life drastically. Even before getting saved, Mike Johnson discipled me. Since then, I have always had people who spoke and are still speaking into my life. One of my repeated prayers is, “Lord, never let me reach a stage where I am unteachable.” Since the Cambridge days, there has been a “cloud of witnesses who have discipled me.” Jim and Joyce Dods, Frank Allan, and Philip Allan spent so much time and effort investing in my life. The Tunnochs, the Priddles, and many others opened their homes and showed me hospitality.

One couple was the Roses, an older couple who worked for the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM). One day I told them, “I would love to become a missionary, but I have no qualifications.” Their response was, “Apply and see what will happen.” As a result, Inge and I applied and were assigned to work in Ouagadougou, West Africa. While training for the field, SIM asked us to consider moving to Nairobi, Kenya.

Eventually, we ended up in Jordan as international workers sent out by Cedarview Alliance Church, Ottawa. Bill Harrod mentored me every Saturday at six in the morning and helped me apply to become an international worker with The Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA).

While in Amman, Jordan, Gerald Hogenbirk visited us, and we had our first official interview. The Hogenbirks opened doors for us to attend Canadian Theological Seminary (CTS). We moved our family to Regina, Saskatchewan, and studied at CTS. A few years later, I was approved to do my doctorate in counselling.

Sharing the Gospel

Taxis in the Middle East and North Africa region are amazing. No father wants his daughter to get married to a taxi driver. Drivers smoke in violation of local laws, drive recklessly and are looked down on by everyone. One day as I opened the door to get into a taxi, I recognized it as an open door to share the good news of Jesus Christ. The driver was smoking, and I asked him not to. After he threw his cigarette out the window, I asked, “Why do you think I asked you to stop smoking?” He answered because it was the law. I said, “Yes, but there is more.” He said, “For health reasons.” I said, “Yes, but there is more.” He was puzzled, and to add to his confusion, I said, “Because my body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.” Totally confused, with a raised voice, he asked, “What?” For the remainder of the trip, I shared the gospel message and gave him a good tip and a New Testament.

Another day I got into a taxi, knowing I had only a short ride ahead of me. I said to the driver, “Good morning. What makes you tick?” The man did not understand

the question at first. So, I said, "What makes you get up in the morning? After all, no one wants their daughter to marry a taxi driver." The taxi driver replied that he must put food on the table; that was his reason for getting up in the morning. So, I said, "Let me share with you what motivates me." Then I shared my testimony with him along with the gospel message.

One evening, a mechanic and I were having tea and talking at his garage. I asked him why when someone builds a new home, according to custom, they slaughter an animal, dip their hand in the blood, and put the blood on the doorpost. The mechanic replied that it was an Islamic custom but did not know why it was done. Then I told him this was done in the Old Testament during the Passover. He was amazed this Islamic practice was in the Bible. Then I went back to the story of Creation, the fall, followed by Abraham and the sacrifice of his son. Afterwards, I told the story of the cross, connecting the story of sacrifice with the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. This principle of using the practices of Islam found in the Old Testament stories when speaking to the local people did not seem to offend them.

Another Christian worker and I went to a gym together, but people did not know we knew each other. We would stand apart from each other and start talking, asking questions loud enough for others to hear. As a result of our conversation, people knew I was a Christian.

Later one man came and asked me about the Trinity while we were in the sauna. I asked him, "If someone knew all about God and could explain to me who God was, what kind of person would that be?" The man answered that person would be God. For the man to ask me to explain God and how he revealed Himself as triune would be blasphemous, as if I fully understood God. I accept it by faith since the Bible is the written Word of God. He accepted my explanation. Our conversations continued for many months, and he always seemed thankful to receive the written materials I gave him.

Inge's Story

I was born in the USA and grew up in a Christian home to German immigrant parents, the oldest of ten children. I came to know the Lord as my Saviour at seven when the preacher at our Sunday evening meeting told the story of Nicodemus. "You must be born again" rang in my ears, and I knew I wasn't. So, I went home, knelt by my bed, and there arose a feeling of relief. Now I was on my way to Heaven.

I was seven years old and had my tonsils out shortly after that. Before the surgery, my father asked if I knew where I would go when I died; he was happy with my answer. The experience in the hospital made me want to be a nurse

because one of the nurses was not nice. But I wanted to be a good nurse.

I felt called to missions at camp when I was twelve years old. I could go overseas as a nurse. So I got my degree in nursing and spent time in Nova Scotia during the summer months working with children in gospel outreach. It seemed to answer the desire to do “foreign missions.”

Marwan and I met at a Bible conference on Easter Sunday, 1984. By this time, all except my youngest siblings had married. I had concluded, though it would be nice to be married, if God wanted me single, I was determined to use the freedom singleness brings to serve Him.

And then Marwan, who made it clear to me he did not like Germans or Americans, showed up to help in the children’s outreach the following summer. We were short-staffed, so it was good to have help, though our first meeting gave me no preparation for the marriage proposal that came after two weeks of working together. I saw the difficulties ahead if I said yes to Marwan, but God was working, reminding me He was the God of the impossible and asking if I was willing to trust Him. We both had a call to missions and full-time ministry, an important issue to settle before marriage. Marwan’s criteria for a marriage partner were someone who was a believer, a growing believer, and already involved in ministry.

We married in 1985 in Ottawa, Ontario, and lived there until we moved overseas. Our four children, Sarah, Rachel, Philip, and Deborah, were born in Ottawa before our seventh wedding anniversary.



Sharing hospitality in their home

During our first year of marriage, we took a biblical counselling course together, and our oldest child Sarah was born nine months and five days later. We continued the work with Chinese university students as Marwan had been doing before we were married. In addition, we started taking Bible correspondence courses and volunteering with SIM. In 1989, we made a short-term missions trip to Egypt.

From the beginning of our marriage, we opened our home to international students, mainly Chinese, many of whom became Christians. Hospitality was a valuable tool for reaching out to those who were lonely and in need.

After training with SIM, in 1996, we

were on our way to Kenya, or so we thought.

I was overwhelmed and wondered how I would get everything necessary done before we moved. Would we be able to adjust to living in another country? Then, while reading Psalm 105:4-5 one morning, the Lord reassured me and reminded me what I should be thinking about. *“Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always. Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced...”*

Marwan told me the promise he read in Exodus 23:25-26 dealing with his concerns about our move overseas. *“Worship the Lord your God, and his blessing will be on your food and water. I will take away sickness from among you, and none will miscarry or be barren in your land. I will give you a full life span.”*

A Change in Plans

We wanted to visit Marwan’s family in Jordan on our way to Kenya. After giving away or selling most of our belongings, we arrived with thirteen suitcases while our boxes of household things made their way to Kenya, where they arrived in good time.

But God closed the door to Kenya, so we started serving in Jordan. The Lord used the unexpected death of my youngest brother not long after we arrived in Jordan. The kindness of the family and the church made me feel included, loved, and cared for, filling me with the hope that we could live in Jordan.

After deciding to stay in Jordan, Marwan started assisting the pastor of the Alliance church we attended in Amman, Jordan. We also attended an English international church on Saturday nights, greatly encouraging the children. They also attended the Christian school, and I taught 7th and 8th grade there for two years.

One way we interacted with local people was by ‘accident.’ A car accident in December 1999 resulted in a hospitalization, where I met staff and the young man who caused the accident. He was given a Bible while his family and our extended family got to know each other using the fascinating Jordanian tribal method to deal with the shedding of my blood.¹



A meal with locals in Northern Iraq

1 You can learn about Jordanian customs at [Bedouins – the backbone of Jordanian culture \(theturbantimes.com\)](http://theturbantimes.com)



Inge working at a medical clinic in the Middle East

A little Kurdish girl, a few months old, needed a simple operation to save her life. Marwan collected donations, paid for the surgery, and then went to her bedside to pray for her. After the procedure, the mother came to our house to thank Marwan. She wanted to know what kind of work Marwan did, and he told her he was a problem solver. She, her husband, and two other couples, each with four children, met regularly on Fridays to solve their family problems and do Bible studies. Seeing the three couples baptized before we left for home assignment was a great joy.

In 2000, Marwan and I studied at Canadian Theological Seminary in Regina, Saskatchewan, and the Lord provided scholarships for us both. We finished in fifteen months and returned to Jordan at the end of the school year.

Marwan started working out in a local gym where they played the Koran during workouts. When Marwan gave a Bible to the owner, he offered to pay for it and then warned others at the gym about Marwan. One of the people who started conversing with Marwan was a professor of Sharia law at one of the local universities. Marwan admitted to being a Christian evangelist when asked. When no one else was around, individual men would ask Marwan about his faith and practice, such as how he fasted.

Once back in Jordan, I studied Arabic while working with our Kurdish friends

and others continued. We returned to Canada when Sarah, our oldest, finished high school.

Our Move to Germany

Marwan had started travelling more during our second term in Jordan and was getting involved in various organizations. We took the opportunity to move to Germany in 2006, so Marwan could continue his travels, and I could then meet many of the people he had been working with. Sarah had married just before we moved to Mannheim, Germany. Rachel started Bible school in Toronto, while Philip and Deborah attended Black Forest Academy in South Germany.

Before moving to Germany, I was asked what my ministry would be since the children would no longer be living with us. I expected to continue to reach out and show hospitality to those in our church, neighbours, friends, and relatives, just like we had been doing in Canada. Our home has always been central to how we do ministry.

We liked to buy from small local stores owned by individuals. I knew if I needed something right away, I should not send Marwan to the store because it would take too long. His habit was to sit down and chat with people, discussing the issues of life. He would look for opportunities to share what the Bible says about these issues rather than his own opinion. He would respond by saying, "Jesus says..." or, "It is written in the Bible..." For example, one day, when he was in a hurry, the butcher shop owner asked Marwan to step outside because he had a question. His fourteen-year-old daughter was invited to a birthday party, and he did not know what to do. Marwan said, "Let me tell you what the Bible says about that."

So, once we got to Germany, Marwan started doctoral studies in counselling, and I also took counselling courses online.

During our second term, we moved to a small village. Our home there has truly been the Lord's providing; soon, we were able to show hospitality to local folks and various overnight guests. Some came for intensive



Teaching a counselling seminar
in the Middle East

counselling, to take a work break, or to do both.

One Arabic-speaking young woman stayed with us for five months, fleeing an abusive marriage. She returned to her home country, and after a few years, she was able to return to the ministry she had been engaged in before her marriage. She now organizes the training we do in her country for people doing outreach. It is a joy to see her able to



Online teaching of leaders in Europe and the Middle East from Germany

serve the Lord once again after a challenging experience.

The Lord sends people we can minister to who are often leaders doing ministry among Arabic speakers in Europe and the Middle East. Sometimes they come to us because of connections with our organization in member care. Marwan is on the board of a few Christian organizations that have asked Marwan to do counselling with people they know. Marwan could then do online counselling with these people.

God used many things in my life to prepare me for the work we are now doing in Germany and the Middle East. For example, I grew up with first-generation immigrant parents, have a German first name, learned German as a child, lived in the Middle East for over seven and a half years, studied nursing and counselling, and attended seminary. All these experiences have been helpful in continuing to follow God's call on my life.

Currently, we are heavily involved with our local international bilingual church in Germany, serving in leadership roles by leading Bible studies, doing biblical counselling, and mentoring church members. When the Covid lockdown restrictions were imposed, the ministry did not stop but was changed. We realized there is no expiry date on our spiritual gifts or the fruit of the Holy Spirit. We wanted to continue working for God's Kingdom during this time. As a result, our church grew in membership, and people came to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus. People also came to our home for personal counselling.

We have opportunities to reach out to our ethnically diverse neighbours from



Marwan and Inge after doing member care in Switzerland

the Dominican Republic, Japan, Gambia, and France, most married to Germans.

As of 2023, back in Canada, we expect to continue to reach out to our neighbours, to continue online counselling and teaching, as well as to travel and teach biblical counselling in person as God opens the way. What has helped us throughout our ministry has been to have godly people speaking into our lives, being part of a local church, and daily reading the Bible. God promises to be with us each step of the way.

Chapter 3

Raising the Next Generation of Workers

by Hans and Ruth Fung

Parents of students at Black Forest Academy in Germany are now serving in over fifty countries to share the good news of the Gospel and build the Kingdom of God. The reason this academy exists is so a whole tribe in a small African village can hear of the saving grace of God and follow Him, and so more than 2,000 Chinese labourers in Israel can become committed Christ followers who return to their home country to lead house churches which have been growing by the thousands.

Churches have been planted in Kosovo, Kazakhstan, Egypt, China, Mongolia, and Russia. Gospel concerts were packed with young people in Germany, local Christians were trained by missionaries to lead the Church in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia, and national Christian schools were planted in Africa, Central Asia, and all over the world. In addition, medical and social services were given to people in places like Afghanistan, Iraq, and many Central Asian countries.

God's power was greater than what we could ever imagine. A small school which began more than 60 years ago did not even think of or dream of reaching people around the world... let alone impacting many nations for Christ. But God's power is truly awesome! When we trust, His power is more significant than

our problem! When we believe His power is for us, He uses us! When we believe He can give us the friend we need, He leads! When we face those lonely moments, He fills our hearts with peace! When we lack the money we need, He provides over and beyond what we expect.

My name is Hans Kwok-Lun Fung, and my wife, Ruth, and I have been privileged to be a part of God's plan



to build up missionary kids in education and their walk with God.

I was born in Hong Kong in 1957 under the British Administration. My parents were from China and moved to Hong Kong before World War II. They were married after they met at my father's shoe factory. My father passed away in July 2013, and my mother lives in Hong Kong.

Growing up with six boys in my parents' house was adventurous and dangerous. But, by the grace of God, we all survived, and we each have our own families living in four different countries. My older brother is a cardiologist in Los Angeles, California, and my younger brother is a retired computer programmer in San Jose. Two of my younger brothers moved back from America to Hong Kong almost 20 years ago. My youngest brother is currently working in Singapore.

I went to a Christian school in Hong Kong and got to know Jesus through an evangelistic meeting when I was in grade 9. I came to Canada as an international student in 1975 and completed my high school and university in Regina, Saskatchewan. I was actively involved in Regina Chinese Alliance Church, leading the children's choir, Sunday school and driving the bus to transport international students to church and other ministries.

I felt God's call to full-time ministry at a Joint Missions Conference in 1982. My degree in education confirmed my love for working with students. After teaching for a year, followed by a year of grad studies, I prepared myself for ministry by enrolling at Canadian Theological Seminary. It was here that I met my wife, Ruth, and we married after graduating in 1986.

Ruth was born in Calgary, Alberta, in the early 1960s. Ruth and I have been educators for over 35 years and have lived in three countries besides Canada and the United States.



After we spent more than two years in San Diego for our Master of Arts in Education and teaching in a public and private school, we returned to Canada to serve at Edmonton Chinese Alliance Church for almost three years before heading overseas. Then we spent the first five years in Penang,



Hans and Ruth with their sons Ben, Evan, and Matthew, 2017

Malaysia, as teachers and principal at Dalat International School. Then, for the following sixteen years, we were in Kandern, Germany, also working as teachers and principals at Black Forest Academy.

We love young people and count it a great privilege to be involved in international transformational education around the world. Since 2014, we have lived in Almaty, Kazakhstan, heading up Tien Shan International School as director/head of school and Ruth as a teacher and academic dean overseeing all high school, middle school, and elementary school principals.

I had the privilege of completing the Doctor of Education Degree with Northcentral University (name changed to National University recently) in 2017 to continue the ministry of serving missionary and third culture kids.

We have three sons, and they are in different stages of their lives. Our oldest son is working as a pilot after graduating from LeTourneau University in Texas. Our second son is working in Calgary for Revenue Canada. Our youngest son teaches math at an international school in Hong Kong.

Introduction

After twelve years of waiting, seeking, training, teaching, serving, and submitting to the ‘mission’ authority, we were finally accepted as full-time overseas workers with the title of associate missionaries. Those setbacks, discouragements, and disappointments tested and tried us. I may disagree with the old recruitment

process; however, there were certain values and elements to bring out the true character of being willing to go and ready to serve regardless of circumstances and environment at that time and beyond. I had to recognize that the tough process was a true test of commitment.

In 1993, we finally embarked on a journey to “go where He wants us to go; do what He wants us to do.” We are now finishing up 30 years of serving overseas at the time of writing.

First Field: Dalat International School, 1993-1998

On August 1, 1993, Ruth and I, along with 10-month-old Benjamin, headed to Penang, Malaysia, to serve as missionary kid (MK) teachers at Dalat International School. It has been a ‘home away



Dalat International School, Malaysia

from home’ to many missionary children since the 1920s and grew into an international school with a diverse population. When we arrived, Hans served as the athletic director and health and physical education teacher; Ruth was the 4th-grade teacher.

The twelve-year journey from when we wanted to go overseas to finally arriving on the field was evidence of God’s grace and mercy. With two years of seminary, two years of graduate school, six years of church ministry, and two more years of teaching experience, we had the perfect preparation to enter the mission field. During those years of waiting and serving, we were blessed to develop prayer and support networks vital for our ministry to MKs/TCKs (Third Culture Kids). We could have only lasted for so long without the prayer support from home.

We were humbled and privileged to be able to serve these children. Our first-year experience as missionary children educators set the foundation for our lifelong ministry to MKs/TCKs. Faith and commitment in a difficult environment outside our comfort zone was a response to God’s call, which took courage and faith. We did not know what was ahead, but we trusted His guidance and provision to meet our needs at the time.

We were encouraged by many stories of success when we witnessed changed lives. Students were developed and called to be in teaching ministries. One of our

students came from a business family without knowledge of the salvation of our Lord Jesus Christ. After four years of high school at Dalat, she developed a strong conviction to follow Jesus and became a high school teacher. She committed herself to reaching the next generation through education ministry. She returned to her home country, taught in a Christian school, and led students to Christ for over ten years. What a privilege to serve our Lord through transformational education ministry as students impact their world for Christ.

The five years of serving as the athletic director and principal for Hans and elementary school teacher and high school French teacher for Ruth were a considerable privilege and provided growing experience as MK caregivers. They were full of joy and love, and challenges.

By God's gracious gift, we welcomed our second son to our family during this time.

Second Field: Black Forest Academy, 1998-2014



Black Forest Academy, Germany

As we continued to be willing to go where He wanted us to go and to do what He wanted us to do, God led us to Black Forest Academy in Germany. The Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) had decided to pass on the ownership of Dalat School to the parents as a private international school in Penang, Malaysia. Therefore,

our leaders began the redeployment of Canadian personnel from Dalat School. Through many hours of consultations and prayers, they recommended that we join the C&MA team in Germany due to the high number of Canadian Alliance missionary children attending Black Forest Academy (BFA) at the time. More personnel were needed to care for them as educators and administrators. Hans was needed as the computer teacher and Ruth as the French teacher when we arrived.

God had a different plan as Hans moved into administration in the second year. Again, he took on the all-school principal position to prepare BFA to reach the highest enrollment in its history. During our first seven years of serving at BFA, the school developed into elementary, middle, and high school programs where each division had its own principal to look after its own growth and development.

After more than sixteen years serving in Germany at the boarding school

as head principal, academic dean, teacher, and elementary and middle school principal, we witnessed many MKs surrender their lives to the Lord and commit to serving Him wherever God leads. Two of the many students got married after university and responded to God's call to Africa. For more than ten years now, they have been in Togo, serving the people there with a hospital, training, evangelism, discipleship, and raising their own family to be servants of our Lord.

Another exciting phenomenon was being able to share human and financial resources with other smaller schools around the world. I (Hans) had the privilege of serving as a consultant to many small schools across the globe, from Vietnam, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, and Switzerland, to build schools and strengthen their academic program. In addition, I was able to refer teachers and administrators to these schools. My passion was the intentional development of school leaders and encouraging them to respond to God's call to serve in remote and challenging countries as school administrators.

I had the privilege of establishing partnerships with different organizations to use transformational education services to bring the next generation of students and the current generation of teachers to Christ. What a joy and privilege to be part of this amazing journey with so many colleagues and like-minded educators to reach the world for Christ.



Tien Shan International School, Central Asia

Third Field: Central Asia, 2014

After sixteen years in Germany, we had come to enjoy BFA's lifestyle, beautiful scenery, and familiarity. We wanted to remain at BFA, but only if God called us to stay, not because it was comfortable and convenient. Our regional developers shared their vision of strengthening the MK/TCK school in Central Asia to receive the wave of international workers (IWs) from

different countries who had landed in the city of Almaty at the end of 2012.

Leaving a vital and vibrant ministry in Germany and moving to an unstable region sounded illogical but was a true test of our faith in His calling. Were we still willing to go where He wanted us to go and do what He wanted us to do? After a few months of praying and seeking God's guidance, we were prepared to enter another chapter of our MK/TCK ministry in Kazakhstan. On August 1, 2014, we



Ruth teaching at Tien Shan

arrived with our youngest son embarking on a journey out of our expectations and human understanding.

The privilege of serving and partnering with (IW) families from more than eleven countries in Asia, Europe, North America, and Australia

is indescribable. Witnessing the work of the parents who are regional workers (workers from other Central Asian countries who speak Russian) reaching the people of Kazakhstan was like having front-row seats in a theatre.

We have supported and partnered with the parents of students who are regional and international workers who reach out to the poor, underprivileged, unreached, minority, and marginalized. The excitement of seeing people from various unreached people groups in Kazakhstan come to know the Lord was beyond words. We have witnessed the outworking of the Great Commission, the discipling and training of local believers as workers.

Meeting the needs of regional workers' and IWs' children with quality and transformational education falls into the hands of MK/TCK schools. We are challenged to train the next generation with exceptional skills, knowledge, abilities, and gifts to reach the world for Christ. It was a blessing to help the school meet international standards with recognition by three top accreditation agencies. We have created a program to meet and exceed the educational standards for North American, European, Asian, and Australian universities. All of this has given us a glimpse of the true international community that will be present when we get to Heaven.

Not only do we serve the IWs and their children from a strict neighbouring country, but we can serve so many adult MKs/TCKs in Tien Shan and, most of all, our former students from Germany.

It has been my prayer for over 30 years that God will raise the next MK/TCK generation to lead and serve schools like Tien Shan worldwide. God has answered my prayer many times throughout the last 30 years. In the past 20 years, a few MK/TCK schools have been led by their own alumni or adult MK/TCK from other parts of the world, like Dalat, BFA, etc. Many teachers in these schools were also MKs/TCKs themselves. The experience of these MKs/TCKs has brought greater



insight and more effective operations to the schools. What a joy and comfort to see those who went through the path to be able to be ministers to the next generation of MKs/TCKs with understanding, love, and care.

Serving IW families and their children from unreached countries is beyond our expectations. As many IWs serve in the least-reached or unreached nations, nothing is more encouraging than seeing these unreached countries send their own IWs to share the good news.

We served one worker family after the father passed away while serving the Lord in another country. The school has also had an unexpected opportunity of reaching people from war-torn countries by receiving refugees and displaced families. In the last eighteen months, our ministry has been extended to reach a few of these families from Afghanistan, Ukraine, Russia, and some of the poor neighbouring countries. The overwhelming response from the community and supporting churches to raise funds for scholarships for these families has been a testimony of the love of Christ for the community and the world.

Another amazing experience of serving here was seeing Jehovah Jireh, the Provider, at work. When we began, the school was over \$750,000 in debt. Since then, it has averaged a \$250,000 yearly surplus for the last seven years. We have also established a substantial scholarship program to assist families who cannot afford to send their children to the school. We now have a stipend program to



Hans and Ruth Fung

support the faculty and staff who need help to raise sufficient financial support from their home or sending countries. All of these are due to the power of prayer and sharing God's provision with the community from the tithes of the earnings from the sale of the old property. Since then, God has been providing over and beyond our needs financially each year, regardless of the number of our enrollment. No accreditation agency will

recognize the reason for our healthy financial situation, but this would clearly explain how we got to where we are.

As we continue on the journey to raise the next generation of workers for His kingdom, recruiting the new generation and young professional workers has become a front-and-centre task for The Alliance Canada. We were honoured to be part of this amazing process.

Conclusion

A study by Dr. Leslie Andrews from Nyack College twenty years ago reported that thirty percent of graduates from schools like Tien Shan, BFA, Dalat, etc., were involved in full-time ministry for His Kingdom. Today, our unofficial estimation of a thirty percent return is still the fact and norm; thirty percent of MKs/TCKs will serve God in some full-time capacity.

This amazing return motivated us, and may this continue to be effective. We testify to God's faithfulness, presence, power, protection, and provision over our 30-year journey. May He continue to glorify Himself as we make Him known wherever He calls us to go and whatever He asks us to do.

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Chapter 4

Leaning On Christ; Leading Like Christ

by Mike Sohm

Before the Ebola outbreak in Guinea, some rural villages persecuted Christians. Thousands died from Ebola, and the impact on their families and villages was overwhelming.

Once the outbreak was under control, a local pastor initiated a five-part response to help families and villages, starting with bringing formal condolences to those who had lost family members. He asked fellow Christians to go with him to speak with the village leaders. The Christians were afraid at first but soon decided to go. When they told the village leaders why they were there, one stood up, saying, “Even though I have had a death in my family, no one had come to give condolences, and now these Christians whom we persecuted and whose building we had burnt down have come to give us condolences.”

This was such a testimony to the other leaders that they asked the Christians for forgiveness and insisted on going to the next village with them. This act of love and kindness opened the door for the gospel message in these Muslim villages.

Beginnings

Growing up in a small farming community in southern Minnesota shaped my values and aspirations. Hard work, honesty, respect for those in authority, attending church, and caring for others were modelled for me and emphasized by my parents and teachers. My parents, Monica and Elwin Sohm, were hard-working, religious people who had grown up on farms. Dad went into the air force, and Mom worked in a small city. After their marriage, Dad worked many odd jobs to make ends meet, and Mom stayed home to care for us five children.

Mom was a staunch Roman Catholic; for me, this meant going to catechism class, confession, and mass every week. I became an altar boy in elementary school and served under different priests. One was



Mike Sohm

kind; others were gruff and grumpy, shaping my views of the Catholic Church.

My hometown of Cleveland, Minnesota, had a population of 500. You knew everyone, and they knew you. When you did something wrong at your friend's house, his mother would discipline you, call your mother, and she would discipline you again when you got home. There was little to do other than sports, working on local farms, and getting into trouble. I excelled at two of the three. I enjoyed sports the most—baseball all spring and summer, football in the fall, and basketball in the winter. Coaches had a significant influence on my life.

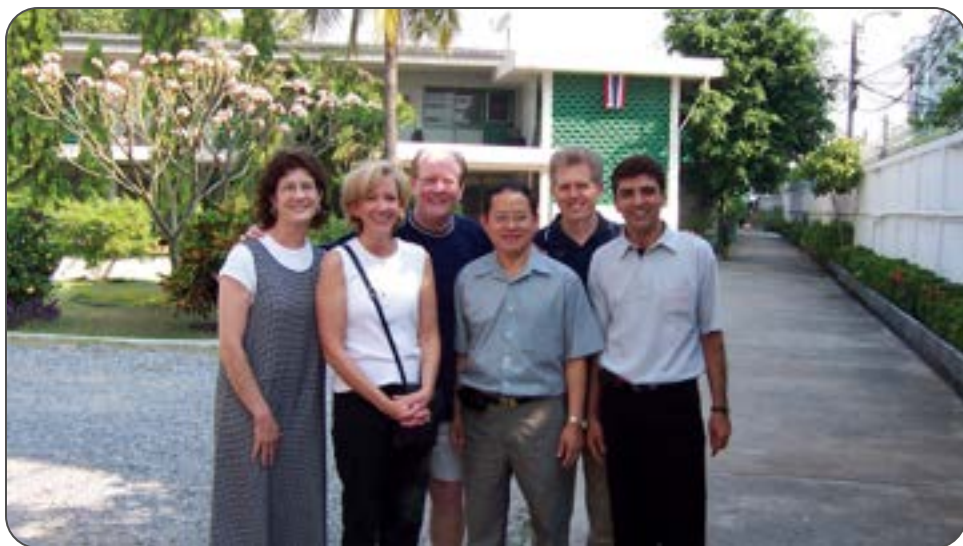
I believed in God, Jesus, and other basic teachings of the Bible. However, I thought I had to earn my salvation by doing good things and going to confession and mass each week. By my early teens, I was pretty certain I was in deep trouble with God.

When I was sixteen, the teacher of our religious instruction class took us all to see a Billy Graham film. I identified with some of the characters and felt some conviction of sin. However, when asked if I wanted to accept Christ as my Saviour, I firmly said, "No!" God sent another person into my life a year later to present God's plan of salvation, and again, my answer was "No." God, who relentlessly pursues us, sent one more person to me following high school graduation at the job where I worked that summer.

I worked in a factory to make money to attend Minnesota State University (MSU) at Mankato in the fall. One day a man named Joe came to work alongside me. He lived a life quite different from everyone I knew. As a former gymnast, he was strong, worked hard, laughed easily, and was a good listener. When asked serious questions, he almost always quoted the Bible to support his answer. Overall, Joe was completely honest about his life and the ups and downs he had experienced.

His life intrigued me so much that I asked about reading the Bible, and he directed me to the Gospel of John. I read a few paragraphs at night, and we would discuss it over lunch the next day. When I came to John 5:24 and saw you could know with certainty you had eternal life, I was shocked and asked Joe if the offer was true. With his affirmation, I put my faith in Christ that evening.

The fall semester started the following week. Joe was a leader in the Navigator student ministry at my campus. For the next two years, he mentored and disciplined me, connecting me with other believers, teaching me how to pray, study the Bible, share my faith, etc. As a result, I also became involved in the Navigator student ministry.



Mike (back row, right) and Nancy (front row, left) with friends in Thailand, 2016

Family

I have been richly blessed in finding Nancy, marrying her over 40 years ago. We met while involved with the Navigator student ministry at MSU. Although shy, she was genuine and very determined in her faith, such as when she helped to smuggle Bibles into former Soviet Bloc countries.

Our relationship grew over the months, and we soon became engaged and were married a week after Nancy graduated and three months before attending seminary in Regina, Saskatchewan. Our three years at Canadian Theological Seminary (CTS) were transformational and foundational. Faculty, staff, and students all invested generously in our lives. Our first son Caleb was born in our final year at CTS.

We now have three adult sons, a daughter-in-law, and two grandchildren.

Preparation for Service

A Navigator staff member at MSU gathered us every Saturday morning to study the Bible and pray for missionaries. He had a three-inch stack of prayer letters that he would pass out to the sixty students to read and then pray for each request. This was my first exposure to missions.

While in college, God gave me a heart for international students, and I had

the privilege of leading a student from Iran to Christ. At the same time, I began attending a local Alliance church and was influenced to consider missions through the annual mission's conference. This led me to apply for Alliance Youth Corp, a short-term mission opportunity of The Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA), during my junior year at MSU. I was accepted and spent that summer in Thailand with Compassion and Mercy Associates (CAMA), the relief and development arm of the C&MA.

During the summer, I served Hmong refugees who escaped Laos. I worked with Sean Campbell,¹ a student from Canadian Bible College and a missionary kid who had grown up in Thailand. He relentlessly encouraged me to attend CTS after completing my undergraduate degree.

The Hmong refugees we served had come across the Mekong River the night before, and we saw and heard first-hand the suffering caused by the ongoing war in Laos. Toward the end of the summer, we visited Alliance missionaries in other locations to gain some exposure to church planting. During one of those visits, I yielded myself to the Lord for future service. I told the Lord I would return to Thailand and serve in any way, but not with CAMA in relief work—it was just too hard.

In the fall, the Lord spoke to me during a missionary conference calling me to serve overseas. Wanting to serve with the C&MA, I knew that Nancy and I would need further training at a C&MA seminary which led us to CTS.

Key People Who Impacted My Life

I recently counted over twenty individuals God used as mentors to influence me at key moments. Let me mention a few. My call to missionary service came through Joe Arthur, a missionary to the Philippines. He spoke at my church and extended an invitation to respond to God's call to missions, to which I responded with a 'yes.'

I am incredibly grateful for the professors who taught, exhorted, affirmed, and encouraged me first as a believer and then as one called to serve. The example, teaching, and encouragement of Doctors Arnold Cook, Al Cramer, Sam Stoesz, and Dale Herendeen were especially timely and impactful.

I recently counted over twenty individuals God used as mentors to influence me at key moments.

1 He later went on to work with CAMA in Asia for a few years and then with Samaritan's Purse for much of his career.

Events Leading up to our First Term in Thailand

Following graduation, we moved to Burnaby, British Columbia, for home service at Brentwood Park Alliance Church. Our senior pastor, Arden Adrian, was a fantastic mentor, pouring into my life in ways that continue to bear fruit today. The congregation welcomed us warmly, and it was a key time in our development as individuals and future missionaries.

Our second child, Katie, was born in Burnaby. We were in the early stages of preparing to leave Brentwood Park for our first term in Thailand. Tragically, the night before we were going to pack our missionary barrels, three-month-old Katie died in her sleep. The following days were a blur, but I remember the loving care we experienced from the church family. Her death changed us in ways we would not understand until years later, and it opened doors of ministry we could not have anticipated.

We returned to Minnesota to spend time with our families before leaving for Thailand in August. While we had studied and served with the Alliance in Canada, we were required to serve with the C&MA in the U.S. under Alliance Missions (AM).

In 1984, we travelled with five other new workers to Thailand, and they quickly became friends and colleagues. However, shortly after we arrived, we experienced something I could not have imagined or anticipated, almost bringing our missionary career to an abrupt end. However, it also shaped the kind of person and leader I would become.

Instead of showing compassion and understanding, some of our leaders insisted we focus on learning Thai and not think about Katie. Later, with the gracious intervention of our regional director, we were able to work through our grief and forgive those who wounded us. We completed the two-year language study program and received our first assignment to Khon Kaen.

Khon Kaen in NE Thailand was where we served on a church planting team. We learned so much from our team leaders, Glenn and Sheila Lewis, and our Thai team members. I also had regular involvement with smaller rural churches in our province. They were older churches having been planted among those who had contracted leprosy. While not everyone had leprosy, the physical deformities we saw made it obvious which people had suffered from this disease. Leprosy limited what they could do, and the general public often ostracized them. Yet these believers were some of the most joyful people I have ever met, lovingly proclaiming the gospel message to their communities. Having grown up in a farming community myself, I felt an affinity with these men and women, who were primarily farmers living out their faith in rural settings.

The call of God was strong, clear, and often repeated when I had doubts about

continuing as a missionary. The lostness of the Thai people and the prevalent spiritual darkness were concrete reminders of the need to present the good news of Jesus Christ. However, my understanding of the impact of sin and the power of the gospel message was inadequate for what I saw daily.

I attended a three-day training on holistic ministry in NE Thailand. As a result, I began to study biblical holism with a growing understanding of how sin had broken every relationship—with God, others, ourselves, and creation. God’s love not only restores broken relationships but the whole person as well. This understanding of sin and the power of Christ reframed how I saw missions and missionary service.

Also, God gave us our second son, Joshua, during our first term.

Second Term Abbreviated

Our first home assignment was full with the birth of our third son Daniel, two eight-week missionary tours, and additional coursework. We anticipated serving on a church planting team upon our return. Imagine my surprise when the regional director (RD) called me and asked if I would consider being the field director (FD). It is unusual to ask someone just returning for their second term to step into this role, but the field needed to be updated. I said “Yes,” and the next two years were some of the most wonderful and challenging years I have experienced. The RD allowed me to handpick my leadership team, and I chose a mix of newer and older missionaries, men and women, and one from the Philippines. They were a delight to work with during those two years. We strove to create greater unity around a shared vision for the future work of the C&MA in Thailand.

There were some hard things to face; the hardest was sending our second grader to boarding school in Penang, Malaysia. I vividly remember trips to the airport and putting him on a plane with other children to go to boarding school each semester.

There were other challenges to face as a new and young FD. Upon arrival, I learned of a moral issue requiring me to lead a formal investigation. The Lord was with me each step, blessing me with wisdom, favour, and courage.

I was just about to complete my second year as FD when I received a call from the newly elected VP of Alliance Missions in the U.S., Peter Nanfelt. He asked me to consider becoming a regional director for the Asia/Pacific Region. Again, I was shocked, stating I would pray about it. My wife was not keen on going, but through God’s grace, and further discussion with Peter, we agreed to the role.

I was often overwhelmed and out of my depth as a young leader. Yet, as an FD with a supportive leadership team, the role was challenging and rewarding. Any

confidence I had as a leader vanished when we returned to the USA mid-term to step into the role of RD for the Asia/Pacific Region in 1991.

An 11-Year Third Term

Our family was adjusting to life back in the States, and I was adjusting to a very different kind of work environment and a new team. While I had a clear role, Nancy's role as a missionary ended abruptly. The wives of other regional directors formed a tight-knit support group while we served in Colorado Springs.

What did I learn in those eleven years as an RD? First, humility or humiliation – you choose. When you are in way over your head, it is best to admit this to God and your boss. Pretending will only get you into trouble. To accentuate this point, I often worked with FDs who were older than me, creating awkward moments.

Second, the line between a strong work ethic and workaholism is very thin. I often crossed the line, which almost destroyed me as a leader and seriously impacted my family.

The Arrow Leadership program and understanding how adults learn profoundly impacted me. My Arrow mentor helped me apply and internalize what I had been learning. He helped me be honest with who I was as a person and leader and what this could look like in daily practice. This launched me on the path to becoming a coaching leader who saw potential in others and looked to see where God was at work in a person, a team, or a field and affirm and encourage them to keep moving forward. Those two years changed the trajectory of my life and leadership style.

Assistant Vice President (AVP)

In 1991, Bob Fetherlin, the new VP for Alliance Missions (AM), launched a plan to have all RDs reside in the region they served. This had been my desire for years, and when I pursued it earlier, the answer had always been “no.” It was over a decade later, and with three teenage sons, moving back overseas was not a good choice. But because this plan involved expanding the role of the AVP, I was asked if I would become the second AVP working alongside David Kennedy – a seasoned leader in AM.

Again, I needed to be more prepared for this more significant role, but the Lord made it clear that I should say “yes.” For the next four years, I benefited from working closely with David and serving RDs in Asia and Latin America. I was also given the freedom to develop a personal growth and development plan for missionaries and a process to review our work in fields every five years. This

collaborative effort with missionaries taught me a great deal about missionary life and the life cycle of missionary work and produced two practical tools that served missionaries well in the following years.

Looking back on the four years in this role, I am grateful for the opportunity to lead at a higher level and gain a more extensive perspective on mission work. One lesson which stands out is how you can easily do the right thing in the wrong way. North American missionaries had worked in much of Latin America and a few locations in Asia for nearly 100 years. The national churches were strong, established, and able to do all they needed to do without the involvement of international workers (IWs) from other countries. At least, this was the conclusion we had come to, which led to the decision to close many fields and downsize others.

This process was painful, made more so by the national churches' lack of input and interaction. They often recognized the need for us to reduce the number of IWs and could have helped with the pace and approach of reducing our size to bring our work to a close. This was important because, in most situations, it involved a transition from an IW leading a ministry to a national church leader leading that same ministry. More frequent dialogue with the national churches could have improved the process. It still would have been painful, but the relationship with those churches in the future would have been healthier.

One lesson which stands out is how you can easily do the right thing in the wrong way.

From Alliance Missions to Higher Education

After twenty-two years of serving with Alliance Missions, I knew I needed a change. I was exhausted and felt I had little more to offer.

An invitation to serve at Crown College in Minnesota fit my need. The newly elected president of Crown College, Rick Mann, extended an offer for me to serve as the Executive VP, working closely with him and the cabinet as well as giving oversight to Operations and Human Resources. The learning curve was steep, but the people I worked with were professional, supportive, and helpful during my service at Crown College from 2006-2013. I treasure the relationships forged during those years and the work we accomplished together.

During this same time, the Director of CAMA Services, Phil Skellie, made it known that he would be retiring from his role in a year. So, I began to think and pray about applying for the position in the organization where I began my service with the Alliance as a student volunteer in Thailand.

Initiating not Responding

Up until this time, I had always been asked if I would consider specific leadership roles. This time, however, I initiated the application process for a position I had prayed about for a couple of years. This process was more rigorous than anticipated, pushing me to clarify my thinking about relief and development. I realized I had been on a journey of becoming more developmental as a leader and committed to serving the whole person. It also highlighted for me that what I did not know far exceeded what I did know.

The CAMA Board appointed me as the new director in 2013, and I served for the next nine years before retiring in 2022. Leading CAMA and working closely with my leadership team has been one of the most rewarding things I have had the privilege of doing. Experiences, training, and key relationships prepared me in unique ways to serve in my role.

Despite the pressures of leadership, I remained committed to the development of the person over policy. I also began a journey with the board and my leadership team to embark on a culture change to become more developmental. The two-year process of developing our mission, vision, values, and strategy map was the vehicle helping to shape and reinforce culture change. There had been a lot of things going well with CAMA, and I merely adopted and reinforced those values and practices.

...I remained
committed to the
development of the
person over policy.

But there were also areas where we needed to change to move forward.

Turning Points and Crossroads

Understanding Biblical Holism

I attended a three-day holistic ministry seminar in my second term, including church planting, sustainable farming, and ethnomusicology. Shortly afterwards, I attended a one-day workshop on biblical holism by World Vision. These two experiences created a desire and a vision for holistic ministry in Thailand. I also began to understand the false dichotomy between the proclamation of the Gospel (word) and the demonstration of the Gospel (deeds).

Multicultural Ministry

Thailand had missionaries from seven different nations representing different cultures and world views. Close personal interaction with colleagues from different cultures helped me to see my own ethnocentrism and adopt the position of being a

learner who was willing to look at things from the viewpoint of a different culture. A few years later, I served on the Alliance World Fellowship regional committee for Asia and again worked with mature and wise leaders from other nations. This was a rich and sometimes humbling experience as an American. I am so grateful for those leaders who encouraged and admonished me as a younger leader.

Coaching

My experience with the Arrow Leadership program in my forties led me to pursue training as a coach and invest in others as a coaching leader. It was transformative and catalytic for me. I have been trained in three somewhat different approaches and have coached over thirty younger leaders. These experiences have provided some of the most fulfilling ministry involvement in my career. One clear impact on how I lead is that I have become more collaborative and less directive as a leader, choosing to develop others as I have shared my authority with them.

Failures and Mistakes

Making mistakes and failure are givens in leadership. How you respond to them determines whether you will learn and grow or repeat the mistakes later. I learned how taking responsibility for my errors, apologizing, and doing what is possible to repair the damage is very important. I also had to accept that my failures were only final if I wanted them to be.

Helping People in Crisis

Disaster management has taught me a great deal about a major disaster's impact on people and the powerful impact a local church can have in serving those same people. As CAMA director, I had general oversight and some direct involvement in responding to major disasters in the United States. Hurricanes, tornados, floods, and forest fires are overwhelming and unpredictable, but the response and recovery follow a more predictable pattern. One of my best investments was a three-day disaster management seminar from the Humanitarian Disaster Institute at Wheaton College. The knowledge I gained there helped me to come alongside pastors and district leaders leading the response to disasters in their communities.

Seeing local churches compassionately engage with their communities following a disaster and hearing of the response to their ministry will make you weep. Hearts, once hard, even angry at Christians, become soft, open, and welcoming.

Community Development Done Well

Travelling to many parts of the globe, I have witnessed first-hand the powerful impact of well-designed and implemented programs to help vulnerable people. For example, one program in West Africa helps vulnerable young girls gain life and job skills and hear the Gospel in a safe location. All of these begin by building relationships and affirming people as valuable. These low-cost, relational programs make a lasting impact on these girls.



Celebrating the opening of a demonstration/
training farm led by a remarkable local leader

Loss of Loved Ones, Friends, and Colleagues

Biblical truth, family, close friends, and community can help you to grieve and cope with these losses, but you are eventually alone with your thoughts and feelings. Losing people close to you changes you in ways not understood at the moment. Each of these losses helped me to weep with those who weep, but it also deepened my conviction about my hope in Christ and the need to share it with more people. The death of those who did not know Christ was the most disturbing.

Pain

Serving as a missionary or missionary leader includes a lot of pain, sorrow, disappointment, and discouragement. Some of the things that happened were unavoidable; those are the times you cry out to God for grace to endure. Some of the pain resulted from my pride or were made worse by it. As a young leader, I too often thought things were about me, which only accentuated the pain from conflict or misunderstanding. Often these situations are not about you, but we are still called to enter into the grief and frustration of those we serve.

Why God?

One of the more difficult and sad losses I had to work through was the death of a young staff member in Thailand. An aneurysm in his spinal column burst, leaving him paralyzed and unable to breathe without a respirator. Watana was a sweet, full of life, eager-to-serve, and fun person in the office. He came from a Christian home in NE Thailand, where his parents were some of the first to believe.

I remember hearing that Watana was in the hospital and in serious condition.

So I travelled to the city where he was, and Boyd Hannold, another missionary, and I spent the last few days of his life with him and his parents.

At one point, the doctor told me he would not recover. I asked him if he would tell the parents, and he said, “No, I want you to tell them.” I remember the look on their faces as I conveyed the sad news. Watana died shortly after; Boyd and I were involved in the funeral and burial service. The depth of sorrow and the contrast between those who have hope in Christ and those who do not have hope could not have been starker. While I rejoiced in knowing Watana was with Christ, I was mad at God for a few months over the loss of such a wonderful young man who died too young.

Fulfilling the Great Commission

As a college student, I shared the Gospel with many students. I was drawn to connect with international students, mainly from Taiwan and Iran. I discipled those who came to faith in Christ and encouraged them to share their faith with others.

As a leader, organizing and planning are areas of strength where I have invested for Kingdom advancement. Three specific initiatives come to mind. First, as an RD, I was tasked with developing a personal growth plan for all our IWS. I did this with a team of eight workers. The tool we produced continues to be used today.

A second initiative was to develop a methodology to evaluate our work in specific countries. The hoped-for results were awareness, agreement, and direction for future plans. Again, the tool developed continues to be used. Lastly, modelling, emphasizing, and putting resources behind coaching initiatives have helped many missionary leaders to grow more intentionally in areas of need.

As a missionary leader at different levels, I was regularly involved in evangelism. Still, I think my investment in the lives of team leaders, field leaders, and regional leaders had the greatest impact on Kingdom advancement. They were the ones who planted churches, trained pastors, implemented successful community development projects, and responded to major disasters. In most of these situations, I played the role of second fiddle.

There is a long list of people who need to be acknowledged for things I have been given credit for doing. Some examples:

Still, I think my investment in the lives of team leaders, field leaders, and regional leaders had the greatest impact on Kingdom advancement.

- **Entering Mongolia** in the mid-1990s began with the passionate and relentless urging from Joon Ho Lim, a missionary serving in the Philippines. I got behind him as the RD, and he and his wife launched our work in Mongolia.
- **Re-entering China** in teams was a collaborative decision in which I played a part. While it got off to a rocky start, the decision was timely and fruitful. Credit for implementation goes to Jim Malone, who coordinated and led this new team approach to ministry.
- **Establishing a partnership with major house church networks in China** to train cross-cultural workers came from another missionary whose knowledge, insights, and relationships led to creating something unique which continues to this day. For security reasons, the name of the individual who shaped this partnership cannot be named.
- **Entering South Asia directly and in partnership** came at the urging of CAMA staff, who saw a need and had a trusted relationship with local leaders. I simply got behind them.
- **Responding effectively to disasters in Asia, Latin America, Europe, the Middle East, and North America** is due in large part to the quick initiative of CAMA staff members and the sacrificial leadership and service of local pastors and other local believers.
- **Leading CAMA Services through a process to integrate into Alliance Missions** after operating in a semi-autonomous way for over a decade was the most challenging leadership task I have had, which I pray will yield unity and synergy and advance God's Kingdom.

Regular Patterns for Nurturing Your Relationship with God

Over the years, I have developed daily, weekly, quarterly, and bi-annual disciplines.

- **Daily**, I meditate on a verse or short passage, take a posture of listening for 10-15 minutes, journal, and pray for those on my list for the day. I have often incorporated music, primarily hymns.
- **Weekly**, I do two things. First, I read over my plan and look honestly at how the past week has gone and where I need to give some attention in the week ahead. Then, later in the day, I begin my weekly Sabbath, which has morphed over the years from a "day off" to something quieter and more contemplative. When I travel, I often have to carve out a half-day somewhere to be quiet, read, reflect, and often take a nap.

- **Quarterly**, I would review my activity, how I used my time and my overall well-being. For example, I often saw a link between a lack of rest or inconsistency in spiritual disciplines and an increase in stress. Extensive travel with not enough downtime also had a negative impact on overall well-being and relationships at home.
- **At least twice each year**, I would take a two-day retreat to be quiet, take long walks, pray, rest, read my Bible and do something in the area of spiritual formation.

Some Lessons Learned

- God, in His providence, has provided local people with local resources to solve local problems.
- Partnership is the preferred path when you can agree on a common outcome.
- The people most changed by our work are us.
- Abandon your preconceived ideas of what is needed as well as your solutions to problems, and you are off to a good start.
- Be careful not to rob someone of their dignity by doing things for them when they could do with just a small amount of help or knowledge.
- Prioritize developing people even as you implement projects, and you will not be disappointed.
- Failure is guaranteed—commit to learning from it and not letting it define you.
- Compassion will not sustain you in the long term; you must know that you are there in response to Christ's call to serve others.
- Since sin has holistically affected our relationship with God, one another, ourselves, and creation, our solutions must be holistic. Therefore, the only answer to the world's brokenness is the Gospel being fully expressed in both word and deed.
- Choose to prioritize and invest in people over programs.
- Find joy in championing the ideas and initiatives of others.
- Develop emotional resilience – you will need it.
- Practice and deepen your spiritual disciplines – daily, weekly, annually.
- Commit to life-long learning, growth, and development.

Chapter 5

God of the Unexpected

by Maida Anderson

I was walking down the street, heading to class, when my situation struck me. I was amazed to be walking on a street in Barcelona, Spain. BARCELONA! It was amazing! And unexpected. How did I get there? It was only possible because of God—the God of the Unexpected.

The Early Years

I was born on April 3, 1956, in the small town of Eckville, Alberta, the oldest child of Raymond (Ray) and Maila Anderson. Five younger brothers and sisters followed. When I was eight, my parents bought an orchard, and we moved to Oliver, BC. We did not grow up in a believing home. However, while I was in grade 12, my sister Ann came to faith through the ministry of a “Jesus coffee house,” which were very popular in the mid-1970s. Our younger siblings also became believers, but I had moved away from home for school and did not become a believer.

I went to the BC Institute of Technology to study computer programming and then worked as a programmer/operator in Richmond, BC. When I was twenty-three, my sister Tami came to Vancouver, and we moved in together. She started attending Richmond Alliance Church, and I went with her. On Sunday, March 16, 1980, the pastor gave a call to accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour. My heart started pounding, and I had problems breathing—I just had to go forward! After we prayed, I felt immediate peace. A baptism was already scheduled for April 13, so I was baptized four weeks after becoming a believer.



Maida Anderson

I got involved in church ministry and learned about listening to the Holy Spirit. In March 1981, a speaker from an urban ministry in Vancouver came to speak at our church. At the end of his message, he challenged the congregation. He asked what we were doing in response to God’s call to urban ministries. Although

it was not what he had in mind, I felt the Holy Spirit talking to me about my response—going to Bible college. This was my second lesson in listening and responding to God—the God of the Unexpected.

Preparation for Service

That fall, I went to Canadian Bible College (CBC) in Regina, Saskatchewan. I was unsure why God wanted me to go to CBC, but I obeyed and planned to stay for one year and return to Vancouver. By then, I realized how little I knew about God and the Bible, so it seemed like a good thing to do.

We had weekly missionary meetings on Friday nights and an annual missionary conference in the fall. Was this what God wanted me to do? I prayed about it during the conference but did not hear from Him, so I decided that was not it. Then the former president of CBC, David Rambo, came and spoke at the missionary meeting. He was an American who challenged Canadian students to go overseas to places Americans were not welcome. God spoke to my heart, and after praying about it, I realized He was calling me to go abroad after all. The God of the Unexpected!

Looking back, I see how this was my first lesson in following God's leading, even if I did not know where it would end up. You see, I liked to plan. I wanted to know where I was headed and what awaited me. So, He called me to go to CBC without knowing why and where it would lead. I had to trust Him. And it's a lesson He has had to repeat a few times!

Because I was now planning on going overseas, I switched to a Bachelor of Theology program and graduated in 1985. The Alliance required overseas candidates to do a minimum of two years of home service, ministering in a local church, before going overseas. There were few church openings at the time, but I was offered a position on staff at CBC and Canadian Theological Seminary (CTS). After praying about it, I accepted the job and talked to the Vice-President for Missions, Arnold Cook. He decided I could use that as my home service as long as I was pretty involved in my local church and did it for a minimum of three years. Next, I talked to my pastor at Westside Alliance, Ron Erickson, who was willing to supervise me. I did this for four years before going to Canadian Theological Seminary full-time.

One advantage to working at CBC/CTS was the offer of free tuition for staff members. As a result, I arranged to take one class at CTS each semester and work longer hours to make up for my time in class. I managed to cover lessons for two and a half semesters of full-time study in four years.

If I had known the outcome of working in administration, I probably would not have done it. I had always enjoyed teaching and did a lot of tutoring in high school and beyond, so I planned to become a professor somewhere overseas. Therefore, I enrolled in the Master of Divinity in Cross-Cultural Studies. But the God of the Unexpected had other plans for me.

I had an interview with Dr. Cook when I started studying full-time at CTS, and he said that considering my administrative experience as a computer programmer/operator and on staff at CBC/CTS, the Alliance would like me to become a field secretary/bookkeeper. So unexpected, and yet ... there had been some indication that this would happen, so I had time to pray and think about my response.

Some of my professors at CTS were former missionaries, and David Hartzfeld once talked about one of his personal beliefs (totally off-topic!). He told our class he had covenanted with God to obey constituted authority unless it was unbiblical or unlawful, and he encouraged us to consider doing the same. So, after thinking and praying about it, I decided to follow his example. So, as Dr. Cook represented constituted authority for me, I would accept the assignment. But what did it mean for my future appointment?

After thinking and praying, I decided I wanted some assurances. Most, if not all, field secretaries at the time were associate missionaries on short-term agreements, but I still wanted to be sent as a career missionary. There is nothing wrong with going overseas for a short term, but I felt God was calling me to go long term. This also meant I would need full language study to communicate with nationals. Additionally, I wanted to be involved in ministry in a local church. It would be many years before I found out how involved that would be!

Another thing Dr. Cook talked about with me was my area study. As their thesis, missionary candidates needed to prepare an area study on their future ministry location. Since he was still determining where I would be appointed, he suggested I do a study on field secretaries in Latin America. So, I developed a questionnaire and sent it to the field secretaries in Latin America. Most of them graciously took time in their busy ministries to send me their answers. It was a fascinating study!

In January 1991, at the beginning of my last semester at CTS, it was time for my pre-appointment interview. This is the last hoop candidates jump through—an in-depth interview on your calling, spiritual life, and biblical and theological knowledge. If you pass it (by this stage, most do), you are recommended to the board of The Alliance Canada for an appointment overseas, and the board appoints you.

One thing I was looking forward to in the appointment interview was finding out where I would be going, as all my classmates who had gone before me found

out in the interview. But it was the God of the Unexpected again. Dr. Cook told me there were no openings in Latin America then, but there were openings in Europe, West Africa, and Taiwan, so I could go anywhere in the world. Wasn't that exciting? My immediate but inner response was, "Nooooooooo!" I wanted to know where I was going!

I was disturbed and anxious about not knowing where I would be appointed, and for a few days, I had difficulty concentrating on anything. Finally, there came a point where I decided enough was enough, I could not continue like this, or I would never finish my coursework. So, I spent all my time outside of class in prayer, sometimes even in class. I asked the Lord to show me why I was anxious. After all, I had applied "open," meaning I had no preference for where I went, and I truly meant it. So, why?

The Holy Spirit spoke and showed me I was not trusting God. He reminded me that God had always guided me in time for anything He asked me to do. I had to acknowledge this and ask for forgiveness. Instant peace!

The board met in March, and I wanted to find out where I was going then. After all, they had to appoint everyone to somewhere specific. Dr. Cook called to tell me the board had appointed me to "destination unknown." I still didn't know! A bad half hour followed; I realized I had already passed through this and did not want to do it again. I asked for forgiveness and again felt at peace. I had been appointed to go overseas, even though I was over the usual age limit of 32. Dr. Cook wanted to bend the age limits slightly to get more people into cross-cultural ministry.

During those years, Canada and the United States worked together in sending workers overseas under the U.S. Division of Overseas Ministries (DOM). They met later in the month, and I received another phone call. Dr. Cook asked if I was willing to go to Spain. Yes!

Now to begin the paperwork for a visa for Spain. In June, I went to Toronto for pre-field orientation and to the Toronto Institute of Linguistics (TIL) to learn how to learn another language. The Spanish consulate in Toronto, the only consulate in Canada where you could process visa applications, was across the street from the TIL, so I could apply for it in person, assuming it would speed up the process. Was I wrong!

After TIL, I returned to Oliver and looked for a job. I still had a balance on a student loan from CBC days which had to be paid down before I could go to Spain. As a result, I planned to go to Spain in January 1992. I was in touch with the field director (FD) for Spain, and there was no news about my visa. At the beginning of December, I asked the Lord to let me hear about the visa before Christmas. I did not hear from the consulate. The FD suggested we might have to begin the process

again! That was not the answer I was expecting. But first, I was to send him the papers the consulate had returned to me without any explanation of what to do with them. I sent them, and he took them to the appropriate Spanish government department. It turned out this was what was needed. The government had changed the process but had yet to inform us. The process changed several times over the years, and it took a lot of investigation to keep up.

Obviously I couldn't go in January, but at least the visa was finally in process. For the second time, I asked the Lord to expedite the process and hear about the visa before my birthday on April 3. Finally, I heard on April 1; my visa had been granted! After that, things moved quickly. The visa was stamped in my passport, I packed my small shipment, and the National Ministry Centre (NMC) bought my plane ticket. I left for Spain on April 18, arriving there the next day.

The FD had found a furnished apartment for me, so all I had to do was move in and unpack my boxes of personal belongings. A few weeks later, I walked down the street to the language school, marvelling that I was in Barcelona!

Serving in Spain

I could start language study almost immediately but could only study until the end of July; August was vacation month in Spain—no long-term courses for study until mid-September. So, even though I had very limited Spanish, I started working in the field office during the break in language learning. It had not been my first choice of ministry assignment, but the Lord had worked on my heart while I was waiting for my visa.

I had been given *Too Busy Not to Pray* by Bill Hybels (InterVarsity Press, 1988). On pages 135-136, he talks about ministry being consistent with God's gifts. God has given us gifts and is purposeful, so He expects us to use those gifts. He expects us to grow, but He does not usually call us to move in contradiction to the talents and abilities He has given us. This opened my heart and mind to what God was asking of me. Yes, I could teach, but I also had abilities in administration. God had given them to me and wanted me to use them in my ministry in Spain. Maybe I wouldn't have as much contact with Spaniards, but I could help the other missionaries in administration. So, I arrived in Spain ready and willing to minister to my colleagues in administration to free them to have more time for ministry with the locals.

Also, the Summer Olympics were held in Barcelona that year. It was fascinating to see the increased security in the city. I saw police with submachine guns for the first time! I was not there to attend the Olympics, but friends who were volunteers

could get two tickets to a soccer game, so I tagged along. The Camp Nou stadium was more interesting than the game, but it was fun to be there with thousands of people.

Shortly after I arrived, it was announced that there would be a feasibility study of Spain and France in September to discover if these countries were viable fields. It was very disconcerting. I had just arrived, and they might close the field! But the study commission decided Spain and France were definitely mission fields, so they would remain open. They also decided to relocate some people from Spain to ministries more suited to their gifts and abilities, appoint a new field director, and move the field office from Barcelona to Madrid. Unexpected changes, but at least we could continue in Spain.

The new field director couple, Raymond and Mary Ebbett, arrived in July 1993, and we moved the field office (and ourselves!) in November.

I finished my year of full-time language study in the spring. I was finally feeling comfortable enough in Spanish to become involved in ministry in the Barcelona church when the move to Madrid happened. There was no established church in Madrid yet, but a small group was meeting as the start of a church plant.

Initially, all the people involved were believers, but our members gradually invited unchurched people. I especially remember Carlos and Conchita. Carlos came at the invitation of his dentist, one of our members who shared the gospel message with most of his patients. Carlos was hesitant to participate at first, but he kept coming.

Just before Palm Sunday, we talked about what happened to Jesus during Holy Week, a significant week in the Spanish Catholic Church. The leader emphasized why Jesus died on the cross on Good Friday for each of us—pointing to people and saying, “For you and you and you....” We later got into smaller groups to discuss it, and Carlos was in my group. He said it was the first time he had heard that Jesus died for him. Carlos was in his sixties, had attended church in Spain as a child, and had never heard the gospel message before! It hit home to me then how spiritually dry, even dead, Spaniards were, how they really needed Jesus. For this reason, our new FD discussed the need to pray for Spain’s “spiritual greening.”

Conchita did not come with Carlos initially, convinced evangelicals were a cult. She did eventually come but remained aloof from the group. I spoke with her one-on-one about various things, showing her we were ordinary people. Finally, after

Carlos was in his sixties, had attended church in Spain as a child, and had never heard the gospel message before!

a few months of attending the group, they accepted the Lord. Conchita and I became good friends, keeping in touch even after they moved out of Madrid. I look forward to seeing them again in Heaven.

The traditional schedule for career missionaries is four years on the field, followed by one year of home assignment in your home country. As an administrator, finding someone to replace you for a year was considered too complicated, so my schedule was different. I went to Canada for a three-month home assignment every two years, with a one-year home assignment after eight years. At least, this was the theory, but it only sometimes worked out due to issues on the field. As I was due for my first home assignment, I needed to prepare to speak to Canadian congregations about my work.

What could I share? Spain was a modern country, and Barcelona and Madrid were modern, cosmopolitan cities. Life was comfortable. But the spiritual background was desolate. Spaniards were resistant to the gospel message. They considered spirituality a private matter and were unwilling to discuss it. The only way to talk about Jesus was to establish a good relationship with someone before even broaching the subject. One of my colleagues said it was “building bridges of trust that stand the weight of the gospel.” New believers were scarce. (Carlos and Conchita had not yet accepted Christ.) The Lord gave me a promise in verses from Lamentations 3:21-26.

*Yet this I call to mind
and therefore I have hope:
22 Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.
23 They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
24 I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion;
therefore I will wait for him."
25 The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him,
to the one who seeks him;
26 it is good to wait quietly
for the salvation of the LORD.*

Verse 24 especially spoke to me; it was my hope over the years I spent in Spain. When I got discouraged about the slow growth or setbacks, I remembered to “wait for him.”

From 1994-2000, there were eleven international workers (IWs)¹ in Spain, so I was about 80% in the field office and 20% in church ministry. I was involved in discipleship with women, especially new believers, and leading small groups of believers.

In 1998, the Alliance in Canada already had its own Global Ministries (GM) department separate from DOM but had to develop its own sending and funding mechanisms because of Canada Revenue Agency requirements. Thus, GM became autonomous from DOM, and the Global Advance Fund (GAF) was born. We could no longer rely on the USA for support in these areas, although we continued to work together overseas.

The following year I became the regional financial advisory (RFA) for the new Silk Road Region, another surprise from the God of the Unexpected. As RFA, I worked with Canadian workers in the region, supervising their bookkeeping and travelling to their fields to train new bookkeepers and conduct audits. Having an RFA in the region meant they did not have to send someone from the National Ministry Centre to do these things, saving time and money. Of course, this meant more time in administration for me, but I was able to keep up with church ministries for a time.

In 2000, Spain added ten workers to the field, including some from South America, almost doubling our staff. This significantly increased the field office's administrative role, and I had to step back from church ministry. Over the next few years, more staff were added to the field, and more fields were added to the Silk Road, so I was kept busy in the office. When I was tempted to feel frustrated at times because I was not more involved in church ministries, the Lord reminded me, by looking after paying bills, organizing retreats and conferences, running errands, and so on, that others did not have to do it, leaving them time for ministry with people. My ministry was with the other workers.

More changes were coming. (Did I mention I don't like change? How did I become an IW where change is constant? Only God could have guided me through!) The Silk Road Region got a new regional developer couple, and they soon asked me to move to their location so I could work more closely with them in areas not related to finance. After praying about it, I felt God was telling me this was not the time to leave Spain, as I would retire in a few years. So, I suggested they find someone else to be the RFA, and I eventually turned over my responsibilities.

This meant I had a lot of time available for other ministries. While praying about what I should do, I was asked if I would pray about being on the pastoral

1 A new name for our missionaries to help those in closed countries not attract unwanted attention.

team of my local church. This would mean being very involved in local church ministry. Another surprise from the God of the Unexpected! After praying about it and consulting with people I trusted, I became a member of the church's pastoral team from 2016-2021, when I left the field to retire.

In those last few years in Spain, I also turned over many of my responsibilities to others, training them to handle new tasks. The last fifteen months on the field were during the Covid-19 pandemic, which was a completely unexpected situation. The hardest part for me was not being able to personally say goodbye to all my colleagues. Although I was in touch with them regularly, it wasn't the same.

But God always knows what He is doing, and I just needed to trust Him in this as well.



Comunidad Cristiana de Tres Cantos
(Christian Community of Tres Cantos)
pastoral team in prayer, 2020



Comunidad Cristiana de Tres Cantos church retreat, 2019

Chapter 6

From the Rising of the Sun

by Doug Woon

After our first Sunday morning service at Hiroshima Minami Alliance Church, we pulled our chairs in a circle for a *kangeikai* (welcome party) in our honour. As very recent Japanese language school graduates, we were starting a two-year stint serving in the church under Pastor Miyoshi's direction. With *sembei* rice crackers and cups of green tea on the small plates on our laps, we introduced ourselves to the tiny congregation, typical of the size of most churches in Japan.

I mentioned that fourteen years earlier when I was in my first year at Canadian Bible College, I and the others in the Far East Prayer Band prayed for this church being planted by a missionary couple. I was interrupted by Mr. Fujii, a white-haired *hibakusha* atomic bomb survivor. "What did you pray for?" he asked. I told him we prayed for the English and Bible program the church was starting, asking God for people to come to Christ through it.

"Because you prayed, I believed. Thank you very much!" he said, bowing. On his first day in English class, he told Dick Kropp, the missionary working there, "I'm here for the English. I'll put up with the Bible." Yet, his spiritual interest was awakened; he came to the point of believing and was baptized. He prayed for over ten years for his wife to come to Christ; she was the organist in the service that morning.

It is a unique perspective to have, being on-site to see and hear the results of one's prayers, and you can be sure I've told this story in many churches during home assignments. It also is indicative of the work in Japan. A spiritual ambivalence, a slow awakening of spiritual need, and a long process, whether it be for Mr. Fujii or his wife, to finally come to the point of commitment.

The Early Years

When people in Japan ask where in Canada we're from, I often say, "Halfway between Toronto and Niagara Falls" because all Japanese people know those two locations. For Carol, it was Oakville, on the north shore of Lake Ontario, closer to

Toronto. In my case, it was Stoney Creek, on the south shore leading to Niagara Falls. We grew up in believing households and were involved in our respective churches. Attending a Lay Institute for Evangelism with my parents was the point at which I shifted from a child's understanding to an adult faith. I was the church's worst nightmare: a compliant child. We compliant children look so promising, as we memorize our verses and do all we're supposed to, but since at our core, we are people-pleasers and people-fearers, when we get away from a Christian environment, many of us go with the flow, with or without some initial moral misgivings. We're like a sailboat without the keel or centreboard in the water.

When the sail is hoisted, we drift whichever way the wind blows.

I was fifteen, and in this training, we were to go out into the community to share our faith using a well-known tract. This was terrifying to a people-fearer like me. However, the emphasis on sharing our faith in the power of the Holy Spirit, leaving the results to God, and explaining the Spirit-filled life came at the right time for me.

I remember the underlying anxiety in everyday life fading away as I began living in dependence upon God daily. Since I enjoyed writing, I thought of a career in journalism, but when considering college, it just didn't seem to be *enough*. I went to Canadian Bible College for a year and enjoyed the courses, so I returned for a second year. At this point, I felt a challenge to vocational service. At the time, it

felt like "ministry" was just a series of meetings. I've since seen it's changed lives, changed families, and someday we'd love to see a changed Japan.

Hearing that ninety percent of Christian vocational workers are working with ten percent of the world's population, in the West, I felt, based on the need, I should head towards the neediest place, which would be overseas.

Carol took a different trajectory as she entered high school. She connected with the cool kids and got invited to their parties. This was not good for her spiritual life, and she continued in the same direction through nursing training and into her career working at The Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto. In contrast, applying to work in the emergency ward was quite good for her spiritual life. Seeing children suffering and dying and parents grieving forced her to think more seriously about life. She prayed for the first time in about ten years, "*God, if You're there, show Yourself to me.*" A person who sincerely prays for God to show Himself will see things happen.

I remember the
underlying anxiety in
everyday life fading
away as I began
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upon God daily.

Through her brother's urging, she reluctantly filled in at the last moment as a camp nurse at a Hockey Ministries International camp, where Christian NHL players teach hockey skills and share their faith. Carol spent time with these players and their families at the camp and saw they had the peace and joy she'd sought. Then, reasoning that when you give your life to Christ, you give your *whole* life to Him, she applied for a nursing position at a World Vision hospital in Cambodia. While she did not end up going there, she and I did have lunch a few weeks later, which led to overseas service, among other things.

We'd first met in Windsor, where I served in Heritage Park Alliance Church, where Carol's sister and family attended. On her vacation back home, I met her for lunch and was impressed with her intentionality to grow in her faith and to serve. She cut back to part-time hours during our engagement year to study at Tyndale College and then served with me in Windsor for my last year there.

I was accepted to study at Wheaton Graduate School, and while we thought Carol would be nursing, it seemed impossible for her to get nursing certification in Illinois. So, the afternoon before classes started, we applied for her to study at Moody Bible Institute. They accepted her on the spot, and she started the next day, tuition-free. I still shake my head when I think of that. Her RN and two years of theological training met The Christian and Missionary Alliance's (C&MA) requirements for overseas service.

Called to Japan

We both felt a call to Asia, having sixty percent of the world's population with five percent of the world's believers. Arnold Cook, vice president of Missions, told us there were openings in Taiwan and Japan and said we should pray about it. Based on the need and the gap of years since new workers had been sent, we felt led to Japan. Thirty-five years later, we see it's now not "Japan or Taiwan" but "Japan plus Taiwan" since, as area directors, we had a support role with the Global Ministries (GM) team in Taiwan.

Learning the Language and Culture

After presenting our future ministry in Japan at our home church, a man told me, "I pity you." A shocking statement, but knowing he had immigrated to Canada from the Netherlands after the war and had to learn the language and adapt to a new country while raising a family, perhaps it meant, "I can identify with you" or, "I sympathize with your future struggle." It shows how a non-native speaker of a

language sometimes lacks the vocabulary to express himself fully. I've been living that reality for 35 years.

One compliment here that is anything but is, "Your Japanese is so good!" I've heard this after merely giving a greeting, which means that person's baseline for a foreigner's understanding of the language is close to zero, and I've already exceeded it. It's never said when a gaijin (foreigner) speaks perfect Japanese. In fact, some Japanese people find it unsettling when a gaijin speaks well. Or so I've been told, at least. Regarding language, Paul's statement, "I die daily," applies. I must die to pride in using my anything-but-natural Japanese.

On our first Sunday at the Kotesashi church, which we attended during language school, there was a potluck lunch, and I was wary of the offerings. I saw a tossed salad, which seemed safe, but when I sat down with the plate on my lap, eyes were staring back at me! Tiny dried fish had been sprinkled in the salad. Even the salad wasn't safe!

Is there a more exciting and interesting city on earth than Tokyo? The language school was draining in all ways, and the commute was tiring, but the weekends exploring the area were invigorating. In business, MBWA means, *Management by Wandering Around*, but we experienced MBHO, *Mentoring by Hanging Out* on selected Sunday afternoons with Dick and Janice Kropp, experienced international workers. We trust our hanging out with teammates was as productive for them as those times were for us.

In planning an outreach event, Janice said, "We've done our best planning; now we'll leave it to God." I reflected on how at home, there had been such an emphasis on the latest study book, program, or emphasis from some thriving church, which resulted in ministry becoming technocratic. Janice's perspective was biblical and refreshing in a land with very few "successful" church models or programs to follow.



After School Club for
neighbourhood children

Hiroshima

After graduation, we moved to Hiroshima for the last two years of our term. Once a month, I took the train ride to the Mihara church, where I did children's and adult English classes and preached in the morning service. I can remember the exhaustion I felt on the train trip back to Hiroshima every

time. While I've already mentioned a welcome party, I can remember two farewell parties quite clearly. At the first, Pastor Miyoshi asked me to pray the closing prayer, and my mind went blank. No Japanese would come out of my mouth. I mumbled something or other and said "amen," feeling dreadful. Six weeks later, there was another farewell (for a young man who is now pastoring a Japanese C&MA church in Princeton, NJ), and during the farewell, I got a strong impression (from God?) I would be asked to pray the closing prayer. I mentally got my act together, and to my surprise, Pastor Miyoshi asked me, and I prayed so well that people commented afterward.

For years afterward, anytime I remembered this, I'd get a lump in my throat. Pastor Miyoshi throwing me a lifeline after I'd earlier failed him so miserably has meant he has a very special place in my heart. I've often thought I would like to do that for others.



Women's ministries build relational bonds with interested women

Meanwhile, Carol was asked by a woman to speak to her friends about "the differences between living in Canada and living in Japan." She was more than a little surprised to find out the meeting was held in a Buddhist temple, and the friends were all wives of Buddhist priests. She had a chance to share her testimony there. You go with the opportunities as they arise. The challenge is sorting out the real opportunities from distractions.

Meeting Resistance

Japan is known for being "resistant" to the Gospel, and people ask why. The first reason is that the Japanese are so much like us. They live in a modern, extremely fast-paced society and are affluent. Affluence naturally builds walls around people. We become suspicious of initial contact with others because we wonder about their motives. We affluent people are also overscheduled, but nothing like the Japanese, who have ridiculously long working hours and commutes. So, it's tough even to make initial contact with people. In an apartment complex of over 570 units, with three rental meeting rooms, our congregation is almost always the only group reserving the rooms each month. Isolation is another result of an affluent society.

After this first barrier, there's the issue of traditional religions. When the total

of Buddhists and Shinto followers exceeds the population of Japan, you can see people have no trouble following both. Most weddings in Japan are “Christian” in the sense that they have all the trappings. It’s just style. So, Jesus’ statement, “I am THE way, THE truth and THE life,” doesn’t translate well in a mix-and-match religious milieu here.

The subway gas attacks by an apocalyptic cult in the 1990s and, more recently, the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe by someone embittered by the Unification Church have reinforced the “religion is scary” mentality. “Mind control” is something people fear in engaging with a faith group. Regarding traditional religions, people will say, “It’s just culture. We Japanese are not religious.” Yet, seventy-five percent of the population annually visit a Shinto shrine or Buddhist temple in the first three days of the New Year, seeking blessings for the year.

However, a recent Gallop poll found that five percent of Japanese identified as “Christian” in a land where it’s actually 0.5 percent. Whether it was a Christian kindergarten, school, college, or Sunday school they contacted in the past, Japanese people think this puts the “Christian” stamp on them because neither Shinto nor Buddhism requires weekly attendance. This at least shows that people are not averse to the Christian faith, which gives some encouragement.

I had an epiphany while speaking in Alberta during our first home assignment. I was “on tour” following the system the C&MA had used since the beginning, and this tour was out of province. As I was encouraging people to pray for Japan and us, I realized the futility of this action. I asked people for a long-term commitment when I was unlikely ever to see them again. This was the system I grew up with, attending an Alliance church, but as an international worker, my evaluation was, “This is for the birds!” I was thus very enthusiastic when we shifted to a model where we connect with a group of congregations for an entire career. That has greatly benefited our ministry, and we trust we’ve also encouraged our partner churches.

We worked for four years in a church in the suburbs. In our first month, we met only twice because the one person who was attending couldn’t come the other two Sundays. The church was meeting in a rented room on a major thoroughfare, on the second floor of a commercial building. The rent was a significant expense for such a small congregation, and thinking of paying a pastor in the future was a real challenge. By the end of our four years there, a small congregation had assembled, and the full room at our farewell party contrasted with the empty space which had greeted us upon our arrival.

My struggle with language, culture, and ministry was acute there. I remember running one of my morning routes, thinking, “At least running is going well, and

my devotional life is going well.” When it felt like everything was beyond my control or understanding, it was good to have an interior life equipped to take it.

We had a two-year home assignment doing the district missions consultant work (now missions mobilizer) in the Eastern and Central Canadian districts, from Thunder Bay to the Maritimes, excluding Quebec. It was a great experience, although it was tough for our middle daughter to leave Canada again after those two years.

In Japan, when personnel are on home assignment, there is a need for someone to come in for the year and give leadership. We did this ministry twice in two churches over the next ten years. We also provided leadership to the Japan field in two three-year blocks. Add in two home assignments, and there was a decade of our lives.

Because of a delay in personnel returning to the field, over several months, we had responsibility for two churches, the mission office, and helping with onboarding two new couples in their first terms in Japan. The time was a blur in our memories.

If you ask, “how many C&MA workers are there in Japan,” the answer is complicated. In addition to people from the USA and Canada, there are Alliance workers sent by the National Churches of Argentina, Brazil, Peru, and the Philippines working in Japan with their respective diaspora (scattered people) ministries. Also, Chinese Alliance churches in Canada are assisting with two Chinese churches in Fukuoka in western Japan.



Special events for children provide contact with whole families

The cultural differences were evident to us as we took on field leadership and were invited to their services and events. Latino churches have many people of Japanese heritage who come from South America. They have Japanese faces but Latino hearts, greeting each other with a kiss on the cheek. You couldn't be further from Japan culturally.

Two men carrying a roast pig along the beach to a feast after a Filipino church's baptismal service caused some Japanese jaws to drop—another huge cultural difference within our C&MA family in Japan.

The Japan Alliance Church denomination has congregations from Kyushu to Tokyo. I remember meeting Pastor Suteichi Oue, who had been imprisoned in the notorious Sugamo Prison during the war for preaching the Second Coming of Christ (since “every knee will bow” would include the emperor, which was deemed problematic). When he gave the benediction at the end of a service, it felt like Moses was speaking.

The churches planted in the Tokyo area by mission personnel have joined the Alliance Church Network, a body for supporting churches and pastors.

It was late in my career when a retired American colleague returned to Japan for a visit, and I learned to follow his experience regarding preaching in Japanese. I had been using a manuscript written in Japanese for preaching up to this point, but following his experience, I started preaching from point-form notes in English as I had done in Canada. Suddenly, I was communicating! I was looking at people and gauging their responses, but also, because I wasn't following the manuscript, I was making Japanese mistakes as I spoke. I would realize the mistake I had just made in the previous sentence, but I couldn't go back and correct it. Communicating is more important than perfect Japanese. Once again, I had to die to myself and keep on moving.

John Ortberg has said, “Leadership is the art of disappointing people at a rate they can stand.” You might wonder how a grown compliant child, a former people-pleaser and people-fearer, could take a leadership position. I would reply, those who supported me helped me in the short term, and those who opposed me helped me in the longer term. They helped in stiffening my spine without hardening my heart.

Knowing interpersonal conflict is a significant cause of missionary attrition, some have explained the phenomenon as being a result of missionaries having strong personalities. In response, I would ask if, in Acts 15, the apostle Paul and James of the Jerusalem church appear like timid souls. Yet, they navigated possibly the most contentious dispute in church history and came to an agreement for the sake of Christ.

Handling Conflict

In the past, Japan had a reputation for discord. I briefly suggest some ways to deal with conflict based on my experience.

Everyone Owns It

At our first field conference in Japan, there was a recommendation for action that even we, as newcomers, saw as a significant problem. Yet, no one addressed it. Carol and I, as “junior missionaries,” certainly didn’t want to. Yet, when I was in the same position, I was often taken off guard by comments coming out of left field and would only later think of an appropriate response.

I’m encouraged to hear now about teams who covenant together to hold one another accountable in all situations, as a practical act of love. The socially dominant ones in Japan could have been steered into more positive interactions had there been solidarity among everyone.

Self-Awareness is Critical

The action proposed at one field conference was to stop a certain practice. Yet, without any sense of contradiction, the person proposing it later employed the same approach when he found it necessary. With a lack of self-awareness, one has the illusion of superiority and infallibility, which is the assumption behind critical speech.

As a former compliant child, I was outraged by people overstepping their bounds because I would never do such a thing. In time, I realized it’s merely a character flaw different from the ones I display. Just as the dominant people were used to challenge me to grow, it’s sobering to realize how by my cluelessness or carelessness, I’ve been a source of frustration and, therefore, a challenge to greater Christlikeness to others. God, in His perfect plan, uses people in many ways. We all want to be used by God, but not in this way.

Build Team Health

A worker can excel at overseas ministry and yet, in relationships with mission colleagues, be a real pill. Rather than being written off, they must be consistently guided and challenged toward proper behaviour. Again, everyone owns it.

Working together in a team setting is becoming more of an emphasis in preparing new international workers, and it’s an essential skill everyone needs to acquire. The “lone ranger” missionary days are long over.

De-Escalation is the Goal

There's a temptation to respond in the same tone to those who come on strong, but de-escalation is the goal. Answering recrimination without a defensive manner is refusing to play their game.

Be Biblical

The pragmatic, no-fault, false-equivalency "resolution" to conflict can leave relationships broken, and scarring prevents genuine resolution. Holding people accountable to biblical standards without fear or favour is essential.

Be like Christ in Your Words and Deeds

To be true to Christ, yourself, and your colleagues, pray for them and their ministry rather than undercutting and delegitimizing them.

Ultimately, It's From God

Martha did not become angry with Mary but rather with Jesus. Tension on the horizontal level affects a person's relationship with God because He obviously knew about it and allowed it to happen.

When I learned to say, "Ultimately, this injustice is God's gift to me," I immediately saw its purpose. It challenged me to see the proactive God-centred stance the new position required.

Leadership Should Be an Ego-Free Zone

I would suggest an essential quality in leadership is, believe it or not, meekness—biblical meekness. Three different times God said He would strike Israel dead and start again with Moses. Three times Moses, in meekness, bowed before God and then resolutely appealed to the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, whose name was too holy to be uttered, to remember His covenant and have mercy. That's meekness. It's a source of great boldness, persistence, and power.

Similarly, Simon was self-assured and self-assertive in rebuking Jesus and later drawing a sword at Jesus' arrest, but after his failures and after Pentecost, in meekness, he was quick to sense the Spirit's nudge and speak boldly. That's meekness. Self-assured, self-assertive leaders are like King Rehoboam, who caused the unified kingdom to come apart at the seams. Leadership should be an ego-free zone.

Our Reproducible Church Structure

In recent years we've been in central Tokyo, working in a simple, reproducible church structure to encourage multiplying networks of multiplying congregations of multiplying believers. We rent facilities by the hour and keep the study and application of the Word interactive for the sake of making better disciples faster. In traditional churches, I am *Woon Sensei*, but here I am *Doug san*. In the traditional church, one has to be ordained to give the benediction. Here we involve believers as soon as possible in ministry.

Contrasting with Japan's gleaming cities and technology is the loneliness and dysfunctionality of relationships, workplaces, and families—so many isolated people surrounded by millions. We try to provide community through various means. People need to belong before they believe. In Japan, where most people take a long time before taking a step of faith, we disciple people before they take the step of faith. Were Jesus' disciples fully committed from day one?

Despite that general reticence to believe, in the Spring of 2018, four people were baptized together, and suddenly, a casual meeting to explore what the Bible has to say became "Shiohama Gathering," and we sought to transition to a full-fledged church. We've aimed to involve young believers in ministry, and they've grown rapidly through it. We've had interpersonal conflicts where in so many churches, one party would leave, but here repeatedly, both parties have come to a resolution and have grown stronger from it.

And yet, a false teacher pulled away a couple of people, the COVID pandemic hurt our momentum, and those at the fringes dropped out. Also, this being Japan, people have limited time and energy due to the hectic pace of life. Men, in particular, have long working hours and commutes, so our men's Bible study turned to Zoom for the foreseeable future. We'd love to turn over more ministry to believers, but they feel stretched. It's exciting to work with young families (even if it means we're the parent and grandparent figures) in a land where the population and the church are rapidly graying.

It's also exciting to work as area directors with our workers at the Chinese churches in Fukuoka, roughly 1,000 kilometres to the west, and with the Canadian team in Taiwan, a three-hour flight away. Our focus is communication, encouragement, member care, and administrative details. At an arm's length, we have a share in transforming lives among the rural Taiwanese and urban Vietnamese in that land.

When I first met Tetsuya, it felt like having a conversation with him was like lighting wet firewood. I'd get a one-word response to my questions. We started studying the Bible together, probably with some arm twisting from his wife. Later,



Carol and Doug Woon

he came to a café nearer to me, and as we studied, I noticed he was interacting with the content of the passage.

We noticed a change as he interacted with the men of the Shiohama Gathering and then started to attend the men's Bible study. He was beginning to deal with the implications of following Jesus. His father in Nara, about 500 kilometres away, had seen a difference in him and after hearing from him and his believing wife, he started attending church. Tetsuya was baptized this Spring, and his father was baptized at a church in Nara sometime later. Jesus talked about the shepherd rejoicing over finding

one sheep, which certainly fits the ministry model in Japan. We can be concerned about the future of the Shiohama Gathering and all the unknowns, or we can celebrate what God has done.

We can't really say the servants at the wedding in Cana helped Jesus perform a miracle; they merely filled the water pots so Jesus could turn the water into wine. Such is the model of ministry here. Jesus involves us and our small actions in the miracle He's performing.

Another picture would be the woman who poured perfume on Jesus' feet. In the Gospel of John, it says the room was filled with the smell. Ultimately, that fragrance symbolized her love and gratitude toward Jesus. With all the negatives of ministry in Japan, it's the fragrance people need to sense when they're around us.

Chapter 7

Kingdom Globetrotters

by Donna Frentz

It was October 1992. We sat in disbelief, holding our treasured passports, which had received the final “chop.” The dreaded stamp denying our visa renewal was clearly visible, signifying our imminent departure back to Canada. *How could this be after ten years of preparation and only three years of living in our new home country of Indonesia?* If we had received this news a year earlier, there would likely have been a great celebration – but not now! Our hearts had shifted and tenderly embraced the loving ways of God in our lives. So many exciting opportunities ahead of us were all abruptly closing. In the equatorial city of Pontianak, West Kalimantan, sitting in our living room, we read His words to our aching souls from Jeremiah 33:1-3:

While Jeremiah was still confined in the courtyard of the guard, the word of the LORD came to him a second time: “This is what the LORD says, he who made the earth, the LORD who formed it and established it—the LORD is his name: ‘Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.’

This has become a theme in our lives, before and ever since that night. Our privilege in this journey, which has taken us all around the world, is to call out to Him. We are to cry out to the Sovereign God of creation. We have done this repeatedly in the big and small of life and have experienced His unsearchable treasures we did not previously know. This is reflected in our God story for His glory.

The Early Years

Brem

My life had an extremely insignificant and unspectacular launch. I was the unplanned sixth child of Joseph and Bertha Frentz, Prairie sodbusters who met and settled into a small hamlet in southern Saskatchewan close to the Frentz family farming homestead. On May 1, 1958, I entered the world at Moose Jaw Union Hospital, about an hour from our town. Sometime later, the birth certificate,

clearly a clerical error, arrived in the mail with the name Bremwell David Frentz. The family decided they preferred Brem for short rather than Bram. So I moved forward with a name I have only found duplicated for a river in BC.

My dad was a small-town entrepreneur, a big fish in a tiny pool, with a population of supposedly 180 during its boom years. He was a hard-working man with a grade 10 education, fresh from a life-changing conversion and a year of Bible school training at the Western Canadian Bible Institute. His roommate was from Montana and introduced my dad to his sister, who became my mom. She found life full and difficult, looking after her in-laws, my dad, and five children spread out over sixteen years, as one had died after a few days of life. Amidst hard rural work, my parents were rooted in their love for Jesus and grounded our family in faith. Their prayers changed my life.

Our family finally left the dying town and settled into new beginnings in Calgary, attending Foothills Alliance Church. Having loved rural life, my early days in a fast-growing metropolis were my first cross-cultural experience and major life transition. My sister Norma and I started school living with my oldest brother and his young family, while Mom and Dad arrived in Calgary nearly two months later. I had more schoolmates in the three sixth-grade classes than the population of the town I dearly missed. I threw myself into sports, trying to fill the holes in my immensely aching heart.

The Western Canadian Revival, which launched in Saskatoon and spread to Calgary, opened my eyes to the work of the Holy Spirit at the tender age of 13. I was baptized shortly after. This faith-strengthening experience built upon my spiritual birth. One of my earliest recollections of life was when I was about three and a half, praying with my mom at the foot of her bed to invite Jesus into my life, essentially fearful of hell. I remember a plaque on the bedroom wall with Mark 16:15 *"...Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation."*

My school years were difficult, but I never gave up my faith. Gap-year plans were to attend Capernwray Bible School in England, followed by Holsby Brunn in Sweden for the spring session after high school. Before departing for Europe, I had a profound encounter with God while alone in my hotel room during the Alliance's Life Youth Conference 1976 in St Louis, Missouri. I was moved by a message from John 10:10 articulating how Jesus came to give abundant life to those who would become His children and give complete control of their lives to Him. While on my knees, I made an agreement with the Lord, which proved life-changing, impacting my decisions to this day. *"Jesus,"* I prayed, *"I want to experience the abundant life You have planned for me. I don't yet know what that means, but I will give this gap year to You to listen for Your direction for me and to act upon it."* This

launched me into the most intense growth up to this point in my life. Among many life-shaping teachings from the Word of God, a mission speaker called to Muslim people articulated how only ones and twos were coming to Christ. The Islamic world was underserved and needed our consideration for action.

Upon returning to Canada, my growing faith was tested while working a construction job. A visit to my pastor, Gordon Fowler, and his prayer over me swung open the doors to attend Canadian Bible College (CBC) in Regina, Saskatchewan, in January 1978. After two semesters, and still needing a clear sense of a vocational call to full-time ministry, I attended a semester at the University of Calgary (U of C), considering a possible career teaching physical education.

Before my semester back at U of C, I applied to participate in Alliance Youth Corp (AYC) after hearing the testimony of an older student. He shared his experiences in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim nation. It made sense for me to apply. If I were to continue with further theological education, it would result from God's clear leading toward ministry. Surprisingly, I was accepted for AYC and to Indonesia, my first choice.

Members of Foothills Alliance prayed, supported, and sent me out. My trip to Indonesia opened my eyes and heart to the needs of this vast nation of people. I could envision a life in missions, but again only if called and confirmed by God. Upon completing AYC in the late summer of 1979, I sensed God was urging me to return to CBC to finish what had been started. This continued my John 10:10 pattern with God. As He would clarify a ministry call, I would continue a posture of listening obedience, knowing Jesus' commitment was to lead me into abundant living.

Never a great academic, I became a conscientious student and continued playing soccer and hockey for CBC. I regularly prayed that God would show me His plan for my life, vocation, and whom I should marry. I answered 'yes' to wherever He was leading, which I felt was in ministry. However, I desperately desired clarity if it was in Canada or overseas. I felt more naturally wired for cross-cultural work as I loved to travel, food, and cultures and was growing a burden for the Muslim world.

A profound answer came to me during spiritual emphasis week in 1980, the details almost too sacredly personal to write. I woke up the morning of January 29, immediately sensing I was to read from the well-known devotional, Oswald Chambers' *My Utmost For His Highest*. I prayed, "Lord, is this the week that You make clear my full-time vocation?" The passage was about the Apostle Paul's call into ministry from Acts 26:12-18. I read it with great shock and enthusiasm as Chambers described it as a clear call to Paul, the nations, and cross-cultural ministry. Then, as I put the book down to bolt for my first class, I prayed, "Lord,

I believe You are speaking to me, but please confirm this so that it will be emphatically clear, and I will never doubt it.”

My class was Speech and Homiletics with Dr. Fred Sonnenberg. He opened the class in prayer and said, “I am sensing that I am to pause my planned lecture for today and instead look at the Apostle Paul’s call to ministry from the Book of Acts.” Instantly in shock, I was filled with anticipation and ecstasy and was giving razor-sharp attention. He took us through Acts 9 and then Acts 22 with some description. I was thinking, but this isn’t the actual passage of my devotions. Then he eliminated any ponderings. He explained that Paul’s vocational ministry call is described in three passages for acute emphasis on its importance; however, the clearest and fullest description of Paul’s cross-cultural call is from Acts 26! This was the very passage the Spirit of God had directed me to.

I dashed out of class, feet hardly touching the ground, full of joy and excitement. I bumped into my close friend Kim Cairns who had also travelled on AYC with me the previous summer. I learned that Kim had been praying that this might be the week God would make His plans clear to me.

In His gracious faithfulness, God indelibly stepped into my life that day and used His Word, my prayers, and His servants, past and present, to orchestrate astounding details. He miraculously gave me what I had been asking of Him. Later in the week, I shared a short version of the story with the student body. He had shown me, without any room for doubt, His cross-cultural plan for my life.

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astounding
details.

I knew I was not wired to serve alone, and with equal focus began the second part of my request from God. I had already set eyes on a young and beautiful freshman student Donna Fair who sang like a nightingale at our Friday night missionary meetings. I wasted little time in asking her out as I wondered if this might be the person God was arranging for me. Sensing reluctance initially from her to begin a dating relationship, I moved forward on a plan I believe was stirred by God’s Spirit. I prayed, believing Donna might be the right person with the qualities to mesh with mine. She, however, was not moving in a similar direction. So, I decided that if a relationship were to emerge, I would faithfully pray and believe God would intervene, moulding and shaping her with a clear call of her own. I determined I would not influence her towards a vocation in cross-cultural missions. This was God’s work to do. With certainty, I knew what God had called me to do, so He would need to change her heart and direction.

Donna

Born in Edmonton, Alberta, in December 1961, I was the cherished daughter of Milt and Joyce Fair and the younger sister to one brother. At the age of three, my dad took a new job, making a big move to the city of Regina! As a chartered accountant by profession, my dad began his 30-year career with Saskatchewan Wheat Pool launching their new computer division and ultimately becoming CEO of this vibrant Prairie organization. My mom was a stay-at-home mom during my early years and then ventured into real estate following her interest and passion in housing and helping people.

My parents were faith-filled followers of Jesus and rooted our family in love for God, each other, and the church. I have many vivid memories of their activities and commitment to our Baptist church, and we often had people in for Sunday lunch. I was taken to church right from birth, and the people of this faith community tenderly nurtured me. My growing-up years were filled with stability, joy, and love, which I attribute and give thanks for to my parents. The consistency and faithfulness in their personal lives and marriage reflected their walk with God. My dad especially modelled the unconditional love of the Father, for which I am forever grateful. I truly am a cherished daughter in every way.

I was about four or five when I prayed to accept Jesus as my Saviour; I remember repeatedly asking Jesus into my heart to be sure! My certainty in personally knowing Jesus came during the Suterra Twins revival in 1971. Our Baptist church was the sister church of where the revival began in Saskatoon.

Not long afterwards, Regina also became a place where the Spirit of God broke through. I remember some Sunday morning services going long as people gave testimonies with times of prayer! As this movement of God grew, the churches in the city began holding joint evening rallies. One Sunday evening, our family went to Hillsdale Alliance Church, just down the road from our church. I remember sitting in the balcony, and at the time of the call to commitment, I felt pulled to go forward. Our whole family went forward, and our pastor prayed with us in the fireside room. While I had thought I was a Christian, from that night on, I knew deep within that Jesus was my Saviour and Lord.

During my teen years, I was blessed with good friends, an active church youth ministry, and a city-wide Youth for Christ program. I was continually given the opportunity for youth leadership and music ministry. Primarily through music, my heart's connection with a loving God became special and deeply personal. I remember many times after singing with our choir, youth music group or a solo in church, my dad would put his arm around me, squeeze me, and put his hand in mine. His affirming embrace connected me to the heart of God. I am forever

grateful for the stability and loving consistency of my growing-up years, which kept drawing me closer to Jesus.

I liked to plan and organize, so I had the perfect plan as I contemplated what would come after high school! First, I would attend one year at Canadian Bible College to further ground my faith. Then, after the year at CBC, I would attend the University of Alberta and pursue medical or dental training. My brother was in dentistry, so it all made good sense. I had done well in high school, ensuring all the academic courses were in place to pursue whatever direction I desired to go.

My best friend and I had applied to attend CBC together, live in the dorms, and begin to spread our wings! During my freshman year, I began to be exposed to other aspects of living a vibrant journey of faith. While I knew well that “God so loved the world,” I had never considered what this meant and how it could impact me. I had been exposed to missions and missionaries growing up in our church, but I had a negative perspective about “those” people and their work. I thought they were all rather strange! Also, I loved home! I had no burning desire to travel the world or live away from my wonderful family and the hopes and dreams of my plans.

With my ever-growing soft and tender heart towards God and desire to learn what it meant to follow Him, I began to grasp His heart for the world. Every Friday night at the missionary meeting and often during chapels and classes, I began to learn and understand His plan for all people.

Alongside this significant growth curve, I met a young man I had admired from a distance for a while. Through mutual friends, my path crossed with Brem Frentz. We began connecting more often during the second semester of my first year. I thought he was a great guy who loved Jesus, but ... he had recently received clarity that God was calling him to overseas ministry. He was going to be one of those missionaries! He was also planning to go far away from home. My wrestle with God began. I called out to the Lord, asking for clarity about my plans and, more importantly, His plan for my life. As I ended my first year at CBC, it became clear that I needed to put my medical education on hold to pursue two things. Was the Lord asking me to engage in His mission for the world, and was Brem Frentz to be part of this journey?

In December 1980, I heard my name read out in the CBC lounge, “Donna Fair assigned to Indonesia.” In faith, I had stepped out and applied for Alliance Youth Corp (AYC), putting Indonesia as my first choice as a fleece. Although Brem had gone in 1979, and we were now dating, I knew I needed to determine if God was calling

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me to serve overseas and whether Brem would be part of the future. So, when I heard my name and Indonesia attached to it, my heart both dropped with despair but also in amazement and gratefulness. God was beginning to reveal His plan.

My summer ministry to Indonesia in 1981 was life-changing. I met so many “cool” missionaries that my preconceived negative attitudes were erased. These “normal” and godly people lived in another land because they loved Jesus wholeheartedly and obediently followed His lead. Every time we stayed in workers’ homes, I asked them about their call and how they knew God had led them. I was filled with new-found faith and confidence in a God who delights to reveal great things to His children as we seek Him with our whole hearts. I also knew after my summer in Indonesia that even if God had different plans related to my relationship with Brem, He had revealed and confirmed His plan for my life to engage with the world by serving globally. Through reading His Word in Hong Kong and preparing to return to Canada, Isaiah 41:8-10 became my anchor and has held me close through all the years of global life.

*But you, Israel (**Donna**), my servant, Jacob (**Donna**), whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend,*

*I took you from the ends of the earth (**Regina**), from its farthest corners I called you.*

I said, ‘You are my servant’; I have chosen you and have not rejected you.

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God.

I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

The image of the righteous right hand of God is intrinsically linked back to the many embraces of my earthly dad. I knew without a doubt of God’s hand upon my life, showing me new plans. While not a courageous person by nature, I had the very promise of God embedded deep in my heart.

God began to open the beautiful next chapter. From my summer in Indonesia and Brem’s summer in Europe, we returned to clarify our mutual calls to global service and how being together fulfilled God’s plan for our lives. Following my graduation from CBC, June 12, 1982, became a milestone day in the lives of a young couple. Seeking to put God first in our marriage and honouring Him above all else, we committed our lives to serve Him wherever He may lead us.

Marriage and Ministry Launch – 1982-1989

Following the wedding, we moved to Calgary, embarking upon our life of transitions. Brem began serving as the first Youth and Christian Education pastor at Rockyview Alliance Church (RAC). It was an exciting time. Building relationships within the church, we desired people to know Jesus more deeply. Donna was a casual worker for a temp agency, ensuring adequate time to stay active with the youth. Brem's early morning guys' Bible study, Friday night youth events, Donna's youth choir, developing youth and sponsor leadership teams provided the perfect training ground for personal and ministry growth.

At the time, a minimum of two years of ministry in Canada was a requirement before heading overseas. This fruitful chapter in Calgary extended to four years. We were deeply blessed by the relationships made during our years at Rockyview. As a young ministry couple with a calling to serve globally, this faith community nurtured and affirmed us personally and were deeply committed to our call to missions. It was also here that we began our family with the birth of Terri-Lynn in 1985.

In the summer of 1986, RAC commissioned and sent us back to Regina for Brem to fulfill a final requirement of one year of seminary. For Christmas, we received the first of many care packages from our beloved Rockyview family, assuring us of their prayers and support. The mission fever of this church buoyed our hearts on many occasions to stay the course.

As we made our way down the missionary candidate track with Indonesia as the anticipated place of service, our one year of seminary extended to three as we awaited visas for Indonesia. We were grateful for the extra years as we added Jeremy to our family and enjoyed extended time with loved ones while allowing Brem to complete his Master of Divinity degree.

The day following graduation Sunday, we received a phone call from Peter Nanfelt, area director for Southeast Asia. The sought-after visas had just come through. We were told it took the death of a high-ranking government official to open the door for four Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) couples to finally be granted visas. Plans kicked into high gear as we had to be in the country before the end of August.

Prior to departure, we attended the one-month Toronto Institute of Linguistics course, where we met the other three Indonesian-bound couples from the U.S. C&MA. Bonds formed quickly as collectively, we marvelled at God's sovereign timing in our lives. These were bittersweet weeks of final preparation as the reality of heading to Indonesia in the summer of 1989 accelerated. The deep joy of following God's leading after years of preparation was met by the grief of leaving people we loved and the separation of miles and time that was ahead.

In those final days packing barrels, we anchored ourselves to the certainty we each had received of God’s call to crossing cultures to share the message of Jesus.

Indonesia – 1989-1999

Stepping back on Indonesian soil after our respective AYC experiences as college students was the culmination of ten years of preparation. The Father orchestrated our journeys with such faithfulness and care. Grateful for our new mission colleagues’ warm welcome and the enthusiasm of four young families landing within weeks of each other, we were filled with anticipation. Commencing language school in Bandung, West Java, soon after arrival, there were highs and lows of learning how to communicate and understand a new culture and the people who called this home.

Our initial year of life overseas was marked by the safe arrival of Brendan two days after successfully passing language evaluations. The many transitions of our first year were navigated through the deepening friendships with people who were becoming like family, the assurance of prayer support from the Alliance family in Canada and the deepening conviction of God’s call to this kind of ministry.

Our first assignment was to teach in the newly established Bible school in Pontianak, West Kalimantan, in Borneo. It was a joy to connect with young adults; however, teaching in a foreign language was arduous and even more challenging to grade handwritten assignments. So, Brem assisted the school’s development by supplying typewriters and required his students to submit typed papers!

The real joy of ministry came outside of the classroom. With his love for sports, Brem’s active involvement resulted in a student men’s volleyball team playing within the community. Brem loved the adventures with a Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF) colleague and the opportunities to fly into remote areas to show the *JESUS* film. He also trekked up a mountain with a team of nationals to build a state-of-the-art telecommunication tower. The tower never operated properly, but the eternal result was the unexpected birth of a faith community at the base of the mountain.



Building a transmission tower, 1990



Christmas ministry trip to the interior, West Kalimantan, 1991

While assigned to train nationals, our hearts continued to be burdened for the majority religion population. Through contact with a local bank manager, Brem was asked to teach English to bank employees. What joy it was to visit friends and family from the bank during their Ramadan celebrations.

Alongside ministry, we experienced the joys and sorrows of raising our family overseas. At the time, the Alliance still required sending children to boarding school. With great struggle, Terri-Lynn began grade 1 attending the C&MA school back in Bandung. We testify to God's grace and the faithful prayers of people during a challenging year. We prayed earnestly for a way the Lord would allow us to fulfill our global call yet allow our family to be together. As her grade 1 year ended, our special request to let us home-school for grade 2 was granted. While considered an exception to policy, we gratefully acknowledged the Lord's care for our family. This also began the much-needed shift in MK education policies.

We began the final year of our first term with a certain unsettledness. While we didn't question our global call, we asked God to meld our growing passions. It was becoming more apparent to Brem that he was a pioneer, pastor, peacemaker, and not a Bible school professor. For Donna, her prayer was to see us serve as a family intact. The year ahead was filled with opportunities to build into students in and out of the classroom, growing connections with Muslim people, and our family of five living and serving in our community. In this calm, our visas were terminated, finding ourselves back in Regina in mid-January 1993 in -30 degree weather.

For the next eighteen months, we cried out to God for all the unsearchable things we didn't know...our Jeremiah promise. We waited and prayed, exploring what God was saying and trusting He would make our next steps clear. We



The Frenz family in Penang, Malaysia 2002

were also blessed with the addition of Danae, who completed our family. As we ministered in churches, we passionately shared about Muslim people needing to encounter Jesus. We continued to deepen our commitment to seeing the world through His eyes. As visas for Indonesia remained tenuous, in dialogue with Wally Albrecht (VP of Missions) and counterparts in the U.S., the way opened for us to return to Indonesia. We were assigned to be the first full-time pastoral couple for Bandung International Church (BIC) while Brem fulfilled visa requirements as a physical education (PE) teacher at Bandung Alliance MK School, the school Terri-Lynn had attended as a first grader. Again, the Lord's redemptive ways shone through.

The next five years of ministry at BIC were exhilarating. The international church assignment was a hand-and-glove fit for us both. It was like a fast-flowing river of people intersecting with a growing faith community and encountering Jesus. Wow! So many fantastic opportunities stretched us and, in turn, impacted others.

A highlight had our family engaged within the ex-pat community as Brem became the Hash Master (aka leader) for the Bandung Hash Puppies, a weekly family running group. We had many outside-of-church friendships, allowing us to be salt and light. We were also learning and our hearts growing for Muslim ministry as we witnessed grassroots workers reaching out to the local Sunda people, a people group with a population the size of Canada but with so few believers. During those years, we helped facilitate the forming of the first C&MA team in Indonesia, focusing on reaching the Sundanese. We were grateful for God's

provision as we lived into our vocational cross-cultural call while our children lived at home. An unsearchable thing we didn't know when we abruptly lost our visas.

The intended three-year assignment in Bandung was extended to five as another shift was underway. As the Alliance in Canada continued its development as a national church, in 1998, the leadership assumed complete oversight of all Canadian personnel serving overseas which the U.S. had structurally managed. Under the direction of Dr. Cook (C&MA Canada president) and his vice-president Wally Albrecht, a new global leadership team was formed. We were asked to provide leadership for the Asia region. When we received Wally's call, we were shocked and overwhelmed. We were young and green yet affirmed and supported to step into this assignment as the first Canadian Regional Developers for Asia. The new model was to have ministry couples serve together, overseeing regional strategy, administration, and member care to Canadian workers. We loved stepping into something not yet done before! After gaining clarity through prayer, our answer was 'yes,' realizing our reach into the Muslim world would continue to be through empowering the frontline workers. In 1999, we embarked upon another significant transition as we said our goodbyes to beloved Indonesia, our home for a decade.

Malaysia – 2000-2012

The summer of 2000 had us relocate and transition to Penang, Malaysia. We began to lay the tracks and envision how this newly formed Asia region could extend the message of Jesus. With servant leaders Wally and Bev guiding us, along with three other regional couples, we discerned our unique missional calling as the Canadian Alliance to reach the people groups of the world who had little or no access to Jesus. Especially for Brem, in line with his pioneering spirit and passionate call to make Jesus known, we leaned in with our whole hearts.

This was an incredible chapter to see what God was doing and join Him. We



Brem and Donna with the Cambodian team at the General Assembly, 2008

had the joy of seeing ministry launched among Uighur people in East Asia, the returning to A.B. Simpson's call for ministry amongst Tibetan Buddhists as well as shifting strategies from a country-based focus to a least-reached people group (LRPG) focus. Alongside strategic realignment, our pastoral hearts loved to care for, support, and nurture our 100-plus personnel.

Serving as a couple enhanced our effectiveness as Donna was fully engaged and released to lead and serve. With a growing commitment to ensuring the health of workers and a vital member care priority developed by Judy Wiebe, we saw God do more of the unsearchable things we could not have known. We were also learning what it meant to intercede for the nations and cry out to Him on their behalf. There were many exciting mountains literally and figuratively climbed along with deep valleys of loss and pain, yet the faithfulness of God's heart for the world was so evident. The Lord graciously continued to align our calling for the nations and nurture our growing family with our children attending Dalat School as day students.

Our love for the international church did not wane upon arrival in Penang. Instead, it took root as we prayerfully discerned God's leading to create a steering committee that saw Penang International Church (PIC) launch to serve as a beachhead for ministry locally and throughout the region. In December 2002, with 27 people present, PIC held its first service. With the challenge and prayer for this faith community to become like the cedars of Lebanon, this church continues

to be a beacon of light and hope to many.



Brem and Donna with Lois Belsey (l) and Mary McElhone (r) in Papua, 2011

These years were a time of significant growth and development for Global Ministries (the international side of the C&MA Canada) and were life-changing for us. Having a front-row seat at what God was doing in the world was an honour. It was a thrill to know our Alliance family, both in Canada and Asia, were deepening

partnerships to bring His light to the Japanese, Khmer, Thai, Muslim people groups in Indonesia, and Tibetan Buddhists in Nepal and East Asia, to name a few. We are forever grateful for the unsearchable things the Lord revealed to us, the people we came alongside and held their arms high, and the glory of God that shone a bit brighter through our presence.

Toronto – 2013-2022

After fifteen years of regional leadership, another call came in September 2012. Dave Hearn, the newly elected president, asked Brem to consider assuming the role of VP for Global Ministries. The wrestle began. It had never been our

desire to be moved into national leadership, taking us further away from grass-root engagements. In addition, the role was designed for one person, Brem, which would require Donna to step away from Global Ministries and leadership. Again, we cried out to God as we didn't see the way forward. In our discernment and prayers, each of us willing to release what may be required, we continued the dialogue with Dave. Could there be a way for us to continue to both serve the global team out of our giftings and callings? Was their room within the structure to try something new? The pioneering spirit runs deep within us.

After three months of prayer and discussion, Brem stepped into the VP role, and Donna accepted a volunteer associate VP position for the initial years. This return to Canada was, by far, our most challenging transition. From our home office in Penang overlooking the Straits of Malaka to the office window in Etobicoke pointing us straight at McDonalds! Those early months were difficult, with more than a few tears shed. Internal and external challenges required us to anchor ourselves again to His call to serve cross-culturally, recognizing in fresh ways that location was secondary in following His lead.

We pressed through numerous obstacles, committed to building strong and healthy relationships across the global team while deepening the mission vision and partnership with our Canadian churches. Bringing stability and relational health in both arenas kept us deeply dependent on Him. While Brem championed the vision and message of commitment to the least reached, Donna brought her strength of organization and attention to detail, ensuring team care was in place.

While providing joint leadership to the Global Ministries Leadership Team, increasing time was spent in discernment and prayer. The committed women and men who made up this team were called gifted servant leaders. Together we affirmed our guiding values, known as the 5 Ps – Prayer, Presence, People, Proclamation, and Partnership – with prayer as the foundation. It was around these values that we committed ourselves to stay mission true to our unique part in God's global endeavour, focusing on reaching the people without access to Jesus.



Brem and Donna in Africa

While our love for Asia will always be present, our years serving the global team expanded our vision and heart for the world. Standing on a rooftop in a North African city and learning there were only about 50-75 believers in a city of over a million people gripped us. Sitting with a young Yazidi teen and hearing her story of abuse at the hands of ISIS called us to respond. The hopeless

efforts of millions of South Asians along the Ganges River looking for life after death deepened our love for Jesus, His heart for the whole world and called us to action. When the stress and frustration of mission leadership elevated, we would find ourselves back on a plane encountering the real challenges of this life when Jesus is not known. Our incredible privilege has been facilitating, coaching, empowering, and encouraging the release of people and financial resources to “bring access to Jesus where few or none have heard.”

The pandemic brought us many unique challenges in leading a global team with people spanning 30+ countries with ever-changing protocols and restrictions. There was a genuine concern that we may lose someone to COVID; the reality was limited medical resources in many locations.

One of the highlights, however, during this season was the ever-increasing commitment to prayer. When lockdown started, led by God’s Spirit, Donna began facilitating what became the global prayer room. Initially holding Zoom gatherings Tuesdays and Fridays at two different times to span the time zones, workers gathered across the globe to pray together. This provided us with what the pandemic took away. We looked forward weekly to community on Zoom, so our GM family, whether in Phuket or Dakar, Toronto or Calgary, came together. It kept us going through those difficult days. From the pandemic’s beginning until concluding in May 2022, over 200 prayer gatherings took place, uniting the team in times of praise and intercession for each other and the world. We are indelibly marked by the joy of serving alongside committed, godly and prayerful people.

We also include the honour it was to serve alongside Dave Hearn for almost ten years. We were empowered and released to lead and minister out of who we both have been uniquely designed to be. He was willing to embrace a new leadership model for the global side and for us to both serve the Alliance together. We loved the journey! When we had first stepped back onto Canadian soil, we didn’t know how long this assignment may last as we were committed to passing the baton on to younger leaders. Brem and Dave regularly had discussions about succession planning. In 2019 more regular conversations began taking place, and by the Fall of 2020, we determined it was time to step away at General Assembly 2022 to ensure a smooth transition of VP leadership prior to what we expected would be Dave’s final term in 2024.

February 2021 will always be marked in our hearts. Two days after the announcement of our planned stepping aside, we learned of Brem’s diagnosis of advanced prostate cancer. Our world was spinning. As never before, we cried out to the Lord for the unsearchable things. We abruptly entered the doors of our cancer journey, all the while knowing our faithful God was with us. Convinced



The Alliance Canada Global Ministries staff at Brem and Donna's farewell, 2022

abundant living is still available amidst disease, we had nothing to fear as we held onto His righteous right hand. In our final months of leadership, a few more unexpected twists and turns came our way, but we celebrate His enduring faithfulness and lovingkindness to finish well.

Bringing our tenure of 33 years serving in Global Ministries to a close, we highlight the following for His glory and mutual encouragement as we prayerfully remain committed to bringing access to Jesus to people who have not yet had the opportunity to encounter Him.

- In 2022, focus and initiatives were underway to bring access to Jesus to 66 people groups.
- The birth of the Muslim-focused team in South Thailand in 2022 fulfilled a vision that took root during our years in Malaysia. To God be the glory!
- With over 200 workers, all personnel focused on an LRPG, directly or indirectly, with other teammates or national colleagues.
- Through launching the Jaffray Project in 2016, specific least-reached people group (LRPG) efforts were initiated and/or gained increased focus among:
 - o Fulani & Wolof (Senegal)
 - o Yazidi (Iraq)
 - o Rohingya (Malaysia)
 - o Balinese Hindu
 - o Egyptian Arabs

- o Yemini
 - o Fulani & Tuareg (Niger)
 - o Huichol (Mexico)
 - o Azeri (Azerbaijan)
 - o Spaniards
 - o South Asians (Gateway Initiative)
- The growing influence of Alliance World Fellowship is noteworthy. Being actively involved to see this fellowshiping network become a mobilizing movement focusing on the least-reached peoples has been one of the greatest highlights.



Donna and Brem in the Middle East, 2013

Postlude

To our children who navigated the road with us, we know life as a third culture kid (TCK) brought you times of celebration but also deep sadness and loss. Thank you for the many sacrifices you made when you had little choice. We pray you will experience His abundant blessing, and as we continue

to walk together, there will be many occasions to remember His loving kindness and watchful ways. You play an integral part in our story and have enriched each step.

To our Alliance family, we say thank you for every prayer you prayed for the Frentz family, for our pictures that hung on fridges, and for the money graciously released. We are forever grateful to have been an extension of your love for the world. Let us continue to release our children and resources to bring access to Jesus, where many have not yet heard.

For future international workers and ministry leaders within the Alliance and beyond, hold fast to God's call on your life. It will anchor you through the difficult and lonely days. Remember, the work God desires to do in you is far more valuable than the work you will do for Him. He may lead you to the other side of the world or face significant obstacles to root you more deeply into His heart. The overflow of the Spirit's work in you is the source of any message you have to share with the world.

The Lord is forever faithful, His sovereign plans are trustworthy, and His redeeming love is for all peoples.

Chapter 8

Experiencing God in Diaspora

by Jacky and Anne Lau

“God is calling those who have the heart to serve Him. Are you willing to respond?”

Dr. Thomas Wang, a well-respected mission statesman, spoke passionately and gave an altar call at the Joint Mission Convention in 1997, the year we turned forty. In obedience to the Holy Spirit’s conviction, we held each other’s hands, came forward, and dedicated ourselves to serving God. About 70 participants tearfully responded to the call.

However, we had many unknowns, such as how to provide for our teenage children if we changed vocations in mid-life. At a follow-up counselling session, a pastor answered the respondents’ many complicated questions with one simple statement, *“Don’t worry! Whatever you have promised God, just do it, and He will guide you and provide for you.”*

We were indignant at his standard reply. Nevertheless, we followed his advice and began our ministry journey. About ten years later, we bumped into the same pastor at the airport in Edmonton. We apologized to him for our negative comments about his counselling skill and affirmed that he had given us the best advice. For the past twenty-some years serving as pastors and international workers (IWs), we have experienced God, His goodness, and abundant grace.

Our Diaspora Origins

The term “diaspora” refers to people who live outside their original homelands. Diaspora people are also called “scattered people” or “people on the move” in mission literature. According to the UN’s *World Migration Report 2022*, there were about 281 million international migrants, roughly 3.6% of the global population in 2020.

When Jacky was nineteen, he chose to leave his birthplace of Hong Kong to go to Britain and study engineering. Anne was born in Wuhan, a Chinese city many people did not recognize until COVID-19. When she was three, her family was forced to leave mainland China to avoid political turmoil. We are diaspora Chinese and

have lived outside our country of birth for over forty years. We are ordinary people living extraordinary lives because we have encountered our amazing Almighty God.

Our Early Years



Jacky and Anne in
Hong Kong, 1976

Jacky is the youngest of four boys in his family. His parents were master silversmiths in Hong Kong. He learned basic silversmith skills in his teenage years and helped in his parents' workshop. Although Jacky believed in the existence of a Creator God and studied the Bible in a Christian high school, he did not follow Jesus. His life goal then was to be happy, study abroad, work as an engineer, and have a good-paying job.

Anne has ten siblings and is the middle child in her family. Her parents were senior managers overseeing hundreds of factory workers in Wuhan. Due to famine, political strife, and social instability, her father moved the whole family to southern China. First, they moved to his birthplace Zhongshan, then to Macau, and eventually to Hong Kong when Anne

was about ten. Despite changing schools many times, she was able to skip a grade and ended up in the same grade and same school as Jacky. At their high school graduation celebration in 1975, Jacky was brave enough to invite Anne to watch a movie on their first date. We thus began our courtship as we embarked on our different career paths.

After high school, Anne began working for a Japanese bank and then with the Cathay Pacific Airline in Hong Kong. Jacky worked for a 5-star hotel for one year, then went abroad to study civil engineering in Manchester, UK. In those days, writing letters was the only economical means to communicate. We wrote three or four letters weekly to share happenings in our daily lives and express our love for each other. By God's grace, we committed to maintaining our long-distance dating relationship for four years despite facing some temptations.

Our Wedding and First Christian Gathering

We got engaged soon after Jacky graduated from the University of Manchester in the summer of 1980. Jacky moved to Canada to join his parents, who had immigrated



Jacky and Anne's wedding celebration, 1981

to Calgary. He worked as a civil engineer on weekdays and as a waiter on weekends to save money for our wedding. Then, in the spring of 1981, he returned to Hong Kong. We got married and celebrated with Anne's family. The celebration continued with Jacky's family in Calgary a few weeks later.

We decided Jacky's parents would live with us after our wedding. Both of us thought we would live happily ever after. However, as a newlywed couple, we faced many challenges adjusting to our different lifestyles with each other and Jacky's parents. At the invitation of a Christian sister who learned conversational English with Jacky's parents at the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), we attended a dinner event with Jacky's parents at the Calgary Chinese Alliance Church (Calgary CAC) on a Friday evening. We had mixed feelings about this gathering which

began with a fellowship meal, followed by a presentation by a missionary intern.

Our expectation was to have a formal sit-down gourmet dinner with our parents' Christian friend. Instead, we were to line up, and volunteers filled our plates with rice, vegetables, and meat. Though we were disappointed by the simple meal, we had a very positive experience with the Christian fellowship and the stories we heard from the intern. On the way home, we sang and hummed to those long-forgotten Christian hymns we learned in our teens. We believe God used this special gathering to open our hearts and to invite us to His fold.

Receiving the Gospel

The senior pastor of Calgary CAC, Rev. Gabriel Tsang, and his wife wasted no time and visited us three days later. They fervently shared the gospel message and encouraged us to follow Jesus Christ. They said, "Don't wait any longer... receive Jesus as your Saviour tonight... we may perish from this world anytime, and you will miss the wonderful opportunity to rebuild the broken relationship with the Creator God."

During the evening of February 22, 1982, we knelt in the living room and invited Jesus Christ into our lives. We began to attend worship services and Sunday school classes at Calgary CAC. On August 15, 1982, Rev. Tsang baptized us, about two weeks before our first child Sharon was born. Rev. Tsang and his wife are enthusiastic

evangelists whose unwavering resolve and zeal to share the Gospel greatly impacted us. We often discuss their evangelistic skills and desire to follow their example.

Due to the economic downturn in Alberta in the 1980s, we moved our family to Saskatoon, changed our careers, and started a grocery business in 1984. In the same year, Ryan, our second child, was born. Anne's mother and three siblings also moved from Hong Kong to live with us.

We were super busy and began to put our relationship with God in the back seat. But He did not give up on us. Instead, he sent a godly couple, James and Emmie Wang, to shop in our store and initiate spiritual conversations with us. Their joy, commitment to their marriage, and faithfulness in following Christ deeply touched our hearts.

After careful consideration, we sold our successful business to a new immigrant in 1985, so we could spend more time with our families, and so Jacky could pursue an MSc at the University of Saskatchewan. As a result, the whole family could regularly worship the Lord, study the Scripture, and attend fellowship meetings at the Saskatoon CAC. God used His Word and Christian leaders to inspire us and strengthen our faith in Him during this season. We experienced His love through the acceptance and kindness of leaders and fellow sojourners at the Saskatoon CAC.

Learning to Serve

At the invitation of church leaders and with a thankful spirit, we began to serve in different areas, including the toddlers' and children's ministries, Sunday school, student fellowship, family fellowship, and visitation. Anne focused on children and family ministries, while Jacky did Bible studies and visitation.

In 1986, Jacky was appointed as the deacon of evangelism and mission at the Saskatoon CAC. Every Tuesday night, he organized two or three teams of believers to visit their friends and relatives or newcomers. We served with great evangelistic fervour. Unfortunately, due to a lack of training and wisdom, their stone-hearted hosts asked Jacky and his teams to stop sharing and leave. We grieved and prayed for those who refused to receive the good news of Christ Jesus. However, we rejoiced in the Lord as we finally could taste the rejection and pain Christ and His apostles had suffered.

Periodically, the church invited returning international workers (IWs) to share their mission experiences. We volunteered to host the IWs and learned from their spiritual journey. During one mission night, we listened attentively to a newly appointed missionary with a wild-looking bowl-cut hairstyle. Suddenly, he pointed at his head and shared, "My hairstyle is not bad, eh? My wife and I choose to live

a simple lifestyle and recently learned the hairdressing skill to help cut each other's hair when we serve in the field." His challenge touched us, and we decided to live a simple lifestyle for the Kingdom's sake. A few days later, we bought an electric clipper from Consumer Distributors, and Anne became our family's hairdresser, a role she has continued for the last forty years.

Saskatoon CAC is located at the edge of the downtown area where First Nations people frequently congregate. Leaders of the Circle Drive Alliance Church invited our church to jointly host an evangelistic powwow for First Nations people at our church venue. It was the first time Jacky had ever worked with other Alliance leaders to organize a cross-cultural evangelistic event. Praise the Lord; over thirty First Nations friends came to Christ Jesus.

...over thirty First Nations friends came to Christ Jesus.

Shortly after the event, Ken Rutherford led a group of First Nations believers, formed the Saskatoon First Nations Alliance Church (SFNAC), and began to host worship services in the Saskatoon CAC building on Sunday afternoons. SFNAC conducted their ministries from that location until 2011, the year when Rev. Rutherford was promoted to eternity. God used this ministry opportunity to widen our hearts for missions, and we experienced the joy of Kingdom partnership.

A Gentle Voice

Canada was recovering from the recession when Jacky completed his MSc training in 1987. While he was looking for an engineering job, we opened a jewellery store in Saskatoon in the fall of 1988, just in time to do business for the busy Christmas season. Our store was located in an open shopping plaza.

One cold, windy evening with wet snow falling, Jacky took a stack of promotional flyers and distributed them to potential shoppers. Though his face was covered with blowing snow, he busily inserted the flyers beneath the windshield wipers of parked cars. Suddenly he heard a gentle voice from within, *"If they were evangelistic tracts, would you still distribute them on this cold, windy night?"* Jacky's eyes welled up with tears as he admitted, *"No, I would not!"* Nevertheless, he continued to distribute the flyers. He was then unable to sleep during the night and prayed throughout the evening.

The church's nomination committee had invited Jacky to join the Elder Board two weeks earlier. He flatly declined the nomination because we were too busy. However, the following morning, he called an elder of the church and said, "Yes, I am willing!"

We had great joy and peace, although our lives were still hectic. By faith, Jacky served on the Elder Board of Saskatoon CAC between 1989 and 1993. He was treasurer and responsible for mission and evangelism, and property maintenance. Anne continued to serve in the toddlers' and children's ministries. We were also actively involved in teaching Sunday school and leading the university student fellowship.

In early 1989, Jacky began working as a regional engineer for the federal government. Anne also continued to run the jewellery business. Our time in Saskatoon was valuable to our future mission involvements as we learned how to serve with like-minded Christian leaders in our spiritual home.

Responding to God's Call

China was opening up to the world in the 1990s. In 1993, a close high school friend, a nominal Catholic believer, invited us to move back to Hong Kong so Jacky could work for his company. We thought we could participate in missions in China while working in Hong Kong. However, our work was too demanding to participate in any ministries. At the workplace and out of frustration, when Jacky refused to become involved in any unethical business practices, our friend advised Jacky, "You should work as a pastor." We believed God used our friend's suggestion to nudge us to follow and serve Him wholeheartedly.

In 1995, we decided to return to Canada and re-establish our home in Regina. At the Regina CAC, we dove into church ministries and served as counsellors for university students. We also became acquainted with many faithful Christian leaders in the city. At a Christmas dinner in 1996, Dr. Paul Siu, a professor at the Canadian Theological Seminary (CTS - now called Ambrose Seminary), suddenly advised Jacky "to serve as a vocational pastor." We were surprised and felt unworthy of this suggestion. However, Dr. Siu was a wise, godly servant. He recommended that Jacky take Bible courses at the CTS and discern God's will for our future. Additionally, he invited Jacky to join the organizing committee for the Joint Mission Convention (JMC) in 1997.

We responded to the altar call and desired to serve God full-time at the 1997 JMC, bringing us back to where we started this story. From a vocational perspective, Jacky was at the height of his engineering profession. He was the sole breadwinner for our family. We had little faith and wanted to ascertain whether it was God's will, instead of our desire, to change our "career path."

For the next few months, we ardently prayed and sought our Lord for guidance. Finally, God gave us these words from Philipians 1:21, "*... to live is Christ and to die is gain.*" He also gave Jacky a vision of himself standing before the Lord at the end of his earthly life. Jacky would be so ashamed to meet our Lord Jesus if he

did not obey God's call to serve Him full-time. So, without hesitation, we began to obey our Lord's command like Gideon did.

We spent the next few years transitioning to full-time ministries. We praise God for our teenage children, Sharon and Ryan, and their unequivocal support. They often encouraged us with words like, "It is good to serve the Lord... follow what God is guiding you... don't worry; God will take care of us!"

Indeed, our gracious God has taken good care of our children. He has blessed them with good professions, like-minded Christian spouses, and children willing to imitate their parents as they follow Christ.

In the fall of 1997, we relocated to Edmonton due to a job-transfer commitment Jacky made right before the JMC. We decided to join the South Edmonton Alliance Church (SEAC). Jacky continued taking courses from the CTS and the North American Baptist Seminary (now called Taylor Seminary) in Edmonton while he was winding down his engineering career. Anne started to take long-distance courses offered by the China Graduate School of Theology.

In 1998, Genghis Chan, the new senior pastor of SEAC, invited Anne to serve as pastoral staff. In 2002, Jacky completed his MDiv in Intercultural Ministries at Taylor Seminary. He began to serve as a missionary/pastor-in-training while Anne transitioned to her new role as the "pastor's wife." We completed our "home services" at SEAC, our home church.

Call for Overseas Missions

In 2001, Jacky conducted a three-month internship under the mentorship of Jonathan and Ruth Teo, who were reaching out to Mandarin-speaking Chinese scholars and workers in Israel. A week after his arrival, Jacky (a Cantonese speaker) was asked to use his rudimentary Mandarin to share the story of Noah's ark with Chinese workers in a camp meeting. He was shocked by the power of the gospel message when over thirty workers (about half of the total gathering) responded to the altar call and received Jesus into their lives. Afterwards, Jacky was emboldened to use Mandarin in ministries.

A few weeks later, Jacky attended a house church worship service for Chinese workers led by a Kenyan pastor. The Holy Spirit spoke to Jacky with a serious message, *"This African pastor does not know a word of Mandarin and has never been to China, yet he obeys my commands to serve the Chinese here... What about you? Are you willing to serve in the Middle East?"* Tears streamed down from Jacky's eyes as he replied silently, *"Lord, I am willing... but what about my wife, Anne? I don't want to force her to follow me. Please call her to join me to serve You in the*

mission field.” Jacky prayed for Anne and kept details of this special encounter to himself for the next few weeks.

Anne went to Israel in the last month of Jacky’s internship, immediately befriending many Chinese scholars and workers. We did our morning devotions in two separate rooms. One morning, Anne rushed to Jacky’s room with tears in her eyes and shared how the Holy Spirit had given her two passages. *“Jesus... saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd”* (Matthew 9:35-36) and *“Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”* (Isaiah 6:8). Then, she urgently asked Jacky, “The Lord has just called me to serve Him in the mission field... What about you? Are you willing?” Jacky shared what had happened a few weeks before her arrival. We joyfully prayed, thanked God for His guidance, and committed to serving in the Middle East. We applied to join the Global Ministries (GM) of The Alliance Canada as soon as we returned.

Our First Term

It took about 18 months to complete the application process. At the last interview, Gerald and Dorothy Hogenbirk, GM’s regional developers, proposed to deploy us as IWs to join a newly established Alliance team in the Arabian Peninsula (AP). A few days later, we took a solitude retreat at Camp Nakamun to discern the Lord’s will. After two days of intense prayers, scripture reading, and discussions, we firmly believed God was leading us to plant churches among the Chinese diaspora in the

heart of the Muslim world.

In March 2003, Jacky completed the ordination process with The Alliance Canada. The Board of Directors formally approved our IW application in the same month. We launched our first term of ministries by visiting churches across Canada and sharing how we would participate in God’s mission. Hundreds of Christians committed to partner with us through financial giving and prayer support.



District and SEAC leaders prayed for them at Jacky’s Ordination Service, 2003

On August 5, 2003, we held off our tears and boarded our plane to the AP after we had bid farewell to our children, Jacky’s dad, and church families. Once inside the cabin, we covered our faces with a blanket, then cried and prayed throughout the first flight to Frankfurt. God

was good to us. He comforted us by prompting the airline staff to upgrade us, His ambassadors, to business class on the flight to the AP. This was the first time we flew business class together.

Within the first few months of our arrival, we were deeply troubled by loud noises calling Muslims to prayer broadcasting from nearby mosques five times a day. We felt threatened by the Enemy's intimidating noises and could not rest well. Both of us knew *"our struggle is not against flesh and blood... but... against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms"* (Ephesians 6:12). So, we reminded each other *"to be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power"* and to *"pray in the Spirit on all occasions..."* (Ephesians 6:10, 18). When the Muslims were called to pray by their imams, at the same time, we began to pray for God's Kingdom to come and for His will to be done.

We were the first Chinese IW couple to join the new Alliance AP team, partnering with an international church in a gateway city. Before our arrival, God had sent several short-term workers and planted a Chinese fellowship with about thirty new believers. While setting up our new home, we visited believers, formed a ministry team, and developed the mission statement and core values for the Chinese diaspora church CCCD (the full name is withheld for security reasons). God guided our team to host an evangelistic meeting and celebrate Mid-Autumn Festival on September 11, 2003. About 150 Chinese merchants and workers came, and seventeen accepted



Evangelistic meeting in the Arabian Peninsula

Jesus into their lives. With a thankful spirit, we planned another evangelistic event for Christmas. About 400 diaspora Chinese crowded into a church villa and attended the Christmas celebration, with twenty-nine responding to the altar call.

By faith, we rented a large meeting hall on the outskirts of the city and hosted the Chinese New Year evangelistic event in January 2004. About 750 diaspora Chinese came, and 211 decided to follow Christ.

Many of you may wonder how to follow up with so many new believers. Our usual practice was to gather new believers as soon as possible and 1) go through the gospel message again using the *4 Spiritual Laws* booklet; 2) teach them how to pray aloud; 3) give them a copy of the Bible and encourage them to read the first four books of the New Testament; 4) instruct them to write in their Bible when and where they accepted Jesus Christ; and 5) encourage them to join a Christian church or fellowship. However, we needed more Bibles to distribute that evening and new believers were fighting to get their copies. So we calmed them down and promised to deliver them new copies of the Bible soon.

Unfortunately, we did not have any more Bibles. We prayed earnestly for God's provision. A couple of weeks later, God sent a Korean IW to deliver hundreds of Chinese Bibles to us. Before we gave away those Bibles, we challenged our Korean co-workers to ship a 20 ft-container load of Chinese Bibles to the AP. By God's grace, over 20,000 copies of the Chinese Bible, the largest shipment ever, were shipped

to the AP. A Chinese Christian merchant helped us to clear the shipment with customs inspectors without any issues.

In our first term of service, we focused on building up church leaders, visiting Chinese workers, boldly sowing the gospel seed, forming small groups, mentoring overseas summer interns, partnering with like-minded mission agencies, and supporting Chinese diaspora missions in other AP countries.

We were like kids sitting in the front row seats, watching God call His people to



Baptism service in the Arabian Peninsula

Him. It was common to see newcomers accepting Christ in camp/family visits, small group meetings, worship services, and evangelistic meetings. Praise our Lord, for we witnessed over 10,000 diaspora Chinese come to Christ and over 1,500 baptized during our time in the AP from 2003 to 2014.

Our Second and Later Terms

After concluding our first term, we returned to Canada for a six-month home assignment in the fall of 2006. CCCD, the main church we planted, went through a painful split during our absence. A newly arrived IW sent by another mission agency decided to fish from our church. He actively persuaded our members to join his new venture, formed small groups and hosted worship services in similar locations. When we returned to the field in early 2007, we counselled frustrated leaders and urged them not to focus on others' failures. We were very disappointed with this other IW, his agency, and his unethical practices. God comforted us with His Word, *"...some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry...But what does it matter? The important thing is ... Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice"* (Philippians 1:15-18). We gradually overcame our negative sentiments, forgave the IW and his agency, and resumed having fellowship with his team for the sake of the Kingdom.

God continued to bless our ministries and transform His people. In 2007, we partnered with the Global Chinese Bible Institute (GCBI) and offered theological training for committed believers. As a result, many lowly factory/construction workers studied the GCBI courses and participated in various ministry roles.

Tim, a poorly educated furniture factory worker, decided to serve God full-time after he accepted Christ Jesus in one camp visit. God gave him a good learning aptitude to read the Bible and memorize the scriptures. A Christian merchant offered Tim to work in her warehouse so he could study GCBI courses and serve at our church on weekends. After he finished two years of biblical training in the AP, we sent him back to Beijing, China, to receive further training in an "underground" seminary. As soon as Tim completed the BTh program, he and several Christians started a house church in eastern China in 2010. Praise God, Tim is now a well-respected leader mobilizing other house churches to plant new fellowships among an unreached people group in western China. Over twenty faithful Chinese diaspora

believers, like Brother Tim, are actively serving as committed pastors or leaders in churches in Africa, China, and the Middle East.

Our team leaders, Pat and Ardyce Worsley, retired and returned to Canada in the summer of 2007. We and another IW couple were appointed as co-leaders for the AP mission team. By then, our team had over twenty IW members sent by the Alliance and other agencies from



Jacky and Anne in the Arabian Peninsula

five countries. Our roles were to care for all members, prepare potential new IWs, and lead the diaspora missions.

To deepen our mission knowledge and perspectives, Jacky enrolled in a PhD program at the Willian Carey International University under the oversight of Dr. Enoch Wan. Though it was very challenging to serve and study simultaneously, this training helped Jacky clarify significant mission issues and connected him with many diaspora mission practitioners and scholars.

We actively communicated with Alliance families in Canada, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, encouraging them to join God’s mission in our field. Additionally, we partnered with local leaders who served among the Filipino, South Asian, and African diasporas in the AP. Chinese house church leaders and Lausanne leaders invited us to support the Back to Jerusalem (BTJ) and Mission China (MC2030) mission movements. Together, we committed to mobilizing our respective churches to pray for local and diaspora people regularly and to equip believers to reach out to Arabs, Iranians, and Muslim people in the AP.

We had the honour of baptizing an Iranian Muslim Background Believer (MBB) in the AP and introducing her to her future MBB husband. The Iranian authorities were persecuting them for their faith and outreach activities in Iran. We helped them to seek refuge in Canada. God has blessed them with two daughters, and they continue to reach out to Farsi-speaking people in our city.

When we joined the AP team, our wise team leaders reminded us to “work ourselves out of our jobs.” Our primary ministry focused on developing new leaders so our work would continue when we left the field. In 2012, we sensed God was guiding us to conclude our ministries in the AP and return to Canada. By God’s grace, He prepared faithful team members to lead the AP team, two full-time pastoral couples, and several lay leaders to take care of Chinese diaspora churches in the AP by the time we departed in 2014.

...our wise team
leaders reminded us
to “work ourselves
out of our jobs.”

Equipping and Mobilizing

When we returned to Canada, we continued to serve as IWs from 2014 to 2022 under the oversight of Brem and Donna Frentz, VP & Associate VP of The Alliance Canada. Our main roles were to mobilize churches, equip believers, identify potential IW candidates, mentor young Christian workers, and support existing IWs. We also served as associate speakers for Family Life Canada and advising pastors for diaspora churches we planted in the AP. We spent about 40 percent of our time

overseas and 60 percent in Canada, challenging churches to join God's mission and networking with like-minded mission agencies.

In 2014, Jacky was invited to join the Kairos Course (SMC) national coordination team, introducing the course to churches across Canada. We partnered with several agencies, built up regional Kairos teams, and challenged every participant to become a Christ-centred world Christian. Many leaders who took the Kairos course developed a biblically-based Christian worldview, and their churches have become more missional. Due to these positive outcomes, The Alliance Canada has adopted the Kairos Course (or the Perspectives Course) as a required core subject for ordination and IW training.

By God's grace, Jacky began to teach mission courses at the seminary level and mentored several DMin students after he had completed his PhD training in 2017. He was also invited to serve as an advisor for the Mission China movement and join the Lausanne mission group, mobilizing churches for diaspora and frontier missions. In recent years, Canada has received a large and increasing number of international students and new immigrants. God helped us see the great potential of reaching the nations by reaching them. Jacky began serving on the International Student Ministries Canada (ISMIC) board in 2018, assisting them in partnering with more churches for greater ISM engagements.

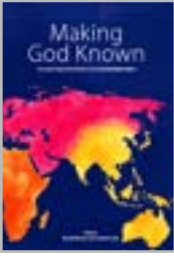
Concluding Remarks

We praise our Lord for calling us to join His mission. The greatest joys in our mission journey include experiencing God's presence and His mighty power as we served Him in the field, witnessing over 10,000 precious souls decide to follow Christ, and assisting young leaders to fulfill their mission call. As we reflect on our mission journey over the past twenty-some years, we have learned the following valuable lessons:

1. Hear His voice and obey His call.
2. Be a learner and serve with like-minded Christians.
3. Work ourselves out of the job.
4. Practise Kingdom partnership.
5. Let God get all the glory.

As we begin a new season of ministry, we pray that our Lord will continue to use us to equip believers and mobilize His church to participate in His mission.

Recent Publications



Lau, Jacky, 2020. "International Students: Missions on our Doorstep" in *Making God Known to Least-Reached People in Extraordinary Ways*, Vol. 3, edited by Ronald Brown and Charles Cook, Mississauga, ON: The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada, p. 167-172. <https://www.cmacan.org/giveaway/>



Lau, Jacky, 2022. "Ten Common Challenges" in *ON MISSION: Caring for Those Who Go*, Vol. 4, edited by Ronald Brown, p. 121-133. <https://www.cmacan.org/resources/on-mission> and also in *Asian Missions Advance*, a quarterly bulletin of the Asia Missions Association published by the East-West-Center for Missions Research & Development, summer 2022, p. 7-12.



Chinese Diaspora Kingdom Workers: In Action and with Guidance
by Enoch Wan and Jacky Lau

God is using diaspora for His mission purposes: the evangelization of the diaspora people and the mobilization of diaspora believers to actively participate in global missions. This book introduces seven guiding principles for field support ministries for diaspora kingdom workers.

Chapter 9

God's Work in and through Us

by Merinda Enns

Although neither Richard nor I knew it then, God was uniquely calling us from when we were very young to say 'yes' to Him. He was calling us to go from the known to the unknown in obedience, to say 'yes' to Him no matter what, being formed more into the likeness of Jesus along the way. Our story is one of God working in and through us. But, in the end, it is all about obedience.

My husband's story illustrates God's relentless pursuit. When Richard was young, his parents were not followers of Christ, and it took a tragic, near-fatal small plane crash involving his dad and older brother to bring the family to the place where they chose to follow Jesus. Already the tone was set: tragedy and suffering are part of God's equation. This first lesson was so critical in the following years.

God was pursuing Richard and preparing him for a life of dependency. Even before knowing about God, our Heavenly Father gave him a supernatural vision as a young child, sending him on a spiritual journey. Making no sense at the time, the pieces of the vision included a small plane, boxes of books, and a jungle. Only a decade later, after committing his life to Christ, God again sent the same dream in full colour! The call became clearer; Richard was to dedicate himself to going to those with little to no access to Jesus.

In contrast, I grew up in a family who loved and served Jesus in short-term cross-cultural work and encouraged me to listen to God and say 'yes' to Him. I became a Christ-follower as a young child and soon after that, believed God wanted me to go to the least reached, those with minimal access to learn about the love of Christ. It was through the encouragement of my parents and home church (Morden Alliance in Manitoba) that the passion was kept alive in my heart.

I remember one very significant moment at the age of thirteen. An international worker (IW), Elfrieda van der Bijl (then Toews), was speaking at my church. My heart was again softened as she challenged anyone to commit to going out to the lost world. I immediately went to the front to declare I was saying 'yes' to Jesus.

This moment was significant in many respects. Not only did I make a public declaration, but Elfrieda continued to correspond with me through air mail to "fan

the flame” God had set in my heart. What joy I had, years later, as we were about to move to Africa, when Elfrieda held our last child in her arms and blessed her and our family as we went.

God may have called us separately, but He brought us together to make Him known among the nations. And so, with two children in tow, having worked in a church for a few years and completing seminary training, we were ready to go.

Ministry in Côte d’Ivoire: 1993 - 1997

Our journey to Côte d’Ivoire, West Africa, in the summer of 1993 was different than anticipated. At the time, the Alliance process included an application form in which you could state your top three choices of location. Our list did not mention Africa, yet in the fall of 1991, we received official notice that our country of service would be Côte d’Ivoire, Africa. We immediately got out a map because we had no clue where this country was located. As the reality began to sink in, so did our confirmation. God gave me this incredible joy and peace in my heart. It was like I had always wanted to serve there but never knew its location.

For Richard, the confirmation came moments before landing in the country. As he gazed for the first time at the land soon to become home, to his amazement, the jungle in the vision from childhood returned. Just outside the plane’s window was



The Enns family in Africa, 1994

the exact picture from that vision...the trees, the landscape, everything was as he had seen it those many years ago. Another confirmation that we were going where God was asking us to be. What a God gift!

These confirmations proved to be so critical in our journey. There were numerous situations where the Enemy tried to discourage us, to make us want to give up. We held on tightly to the knowledge that we could make plans, but God is the One who brings about His purposes. All we could offer was a daily surrender of saying ‘yes’ to Jesus and taking opportunities to share the love, hope, and truth of Jesus with those who had not yet heard.

One of the most significant lessons we learned early on was that we could depend on God no matter what. A week after landing, we drove inland to our

first home and place of ministry. Divo is a large town, and it had a large Alliance church. The pastor, Michel, and his wife took us under their wings and graciously showed us how to minister among the people.

One of the earliest lessons was to sit back and watch. To make us into the most useful tool, God knew He needed us to be humbled. And so, Richard found himself driving Pastor Michel from village to village, sitting around fires or in courtyards, listening and observing. Eventually, Richard was released to train village lay pastors, but likely he learned more than they did.

Richard often ventured out with Michel to villages with no Christian presence or believers. These moments usually took many days of sitting with the chiefs and elders, seeking their permission to share the Gospel publicly. Often, the most enticing method was to project the *JESUS* film. This would require a reel-to-reel projector, a generator, sound equipment, and a bed sheet to be draped on a strategic hut's wall.

Given how many things could and did go wrong (like running out of fuel or the only bulb burning out), Richard's humble duty was to ensure everything worked out in the jungle.

Quickly he realized the antiquated projector needed help to operate. From the first showing and the dozens to follow, Richard had to place his finger into the intake reel and manually gather the film before it spilled on the ground. At the same moment, he needed to hold the mic to the speaker with the other hand. He also had to change reels in complete darkness. Even so, nothing can describe the joy of witnessing people not only seeing a film for the first time but of Jesus becoming real and salvation in Him making sense to the audience. Bringing the truth and hope of Jesus to those who had not yet heard impacted our hearts for all the years to come.

We also began to develop a deep burden for those who were either in bondage to spirit worship or those who followed Islam. On one occasion, a young man, Bak, came to our door begging for food. Fascinated by a Christian helping a Muslim, he became a regular around our home. For months Bak was intensely opposed to discussing or hearing about Jesus. But God was pursuing him through our friendship. After months of living out Jesus to him, Bak finally asked his burning question, "Why do you love me? You have shown love to me. Why?" Richard explained to him that we were vessels of Jesus' love; what Bak was experiencing was Jesus' love through us. That evening, Bak gave his life to Jesus. Richard warned him great persecution would likely come. Did he still want to become a Jesus follower? There was no doubt in Bak's mind that he had found the truth.

Shortly after, we moved to the capital city of Abidjan to work among Muslims.



Richard with district pastors, 1994

And so began a new journey for us. Due to a huge influx of people from neighbouring countries seeking a better life, there was a growing need to establish churches and reach out to these people groups. So for the next three years, we learned their language, established growing churches, and trained leaders. These people were the most marginalized and needy, but working with them was pure joy.

While Richard taught the men, I was delighted to teach women in small neighbourhoods to read in their own language and watch their eyes light up as they read God's Word for the first time. People like Deb, living in modest surroundings, forever impressed me with her gentle yet bold proclamation and living out the Christ life in her

Muslim community. Deb and Bak's story are but two examples of many who counted the cost and then, against the culture of their upbringing and society, chose to follow the Son of God, their hope for now and forever.

Jumping ahead about twenty-five years, Richard was in an Alliance World Fellowship gathering and met church leadership from Côte d'Ivoire. He learned that the small group of five churches we had previously seeded and watered had grown. There are now so many churches made up of local believers, they make up their own district. God be praised! What a lesson: be faithful in the small things and then step back and see the great things God will do.

Ministry in Quebec: 1998 - 2009

God never wastes our time or efforts. Prior to going to Africa, we spent a year of French studies at a university in Quebec City. I recall thinking Quebec would be a wonderful place to minister. Little did we know then that our experience and connection with many wonderful Quebecois and their culture would be part of our future.

We had returned to Canada for a year's home assignment after our four years

in Côte d'Ivoire, knowing we would not be returning overseas. Our daughter Jenissa was born with a rare chromosome irregularity which results in global developmental delays. God was calling us to a new place where her special education needs could be met. As we mourned the loss of our overseas life and ministry, God gently opened our hearts to what He had planned for our next season. There were many days of wondering, feeling lost, and being "in-between," not knowing what would happen, where we would be, or what we would be doing next after our home assignment. But He was present and opened doors we had not anticipated.

While we had been studying French in Quebec City six years earlier, there had been other IWs studying at the university, and some of them had visa issues making it impossible to go where they had intended.

As we witnessed our peers living through the realities of changes in plans, we talked about "what would we do if this happened to us?" "Well, we would definitely consider staying here," we said to each other. God brought the conversation back to our minds when the opportunity came to work in Quebec. And thus began more than a decade of Montreal life and ministry both in the city and beyond.

God knew we needed confirmation that this was His plan. I still remember July 4, 1998, when we were at Assembly in Ottawa. We had to move our family and a few possessions to Quebec in a few short weeks. So we needed to find an apartment in the specific school's catchment immediately.

In Quebec, most rentals are advertised in April and May, so the pickings are sparse by summer. We knew if God called us to Montreal, He would have to provide an apartment in the four hours we had. It was nearing the end of the afternoon, and we had stopped at a parking lot to pick someone up when we noticed a second-floor balcony with a "for rent" sign. Richard ran across the street with little hope but was willing to ask. The woman who answered the door said she was sorry, but the upstairs apartment was rented. As Richard turned to go, she called, "Wait...let me call my husband." It turned out they were moving, and they said, "We feel that we should rent our place on the main floor to you." God's provision! It was a miracle; we called that place home for the next three years—another beautiful confirmation from God. We were following His leading, and He provided what we needed.

We began our new ministry in church planting by working alongside a Quebecois couple in East Montreal. It was our privilege to witness God at work in the lives of people growing in their young faith. Seeing how God spoke to them through His Word and convicted them of how they needed to live their new life in Christ now was a humbling experience. We learned much about God's grace, forgiveness,



Hochelaga Alliance Church, c. 2000

and being reconciled to God and each other. We are deeply grateful to God for allowing us to be among those who are a light on a hill among some of the least-reached people in North America. Encouraging smaller church groups among francophones and allophones was a joy for us. People from many ethnicities in Montreal call the city home for both shorter and longer terms; we were delighted to have the chance to work among various groups and be part of their journey with God as fellowships and individuals.

Another highlight was mentoring students at Institut Biblique V.I.E. (IBVIE),¹ the Alliance's Bible school in Quebec. These students were sponsored by their churches to study for the ministry. Regular prayer times and discussing how Scripture integrates into our lives were a great joy. All these years later, it is a delight to know many of these students are in formal and informal ministry and leadership roles in their various faith communities. They have grown in skills and mostly in listening to God and His call on their lives to serve Him within the church and the community.

We distinctly noticed the profound need for hope and connection in people's lives in our neighbourhood and other community groups where God opened doors. One specific way we loved connecting was our yearly "corn roast" at the end of August, where we invited our neighbours to get together for a Quebecois tradition. They were so happy to share this cultural event with us. God opened the doors through this annual backyard event to a deeper relationship with

¹ Present-day École de théologie évangélique du Québec (ETEQ)

neighbours, allowing us to pray for them, listen to where they were in their spiritual journey, and answer questions about what it meant to be a Christ-follower. One of these connections, in particular, has continued to this day nearly fifteen years later. We pray for those dear people to hear the call of Jesus personally.

We also served as the team leaders for the Quebec Global Ministries team spread across the province. Together we prayed, believed God for miracles in people's lives, and moved into our communities to live among those who needed Jesus for their hope for today and forever. Apprentices in the Global Ministries program came under our care and supervision, and we had the privilege of listening to God with them, growing together in our faith and trust in God, who directs our paths. What a lesson we learned during these years: invest in leaders to multiply the ministry.

And then God called us to another chapter and new ministry. Over the eleven years we spent in Quebec, God grew a deep love in our hearts for the Quebecois and those who call Quebec home. We learned we did not have to give up the heart we had for Africa but could also have a heart for Quebec. Neither detracted from the other, but each reflected God's heart for the nations. So, when He called us to take another faith journey, we could remember His faithfulness in giving us all we needed and more for the next season.

Return to Africa: 1999-2021

It seems God loves to surprise us! Our initial appointment to Côte d'Ivoire had not been part of our plan, nor had eleven years in Quebec been something we had anticipated. So when leadership asked us to lead and serve back in Africa, we could hardly believe it. It was a huge step, and we felt inadequate to take on the task. However, we agreed to this new assignment by seeking God through His Word, praying, and hearing from trusted, godly, and wise people. Back to Africa!

In this move, we again saw how God prepared the way for us to live and thrive in another new context. Suddenly our focus shifted from one specific people group to overseeing the personnel and work in Africa. Even after more than ten years, we felt at home when our feet landed on African soil.

While God had provided a place in Montreal in four hours, this time, God came through with an apartment, visa, and school for Jenissa in less than two days! So, on December 1, 1999, only three months after that two-day trip, we once again settled into Africa.

During this era, we were welcomed into the Sand (Africa) family, as we affectionately called the IWs, spread over a dozen countries in various contexts

and ministries. Our hearts grew for the many people among whom they lived, loved, and served. It was our great privilege to serve and lead these workers whom our Heavenly Father brought to Africa to proclaim and live out in action the name of Jesus as the truth and the life. We celebrated their joys, cried over the deep sorrows, prayed for those they loved who had not yet said 'yes' to Jesus, and made creative plans for engaging in cultures and lives very different from those we grew up in. All this while holding these plans with open hands to God's purposes.

Imagine getting to sit in the first row of an event. Better yet, sit on the bench and see the action firsthand. We had the great joy of being first-hand witnesses to God's work in central, west, and north Africa. The stories of God at work in Congo, Guinea, Niger, Senegal, and several North African countries became the ones we shared with many around the world, with prayer and partnership increasing. God drew people to move to Africa, join existing teams, and start new teams to work in partnership with other like-minded organizations to bring the light of Jesus into places without access to Him. Their commitment to stick it out through thick and thin, their willingness to suffer for His name, and their selflessness in service were humbling.

Through years of seemingly fruitless work, time has yielded a harvest in many places, with people from these unreached groups choosing to "follow the Jesus road" and be baptized as a public declaration of their faith. Those who have chosen to believe often live lives of familial and sometimes life-threatening persecution. They continue to count the cost every day. And one day, we will see "*a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb...*" (Revelation 7:9).

Every chapter or season holds memories of great joys, sorrows, and everything in between. Political and economic crises brought uncertainty and upheaval, sometimes making it seem like the work could not go forward. Epidemics, endless malaria, and many other outbreaks of diseases kept us on our knees, pleading for the lives of people and the mercy of God over those who are often the most vulnerable. Food shortages, droughts, and floods wreaked havoc on a physical level for so many. And yet, in each situation, God was present. He showed us ways to be the hands and feet of Jesus. Sometimes, in great suffering, people realize their need for Him.

There were so many highlights that there is a significant risk of missing some of the greatest while writing as the "pen comes to paper." To name some...

- A private radio station preaching God's Word and praying for people to know Jesus.

- HIV orphan care.
- Audio and written Scripture available in languages of least-reached people groups.
- New believers gathering under a mango tree.
- New babies coming into the world with prayers of blessing and protection prayed over them.
- Spiritual conversations on a rooftop away from the crowds (think Nicodemus).
- National churches, strengthened through leadership development, becoming independent and sending out workers to other least-reached peoples.
- Secret believers standing strong when their faith was made known in their families and communities.
- Social media providing safe places for people from Africa and beyond to ask questions about Jesus, receive Scripture, and choose to follow Christ.
- People coming to know Jesus in prison and shining the light in the darkest of places.
- Young people and adults alike learning to read and gaining skills to help provide for their families.
- Training for believers to share their faith and become leaders in small and large faith gatherings.
- Compassionate medical care and prayer offered on behalf of those who needed both physical and spiritual healing.
- Answered prayer after answered prayer, which demonstrated the power and strength of Jesus in the lives of both believers and those not yet following.

And to God we say.... *“One generation commends your **works** to another; they tell of your **mighty acts**”* (Psalm 145:4).

Back to the Prairies: 2022-Present

And then there is the present. We never thought our path would bring us back to the Prairies, especially Regina, the city of Jenissa’s birth more than thirty years ago.

We knew God had something new, something on this side of the ocean for the next season, but what? We are again thankful for God’s direction and wisdom from leadership who prayed with us through our move to Regina in October 2022, where Richard is now the assistant district superintendent in our home Midwest District.

How gracious of God to bring us to a place where we feel known and know some of the people and some of the culture (although significant changes have occurred since we last lived here). We are thankful to be part of a ministry team whose hearts are like ours, desiring to bring access to Jesus to people who do not know Him and to journey with those becoming more like Him. While we are newbies here, this ministry has been part of our lives quite a few times, and we know that as we keep listening to God, we will find the steps He has for us.



Richard and Merinda, 2023

Family and Lessons Learned

God has provided miraculously for us to be able to live and serve in so many situations. We have trusted Him to provide for our family wherever He has called us, and we live with our hands open. God gave us two wonderful children; sometimes, it was hard to release and trust that the situations they would live and experience were the best.

Two years into our time in Côte d'Ivoire, Elliot, who was five years old, had malaria. It became so severe that Elliot only hung on to life and breath through God's intervention and healing. This was one of the moments when we again dedicated Him to God as we had in 1990 when he was just a babe being held in the Russell Alliance Church. Years later, as we were preparing to return to Africa, leaving Elliot, who was studying at Ambrose University, was one of my most challenging release and trust moments.

Just before getting on the plane for Côte d'Ivoire, we heard from the pediatrician that Jenissa, then eighteen months old, had a rare chromosome anomaly. The news could have been a closed door to Africa, but God's plans are rarely our own, and over the many years, He has made way for us to have care and resources for Jenissa in the most unexpected places. Her "disabilities" have created some of the widest open doors. It has not been easy, but God's faithfulness and provision have become miraculous stories and mile markers in our lives, shouting, "But God!"

In her pre-school years, God provided an English language stimulation playgroup run by an American speech pathologist within walking distance of our home in Abidjan. Arriving in Quebec, the public elementary school in the area we would be church planting was known for welcoming children of all abilities. Jenissa spent four wonderful years of friendship and learning in a most welcoming

environment. Unfortunately, when the educational transition was needed, the school we believed was best for her had a waiting list of seventy children...But God! Jenissa was accepted into the school where she learned and thrived in an encouraging atmosphere.

In the private sector, we sought out speech and language therapy where we found the cost to be prohibitive, but God laid it on the heart of a friend who did not know of our need to send us a significant financial gift designated specifically to the resource needs we may come across helping her to grow and develop. Our hearts were overwhelmed. This was a miraculous and most timely gift in the mail the day we came home from our meet-and-greet visit at the speech clinic.

Years later, preparing to move back to Africa, we asked God where He would provide for our family. He led us to Accra, Ghana, which not only had a good air connection to all our IWs in the region, a partnership with the Mobile Member Care team, which was significant in caring well for our whole regional team, but also a great school for children and adults with disabilities run by a godly Ghanaian woman. This would be one of the most tangible gifts God gave to us as we served in Africa over the upcoming years.

Global Ministries supported our family and ministry in countless ways, and we are beyond grateful for the excellent care we received as we lived out the calling God had placed on our hearts.

Now as we look back, there are some times when we can already see the reasons and purposes, and other times remain a mystery. But we know He is good, and His purposes will come about.



The Enns Family, 2023

How does one wrap up an unfinished story? We don't. There is so much left to be written in our own lives and hearts, in the lives of our children (now three... Elliot and Morgan and Jenissa), and in our new grandson Simon! And much to be written in the lives of those who have come across our path and those yet to come across our path. He is faithful! He will carry out His work in us and bring it to *"completion until the day of Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 1:6).

Chapter 10

Choice

by Cecilia Cheung

When I was eleven years old, I went for a holiday with my family to my birth country, Malaysia. I remember the long flight over the Pacific Ocean, the humid heat, the delicious food, and a little girl.

We landed in Kota Kinabalu and piled into a taxi to make the trip to the mountain town of Ranau. We stopped several times along the way to pick up snacks and enjoy the views. I noticed a little girl sitting by the roadside selling fruit at one stop. The sight struck me as odd. So I asked my mother, “Why is she selling bananas and not in school?” My mother gently answered, “You’re assuming she has a choice.”

Niger is one of the poorest countries in the world and consistently ranks amongst the lowest on the United Nation’s Human Development Index. With a life expectancy of sixty years and the world’s highest birth rate, it is not surprising that half of the population is under fifteen. Niger’s literacy rate is 35 percent, with the average child attending school for only six years. There are 0.04 physicians for every 1,000 Nigeriens, and 31 percent of children under five are underweight.





In this country, my husband Ace and I, along with our daughters, Elise and Iyla, served from 2006 to 2022 with The Alliance Canada. Over those sixteen years, my mother's words would echo in my mind as the concept of choice informed me.

Our Journey Begins

Our journey to Niger began in 1992 during a missions conference at South Edmonton Alliance Church. Eric Persson, a former international worker to Burkina Faso with The Alliance Canada, asked, "If God ever called you into full-time ministries, would you obey Him?" At the time, Ace and I were university students and not yet married. Although we had never discussed a future in full-time ministries and were not sitting together at the conference, we were both prompted by the Holy Spirit to make our way to the front to indicate we would be willing to obey.

Life carried on after the missions conference. Ace earned his Bachelor of Science and Doctor of Medicine Degrees from the University of Alberta and began practicing family medicine in Edmonton, Alberta. He would later acquire a Master of Public Health from the University of Waterloo and study tropical medicine at Johns Hopkins University. I also studied at the University of Alberta. After earning a Bachelor of Commerce Degree and a Master of Business Administration, I worked in commercial marketing in the construction and utility industries.

By 2002, Ace and I had been married for five years and were about to embark on an adventure with The Alliance Canada. The first stop was a roadside restaurant on Gasoline Alley in Red Deer, Alberta, to meet with Ron and Myra Brown, seasoned international workers to several African countries and Canadian regional developers with The Alliance Canada. The meeting was followed by many others and much prayer as we discerned how and where God could use us. The Alliance Canada was actively seeking workers for Africa, and we were willing to go where our skills could best be used. This is how we were paired with Niger.

The following four years went by in a flash. Ace scaled down his medical practice and took seminary courses. Our two daughters were born. We moved to Quebec City to study French for a year at the University of Laval. Our language learning did not end there, however. While French would serve us well in government offices and daily life once we landed in Niamey, Niger, in 2006, we needed a local language to engage Nigeriens at their heart level. We spent an additional two years studying Zarma. Years later, we would find ourselves in language learning once again. This time it was Tamajaq, as our ministries and relationships focused more exclusively on Tuaregs.

During our season of language learning, we also took the opportunity to pray over and learn about Niger, its different people groups and what our future would look like. As we did this, we clearly saw that God brought us to Niger to engage in holistic ministries.

Holistic Ministries

Amartya Kumar Sen, the 1998 Nobel Prize winner for economics, said, "Poverty is the absence of meaningful choices." Dr. Sen's statement about choice is compelling. I have freely made choices throughout my life. The choice to go to school. The choice to marry. The choice to be a parent. The choice to work. The choice to follow Jesus. This, however, is not everyone's experience.

Poverty is the
absence of
meaningful choices.

~ Amartya Kumar Sen



It is difficult, if not impossible, for choice to exist without access. Our time in Niger was primarily about participating in God’s offering of options to Nigeriens through providing access to the Gospel, healthcare, and education. Through holistic ministries, we loved and cared for the whole person; however, bringing access to the gospel message undergirded our work, for *“what good will it be for someone to gain the whole world yet forfeit their soul?”* (Matthew 16:26a)

In 2010 the Niger Vocational Training Centre (NVOC), a sewing school, was started by our colleague, Chantelle McIver, in partnership with the Adventist Development and Relief Agency. Through NVOC, we have impacted the lives of at-risk girls with little to no formal education.

Through the ministry of NVOC, we offer parents a choice to educate and train their daughters in the country with the highest child marriage rate in the world. In Niger, the legal age to marry is fifteen, and 76 percent of girls are married before they turn eighteen. Being in the program gives girls a chance to grow physically and vocationally and in their self-esteem and self-worth.

Students receive vocational training and attend French, math, health, and biblical values classes over a three-year program. Christian values and Bible stories are incorporated into the curriculum so students can openly ask questions about faith in a safe environment. Moreover, celebration days are intentionally set aside each year at Christmas and Easter, where stories of Jesus’s birth and resurrection are shared and discussed.

Being vocationally trained and empowered with increased literacy in French, numeracy, and knowledge about women’s health opens up the world of choices for students upon graduation. For many, there is the choice to work and the

ability to make a case for themselves when parents arrange marriages since they can inform their parents about the risks and dangers of early marriage. After marriage, students are better equipped to make decisions about family planning, how to raise and educate their children, and how to build healthy households.

Prayer for students and staff is a regular part of NVOC. Often prayers are offered



for family members needing a job or for health concerns. For example, one day, I received a hurried call from the head sewing teacher asking me to come to the school quickly because one of the students was sick. When I arrived, a student named Holly was sleeping on a mat outside in the shade. When I tried to rouse her, she did not wake. I asked the sewing teacher what happened, and she said a spirit was attacking Holly regularly and making her faint. At this point, I called Ace and asked him to come to the school. When he arrived, he examined Holly; her physical condition was normal. Soon after, Holly's mother arrived. We asked her if we could pray for Holly in

Jesus' name. Ace and I began praying when she agreed, and Holly started waking up. Seeing how our prayers worked, Holly's mother started chanting in Arabic. As she did, Holly's eyes rolled to the back of her head, and she fell back unconscious. Ace and I continued praying. After a few minutes, we noticed Holly starting to cry, and then she awoke. When she came to, she was physically fine, was of sound mind, and went back into the school to finish off the day.

Two weeks later, Holly pulled me aside. She told me that a month prior, she walked outside her hut and saw a black goat buried up to its neck in the sand in her family courtyard with herbs burning around it. Shortly after, she began having fainting spells. This was a sure sign that the family had been hexed. It was a privilege to witness Holly's deliverance from the curse. When we met at a wedding two years later, she testified she had not fainted again.

Friendships naturally grew out of relationships with sewing students. Alma was one such friend. I visited her at her family compound every week for years. We would sit under the shade of a hanger (an open-sided straw shelter) and share



cups of strong, sugary Tuareg tea as the family's goats and sheep milled around us. During these visits, we talked about our families, different cultures, dreams, joys, heartbreaks, and faith. I wish I could say Alma accepted Jesus as her Saviour, but she politely and gently declined as I shared the good news of Jesus. However, her rejection of the Gospel did not end our weekly visits or our friendship. As the Father loves unconditionally and without discrimination, so must we because bringing access to Jesus is but one aspect of loving the whole person.

Other relationships developed because people heard about us. People like a young woman named Bella sought us out because she heard "the church helps people."

In 2019, The Alliance Canada partnered with a local Nigerien church, l'Église Baptiste Évangélique Emmanuel Goudel, and NVOC relocated to its compound. The church is pastored by Pastor Amadou and his wife Hassi, well-known in the neighbourhood for being wise, loving, and compassionate.

When Hassi and I first met Bella, she was alone and desperate. She had made poor life choices, leading to a cycle of abuse and dangerous situations. Little by little, however, she started spending more time in the church compound, attending Sunday service and Bible study. Soon after, she gave her heart to Jesus and committed to live a life of purity.

Forgiven, loved, and armed with hope, Bella dared to dream about her future. She wanted to be a tailor, but NVOC was already at capacity, so we enrolled her

in another Christian sewing school. Three years after our first meeting, Bella is on track to graduate as a tailor. She is also married to a loving man and was blessed with a daughter.

Another Nigerien church we engaged with is l'Église Évangélique Internationale Riyad (EEI Riyad). Church members were pivotal in helping us care for and secure a safe home for a Tuareg widow with three young children.

Ally lost her husband Ray in 2020 when he was hit by a truck while riding his bicycle to work. Ray was our first house guard. He was open-minded, friendly, and loyal to a fault. Ace and Ray's friendship grew over the years as they shared significant life events. As they studied the Bible together, they debated and openly discussed the freedoms and sacrifices which came with putting one's faith in Jesus. We cannot be sure if Ray accepted Jesus as his Saviour before he died. We count it a privilege, however, how Ace was able to share the Gospel with Ray in the years prior and how we continue our relationship with his widow and children.

After Ray's death, Ally had little means to support herself and her children aside from a small widow's pension from the government. Nevertheless, she chose to remain in the city rather than return to her family's village because her children wanted to go to school.

With the help of EEI Riyad church members, God led us to the perfect rental unit. It is a small, safe space with electricity and running water. Moreover, it is in the same neighbourhood as church members, so Ally and her children have support nearby who are committed to sharing the Gospel with them in word and deed. We are also thankful for ministry partners who recorded teachings about God and Jesus in Tamajaq (the language of Tuaregs) so Ally can hear them in her own language on a solar mp3 player.

We also partnered with self-governing urban Tuareg men's cooperatives, Animataf and Tazedirte. Ace built relationships with heads of households which opened doors to spiritual conversations. Trust was built slowly over the course of several years, and the men allowed Ace to share God's Word at their monthly meetings. These gatherings were part of relief and development programs such as subsidized food aid and animal distributions.

Food aid distributions typically include 50 kilograms of rice, one kilogram of milk powder, and five litres of oil for each member of the cooperative, subsidized at half price. Distributions usually occur monthly for four to six months, depending on the severity of the food shortage. Alleviating food insecurity, even for a few months, allows heads of households to peacefully search for work while maintaining food on the table. This, in turn, means healthier families, fewer absences from school, and less stress in homes.

Animal distributions typically include goats and sheep offered to cooperative members at subsidized prices. Female animals are raised for milk and offspring potential, while male animals are raised for sale. Like food aid, subsidized animal distributions decrease food insecurity and increase income-generating prospects for the families.

Despite trusting relationships built over years of working together, a cloud of fear looms over these men, preventing them from openly pursuing Christianity. For example, one Tuareg man said someone could attend church a few times a year, but others would shun them if they attended more often. Another young Tuareg man used to visit a follower of Jesus to investigate Christianity, but his family eventually forbade him to continue the visits.

Ace had the opportunity to share Jesus's words from Matthew 10 at a food aid distribution, not to fear those who can only kill the body and not the soul, but rather fear Him, who can destroy both body and soul. He reminded the men that the food is distributed to concretely show love to the Tuaregs because we were first loved by God. Running the distribution does not help our salvation, and the food is not given as a way of buying them to become Christians. Rather, we share what we have, including the truth about God, because we cannot keep good things to ourselves. A believer at the meeting shared how it is like finding water in the desert – you cannot keep it to yourself; you must share it. After hearing this, the young Tuareg man dared to visit the follower of Jesus to ask questions about Christianity again.

Working amongst a predominately illiterate Tuareg population meant we could be creative in making the Gospel accessible. One way was through broadcasting radio programs in partnership with SIM International mission.

Five radio stations broadcast Bible programs in Tamajaq fifteen times a week. These programs reach across Niger, including areas of insecurity. Listeners are encouraged to call a phone number to discuss aired programs or ask questions. Believers who field the calls also visit listeners, bring Bibles as requested, and offer additional Christian programs through WhatsApp or SD cards.

In 2022, on the way to meet a radio program listener, two Tuaregs became the first Christians to visit a remote village in Niger. When they stopped there to share God's Word, the village chief told them they were openly welcomed because they were also Tuaregs. After a night of discussion, the believers met the radio program listener and left an SD card for the chief so he could listen to more stories of truth from the Bible.

The proliferation of smartphones and the use of Apps in Niger opened another door through which we could bring access to the Gospel.

Ace developed two Tamajaq Apps. One is the Tamajaq Bible App, created in

partnership with SIM Niger, SIL International, and Wycliffe International. The App facilitates ease of reading, listening, and sharing of the Word for both literate and oral tradition Tuaregs in Niger. Users can also create images with Tamajaq Bible verses for sharing and export videos, including the audio, so the verse is read aloud while the image is displayed. The second is the Way of Righteousness Tamajaq App, created in partnership with SIM Niger. This App presents a journey through the Bible written and adapted specifically for West Africa.

Throughout our time in Niger, providing medical care, in one form or another,



Dr. Ace screening patients at a cataract clinic with partner agency, the Nigerien Christian Blind Mission

was a steady ministry for Ace. Initially, from our arrival in 2006 until the end of 2008, it was considered safe by the Canadian government for Westerners to travel freely in the country. In this small window of time, Ace led short-term mission teams to remote northwestern Tuareg villages. These teams provided medical and dental care, distributed mosquito nets, taught health topics such as malaria and hygiene, told Bible stories using skits, and offered prayer for the sick.

Ace also ran a part-time outpatient clinic and small pharmacy in our house courtyard in Niamey. He offered free primary care, health education, vaccinations, medication, and prayer to our team's house guards, house helpers, and family members under their charge.

Sometimes, he made house calls like he did to treat Lily, a young Tuareg girl. Lily suffered third-degree burns to her leg and thigh after tripping over a cup of gasoline that spilled onto her

skirt and lit up from a nearby cooking fire.

For wound care visits, Ace packed a Rubbermaid container full of donated dressing supplies and took his Canadian Tire tool bag, which he used as a doctor's bag. At the end of each visit, Lily and her mom prayed with Ace in Jesus' name,



Dr. Ace treating Tuareg men at a mobile clinic near a military base in northwest Niger near the Mali border.

asking Him to heal and care for her.

Lily bravely bore extremely painful dressing changes daily. After weeks of care, her skin began to heal as her wounds no longer hurt to touch, plus she fought off an infection. Like a typical teenager, Lily wanted to celebrate by taking a selfie with Ace! As Ace packed up to leave, Lily said, “Don’t forget.” After a moment, Ace asked, “Don’t forget what?” She replied, “Don’t forget to pray.” Ace reassured her he would not forget. And so, they prayed together with her mom, and this time her grandpa was there too.

Our season as international workers with The Alliance Canada has come to a close. As we reflect on the relationships we have built and the experiences we were afforded, we cannot help but feel overwhelming gratitude. Through holistic ministries, we were the hands and feet of Jesus to those who were poor, who had limited opportunities and few choices. As much as we participated in God’s transforming work amongst Nigeriens, our hearts were truly transformed.



Lily, Ace, Cecilia, and Elise Cheung

We see God's desire in 1 Timothy 2:4, "[He] *wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth.*" What an immense privilege to have taken part in God's heart to reconcile His creation to Himself.

Notes:

1. Names have been changed for privacy
2. Sources used:
 - www.cia.gov (The World Factbook)
 - <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/niger/#people-and-society>
 - www.unicef.org
 - <https://data.unicef.org/country/ner/>
 - <https://www.unicef.org/protection/child-marriage>
 - www.hdr.undp.org
 - <https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-2021-22>

Chapter 11

For Better or for Worse

by Myra and Ronald Brown

We feared for our lives that day in 1997. Extreme tension between various military leaders in the city of Brazzaville, Republic of Congo, had brought out well-armed and determined militias seeking to gain control of the capital—and then the entire country. Heavy artillery shook the ground at regular intervals near our downtown duplex, where we huddled with our girls, then aged 10 and 13. Fear gripped us, and the future was fully obscured in every way.

As an armed escort, supported by the U.S. military, ushered us to the Brazzaville airport and to eventual safety in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), we had no way of knowing our fragile well-being was going to be firmly tied to the denominational changes which were brewing.

Although we didn't realize it at the time, the future of our sending organization was also going through a period of huge organizational change. The Global Ministries department was being birthed; The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada's (C&MA) overseas branch was moving into autonomy with many dreams, challenges, and significant changes for every member.

Shattered and without any realistic hopes of being able to return to Brazzaville, we went back to Alberta and wondered what was next in God's plan for us. Within weeks, we had received an unexpected call. Global Ministries Vice President Wally

Albrecht cut to the chase—would we join his Global Ministries leadership team (GMLT) to give administrative and pastoral leadership to the 30-plus workers in West Africa?

We had already been working in Africa since August 1980 when a small Cessna Mission Aviation Fellowship plane had deposited us on a red dirt runway in Boma, Zaire (now the DRC), to begin our first term of service. At



Myra teaching at the Boma Seminary
in Congo.

the time, the Gospel had already been planted in Central Africa; in fact, Congo was the Alliance mission field to which our founder, A.B. Simpson, had sent his first missionary team in 1884.

Our ministry years to that point had been primarily in the area of leadership development for this exploding church movement. But unfortunately, that chapter of our lives ended violently in 1990 when a sudden military uprising

provoked huge changes, which led to the eventual withdrawal of the missionary team. From there, we moved to Brazzaville, Republic of Congo, where violence again played a catalytic role in our lives several years later.

Taking a leap of faith and obedience, we accepted the call to join the GMLT. We moved to Bouake, Côte d'Ivoire, because of the continual stream of international workers (IWs) coming and going to the International Christian Academy, where their children attended. As a result, our house there became known as "Canada House," where Canadian IWs, among many others, could drop in for a cold Coke and a clean bathroom before hitting the road to various destinations across West Africa.

As the GMLT began to work together, questions surfaced in light of the newly established Global Ministries' purpose statement: *To glorify God by developing indigenous movements of reproducing churches among least-reached people groups.* Because this statement pointed us toward least-reached people groups, some workers would have to emigrate from reached areas and start up entirely different types of work in unreached areas. The personal and organizational costs of this re-alignment towards harmony with the new purpose statement were challenging and often painful. In some cases, workers who had invested decades into specific ministries were asked to relocate, leaving behind beloved people and fulfilling work.

First to make this move were workers in Kinshasa, DRC, who developed a withdrawal plan with a line in the sand and, as mentioned, moved on, leaving a flourishing church to continue to grow and reach out to other people groups. In 1998, the eleven Canadian workers in Gabon, a country with a greater percentage of Christians than Canada, started to transition to places like Quebec, Mauritania, and eventually Niger and Senegal.

Afterwards, over the next five years, IWs redeployed out of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Côte d'Ivoire. As this focus continued to shift towards the least-reached



Myra engaged with a group of women, c.1985.

peoples of the world, new workers were asked to join some redeployed experienced workers in order to live with the Fulani and Tuareg peoples of Niger. Global Ministries continued to work with unreached groups in Guinea while other workers moved to the unreached living north of the Sahara. There, traditional ways of establishing churches gave way to new and innovative paths towards Kingdom expansion.

During the decade we were on the GMLT, we watched the Global Ministries purpose statement serve to re-align Canadian Alliance efforts in Africa. We were blessed by the vision and skills of the leaders who directed these changes. Perhaps the most poignant memory of this eventful decade, however, was witnessing and being humbled by the all-in attitudes of the fearless foot soldiers who, at great personal cost, took up the challenge to leave mature churches and take the Gospel to the difficult places of the world.

What influences brought the two of us into this vast arena of international Kingdom building? What motivated us to live this nomadic life in four different African countries as well as France? Why couldn't we settle into a ministry and see it through for all the decades of our careers? The reasons why were very similar in each of our lives.

Our Early Years

Myra

"We gave Myra to God before she was born and prayed she would be a missionary," are words my mother wrote just after my birth. The third child of five in a pastor's home, I grew up learning about my parents' faith through Bible storybooks, Sunday school, summer Bible clubs, and getting to know many international workers who passed through our welcoming home. These workers included Roland Pickering, a linguist working in Benin. His work inspired me to someday work in Africa, spreading the Word of God.

My father was a first-generation Christian who worked fearlessly and tirelessly for his God. Starting with outdoor street preaching in his hometown of Mitchell, Ontario, he loved and served God every day of his life; I have many memories of him on his knees beside his bed with the open Bible beside him.

My mother, however, was the strongest spiritual influence in my life. A warm, hardworking, positive person, she lived and breathed her faith – somehow, her faith seemed so full of love, forgiveness, and great joy. Today her portrait smiles at me from across the room and speaks of the Saviour's unconditional love.

At the age of five, I knelt by my mother and asked Jesus into my heart. As I

grew in my knowledge of Him, I gave my whole life to Him when I was thirteen, and that, to me, meant vocational ministry. Baptism was an affirming step along the way, along with countless international influences in my life due to our family having moved to Prairie Bible Institute in Three Hills, Alberta. Also very affirming was beginning my lifelong involvement with children – two summers in southern Ontario doing backyard clubs, teaching Sunday school, working in Pioneer Girls and AWANA, ten years of church nursery, doing orphanage work in Africa, and even teaching on two occasions, a class of future pastors about the theology of the child.

After graduating from Prairie College, I took a two-year diploma program at a technical school to learn more about liberal arts and writing. Much later, I completed an MA in Religion and also earned a diploma in Teaching English as a Second Language.

As a student interested in Africa, it wasn't a leap one day in 1968 to notice Ron Brown and eventually join my life to his in 1974. After a long wait, God gave us two beloved daughters, Bethany in 1983 and Rebecca in 1987.

Ron

While in my mid-life, my mother sent me this story in a letter. She was living in the Belgian Congo and on her back resting early one afternoon when she pulled my bassinet closer to her bed. She went on to tell me, "I heard the Lord say, *'he's not yours, he's mine; you get to look after him for me.'*"

What a privilege I had to be cared for by this strong Mennonite woman from Saskatchewan. She raised me, and all during my years of growing up and ministry, she, along with Dad, was my prayer warrior.

Born and raised in Africa and then returning to work there in a 26+-year career, more than half of my life has been spent there. My mother home-schooled me during my first five years of schooling, with correspondence courses from Saskatchewan. Then after some home assignment years, I was enrolled in a residential school for missionary kids in the Congo for grades eight and nine. Dad would spend three days driving on dirt forest roads to get to the mission school, drop us three children off, and then drive three days back home.

When I was fifteen, rebel soldiers took over our part of the country in NE Congo, and we lived under house arrest for some weeks. The rebels had planned to



Hulda Schroeder Brown with
Ronnie.



My brothers Ken and David with famous Congo missionary and author Dr. Helen Roseveare on her last visit to Canada, 2011. She was our family doctor and the attending doctor at my brother David's birth in the Congo.

gather all the foreigners living there, missionaries, plantation owners, businesspeople, and diplomats and execute them. An hour before the deadline, mercenaries from Rhodesia and South Africa burst into the town, shooting in the air, and one jeep came up to our mission station. They told us to bring one suitcase and climb into the jeep. We were taken with others to a small town with an airstrip, where we were evacuated by plane two days later.

As our truckload of foreigners headed out, three military jeeps full of soldiers with machine guns were shooting and clearing the way. I witnessed the bleeding bodies of rebel soldiers who had just been killed. "Refugee" was scrawled across my passport page as I left the country and returned to Canada, eventually settling in Swift Current, Saskatchewan. My memoir, *INTERSECTIONS*, includes more details of this story and two other political evacuations I experienced.

Mel Sylvester was my pastor in Swift Current during high school. Before grade 12 students graduated, it was his custom to call them into his office during Sunday school to discuss their futures. During my session, he told me I should consider the option of a future in ministry. So I did head in that direction, first studying the Bible at Prairie College, then education at the University of Calgary, then missions at Canadian Theological Seminary in Regina.

Gordon Fowler was my pastor at Foothills Alliance Church in Calgary during my university years. When I mentioned I was looking to go into missions and trying to decide on a mission agency, he informed me that the Alliance has its own missionary-sending department. This was news to me, but I began to check it out and ended up in Regina (Canadian Theological Seminary) with my new wife, Myra, where our application for missionary service was finalized. Before leaving for Africa, the last hoop was two years of pastoring Vegreville Alliance Church in Alberta. This meant learning to work with an elders' board, learning to prepare weekly messages, and learning how to provide pastoral care to the congregation, primarily of Ukrainian descent – a good learning experience complete with a cross-cultural element.

Just as we had joined our lives 'for better or for worse,' so we embarked on a lifetime of loving,



"Take the Gospel to the ends of the earth" - I made it!

trusting, obeying, and following our parents' God for better or for worse. And one happy day in Calgary, Foothills Alliance Church commissioned us and sent us to the country then known as Zaire and later to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

First Term: 1979-1983

- **France** – a year of French language learning, including an immersion element living with a French woman in Paris.
- **Maduda, DRC** – a year of Kikongo language learning and cultural adjustments. My (Ron) most embarrassing moment was in a Sunday service where, three months into language study, the pastor looked at me after the offering and asked if I would pray. He knew I was a pastor from Canada, and I should know how to pray, but in his language? I knew how to begin and end a prayer, so I bumbled a few words and reached into my French vocabulary to pray a short prayer. I sat down, so embarrassed. During the next week, I worked with my language helper to create and memorize a decent offering prayer, from the start to Amen. I was ready and sat confidently on my bench. After the offering was taken, he turned to an elder to pray. What! I was ready, all my work for nothing?! I was dejected. We had the sermon, and then he turned to me and asked for a closing prayer – you must be kidding!
- **Boma, DRC** – Myra managed the mission guesthouse as well as the literature department, which produced tracts and maintained satellite bookstores stocked with Bibles and school supplies. Ron taught some courses at the Boma Seminary and was field director in our fourth year for a team of about 30 missionaries from three sending countries (Canada, USA, Holland) who were involved in medical work, theological training and church planting. We were green as grass, but we stood on the shoulders of others who had gone before us and leaned into the Lord, who never let us down.



Often 30 or more youth would be lined up on Easter Sunday to be baptized two by two in Boma's largest church of 2,000 members.

Second Term: 1984-1989

- **Muanda, DRC** – first three years training others for leadership in Theological Education by Extension (TEE). An American donated a boat which Ron used every two weeks to travel up the Congo River to three fishing villages for leadership training classes in the local language and travel by road to several other villages for the same courses. Myra taught literacy classes, cared for our first child, and prepared a basic manual for women's meetings.
- **Alberta** – for three months for family reasons.
- **Kinshasa** – Ron spent a year as the business agent for the mission, making purchases for missionaries in rural areas, booking out-of-country travel with a travel agent, meeting guests and visitors at the Kinshasa airport, and processing visa applications at government offices.
- **Boma** – a year with Boma Seminary in administration and teaching.
- **Note** - This five-year term saw us living in three different cities doing wildly different types of work for the mission and church (for better or worse).



A bi-weekly TEE class with village church leaders in the shade of a mango tree, using manuals in the local Kikongo language. They did their lessons during the week; I came to listen and discuss the application.

Second Home Assignment: 1989-1991

- **Regina** – a year as missionary-in-residence at Canadian Bible College (CBC), teaching a couple of missions courses and hosting groups of students interested in international work. We both turned 40 and bought our first computer!
- **Calgary** – a year as missionary-in-residence at Southview Alliance Church.
- **Note** – we asked for a two-year home assignment to avoid returning to Africa after a year in Regina at CBC without having visited churches in our home district of Alberta.

Third Term: 1991-1992

- **Kinshasa** – six weeks after arriving in Africa to start our third term, we were evacuated out of Congo; our home was broken into and looted after we left.
- **Kinshasa** – I, Ron, returned three months later as the C&MA representative on a food distribution initiative of World Relief. Early one morning, I received a phone call from Myra in Canada informing me my father had died. That day, as the mission driver chauffeured me around the city inspecting food distribution centres, I sat alone in a city of six million people, staring (at times with tears) out the Landcruiser window in my grief. I was able to book a flight home in time for the funeral. (We were where we were, for better or worse.)
- **Note** – this third term never materialized but was full of trauma and transition. Because we had lost our belongings, Foothills Alliance and other churches and individuals generously replaced everything we had lost and more.

Leave of Absence: 1992-1994

- Ron was on the pastoral staff of Southview Alliance Church in Calgary, working with such luminaries as Terry Young and Lynda Friesen.
- Myra graduated with her MA from Canadian Theological Seminary. God had provided her with a part-time job and a supportive husband so she could take course modules here and there until all the requirements were complete. (For better or for worse.)
- David Noel, a colleague from Congo days, phoned to say he was starting a new team in Brazzaville, Congo and asked if we would join and provide leadership for pastoral training.

Fourth Term: 1994-1997

- **Brazzaville, Congo** – with a new team of eleven missionaries focusing on discipleship training and helping to launch the Centre for Christian Studies. We learned to contextualize—most pastors were bi-vocational, working all day, so we taught in the evenings.
- **Life Interrupted** – Civil war broke out, and we evacuated to Kinshasa, but after a month of seeing no peace or safety in Brazzaville, we returned to Canada empty-handed once again, having lost all our belongings and our vehicle.



Ron, Rebecca, Bethany, and Myra on the Congo River in Brazzaville

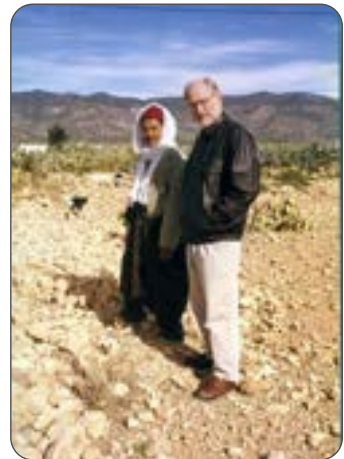
- **Note** – this was our first experience working on a tightly-knit team towards specific goals, and we loved it! When war came, and we fled, leaving developing relationships and unfinished projects behind, we were devastated and lost. Southview Alliance and other churches again replaced all our belongings and welcomed us back (for better or for worse).

Fourth Home Assignment: 1997-1998

- **Three Hills, Alberta**, was our base – In response to Wally Albrecht’s request mentioned in the introduction, we joined the newly formed Global Missions Leadership Team and started in January 1998.
- **Note** – this wasn’t a scheduled home assignment. Instead, it was time to shift gears and then move on to the GMLT, a brand-new type of work for us. After this, we didn’t count our work in “terms” anymore. We just worked and took a month of vacation every year like the rest of the world.

Regional Developers for Africa: 1998-2007

- **Bouake, Côte d’Ivoire, 1998-2002** – ‘Canada House’ became the base for the C&MA Africa; in our new role as Canadian regional developers for Africa, we visited all Canadian Alliance workers in the region, usually at least twice a year.
- **Three Hills, Alberta, 2002-2005** – our base changed to Three Hills, from where we made periodic trips to Africa.
- **Dakar, Senegal, 2005-2006** – our base moved to Dakar, where the boarding school had moved.
- **Note** – During our nine years on the GMLT, we lived in four cities in three countries, a



Travelling the region of Africa and connecting with a Berber in Tunisia

lot of transition – for better or for worse.

- **Mobile Member Care Team** – Ron was involved with the West Africa Mobile Member Care Team (1999-2017) as a board member, a trainer and seminar facilitator working with Dr. Karen Carr, Marion Dicke, and Darlene Jerome –



pictured here at a conference in Senegal. During these years, he researched and wrote a doctoral project entitled “Self-identified retention factors by Western missionaries in Africa who have experienced traumatic events.”



What a thrill on graduation day (2005) to have a handshake with Dr. Tite Tienou, VP/Academic Affairs at Trinity International University. Dr. Tienou is an Alliance pastor from Burkina Faso.

Post Africa: 2006 – Present

Myra

Kept the C&MA Africa office open with Ron’s help until Richard and Merinda Enns were appointed and settled in.

- 2006 - 2008: Administrative Assistant at Trinity Mennonite Church. I needed a job and loved working halftime in this church just outside Calgary.
- 2008 – 2012: Training Events Coordinator, Cooperative ESL Ministries. This organization, founded by Madeline Johnson, opened my eyes to the realities of new Canadians in Calgary. We trained church volunteers to hold conversational English classes in neighbourhood churches of all denominations.
- 2010: Sensing a need to be more qualified for my job, I earned a TESL (Teaching English as Another Language) Diploma at Mount Royal University.
- 2013 – Present: Kairos Head Facilitator, working in many courses with

scores of tremendous volunteers, has been life-changing for me. I now live for His Kingdom in ways I didn't before absorbing this teaching.

- 2013 – Present: Volunteer, at Calgary Catholic Immigration Services (CCIS), in a federally sponsored refugee community program, connecting families to Calgary from Myanmar, DRC, Afghanistan, Syria, and Northern Iraq.
- 2006 – Present: Grandmother, for better or for worse.
- 1974 - Present: Facilitating Ron Brown, for better or for worse.

Ron

- **Vice President for Global Ministries, August – December 2006**

While in Dakar, Franklin Pyles, president of the C&MA in Canada, asked us to consider the Western Canadian District's missions mobilizer position based in Calgary. We said 'yes', and within a month, Myra returned to Alberta while I finished up with some appointments and returned a month later.

I was visiting Merinda and Richard Enns in Montreal, discussing options for them, including taking over the Africa regional role. Dr. Pyles phoned again, asking if I would consider filling in as interim vice president of Global Ministries for six months until the permanent person was designated. So for those months, I commuted from Calgary to Toronto for ten-day stints in the office.

- **Mission Mobilizer, Calgary, January 2007 – July 2019**
 - **Mobilizing the Canadian Church** – On returning from Africa in 2006, I immediately became involved in the Perspectives Course and later the Kairos course to mobilize the church. I worked as the Alberta Kairos coordinator, running the first course at Ambrose University in May 2013 and continued to develop new trainers and facilitators, participating in some 60+ training courses. Both Myra and I were head facilitators. I was on the national coordination team for Simply Mobilizing Canada for eight years.
 - **Missions Mobilizer in the Western Canadian District** - Being part of the district team leadership was a privilege. I frequently promoted God's heart for the nations while meeting with missions committees, having coffee with pastors, and speaking on Sundays in one of the hundred district churches. During these years, I was engaged by Ambrose University to teach a cultural anthropology course, and I began the annual Perspectives/Kairos course at Ambrose every second week of May and worked with the Jaffray Centre to develop a syllabus for a three-credit course.

After discussions with other mission mobilizers, it became clear there was no common ‘vault’ for mission resources we wanted to use nationwide. So, the globalvault.ca was born as a collection bucket for resources; it continues to grow and is today referenced on various websites.



- **Producing Books on Alliance Missions, 2016 - Present**



With Charlie Cook signing volume 3 of our trilogy

- Dr. Charles Cook, professor of intercultural studies at Ambrose Seminary, and I began working on a trilogy (2016, 2018, 2020) published by The Alliance Canada. See [page 150](#) for more information.
- Since retiring in 2019 after 40 years of employment with the C&MA, I have engaged in some projects close to my heart.
 - A collection of [missionary biographies](#) on the Global Vault since 2007.
 - A new series of mission books, *ON MISSION – Stories of Those Who Went*, available as a [free download](#) and [in print](#).
 - A member care book, a missions primer, and a theology of mission were also produced. These are available as a [free download](#) and [in print](#).

Conclusion



Ours was different from the more typical story of international workers. It was not our privilege to start in a position and mostly work there until our retirement. Instead, we were part of various teams working in four different countries of Africa and living in more than a dozen different houses and communities until we finally settled in Calgary in 2006.

What hasn't changed during all this time is our deep gratitude to our church, to the C&MA, to our families, and to the many who prayed for us and gave generously to the Global Advance Fund so we could do His work in Africa.

Despite all the transition we went through and our numerous mistakes and

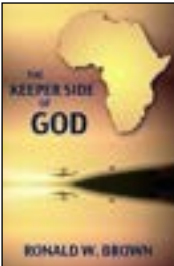
failings, God kept us true to His original calling on our lives. We followed Him then, and we follow Him now, wanting only to give glory to His Name. For all He did and does through us, we praise Him. May His Kingdom come!

Publications



INTERSECTIONS by Ronald W. Brown

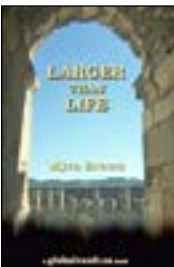
This is the story of my life and how it intersected with the four streams of missiology, showing my place in the history of missions, showing where cultural anthropology helped me as an international worker to journey alongside other cultures, showing a variety of strategic methodologies used in my missionary career, and then showing how a life based on a theology of mission took me from being a blessed one to then engage with the nations of Africa and beyond. Available [here](#).



The Keeper Side of God by Ronald W. Brown

Africa is becoming a more violent place to live and work. At any given time, several countries are involved in ethnic wars, on the brink of a coup d'état, or in turmoil of one kind or another. Working in these settings are human resources associated with non-governmental organizations, relief and development agencies and missionary organizations. One result of populations at war is the sudden displacement of people through political evacuations.

This research project identifies and analyzes factors of retention in Western missionaries in Africa who have experienced evacuation trauma yet have been able to continue in their missionary calling. Available [here](#).



Larger than Life by Myra Brown

On a warm day in July 1956, Jessie and Herb Nehlsen were about to step onto African soil for the first time. They were filled with great faith and optimism—ready to work, laugh, pray, and give their entire lives to the Samogo people.

Throughout their missionary career, they followed the principle: “We don’t need a call to go where the need is endless; we need a call to stay where the work is well supplied.”

And for four decades, the Nehlsens served with joy. No matter what happened, their attitude was always the same, “Hallelujah, anyhow!” Available [here](#).

Canadian Alliance Missions Engagement

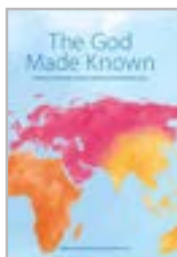
Books that tell our story



The God You May Not Know: Ordinary People Leading Extraordinary Lives, edited by Ronald Brown and Charles Cook.

In *A God You May Not Know*, Ron and Charles provide a compelling collection of true-life stories. This autobiographical material by people who have "been there, done that" is both informative and inspirational. As Alliance missionaries, when they tell their stories, they are telling our story. They provide a window through which you catch a glimpse of our mission.

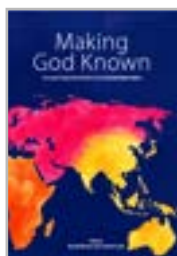
Mel Sylvester, President of C&MA in Canada, 1980-1992



The God Made Known: Through Ordinary People Leading Extraordinary Lives, edited by Ronald Brown and Charles Cook.

The God Made Known should be required reading for anyone ministering or leading within our Alliance churches, as well as for anyone looking to be inspired and encouraged by God's hand and provision in the joys and deep challenges of reaching out to the nations with the Good News of Christ. How does God work in the world? For some insight, read through the pages of this compelling history.

Clyde Glass, Lead Pastor, Southview Alliance Church, Calgary



Making God Known: To Least-Reached People In Extraordinary Ways, edited by Ronald Brown and Charles Cook.

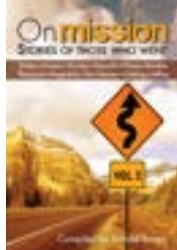
This book tells our story.... As with any good family narrative, you'll also discover connections and explanations about people and initiatives that were previously unknown to you. It is like reading a collection of family stories. This book chronicles how our denomination got the gospel message out to people and places where Christ is unknown. It recounts how it all came together and the people who made it happen in a world where there was war, uncertainty, chaos, and upheaval....

Pamela Nordstrom, Ph.D., Vice President, Academic Affairs, Ambrose University

To download a zip file containing a FREE PDF of these three books, click on the link below and the download will start immediately.

<https://www.cmacan.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Book-Series-CMA.zip>

ON MISSION Series



ON MISSION: Stories of Those Who Went, Volumes 1-3, edited by Ronald Brown

These books contain stories of more Canadian Alliance international workers. They celebrate the redeeming work of God and provide accountability to those who faithfully provided sons and daughters, finances and prayers, for God's mission.

They describe how workers in obedience to God's call engaged in His redeeming activities all over the world by going to some of the most difficult places. They persevered, some under horrible conditions, having survived traumatic events, in order to see communities of faith established amongst least-reached peoples.

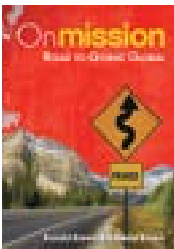
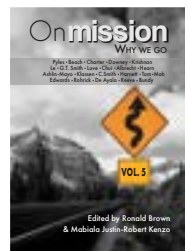


ON MISSION: Caring for Those Who Go, Volume 4, edited by Ronald Brown

The chapters in this book show how the international worker's sending church, team leader, agency office, and member care provider can all better lean into their roles; namely, being the presence of Jesus walking alongside the workers and "keeping" them as they carry out the Great Commission.

ON MISSION: Why We Go, Volume 5, edited by Ronald Brown and Mabilia Justin-Robert Kenzo

Knowing clearly why we go, how we go, and what issues must be considered as one goes is absolutely crucial in the life of every Christ-follower and their obedience to both Christ's example and command.



ON MISSION: Road to Going Global, Primer, by Ronald Brown and Rebecca Brown

This primer contains 16 tips the authors wish they had known sooner and many helpful resources for those preparing to go on mission.

[Download your FREE copies today or purchase print copies!](#)

**For more biographies, podcasts, blogs
and book reviews, please visit**

The Global Vault

The Global Vault – A Toolbox for Missions

Biographies



GVPodcast



GVAcademy



globalvault.ca

Around the globe Alliance workers are actively reaching out to the least-reached people groups of this world. The Global Advance Fund is the primary means of providing for our workers.

thealliancecanada.ca/give

On mission

STORIES OF THOSE WHO WENT

The mission of God is advancing with global workers who have "...a consecrated edginess that fixates on the worth of Jesus and his glory amongst all nations."

- Dick Brogden

Compiled by Ronald Brown

Cover Design: Dan Nel
Cover Photography
Joel Dunn, Fabien Bazanegue
& Will Stewart



global vault

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