

August 2022

# MISSIONS

## **RWANDA** The Gospel and Education Transform Lives

**Middle East**  
Scholarships  
Provide Hope

**Peru**  
MKs Discuss  
Life on the Field

**MOP 2022**  
Meet the Students







# THINKING IT THROUGH

BY PAUL D. BRAMSEN

## What Makes the Great Commission So Great?

I heard it from childhood: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations. . . .” (Matthew 28:18–20) The globe-shaped poster at the front of the auditorium during my church’s Sunday-to-Sunday Mission Conference put it as simply, “Go ye!” (Mark 16:15, KJV)

Missionaries with nightly messages and stories and slides or 16mm films (some with shocking cross-cultural content) underscored our personal responsibility to participate in this global task of making disciples of “all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues.” (Revelation 7:9) To this day, I remember a message—titled “Here Am I, Lord; Send My Sister!”—challenging me at 10 years old that my role in the Great Commission could not be transferred to someone else. My Savior and Lord wanted to include me. And He has.

What makes this mission so great? The Great Commission is:

### Great in its plan

In the Bible’s first chapter, God hints at His blueprint for Earth. After creating the first man and woman “in His own image,” God “blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth.’” (Genesis 1:26–28)

God’s command to His two image-bearers went beyond biological reproduction. His intent was for His glory to go global and fill the earth with beings who could think and feel like Him, know Him, magnify Him, and enjoy Him forever.

But those image-bearers rebelled and rejected God’s plan. Humankind’s relationship with the Creator-Owner was broken. So Adam produced sons and daughters “in his own likeness, after his image.” (Genesis 5:3–4) Consequently, each of Adam’s descendants has inherited his rebellious, sin-bent nature and, with it, spiritual, physical, and eternal separation from God.

But the Lord had a plan to rescue, redeem, and reconcile helpless sinners to Himself. He promised to send to earth His own Son, who “is the image of the invisible God” and who spanned the mighty gulf to become human and make “peace through the blood of His cross”—“[suffering] once for sins, the

just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.” (Colossians 1:15, 20; 1 Peter 3:18)

What a plan!

### Great in its privilege

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself “has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” (2 Corinthians 5:19) His plan is to use you and me as His image-bearing ambassadors to help the world’s diverse people groups understand who He is and what He has done for them so they can be forgiven, declared righteous, and indwelt by His Spirit. Then, they can enjoy a relationship with Him and become His bright image-bearers in a dark world.

Think of it: God Himself (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) has called us to be “workers together with Him.” (2 Corinthians 6:1) How immeasurably blessed we as “God’s fellow workers” are to experience His presence, hear His voice, follow His leading, and find Him faithful through times of intense spiritual warfare and triumph (1 Corinthians 3:9).

What a privilege!

### Great in its partnerships

Over decades of ministry, my wife, Carol, and I have watched God multiply His work in ways we could never have imagined. And it has happened through thousands of partnerships.

As we walk with God, He privileges us to work with His redeemed people. On the night when Jesus was betrayed, He prayed that all who would believe in Him “may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.” (John 17:20–21)

We can do nothing of eternal value by ourselves. Our Lord calls us into a life of dependence on Him with interdependence on the members of His body—each of us fulfilling a role in the greatest mission of all time for the One who promised: “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)

What a partnership! What a privilege! What a plan! ■

*Paul Bramsen serves in Other Overseas Service (MPH Day 27).*

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FRONT COVER: Rwandan woman—Jennifer Kamari

BACK COVER: Sea of Galilee—©AdobeStock



## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

# IN RWANDA

The Gospel and Education Transform Lives

BY JENNIFER KAMARI



Rwandans like to say that God travels the world by day but rests at night in Rwanda in recognition of their country's natural beauty. This landlocked nation, known as the "Land of a Thousand Hills," lies in East Africa's Great Rift Valley, bordered by Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, and Tanzania.

Rwanda is the most densely populated country in Africa: 13.17 million people live in 9,524 square miles. The median age of its people, who are shy but curious, is about 20.<sup>1</sup> It is a country moving from low to middle class income levels. However, 76 percent of the population relies on subsistence farming, meaning that all the crops and animals raised maintain the family, with little to no profit.<sup>2</sup>

### Rwanda's deep and divided history

Most Rwandans say they believe in God. Churches of various denominations are everywhere, but most teach the prosperity gospel. "Church" seems to be built on numbers: how many people are converted, and how many enter a building on Sunday mornings and weeknights.

I cannot write about Rwanda without mentioning the genocide that happened in 1994 after decades of unrest, which began when colonizers divided the people into ethnic classes. A mentality of "us versus them" resulted.

On the evening of April 6, 1994, the Rwandan president's plane was shot down as he was returning from peace talks. In the following 100 days, about one million people were killed. With the killing came children born out of rape, the spread of HIV/AIDS, fatherless families, distrust, deep-seated shame and guilt, and the need to rebuild a country at every level. The genocide of the Tutsi has affected each and every Rwandan living today in one way or another and no matter where in the world they now live.

Today, when Rwandans approach Christianity, they struggle to believe certain truths: *You say that God is faithful, that He loves*

*me, that I can trust Him, that He sees everything, that He knows all things, that He cares for me, and that He wants a relationship with me. But how can I trust God? He didn't come to help us when my family was being killed and I was hiding in the swamp. Where was God?*

### The Gospel for all people

My husband, Serge, and I are passionate about coming alongside people and pointing them to Jesus. As the "author and finisher of our faith," He has created each of us with a purpose and given us unique gifts to serve in His kingdom, regardless of social or economic status (Hebrews 12:2). The Gospel we believe, live, and teach is for all people. The good news is not only for the West or for the people who have their lives together—it does not oppress; it does not discriminate. It says God wants a relationship with you, cares about your entire life circumstance, and brings hope.

However, sharing that truth is easier said than done. The gospel usually preached here, which focuses on getting into heaven, includes a list of dos and don'ts.

Many Rwandans wonder: How can I have a relationship with God when I can't get to church on Sunday because I need to find money for the day to feed my children, let alone spare a coin for a tithe? How can I live in hope when I have never experienced it? How will God change my life since life has always been this way and always will be?

As we point people to believe in Him, to acknowledge their sin and repent, and to follow His teaching, we also see them as created in God's image; we see them in their hurt, in their daily challenges. We sit, cry, pray, encourage, learn, and grow together, wherever they are in their faith.

The good news is not only for the West or for the people who have their lives together.

Above: Families participate in the faith gathering.

## The power of education

One of the current ministries we participate in was birthed from a faith gathering we helped start in the fall of 2013. We began as a church plant with seven adults in our living room and then moved to a rented space. This community of believers comprised people who are among the most vulnerable and were shunned by other churches or had walked away from them because of legalism. Here, each believer was known by name and challenged to grow in faith, children were valued, and community impact was expected. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, about 50 adults and about as many children attended. However, due to complications in registering with the government, we can no longer meet for traditional Sunday services. Today, the faith gathering facilitates discipleship and hosts spiritual-development meetings, a Wednesday-night Bible study, and vacation Bible school.

Many of the children who came to the original faith gathering are fatherless, yet they found a safe place there. Serge and I cared about the children's spiritual and earthly futures.



We desire that all know God. In knowing God, lives can transform. So educating people about the Bible is essential. What Serge and I also know and believe is that education—formal and informal—changes people's lives. It equips people with "simple" skills like literacy. Education enables people to speak with confidence and make life-giving decisions for their families. It changes cultural and personal ideologies. It empowers. It brings hope. Education is key to breaking the cycle of poverty.

So we started an early childhood education (ECE) program, KomezaLife, with a vision to teach families about the Bible and to equip the community through formal education. We believed that if we could give a fatherless child with an illiterate mother a leg up for starting first grade, then we had to do it. Not only would the child learn and develop in a safe, Christ-centered environment, but we would reach his or her mom too.

In July 2022, our third class graduated. These children have

transformed into five-year-olds who know and talk about Jesus, love to pray and worship, think creatively, understand the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic—and can be kind while doing all this (for the most part!). They are ready for first grade.

Simultaneously, we informally educate their parents. We teach them about child development, nutrition, money and saving for the future, cleanliness, discipline, and nurture—all through Jesus and the good news He offers. We watch their lives transform too. It's a daily struggle, but as a community, they are learning to be more like Christ.

## Staff members with unique stories

Our program leaders, each of whom has a unique story and a personal relationship with Christ, help facilitate growth among the students and parents. When we interviewed Grace, now our program coordinator, she apologized, saying she didn't fit into Rwanda's churches because she believed Jesus came to redeem the whole person, not just to get her into heaven.

Bienvenu is our community shepherd. He is a male role model and Bible teacher for the students and a spiritual leader for the staff and community. Angelic is our lead teacher. She initially came to the faith gathering with her young son, seeking help to survive the day. Then, we helped her upgrade her formal education.

Divine, now our assistant teacher, took a chance one Sunday morning and attended the faith gathering after hearing that we were different. She believed in God, but other churches had ostracized her because she was a single mother.

Our other assistant teacher, Cecile, is a mother of three who came to the faith gathering because of her children. Her husband is in jail for crimes of genocide, and the family continues to heal from trauma. Vestine, a teacher, is a single mother who came to us at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, after her former employer let her go. Her child is part of the ECE program.

## The good news for another community

About a year ago, we learned that KomezaLife could no longer rent our current location. So we bought 4.9 acres of land in Bugesera, one of Rwanda's poorest districts. This land is two plots down from Aspire Academy, a primary and secondary school that fellow missionaries are starting. When we heard about their vision, we knew we had to meet for coffee and talk with them. We share their vision of community transformation; however, they are not interested in adding an early childhood education component to their school, although they know it's important. So the ministries will complement each other.

Currently, we are praying for the funds for our building project. By the time you read this, we trust that we will have obtained our building permits and started construction. School

Above: Serge teaches parents about the Bible.



starts in September, and we hope to be ready. But we know that God's timing is always right. We're humbled to be part of His kingdom coming to this community.



## Leadership training for young Rwandans

Another big part of our time is spent mentoring young Rwandan leaders involved in ministry and business. We run a year-long leadership development institute in partnership with One Rock International from the UK. We have started our second cohort, with 26 participants. Our training will challenge them in their spiritual formation, vision and discernment, leadership skills, and their part in global missions. The institute combines in-person intensive classes, personal-reflection assignments, Zoom meetings, and one-to-one mentorship. Please pray for these young leaders who love Jesus and desire to live out the purpose He created them for.

## Lives grounded in Christ

We pray that all of Rwanda's people will have opportunities to hear and respond to Jesus's message; experience lifelong, Christlike transformation; and walk in the hope of what is unseen. May all Rwandans believe that God is the faithful, loving, caring, trustworthy, all-knowing Father. Thank you for your prayers for us and this country. ■



*Jennifer and Serge Kamari are commended from Woodside Bible Fellowship in Elmira, Ontario.*

<sup>1</sup> Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), *The World Factbook*, 2021, [CIA.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/rwanda/](https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/rwanda/). <sup>2</sup> David D. Weatherspoon, Steven R. Miller, Fidele Niyitanga, Lorraine J. Weatherspoon, and James F. Oehmke, "Rwanda's Commercialization of Smallholder Agriculture: Implications for Rural Food Production and Household Food Choices," *Journal of Agricultural & Food Industrial Organization* 19, no. 1 (March 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1515/jafo-2021-0011>.



**Left:** The KomezaLife team—(L-R, starting second from left) Bienvenu, Cecile, Grace, Vestine, Divine, and Angelic—meets families in the new community. **Right (from top, L-R):** A Rwandan woman walks up a mountain with her wares; The Kamaris buy most of their fruit from this stand; A community mom appreciates some food help; ECE students make pizza dough during a baking-themed week; Two moms in the new community say hello; The leadership development institute's second cohort comprises 26 students, pictured with the Kamaris.



# MK CORNER

Missions Magazine Chats with Missionary Kids

## INTERVIEW WITH THE CENEPO-TORRES SIBLINGS — Peru, Day 22

BY SARAH DUNLAP

One Friday afternoon, I chatted with Hannah, Gabriela, and Selah Cenepo-Torres. Zoom helped us bridge the distance between my office in New Jersey and their house in Maryland, where they were living while on furlough. Their oldest sister, Abigail, joined us for a few minutes to share about her transition to college. We covered many other topics, from personal hobbies to unusual Peruvian foods, but the insightful siblings also discussed the joys and challenges of being MKs who straddle multiple cultures. Please pray for the Cenepo-Torres siblings, who have returned to Peru, as they continue growing up and exploring this unique lifestyle the Lord has given their family.

### Would you say that home is the US or Peru?

**Selah:** I feel more at home in Peru.

**Gabriela:** Wherever the family is is where the “home” is at the moment.

**Hannah:** I was the only one born in Peru, so I feel like Peru is my homeland. But I’m kind of leaning toward the States right now because there’s so much more I can do here, like get a job, drive, and [participate] on the worship team—stuff like that.

### Do you have any favorite foods from Peru?

**Hannah:** I feel like we haven’t had them in so long because we’ve been in the States, so I’m like, “All of them are my favorite!”

**Selah:** Oh! *Aji de gallina*. It’s kind of like rice with potatoes and lettuce and chicken in a sauce.

### Are there any unusual Peruvian foods?

**Gabriela:** There are a lot!

**Hannah:** The first one that comes to mind is *mondongo*, which is the stomach lining of a cow. I had it once.

**Gabriela:** And we were like, “Never again.”

**Hannah:** Who thought to eat that? A lot of times, it’s in soups or sometimes like a curry—eaten over rice.



Pablo, Timothy (6), and Sarah with Selah (12), Hannah (17), Gabriela (15), and Abigail (19)

### What are your hobbies?

**Selah:** I really like roller skating and riding my RipStik. [Note: A RipStik is a two-wheeled, pivoting board similar to a skateboard.]

**Hannah:** Annoying us is her hobby.

**Selah:** Oh, it’s really fun.

**Gabriela:** I paint a lot, and I ride my skateboard and long-board. I also play the ukulele.

**Hannah:** I play a lot of instruments, and then, I write songs, and I play on the worship team. I play bass guitar (electric), acoustic guitar, ukulele, vocals, piano, and I can play electric [piano], so that’s six instruments. And I enjoy random stuff. Every week, it seems like I find something new to do, whether it’s crocheting or painting or cross-stitching. I [also] dance ballet. It’s important to me.

### Any ideas of what you want to do when you’re older?

**Hannah:** It’s my time to shine! This is an obsession of mine: I want to be a firefighter-paramedic—fire trucks, ambulances, flashing lights. Children say they want to be firefighters when they grow up. That’s me. I want to be a firefighter.

**Selah:** I want to do sign language, like interpreting for concerts and stuff.

### Abigail, tell us about your transition to the States and college.

**Abigail:** [I attend] Lancaster Bible College in Pennsylvania. It’s definitely been interesting; I feel like [my first] semester was very difficult. Maybe this seems like a dramatic metaphor, but the transition almost seemed like a new cut or bruise or something that was hurting me. But it also seemed like the antiseptic that was revealing all the old bruises or cuts or past things that I’ve felt. It was just a lot of triggers, or feeling out of place or missing home. [My first] semester, I was trying to be incredibly intentional—it was very painful—to process what was on my mind and heart and to allow others to speak into that. That was very, very helpful. Going home over break, I’m back in my normal culture, my

place. And then, coming back to school, I'm like, "Oh! OK, this is American culture all over again." And I have to get used to that. There have been a few reminders that the transition wasn't just [my first] semester. I'm still in that process.

### **Understanding your transition, Abigail, do you feel more at home in Peru?**

**Abigail:** As far as comfort and familiarity, definitely Peru. In Peru, the way you connect with people is often through culture. You're in the same culture, in the same place; therefore, we're great—it's a very warm culture. Here, I feel like you have to establish a connection before you have a relationship. So, as far as making relationships, knowing how to foster those, I have to sort of reel myself back and be like, "OK, I went a step too far there." I'm not used to some of the things here, like "Hi, how are you?" is more of a greeting than an actual question. But there are some ways where I feel like [the US] is homier. [English] is the language I communicate easiest in, and so, I can get myself across in ways that are very difficult in Spanish sometimes.

### **What is difficult about being an MK?**

**Gabriela:** There's the struggle to maintain friendships or even create them in the first place. There's the question of "Where's home?" Generally, it's struggling to see where you fit.

**Hannah:** I think the hardest thing is going between places. You go somewhere, and you start rebuilding what you were ripped away from, and then, oh, in a few months, you're ripped away, and all of that just goes down the drain. And you're off to the other place to do the same thing again: try to rebuild what just fell apart. If only it could stay the same when you're not there. It's really hard to keep relationships and friendships together when you're not face to face. You can only text or FaceTime so much.

### **What do you like about being an MK?**

**Gabriela:** I like being able to speak [Spanish]. And I like the different culture. I like the food a lot. It's good food. [Being an MK] comes with a lot of hard things, but it's a really cool experience overall.

**Selah:** The food—I love the food.

**Hannah:** For me, I appreciate it because, when I come to the States, I see all these kids who have never left their home or lived in a third-world country. They have everything at the tip of their fingers. This is such a country of plenty, and they've never seen what the outside world is like. And we have, and we get to experience both sides. It really opens doors to so many other things. And growing up with two cultures—although it's hard—is also a blessing because you understand more of the world around you. ■





# Ask a Missionary?

Missions work around the world is unique—different from what friends and family at home encounter day to day. So, to learn about life on the field while getting to know our missionaries better, we asked them to share their firsthand experience or advice.

## QUESTION: What family tradition have you adopted since moving to the mission field?

### HONDURAS

Holly Wooler



We make *ceviche de camarones* (an appetizer of shrimp marinated in citrus juice) served with hot popcorn every New Year's Eve. It's a tasty, citrusy dish that we first enjoyed while living in Ecuador. It's become such a family tradition that our adult children often make it themselves on New Year's.

### SPECIAL AREAS

Rachel M.

We are in a part of the world where Christmas is not celebrated. However, since the people here see Christmas trees and other decorations on TV, they associate Western customs with New Year's, so they decorate and give gifts then. For that reason, and since any gifts that were sent to us were usually late, we celebrated Jesus's birth on Christmas and exchanged most gifts on New Year's Day. We were glad for this adjustment to our Christmas traditions.

### CROSS-CULTURAL MINISTRIES

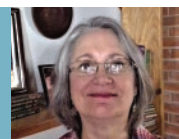
David Reeve



When we served in Nicaragua, breakfast became our family meal because it was the only time we didn't have other people eating with us.

### PARAGUAY

Robin Wagar



I began drinking *tereré* as a teenager. It's a refreshing tealike beverage made with *yerba mate*, which is served cold (*tereré*), hot (*mate*), or steeped like tea (*cocido*). At first, nobody in my family liked it. When we visited people, they almost always offered us the drink, and it was considered rude to turn it down, especially in the country towns and villages. Offering it to guests and accepting it as a guest is part of the culture of hospitality; there is an almost ceremonial aspect to serving and drinking it. We eventually got used to the drink, and now, I fix my *tereré* after breakfast and drink it most of the day—partly because of the extreme heat and partly because I really enjoy it. All of my family (my parents, siblings, kids, and grandkids) drink *tereré*, *mate*, and *cocido*. When I travel to the US for a visit with family, I take lots of *yerba mate* to distribute!

### MEXICO

Cabe & Christine Pillette



When we moved to the mission field, we as a family began taking Mondays off instead of Saturdays. As our kids have grown, we have started doing school from Tuesday to Saturday, which fits our schedule better since Cabe studies for Sunday service on Saturday. We love spending time as a family on Mondays. Sometimes, we go to a large city for shopping, but other times, we just hang out and spend time together. Because of this tradition, the kids always look forward to Mondays.

**ASK YOUR QUESTIONS!** Visit [CMML.us/askamissionary](https://cmml.us/askamissionary) to submit your question—it might be selected for a future issue!