

December 2021

MISSIONS

55 Years of Ministry
in **Argentina**

A Home for At-Risk Seniors
in **Mexico**

An Encouraging Conference
in **France**

The Imperative for
Cross-Cultural Missions





THINKING IT THROUGH

BY GEORGE BRISTOW

Shine as Light Wherever You Are

During this season, Christians worldwide celebrate the coming of the Light. We wonder as we ponder the incarnation of the eternal Word of God: “I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness.” (John 12:46)

We rejoice because Jesus’s birth announced the dawning of light in our dark, chaotic world. He gives the light of life to all who follow Him—bringing salvation by the remission of sins “through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Day-spring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” (Luke 1:77–79)

What does incarnation have to do with missions? He who came as the light entrusts the mission of being light to His followers: “You are the light of the world.” (Matthew 5:14) As Jesus’s death becomes our death and His resurrection, our resurrection when we believe in Him, so His mission becomes our mission.

God gives each of us a small corner in which to be light.

Earlier, Isaiah had prophesied about the Servant being light to

the nations, and the apostles took that as their own commission—“For so the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have set you as a light to the Gentiles [nations], that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.’” (Acts 13:47)

For the Son of God, incarnation meant becoming fully human in a particular setting. He spoke Aramaic, talked with all sorts of people, and sat at their tables, eating Middle Eastern food. Jesus was light in their particular darkness.

What did it look like when light came into the world (John 3:19)? Jesus walked miles to one town in Samaria, met a woman as she drew water, asked her for a favor, talked with her about her life, and then revealed His identity to her before spending two days in her town teaching (John 4). The light of the world

shone in their hearts, in their place, and in their space.

As followers of Jesus today, each of us in our particular setting is called to be light to those our Father brings us into contact with. We should visit them and talk with them, telling them Christ’s story: His death, resurrection, and future return. We are the coming of light to their particular world. Some of us are sent to other parts of the world, but it is the same mission.

This applies to us as individuals but also as assemblies of His disciples. When our Lord said, “You are the light of the world,” he added the imagery of a city to show that this calling is communal: “A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.” (Matthew 5:14)

God’s dwelling today is not the temple on the hill Jerusalem but the local church. Only when assemblies are brightly shining lights can they “send the light” overseas. Let’s fan the flame of our church witness by praying, planning, and stirring up love and good works (Hebrews 10:24).

Once, Donna, my wife, was asked to speak at a conference. While preparing, she became discouraged, comparing her seemingly small efforts in a ministry to refugee women and children with those of her energetic friend Carol, who led the ministry. As He often does for Donna, the Lord brought a song of encouragement to her mind:

Jesus bids us shine,
With a clear, pure light,
Like a little candle burning in the night;
In this world of darkness, we must shine,
You in your small corner,
And I in mine.¹

God gives each of us a small corner in which to be light, as individual followers of Christ and also as local assemblies. Whether in the Middle East among Muslim neighbors or in North America with neo-pagan or nominal Christian neighbors, we are called to be light for them. Let’s rejoice in the coming of the Light and shine as He bids us. ■

George Bristow serves in Special Areas.

¹ Susan Warner, “Jesus Bids Us Shine,” 1868.

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Until the Day the Lord Returns

55 Years of Sharing the Gospel in Argentina

BY DOUG BAERGEN



OH, TASTE AND SEE THAT THE LORD IS GOOD; BLESSED IS THE MAN WHO TRUSTS IN HIM! (Psalm 34:8)

In August 1965, after the Lord had burdened my heart to serve Him in Argentina, I left the US to attend a language school in Costa Rica. My assembly's commendation and the farewell at the Philadelphia airport are precious memories. While in language school, I began attending a church and soon joined the choir. This enriching experience came with a bonus: I met Martha in the choir. We married at the end of my time at the Spanish language institute and, then, stayed in Costa Rica for an additional



two months—working on the immigration papers that we needed to enter Argentina as permanent residents.

To reach Argentina, we first traveled to Panama by bus, then sailed down the Pacific coast of South America before traveling by train across the Andes Moun-

tains. On September 16, 1966, we arrived in Salta, in northern Argentina. From there, we traveled to the city of Orán, where we had contacted Herbert Gerrard, an MSC missionary who had served in Argentina for many years. I had first met him when he visited my home assembly in Plumsteadville, Pennsylvania.

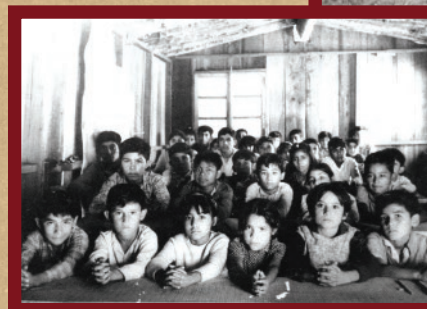
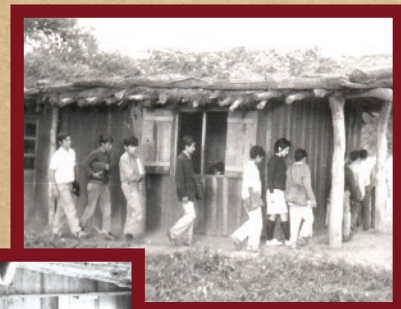
LA ESTRELLA

We lived in Orán for a year and a half, during which time we traveled with Herbert to visit rural assemblies. Seven assemblies had sprung up without missionary influence. On at least two occasions, the Lord's work came through men obtaining Bibles while traveling through the area. I had the privilege of meeting them and hearing their stories.

One man told me that he had been in the area smuggling things across the border into Bolivia. During this trip, he passed an Anglican mission with a store. He saw a Bible on the shelf and purchased it, never imagining that the book would change his life and those of many others. As he, like the other men, read the Bible, he learned of salvation in Christ. Soon, these men were working to spread the Gospel in the area.

We wanted to be used of the Lord in the area too, but the assemblies were not accessible by road part of the year. So we moved to a place where we could better reach some of these groups, even in rainy weather. The Lord had given us our first child, a daughter, so we also wanted to be within driving distance of a city, if we needed a doctor.

We chose La Estrella, which had a train station and a train that passed twice per week. There, we built a simple house, with no modern comforts, on government land. We spent much of our time hauling water from the train station and working on our house and our Jeep. Nevertheless, what



Above: Students file into the school the Baergens built 16 miles from La Estrella.

Left: Children near La Estrella (shown here in about 1969) clearly heard the Gospel in their school.

Top photos: The Baergens began their ministry as a married couple in 1966, and they continue to serve the Lord together today. **Above:** Herbert Gerrard and a believer in a rural assembly discuss a Bible passage.

we remember most is the opportunity to share the Gospel with people who had never heard the good news—what a privilege.

The area had never had its own school, and the people were eager for basic education for their children. So, next, we built a simple school 16 miles from our house in a place called “El Retiro,” where about 20 families lived. Each morning, I drove to the school, taking with me children from La Estrella and picking up a few along the way. The rest lived within walking distance of the school. We used a simple translation of the New Testament and other Christian materials in the regular classes.

“Week after week, we opened the Bible and proclaimed Christ.”

On Friday evenings, in our simple schoolhouse with only a gas light, we held a meeting for the families, and many attended. Week after week, we opened the Bible and proclaimed Christ. In the four years we worked in the area, three people professed faith in Christ, and one of them was baptized.

SARAVIA

Eventually, we left La Estrella for Saravia, a small farm town. After our previous location, with so few people scattered over a large area, Saravia seemed like a city, with its population of about 3,000. The town had a doctor, two schools, a gas station, and stores where we could buy supplies for our family, which included two children by then. We purchased a small piece of land and built facilities for a boarding school and a camp. The boarding school soon proved too much for us. But the Lord blessed the preaching of the Gospel in the town, and we were busy visiting and building up the young Christians.

At this time, several families came to Saravia from Bolivia to work as farmers. They worked hard and eventually owned much of the land they tilled. In our first years in Saravia, several of these Bolivian immigrants received the Lord and became active in the assembly.

For 12 years, we lived on the camp property, taught Christian living to the believers, and proclaimed the Gospel to the rest of the town. We purchased a lot in town for the assembly. We planted fruit trees on the camp property, hoping to have fruit for the table in future years. I expected to spend the rest of our lives in Saravia.

In 1982, the Falklands War changed our plans. We were advised to leave town for a while. Although the war ended quickly, we felt led to stay in Salta, the provincial capital, where the Lord had placed us during the war. The city offered better educational

opportunities for our children and many open doors for gospel work. When we left Saravia, our assembly had about 60 believers in fellowship and some national leaders. That assembly has now grown, and today, about 150 people fellowship there.



SALTA

In Salta, we began to work with a small group of believers on the south side of the city. Little by little, an assembly arose. As we had done before, we purchased a lot and began constructing a meeting place, mostly working with the men of the fledgling assembly. We found the people receptive to the Gospel. Besides those who accepted the Lord through our efforts, we received several families who had moved to Salta from Saravia like us.

Currently, about 65 believers are in fellowship with a good group of spiritual leaders who share in the decisions and in ministering the Word. A large group of single people in their 20s and 30s have proven to be a dynamic force. The Lord uses this group, as well as several older adults, to manage the present ministries and reach out to certain areas of the city, hoping to establish new assemblies.

Right: The Saravia assembly grew to 60 people before the Baergens left in the early 1980s, and today, it has swelled to about 150 people.



Above: The Baergens helped start the assembly in Salta.

Right: Salta's young people engage in vibrant ministry in the community.



TIMOTHY CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Presently, our largest ministry is a Christian school, which grew out of an effort to establish a new assembly on Salta's southern edge. I had earlier visited a new government housing project with almost 2,000 living units but no church of any kind. After much searching, we purchased a large lot adjoining the housing project. There, we built a small chapel and began holding services for adults and a Bible club for children. Believers from the nearby assembly helped us visit the homes to distribute tracts and worked with us in the children's and adults' activities.

For 10 years, we worked in the area, and during that time, we baptized three young people. We had intended to also start a school on our lot after establishing an assembly. However, we could see that the evangelistic work would take more time, so we decided to begin a Christian school meanwhile—to lead children and their parents to the Lord.

After two years of building the first classrooms, we opened the school for kindergartners. Slowly, we added more grades, and today, Timothy Christian School spans from kindergarten through high school, with an enrollment of 360 students.

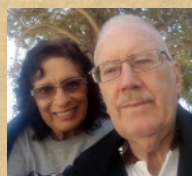
Over the 28 years that the school has operated, the Lord has always provided Christian teachers. All of our students have heard the good news in the classroom, and some have received the Lord and show spiritual fruit. Many of those who studied at Timothy Christian School are active in the assembly where we fellowship.



STILL SERVING TODAY

We continue to be involved in the work of the assembly and the Christian school—I help with decisions regarding the school and serve as an assembly elder—but in some ways, we no longer have the strength to be hands-on missionaries. The pandemic has also limited our activities. We are fully vaccinated but face some risks associated with being in public places. Nonetheless, our biggest tasks are praying and helping others fit into the work to take our place.

We appreciate the prayers of the Lord's people to this end: that He may graciously provide the leaders needed in the assembly and in Timothy Christian School until the day when the Lord returns to take His own to glory. ■



Doug and Martha Baergen are commended from Grace Gospel Chapel in Plumsteadville, Pennsylvania.

Right (clockwise from top): (Photos by Daniel Musa, Studio 54) Timothy Christian School in Salta educates and equips the next generation; Classmates listen while one student reads the Bible aloud; While Timothy Christian School began as a kindergarten, it now serves youth through high school; A senior in high school uses a microscope as her teacher and classmate observe; Kindergartners listen to a story.

A Home for At-Risk Seniors

“Speaking Less, Loving More” in Las Pozas, Mexico



BY ROSALIND CAVENAGH

What makes us suitable for God’s purposes? Is it knowledge, experience, or resources? If those three measurements were the only criteria, then Bet Shalom, a home for at-risk seniors in Mexico, would not exist.

When God burdened my heart for a senior care center, I knew that I was not a builder, architect, plumber, electrician, or any of the specialists that would be needed to launch this project. And, humanly speaking, the odds were against me in a country where, culturally, men lead projects of this magnitude. Counting the cost, I—an initially reluctant, stubborn, and at times, sad servant—moved forward in obedience. I was fully aware of who would build “the house” (Psalm 127:1).

Creating a safe space

Around 2005, during a hospital visitation, I identified two needs as unresolved crises: patients with AIDS who entered the general hospital were dying, and seniors brought there were abandoned. As a follower of Jesus, and as an RN with years of experience in a variety of settings, my heart ached for these marginalized people, who were separated from loved ones and, often, from Christ.

In 2007, five willing individuals united to form a Mexican charitable association called *Hablando Menos, Amando Mas* (“speaking less, loving more”). We began shaping a vision for a safe place where at-risk seniors could live with dignity and be ministered to physically and spiritually. (Our work with AIDS patients is another story for another time.) As we did so, the experts stepped forward.

Two architects gifted us with the facility’s design. A local geriatrician offered advice on what features to include. Builders and plumbers from afar contributed knowledge, ideas, and experience. Even the mayor showed his support. Through our visit to

a children’s home, we learned how to avoid common pitfalls in construction and operation.

To begin the facility’s construction, we needed to have about 13 percent of the projected funds in hand. Truly, this would be a work of faith. We promised never to incur debt, so we eliminated all unnecessary *lujos* (“luxuries”). However, we ensured safety: the foundation would be solid, and the structure, earthquake-resistant. On June 13, 2010, we laid the first stone.



Bet Shalom’s pavilion hosts activities for residents and staff, including Bible studies.

Daily work on future policy and procedures made a great excuse for my regular presence at the construction site, so I oversaw the work. Along the way, we swiftly dealt with scorpion stings and a near catastrophe in well-digging. But, by God’s grace, only a few safety incidents occurred during the entire construction process. We learned to be firm in financial accountability, and we gained the ability to confront and deal with issues of safety and ethics.



Bet Shalom is a haven for at-risk seniors like (L-R) Aurora and Transito.

Serving our residents

Between late 2012 and early 2013, we received our first four residents. Two had no family. One had family, but he was regularly hungry, wet, and dirty. The fourth was an American living illegally in Mexico with only friends, no family, and suffering from rapidly progressing Parkinson's disease. Only his mind functioned well.

Since then, the waiting list of potential patients has grown long. We've learned how to properly evaluate whom we can actually assist based on their disabilities and needs and on our staff's ability and availability.

We have housed up to 14 residents, including some requiring only respite care. Today, we have nine residents. All are multi-handicapped, and several also live with dementia. Though Bet Shalom has the capacity for 20 residents, we can currently care for only a maximum of 14 until after the dangers of the COVID-19 pandemic have passed and our ongoing staffing needs have been resolved.

Bet Shalom's caregivers are multitaskers, caring for the home and residents and even watering the gardens. Cynthia Lopez, our missionary volunteer, oversees regular care, medical appointments, medications, and the eco-garden and chickens. She has improved the order of daily tasks.

The cost of caregiving is huge, even with Mexico's low average rate of pay. More than 80 percent of our monthly income, based on donations, goes toward our caregivers. Still, the lack of available, willing Christian caregivers is significant. Few desire to care for disabled seniors. The COVID-19 pandemic has left us at an even greater deficit, unable to deal with the long waiting list.



Through physical therapy, missionary Cynthia Lopez cares for Robert, a patient.



Bet Shalom's residents enjoy activities like napping on the patio and reading the Bible.

Trusting God to provide

We need to reach seniors for Christ as well as the people in the village of Las Pozas, where Bet Shalom is located. In fact, one of our goals is seeing Las Pozas reached with the Gospel. Our actions and our words speak about the reality of Jesus Christ in our lives. Each resident has opportunities to hear about the One who came to forgive and who can give them peace.

With special donations, we built a roofed pavilion, and now, we regularly use it for Bible studies, a weekly Sunday service, socially distanced visitation (with masks), activities, and ongoing staff education. Mexicans tend to donate gifts in kind rather than cash, so we receive donations of products from local businesses, hotels, and people. We are grateful for all they contribute. God has been more than faithful.

Nevertheless, since the work began, our costs have quadrupled, and no increase in residents or staff can happen at this time. The government offers no assistance or subsidies at any level, which we prefer. Please pray that God will continue to provide for Bet Shalom's and the patients' needs.



Residents can help care for Bet Shalom's garden, which offers outdoor recreation and fresh, homegrown food.

Following God obediently

So who qualifies to fulfill God's purposes on earth? The ones who are willing to follow Him, pick up the plow, and move in the long, sometimes treacherous, path of obedience (2 John 6). God instills passion and vision in whomever He chooses (1 Corinthians 1:26-29). The key is trusting in Him and following Him obediently.

God created me with a "don't give up" spirit of service and character, and He guided my previous experiences. I'm no one special, but I'm His (Luke 12:7). ■



Rosalind and Ron Cavenagh are commended from Youngstown Gospel Chapel in Youngstown, Alberta, Canada.

Rest, Fellowship, and Encouragement

2021 EUROPEAN CHRISTIAN WORKERS' CONFERENCE

BY PHILIP C. PARSONS

Every year since 1978, assembly-commended workers serving in Europe have gathered for a week of fellowship and spiritual enrichment. This year, they met near the quaint French village of Saint-Jorioz in southeastern France. Surrounded by spectacular mountains and the beautiful Lake Annecy, the setting enhanced the attendees' much-needed refreshment and reflection.

Many European workers look forward to this retreat each year, and the 44th annual gathering was no exception. However, the COVID-19 pandemic limited attendance, just as it did the year before. France welcomed workers from other countries, yet the quarantine requirements that workers would face upon returning to their countries of service led many to cancel their plans to attend the conference. Nevertheless, 56 adults and 17 children attended the event, held from August 21 to 27.

The people who fellowshiped

The planning team for the 2021 conference included Liz Basle (France), Gérard Chalvet (*Missionary Prayer Handbook* Day 10), Colin and Maureen Crow (MPH Day 10), Peter Gifford (MPH Day 9), Matthew Glock (MPH Day 10), Mirek and Beata Marczak (MPH Day 13), Tom Marinello (MPH Day 13), and Michael Potts (MPH Day 9). While not on the planning committee, Jeannie Tabilloux (MPH Day 10) recruited workers for the teens' and children's programs.

The conference included workers from Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, France, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, and Spain. Representatives from the missionary service groups also attended and lent their expertise in behind-the-scenes help, including Russell Sutherland (MSC Canada's president) and Allan Wilks (CMML's vice president, technology) managing the technology needs.

The teaching that encouraged

Each day of the conference began with a time of prayer. Mary Parsons (CMML), my wife, led the women's prayer time, and I led the men's prayer time. Following breakfast, Stephen McQuoid (UK), the general director of Gospel Literature Outreach, who served as the conference's keynote speaker, led two sessions with a short break between. Over the week, Stephen taught

through the book of Isaiah, and everyone appreciated the nine-session journey. At the same time, volunteers organized activities for children and teens.

In the afternoons, Paul Rabideau, an elder at Cedarcroft Bible Chapel in South Plainfield, New Jersey, presented seminars focusing on the themes of justice and peace and offered a biblically sound perspective to help equip the believers. Stephen McQuoid presented seminars on ethics, including abortion, same-sex marriage, and transgenderism. In a seminar that revisited a presentation from last year, Matthew Glock discussed methods for sharing the Gospel in European churches.

The activities that refreshed

Besides the optional seminars, the afternoons were intentionally unstructured so attendees could explore the region or join the outings that Kathy M. (MPH Day 12) arranged. Tom Marinello led a hike of moderate intensity, and Matthew Glock organized a mountain trek for the more seasoned hikers. Both afforded a panoramic view of Lake Annecy.

The evenings featured an array of reports from missionaries and subsequent prayer times. Bernd and Karin Flock (MPH Day 9) shared about a recent health concern of their daughter, Heidi Witt, who lives with her family in Nebraska. They explained that, one Saturday evening, without warning, Heidi collapsed—her heart had stopped. Not until early Sunday morning did Bernd, in Austria, discover 14 missed calls on his mobile phone. He and Karin immediately began arranging to travel to the US. The COVID-19 restrictions compounded their attempts, but believers in the Witts' assembly generously provided a place to quarantine. The Flocks' account testified to God's faithfulness, and we rejoice with them that He has restored Heidi's health.

David Sutherland, a UK missionary in France, presented the final evening's message, which focused on thanksgiving. We were all reminded that we have much for which to be thankful, even in these last many months, while in the throes of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact. What a positive way to end the week! ■

Philip C. Parsons coordinates CMML's assembly relations and missionary care.



From top left (L-R): Before the conference started, the Parsons toured some of France's famous landmarks; In August, 73 people gathered for the 44th European Christian Workers' Conference; Paul Rabideau leads an afternoon seminar; Bernd and Karin Flock share about God's faithfulness; During the evening sharing time, Sylvie and Matthew Glock report on their ministry; (L-R) Patti and Tom Marinello chat with Stephen McQuoid; Mary and Phil Parsons (far left and far right, respectively) catch up with Jeannie and Jean-Luc Tabailleux (middle); Stephen McQuoid, the keynote speaker, spoke on Isaiah; One evening, the kids performed a skit, which they practiced as part of the children's program.

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: Do you have a special memory from a time when you visited the CMML facility and Missionary Guest Home?

AUSTRIA

Leslie Walt



I was lying in bed exhausted and somewhat sick as Scott, my husband, carried on a conversation with our oldest son, Michael, who was six years old at the time. Michael was crying and asking why we had to move to Austria. I will always remember Scott's answer: "God's ways are not always easy, but they are always good." Thirty-three years ago, CMML provided that haven where we could stop, rest, and let God speak to us.

UGANDA

Bob & Sue Cullen



Our family has fond memories of the CMML Missionary Guest Home: the helpful clothing center from which I (Sue) still have a pair of classic black slacks that I've worn for more than 20 years and the cozy kitchen where missionaries can find comfort food that they would never have imagined eating out in the field. But, oh, the people! They're always our supportive cheerleaders. Our hearts overflow with love and gratefulness for them.

FRANCE

Jonathan & Rachel Ward



We remember the magic of being greeted by dozens of fireflies as we arrived at the CMML facility on a warm August evening when our kids were young.

JAPAN

Bob Longo



We have enjoyed close, individual fellowship with others who were also staying at the guest home. It is refreshing to see my favorite birds, the red-bellied woodpecker and northern flicker, right on the CMML property.

OTHER OVERSEAS SERVICE

Bert & Lois Mast



In 1997, after we had evacuated from Zaire because of civil war, Jane Wolcott (guest home hostess at the time) was looking after the missionary guests. One afternoon, Jane was playing with our daughter Yoanna (age two) and even crawled under the big oak display table in the second-floor foyer. Many 30-year-old women might not have been as playful!

PHILIPPINES

Steve & Dottie St. Clair



When we visited CMML, we were spoiled by the clothing center, the beautifully furnished apartments, and swimming in the nearby cold ocean with waves to dive through. In Manila, we took cold, five-minute "bucket" showers. CMML had a multi-headed hot shower and no five-minute rule. We surely doubled CMML's water bill enjoying such luxury. ■

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