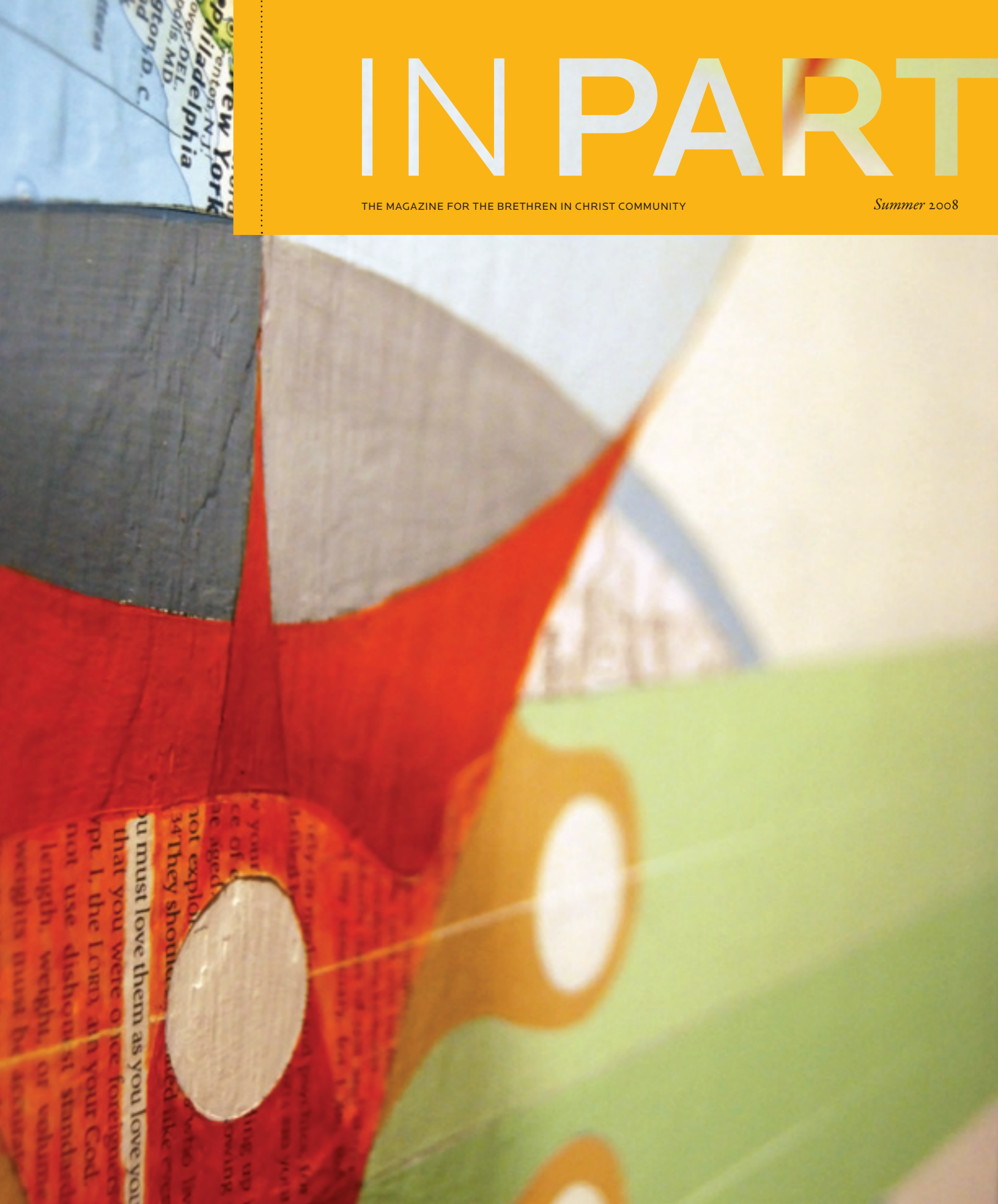


IN PART

THE MAGAZINE FOR THE BRETHREN IN CHRIST COMMUNITY

Summer 2008



THE VIEW FROM HERE

My husband, Ryan, and I recently moved into our first house, so we’ve been acquainting ourselves with the antique stores, flower shops, and cafés within walking distance of our home. We’ve also had fun meeting our neighbors, an eclectic bunch from all sorts of different backgrounds.

What has astonished me most about the town, though, is the number of churches. From our house alone, you can see four churches, and driving down the main street, you pass one a block. But they’re almost always empty. I see more people streaming out of the fire station on bingo night than from all these churches on Sunday morning, when it’s more like a trickle.

Seeing this has again reminded me that the people who need to hear about and experience the hope of Christ are not usually those sitting next to me in the pew, but rather those selling vegetables at the farmer’s market, walking in the park, or standing outside the unemployment office.

Witnessing to the world requires that we bring an active and loving witness for Christ to people where they are at. As you will read in this issue of *In Part*, sometimes this means us going to the world. At other times, it means welcoming the world when it comes to us. At all times, it means compassionately declaring God’s love in both word and deed.

Best,

Kristine

Kristine N. Frey
Editor

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I want to say that I’m enjoying what feels like just a bit of changed emphasis in the magazine. As an older reader, I’ve enjoyed hearing some of the old themes of the Church and also seeing the names of some of our older leaders. I’m all for appealing to the young, but we need one another, and I’m happy to see the heritage of the church appreciated along with extending an eye to the future.

GRACE HOLLAND—Dillsburg, Pa.

.....

Congratulations on another great issue of *In Part*! I enjoyed all the writings on salvation in this issue. The concept of “Forsaking a Halfway Covenant” has really been on my mind lately. In the Church we often are so eager to have others say the “magic words” of accepting Jesus into their heart, which we feel will gain them entrance into Heaven. But that alone really doesn’t fit the Biblical model of what a believer’s life should look like.

Living for Christ and spreading the Gospel to everyone is really all that counts. Encouraging Christians to settle for less than this is doing them—and the Kingdom—a disservice. Great healing and power await those who seek to serve Him every day. I thank God for pastors (like our own at Millersville BIC) who encourage us to be willing to change our lives in some very significant, and sometimes painful, ways.

DARYL NAUMAN—Millersville, Pa.

.....

One thing I really miss is having a family news section in the magazine. I wish this would come back.

MARJEANNE SIDER—Riverside, Calif.

Good news! Keeping up to date on happenings within the BIC family just got easier with the creation of two new resources from the BIC Church:

→ “Family News” is a quarterly publication which chronicles the births, weddings, anniversaries, and deaths of those in the BIC. To view or subscribe to “Family News”, visit **bic-church.org/family** or contact General Church Offices. (See opposite page for contact information.)

→ The Local Church News webpage at **bic-church.org/localchurchnews** highlights news from BIC churches across North America.

IN PART™

Summer 2008

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THE MAGAZINE FOR THE BRETHREN IN CHRIST COMMUNITY

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IN MOTION

A REAL JOY RIDE

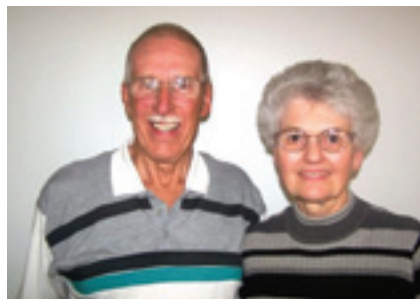
Glenn and Joyce Ginder have been taking a drive down a new road in their lives . . . quite literally. The Ginders are spending their retirement years in a fifth-wheel trailer traveling with Roving Volunteers in Christ's Service (RVICS). This faith-based ministry connects retired Christian volunteers and their RVs with Christian schools, churches, and camps across North America to complete any maintenance and service work needed by the establishments, free of charge.

After 35 years of pastoring BIC congregations in Pennsylvania, California, Oregon, and Indiana and 10 years as bishop of the Midwest and Central (now Great Lakes) Conferences, Glenn never would have guessed that "craftsmanship" was his top spiritual gift. But a spiritual gifts assessment that he took in 2002 while serving at Manor BIC Church (Lancaster, Pa.) indicated just that.

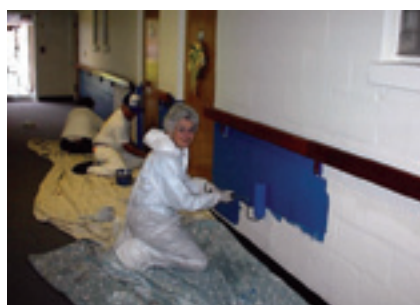
"Craftsmanship" grabbed my attention," he recalls. "Joyce and I talked that evening. Could it be possible that we could spend 'retirement' in a ministry where we primarily used our hands and the gift of craftsmanship? That same day I did an internet search and found RVICS."

Since joining RVICS in 2003, Glenn and Joyce have spent time in a number of U.S. states, and they plan to head to British Columbia next. As team leaders, they've worked with other participants doing construction,

The Ginders have exchanged the pulpit for a paintbrush through their work with RVICS.



PHOTOS: Courtesy of the Ginders



landscaping, painting, plumbing, sewing, and office duties.

Yet Glenn and Joyce don't separate their physical labors from their spiritual ones. "We have become a significant part of these ministries, working behind the scenes to assist in telling the good news to all sorts of people," Glenn shares. "It is exciting and rewarding!"

For more information about RVICS and its ministries, visit www.rvics.com.

MEADOW PIEPHO
Revolution BIC (Salina, Kans.)

BICWM WELCOMES NEW LEADER

Listening to Christine Sharp, the recently named interim executive director of BIC World Missions, talk about her move from the local church to a global ministry, it is immediately evident that this is someone for whom geography is not a limiting factor. Chris is passionate about winning souls for Christ—here, there, and everywhere—and her goal is to partner with whomever shares her enthusiasm for evangelism, wherever they are.

"Spreading the good news of Jesus is what I was doing in my local church. And that's exactly what the Brethren in Christ Church is doing around the world. So how can we partner in more strategic ways? That's the passion of my heart . . . right back to the local church," she stated in comments to the General Conference Board.

And it was precisely this passion for reaching the lost with the salvation message that sealed the deal in the Board for World Missions' decision to

Chris Sharp brings a passion for connecting local and global churches to her new role at BICWM.



forward Chris' name to the General Conference Board. Coupled with her extensive experience in the area of leadership development, including staff positions at Mechanicsburg (Pa.) and Pequea (Lancaster, Pa.) BIC churches and wide-ranging volunteer roles within the Atlantic Conference, Chris' vision fit in perfectly with the current direction of BICWM.

Following a three-month transition during which Chris worked alongside Executive Director John Allen Brubaker, she officially began her interim term as executive director on April 1, 2008. As he passed the mantle of leadership within BICWM to Chris, John described her as "fully engaged in the spiritual leadership of this organization."

In return, Chris has high praise for John and his wife, Kathy, and their dedication to BICWM. "John and Kathy brought a great 'movement' to BICWM over the last 10 years, and I look forward, along with a fantastic team and board, to what God has in store in the months and years to come."

FAITH AND POLITICS MEET AT MESSIAH

In today's highly partisan environment, faith and politics can seem an unlikely pair. However, on the evening of April 13, the two met on the campus of Messiah College when Senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, the Democratic candidates for the U.S. presidency, participated in a Compassion Forum held at the Grantham, Pa., school. (Republican hopeful John McCain was invited but could not attend.)

During the 90-minute Forum, the candidates spoke candidly about how their faith has informed their thinking on issues ranging from environmental stewardship to end-of-life decisions, and from the HIV/AIDS pandemic to the situation of refugees in Darfur. The College co-sponsored the event with Faith in Public Life, a national nonpartisan, nonprofit resource and communication center for faith leaders. The Compassion Forum was broadcast on CNN International and reached more than 3 million viewers worldwide.

Although some people were surprised that Messiah, with its roots in the Brethren in Christ Church, agreed to host the Forum, President Kim Phipps noted that doing so was "consistent with Messiah's core values of peace, social justice, and faith." In fact, as Dr. Harold Engle, a trustee emeritus of the College and lifelong member of the BIC Church, observed,

U.S. presidential hopefuls Clinton and Obama greet each other at the Compassion Forum.



PHOTO: Erin Schuett

the event was simply another step in a more than 60-year progression for the school and its denominational parent. "Tonight began when C. N. Hostetter, Jr. [Messiah's fourth president] went to Washington, D.C., in the late 1940s to help establish the National Association of Evangelicals," he mused from his seat in the Forum audience.

Today, fully 88 percent of Brethren in Christ in the U.S. and Canada agree or strongly agree that Christians should try to influence their government to do what is right or should actively participate in government to improve it (based on responses to the 2006 Church Member Profile).

And for one night at Messiah College, none of the cameras, lights, or people could distract from the fact that doing so is both possible and incredibly important.

IN PART Online
at INPART.ORG

- WATCH A VIDEO OF CHRIS SHARP'S COMMENTS TO THE GENERAL CONFERENCE BOARD
- CHECK OUT TODAY'S TRIBUTE TO JOHN BRUBAKER'S WORK WITH BICWM
- READ MORE STORIES OF THE BIC CHURCH IN MOTION FOR GOD

PART OF THE WHOLE

FOCUSING ON ONE YOUNG WOMAN'S FAITH

STEPPING OUT

by HOPE NEWCOMER

In September 2007, Karen Hess, an Abilene, Kans., native, found herself transitioning from mobilizing *others* for overseas missions through her work as human resources support facilitator in the BIC World Missions office (Grantham, Pa.) to preparing *herself* for it.

A few months earlier, BICWM had offered Karen the position of team leader on its 2007–2008 STEP Team. Based on the concepts of Service, Training, Evangelism, and Promoting growth, the STEP program is a cross-cultural experience provided to young adults who want to explore their interest in missions and ministry. Karen knew in her heart that this was a part of God's plan for her, and two days later she accepted the position.

September marked the beginning of the internship, a two-month period of meeting the other team members, studying Spanish, and learning about community involvement at the Harrisburg (Pa.) Discipleship Center. But for Karen, the real challenges came at the end of November, when she and her four teammates packed up and moved out to Honduras, where they would be spending the next five months.

Through her previous work with BICWM, Karen had heard many stories about missionaries and their work,

↓ Karen Hess (left) joins her host mom in the kitchen.



PHOTO: Courtesy of Karen Hess

so she thought she knew what to expect. However, three months into the program, she found herself growing even more than she expected, particularly as she struggled with the difficulty of learning a second language. "Going through it yourself, even just a taste, brings it to reality," she reflects. "My first couple of weeks here, it felt as if I was stripped of everything that I placed value in. I could not communicate to encourage or show compassion. As I struggled with the language, I had to remember that Jesus is more than enough for me."

Today, Karen still finds herself leaning on God more than ever before. "I can't do this on my own! I need the Lord's help in everything, especially in learning the language," she shares.

Despite the difficulties she's encountered, Karen concludes, "It is worth it to give your life for ministry.

There are many tough days, but the lessons learned and the blessings received are things you would not experience if you would not take a step of faith."

And to those considering involvement in missions, Karen has encouragement: "Go for it! If you have an interest in missions, God has put that on your heart for a reason. Try going overseas for a short-term experience and see what the Lord has in store. How will you know that God is calling you if you don't step out and try it?"

IN PART Online at INPART.ORG:

- FIND OUT ABOUT HOW OTHER YOUNG ADULTS ARE PREPARING FOR MISSIONS
- READ THE REFLECTIONS OF ONE 2006 STEP TEAM PARTICIPANT
- CATCH UP WITH THE 2007–2008 STEP TEAM AT THEIR BLOG



Hope Newcomer grew up in Zimbabwe as a missionary kid with BICWM. She graduated from Messiah College (Grantham, Pa.) with a degree in Sociology and Cultural Anthropology. Currently she is participating in a cross-cultural apprenticeship in Lancaster, Pa., that focuses on befriending Muslims.

TO OUR CORE

EXPLORING THE CENTRAL VALUES OF THE BIC CHURCH

WITNESSING BEGINS WHERE WE STAND

by CRAIG E. SIDER

How are we going to win the world for Christ? In Acts 1:8, Jesus tells His disciples to start from where they are in Jerusalem. His point is that witnessing begins where we stand.

There is a built-in strength to this approach. God has placed each of us in locations from which we are to begin our witnessing endeavors. The town where I live (Elizabethtown) is my "Jerusalem." Through my actions—and, when necessary, my words—I begin my witnessing endeavors in this community by reaching out to my next-door neighbors, to the teller at my bank, to the cashier at the corner mini-market. These people—Charlie, Doug, Matt, and Tracy—are my immediate mission field. Witnessing is up close and personal and begins where God has placed me.

Yet we must be very careful, for while Jesus says that His disciples' work will begin in Jerusalem, He is clear that it will not end there. Rather, He commands them to spread the news by moving outward from Jerusalem, first to neighboring Judea,

→ We value an active and loving witness for Christ to all people.

then to Samaria, and from there to the ends of the earth.

As people, we tend to gravitate toward what is familiar and easily identifiable. The people we interact with and the country we reside in are, from our viewpoint, the "center" of the world, and we tend to look at God's plan of redemption from that perspective. But we must be aware that the places we live represent only small parts of the world for which Christ died. God loves people in all those other dots on the globe just as He loves people in the dots you and I happen to inhabit. Jesus offered His life and blood for the Iranian, the Slav, the Hispanic, the Caucasian, the Chinese, the African-American. He offered His life and blood for you and me.

The challenge of telling the whole world the good news of Jesus is complicated by the distribution of those who have already heard. Christians are not evenly spread across the globe. At some places, both physical and cultural barriers separate the millions who walk with Christ from the millions who have never heard the name of Jesus. We need to be reminded that God deeply loves these least-reached people and that He died for them as much as He died for you and me. This should motivate us to do our part in spreading the news, as the apostle Paul



Illustration: Amanda Hakanson-Stacy

recognized: "...how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'" (Romans 10:14–15).

Witnessing started at Jerusalem but was never designed to stay there. The witness of the first disciples was to move increasingly outward, widening as it spread. The same is true for believers today. Witnessing begins at home, but moves continually outward to all nations.



Even as he completes his 12-year assignment as bishop of the Atlantic Conference, **Craig Sider** has taken on the additional role of interim bishop of the Susquehanna Conference during Bishop Ken Letner's health leave. Craig was a BIC church-planting pastor for 11 years in Oakville, ON. He and his wife, Laura, have three children.

TO READ MORE...

about salvation, as well as other Brethren in Christ core values, see the book *Focusing Our Faith: Brethren in Christ Core Values*, edited by **Terry L. Bremsinger**.

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From
Commandment
to
Commission

*Creating a
community in Christ*

BY Nancy R. Heisey

On the first day of the 2003 Mennonite World Conference Assembly in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, the members of its executive committee hosted a group of representatives from a number of other Christian groups from around the world. There were important leaders from the Methodist, Baptist, Anglican, Seventh-Day Adventist, Friends World Community, and Roman Catholic churches, and we would all be proceeding into the grand meeting hall a bit later. But first, we were to have tea with our Zimbabwean sisters and brothers.

Sharing in this tradition is the Zimbabwean way of showing hospitality and welcoming honored guests. On special occasions, tea is more like a mid-afternoon lunch, with delicate little sandwiches and delicious sweet biscuits usually accompanying the tea. However, on that day it quickly became obvious that there was no tea. After several minutes of awkward uncertainty, we were invited to walk around the grounds and come back in an hour.

When we returned, coffee, tea, and a small plate of cookies were provided. But I had a funny feeling that this was not what the Zimbabwean hospitality committee had planned. The next day I heard the story.

Thousands of members of the Brethren in Christ Church in Zimbabwe had been arriving since the day before, many of them coming from long distances on crowded buses. About an hour before our official high tea, a busload had arrived, exhausted and hungry, having traveled all day with next to nothing to eat. The food committee was busy preparing the

meal for 5,000-plus people after the service, so the hospitality committee, having nothing else to offer, gave the hungry busload our tea.

What a wonderful choice! Certainly neither those of us on the executive committee nor the other church leaders needed any tea at all. Our Zimbabwean hosts' decision to offer it to those who were truly hungry represented the best tradition of African hospitality. It also fits a biblical pattern and has something to do with becoming one in Christ.

Legal trapping(s)

In Matthew chapter 22, we're given the words Jesus spoke about love for God and neighbor. Ironically, these words were not spoken in a friendly or worshipful setting. Rather, Jesus gives this commandment in response to a legal challenge—the one that probably mattered most to the religious authorities interrogating Him, because the Law was at the heart of God's covenant with them. It defined who they were as a people and what kinds of commitments they had to God and each other.

For centuries, the best Jewish thinkers had taught that God was most present with His people through the Law. But now this Jesus had arrived in town with an understanding of God that threatened the religious leaders and their power. It was decided that He must be nailed down. If they could just trap Him into saying something controversial, they would have an excuse to deal with Him.

So a lawyer is given the job of testing Jesus. "Teacher," he asks, "which commandment in the Law is the greatest?"

How can there be a right answer to that? All of the Law must be observed. In fact, lawyers like the one questioning Jesus spent all their time studying and discussing every aspect of the Law to be sure that they were keeping it all correctly.

But Jesus doesn't hesitate, just as He didn't pause in response to the earlier questions. He knows

that the word of God is vibrant and active and speaks in the present, not just in the past. Drawing on the rich tradition of the Scriptures that have been the foundation of the faith of His people for generations, He answers. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind," Jesus quotes. "This is the greatest and first commandment.

And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the prophets."

Love over law

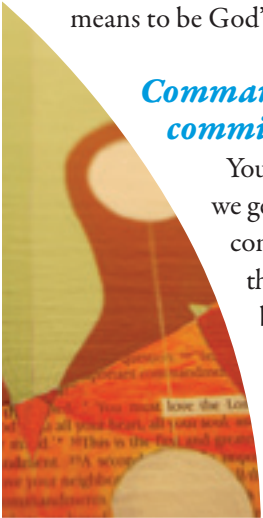
It's no surprise that Jesus would call for us to love God—that's exactly the heart of the covenant that God made with the people of Israel. God had liberated the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. In response, they were not to have other gods, but to commit themselves to God's ways. As they traveled on from the mountain where they met God, they were to remember one thing: They belonged to God alone. "Hear, O Israel, the LORD is our God, the LORD is one," the Shema, or first commandment, declares. "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

Love for God was central to the lives of faithful Jews; they had experienced God's grace in their lives, and they wanted to actively show it by keeping His commandments. So it seems reasonable for Jesus to start with the Shema. Anyone might have expected that.

But He goes further. Instead of drawing from another of the Ten Commandments, He pulls up a little command stuck in a back corner of the Law, in the book of Leviticus, chapter 19. The command to love one's neighbor is just one of many in this chapter, which covers everything from when to eat the sacrifice, to how to harvest the crops, to what the rules are for sexual relationships with slaves. Yet Jesus says that this little command to love the neighbor is like the Shema.



And after declaring that the commands to love God and one's neighbor are alike, He adds the punch line: "On these two commandments"—both of them, together—"hang all the Law and the prophets." In other words, Jesus reveals that only those who observed these two commandments have truly understood what it means to be God's faithful people.



Commanded and commissioned

You're probably wondering how we get from Jesus' summary of the commandments to the mission of the Church. That move might be just as surprising as Jesus' choice to link the love of God with the love of neighbor. But isn't mission about the Great Commission? And isn't that how Matthew wrapped up his Gospel in chapter 28?

First, we need to notice that what Jesus called great was the commandment in chapter 22. We also need to look again at what Jesus asked His followers to do in chapter 28: They were to teach His future disciples everything He had commanded them. Jesus had already explained what they were to teach when He said that everything hangs on love for God and love for neighbor, and now He was sending them out to do it.

This demonstrates to us that if we want to be a community that can truly invite others to join us in following Jesus Christ, then we need to dedicate ourselves to both the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. But what do these commands mean in our world, and how do we practice them?

When I reflect on what love for God looks like, I think of a Navajo woman who greatly influenced me when I was a missionary kid growing up on the Brethren in Christ Navajo Mission in New Mexico. Louise Werito was a grandmother and a leader in her commu-

nity. But what I remember most about her is the time she stood in church to sing her testimony of experiencing God's presence in her life. Her faith encouraged me to get involved with the churches around the world.

I think also of Barbara Nkala, the master of ceremonies for the assembly in Bulawayo, who repeatedly led the whole audience in singing "God is so good." I knew that one of her nephews was dying of AIDS, and yet she sang. We knew that many of the Zimbabweans would have to go back to living on one meal a day after the assembly. We knew that the police were watching our meeting to make sure that nothing too political was said. And yet we sang "God is so good."

And when I think about love for neighbor, which Jesus said is like love for God, I remember the hospitality committee members who served our tea to our Zimbabwean brothers and sisters.

When Jesus named the greatest commandments, He was responding to an effort to trick Him. Yet, still today, His words have the power to shape us as God's people. In order for the message of Jesus Christ to make sense, however, it has to make sense in a community—not of sameness, but of oneness.

May we, in all our diversity, become the people God wants us to be. Only then we will truly be able to invite others in our desperately needy world to enter into this community for God's glory.

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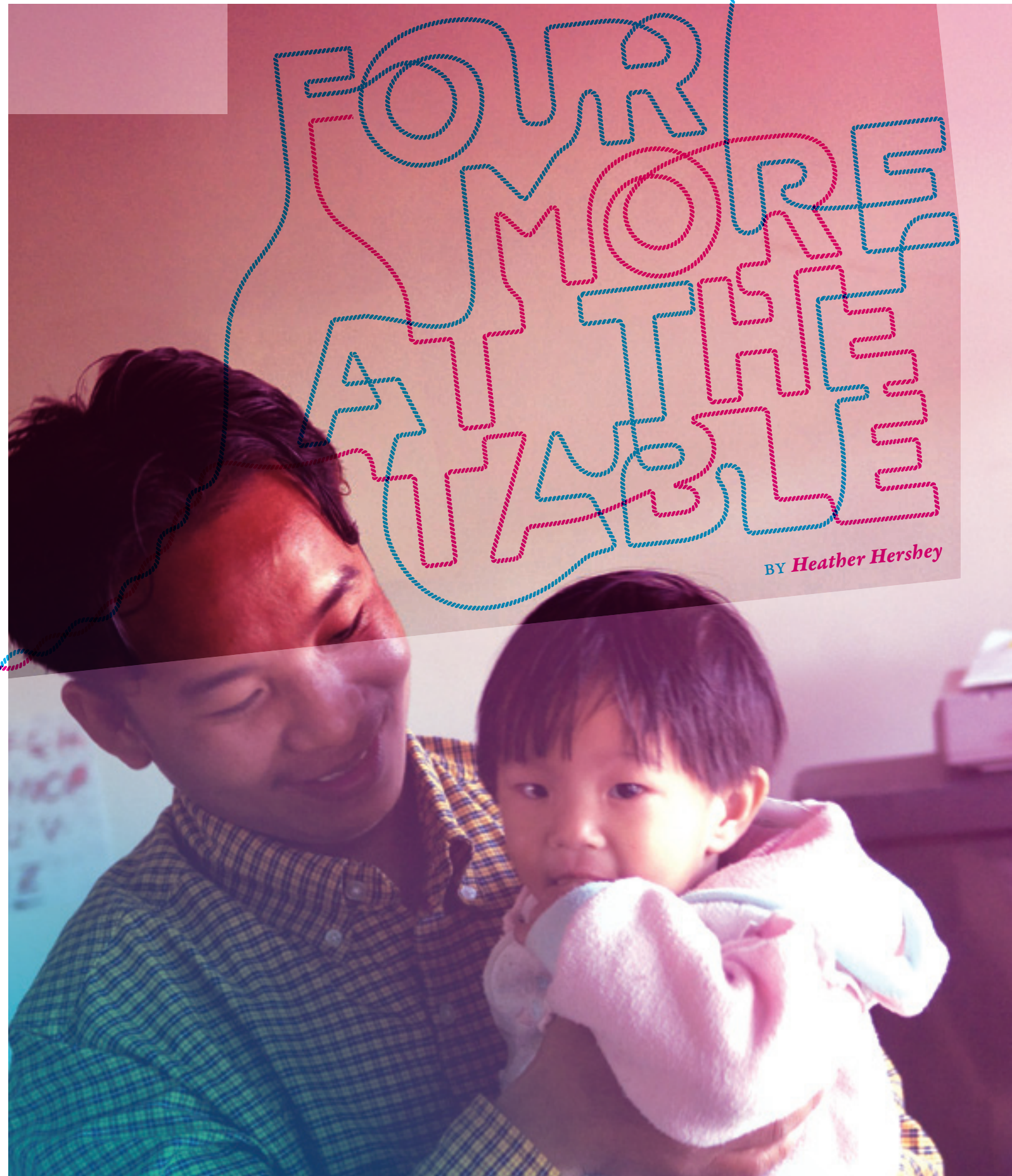
- FIND OUT ABOUT MENNONITE WORLD CONFERENCE
- READ ABOUT THE BIC NAVAJO MISSION WHERE NANCY GREW UP
- LEARN MORE ABOUT THE BIC CHURCH OF ZIMBABWE (THE LARGEST BIC CONFERENCE) AND WAYS TO PRAY FOR IT DURING THIS TIME OF CRISIS



Nancy Heisey is an associate professor of Biblical Studies at Eastern Mennonite University (Harrisonburg, Va.) and the current president of Mennonite World Conference. She grew up at the Navajo Mission (N.M.), where her parents served with BIC World Missions.



Andy Rash received a degree in Fine Arts from Kutztown (Pa.) University. Frequent sightings of him collecting discarded items off of public sidewalks for use in his collage art projects have resulted in the motto "Andy Rash picks up trash!" He lives in Harrisburg (Pa.) with his wife and son and attends Harrisburg BIC.



Van Hmung plays with Mary in the family's new home in Lancaster, Pa.

Four years ago, when Van and Sung Hmung (pronounced “muhng”) fled their home in the Union of Myanmar (formerly Burma) to a refugee camp in Malaysia, they didn’t know that God was already preparing a table for them in a far-off place called Lancaster, Pennsylvania. And when Dan and Sharon Houck accepted a church-planting assignment with the Atlantic Conference of the Brethren in Christ Church, also four years ago, they didn’t know that their congregation-in-the-making would one day help in resettling a refugee family from Southeast Asia.

But one warm evening in July 2007, the Hmung family and The Table Community Church came together beside the baggage carousel at the Harrisburg International Airport.

Dan can chuckle about it now, but as he and Sharon waited for the Hmung’s plane to touch down, he was fighting a serious case of the jitters. “We couldn’t speak their language, and they couldn’t speak ours. But there we were, ready to welcome into our home a family we had never met,” Dan recalls. “We didn’t know what we had gotten ourselves into.”

However, within minutes of greeting Van, Sung, and their beautiful little girls, Emanuel and Mary, Dan’s apprehension gave way to excitement.

“I’ll always remember laughing at one another as we tried to understand each other’s language,” Dan says. “I have learned a lot about myself and our culture by watching Van, Sung, and the children. Everything was stacked against them succeeding in this country. Without an advocate, it would be nearly impossible for a family to resettle in Lancaster. Yet, they put their trust in us and in God, and we’ve had the joy of watching them find their way.”

Parallel paths

Having grown up as Christians in the ethnically Chin region of northwestern Myanmar, Van and Sung Hmung know what it means to suffer for their faith. Their homeland has a long history of human rights abuses, and the military regime that has ruled the country since the early 1960s has made Christians a particular target.

Not that it’s ever been easy to be a Christ-follower in Myanmar. Adoniram Judson, the first protestant mis-



Sung Hmung smiles as she practices her English with Dan and Sharon Houck.

sionary to Burma in the early 19th century, spent a good part of his 40-year tenure in the country locked in a jail cell, and, ever since, Burmese converts to the Christian faith have faced persecution and economic hardship. But the past thirty years or so have been a particularly difficult time for Myanmar Christians, and thousands of believers, including Van and Sung Hmung, have fled the country in search of a better life and religious freedom.

Initially, Van left Myanmar alone, traveling first to a refugee camp in Thailand and then to one in Malaysia. After three years, he had saved enough money to partially pay a driver to bring Sung and Emanuel to join



Emanuel Hmung shows her surrogate grandfather, Dan Houck, her new outdoor toy.

him in the camp. (Van continues to pay off this debt to this day, for fear that if he does not, family members still in Myanmar will be harmed.)

While the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and the U.S. Department of State researched the family's background to see if they would be candidates for receiving refugee services, the family faced police brutality and discrimination in Malaysia. At one point, Van was thrown in prison for nine months because he was caught by a Malaysian police officer and didn't have the money that the corrupt official demanded of him. Van's family had to work to pay the \$200 fee demanded by the police force to free him.

Despite the difficult of their situation, Van used the time in Malaysia to his advantage, picking up basic skills as an electrician. At last, in the summer of 2007, the family, with its newest member, baby Mary, was told to pack up their belongings and prepare for the move to North America.

Meanwhile, half a world away, Dan Houck's vision for planting a "real, relevant, and relational" church in the city of Lancaster had taken root as The Table Community Church. "We wanted The Table to be a place where people experience hospitality, extending it to all, especially those new to our community. We wanted it to be a place where we welcome our guests and treat them as family," he explains.

And it was this vision that brought The Table to the attention of Eric Kennel, the site director for Lutheran Refugee Services (LRS), a faith-based social ministry

FOUR MORE AT THE TABLE

organization that provides refugee resettlement assistance through a contract with the U.S. Department of State. With more than 120 refugees passing through the doors of LRS each year, Eric is always on the lookout for friendly, generous congregations and individuals to act as sponsors. "The Table seemed like a place where all are welcome, so it looked like a good fit for this kind of ministry," he states.

As a young church, however, The Table didn't have the financial resources to support a family all on its own, so the congregation was paired up with the Mechanic Grove Church of the Brethren in nearby Quarryville, Pa. The Mechanic Grove Church would help with finances, and people from The Table would handle the day-to-day tasks of settling a new family into the community.

At last, in late May 2007, Dan received word that a family was on its way and would be arriving at the Harrisburg airport in just 10 days. All at once there were a thousand things to be done, or so it seemed to Dan, Sharon, and the rest of the welcome committee. They needed to collect clothing, furniture, appliances, and other household items so that when the family arrived, everything would be ready—down to the last diaper. "Emails were sent, calls were put out, and announcements were made at church. Everyone felt the urgency and stepped in without hesitation," Dan recalls enthusiastically.

Then, all of sudden, there they were—an anxious, middle-aged Pennsylvania pastor and his wife and an exhausted young family from Myanmar, standing together in front of the baggage carousel in the Harrisburg International Airport. They didn't speak the same language, so they smiled and hugged, and then they went home.

After hello

The Hmung family lived with the Houcks during their first week in the United States while last-minute work



Today, the Hmung family gathers around the table, inviting other area refugees to join them there in fellowship.

was completed on the house that the church had found for Van, Sung, and the girls. "When they finally saw their house, I thought they were going to cry," Dan says.

Over the next few months, volunteers from The Table helped the family with everything from finding their way to doctor appointments and navigating the city bus system, to opening bank accounts and enrolling Emanuel in school. There was a trip to Maryland, where Van and Sung met with relatives from Myanmar who had also been resettled in the area. And just in

time for their first Christmas in the United States, a small group helped Sung and the girls decorate their home for the holidays.

The Hmungs are quick to show appreciation for the kindness of the folks around The Table, although at times the generosity has almost overwhelmed them. "They live simply," Dan explains. "When people try to give them things, their typical response is, 'Too much, too much.'" Even before they could say the words themselves, Van and Sung asked relatives who know both English and Chin to express their thanks for all the church has done for them.

As for Dan, his heart hasn't been the same since that night at the Harrisburg airport. Just like a doting grandfather, Dan's face lights up when he describes Emanuel darting out to greet him when his little yellow car pulls up to their house. "She runs to me with her outstretched arms, and I scoop her up and carry her to the porch and talk about her day," he shares, smiling.

Dan also recalls with pride what happened when he sat with Van during his first job review with Lapp's Electric. The human resources director described Van as one of the hardest-working and most well-liked men at the company. With tears welling up in his eyes, he commended Van for achieving success against all odds. "It was very emotional," Dan says.

Today, Van and Sung are reaching out to other refugee families with the same missionary zeal that they grew up with in Myanmar. In addition to participating in The Table, Van and Sung host a fellowship group for other Chin Christians in the Lancaster area. More than 15 people regularly attend this gathering.

Strangers no more

When asked if The Table would consider sponsoring another family, Dan refers to the "something wonderful about working with refugees." What began as a sponsorship between a church and refugee family quickly blossomed into friendship, and no one seemed to notice when the four months to which the congregation had committed were up.

"They came to this land seeking freedom and safety. We had the opportunity to be the church family who welcomed them to our city and helped them with their basic needs," he says. "Too often, churches get so lost in planning, programming, and publicity that we forget there are real people with real needs who need a friend to walk with them," Dan continues. "Sometimes I leave a meeting wondering if anything significant really happened there. But I never feel that way when I am driving home from the Hmung's house."

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Heather Hershey is the part-time director of youth ministries at The Table Community Church and a full-time mom at her home in Lancaster, Pa., where she lives with her husband, Curt, and her daughter, Alyssa. She enjoys hiking, walks, and playing in the park with Alyssa and their beagle, Chloe.



Matthew Lester is a Colorado native now living in Lancaster County, Pa. When he is not photographing, he enjoys travel, hiking, camping, and restoring his century-old row home in downtown Lancaster. More of his photography can be seen at [WWW.MATTHEWLESTER.NET](http://www.matthewlester.net).

FINDING GOD ON THE INTERNET

by JOEL PERCY

I worked out with Rob Bell this morning. I try to do this at least a few times a week. Rob is the pastor at Mars Hill, a church of 10,000 people in Grand Rapids, Mich., and he always has something interesting to say. There I was, pounding away on the treadmill, sweat dripping down my face, listening to Rob go on about Jewish purity law and cleansing rituals and how Jesus went out of His way to trash them every chance He got.

I should clarify that Rob was not actually with me in the flesh. Actually, I was listening to a podcast of a sermon he delivered a few days ago. This is the kind of thing that happens in the age of the internet. Rob Bell preaches a sermon in Grand Rapids on Sunday. A couple days later, I am listening to it in a gym in Oakville, ON. For those who can remember a time when the switch from hymn books to the overhead projector was the hot topic in church leadership circles, it seems amazing. But in truth, this is just the beginning of the possibilities for interaction between the Church and technology.

It is no secret that the internet is changing how we think and relate to one another in the twenty-first century. Whether ordering a copy of the latest bestseller, buying tickets for



an upcoming concert, or logging on to do some banking, the internet has become a part of everyday life for many North Americans. And now, the advent of so-called Web 2.0—a catch-all name referring to the trend towards increasingly collaborative sites with user-generated content—is changing the game again. Sites like *Facebook*, *YouTube*, and *Wikipedia* are taking off in popularity precisely because they involve the user as part of the action. Instead of going online to see what some slick web design firm has generated for me to see, I can post photos of the family reunion for those who couldn't make it or add my two cents

on a blog discussion about the latest political issue.

Presented with a culture that is being shaped by these new technologies at an unprecedented rate, churches have responded in a variety of ways. Some have been dismissive of the explosion of opportunities in the cyber-world, seeing them as a threat to real relationship and authentic community. Others have rushed headlong into the fray, seeking to

leverage the new possibilities on the internet for the advancement of the Kingdom, as evidenced by copycat sites like *GodTube* and *Conservapedia*, which seek to provide Christian alternatives to popular mainstream sites. And a growing number of groups have begun to experiment with the idea of forming online communities, whether by creating discussion boards that church members can contribute to electronically or by establishing fully virtual churches with no physical meeting place.

Life Church (www.lifechurch.tv)—a multi-site church based out of Oklahoma with locations in six states—has recently launched a campus within the popular virtual 3-D world, *Second Life*. *Second Life* users, who create profiles for themselves and can move about the virtual world and experience everything from online casinos to personal conversations to real estate deals, can now attend a cyber-version of New Life Church, where they can listen to sermons, talk with a youth pastor, or browse the church bookstore.

So what are we to make of this proliferation of ways to experience Christianity online? Can someone really find God on the internet? Or does the Gospel lose something of its power when it is digitized and

transmitted through high-speed DSL cables?

A historical perspective is helpful here. No one would accuse the Church of being on the cutting edge of technological innovation—not today or in the past. Nor has technology always been the evil force encroaching on the traditional way of doing things, a threat to all that is wholesome and relational and good. Rather, God has used technology in powerful ways to spread His message. Think of millions being able to tune in to Billy Graham Crusades through the magic of television. Or, to rewind a little further, think about the invention of the printing press and what it meant for getting the Bible into the hands of the average person. If we wish to go back even closer to our origins, we might look at the system of roads built by the Roman Empire, without which, the Early Church may not have had the means to spread the message of Jesus as far or as fast as it did.

In the end, the internet is just another wineskin that can carry the wine of the Gospel. Where we find it is helping to open doors for people to hear afresh the message of Jesus or to bring people into authentic community, we can celebrate it. Where we find it distracting from or even

hindering these goals, we can happily put it aside. If you ask me, we should all be cheering on our brothers and sisters who are seeking to bring about God's kingdom here on earth, whether by posting an encouraging comment on their blog or just giving an old-fashioned pat on the back.

And now, I have to go run some errands. I think I'll bring Philip Yancey along for the ride.

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Joel Percy is the weekend service pastor at The Meeting House (Oakville, ON). He and his wife, Julianne, recently spent a year living in Zimbabwe working with the Brethren in Christ AIDS Project at Mtshabezi Hospital. When Joel is not working out with Rob Bell, he enjoys reading, tennis, and chess.



Ammon Perry is a native of Rochester, N.Y., currently studying studio art at Messiah College (Grantham, Pa.).

TO THE POINT

REFLECTING ON SHORT-TERM MISSIONS

What long-term value is found in short-term missions?

Jim Baker
HEISE HILL BIC
Gormley, ON

When I went with a short-term work team to Venezuela in 2001, it was really just about satisfying my curiosity and easing my guilty conscience. We live in such an affluent society, and I thought maybe I would “feel better” if I gave something back. I’d heard that short-term mission trips were life changing, but for me, that turned out to be a real understatement. On the final evening, I was sitting on the rooftop, and all at once—and most unexpectedly—the Spirit of God settled upon me. In that moment, God spoke to me, saying, “I want you to follow me into full-time ministry.”

It’s been a five-year journey from there. At many times, it’s made

no sense at all—having to let go of 1,800 acres of cash crop land, cattle, and machinery—but here I am today serving as a pastor in a BIC congregation in Gormley, ON. Most times I feel inadequate and ask God why on earth He called me to this. But isn’t that the lifelong journey of a Christ-follower?

So, my whole point is simply this: Regardless of self-seeking, ungodly motivations for going on a short-term mission trip, I believe with all my heart that God uses these opportunities to change lives. My caution: Don’t dare to sign up for a short-term trip unless you’re OK with God doing something in your life. He just might!

Tim Harden
ROSEBANK BIC
Kitchener, ON

Been to a grocery store lately? I know people who go there to see what samples they can try. Why do they offer samples? So you’ll buy in, of course! The same principle applies to missions. Serving others takes on a new degree of intentionality when you go on a short-term mission, and frequently it translates into long-term difference-making subsequent to the trip.

My wife and I visited Haiti a number of years ago, delivering medical supplies to tuberculosis clinics. We shared at a church held in a narrow, dilapidated building that was packed wall-to-wall with spiritually hungry people. We learned that the building was being refurbished and the landlord would be giving them the boot within

Debby Bentch
HANOVER (Pa.) BIC

The closest thing I have ever experienced to what may have been a truly “missional” experience was on my first trip to Haiti with 10 teenagers. For weeks, I had warned them, “Do not eat or drink anything off of the mission compound. Nothing!” We arrived in Haiti, and on Sunday we visited a Haitian church, where they were sharing communion. And when I say “sharing” I don’t mean with individual plastic cups of grape juice and a plate laden with neatly cut little wafers. I mean a church sharing out of a communal cup and a loaf of bread passed hand to hand. As the cup and the bread slowly made their way through the congregation to the very back two rows where we were seated, 10 pairs of great big eyes pinned

me and the other leader to our seats, asking, “Should we take communion or not? What are we supposed to do now?”

I wonder if, to really get away from that “rich American tourist” experience, we wouldn’t need to not only share communion with our brothers and sisters, but also to share their homes, meals, bathroom facilities (or lack thereof), and modes of transportation.

But I admit that I would be the first to hesitate and probably turn down such an experience. I am spoiled and finicky; I like air conditioning and comfort. I am certainly not proud of it, but I’m pretty sure I am not cut out for that kind of an experience. God, forgive me!

the next month or so. We came home burdened by what we had seen. Over the next year, we shared that burden with enough friends to see provisions raised for a new building, which was erected in the same area of Port au Prince and seated 500. It was full within the first few months of being built.

I was a businessman when I went on that first mission trip. Now I’m a pastor because there is no joy like that which comes from serving others and seeing people come to Christ. Yes, short-term missions makes a difference!

P.S.: Four of my parishioners just got back from Haiti a few weeks ago. They were thrilled to have been there!

PARTING WORDS

MY SALVADORAN BAPTISM

by PERRY ENGLE

The highway connecting the Salvadoran towns of Santa Ana and Metapan runs less than a dozen feet from the front door of Pan de Vida, a BIC church in Texistepeque, El Salvador. Buses and trucks belching diesel fumes scream by as we load the back of Pastor Cesar’s mini-pickup with people needing a ride home from the evening service. It’s my second trip to this poor Central American country, and I’m doing my best to connect with the brothers and sisters who have so graciously accepted me and my traveling *compadre*, Mike Holland, into their midst.

“I’ll ride in back,” I tell Cesar and Mike as I hoist myself into the open bed of the truck. Not surprisingly, I’m the only one among the 15 or so passengers wearing a navy blue pinstripe suit, but it’s a beautiful night, and I can’t resist the romantic notion of seeing what it’s like to travel 40 miles on these roads in the back of a pickup going home after church.

“Just don’t tell my wife I did this,” I say, only half-joking.

I notice lightning on the horizon before I realize it’s starting to rain. Flashes backlight the Santa Ana volcano in the distance. The women and children around me begin to sing choruses in Spanish as the



you!—we call out to each other. And almost immediately, a wave of guilt and embarrassment washes over me for turning a journey home with these dear people into a joy-ride for a visiting bishop.

I squish into the cab for the trip home, looking very much like a navy blue, North American, pinstriped rat. My Bible is soaked all the way through to the Psalms. I feel indulgent, humbled, and blessed all at the same time. I’ll be going home in a day or so, but this is how these faithful brothers and sisters get to church multiple times a week, every week of their lives.

“This is nothing,” Pastor Cesar says with a knowing smile as I attempt to dry God’s wholly-waterlogged Word. “You should see it during the rainy season.”



Perry Engle is the bishop of the Midwest and Pacific Conferences. He also oversees Pan de Vida and Mision Cristiana Rhema, two Salvadorian BIC churches adopted into the Pacific Conference. When not riding in the back of mini-trucks, Perry rides around Ontario, Calif., with his wife, Marta, and their three daughters in their minivan.

drizzle turns to a downpour, and a little girl buries her head in the small of my back.

It’s raining buckets by the time we arrive in Metapan, just a few miles south of the Guatemalan border. The side roads have turned into rivers, and boulders the size of coffee tables litter the way. Each dip in the road is filled with a torrent of water threatening to kill the motor as it coughs and sputters with each crossing. I try to remember the last words I said to Marta and the girls before I left home and the amount on my life insurance policy.

As the road narrows and ends, Cesar pulls over and the waterlogged riders empty out into the darkness, disappearing up muddy paths to their huts in the hills above us. “¡Dios le bendiga!”—God bless

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