

December 2023

# MISSIONS

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# THINKING IT THROUGH

BY MARK SWAIM

## "Fear Not, for I Am with You"

The prophecy of Isaiah was written, in part, to teach us that in times of crisis, a believer must trust in the Lord. This message is central in chapters 1–35 of Isaiah, where God shows how His people were guilty of rebellion and sin, putting their trust in idols and political alliances rather than in God.

This same message is the focus of Isaiah 36–39, where we read about King Hezekiah, who was under threat from Sennacherib, the Assyrian king. Faced with the possibility of being conquered, Hezekiah had to think about where he would place his trust.

In the final section, Isaiah 40–66, Isaiah writes about the Lord's Servant and how He is far greater than any idol and more reliable than any political alliance. He is faithful, compassionate, merciful, and sacrificial—a true and genuine Savior in whom men and women can find their confidence and put their trust.

Isaiah predicted the coming Babylonian captivity and all the upheaval it would cause (Isaiah 39:6). And, a century later, the prediction became a reality. The invading army came, bringing destruction and despair, upending lives and families, and causing anxiety and fear. For the people of God, their whole way of life—its traditions, culture, and religious activities—ceased to exist. They faced an uncertain future in an uncertain place.

The Bible tells us to remember our Creator now, in our younger days, before the difficult days come—because the difficult days, the times of crisis, will come (Ecclesiastes 12:1). And, if we have not learned to trust in God during the good times, then we will find it hard to trust Him in the difficult times.

In Isaiah 41, we read how God can transform circumstances. He knows what He is doing. He is in control (Isaiah 41:4). In verse 9, we learn that God reminded His oppressed people that He had chosen them and they belonged to Him and would not be forgotten. Despite the crisis they were facing, God was there, orchestrating the end as He had the beginning.

Isaiah 41:10 says, "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand." Here, we find God's promise to deliver Israel and to be with the people amid their trial, to strengthen and help them.

God's promises are a great source of comfort. They remain as true today as in biblical times:

- "As your days, so shall your strength be." (Deuteronomy 33:25)
- "My grace is sufficient for you." (2 Corinthians 12:9)
- "Fear not, for I am with you. . . I will help you." (Isaiah 41:10)
- "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5; Genesis 28:15; Deuteronomy 31:6; Joshua 1:5)

So many promises in God's Word comfort us when comfort is needed. He is the almighty God, yet He is gentle with His lambs.

He is the almighty God, yet He is gentle with His lambs.

As a Shepherd, He is the one who goes before us (John 10:4). And, if the Lord has not forgotten even a sparrow, He certainly has not forgotten you (Matthew 10:29–31). He has His eye on you (Psalm 32:8).

On the throne is a great High Priest, and His invitation to boldly approach Him is still valid (Hebrews 4:16). There, He promises to be merciful and gracious with us (Hebrews 8:12).

We cannot always understand why God allows difficult times in our lives. But we can trust that He has a purpose and plan that goes far beyond what our human eyes and understanding can imagine. Isaiah hoped in the Lord (Isaiah 8:17). David trusted in Him (2 Samuel 22:3). May the Lord help us, when under the weight of crushing trials, to stand firm in our resolve to trust in Him with all our heart, choosing not to lean on or trust in our own understanding. Instead, may we acknowledge Him in all our ways (Proverbs 3:5–6). And, in the coming ages of eternity, the trials we endured will have their purposes made known. ■

*Mark Swaim serves in Poland (Other Overseas Service).*

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# History, Friendship, and the Gospel

## CMML Visits Dorle Smith in Edingen, Germany

BY PHILIP C. PARSONS

Picture a small town that is home to about 14,000 people and filled with traditional German-style houses and buildings, a palace dating as far back as the eighth century, beautiful gardens, and grassy fields—all nestled along a tributary of the Rhine called the Neckar River. What I've just described is Edingen-Neckarhausen, Germany, about seven miles southeast of Mannheim and five miles northwest of Heidelberg. More specifically, it's where my wife, Mary, and I found ourselves late this summer on a visit to Dorle Smith (*Missionary Prayer Handbook* Day 11), a longtime CMML missionary.



### From denying God to smuggling Bibles

Dorle was born in East Germany during World War II, but her parents escaped to West Germany before the borders closed. Raised in nominal Protestantism but not knowing God, Dorle experienced a shattering of her faith when she started life as a university student in Cologne. Troubles with friends and tragedy in her family finally brought her to the point of total despair.

She shared with us that, one night, she sneaked into a cathedral in Cologne and cried out to a God who, in her mind, did not exist. However, she took note of a Bible verse on a wall by the cathedral's entrance: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine." (Isaiah 43:1) In the following days, the Lord brought her together with Christians, and a totally new life began for her. Only one year later, God began opening new doors for Dorle: two years of Bible study at Emmaus Bible School in Lausanne, Switzerland, followed by a university ministry with Operation Mobilization (OM) in Vienna, Austria, and

three years of smuggling Russian Bibles behind the Iron Curtain. During that time, she met a fellow OM worker who introduced her to the Brethren movement. Dorle continued working with OM in various countries for another few years. In 1976, after she spent time in the US, Hollywood Bible Chapel in Florida commended her to the Lord's work. Due to the closure of that chapel, another assembly in Florida, Boulevard Bible Chapel, commended Dorle to the work in Germany, specifically evangelism.

### Planes, trains, and automobiles (and ferries)

Late in the summer, after a weeklong conference in Annecy, France, Mary and I boarded a bus and then a train to travel through Geneva and Basel, Switzerland, and on to Mannheim, Germany, where our hotel was located. The next day, Saturday, we rented a car and found our way to Edingen and to Dorle's home—which has been in her family for decades.

When we arrived, we presented Dorle with a special card. While at the conference in France, Mary had asked Sylvie Glock (MPH Day 10), an artist, to create a card so women at the conference could send their greetings to Dorle.



For many years, Dorle had been a regular participant at the annual conference; more recently, however, back issues have made it difficult for her to make the trip. Many women wrote their well wishes to Dorle, and she was most appreciative of the expressions of love and kindness.

On Saturday afternoon, we traveled via car ferry across the Neckar River to the quaint village of Ladenburg. True to her convictions and heart for evangelism, Dorle wasted no time sharing the Gospel with a man who had offered to help unfold her walker. For the next several minutes, she easily engaged in conversation and even offered to help him find suitable housing as he intended to move to the region.

**Above (from left):** Like Edingen, Heidelberg is located along the Neckar River; Dorle (left) enjoys reading a card from Mary Parsons (right) and fellow missionary friends.



After lunch at a German restaurant, which we all enjoyed, we meandered the streets of Ladenburg so Dorle could get the necessary exercise to help her back. We enjoyed seeing some of the ancient ruins of the Celtic and Roman era. And Ladenburg is home to Carl Benz, inventor of the first modern automobile.



### The 105-year-old Heidelberg assembly

On Sunday morning, we picked up Dorle and traveled to the assembly in Heidelberg. The service began with the Breaking of Bread, followed by the preaching service, when I spoke. Many in the congregation knew English and seemed keen to hear an English message, although someone did provide interpretation. At a luncheon afterward, we met some of the young people, many of whom study at Heidelberg University—one of Europe's most reputable universities and Germany's oldest, founded in 1386.



Two men from the assembly then took us on a walking tour of Heidelberg. We made a trek up to a ridge that overlooks the city and includes the famed Philosophers' Walk, a picturesque



**Left (from top and L-R):** Dorle shows Phil and Mary around Ladenburg, just across the river from Edingen; These ancient ruins date from the Celtic and Roman era; The Heidelberg assembly has existed for 105 years; The Heidelberg assembly waves hello to fellow believers in North America. **Right:** Places such as Heidelberg's Market Square, where locals and tourists gather, present opportunities for sharing the Gospel.

path where philosophers and university professors of the Romantic period walked and talked.

We then descended on a cobblestone path, crossed the bridge over the Neckar River, and entered the old city, where the university and many historical churches are found. During World War II, Heidelberg served as a garrison for the American forces in Europe (and as their headquarters following the war). Consequently, the city was not significantly damaged by bombing. It is also believed that military personnel spared the city because they saw it as a future place to live.

### Passing on her heart for students

We said goodbye to Dorle on Monday, but not before she shared some details of her calling. She, a coworker, and a prayer partner sensed the Lord calling them to evangelize in the streets of Heidelberg with a focus on reaching university students. This work expanded into a backyard



barbecue outreach. International students loved to be invited and share their lives. Dorle and her companions also introduced them to young believers from the assembly.

Due to health reasons, Dorle can no longer lead this outreach, but two other believers caught the vision, and each has organized their own ministry. Now, these two groups reach out to the people in Heidelberg regularly.

Over the years of serving in Germany, Dorle has met several women willing to learn more about the Bible. Because of the women's unique spiritual and emotional needs, Dorle has added two additional Bible studies to the two she has been leading for some time. Dorle said, "Teaching the Word of God has always been my heart's desire, and I cannot thank the Lord enough for this privilege."

### Prayer for health and strength

Mary and I had a wonderful visit with Dorle, and we were all encouraged by the time spent together. Please pray for Dorle and her ministry in Germany—for her personal evangelism, her involvement in the local church, and her Bible studies. Pray that the Lord will give her health and strength to continue serving her Lord and Savior. ■

*Philip C. Parsons, CMML missionary care and security*

# Interview with Juanes Pineda



## A New Missionary Shares about Daily Life

A native of Duitama, Colombia, Juanes Pineda possesses a deep love for his city and fellow Colombians. He grew up in a Christian home and, as a child, attended an assembly that Gary and Vivian Michael (*Missionary Prayer Handbook* Day 21) had started. When the Lord took Juanes to Bogotá for his college education, he connected with other CMML missionaries who disciplined him. Later, he moved to the US and began serving at Wauwatosa Bible Chapel in Wisconsin. In 2022, the assembly commended Juanes to the work in his hometown, Duitama, and today, he focuses on evangelism, discipleship, and church planting. Please pray for Juanes as he serves the Lord.

### What is Duitama like?

Duitama is a really cool city to live in. Not many people in Colombia know about it, but they should! It is known as the Pearl of Boyacá (Boyacá is the state Duitama belongs to), since you find pretty much everything you need in such a small territory. It is not as busy as other cities in Colombia and has the perfect mixture of urban and rural areas.

### What is the weather like?

There are no seasons here as there are in the States. There are only rainy and dry seasons. But, in general, the weather is cool and overcast. Over the course of the year, the temperature typically varies from 45 to 67 degrees Fahrenheit and is rarely below 39 degrees or above 70 degrees. Tourists would suggest that the best times of year to visit Duitama for warm-weather activities are from late May to late September and from early December to late March.

### How do you get around?

Not every family here has a car, so people usually take buses to get around. I have a 1980 Nissan Patrol—it was designed back in the day to drive in tough terrains so you can get to hard-to-access places. It's been a blessing!

### What foods do you eat?

People grow a lot of potatoes and green onions and a variety of delicious fruits in this area. So we eat a lot of rice and potatoes and have different ways to prepare chicken and meat. People don't eat much processed food, which makes our food pretty healthy—a lot of natural sauces made of tomatoes, onions, garlic, and some other spices. Oh, and we eat an interesting variety of soups. The food is very good! You should definitely come and try it.

### What cultural behavior or tradition do you find interesting?

The Christmas season is definitely at the top. Christmas music here does not necessarily have to do with Christmas; it's more like nostalgic dancing songs talking about romantic betrayal or something else. What is pretty cool is how people have *novenas*: here, a novena is a traditionally Catholic celebration where families gather around the manger from December 16 to 24, and some Christians have started to do the same as a way to share the Gospel with their families. You see people out in the neighborhood listening to "Christmas" music, kids playing on the streets, and families lighting candles and eating a variety of foods eaten only during that season. It's a great way to fellowship with families and share about the light of Jesus.

### What does a typical week look like for you?

Every week looks different. Some things I do are scheduled, such as time to pray with the leaders of the church and two Bible studies throughout the week. The rest of the time, I visit people from the church and do translation projects, discipleship, and small-town outreach. My buddy James and I play on a basketball team, so we try to be in shape for the games too.

### How do you get to know people?

Basketball has given me the opportunity to connect with people. From being part of a team to coaching some young kids, the Lord has allowed me to spend time with different people and invite them to come over to eat and watch football or basketball on TV and have key conversations about Jesus and spiritual life.



## How do you relax?

I love mountains; they remind me of how great and faithful our God is. Thankfully, I'm surrounded by the Andes mountains, so whenever I want to get away with the Lord, I drive my old Nissan Patrol off the road and up the hills and pray for Duitama and the towns that surround it.

## Do you have any personal hobbies that you use in your ministry?

Basketball! The Lord started our church in Duitama three years ago by allowing a few believers and me to share the Gospel with some of my friends from high school who played basketball with me. We would invite them to watch basketball on TV, then we would go out to play, and there would always be a chance to talk about Jesus. One of my friends was saved back then, and now, three years later, he and I have had opportunities to coach different high school teams. We pray for the players and share how there's Someone greater to play and live for.

## What is challenging?

Time to reach as many people as possible is challenging. People are very open and always down to hang out, but there are towns that haven't heard the Gospel yet. Just as the Lord said to His disciples in Matthew 9:37–38, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." Finding enough laborers to maximize the time was the challenge back then; it is still the challenge now. So pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest.

## What is exciting?

Seeing the Lord at work is exciting. We open our mouths, we hang out with people, we pray for the Lord to lead us in every way, and it is super exciting to see Him do the things only He can do. The missionary who started the church where I grew up used to say, "When we work, we work; when we pray, He works." He's at work!

## How can we pray for you?

Busyness is a reality even in ministry. But we are not called to busyness; we are called to obedience. So please pray that I will obey the Lord in what He has already established for me. Pray that the Lord will use us believers mightily to make Christ's name known in Duitama, in Boyacá, in Colombia, and to the end of the world. ■

**Right (from top):** Playing on a basketball team provides opportunities for fun, exercise, relationship building, and evangelism; A 1980 Nissan Patrol faithfully transports Juanes and his friends; Discipleship can happen anywhere, even on a mountain peak; Juanes likes to escape to the mountains around his city, where he relaxes and prays.





# A VISIT TO BURUNDI

Experiencing God's Work, Sharing His Love

BY JUSTIN GEORGE



I recently spent a week visiting Jesse and Joy Johnson (*Missionary Prayer Handbook* Day 1) in Burundi to get a better understanding of the ministries of New Testament-patterned churches. Burundi is the poorest country in the world, in terms of GDP per capita. Unemployment is high, many citizens struggle to find enough to eat, and most work informally or as subsistence farmers. The country has been plagued with conflict, most notably between 1993 and 2005, when hundreds of thousands died in a civil war between Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups.<sup>1</sup> Recently, Burundi has enjoyed relative political stability.

Spiritually, most people there think salvation is earned by merit, or they may adhere to a combination of things, such as witchcraft and superstition. However, the door for the Gospel is wide open, and opportunities to demonstrate the love of Christ abound.

## WATCHING SPIRITUAL LIGHTS TURN ON

Discovery School is an English-based school that Jesse and Joy started several years ago as a pre-kindergarten but that now extends through 12th grade and serves more than 1,500

students. Discovery is unique in Burundi in that all its teachers are professing Christians. Many families will send their children to Discovery, despite disagreeing with the Gospel, because they recognize the potential of education to transform their children's future. Every child at Discovery regularly hears the Gospel through Bible classes.

From what I understand, more than 90 percent of the kids in the school can't yet answer basic salvation questions, so Discovery School works to change that. During my visit, I shared the Gospel in 10 classes, but it was hard to tell if the message was truly reaching hearts. However, four high school seniors asked to meet with me privately with the genuine questions of why salvation is a free gift and why works can't save you. As I slowly explained Romans 4:4–5, I could see the light turning on in their minds. Imagine thinking for your whole life that you had to earn your way to a relationship with God and then understanding for the first time that you can simply believe in Christ's finished work. Pray for the salvation of precious souls at the school.



**Top row (L–R):** This newly refurbished classroom is ready for students; This class enjoys Justin's visit. **Bottom row (L–R):** Students listen as Justin presents the Gospel; Justin explains the Gospel to high school students who asked to meet with him; Teachers and the administration, including Joy Johnson (left), appreciate new science and art supplies.

## “NOT FORSAKING THE ASSEMBLING”

I also visited three different assemblies. There are 172 throughout the country, with more than 60 in the Bujumbura area. Many assemblies have hundreds of attendees and regularly hive off into new works, which I found quite refreshing given the conditions in the West. Many believers walk hours to and from church each Sunday; some cross treacherous, mountainous conditions, even if over relatively short distances. “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together” takes on a whole new meaning (Hebrews 10:25).

Believers also construct their church buildings themselves. Chapel workdays are like what we have in the West, except Burundians bring their machete and other tools to clear the field to physically build the church.

The midweek meeting starts at 4:30 p.m. so people can walk to the chapel after their workday and then walk home before dark. Even in the mountains, the fairly poor believers showed Jesse and me kindness and hospitality—cooking a special meal just for us. The believers wonderfully demonstrated 1 Peter 4:9 to us: “Be hospitable to one another.”



**L-R:** Justin (left) preaches at one of the assemblies, while Jesse Johnson (right) interprets; Burundian believers gather for their assembly's prayer meeting.

## SYSTEMATICALLY TRAINING BELIEVERS

Many believers have zeal for God but limited understanding of the Bible because no one has ever systematically taught it to them. Hence, Jesse restarted the Timothy Bible School almost 20 years ago as a training program for current and future elders. Given the sheer number of assemblies and the relatively few missionaries in the country, the school represents an opportunity to invest in the greatest number of people at one time. I also had the privilege of meeting Jeremy and Sonja Bassett (MPH Day 1), who oversee the Bible teaching and develop materials in Kirundi, the local language.

Local assemblies recommend the men first, and then, the students come for a month at a time, boarding at the school until they return to their families. They receive systematic teaching and can work out the questions they have. After completing

the four-month program over the course of a year, they may go back for a second year to receive additional training.

Pray that these men will be trained so as to effectively shepherd. When I spoke to one of the cohorts, I sensed a longing for God's Word. This ministry is arguably the most vital for addressing the local assemblies' future health.

I also visited the new campus of the Ephphatha School for the Deaf. Formerly colocated with Discovery School, Ephphatha moved when a government program provided land. I also visited the school for the blind that Jesse's grandparents started. The schools meet a vital need for an often-neglected population.



**L-R:** Justin teaches the students at Timothy Bible School, and beside him, Jesse Johnson interprets; Relocated onto property of its own, the Ephphatha School for the Deaf will soon have a new dormitory.

## PRAYING FOR GRACE AND STRENGTH

Spending time with missionaries on the field made me reflect on what Paul said to the Corinthians: “I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls.” (2 Corinthians 12:15) Their task seems overwhelming. Some sort of issue related to the ministries, the churches, and other concerns always requires attention. Practical needs also require a response. I was exhausted after one week of just watching Jesse and Joy live their lives. Pray for grace and strength in times of need.

One of the more poignant moments of the trip occurred after I shared the Gospel with a class and then asked if the students had any questions. One asked, “If you had only 15 minutes left to live, what would you do?” I told him that if I had only minutes, then there could not be a better thing to do than to share the Gospel with precious souls for whom Christ died. May we seize the opportunities before us. ■



*Justin George and his wife, Christina, fellowship at New Hampshire Avenue Gospel Chapel in Silver Spring, Maryland.*

<sup>1</sup>“Burundi,” The World Factbook (website), Central Intelligence Agency, updated 3 October 2023, [www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/burundi/](https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/burundi/).



# A Weekend at REACHING HIGHER CMML

## Unites and Edifies Young Adults

BY SARAH DUNLAP

Late in the summer, the CMML office is abuzz with preparations for Reaching Higher, our weekend retreat for young adults ages 20–39. This year, we planned to host the event from September 15 to 17 at our facility in Wall Township, New Jersey. Days before, a cool breeze swept in and announced autumn while contributing a fresh, energized tone to the weekend of Bible teaching and fellowship.

On Friday night, we welcomed the attendees and helped them settle in. The 49 young adults came from the US, Mexico, and Germany; a handful were drive-ins, but most were overnight guests staying in the CMML Missionary Guest Home. Many were also newcomers who, from the moment they entered the building, commented on its size and distinguished Tudor style.

Besides settling in, Friday night included supper, an ice-breaker game before the event's first meeting, and free time. Throughout the evening, the friendly group got to know each other—many having never met and living states or countries apart. The speaker himself, Dan (*Missionary Prayer Handbook* Day 24), and his coworker came from a distant special-areas country, where they serve the Lord.

Saturday morning started early with men's and women's prayer times at 7:30 followed by breakfast. The second ministry meeting began at 9:00 a.m., when Dan dug into the theme of "Disciples Useful to the Master." He encouraged the attendees to seek Christ's kingdom above all, asking, "Are you seeking your 'best life' now or eternal life?" Throughout the weekend, Dan tackled topics such as God's will, confidence in the Lord, petitionary prayer, and proactive versus reactive responses. All the while, he used personal anecdotes to illustrate what discipleship looks like in his country of service: living among the people, working with them, and laughing, weeping, and growing in Christ together.

After lunch, everyone enjoyed free time. Some opted to hang

out around the house; others visited the nearby beach and surrounding towns. Then, the Bible teaching resumed with breakout sessions scattered around the house.

The participants divided into three groups and,



working in rotation, listened to three seminars: Dan discussed the Lord's work in his special-areas country, Scott and Michelle Dunkerton (New Jersey) shared thoughts on singleness, and John Peasland (CMML's executive director) presented on business as missions.

Saturday evening held a catered dinner and another message from Dan, where he addressed five things that result from tested faith. Afterward, Craig Fritchey (CMML assembly relations and security) moderated a Q&A session with Dan using questions the attendees had submitted.

On Sunday, a Breaking of Bread service, Dan's final message, and a fried-chicken lunch rounded out the weekend. Around 2:00 p.m., we said goodbye to the participants, and they began their trips home—some a short car ride away; others a journey as far as California and Mexico.

While chatting with the attendees, we discovered what they valued about Reaching Higher. One shared, "This was my first time at Reaching Higher, and I was so impressed. I enjoyed the weekend so much, especially the great, practical Bible teaching and meeting new friends." Another said that she appreciated the conference setting, which facilitated serious conversations with like-minded Christians. We thank the Lord that Reaching Higher encouraged this year's participants and pray He will use it again in 2024. ■

Sarah Dunlap, Missions editor

