

September/October 2021

MISSIONS



**God's Faithfulness
in Serbia**

**Refocused Missionaries'
Continuing Passion
for Serving God**

**Interview with a
New Missionary in the
Republic of the Congo**



THINKING IT THROUGH

BY DAVID DUNLAP

“Give Me Your Heart”

Throughout our lives, God molds and shapes us so that our wills, minds, and hearts—the whole person—may be spiritually transformed. His intent is that His will be our wills and His desires be our desires.

We read in Proverbs 23:26, “My son, give me your heart.” The writer, in this fatherly admonition, does not say, “Give me your head” or “your intellect” or “your tongue,” but instead, he says, “Give me your heart.”

God wants all of these things, but most of all, He wants our hearts. We may have much truth on our lips and in our intellects, but God looks for it in our hearts. David echoes this truth when he writes that God desires truth in the “inward parts.” (Psalm 51:6)

Total surrender

We find this principle at work in Abraham’s life. In the early chapters of Genesis, we see Abraham in willful disobedience journeying down to live in Egypt. There, God began to convict his heart. During the time Abraham lived in Egypt, he never built an altar, he never prayed, and he never worshipped the Lord. But God used Pharaoh and a lie about Sarai to press His finger upon a tender place in Abraham’s life. Then, Abraham began to yield his heart to God. God’s will began to be his will, and God’s ambitions, his ambitions.

Finally, Abraham turned his back on Egypt and returned to the place where he had formerly built an altar and worshipped God. There, Abraham bowed his heart in surrender to God and called on the name of the Lord (Genesis 13:4).

God uses such times of surrender to bring us to the place where He can use us as He desires. Charles H. Spurgeon, the “Prince of Preachers,” once wrote:

When I surrendered myself to my Savior, I gave Him my body, my soul, my spirit; I gave Him all I had, and all I shall have for time and for eternity. I gave Him all my talents, my powers, my faculties, my eyes, my ears, my limbs, my emotions, my judgment, my whole manhood, and all that could come of it.¹

A yielded heart

God’s method is to break our hearts with the things that break His heart. He had the same intent for King David. After David’s unlawful relationship with Bathsheba, their child was destined to become sick and die. When David saw his dear child suffering, it broke his heart. He fasted and pleaded with God concerning the child’s life (2 Samuel 12:13–17). However, he had not yet yielded his heart and will to God.

But, once the child died, David changed his clothing, ate, drank, and worshipped the Lord because the struggle in his heart had ceased (2 Samuel 12:18–20). At that moment, David may have learned, “A broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise.” (Psalm 51:17)

Unwavering faith

It was not for Abraham and David to question God’s sovereign ways but simply to obey. “‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ says the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.’” (Isaiah 55:8–9)

May we have faith like that—to simply believe what God says, being assured that He will do just what He has promised. Like Abraham, we must trust in God’s secret and, at times, difficult-to-understand ways and yield to Him. Like David, may we look past all the circumstances of life that perplex us and trust unswervingly in the bare Word of God, even as our hearts break.

We should begin to practice such faith, stepping from stone to stone, until we are far out from the shore of human strength, leaning alone on the arm of God. ■

David Dunlap is a commended worker based in Florida.

¹William MacDonald, *The Disciple’s Manual* (Gospel Folio Press: Port Colbourne, Ontario, Canada, 2004), p. 110.

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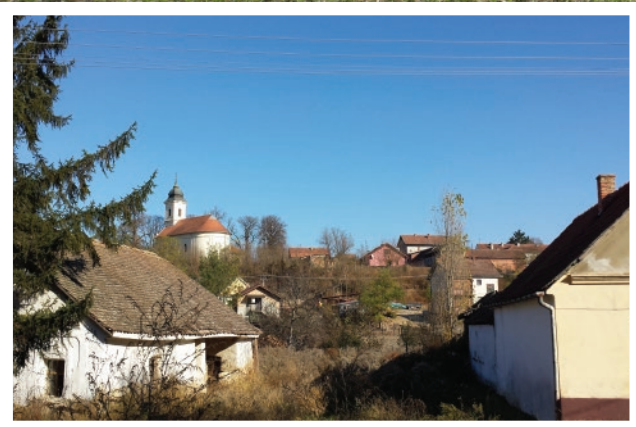
COVER PHOTO: Serbian countryside—Photo by Steve Luibrand





SERBIA

God's Faithfulness Shines in a Spiritually Bleak Environment



From top: Shepherds and their sheep are features of the Serbian countryside; Small villages are common outside of Belgrade; Steve teaches at the HUB, a Bible school.

BY STEVE LUIBRAND

We arrived in Serbia in January 2005, spending our first night in a hotel. I still remember the clip-clop of horse's hooves on the street below our window as a Roma (Gypsy) cart passed by and the grinding of the cement mixer in the neighboring lot as I woke up the next morning. We had just moved to a new country to live indefinitely, and all the unknowns hit me at that moment: *Where will we live? Will I really be able to learn this language? Do I have the courage to preach the Gospel to these people? How will my family adjust?*

What a God we serve! He proved faithful in every respect.

ABUNDANT BLESSINGS

That very day, we found an apartment perfectly suited to our needs, and we registered for language school. The following Sunday, one of the main elders in the tiny assembly in Novi Sad took us to church. Our friend Miro, who had picked us up at the airport, helped with many of those first tasks that needed to be arranged.

In the following months, the believers from the assembly took us under their wing, helping us become established. Within the first two months, I was invited to teach at the HUB, a Bible school in the capital, Belgrade, that serves the Balkans. I taught a class on Acts 9–15, which I still teach today. God went before us in acquiring visas and residence permits, something that many people have trouble obtaining.

When we arrived, we had two boys, Dave and Will. Since then, God has blessed us with five more children: Joe, Katie, Peter, Bethie, and Timmy. After nearly three years in the apartment, we needed

more space and a quieter setting. God opened the way for us to buy a house in a village outside Novi Sad—something we had not originally considered but, now, are so glad we did.

Life here has its challenges and difficulties. Being a missionary puts you at special risk of attack from the enemy. It provides you with many opportunities to humble yourself and admit failure. All of these trials have been God's tools to mold Jenny and me as well as our children. The process is far from over, but we are thankful for our personal growth so far.

Sometimes, people say they admire our courage to move our family to a country like Serbia. But we have an admirable God who gives the grace necessary to do whatever He has commanded. If we obey, we will never look back and regret having obeyed God and taken steps of faith. I am confident that we are better off in every respect than if we had stayed in America. We have received more than we gave up in coming here. God is so good: He blesses the missionary with more than he or she can give away. God took what seemed like a daunting challenge to us and used it to bless us. All the glory belongs to Him.

SERBIA'S EVANGELICAL CHURCHES

The vast majority of the evangelical churches here are small, with 15–20 people. Other than the Brethren assemblies, the main evangelical denominations are Baptist, various forms of Pentecostal, Nazarenes (similar to Mennonite), and nondenominational churches. Among the traditional churches, like Slovak Lutheran and Hungarian Reformed, a few pastors are evangelical and preach the Gospel. Evangelicals, by the most accurate estimates, comprise less than one percent of the population. More than half of them live in the northern part of the country among the minority ethnic groups: Slovak, Hungarian, Romanian, and Roma.

Religious affiliation and belief are inseparable from ethnic identity in the Serbian mentality. Evangelical Christianity is seen as a foreign faith, and patriotic passions run high in Serbia. So Serbians view evangelicals as a "sect"—a word carrying much negative connotation here. It is not easy to be a believer in a country with so few people who are of "like precious faith." (2 Peter 1:1)

Many of the young people who grow up in the evangelical churches either leave the faith or leave the country, hoping to find a better life in the West. As a result, many churches are weak, with little hope for future existence. This problem is especially pronounced among the Brethren assemblies. Of the 11 assemblies in Serbia, about half are on the brink of extinction. Others are in varying states of health. In Belgrade, the assembly disappeared several years ago. The building still stands, periodically used by another church. Amid this bleak picture, godly and faithful believers are praying and longing for new additions to their assemblies. Would you pray along with them?

RAYS OF HOPE

Despite these challenges, people are coming to faith in small numbers. One group the Gospel has begun to reach is people with drug addictions. The desperation accompanying drug addiction seems to help break down the nationalistic resistance to the Gospel. A few evangelical rehab centers lead good ministries, and some people leave the programs radically saved and on fire for the Lord. They influence their families and other Orthodox people because they are evidence that the evangelical church's teaching has power. Some attend the Bible school when they leave the rehab centers, and we are privileged to have them.

A bright spot is a group of young people who study the Bible and pray together in the leading assembly in Bački Petrovac. In recent months, they have seen a few conversions. They also seek ways to evangelize their classmates.

Another ray of hope is the number of new Roma believers coming into the assembly circles. A group of younger, growing believers—mostly Roma—meet in Kikinda, in a new chapel built with help from believers in Northern Ireland. In Belgrade, another Roma group in various stages of spiritual health has affiliated with the assemblies. We are working with them in evangelism and discipleship, hoping that they can resume regular Sunday meetings soon.



EVANGELISTIC OPPORTUNITIES

Currently, Roma are the people initially most open to the Gospel in Serbia. We see much potential for evangelism among them but few workers. Thousands of Roma have come up from poorer parts of southern Serbia to live around Belgrade. They construct makeshift dwellings on public property just outside the city and make a living by collecting recyclable materials and used merchandise. These communities are full of children and are potential fields for evangelism.

However, one obstacle to the Gospel is the prevalent use of humanitarian aid. Because of such aid over the years, many Roma are accustomed to the Gospel being attached to a "packet," or financial assistance. It is easy to quickly gather people around a program of aid distribution—even baptizing them after they make some profession of faith—but, often, their lives do not change. Great care must be taken that the help does not end up hurting lives in the long run.

In other cases, many Roma will seem interested in what you have to say until they find out that you aren't offering material



benefits. The challenge is making them aware of their spiritual need so they will continue to listen.

PRAYER FOR SERBIA

We need prayer for ourselves, that we may speak the Word in such a way that it will persuade the hearers. We are aware that it is a work of God's power through His Spirit. "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak." (Colossians 4:2-4)

The believers in Serbia need prayer. Pray that they "may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." (Colossians 4:12) Pray "always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints." (Ephesians 6:18)

Pray that God's Word will spread throughout the land of Serbia and soak into all the nooks and crannies. Pray that it will crack and penetrate hardened hearts. The Word runs by the feet of God's people who are given to preaching and witnessing. Pray that the Lord will raise up evangelists here or bring them from afar if necessary. "Pray for us, that the Word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you." (2 Thessalonians 3:1)

After more than 16 years, Serbia has become our family's home. God has given us a love for the people and enabled us to enjoy life in this country. God blesses the way of those who commit their way to Him. We encourage each of you to step out in faith on whatever path God is putting before you. Truly, He will never be any man's debtor. ■



Steve and Jenny Luibrand are commended from Stevensville Bible Chapel in Stevensville, Montana.

Opposite page: In Belgrade and Kikinda, Roma believers are entering assembly circles. **This page (from top):** The village of Susek boasts picturesque landscape; Because Orthodoxy is the dominant religion in Serbia, its structures, like the convent in Kač, can be found in most villages; Serbia is home to almost seven million people, but less than one percent of the population is evangelical; Roma Christians worship in the new assembly in Kikinda. (Photo courtesy of Vladimir Majersky.)



How Refocused Missionaries Serve the Lord

BY SARAH DUNLAP

When missionaries retire from service on the foreign mission field, they leave behind a familiar home and return to one vastly changed. But one thing doesn't change for them: their passion for serving Christ. Simply put, a missionary never stops being a missionary.¹ That's why, when preparing the 2006 *Missionary Prayer Handbook*, CMML re-examined the future of these faithful workers and chose to replace the term *retired* with *refocused*—"to keep going but down a different road at a little slower speed," as refocused missionary Penny DeFouw (MPH Day 12) defines it.

However, such situational changes lead many people to question what refocused ministries entail and, sometimes, assume that refocused missionaries no longer need support. That couldn't be farther from the truth. The 93 refocused missionaries listed in the 2021 MPH have differing talents, circumstances, and ministries, but they all actively point others to Christ. We praise the Lord that He uses each one to reach people, near and far, with the Gospel.

The refocused ministry

What, then, do refocused ministries look like? To explore that question, we interviewed a portion of the refocused missionaries and observed several characteristics of their ministries as we learned about their experiences.

A hand ever reaching out

First, refocused missionaries encourage others: believers and unbelievers, friends and family, strangers, national workers, and other missionaries. While the goal of a refocused ministry is pointing others to Christ, the vehicle is often a form of encouragement, of which there are many. As such, the threads of encouragement can be seen in each characteristic discussed in this article. But the most direct forms are the refocused missionaries' words and actions in their interpersonal relationships.

Even apart from their former countries of service, refocused missionaries can offer everything from prayer, guidance, and comforting words to direction to Bible passages as they communicate with national believers and coworkers. Locally, they bring listening ears and kindness when they visit friends and neighbors. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Jay and Ruth Kraai (MPH Day 7) have dropped off cookies and treats at neighbors' doors to "let them know they are not forgotten and, at the same time, try to encourage them and pray with them." One widow encourages other widows through regular phone calls and visits.



Refocused missionaries' outreach of encouragement takes practical forms too. Jo Banzhaf (MPH Day 3) opens her home to a Bible study that needs somewhere to meet, and Donna Turner (MPH Day 10) builds new friendships and develops existing ones while sharing "the Gospel to further God's kingdom." Daily, the Lord uses each refocused missionary to encourage someone who has a spiritual, physical, practical, or emotional need.



THE LORD USES EACH REFOCUSED MISSIONARY TO ENCOURAGE SOMEONE WHO HAS A SPIRITUAL, PHYSICAL, PRACTICAL, OR EMOTIONAL NEED.

From knowledge to advocacy

Second, refocused missionaries are informed. They stay up to date on the social, political, and economic conditions in their former countries of service; on the challenges the people, especially Christians, face; on the spiritual and physical needs; and on the ministry opportunities. They do so primarily through communicating with their national contacts, via phone calls, emails, virtual meetings, and many other online platforms. This communication not only shows the missionaries' ongoing support for national believers but also facilitates informed prayer. As Penny DeFouw said, "If I don't keep in touch, how then can I pray specifically?"



But that knowledge doesn't stay with them; they share it with others to encourage action. "As opportunities come," said the Kraais, "we talk about Japan and the struggles and joys of the nation as well as of the believers. For example, [we discuss] the rise of suicides during the pandemic. Also, on the anniversary of the big tsunami, we reported on the current situation in that area." This advocacy leads to informed prayer and praise and increased interest on a larger scale.

A continued investment of talent

Third, refocused missionaries contribute their technical skills to the Lord's work. Using their knowledge of languages, many translate Christian literature and even their national coworkers' newsletters. Peter Clift (MPH Day 7) helps check the translation

of Emmaus correspondence courses into Japanese. Bob and Glenda Watt (MPH Day 1) continue the translation of William MacDonald's *Believer's Bible Commentary* into Swahili, which Gertrude Harlow (home with the Lord) began and Merton and Jane Wolcott (MPH Day 1) proofread.

While many refocused missionaries lead Bible studies, others, such as Don Tinder (MPH Day 9) and Richard Haverkamp (MPH Day 9), also teach and preach in overseas Bible schools and churches using recorded videos or other online means. Odette Beauregard (MPH Day 10) mentors women at Word of Life Quebec, and Paul and Jayne Carlson (MPH Day 3) mentor contacts in South Africa, Australia, and the US. Peter Clift uses the experience he gained as head of the Emmaus correspondence course program in Japan to lead a prison ministry in Minnesota, where he now lives. Some contribute their skills in writing, proofreading, and graphic design to facilitate the spread of the Gospel and sound biblical teaching.



Enriched prayers

Fourth, refocused missionaries support the Lord's work through prayer and finances. Their knowledge of and connection to the mission field positions them as natural conduits for relief efforts. Recently, the Watts sent funds from their assembly to aid displaced people in Bunia, Democratic Republic of Congo. Nisa Crutchfield (MPH Day 27) collects items that are scarce or unavailable in Cuba, and when she visits the country, she distributes them among the believers.

Other refocused missionaries provide for everyday needs. One helps send clothing to Venezuela, one mails packages of

Opposite page: Jay and Ruth Kraai served the Lord in Japan for 45 years. **This page:** (left, from top) Donna Turner served the Lord in France; A resident at Rest Haven Homes, Penny DeFouw listens for opportunities to help her neighbors; (right, clockwise from top left) Bob Watt proofreads the Swahili translation of William MacDonald's *Believer's Bible Commentary*; The translation process involves many tools—grammar books, dictionaries, and of course, a red pen; In her work with Word of Life Quebec, Odette mentors about five students and interns; Richard and Marina Haverkamp actively communicate with believers and unbelievers in Belgium.

food to families in Cuba, and another supports national workers, who are underfunded, in Ireland.

But, most importantly, refocused missionaries provide prayer support, which their communication, encouragement, love for the Lord, and commitment to gospel outreach enrich. The Watts noted that they enjoy “being able to pray for precise places, people, and situations in a focused manner.” Peter and Mary Clift pray “daily and personally for the assemblies [they] started” in Japan. Odette Beauregard acts as a prayer warrior for the women she mentors: “Many times, the women [I mentor] need a friendly and caring heart from which they can seek advice and ask for prayer based on God’s Word.” Prayer is the lifeblood of a refocused ministry.



The refocused experience

The refocused life holds unique challenges. Amid health concerns and a general slowing down, many refocused missionaries find the transition back to their home country difficult. They grieve the physical separation from the country where they lived and served for many years. “We miss Japan—the people and the food and the scenery and the culture,” the Clifts shared. Donna Turner highlighted the “struggle to get over grieving [her] home, [her] French family and friends, and the ministries that were so fulfilling and were [her] life for almost 40 years.” Some, like Sid and Karen Halsband (MPH Day 3), wrestle with the transition from living in a developing nation to a developed one.



Often, refocused missionaries feel alone as they navigate the relocation process. Everything can become monumental: completing paperwork, registering for insurance, finding affordable housing, integrating into a new community, and resettling into a primary culture, which changed in the intervening years. “The process of leaving my life in Ireland after nearly 40 years was huge,” said Penny DeFouw. “When I got ‘home,’ I wasn’t prepared for all the emotions, loneliness, and how out of place I felt.”

However, the refocused life contains joy too. Refocused missionaries enjoy living closer to their families, developing new ministries, maintaining contact with former coworkers, exploring new and old hobbies, and being free from the stressors associated with missionary life. And all enjoy the ability to be involved in the Lord’s work. “It is a joy and privilege,” said Nisa Crutchfield, “that, at my age, God still has work for me!”

Support for refocused missionaries

While locations may shift and ministries may take new forms, the passion that refocused missionaries feel for serving the Lord remains unchanged. As they continue living for Christ, they need our prayers and practical support more than ever to meet the challenges of everyday life.

Using the MPH, you can pray for refocused missionaries throughout the month. If you would like to contribute financially, you may do so through the WARM (widows and refocused missionaries) fund, or you may suggest donations for individual refocused missionaries (CMML.us/giving). May we encourage them as they have, so faithfully and for so long, encouraged others.

Prayer requests:

- Pray that recently refocused missionaries will adjust to their new lives and find opportunities to serve Christ.
- Pray for health and strength for refocused missionaries so they can carry on their ministries.
- Pray for wisdom and discernment as they mentor and encourage believers around the world.
- Pray for effectiveness as they launch new ministries or transfer leadership to others.
- Pray for those who struggle to know how to use each day for the Lord now that they have more free time.
- Pray for encouragement for those who are lonely.

Sarah Dunlap is the editor of Missions.

¹ Further reading: Roxana Ericsson (MPH Day 18) examines this reality in the article “Once a Missionary, Always a Missionary: Considering the Future of Lives Lived for Christ” (*Missions*, December 2020, pp.6–7).

Above (from top, left): Nisa Crutchfield encourages believers in Cuba, visiting whenever possible; Odette Beauregard leads Bible studies with women in her area of Canada; During the Clifts’ 48 years in Japan, they planted several churches.

In their words

Refocused missionaries have diverse ministries. The following excerpts from the interviews we conducted express their heart for others and passion for serving Christ:

PAUL & JAYNE CARLSON—Day 3

Often, our mentoring partners seek direction when dealing with difficult situations. We remind them of what we did when facing similar issues. However, pray that God will give us discernment and wisdom in directing them. We want to avoid overshadowing God's work in their ministries; we know it is easy to interfere by sounding authoritative.

DON TINDER—Day 9

It is encouraging that, as long as the Lord gives me physical and mental health, He also gives me opportunities to serve. Please pray that I will continue to be fresh in my teaching and preaching and excited about the truths I seek to impart.

ODETTE BEAUREGARD—Day 10

The vast majority of the wives of full-time workers are involved, in one way or another, in caring for others. But who takes care of those who give? From this reflection, my colleague and I felt led to offer a time to meet virtually with these women. Our goal is to help them feel more connected to one another so they will be encouraged, strengthened, and edified. Since June 2020, a dozen women have met approximately every six weeks, and it seems to meet a real need.

DONNA TURNER—Day 10

Since I refocused just before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, I haven't been able to use the first year to investigate and discover the needs and opportunities for ministry in my assembly, new neighborhood, and community—my new, very diverse mission field. I covet your prayers for God's guidance and vision as I seek His plans for how I can continue to serve Him and to minister.

PENNY DEFOUW—Day 12

What brings me joy is that I can still be involved in the Lord's work. Because I now live at Rest Haven Homes, and I am one of the youngest here, there are opportunities all around me, especially since the COVID-19 virus arrived. I find if I just listen to people, I hear of lots of needs. A lot of the residents are lonely, and visiting them is so needed (when allowed).

NISA CRUTCHFIELD—Day 27

The label "refocused" is very appropriate in my case since the Lord has given me the opportunity to focus on Cuba, where I was born 77 years ago. The fact that my Spanish is still intact and that I minister to the adults whose parents my parents led to Christ gives me great joy. In 2020, I made two trips. Pray that God will give me good health so I can continue to travel. ■

More refocused missionaries:

Jane Winterling (DR Congo)
John & Margaret Clark (Kenya)
Marie MacDougall (Kenya)
Joan Levengood (South Africa)
Donald Brooks (Zambia)
Jean Hayes (Zambia)
Esther Howell (Zambia)
Lois Logan (Zambia)
Alice Turner (Zambia)
Alice White (Zambia)
Marion Wilson (Zambia)
Beth Young (Zambia)
Eleanor Sims (Zimbabwe)
James & Marilyn Cooney (Fiji)
Samuel & Annamma Kurien (India)
Elaine Brooks (Philippines)
Ken & Joyce Hardisty (Philippines)
Carl & Betsy Armerding (Austria)

Ed & Wendy Beidleman (France)
Lois Black (France)
Barbara Congo (France)
Ernest & Ellen Green (France)
Ramona Black (Ireland)
Carole Woehler (Ireland)
Lois Ginder (Italy)
Gerda Bouwman (Netherlands)
Gertrude Swaan (Netherlands)
Beverley Boyle (Spain)
Les & Sharon Frey (Spain)
Elma Riches (Antigua)
James Cochrane (Dominican Rep.)
James & Carla Cocking (Guatemala)
Kay Tidsbury (Honduras)
Eric & Roxana Ericsson (Mexico)
John Nesbitt (St. Lucia)
Helmut & Shirley Haltrich (Bolivia)

Robert McElmurry (Bolivia)
David & Ruth Sommer (Bolivia)
Donald & Janet DeWeese (Brazil)
Floyd & Helen Pierce (Brazil)
Katherine Moore (Chile)
Gary & Vivian Michael (Colombia)
Bruce Simpson (Colombia)
Marcia Vander Laan (Colombia)
Irene Ridgeway (Ecuador)
Willi & Beatrice Gyger (Fr. Guiana)
Joseph & Ramona Kay Marquez (Paraguay)
Florence Wakefield (Peru)
Evelyn Pelley (Uruguay)
Rhoda Cumming (Venezuela)
Tom & Elisabeth Aiken (Special Areas)
Adib & Hala Daghfal (Special Areas)
Paul & Ruth Furseth (Special Areas)

Interview with Sonja Petersen



A New Missionary Shares about Daily Life

In late 2020, amid challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, Sonja moved to Impfondo, Republic of the Congo, with the support of Gorrie Bible Fellowship, her commending church. Trained as a midwife, Sonja serves women in the maternity ward at Pioneer Christian Hospital. While tackling a busy schedule of three to four shifts at the hospital and studying the language, Sonja is adjusting to her new culture and community—learning to like new foods, manage the hot climate, and connect with her family from across the world. Please pray for Sonja as she settles in and serves her patients and Christ.

Do you feel settled?

I'm getting there. It definitely helps now that I am better at navigating our clinic's systems, the town, and the market. Social situations are quite stressful since my communication abilities are still basic. It can be difficult not knowing what is going on or not being able to explain something the way I want to.

What foods do you eat?

A lot of beans, rice, eggplant, papaya, plantains, spaghetti, and fish. *Kwanga* is a staple here; it takes the place of rice or bread and is made from a root similar to a tough potato. The root is dried out, ground into flour, and made into *kwanga*, which is then wrapped in leaves. My best description of *kwanga* is a tough, chewy Jell-O that is unsweetened and slightly fermented. I am trying to like it.

I love having fruit trees around our house. We have an avocado, a mango, and a lemon tree—and lots of guava trees. My housemate has a bee colony, which we look forward to getting honey from.

How do you get around?

I ride a bicycle to get around. The hospital and my house are at the edge of town, and it takes only about 15 minutes for me to travel from one end of town to the other. Since there are just two of us in our house to buy groceries for, we bike to the market, and our backpacks are sufficient for carrying home our food for the week. Impfondo is pretty far (on a rough road) from a city, so even though it is home to 40,000 people, there aren't many cars. Most people just walk or bike, and some have motorcycles.

What's the weather like?

Hot. In the dry season, temperatures from 95°F to 100°F in the shade are hard to deal with. When it rains, everything cools down. On one dreary, rainy day in March, it got quite chilly, and I had to put on my sweater for the 73°F weather!

What cultural tradition do you find interesting?

We sometimes have twin deliveries at our clinic, and it is interesting to me that the babies are identified by who was born first. *Koumou* is the older twin, and *Peya*, the younger. They may or may not receive other names, but even if they do, they can always be called "Koumou" or "Peya."

What is a typical week for you?

In a week, I work three to four shifts at the maternity clinic. Since midwifery work is so unpredictable, my tasks vary. We typically have about 30 prenatal checkups in a week, which we do on Monday and Friday. Other than those scheduled appointments, we care for the women who are in labor and help deliver their babies (about 25–35 women each month). Additionally, we care for sick newborns or pregnant moms who are admitted to the hospital.

On the days when I am not at the clinic, I study the language—independently with a book or through talking to people in the hospital wards.

On Sundays, I attend a Congolese church; the services are in Lingala and French. I am starting to understand it better, but I still have it translated for now. In the evenings, we have an English service for foreigners. Since there are only five of us here now, it's more like a small group, and it has been an encouraging time of prayer and Bible study.

What do you miss the most?

I miss being with family. Video calls help, but it's not the same as being with them in person. I especially miss spending time with my nieces and nephews; it's more difficult to build relationships with them through a call.

Far less significant, but very real, is the difficulty—or impossibility—of obtaining some foods here. Cheese, real butter, and types of meat (sausage, bacon, or ground beef) are some of the foods I miss cooking with most.

How do you relax?

I enjoy music, and before I moved, I used to play the piano often. Since I don't have a piano in my house here, I have been learning the guitar, which I am glad for since it is something I have wanted to do for a while. I also enjoy going for leisurely bike rides around the city in the late afternoon.

What is challenging?

One of the most challenging things for me has been building relationships. It is partially due to the language barrier, but navigating cultural differences and finding common interests with people is also hard and sometimes awkward. Congolese women spend a lot of time on their hair. Although I think my hair looks dreadful in the styles that their hair looks great in, they like braiding mine. It is fun to spend the afternoon braiding hair with the women in the postpartum area.

What is exciting?

I'm excited that I'm now better at recognizing the women who come in for prenatal visits, and it's fun to get to know them during their pregnancies. I also love caring for women and feel especially thankful that I can help them in situations in which, if they had not come to the hospital, the outcome would have been much worse.

How can we pray for you?

Please pray for continued unity among the people I work with—the foreigners and my Congolese coworkers. Also, pray that we will clearly show Jesus's love to the people who come in and convey the reason why we care for and about them. Pray that I will push through the initial difficulty of getting to know people and that I will develop good friendships and become invested in the people here. ■

Right (from top): Sonja and her coworkers, Olivia (left) and Mary (middle), often bike into town for groceries; The maternity ward at Pioneer Christian Hospital consists of two buildings; Sonja works with two nurses, one other midwife, and one doctor; Spending time with recovering patients is an important part of Sonja's ministry.



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 do you enjoy most about your work on the field?



I most enjoy one-to-one contact with people—either sharing my faith with nonbelievers or encouraging, counseling, and praying with believers.



The most enjoyable part of the work is discipleship and seeing the fruit thereof. He Lives!



We enjoy the feeling that we are still in the Mexican culture even though we're in the United States. We love how the culture shows hospitality: people are more important than time.



I love working with the believers here. They are so friendly and resilient in the face of even the most difficult circumstances. They are truly an example to me.



I appreciate the great opportunities to share the Gospel with many people in different ways. Zambia is still open to evangelism and Bible teaching.



I most enjoy seeing thirst and hunger for God and His Word. I love spending time with new believers who are excited about who God is. It makes my love for Christ grow and encourages my own walk with Him. I also enjoy seeing how the Gospel transforms a culture as I see Colombians mature in the Word, even making decisions different from the culture around them.



I enjoy interacting with people. Brazilians are very warm and friendly, which makes it easy to start conversations, so witnessing can come naturally. They always accept a tract and show gratitude.



What a blessing it is to work with keen young people. In the one-year intensive Bible study and discipleship program at Facultad Bíblica Camiri, we have the delight of investing in young people who come to us well recommended by their local churches and eager to learn and develop their gifts.



It gives me great joy to see people respond to the Gospel and to watch their lives change. John said, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." (3 John 4, KJV) There's no greater joy than seeing them continue to walk in the Lord.

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