

WINDOW ON THE WORLD

Fall/Winter 2020

Seeing Jesus Clearly in a World in Crisis by Rev. Ted Rathman

In the month of September my church and I embarked on a journey of endeavoring to figure out how we, as followers of Jesus, can see him clearly when our world, whether that is global or personal, is in crisis. Each Sunday we focused on a particular word that would, I believed, help us as a church continue to follow Jesus faithfully and passionately as we dealt with our changing lives as a result of Covid-19. In this shared ministry capacity as the Global Ministries Associate and pastor of Grace EC Church, I am always thinking of how what I am preaching applies cross culturally, and this sermon series was no different. I shared that the Scriptures provide the framework we need in order for us to see Jesus clearly as we navigate these uncharted waters in our world. As a church we looked at how the Bible discusses and defines these five words: Perspective, Lament, Peace, Sacrifice, and Eternity and how understanding them from a Biblical perspective can help us see Jesus clearly.

When I shared these messages at Grace Church, the word that kept coming back to my mind when I, as the GMA, thought about the world situation was the word “sacrifice”. In many ways the work of the GMC revolves around asking the global EC Church, but specifically, the US EC Church to sacrifice on behalf of our brothers and sisters in Christ. This reality was brought before me afresh as I received emails and calls from our International leaders describing how the lockdowns were dramatically impacting their congregations. When the world is in crisis, one’s mind and immediate instinct does not automatically go toward sacrifice or sacrificing on behalf of others, and this seemed to prove itself out as stories emerged of super markets and various other stores running out of supplies as people hoarded items. I remember standing in line at Lowe’s to purchase an item for the church back in March and asking the gentlemen in front of me if he was building a bunker with the mountain of supplies he was purchasing. He responded that due to the current situation he would be spending the next three weeks at home and since he wouldn’t need to go to work could finally get to that home improvement project he had been putting off. While Lowe’s and Home Depot had their best quarter in months during the pandemic, our pastors in Mexico struggled to provide food for their families and congregations.

When I thought about our world in crisis and Scriptures' various discussions of sacrificing for others, I immediately remembered these words from Paul when writing to the church in Corinth:

And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ²In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability.

The Macedonian churches were experiencing their own crisis and what welled up inside of them was rich generosity, or one might say sacrifice, for the impoverished brothers and sisters living a world away in Jerusalem. What a great example of how to love and follow Jesus in the midst of a world in crisis. We too, as the EC Church USA, have this same opportunity to see Jesus clearly in a world in crisis by continuing to support our EC Churches around the globe by sacrificing on their behalf, and in many cases, not all, not out of poverty, but out of the wealth God has blessed us with in this country. We put this message of sacrifice into practice at Grace Church on October 11th by not holding a Sunday service, but rather going out into Schuylkill County to serve and love our neighbors through various outdoor work projects as the Church (the people) left the building. May we as the EC Church USA, see our present circumstances as an opportunity and privilege to sacrifice for our EC family all over this world. Please consider how you or your church can provide for our International Churches during this time of Covid-19, and as you sacrifice may you see Jesus clearly in this world in crisis.

I hope this edition of the *Window on the World* will provide you a glimpse of how the GMC seeks to help the EC Church USA sacrifice on behalf of others.

International Churches report – Rev. Ted Rathman

A recurring theme regarding our International churches will of course resemble much of what has taken place in the United States; which is to say, a lot of the normal events of ministry were canceled due to Covid-19. The United Nations is estimating that starvation will affect tens of thousands of children this year due just to the global lockdowns. Most of the funds that the GMC has distributed have gone to our church leaders to buy food and supplies to feed members of EC churches; without these donations many would have gone hungry. It is clear that whatever happens with the actual Covid-19 virus in the future, the global disruption to all areas of life will continue to impact our churches well into 2021.

Japan

At the beginning of April 2020, the government of Japan announced a temporary State of Emergency that was eventually lifted in May 2020. However, the Annual Conference typically held in Japan during the month of April was cancelled due to Covid-19. The country of Japan has begun to ease travel restrictions with other Southeast Asian countries already and will most likely allow travel again from all countries excluding tourists. Due to the travel restrictions and cancellation of National Conference, the Vision Tour that the Japan EC Church had originally scheduled for our National Conference 2020 was canceled. Along with this trip cancellation, a mission trip from Grace Community Church in Willow Street to Japan for the summer of 2020 was also canceled.

The churches in Japan are offering both online and onsite services. Similarly to the United States, the churches are seeking to comply with the guidelines the government has put forward for physical gatherings. One of the major difficulties stems from the inability to host events that serve food. The Japan EC Church, and specifically Grace Garden Church, used holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas to host parties as outreaches into their communities that would typically involve food. The leaders are meeting to figure out how they can continue to do some kind of ministry to reach people around these events. The churches are also seeking to provide CDs to people who cannot attend physically or have the capability to use online platforms.

Like many of the EC Churches in the USA, due to these online services many people who have not attended church are able to participate online and they have even reached new people that have never actually been to church. Even some members who have moved to the United States have been able to join EC Churches in Japan via the internet. With the new addition of online services, the churches have sought new ways to do evangelism utilizing the reach they now have. The EC Church- Japan has also endeavored to have their cell groups become more active since the larger gatherings are being discouraged and will be looking for opportunities to begin new cell groups.

India:

In April of 2020, the Bishop and I were scheduled to travel to India to take part in the Annual General Conference and the General Leaders Conference (their National Conference) to observe and celebrate the election of a new General Director. Naturally, that trip was canceled due to the global pandemic. However, the EC Church of India was still able to hold that election and on May 15th, 2020 in Churachandpur Rev. Paozathang Singson took office for a four-year term to replace Rev Dr Kaitinkap Vaiphei. Rev. Singson has served as a missionary with ECCI in Bhutan and Arunachal, India and has also served as the Missions Director in the ECA presbytery. Rev. Singson taught as a lecturer for our Evangelical College of Theology for a few years. He has a heart to see ECCI expand its missions work into places like Bangladesh and Myanmar. Overall,

the transition into the director position was relatively smooth considering the circumstances and I look forward to meeting and working with Rev. Singson in the future.

In late March the government of India ordered the country in lockdown and most of our churches in Churachandpur could only do online services. However, the churches in the “hilly country” were able to carry on as normal which provided the new General Director opportunity to fellowship with them. In the midst of the lockdown, Rev. Singson has been able to visit all the presbytery offices that make up ECCI and even organized a fellowship time for the leaders of the presbyteries to share and encourage one another through the pandemic.

As of July 2020 the government has still forbidden churches to gather and hold services in the “town area” and this has had a very negative impact. The economic situation has hit our churches very hard and Rev. Singson believes if the situation continues it will be difficult for many of them to survive. In addition, a large number of the missionaries of ECCI have returned home due to Covid-19 and they too are struggling to provide for their families and wondering whether or not they will return to the mission field. The leaders of ECCI will plan, tentatively, to make the most of this circumstance by holding a training in December 2020 to encourage and equip the missionaries while they are home. The leadership of ECCI will hopefully hold a Camp and leadership training for one of the smallest presbyteries, Evangelical United Church when the lockdown is over.

Evangelical College of Theology

From Dr. Rev. Lalrosiem Songate:

“It’s been more than four months since we have been under lockdown due to the pandemic. I thought it was a miracle that we were able to end the Spring Semester with a graduation service (a small one though) at the end of May in the midst of an intense lockdown. But the fact that we have been able to start a new academic session as exactly scheduled, and with the highest number of enrollment in recent years is indeed the Lord’s great doing, and may His name be praised! We also have 7 students enrolled in our M. Th. program which is our maximum capacity at this time.”

The Evangelical College of Theology has had to move to online classes which they were not doing previously, and all the faculty and teachers have had to learn how to use Google Classrooms for their instruction. This proves even more difficult when internet connections are very weak and limited throughout the day.

“However, with the increase in the spread of Covid-19, Manipur has now been declared as a community transmission zone and as I write this reports (August 3rd, 2020) there has been a record of seven deaths as per the government reports. How fast this death rate will grow its hard to say, but with the poor healthcare system in India and Manipur in particular, the very thought itself is alarming. We have twenty-eight students staying in the hostel as accessing internet is not possible for them in their homes for the online classes. We are doing our best to prevent them from any possible contamination as any

positive case found among them will result in our campus declared as containment zone and all restrictions as per the rules will be imposed. That will also affect our online classes.”

As noted previously, the Corona virus itself simply begins a ripple effect of the many challenges the families, leaders, and churches face.

Nepal:

On March 24th, 2020 the government of Nepal enforced a lockdown of the country which remained in effect until July 21st, 2020. The GMC was able to send funds quickly so that ECCN could buy rice in order to distribute it to their churches. Starvation will be at an all-time high following the complete disruption of supply chains and the economic shock the world economy has undergone through the various government-imposed lockdowns. The churches were not allowed to meet and those who were able moved to online services. Due to the fact that many people and churches do not have that capability, the leadership of ECCN sought to organize the people into smaller groups so that they could meet in people’s homes during the pandemic. They also arranged for families to engage in prayer and fasting on a rotational basis and challenged people to read the Bible for three hours each morning. Janga’s one son has read the Bible through twice since the lockdown began. All of the various fellowship groups that would meet throughout the year also cancelled all of their gatherings. The classes for the ELTC have also been cancelled and the graduation of the 2nd graduating class of ELTC has been postponed.

In the midst of these challenges, the EC Church of Nepal continues to take the gospel into new areas. Rev. Janga and others have been doing missions work with the Chepang tribe which is the “poorest” and most “uncivilized” tribe in Nepal and will hopefully be able to inaugurate a new church plant in this region very soon. Another development in Nepal over the last year or so has been the increased pressure from the government for Christians not to convert anyone or distribute Christian information. If the government decides to prosecute someone for these offenses, it could be up to five or six years in jail. However, the churches continue to do personal evangelism and witness door to door, although much of that has ceased as a result of the lockdown.

Mexico:

The Mexican government ordered a lockdown on March 23rd, 2020 of most of its economy and restricted physical gatherings. The churches in Mexico, similarly to everywhere else, sought to begin online services for those who were able to access the internet and possessed the technology to watch. This has proved difficult since many of our churches are not in areas where they can access this technology. The leader of the EC Churches of Latin

America, Rev. Juan Morales Zuñiga, actually contracted Covid-19 as did many members in his church. Rev Zuñiga has recovered from the virus but has had one death in his church. The other EC churches in Mexico are reporting that they have many members who have suffered from the virus. However, the most difficult issue all of the churches face pertains to the economic shutdown and closure of many businesses. Due to the lack of work, the pastors have not received offerings and therefore have struggled to pay their bills. It was only at the end of August that the government gave permission to churches to begin worshipping again in their buildings, and that was only at 30% capacity. Some of the pastors could not afford food, medicine, or rent for their homes and church buildings. This has led to many of them selling property, cars, or other personal belongings in order to meet their basic needs.

Mexico Covid Response:

The GMC has responded by disbursing necessary funds to Mexico to bring aid to the pastors of our churches and their families. This past year the Vacation Bible School focus centered on the work being done in Mexico with the hopes of helping them fund a renovation project to create a training center. Obviously, many of the churches in the USA did not hold a VBS this year and so the monies that typically come in during the summer months to fund this project did not amount to what we usually send. However, with the appeal letter that went out earlier we hope that this will generate some extra support, along with encouraging churches to still take an offering for the ECC of Latin America. We hope to be able to supplement the VBS offering. These funds, rather than going to the building project, will go to help the pastors and their families as well as the families of their churches.

Liberia:

If you have been reading/watching the news you probably know that, fortunately, Africa has not experienced a high number of infections and deaths compared to the rest of the world. However, the Covid-19 lockdowns will potentially create an even bigger threat in places like Liberia in western Africa when it comes to basic needs and the discontinuation of vaccination clinics for things like measles, diphtheria, and wild polio (which was recently reported eradicated from Africa). The GMC, through our World Relief account, responded quickly when the lockdowns throughout the world were enforced in late March. The leader of ECCOL, Bishop Abraham Powell, shared:

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic poses a grave health threat to Indigenous peoples. Indigenous communities in Liberia already experience poor access to healthcare, significantly higher rates of communicable and non-communicable diseases, lack of access to essential services, sanitation, and other key preventive measures, such as clean water, soap, disinfectant, etc. Likewise, most nearby local medical facilities, if

and when there are any, are often under-equipped and under-staffed. Even when Indigenous peoples are able to access healthcare services, they can face stigma and discrimination. A key factor is to ensure these services and facilities are provided in indigenous languages, and as appropriate to the specific situation of Indigenous peoples. The equipment is of great use in this venture and we are going to also be recording health and hygiene promotion messages on the COVID-19 prevention for them to easily get to understand all about the virus.

Indigenous peoples experience a high degree of socio-economic marginalization. They are indeed faced with food insecurity, as a result of the loss of their traditional lands, territories and confront even graver challenges in access to food. With the loss of their traditional livelihoods, which are often land-based, many Indigenous peoples in our churches and church communities' traditional occupations and subsistence economies or in the informal sectors are adversely affected by the pandemic. The situation of indigenous women, who are often the main providers of food and nutrition to their families, is even graver.

The GMC and Liberia Committee purchased equipment for the purpose of recording messages from Bishop Powell, Biblical teachings and doctrine for the pastors and leaders of the churches, and other discipleship and evangelism training that can be delivered by motorbikes to the difficult-to-reach areas of the country where some of our churches exist. They have now used this equipment to share messages about hygiene, cleanliness, and protocols in dealing with Covid-19.

MINISTERING DURING A PANDEMIC

Obviously, COVID 19 has impacted all of our lives, as well as those of people around the world. Our missionaries have also had to adjust to the 'new normal' of initially staying home except for medical appointments and necessary shopping, face masks in public, etc. However, just because their usual method of ministering was disrupted, our missionaries weren't just holed up at home. They have had to adapt to a new way of reaching out. Here are some of their stories:

Kathy Wilson, PNG

We arrived back from our remote village in March having heard very little news about the Covid. In fact I was very excited to start on my month long trip to see our children & grandchildren. Tickets were bought & plans all laid out to visit my family in four states. What a disappointment to cancel :-(. Once in the states it would have been very difficult to return to PNG & back to my husband.

Many of our PNG friends were ask to return to their home countries because of health, pregnancy or age. How we thank God for good health to stay on. If the covid does hit our mission center we are not well equipped or staffed, with only one doctor & several nurses. Only one half of the membership stayed behind in PNG. Many are now finding it almost impossible to return because of cancelled flights.

Our aviation department needs special government permission granted for us to travel within the country of PNG. It is also very difficult to transit through Australia at the moment. Speaking for our branch, SIL-PNG is facing significant challenges, including personnel shortages and the financial burden of crisis response.

Be as it may, Jonathan was granted permission to hold a three week consultant checking of 6% more Binandere scripture with the three village men who traveled by boat & road to our mission center during July. And now we have been granted permission to fly to our village in Oro province to continue translation work mid Sept through November. We normally host regular gatherings in our village home for co-translators and neighbors, so we are praying for wisdom and ease in adjusting to COVID guidelines. I hopes to safely visit village families and distribute Binandere scripture pages. We have agreed to not enter homes or have others enter our village home. Jonathan is able to daily work outside & under our village home with his translation team.

For a few months we were not allowed to have friends into our homes, but have since moved out of that phase. We are able to gather for exercise classes, host people in our homes, and gather at the meeting house for Sunday services. Our Primary & high schools are also teaching "in person". We feel blessed.

I miss many of our good friends away in their home countries. But God has allowed us to connect with others & even get better acquainted with some of the young families in our Ukarumpa community.

God is good & we are clinging to Him during these uncertain times.

Ken Sears, Ukraine

As Ukrainians seem always to kick off their response when you ask them to tell you about something: "*Well, what can I say about...*" life with Covid in Zaporozhye, Ukraine? A lot of it is, by now, same-old-same-old all over the world. Our seminary is wrestling mightily with the complications it brings. There's no such thing as an ideal solution, only make-do ones. "Zoom" rules, it seems! Still, we're going bold and planning on-site instruction for our small-ish full-time department. The much larger part-time one...I am still not sure. Uncertainty abounds. It can all be terribly upsetting if you let yourself give in to it. My church is now (don't gasp) back to completely normal services, just like before. Packed hall. And nobody in masks. Actually, nobody in Zaporozhye is wearing masks anymore except in stores that demand it. I can't quite explain it: it's like the "collective consciousness" rose up and said, "Enough!" Yet Zaporozhye remains one of Ukraine's sparkling "green" (safe) zones with minimal Covid incidence. It's...phenomenal. We prayed fervently for this, as we prayed in tears five years ago for the Lord to spare our city from the war. He seems to have poured out His mercy in both cases.

Joe Toy – Philly/NJ area

When the Covid-19 lockdown began in the US, we were in Miami, FL with a team of Liberty University students. We finished our five-day children's outreach in Liberty Homes, but saw our night time crowds diminish as Miami began to shut things down, so we finished up and came home one day early. After arriving home, I explored our ministry sights to see how many people were out and about. There were people out at the various transportation centers although the number of commuters had diminished in size. So our local ministry in the Philly area never shut down. I checked the legal angles and neither PA nor NJ shut down religious organizations, both states have strong religious freedom statements in their constitution. I also contacted my friend who is a lawyer in case we might need him. I have had no problems with the authorities in any of our outreach locations in Camden, Upper Darby, and the Olney and Frankford sections of Philly. I have also joined some friends for three organized outreaches in Ocean City, MD over the summer. I am still able to share the gospel with hundreds of people each week,

On the downside, all of our Event Outreaches such as Indy 500, Kentucky Derby and the RNC in FL were canceled due to no spectators allowed or the canceling of the event. A few summer outreach teams canceled also because of the virus. Lastly, our annual outreaches in London have been canceled, because of travel restrictions. College campus ministry was totally shut down in the spring and most schools are doing virtual classes this fall, with the exception of Temple University and possibly the University of Delaware, so we may get on these campuses this fall. Because we live in the Philly area, I will keep busy in the local harvest fields and as things begin to open up and change we will spread out to other harvest fields. I have already made plans to be at the Super Bowl, Mardi Gras, Spring Break and London outreaches in 2021.

David Hershey, Campus Ministry in Reading, PA

Usually this time of year is the coming to fruition of lots of planning for a long semester of discipling Christian students and seeking to actively reach out to other students on campus. But planning a whole semester seemed nearly laughable this summer, or at least, quite mystifying. From planning what to do with my students and coaching other ministers as they planned, the common refrain was, “how do you plan when you have no idea what the semester is going to look like?”

Every university campus has its unique challenges. At Penn State, any student club meeting that has more than ten people needs to be approved by student life. Due to this, we are planning to do our Thursday night meetings online. All student club travel has been denied, so we had to cancel our fall retreat. As classes began, campus is much quieter since all classes have a virtual option and thus most commuter students are just staying home. Everything has changed.

Yet, our purpose has remained the same: discipleship, evangelism, hospitality, acts of love. Students still need community and our goal is to build this community. Just yesterday we had an ice cream social during which we also handed out care packages (donated from EC Churches!) and masks. Rather than planning a whole semester, we’re planning one week at a time. Next week we’ll have Bible study. We’re kicking up our social media outreach so students know we exist. We are planning a virtual fall retreat, small groups (under 10!) on campus, activities off campus, and opportunities to serve others on campus and in the community. Everything has changed...except our mission and purpose.

Gloria Smethers - Florida

Obviously we have had to adapt to the Covid-19 restrictions, lockdowns, detailed research information that we hardly understood before middle of March! For a while it

was worse trying to decide how best to gradually open up than to shut down. But I was want to start by thanking the Lord for HIS goodness that none of the 84 residents, staff or volunteers have been diagnosed with Covid-19 to date of writing this. PRAISE BE TO HIM! Normally, we have only 2 nurses on staff (myself+ another) but the Lord gave clear direction and a number of our retired nurses and two doctors met several times at the beginning. After some meeting we chose 4 people to be on our own "TASK FORCE" here at the Retirement center. We considered the restrictions the governor and decided how best to close down activities at the start. Later we had two town hall meetings on the property so that everyone could attend one the same day to hear/voice concerns about restrictions and research. That helped to decrease tension. Covid also curbed the number of doctor visits we are making in-person and increased the number of virtual calls which has it benefits and frustrations. It has meant not many trips in the Florida heat/rain, but it is frustrating for some residents who don't have cell phones in order to do virtual calls. Nevertheless, I do believe that we are all slowly adjusting wearing masks more often, standing apart from others and not going out to restaurants as often as we liked- perhaps a savings!!!

For me it has meant learning what DUO or ZOOM is, picking up medications more often for others on the property from grocery store pharmacy or the drive thru more frequently as well as other nursing responsibilities. On August 12th I felt that I should get tested. It came back positive two days later. That started a chain of events to contact 35 folks with whom I had spent more than 15 minutes in the 7 days prior. I was in isolation at home for 10 days and notified the Florida health department. PRAISE THE LORD all 35 folks were negative. I re-tested twice and they came back negative so we figure mine was a false positive as I had not symptoms at all. I was thankful that it was me who tested positive rather than one of the residents. Now I am back to work as usual. This has also be a period of time to trust the Lord for support that had dropped off since January. I am so thankful to ALL of you who give regularly each month or quart via GMC or AIM. The Lord is gracious and the financial situation had gotten better. The Lord bless you for your prayer support, letters, emails and concern. I really do appreciate it.

David & Conce Roof – Brazil

Like most of you when the wave of Covid-19 struck our region public gatherings where prohibited. In compliance with state and city regulations the physical doors of our church in Icoaraci remained closed for eighteen weeks. *We scrambled* to learn how to go to a virtual format. By God's grace the technology sustained the life of our congregation as we met online, continued proclaiming the Word and mutually encouraged one another through prayer and sometimes *through just plain seeing* one another on the screen! It was fascinating to experience how crises brought a new

intensity to our gathering even though we were not physically assembled in the same space.

Praise the Lord, since August 1st the doors at the church could be opened again! Once again, we are physically gathering together following the ongoing social distancing and sanitation guidelines. Our services continue to be broadcast online for our high-risk contingency who cannot physically attend. We continue on the learning curve striving to perfect broadcasting our service from the larger space of the sanctuary.

We also want to thank you for your faithful prayers especially in response to our requests for church members, partners in ministry and family through the onslaught of Covid-19. We knew so many people who were affected and saw many answers to your prayers!

Ed & Val Schubert – Honduras

As with any challenge or difficulty, we have had a CHOICE as to how we were going to respond to Covid-19. While many, myself included, have used the term "crisis" to describe the moment at hand, we have come to believe that God has called us to a time of **SACRED OPPORTUNITY** rather than to crisis and chaos. We are being invited by our merciful and trustworthy God to seize the opportunity to strengthen our families, do good to others, pray without ceasing and to join God where He is busily at work changing lives **because eternity matters.**

A Sacred Opportunity to Wage War Against Malnutrition & Starvation:

In this time of financial upheaval and abrupt loss of income, children and families living in poverty have entered into even more precarious life situations where hunger has become an hourly concern, not just a theoretical discussion in an Ethics course at the local university. Our 214 ministry children and their families, along with thousands of our neighbors have been in a fight for survival since March. We have committed to provide emergency food supplies for thousands of infants, children, teens, families and elderly members of our communities who are at risk of malnutrition or starvation.

In the past six months, we have provided over **72,300 pounds of life-sustaining food**-including: rice, red beans, pastas, oatmeal, sugar, coffee, juices, corn flour, white flour, dry cereals, soups, and milk- to more than **10,600 PEOPLE** in danger of malnutrition or starvation!

A Sacred Opportunity to Battle Depression, Fear, Anxiety and Hopelessness:

Back on March 15th, the nation of Honduras was placed under a Federal Lock-Down order. Since that time, we have been living under Martial-Law type restrictions, with the ability to leave home limited to only once every fifteen days for the initial five months, and now in month six, we are permitted to leave home once every five days. Honduran

Security Forces have enforced this type of isolation and forced quarantine on the population of Honduras for over 200 days so far. The harmful emotional consequences and traumatic impact of this lock-down order had begun to negatively affect our ministry families. We responded to the need by offering our ministry families a way to connect emotionally and spiritually with our staff each week, in order to receive “soul care” during a time of great uncertainty. We engage dozens of struggling parents in weekly trainings by internet, using Zoom group calls to unite moms, dads, grandparents and children with our ministry staff. During these internet ministry sessions, our staff encourages our ministry families, challenges them in healthy ways, and then prays for each family. In addition, our staff of fifteen and myself meet once a week by Zoom as well, to dig into God’s Word together, as a unified team, and to pray for one another. These weekly Zoom sessions with the staff and with our ministry families have been rich, dynamic and life-changing!

A Sacred Opportunity to Combat Violence:

As part of our normal, on-going ministry, we advocate for victims of abuse, sexual assault and domestic violence and provide education on the legal rights of victims of violent crimes. Sadly, this type of criminal activity does not cease just because a pandemic sweeps the globe. In the midst of the instability and hunger, we have continued to combat violence against children and women. We have been able to encourage victims, pray with them and for them, provide legal counsel, facilitate follow-through in the prosecution process, provide transportation to court hearings, and advocate for victims without a voice.

A Sacred Opportunity to Fight for Healthy Families:

Overnight, our family of four (Ed, two of our daughters Stephany & Chey, and myself) became 50% of our ministry work force! When the federal lock-down orders were instituted, all public transportation was halted, meaning the vast majority of our ministry staff has had no ability to travel from their homes to our ministry buildings. Our available/accessible staff was in half while at the same time our ministry work load more than doubled as the hunger spread across the nation. So, our family jumped right into the thick of the planning, purchasing, organizing and executing of these massive food distributions. We have worked intimately, side-by-side, for the past six months, and as we have served together, we have grown stronger and more encouraged by one another. When conflict has arisen, we have learned new, more effective ways of resolving those points of stress. We are learning to love one another on a new, fresh level. We praise God for this Sacred Opportunity to strengthen our family even in the middle of heavy, busy work loads.

Taking Hold of the Sacred Opportunities, Because Eternity Matters:

We are thankful God has entrusted us with these Sacred Opportunities. We eagerly seek His guidance as we traverse this season which is ripe with spiritual opportunities. Pray for us to continue to accurately reflect Christ to a watching world that is both physically and spiritual hungry. We pray, also, that you will reach out and lay hold of the Sacred Opportunities which God is laying across your path during this Covid-19 season! God's at work, we just need the spiritual discernment to see where He is busy working and join Him there... ***Because Eternity Matters!***

Gene Stevenson (candidate) – Indian Bible College, Flagstaff, AZ

The explosion of the Coronavirus forced Indian Bible College to close down classrooms and move class sessions to an online-only format for the last several weeks of the Spring semester. This was challenging for staff and students alike, especially because IBC's institutional goals—to be Biblical, Relational, and Transformational— are best developed by the connections made when time is spent in the presence of others. So in mid-March, the Academic Department turned their attention to becoming familiar with teleconferencing software and leading faculty and students through a series of orientation sessions in preparation for the last term (5-week session). It wasn't without its challenges, but the IBC faculty adapted and the students persevered. On May 23rd, thirteen students graduated with either a Certificate of Biblical Studies or Associate of Biblical Studies degree. While most students opted to return to campus for the Fall semester (following proper testing and safety protocols), IBC has more online and part-time students than any time in recent memory. Classes are being held in person with the option for synchronous online participation, and Gene is teaching or co-teaching three of these classes.

BJ and Rachel Whitaker, church planters in Spain

So, what have the Whitakers been up to during the Covid-19 pandemic? When the first wave of the pandemic hit Spain particularly hard and we were in home confinement for 42 days, we did what ministry we could from home. This meant moving our worship service to Zoom from March to June, making pastoral calls instead of visits, too many ministry-related Zoom meetings to count (getting Zoomed-out is a real thing), and producing some video reflections for Holy Week for our church community's Facebook page, which actually got more views than we expected. Perhaps the most exciting opportunity in the 6-week lockdown was the 8 p.m. applause, when neighbors would go out to their street-side windows and balconies to applaud and interact with one another briefly, trying to keep spirits up. Many of those evenings at 8:02 I would go out to our 4th floor patio play my guitar and sing a worship song, with the help of our church sound

system, and give a brief word of encouragement and spiritual nourishment, which was met with more applause than we expected.

In the midst of all of this, and after 10 years of pioneer church planting in Alcora, God called us away from that ministry and into a new chapter in life in the town of Meco, on the very outskirts of Madrid, to help in outreach in the town and pioneer men's ministry locally and nationally. Moving during the Covid Pandemic...sounds a bit crazy, right? Well, that's the fierce, adventurous heart of our God, and it's been a wild ride as we've done our best to end well in Alcora and start life all over again in Meco. As we reflect on our time in Alcora, we see what God was doing through us in those months of March, April and May, while now in our first two months of life in Meco, the focus for us has shifted to what God is doing in us during these first months where ministry is not well-established yet, and would not be even in "normal" times. We still have regular ministry meetings via Zoom, but nearly everything is up in the air, and as I write this the province of Madrid is facing a second strong wave of the pandemic and some resulting level of confinement. What is this doing in us? What is God doing in us? In our uncertainty and even a little fear, it is driving us to trust God, not just in some theoretical way, but in the day-to-day, to put our sometimes shaky hearts in His hands, and to entrust our daughters to Him on a deeper level than before as they are adjusting little by little to a new school, a new town, a new life.

So what have the Whitakers been up to in the pandemic? A lot. At first a lot of ministry. And now a lot of God reminding us Who He is and who we are as His children, because this is what will steady us as the waves of Coronavirus hit around us. He is our refuge and strength in times of trouble, in times like these (Psalm 46).

Lamar and Janice Stoltzfus, serving at Rift Valley Academy, Kenya

2020 is a year that will evoke a multitude of emotions when we remember it. There will be memories of fear, helplessness, and waiting. There will also be memories of God's faithfulness and provision that will overshadow all the rest.

Covid-19 arrived in Kenya in March. It had already begun to spread throughout the globe. It quickly became apparent that we needed to reunite our students with their families. So, the decision was made to end the school term two weeks early so that we could evacuate our nearly 500 students. That decision, as hard as it was, turned out to be a huge blessing. Stories began to pour in of how families just made it through border crossings before they closed. Two students arrived at the border of the country in which their parents serve at 12:06 AM. The border closed at midnight! The teen siblings pleaded with the guards to allow them to enter the country to reunite with their parents. At last, the guards opened the border to allow them to pass. No one came through after

them. Praise God for softening the hearts of those guards. Through the hard work of our travel staff and multiple miracles, RVA managed to reunite families across Africa in two and a half days. Had the school waited 24 hours longer to make the decision to close, we would have had students stranded on campus with no hope of reaching their parents. Borders closed in Kenya and around the world. "What next?" we wondered. In the months that followed, we had many staff members return to their home countries. With each family that left, there was a sense of loss, but also a mounting pressure to pick up more duties to keep the school running. Lamar was faced with sending our 87 national staff members home indefinitely for everyone's safety. However, he had to develop ways to continue to provide essential services like electricity, water, etc. without those staff members. At the same time, the well that had supplied water for our 90-acre campus for over 40 years went dry, adding another crisis on top of the pandemic. Fortunately, our students had already left, so the demands on our water supply were minimized. Our third term was taught online, creating a huge stressor to staff and students alike. Imagine teaching classes with students spread across sixteen time zones across the globe! We made it through the term, which culminated with a virtual graduation. Even more families left to return "home." Out of 67 staff families that started the school year, only 21 remained on site. As we enter each new phase of the pandemic, Janice keeps walking alongside each family unit. She supported families as they quickly prepared to travel, juggled online teaching while also monitoring their own children's online learning, and figured out how to manage household duties without the normal helps. Many families were stressed, tired, scared, and frustrated so she was quite busy providing reassurance, hope and encouragement by providing practical help and prayer support. RVA then made the decision that our first term of the 2020-2021 school year would be online as well. Another good decision considering that Kenya announced that schools would remain closed until January of 2021. Even now, we have teachers all over the globe teaching online classes to students also scattered across the world. Since mid-August, we have had some new staff members arrive and we have had some staff members return to campus. Each new arrival brings a sense of relief and renewal. We have been able to welcome back some of our national staff. We look forward to the day that all missionary and national staff members return...as well as our students!

SHORT STOPS

Due to Covid 19, many short- term mission trips, as so many other plans, had to be cancelled or rearranged this summer. We are grateful that some churches were able to carry on as planned.

Sinking Spring Community, PA -The Youth of Community Evangelical in Sinking Spring PA changed their plans for the 2020 Summer mission trip. Originally scheduled for a trip to Boston MA in July, we decided to stay in Berks County and minister to our own community. Several teens from Community spent several days working with the children of one of the ministries we support called Hannah's Hope. Hannah's Hope started several years ago to address the needs of homeless women and children.

The youth group took the children from Hannah's Home to Blue Marsh Lake for a picnic and hike around the lake. We visited a favorite local ice cream parlor and the Reading Public Museum. We also put care baskets together for the moms at Hannah's Home as well as provided back packs for the children so they would be ready to start school. Hannah's Hope is a great ministry that provides safe shelter, support for the women and children, and a loving environment. It was a privilege to spend time with these strong women and their children. – *Rev. Tim Sanger, Pastor of Student Ministries (photos)*

Trinity Lighthouse, Royersford, PA – In March a team of men were part of a Building trip to Tellok, Nepal with Reach Out - Nepal. Two men from Trinity Lighthouse Church in Royersford, one man from McConnellsburg, three Polish builders from Palowice, Poland and five Nepali pastors spent two weeks in Tellok, Nepal building for a school that is being started there. Reach Out – Nepal has a pastor that we are helping in an area that has very little Christian influence and no church. He is originally from the area but has not lived there for some time. We helped build a bathroom, septic system, and 56 desks for the school. It was an amazing time with three languages being spoken on the job. Devotions were translated back and forth in English, Nepali and Polish. We left Nepal for home on March 17th just as the Covid situation was beginning to spread worldwide. The school has not been able to open but as of September the school is starting to enroll kids and will open for teaching soon. At first it will be a school for 1st - 5th grades and then will expand as the students grow through the grades.

Rural areas are very hard to reach and very poor. Reach Out Nepal seeks to solve some of these issues by taking the teaching to the farther out areas. In the past we have done teaching in Taplejung, Butwal, Jumla, Baglung as well as many other towns. Almost all of these areas are difficult to reach but this makes the training that much more valuable to these pastors.

Reach Out Nepal's philosophy is to train pastors/leaders who will then go back and train others. That way our time is multiplied. We also train pastors in business skills and make micro loans for them to start businesses. – *Curt Sandberg, Outreach Coordinator (photos)*

Grace EC Church, Schuylkill Haven, PA -This past summer, Grace EC Youth Ministry participated in a “stay at home” Mission week. From August 10-14, the group of 12 kids and 3 adults did several community service projects in our hometown & surrounding area. The tasks performed were weeding & mulching for the Borough of Schuylkill Haven. Organizing & cleaning a local pregnancy center. Mulching, as well as cleaning & organizing one of the facilities at Adult & Teen Challenge Center.

Finally, we painted & did some landscaping at our home church. The kids slept & ate their meals at the church, as well as participated in a time of worship each evening. We all had a wonderful week serving the community & bonding as a Youth – *Kim Hasenaur (photos)*

Notes on Life in the Lord for Forty Years (1980-2020) by David and Celia Dick (photo)

Forty years ago, God called us out of our former vocations into His full-time service through cross-cultural ministry with OMS. He guided and provided all our needs from the very beginning. Looking back, our missionary career can be described in four stages: *All for Jesus!*

Our Field Stage: In December 1981, while Dr. Wesley Duewel was the fifth OMS President, we were accepted as members of OMS, and then assigned us to Indonesia. We loved the ministry and the sons and daughters of the nation. Dave was a seminary professor, distance education teacher and coordinator, evangelism coordinator, business manager, construction supervisor, IT technician, and finally the field director, implementing and overseeing our four-fold focus of evangelism, church planting, theological education and international partnership. Dave installed and programmed, with the help of a financial whiz coworker, the first field to use and produce computerized financial reports for headquarters. Dave negotiated rental contracts, coordinated the acquisition of building materials, and served as the general contractor on seminary expansion. Dave also cared for, and coordinated, the field’s transportation fleet, including eight vans and six motorcycles. Dave was the first OMS field director to incorporate six different nationalities into one team on one field in OMS: Americans, Australians, British, German-Canadians, New Zealanders, and Koreans, 21 adults at our high point, not counting 13 children. Dave’s most strategic contributions during those years, included developing performance tracking tools for evaluating and improving young graduates, cum evangelists; working to formalize theological education by extension, to the point that non-resident graduates could matriculate into the residential program; overseeing the first ever self-study process leading toward formal accreditation, and inaugurating a philosophy of financial assistance that incorporated the concept of “*shouldering together and sacrificing together*” on the part of the mission

and national church, thereby, gradually, moving the national church to becoming fully autonomous, cultivating cultural indigeneity, and promoting spiritual reproduction and sustainability. (photo)

Celia was mother, homemaker, and secretary to the field director, seminary registrar and librarian. Her most important contributions included creating the first student academic transcripts, and designing, financing, and overseeing a fully catalogued seminary library, helping to fulfill the first steps towards accreditation. We both trained Indonesians to take over our various duties. To this day, we stay connected online with former students, now faculty and staff in the seminary, pastors in local congregations, and leaders in the denomination established by OMS. Several decades later, we see the fruit of our labor expanding, and look forward to sharing eternal rewards with you in glory. They will know and thank you, too.

Our Headquarters Stage: In 1992, again through OMS, God called Dave to oversee the OMS outreach in 14 nations. During the first year and a half of traveling to each field and returning to the office, often physically exhausted and ill, emotionally spent, and always overwhelmed with work that piled up on his desk in his absence, he realized there had to be a better way to manage the overseas operations. Celia said, “You need partners.” Subsequently, God led him to see the world of OMS segmented into thirds, 1) Asia-Pacific, 2) the Caribbean and Latin America, and 3) Europe, Asia and Africa (aka “Eurasica”), each region consisting of six fields. Then Dave took his *OMS Manual*-defined job description and re-allocated authority to develop the role and responsibility of international directors for each of the regions. After recruiting and orienting three veteran missionaries for the new responsibilities of strategic supervision, administrative oversight, and member care, OMS worldwide performance improved, and the outreach expanded fruitfully from 14 to 18 nations, to eventually four regions, each with its own international director, and an outreach of 46 nations, and subsequently, to more than 72 nations. OMS worldwide statistical metrics, including graduates, conversions, baptisms, and new churches multiplied exponentially during this time. That was the first major operational restructuring of OMS that ever took place in its first 100 years of worldwide ministry. Dave considers this restructuring, that the Lord inspired and aided in implementing, his most strategic and important contribution to the overall worldwide outreach of OMS. (photo)

God guided in many other developments that surfaced during his watch, including organizational involvement in the Co-Mission (Russia), utilizing specialized short-term teams, and non-residential missionary status, more frequent, and often irregular, furloughs for isolated and overstressed missionaries, incorporation of a new “sister” umbrella organization specifically for creative access nations, plus others too numerous to list. In the midst of those developments, the world became a less friendly, more hostile place. Dave again, leaned on the Lord, to create mission-wide emergency

plans, with crisis management teams, evacuation protocols, hostage negotiation resources, and post-traumatic disorder counseling training. Dave traveled overseas the majority of his time, logging over 2.5 million air miles, maintaining organizational harmony, strategic alignment, and building unity in vision and direction. During this meaningful, rewarding “marathon,” he also trained a successor and, eventually turned the assignment over to him.

Celia also found numerous opportunities to serve the Lord at world headquarters. She not only served as secretary to the First Lady, but also in so many roles and offices, that often new candidates ran into her at various phases of their application and orientation process, that they thought she was twins. She learned a lot about headquarters and the dedicated staff. Upon reaching retirement age, she hung up her “volunteer hat,” accompanied Dave during domestic itinerant meetings, and maintained correspondence with our very important partners. The foundations laid during our tenure at headquarters were preparation for a broader future with “OMS Global.”

Our Consultation Stage: Stepping out of the Executive Director’s role in 2007, God called Dave to serve as a consultant and researcher for ministry among Muslim. He became a self-taught champion, advocate and resource person for OMS Islamic ministries, attempting to enhance and cross-pollinate best practices, as well as expand our outreach among the unengaged and unreached Muslim people groups worldwide. He developed many practical tools and training experiences that aided our missionaries serving among Muslims to be more comfortable and competent in sharing Jesus with them. He interacted among several agencies who also specialized in ministering among Muslims. It was exciting to be part of a movement that saw more Muslims coming to Christ than at any other time in history.

Our Final Stage: In 2015, when Dr. Robert Fetherlin, our tenth OMS President, came on board, he advised Dave, “*When you retire, don’t just walk away and turn out the lights.*” Dave had relocated to an office near President Emeritus, Dr. Wesley Duewel, and interacted with him daily. Thirty-five years later, he invited Dave to be a member of the Duewel Literature Trust, Inc. (DLT) Board, which funds the publishing and distribution of his books, now translated into 58 languages, with 2.5 million copies circulated worldwide. His books, strongly focused on Scripture and prayer, are used as texts, or resources, to train and inspire leaders around the world. When he went to Heaven in March 2016, three months short of age 100, God called Dave again, through the DLT Board, when they elected him to succeed Dr. Duewel as DLT President. This role allowed him to continue as consultant and resource person for OMS Global.

Dr. Duewel asked Dave for help in compiling, selecting, and editing his autobiography for publication. One might call Dave a “ghost writer” for “*All for Jesus, My Life’s Story and Testimony.*” It was a great honor, and awesome task, to examine nearly 100 years

of a great man's life and ministry, and then condense it into one volume. With the invaluable help of his former secretary of 40 years, who became his second wife during the last seven years of his life, we have compiled all his memories, notes, articles, and musings. Now we're in the process of condensing it into publishable size. Celia has edited my writing since college and is vital in the process. Our goal is to complete it in time for public release at the OMS 2021 Conference. Please pray that God will give us wisdom, stamina, and clarity to accomplish this objective.

Dave considers his most important contribution to the DLT, during this time, as the development of a dedicated website where all English versions of the DLT inventory may be purchased (www.duewelliteraturetrust.org), the installation of Quick Books online financials, and the recruitment and cultivation of new DLT corporation members, from which future members of the Board of Directors, and leaders of the DLT will be chosen.

Although, we are retiring from the GMC, effective December 31, 2020, Dave will continue to actively serve the Lord through both OMS and DLT. Missionaries never really retire because we consider our calling, a "*work of the heart.*" Until we fully retire from OMS, Dave will continue to receive a monthly allowance based on whatever income is in our OMS support account.

We can't thank the EC Church in general, and the GMC in particular, enough for their unwavering prayers, financial support, and spiritual fellowship. We enjoyed itinerating among the EC Church congregations. Many became long-term supporters, giving to us in many diverse ways. We are very grateful for the various leaders of the original Division of Missions, and now the Global Ministry Commission, because each one has given their utmost support, counsel, and encouragement whenever requested, or needed. Dave always said that he wanted an inscription he found on a tombstone in Africa, to be written on his one day. It's a mere six words: "*Received great call, pursued it greatly.*" Our EC Church partners will share in the eternal reward that is laid up in Heaven for all of us.

VBS UPDATE

As with so many things this past year, Covid 19 interrupted the ability for many of our churches to hold a Vacation Bible School. As a result, this year's project, to help our Latin American EC churches renovate a building as a training center specifically for children's ministries, has not reached its goal of \$10,000. If your church has a budget line item for VBS, would you consider sending those funds as an offering? Our churches in Mexico have been closed by the government as a response to the Covid virus there, which means the pastors aren't getting paid. Many are selling personal possessions to get enough money to feed their families. As a result, we have redesignated our 2020 VBS funds to help the EC pastors and their families in northern Mexico.

Updated Mission Minded Kids lessons are now available on our EC website. Go to the Structures tab at the top, click that and go to Communities, then Global Ministries, and you will see the listing for MMK. There are nine lessons featuring Mexico.

ZOOM, ZOOM! – A MISSIONARY

It goes without saying that this has been a year unlike any other most of us have known. The Covid pandemic has turned most of our plans upside down and sidelined almost all activities, including worshipping together in our churches. As the saying goes, “Necessity is the mother of invention”, and many churches scrambled to figure out how to reach their members using social media platforms.

One of those platforms, which most of us were not familiar with before the pandemic, is Zoom. This is a program that allows for live virtual meetings. Since the lockdown that ensued around the world as a result of Covid 19, Zoom has become a major player as a means of communication. Before that, Zoom was just a noise that little children made when playing with their toy cars and trucks, or that little boy made on the Mazda commercials. 😊

As always, there are pros and cons. The cons are that even when holding live meetings on social media, it's not the same as being with other people. The pros are that more folks can participate, many of whom would not be able to attend a meeting in person. For example, David & Conce Roof can attend the weekly Zoom bible study of their home church in PA because they are all in the same time zone!

Many of missionaries, who can't return from overseas due to the pandemic and quarantine regulations, are available for Zoom meetings. If your church, missions group or Sunday School is meeting again, or has someone who can coordinate a Zoom meeting, perhaps you'd like to invite some of our missionaries to join you. I don't have a complete list of who has the capability to do Zoom at this time, but call the GMC office and we'll see what we can arrange. Who knows? You might be able to meet some folks that you were never able to book to speak at your church. It's a new world and the Church is a part of it.- *Pat Strain*