

January 2022

MISSIONS

Albania
CMML Visits Missionaries
on the Field

Canada
Naomi House Supports Refugees

Mexico
Prayer Changes Lives





THINKING IT THROUGH

BY ERIC BARTON

3 Elements of Prayer on behalf of Believers

The second chapter of Colossians opens with one of several tremendous prayers contained in the epistle. Right away, we are challenged by the extent to which Paul prayed for believers he had not met and are reminded of the importance of prayer. We need not be physically present to make a spiritual impact.

As missionaries around the world will testify, the prayers of saints like you and me back home underwrite and sustain their success in foreign lands. This reality should also encourage every person who no longer feels useful to the Lord, for He faithfully assures us, “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” (James 5:16)

Comfort

The first thing Paul wrestled over in prayer on behalf of the believers, from Colossians 2:2, was “that their hearts may be encouraged.” The idea here is of comforting and strengthening. Too often, God’s people are quick to find fault with one another. But Paul offers a better approach: a fervent prayer to the God of all comfort on behalf of others.

My friends, there are already enough attacks, persecution, and suffering from without. God forbid they come from within too. Rather, following Paul’s example, let us beseech our Lord to encourage, comfort, and strengthen those of “like precious faith.” (2 Peter 1:1) Then, having prayed, let us look for opportunities in which the Lord may use us to answer that prayer.

Closeness

Second, Paul longed to see the believers “knit together in love.” The idea Paul had in mind is well illustrated by the Hyperion redwood tree. Located on the West Coast of the United States, the Hyperion reaches 380 feet, making it the world’s tallest living tree. Reasonably, you might expect the roots of such a tree to run deep, but the opposite is true.

Regardless, the Hyperion can withstand the wind, rain, and storms of life despite its shallow root system. How so? Because its

roots are intimately intertwined with the other redwoods around it. What one tree lacks another one supplies. And, when the wind blows, their combined strength allows them to remain standing.

God intends the same closeness and interconnectedness for the body of Christ. Fortunately, we have things far greater than the redwoods have to help us achieve such unity: Christ in us and love as the perfect bond (Colossians 1:27; 3:14).

Conviction

Paul’s final request was that the believers attain “to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ.” In other words, Paul deeply desired that they grow in their understanding and knowledge of the Godhead—specifically grasping that the all-sufficient, all-glorious, and preeminent head of the church dwells in Jew and Gentile believers alike. Why? Because Paul had absolute confidence in the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ, and he knew that the more the believers understood and appreciated the same, the less vulnerable they would be to the false teachings of the day (Gnosticism).

Today, Christians are inundated with similar erroneous teachings, but the antidote remains the same: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8) May God help us to grow in His grace, our knowledge of Him, and our appreciation for Him each day He gives us breath.

Another year has dawned on a world that seems determined to drift into confusion and chaos more deeply each day. Similarly, the pressure for us to compromise on, conform to, or accept views contrary to biblical truth grows. Fortunately, we need not fear, since we have a Savior who has declared, “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33) He is the ultimate source of the comfort, closeness, and conviction we need to withstand the onslaught. Like Paul, may we “come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16) ■

Eric Barton is a CMML director.

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COVER PHOTO: Lake Ohrid in Albania—Photo by Philip Parsons





NAOMI HOUSE

Offering Refugees a New Start in Winnipeg, Manitoba

BY TIM & SUE NIELSEN

Three years ago, we met Paul* when he first came to Naomi House—a transitional home for refugees and asylum-seekers in Winnipeg, Manitoba, about an hour north of the North Dakota border. A successful Muslim machinist in Syria, Paul was part of a family that had lived in Damascus for hundreds of years. But, when war and chaos erupted, he and his family were forced to flee their country and enter Canada.

Our church had created Naomi House in 2017, recognizing the great need of people like Paul, who are fleeing for their lives. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), our world is experiencing the highest number of displaced people ever: 82.4 million. The average refugee spends 17 years in a refugee camp, and only 1 percent of them will be sponsored to a safe third country.

Although Paul didn't stay long, he engaged in deep discussions about faith with an Eritrean believer from our church. Then, in the fall of 2019, he returned to live at Naomi House. This time, he told us that Jesus was appearing to him in dreams. Jesus had done so back in Damascus, but with this recent dream, Paul began listening to evangelical podcasts in Arabic. He gave his heart to God and was baptized. For Paul and the many more refugees who live at Naomi House, we serve as a safe place where they can start their new lives in Canada—and, we pray, their new lives in Christ.

Identifying the need

The story of Naomi House reaches back much further than its opening in 2017. Twenty years earlier, the Brethren church we were attending, Maples Community Church, sponsored Lian Thang,* whom two young people from our church had met while doing summer ministry in Bangkok, Thailand. A member of the Chin ethnic group, Lian, along with 99 others, was on a government wanted list in Myanmar (Burma) for participating in the 1988 uprising against the dictatorship.

Lian had fled to Thailand, where he found Christ. There, he was often jailed because he was in the country illegally, but God still used Lian to help start an ethnic church in Bangkok. Then, when he arrived in Winnipeg, he located his girlfriend, who had fled to Japan 10 years prior, and eventually, sponsored her to come to Canada too.

In 2005, government-sponsored refugees from around the world started pouring into Winnipeg. We felt God urging us to take a step of faith to leave our long-standing Christian literature ministry with Native Americans and begin walking alongside the “newcomers,” or refugees, who were entering Canada.

The church started paying for two buses to pick up people from downtown Winnipeg, where most were living, and drive them to our building. The newcomers were primarily Congolese, Chin, and Karen people (another ethnic group from Myanmar). On Thursdays, the church members conducted conversational English classes (ESL); on Sundays, we offered a Sunday school class with translation. Church members, friends, and even strangers donated furniture and household supplies, and volunteers distributed the items to the refugees. Friendships developed as we shared each other's stories—many very sad but some quite hilarious. Despite severe hardship, the newcomers' humble trust in God challenged us all to develop deeper walks with Him.

Soon, our congregation had doubled in size, and we recognized that meeting on the city's outskirts when the newcomers all lived downtown was not sustainable.

Launching City Church

In 2008, through the help of a long-time friend, we purchased a building downtown: the former First English Lutheran Church, complete with stained-glass windows and a working pipe organ. We welcomed about 300 people each Sunday, and about 500 considered it their home church. We offered translation in Chin, Karen, and Swahili. And so, City Church was born.

We experienced a high learning curve, but love covered many mistakes and misunderstandings. Operating under the plurality of elders, we recognized the importance of integrated, multicultural eldership. Today, our elders come from Myanmar, Colombia, Pakistan, Congo, and Canada. Our deacons also come from various countries, including the Philippines.

We soon formed many Groups of Five, a sponsorship program unique to Canada where five people can sponsor an individual refugee or family if they have a UNHCR number (however, many refugees cannot obtain a number). When the refugees



From left: One of City Church's ministries is sponsoring refugees from around the world; Tim (left) leads a baptism class; Some of the church's 500 members enjoy a potluck; Tim baptizes a believer at City Church.

arrive, the Group of Five must provide for them for a year and help them settle.

Then, in 2020, the Canadian government granted City Church the privilege of becoming a Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH)—allowing us to sponsor refugees who do not have a UNHCR number. This agreement cuts down on paperwork, although it is still quite daunting. We expect 88 people to enter Canada via our sponsorship by 2024. They originate from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq, Ivory Coast, Myanmar, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen; however, their temporary countries of refuge are Egypt, Ethiopia, Greece, Indonesia, Israel, Kenya, Malaysia, South Africa, Thailand, and Turkey.

Daily, we receive requests for sponsorship from persecuted Christians. Our current backlog of “doable” cases is 170 people! They can only be fulfilled through prayer. We need the government to give us a bigger allotment, and we need people or churches to help settle refugees or sponsor them financially. (Sponsorship costs about \$16,000 CAD for an individual and \$32,000 for a family of four.)

Building Naomi House

In 2013, we once again noticed an influx of asylum-seekers entering Winnipeg and desired to help them more. Around 2015, friends of City Church purchased a nearby building, and volunteers including architects, plumbers, painters, electricians, and others donated their time and expertise to gut the building and prepare it for occupancy. When we opened the house in the fall of 2017, we named it Naomi House because the biblical Naomi was a refugee, fleeing Israel due to famine.

Now, Naomi House comprises seven bedrooms, including a handicap-accessible one; five bathrooms; a large eat-in kitchen; five offices and a conference room; an upper-story patio with a rooftop garden; and a large multipurpose room for sewing classes, youth group activities, Bible studies, and seminars. Since opening, it has been “home” to 51 people from Burundi, Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Somalia, Turkey, Pakistan, Nigeria, and Syria.

Right (from top): City Church's children, from diverse backgrounds, participate in Awana; Children listen to a Bible story at the church.

We also host trauma support classes. Shahrazad, from Somalia, uses her master's degree in trauma support counseling to lead this group along with Jane, a social worker from Kenya.

Candace Loewen, who has been taking courses on immigration, works at Naomi House part time. The Loewens are former missionaries with Africa Inland Mission and are a significant asset. Lemlem, an Eritrean mother, works alongside Candace to complete paperwork and help with complicated immigration decisions.

In the fall of 2021, City Church also hired two part-time staff. Brenda is the settlement volunteer coordinator. Formerly, she led the Transitional Classroom, a program which, from 2010 to 2017, grounded 75 children in Christian education and helped them adapt to their new culture. Paula is our church secretary, who arrived from Colombia two years ago with her husband





Top (from left): Over the years, Naomi House has been “home” to 51 people; Naomi House is complete with a rooftop garden; Newcomers participate in a sewing class. **Bottom (from left):** Naomi House supports its residents by addressing physical, spiritual, and emotional needs; Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, more young adults began attending the evening Bible study.



and sons. She tells us she is more passionate about being involved in ministry than she was about her former desire to work with the Peoples’ Liberation Army. Her husband, Andres, is an elder at City Church.

Finding refuge

Some people who arrive in Winnipeg are stateless, such as the Karen, who have been at war with Myanmar since 1948, or others like Samed. He, his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather have been stateless since World War I. Originally from Turkestan, they fled to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Turkey over the years. When Samed was unable to establish residency in Turkey, he left his family behind to seek asylum in Canada. The Canadian government approved his case, and recently, he was granted asylum.

Unfortunately, not all cases are successful. A Japanese woman and her child were deported in January 2021 after being with us for three years. We grieve these losses, and the possibilities of several others are still in the courts.

Current disastrous situations worldwide—such as in Myanmar, Congo, the Tigray region of Ethiopia, Afghanistan, and many other homelands of City Church members—cause our friends to relive the trauma of the situations they fled: night raids, burning of villages, shootings, bombings, and running into the jungles, sometimes with children being lost in the panic.

Many of the asylum-seekers who have come through Naomi House are acquainted with the Darien Gap, which is considered one of the most dangerous passages on earth because the area

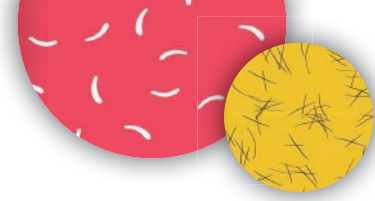
lacks roads and teems with guerillas and drug smugglers. As a young, pregnant mother, Aida* made that trek along with her nine-year-old daughter, having begun their journey in Ethiopia.

Aida and her daughter journeyed through Brazil, Colombia, the Darien Gap, Central America, and the US before finally arriving in Winnipeg in December, having walked through deep snow along the border without winter clothes. A month later, an Ethiopian taxi driver brought Aida and her daughter to Naomi House. (She actually stayed at our home for a few weeks because Naomi House was fully occupied.) In broken English, Aida communicated some of her stories of the journey and her life before: After her Orthodox father had died and she had left the care of her Muslim mother, Aida spent most of her teenage life as a servant child bride. Torn between the two religions, she began her search for truth.

Aida agreed to come to the ladies’ Bible study group, called Village Well. But, then, she stopped coming, although she kept attending the sewing class. When I, Sue, visited her, I noticed she was wearing her Muslim attire more frequently and watching the Muslim TV station. It was disheartening.

However, in the summer of 2021, while we were wading in the water at a local beach away from her daughter, she blurted out, “I have Him!” I asked what she meant, and Aida replied, “I have Him in my heart, like you.”

She told me that she had been reading the Bible and the Koran, trying to find the truth. Then, Jesus had appeared in a dream and had reassured her that He loved her and that He was the Way she was looking for. Aida astounds us as she speaks of profound biblical truths.



Seeing the Holy Spirit's work

For a year and a half during the COVID-19 pandemic, we could not meet face to face with most of the people of City Church. However, when restrictions started lifting, we saw that the Holy Spirit had been working in people's hearts. In September 2021, 11 young people—Karen men in their late 20s and early 30s, a 19-year-old from Nigeria, and a girl from Germany—committed to following God in obedience and were baptized. What an amazing and joyful day, which also happened to be the first day we were allowed to have 150 people at an outdoor service.

More young adults kept showing up at our Sunday supper and Bible study nights, including seven young adults attending a nearby Bible college and a young Lebanese evangelist training to be a military chaplain. Please pray that a solid team that can mentor and disciple these sincere Christians will develop and that the world will not attract these believers as we live out the Gospel together.

Serving and praying

In Acts 17:26–28, we read about what our church is witnessing today: "From one man He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us. 'For in Him we live and move and have our being.'" (NIV, 1984)

In Winnipeg, Manitoba, just as in Paul's day, God is allowing nations to be scattered so that souls will perhaps reach out and find Him, though He has never been far from any one of the newcomers. Now that many of them are in our neighborhoods, schools, grocery stores, sports teams, parks, and buses, we have the opportunity to be Christ's loving hands and feet. We pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to multiply biblically based intercultural churches around the world so that those who have been stripped of so much might turn to Him as their Savior. ■



Tim and Sue Nielsen are commended from Charleswood Community Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

**Names changed to protect identity*

Besides prayer, the need for churches and individuals to sponsor newcomers is great. If you are interested in this ministry, please pray about it and contact us at tim.nielsen.ccx@gmail.com or sue.nielsen.ccx@gmail.com regarding available options to help.



Top (from left): Sue helps her Somali friends explore Canadian culture through an outing to a museum; A friend introduces Sue to an Eritrean meal. **Middle:** A Naomi House resident makes Eritrean coffee for her friends. **Bottom (from left):** Sue spends time with one of Naomi House's youngest residents; A Karen couple include Tim and Sue in their wedding.



THE 51st ANNUAL FALL CONFERENCE

Celebrating CMML's Centennial While Looking Ahead

BY SARAH DUNLAP

Since 1971, CMML has hosted a missions conference each fall. The event is always a special time, whether you're a first-time attendee or you've attended every year since 1971 (it's true: some haven't missed a conference). But, in its 51st year, the Annual Fall Conference marked the culmination of CMML's yearlong 100th-anniversary celebration—a commemoration of God's faithfulness over a century while anticipating His plan for the future of Brethren missions.

On Saturday, November 13, more than 300 adults and children gathered at Grace Bible Church in Allenwood, New Jersey, to fellowship with other believers, learn about missions, and study God's Word. The theme, Mission2022, challenged believers to engage in Christ's mission today by rekindling our passion for evangelism, discipleship, and church planting. The keynote messages, delivered by Nate Bramsen (*Missionary Prayer Handbook* Day 25), Jim McCarthy (California), and Thomas Schetelich (CMML director), celebrated the past, considered the present, and suggested ideas for moving forward under Christ's leadership as He builds His church globally.

Reflecting on the Gospel's work

Once attendees arrived at the Annual Fall Conference's new location, the event began with a showing of *Compelled: A Century of Faith, Love, and Sacrifice*, a 20-minute film that showcases missions stories from CMML's century of service. Then, Thomas Schetelich presented the first keynote message, which reaffirmed the Brethren commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to the New Testament model practiced in local assemblies and their worldwide missions.

In the hour before lunch, attendees separated into groups to participate in Continent Tracks. Each track featured three videos, narrated by missionaries, that illustrated the spiritual needs and evangelical work in a particular global region. Then, via Zoom, the missionaries and participants engaged in live Q&A sessions.

At noon, the attendees reunited for a Chick-fil-A lunch, which

has become a favorite conference feature over the years. Thanks to the new facility's spacious gymnasium, all conferencegoers ate lunch together—something which returning attendees realized as a significant change. In past years, CMML divided lunchtime into two sessions due to a small dining area.

Going forward with renewed hearts

After lunch, the conference resumed with two more keynote messages. Weaving between the stage and the audience in his active preaching style, Nate Bramsen challenged his listeners to "run to the battle," even when that means confronting the unexpected. Using 1 Samuel 17 as an illustration, he answered the question, "How do we fight?" Then, Jim McCarthy spoke on the New Testament church's principles and purpose while considering Ephesians 3:8–12.

Throughout the day, volunteers ran the children's program so parents could focus on the conference's sessions. Hannah Allen (New Jersey) managed the nursery while Annette MacArthur (New Jersey) organized activities for kindergartners, and Eric and Alma Smith (New York) worked with the grade-schoolers. The kids listened to Bible stories, made crafts, sang songs, and played games. According to one parent, his kids enjoyed the program so much that they begged to stay after the conference had ended.

Around 3:00 p.m., Craig Fritchey (CMML conference coordinator) sang "Compelled" before Bob Dadd (CMML president) concluded the conference with a few remarks and prayer. Some attendees returned home soon after, and others stayed behind to chat and explore an expo featuring ministries like Emmaus Bible College, Everyday Publications Inc., and Gospel Folio Press. We praise the Lord for CMML's 100 years and the Annual Fall Conference's 51 years, and we anticipate what the Lord has planned for missions in 2022 and in the next century. As Bob Dadd said in closing, "May we go forward with fresh desires in our hearts, with the love of Christ compelling us to run to the battle."

Sarah Dunlap, Missions editor



From top (L-R): The congregation sings, opening the conference; The music team leads attendees in singing; Thomas Schetelich presents the first keynote message; Nate Bramsen interacts with the audience during his message; Jim McCarthy speaks on the New Testament church's principle and purpose; During a Continent Track, participants listen to a report of the work in Asia; Conferencegoers chat with a representative at the ministry expo; Friends enjoy their Chick-fil-A lunches.

Watch the conference on demand at CMMLConferences.us, and view more photos on our Facebook page.



MEXICO MISSION TRIP

HOW PRAYER CHANGES THINGS—AND PEOPLE

BY STEPHEN & SARAH ROUGHTON

Since returning to North Carolina in 2020 to await Sarah's US citizenship, we have developed ministries for the Spanish-speaking people around us while maintaining contact with the believers in Ensenada, Mexico, where we formerly served. One of our goals has been to organize a mission trip to Mexico. In the late summer of 2021, we hosted our first one, and the team comprised believers from our commending assembly, Shannon Hills Bible Chapel in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Our goal for the weeklong trip was to distribute tracts in Ensenada, run an English camp, and encourage La Iglesia Cañon Buena Vista—the church Sarah and I had worked with when we lived in Mexico.

WITNESSING PRAYER'S EFFECTIVENESS

After much planning and many prayers, our team boarded a plane going west, taking us to our final destination, Ensenada. Before leaving, our small group of six voiced some fears and uncertainties, but we began our journey trusting God to work out all the details. It was fitting that, during our trip, we read R. C. Sproul's *Does Prayer Change Things?* as our group's devotional. We prayed that the Lord would bless those in Mexico we would

be ministering to and that we would be blessed too. Many believers were praying for this trip. Well, prayer did change things: it changed those we ministered to, but most importantly, it changed us.

Before the trip, I had asked each team member what we as a team could pray for. I witnessed a lot of tears due to honesty and openness, but the prayer request that touched me most was from a team member who was afraid of everything about our trip: She was scared of flying, she was scared of the border crossing, she was scared to be in Mexico, and she was probably scared of more.

Yet she became an inspiration to me because I knew that, despite those fears, she was willing to follow God's leading. If you were to see her now, you would know that prayer did change her. By day three in Mexico, she was loving everything about the trip, and afterward, she made it clear that she wanted to go back. That is what prayer can do.

SHARING CHRIST'S LOVE

Once we arrived in Mexico, we got to work. Nearly every morning during our weeklong trip, we would walk Ensenada's

dusty, hot, dirt roads, and as we walked, we would pray and distribute tracts to the people we saw. One individual we met turned around again after receiving the tract. I was sure he was going to ask this group of foreigners for money. Instead, he introduced himself as Abel. With tears in his eyes, he told me about the sad situation he was in due to his own behavior and choices. I offered for the group to pray for him.

As we laid our hands on him and I prayed, the man himself started admitting his sin to God. I had not even mentioned sin to him. Though we never saw Abel again, I believe God placed us there at that time to pray for him. Please pray for his salvation and for the Lord to help him in his plight.

At around 2:00 p.m. every day, we conducted an English camp, which Sarah led. We were able to reach the lives of more than 50 kids. God truly blessed. On Friday night, we hosted a special parents' night, and more than 80 people heard a clear gospel presentation. Please pray for these precious children and their parents.

Every evening, we led music, sang a special song, had someone from the church read one of our testimonies, and then, presented a short message. Scott Murphy, one of our team members, and I preached through a series called "Things Found." We presented the stories of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son, pointing out that all of those things were also found. On Friday, we combined this evening meeting with the English camp closing program. We are thankful that the church was encouraged by this week of special meetings. Please pray that, at La Iglesia Cañon Buena Vista, God will continue to develop the believers' faith in Him, their knowledge of His love for them, and their service for Him. ■



Stephen and Sarah Roughton are commended from Shannon Hills Bible Chapel in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Prayer requests

- Praise God for our time in Mexico.
- Pray for those in Mexico whom we ministered to.
- Pray that the team members will continue to grow in prayer.
- Pray that the Lord will lead us concerning a mission trip to Mexico in 2022.



Top (L–R): During the weeklong trip, the team members witnessed the power of prayer; English camp includes more than learning—the kids enjoy games too.

Bottom (L–R): Stephen shares the Gospel with parents and children; Sarah and Stephen talk to Abel.

