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THINKING IT THROUGH

BY NATHAN BRAMSEN

When Jesus Tells You to Look

Many hearts are burdened and overwhelmed by the state and practice of our world. Our news feeds are incessantly filled with violence, anger, injustice, and confusion. Yet there is no wonder in my mind about why many Christians feel disillusioned, discouraged, and even depressed. What we feed will grow, and when our minds are absorbing and digesting the constant stream of the world, the result will be what the world gives: unrest.

In contrast, Jesus promised, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." (John 14:27) So where would Jesus tell you to look in a world of turmoil? I suggest the same three places He instructed His disciples to turn their gaze to.

Look at the fowl

Heaviness of life isn't a new phenomenon. In the Bible, Jesus repeats few things three times, let alone three times in one passage. That said, in Matthew 6, Jesus repeatedly commands, "Do not worry." (vv. 25, 31, 34) He doesn't give this directive to His followers as mere encouragement or as an inspirational way to view life. Rather, Jesus points to the big picture. He doesn't say their problems are illegitimate, but rather, He points to the ultimate reality that they have a Father in heaven who cares for the birds of the sky. "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (Matthew 6:26) The solution to an anxious heart is more than turning your eyes away from the cares of this world; it is focusing your gaze on our heavenly Father's compassion.

Look at the fields

The enemy would love to keep believers in Christ Jesus consumed with the cares of this life and, thus, prevent them from looking at this second imperative. In John 4:35, Jesus tells some distracted disciples, "Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and

look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!" Our calling as Christ followers is not to survive the journey that is life, but rather, our calling is to be the "light of the world" and "a city that is set on a hill." (Matthew 5:14) We live in a world where billions have yet to hear the Gospel. Are we so consumed with social issues that may preserve life for a time that we ignore and delay our duty to proclaim the only message that provides true hope and eternal life? We must lift up our eyes and embrace the marvelous opportunity before us to co-labor with the Lord of the harvest.

Look at the fig tree

As believers in Jesus Christ, we have the privilege of knowing the end of the story. Jesus reminded His disciples not to lose sight of the last earthly chapter. In Luke 21:29, He tells them, "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees." His purpose in commanding them to take a closer look at the fig tree is to teach them that

*The time is short.
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a person can quickly recognize the season based on the "things happening." (Luke 21:31)

The very things in the world that might tempt to overwhelm the Christian ought to remind us that God is true and that though "heaven and earth

will pass away, . . . My words will by no means pass away." (Luke 21:33) This is not a longing for Christ's return so we may escape the present world, but it is a call to be faithful until the end, knowing that we shall soon be forever with the Lord.

My fellow coworkers in the Gospel, rather than grow weary, let us choose to look where Christ instructed. May we not fill our minds with the nonsensical arguments of this world when many peoples live enshrouded in darkness. We have the answer for their soul!

The time is short. The opportunity is great. May we lift up our eyes and look. ■

Nathan Bramsen serves in special areas.

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FRONT COVER: Braşov, Romania—Photo by Jennifer Evans

BACK COVER: ©iStockPhoto.com/Mladen Zivkovic



A Trip to Romania

Encouraging Missionaries, Supporting Refugees



BY JENNIFER EVANS

Earlier this year, from May 31 to June 10, I traveled to Romania to visit CMML missionaries, learn about their relief efforts for Ukraine, and engage with Ukrainian refugees. My connection to the region started about 20 years ago when I met Eugenia, from Ukraine, during my freshman year at Emmaus Bible College. Seven years later, Eugenia had to move back to Ukraine for two years, and she invited me to visit her in Odesa. So, in 2010, I got a passport and flew to Ukraine for two weeks. What a trip! I saw the country through Eugenia's eyes. Later, she moved back to the US, and we stayed in contact.

In April 2022, Eugenia sent me a text about the devastation in her hometown due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The things that I had seen, visited, and touched were either gone or damaged. I couldn't comprehend the feelings that were going through my mind, let alone hers as she worried about friends and family in her home country.

On May 6, Eugenia sent me an unexpected message: She would be going to Romania at the end of the month and asked if I would go with her. She planned to help with relief aid—taking five suitcases packed with medical supplies, essential items, and gifts for the refugees—and to assist Bethany and Pablo Calderon (*Missionary Prayer Handbook* Day 13). “Yes! Tell me the details!” I replied.

From top (and L-R): Jennifer and her friends spent most of the trip in Braşov, surrounded by the Carpathian Mountains; Jennifer and Eugenia chat with Ukrainian refugees; Jennifer and Eugenia have been friends for about 20 years; Sofia and Jennifer were great travel companions; Jennifer enjoyed seeing John and Mariana Dobrovat's ministry in action during her visit.



Plans, complications, and God's intervention

Soon, I was finding flights and making arrangements. But it all came to a crashing stop when I realized my passport had expired. With research, I learned about the possibility of expediting a passport renewal through a special in-person meeting. So I scheduled an appointment for May 31 at 9:00 a.m. Talk about cutting it close: my first flight on the way to Romania was leaving the same day at 9:00 p.m.

Everything was planned. If I could renew my passport in time, I would meet Eugenia and her daughter Sofia at the airport in New York. Together, we would fly through Amsterdam to Bucharest. Missionaries Phil and Ronda Barnes, whom Eugenia had met the summer before, would pick us up at the airport. Then, we would spend a day recovering and visiting refugees before heading to Braşov. I prayed the Lord would work everything out at the passport office.

On May 31, I woke up early and drove to Philadelphia for my appointment. I waited nervously, asking the Lord to make His will clear. The official took my documents and said he would call me at 3:00 p.m. I walked around the city until 2:00 p.m. and then returned to the office. They handed me a blue folder, and I peeked inside. I had a passport!

On the way to the airport, I received a phone call from Eugenia, saying the airline wouldn't let her, Sofia, or their five bags onto the plane due to complications with changing COVID-19 regulations. Although I was concerned, I tried to calm her down.

By the time I arrived at the airport, I knew Eugenia and her daughter would not be joining me. Still, Eugenia encouraged me to travel ahead. I made it through security, flew to Amsterdam, boarded the connecting flight, and landed in Bucharest at 5:00 p.m. the next day. Unsure of how I would recognize my host family, Phil and Ronda Barnes, I stood at baggage claim and asked the Lord to help me. Suddenly, I received a text from Ronda. She sent a picture of her family and said they were waiting for me outside. What a relief!

As we drove through Bucharest, the Barnes pointed out the famous landmarks. I learned much about beautiful Romania. It is home to the world's second largest administrative building, Palace of the Parliament. The building is also the heaviest in the world, weighing more than nine billion pounds. Even though the people speak Romanian, most also speak English. Romania has committed to supplying Ukrainian refugees with resources, helping them find places to live, and offering overall support.

Eugenia and Sofia had issue after issue, but they finally arrived on June 2—without their bags. We went to bed praying the luggage would arrive before we left for Braşov the next day. In the morning, Phil and Ronda took us around Bucharest, and we enjoyed lunch at a traditional Romanian restaurant. We stopped at the airport, but unfortunately, Eugenia's bags were still missing. We decided to head to Braşov anyway.

The love that motivates believers

The drive from Bucharest to Braşov was spectacular as we passed through towns up and down the Carpathian Mountains. In Braşov, I connected with John and Mariana Dobrovat (MPH Day 13), Pablo and Bethany Calderon, and several refugees.

On Saturday, John and Mariana picked us up and took us to the Hosanna Foundation, a home for widows, orphans, and refugees that offers them rooms to sleep in and three meals per day. The Hosanna Foundation is where Mariana spends many days making sure all who stay there are comfortable, well fed, and safe. We toured the property and met the residents and staff.

We spent the rest of the day with John and Mariana, listening to their stories of God's leading while we visited Bran Castle (nicknamed Dracula's Castle) and enjoyed Romanian food. The Dobrovats' desire to serve God is strong, and their love for the Romanian people is great. I was blessed to see their hearts open to whatever He puts before them.

Refugees' stories

That evening, we got together with Eugenia's friends Vika, Natya, and Katya and their families. I met these women 12 years ago, so it was fun to see them again but sobering to hear how they fled Ukraine. When the fighting approached Odesa, the women decided to pack up their families and head west. Listening to their stories through a translator, I realized how fortunate I am but also how amazing God is. He brings the right people to the right place: Eugenia had known Bethany and Pablo Calderon at college, but a friend reconnected them

I realized how fortunate I am but also how amazing God is.

when the war began. Eugenia explained to Pablo that the women and their children had left home with only the essentials and they needed help crossing the border. Almost immediately, Pablo and a couple of friends drove to meet them. When

they arrived, one of the men got into each of the cars, and they all drove back to Braşov. Soon, the Calderons helped the women find a place to live and furnishings. The women were amazed that people they had just met would help them in so many ways.

On Sunday, we visited the church that the Calderons attend along with Daniel and Georgiana Eakins (MPH Day 13). The congregation welcomed us, and a believer interpreted the message into English for us. After church, Eugenia and I met Vika, Natya, and Katya at the mall for lunch. They shared more stories and their plans for the future. Vika plans to stay in Romania. But Natya and Katya are ready to return to Ukraine, despite the ongoing conflict there. Their husbands are in the country, and the separation is hard.

On Sunday evening, Bethany and Pablo invited us for dinner. Two other women, whom they had helped evacuate and whom Eugenia knew, joined us. Bethany made a great dinner, and her desserts were amazing (as everyone said they would be). Later, Pablo drove us to our apartment, and I chatted with him about the relief work in Ukraine. The needs are great. When the war started, relief workers made trips to the border, helping refugees safely evacuate. Now, the work focuses more on communicating with the refugees and building relationships. Pablo is on the go all the time: Besides his involvement in the relief work, he teaches at an international school, participates in a music ministry, and runs a Frisbee outreach.

A helping hand and listening ear

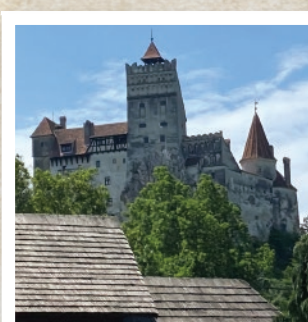
On Monday, Eugenia's bags finally arrived. On Tuesday, I served at Hosanna Foundation. In the kitchen, I dried the breakfast dishes, helped prep lunch, and talked with Laura, one of the volunteers. The women were so friendly, and Laura helped interpret. Then, the Dobrovats and I went out for lunch, and I learned about John's trips into Ukraine and the supplies he has taken there. That afternoon, Eugenia, Sofia, and I visited the field where Pablo practices Frisbee with one of the teams from Transylvania Ultimate Frisbee, a sports ministry he started with Daniel Eakins and another believer in 2013. It is a great ministry, and the practice was a lot of fun to watch.

On Wednesday morning, Pablo and a coworker picked up the medical supplies from Eugenia while heading to Ukraine to minister to the soldiers. It was also time for me to pack my suitcase and return to Bucharest. I boarded the train and enjoyed the scenery on the ride.

I arrived in Bucharest in time to have dinner with Adriana Rusu (MPH Day 13). We had a lovely time together, talking about the end of Timotheus Bible Institute's school year and their plans to host refugees in the facility during the summer. Adriana also shared their backstory—how they came to be missionaries—and I observed Adriana's heart for the Lord.

On Thursday morning and into Friday, I traveled home. During the flights, I reflected on my trip. I had truly enjoyed talking with our missionaries and seeing their ministries in action. While I don't have opportunities like this every day, I do witness the Lord's provision for our missionaries daily. I have worked in the CMML office for 11 years, and part of my job is opening mail and processing donations. I love seeing how the Lord is working around the world through each missionary and how prayer letters, *Missions* magazine, and the *Missionary Prayer Handbook* encourage donors to support these workers. This trip opened my eyes, enabling me to see how the Lord's work comes full circle. ■

Jennifer Evans, CMML donor relations and special projects coordinator



From top (and L-R): Eugenia and Sofia tour the Hosanna Foundation grounds with Mariana Dobrovat; The Hosanna Foundation offers women, children, and refugees nourishing meals and a comfortable place to rest; Carolina and Camilla Calderon hang out with Sofia; Washing the breakfast dishes, Laura and Jennifer show the important role teamwork plays at Hosanna Foundation; A team, part of the sports ministry, practices Frisbee in a field; Jennifer enjoyed visiting Bran Castle, a Romanian landmark.



ADOPTION IN JAPAN

Opening Unexpected Doors for the Gospel

BY TIMOTHY & CHRISTIANE MARCY

We never thought of our journey to adoption as a strategy for reaching the Japanese with the Gospel. Still, in His providence, the Lord arranged for the adoption of our son, Kento, to open doors for witness we could never have imagined.

In Japan, approximately 80,000 adoptions occur each year, placing the country second only to the United States in number of adoptions annually. This seemingly happy news is deceptive, however, since nearly 80 percent of adoptions in Japan are of adults, and the majority of these are males in their 20s.¹ Why is this? What about adoption of children?

A centuries-old mindset

Unlike most North Americans, who have grown up in cultures strongly influenced by Judeo-Christian concepts, the Japanese think of adoption primarily as the centuries-old practice of adopting a male heir to improve or preserve family fortunes. When a Japanese couple have no children or have only daughters, they adopt a male heir to continue the family bloodline and name.² Tax reduction is another big motivation: Due to a provision in the law, additional heirs reduce the inheritance tax when a person dies.³

When it comes to adoptable children, Japan has long considered institutions adequate places for them to live. The greatest hindrance to their adoption is that most families will not give up their parental rights, despite having no intention, or capability, of raising the children.⁴ Many birth parents hold on to the hope of receiving honor and care from their child when they are

old, despite their neglect. Placing their child in a foster family is similarly seen as threatening to familial rights. As a result, 85 percent of the almost 40,000 children currently in Japan's public care will grow to adulthood in institutions.⁵

While many Japanese families adopted war orphans between 1945 and about 1952, child adoptions dropped precipitously thereafter and have continued to up to today.⁶ International pressure and influence, research on child welfare, and the exposure of cases of child abuse and deaths forced Japan to stop assuming the best and safest place for a child is always with the birth family or an institution. A law enacted in 1988 began allowing children under six to be adopted into a new family when the courts deem it necessary and best for the child.⁷ In 2020, this law was amended to include children up to the age of 15.⁸ This "special adoption," as it is called, severs the birth family's parental rights and cannot be dissolved (except in extreme cases).

God's perfect plan

When we were young, the Lord gave both of us the desire to be involved in adoption and foster care. In 2015, He started to bring this vision to reality when we applied to an adoption agency. We faced various obstacles, including our age and adoption laws favoring Japanese families over foreigners. From the beginning, we knew that if we were matched with a child, he or she would be between two and six years old with some sort of disability. Yet the only adoption agency willing to work with us dealt exclusively with newborn and infant adoptions. At

one point, realizing the improbability of our case, they suggested we give up rather than risk wasting our money. Convinced that our desire to adopt was from God and that He was leading us, we stayed the course.

Five months after we made it onto the adoptive-parents waiting list, God matched us with our son. He was born in 2016, the very week during which, 100 miles away, we had lost our only child to a miscarriage. In August 2019, this boy was about to age out of his orphanage, and no placement could be found for him in a facility for older children. When the boy's birth family finally agreed to sign away parental rights, the adoption agency called us. After intensive discussion and prayer, we traveled to meet Kento in October 2019. We visited him several times at the baby home over a six-week period. Then, he came to live with us, and the adoption was formalized a year later.

Seedbeds for the Gospel

Now an energetic six-year-old, Kento still doesn't speak. He also lacks many basic daily and social skills but is affectionate and happy. Picture a cute, little Japanese boy joyfully rumbling through the narrow neighborhood streets on his tricycle with a tall Caucasian woman jogging behind, calling out to him as he starts to veer into driveways or ditches or out onto the road. People notice Kento! Many neighbors, construction workers helping us with renovations, delivery people, and employees at the city office, hospitals, therapy offices, post office, library, and stores go out of their way to greet him (unusual in a reserved culture like Japan's). All these interactions are seedbeds for the Gospel.

The Japanese who see and know Kento constantly face an arresting object lesson of who Christians are and what God offers in the Gospel. They see foreigners who, for some inscrutable reason, have done something the average Japanese would never dream of: take an unrelated, unwanted, mentally disabled foreign child as their own. Rather than caring for us as we age, Kento will require care his entire life. Even with our imperfect parenting, they can see we love Kento and enjoy him.

One of the many contacts we have made as a result of Kento's adoption is a woman we'll call Grace. We met at the special preschool where our sons, who have similar disabilities, were partaking in a therapy program. Grace has the same struggles raising her son as we have raising Kento but without the hope and strength we receive from the Lord.

The last time we met, we walked in the spring greenery, and I (Christiane) told Grace the story of creation and the fall—that our first parents' sin is what brought this suffering on us and our children. After outlining God's offer of reconciliation to Him, I pointed out that He has a special place in His heart for widows, outcasts, and orphans. She said, "It is a good story; thank you for telling me," and she wanted to meet again soon.

Please pray that we, as Kento's parents, may be consistently God-honoring and that we might always be ready to give an answer for the hope in us so many more Japanese like Grace will learn of the God who is "a father of the fatherless." (1 Peter 3:15; Psalm 68:5) To Him be all the glory. ■



Timothy and Christiane Marcy are commended from Ardsley Bible Chapel in Ardsley, Pennsylvania.

¹ Matthew Hernon, "Adoption in Japan: The Children Left Behind," *Tokyo Weekender*, April 2018, TokyoWeekender.com/2015/05/adoption-in-japan-the-children-left-behind/.

² Hernon. ³ Kelly Buchanan, "Many Adoptions in Japan Are Not about Raising Children," *In Custodia Legis* (blog), *Library of Congress*, April 2017, [Blogs.loc.gov/law/2017/04/many-adoptions-in-japan-are-not-about-raising-children/](https://blogs.loc.gov/law/2017/04/many-adoptions-in-japan-are-not-about-raising-children/). ⁴ Hernon, "Adoption in Japan."

⁵ Kanae Doi, "Japan's Vision for a Revolution in Child Care," *Human Rights Watch*, August 2017, [HRW.org/news/2017/08/25/japans-vision-revolution-child-care](https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/08/25/japans-vision-revolution-child-care). ⁶ Chiaki Moriguchi, "Child Adoption in Japan, 1948–2008: A Comparative Historical Analysis," *Economic Review* 61, no. 4 (October 2010): 342–357. ⁷ Moriguchi. ⁸ *Japan Times*, "Japan's Adoption Rules Changed," June 2019, [JapanTimes.co.jp/news/2019/06/07/national/crime-legal/japans-adoption-rules-changed-allow-older-kids-ties-biological-parents-severed/](https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/06/07/national/crime-legal/japans-adoption-rules-changed-allow-older-kids-ties-biological-parents-severed/).



Opposite page (left, from top): Standing atop an ancient burial mound, Kento overlooks his neighborhood; Kento sits through his preschool graduation with help from his teacher's aide, whom the family has a continuing relationship with. **Opposite page (right):** In November 2019, Christiane and Tim picked up Kento from the baby home to live with them. **This page (from top, L–R):** The Marcys open their home to their high school-aged foster son (right), who would otherwise have grown up entirely in an institution; A tricycle-riding Kento greets a neighborhood grandpa; The Marcy family shares a close bond with their neighbors, who love Kento as if he were their grandchild.

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

Slovaks Respond to Global Issues with the Gospel's Compassion

BY ALLAN BUSSARD



When an expert in the law asked, in Luke 10:29, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus answered with the parable of the good Samaritan. We learn that our neighbor may not be the person we expect. A neighbor could be someone we meet by chance or a person from far away who has different customs and speaks another language. Helping a neighbor may be inconvenient or even risky. When we come across a person in need, we are challenged to ask ourselves if our response reflects the compassion of the good Samaritan.

Is the Gospel good news in Slovakia?

When we moved to Slovakia more than 30 years ago, right after the collapse of Communism in Czechoslovakia, we were familiar with the atheistic and secular context, having ministered in Communist Eastern Europe since 1975. One question was foremost: How does one reveal the Gospel as good news in this place?

Most people in Slovakia do not regard the Gospel as good; most feel that religion causes conflict and bloodshed and is best

avoided. The church was complicit in the transport of Jews to Auschwitz during the Holocaust, and Protestants and Catholics fought the Hundred Years’ War. Nor is the Gospel seen as news in a place with 800-year-old church buildings. We realized that for people here to believe the Gospel, they need to see it at work; proclamation needs to be accompanied by affirmation for the Gospel to be understood.

One of the purposes for which the Father sent the Son into the world is to bring good news to everyone, including the poor. In his first chapter, Isaiah



records a shocking statement from the Lord: “Stop bringing meaningless offerings!” (v. 13, NIV) The leaders of Jerusalem had been faithfully observing the God-given rules of sacrifice and worship, but God was tired of their worship—not because it was idolatrous but because they neglected widows, orphans, and the oppressed. The conclusion is inescapable: worship without righteousness and justice becomes merely entertainment, which God said, “I cannot bear.” (Isaiah 1:13, NIV)

We live in a global world and want a global vision. As citizens of a rich country, Slovaks needed to look outward. In 1995, working with Slovak colleagues, we took inspiration from the

WE TOOK INSPIRATION FROM THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

the Gospel in a way that could be seen, understood, and embraced. The result was Integra Foundation, a Slovak Christian humanitarian organization that focuses on holistic poverty alleviation through economic development and discipleship training.

Over the years, we have engaged several thousand Slovak partners and sponsors, believers and unbelievers alike, in responding to the needs of women at risk in Eastern Europe, children in Kenya’s slums, displaced mothers in Sudan, persecuted Yezidis in Iraq, malnourished children in Yemen, and impoverished farmers in Ethiopia.

Cash crops in Ethiopia

A few years ago, we learned of a looming crisis in southern Ethiopia. Due to changes in the climate, as much as 60 percent of coffee production in Ethiopia may disappear by 2040. Growing coffee sustains 18 million Ethiopian farmers and their families, and these livelihoods are under threat.

For the past 15 years, we have successfully grown macadamia and cashew trees in Kenya. The Ethiopian government and the local church contacted us for help with introducing the same scheme in Ethiopia.

The idea is to provide an alternative cash crop for farmers when their coffee begins to decline. An additional advantage is that when these trees are planted among the coffee bushes, they provide shade, which extends the productive life of the bushes by as much as 20 years, buying precious time. So, in 2018, we began to import 200,000 seedlings from Kenya into Ethiopia, where they are beginning to thrive. It turns out that macadamia trees do well wherever coffee grows, and they are more resilient to climate changes. After four years, these trees

parable of the good Samaritan and began to experiment with holistic poverty alleviation in an effort to live out



will produce income for farmers and, since they are productive for up to 80 years, for their children and grandchildren too.

We had a meeting with coffee farmers in one region of south-central Ethiopia, at which they entrusted us with about 500 acres of prime coffee-growing land to be used to plant 40,000 macadamia trees. One of the Muslim elders said, “I believe that God has sent you to help rescue our children from poverty.”

Integra is developing this project in partnership with an Ethiopian local church that we have cooperated with for the last 15 years. Our partners have strong local knowledge and connections, which is critical. This project also gives the Ethiopian believers a way to participate in missions within their own country, reaching across tribal and traditional barriers with the Gospel and with compassion.

The challenge for today’s generation

The issue of poverty is complex, but we can make a difference in a person’s life. And, by demonstrating the love of Christ in a tangible way, we can overcome despair, rekindle hope, and offer love. As people come to know Christ, they gain a new ability to love, forgive, show mercy, and seek justice. They are enabled to develop relationships of grace, which become the foundation for communities that work for the weak as well as the strong.

How does considering who my neighbor is work on a global scale? Much of what kills people in the developing world is preventable.

Every 19 seconds, a child dies as a result of drinking dirty water; each day, 800 women die while giving birth; and each year, 1.2 million people die from malaria, of whom 90 percent are children under the age of five. Most of these deaths are avoidable with access to things

AS PEOPLE COME TO KNOW CHRIST, THEY GAIN A NEW ABILITY TO LOVE, FORGIVE, SHOW MERCY, AND SEEK JUSTICE.



Page 9: Ethiopian farmers officially designate land for the cultivation of macadamia trees.

This page (top row): Many families across Ethiopia operate small coffee farms.

This page (bottom row, L-R): Farmers care for macadamia and cashew seedlings before they are transplanted; A Kenyan agronomist (third from left) trains Ethiopian farmers.

like clean water, sanitary toilets, and mosquito nets. Such widespread, preventable suffering is not only a poverty issue, but it is also a justice issue. It is relational failure on a global scale. We know how to fix it, and the church needs to be front and center in providing solutions.

This is where the Gospel begins to look relevant to a doubting generation. I have seen that as Slovaks are drawn into issues of global justice, they are drawn to the Gospel. Recently, I was talking with a Slovak believer who grew up under Communism and is a leader in our local church in Bratislava. He commented on how healthy it is for the youth growing up in our church to hear about and become involved in the world's needs. He said, "My generation was entrusted with the challenge of keeping the faith alive under Communism. Today's generation of Slovak Christian leaders is entrusted with the challenge of taking the Gospel to the neediest parts of God's world. Integra gives a practical way for them to get involved."

The source of transformation

The last 25 years have taught us that Slovaks come to understand, believe, and embrace the Gospel as we engage them in

helping to solve global issues of justice and mercy. Proclamation and explanation of the Gospel is critical, but "telling" is not sufficient if the message gets stuck on the skepticism, prejudice, and preconceptions that have built up over the years and generations. Explaining the Gospel as the reason for the transformation they see often brings an "aha" moment revealing true understanding.

When someone shows love to another, they are also being drawn to God because He is the source of love. It turns out that as skeptical, secular Slovaks engage in global issues of poverty and justice, they begin to taste and see that the Lord is good. Pray that as they look for answers to the world's troubles, their hearts will be drawn to God. ■



Allan and Caulene Bussard are commended from Marineview Chapel in Vancouver, British Columbia.

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Interview with Randy & Teresa Walker

New Missionaries Share about Daily Life

In August 2021, Randy and Teresa Walker moved to Manila, Philippines, with commendation from Fairhaven Bible Chapel in San Leandro, California. Randy teaches third grade at Faith Academy, an international K–12 Christian school. While the Walkers focus on that ministry, they are also excited to serve the Lord in other ways: Randy has performed Christian magic shows in local neighborhoods, reaching more than 100 kids in total; Teresa engages with her neighbors daily; and both support a women's shelter. But with these ministry opportunities come challenges, including Randy's heavy workload and Teresa's language learning. Please pray for the Walkers as they serve the Lord and consider the future.



What is your area like?

We live in a suburb of Manila, where the traffic is normally heavy.

What foods do you eat?

Our helper cooks Filipino food for us three days per week, which we really enjoy. Otherwise, Teresa cooks American food for us many days. Two of the local foods we enjoy are garlic fried rice and chicken adobo.

How do you get around?

We bought an old car from the family whose house we are staying in while they're on furlough. The car has needed various repairs but has generally been good transportation for us. Teresa does not like to drive in the Manila traffic, so if she needs to go somewhere while I (Randy) am at school, she rides in a trike—a motorcycle with a sidecar.

What's the weather like?

It's tropical, so always hot, but with air conditioning, it's not a problem. Due to the heat, I wear long pants only to attend church and to teach at school and long sleeves only to do my Christian magic shows. The tropical climate encourages wonderful, lush flowering plants to grow everywhere—we have seen so many plants and flowers that are new to us!

Do you feel settled?

Yes, we had minimal culture shock. We like it here so much.

What cultural behavior do you find interesting?

Filipinos have a great respect for older people. We are both in our 60s, so it has been pleasant to receive this respect. But, as a result, Filipinos are reluctant to give feedback or criticism to older people, which makes it difficult for me to get constructive input from my students' parents.

What do you miss the most?

We miss our kids and our five grandchildren. One of our grandchildren was born after we moved here, so we have met her only via Zoom. We also miss our church family.

What is a typical day for you?

On school days, I get up at 4:30 a.m. to have time for devotions and prayer with Teresa. Then, I head to school at 6:30 a.m. (school starts at 7:10 a.m.), teach my third graders until 2:30 p.m., come home to take a nap, prep for the next school day, eat dinner, and have an hour relaxing with Teresa before going to bed at 8:30 p.m.

How do you relax?

We enjoy jigsaw puzzles, word games, and our favorite TV shows (on DVD). One night per week, I play volleyball with staff and high schoolers from the school.

How do you get to know people?

I get to know my students and coworkers at the school, and I interact with the children in the biweekly Bible class I

teach in a home for single moms. Teresa gets to know people on her daily walks, interacting with the shop clerks in our neighborhood, and at a weekly women's Bible study in the home for single moms.

What is challenging?

The long teaching days, extensive lesson prep (including on weekends), and homework evaluation definitely challenge me. Since February, when all my students returned to the classroom in person, Teresa has been helping me with the homework evaluation, which supports me greatly. They say the second year of teaching is much easier. We are praying it will be.

Teresa's biggest challenge is learning Tagalog, which is a difficult language. I am not trying to learn it, since my hands are full with teaching in English. Even though many people here speak English, they really appreciate those trying to learn and better understand Tagalog.

What is exciting?

The interest that my students show in the Gospel and the Bible is so encouraging. All but two of my students volunteered to have lunch with me, and we discussed where they stand with God. Several are believers, and three others are very close to the kingdom. Many expressed an interest in having a Discovery Bible study with me, through which I am trying to teach them to read and understand the Bible on their own.

How can we pray for you?

Please pray for the COVID-19 pandemic to continue to decline here so we won't have to go back to remote instruction. Pray that my students who are close to the kingdom will come to Christ and that all my students will start having personal devotions in the Bible. Pray for Teresa to have perseverance and breakthroughs in learning Tagalog. Pray for our health to hold up and allow us to continue serving here. Teresa had knee-replacement surgery in December 2021 (her knees are doing well now); I have back problems that come and go in levels of discomfort. Pray for wisdom and guidance from the Lord as to whether He wants us to teach at Faith for more than the two-year commitment we made, through the 2022–2023 school year. ■

Opposite page: The Walkers explore a nearby region during spring break.
This page (from top): Randy's students dress up for International Literacy Day; The Walkers enjoy dinner at a restaurant; Randy performs a Christian magic show, one of four he has done for more than 100 children; Besides learning from Randy, dressed here for a magic show, the third graders have fun with him too.

