

May 2024

# MISSIONS

**Demonstrating  
God's Love to  
Mothers in  
Albania**

**Captured by a Church-  
Planting Vision in  
Burundi**

**Practical Learning  
Programs Equip Believers  
in Italy**

**The Results of Visiting  
Missionaries on the Field**





# THINKING IT THROUGH

BY TIM BEER

## Look Up at the Stars

Isaiah 40 declares in amazing detail many of the incredible characteristics of our God—who is truly unequalled and absolutely transcendent. Therefore, the chapter lifts us up when we are feeling down or discouraged.

In our times of need, we may feel, as the nation of Israel did in verse 27, that our “way is hidden from the LORD.” Deep down, we know that can never be true since our awesome God is omnipresent and omniscient, which verse 28 confirms: “The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth. He never grows weak or weary. No one can measure the depths of His understanding.” (NLT)

For every challenging situation in life, verse 26 becomes a source of strength and encouragement: “Look up into the heavens. Who created all the stars? He brings them out like an

army, one after another, calling each by its name. Because of His great power and incomparable strength, not a single one is missing.” (NLT)

He knows each star individually and has given each its own name. It moves in the exact orbit God designed it for and shines light into that area of the universe. These facts are powerfully true for everyone who belongs to the Lord Jesus. If God has such a personal interest in and ongoing care for the stars, then how much greater is His concern for each one of us who are His children?

Every child of God has been born again through His grace, and He loves each one so greatly. What Isaiah 43:1 records applies to each of us: “Thus says the LORD, . . . who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine.’” The Lord Jesus, as our shepherd, “calls His own sheep by name and leads them out. . . . He goes

before them.” (John 10:3–4) As Romans 8 confirms, nothing can separate us from the love of God (vv. 38–39). Truly, we are immeasurably more precious to God than the stars.

Just as every star is in the exact location where God placed it, so we, as His children, are in the place He chose for us. And, incredibly, He is with us in every circumstance, having promised, “I am with you always” and “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” (Matthew 28:20, Hebrews 13:5) The Lord Jesus loves to walk with us through each and every situation and invites us to follow His example: “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11:29)

**We are immeasurably more precious to God than the stars.**

Stars do not communicate using words, and so often, our lives speak more to those around us than our lips. The Lord Jesus stated, “You are

the light of the world. . . . Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:14, 16) Just as I am drawn to looking up at the stars when I walk at night, the way that Christians live in this spiritually dark world should attract people’s attention. God shines His light through us to draw others to our Savior, the Light of the World.

Therefore, when we feel discouraged, let us remember that God has a powerful object lesson in the stars for us every night. He invites us to look up in the darkness, into the sky, and remember that the same God who cares for each of the innumerable stars cares for each of us in a far greater way (1 Peter 5:7).

One day, along with every part of this universe, the stars will be no more, but our Savior has promised that we will be with Him in the Father’s house forever. (John 14:1–3) ■

*Tim Beer, Other Overseas Service (MPH Day 27)*

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COVER PHOTO: Mother with child in Albania—©AdobeStock



# The Courage to Demonstrate God's Love

## A Ministry Reaches Moms across Albania



BY BONA MIEKLEY

Some of us have the courage to tell the gospel story of what happened 2,000 years ago, yet we are afraid to say what God has done in our lives or what more He might want to do. "I'm just too afraid to think about what happened when I was a girl," a woman told my husband, Josh, and me recently. In fact, I grew up with that same fear.

More than 20 years ago, I would have been surprised if you had looked me in the eye and said, "Bona, Jesus sees you. He knows you. He loves you." I believed that Jesus loves *all* of us. Yet there is something different between that and knowing He loves *me*.

I'd like to share with you my journey to starting a women's ministry in Albania—a branch of Mothers of Preschoolers International (MOPS)—and what God has done in the lives of other women. First, let me tell you about my home country, Albania.

### Albania, nestled in the Balkans

Albania has a population of more than three million people and carries a unique spiritual climate: About 60 percent of the people adhere to Islam and less than 1 percent identify as evangelical Christians. Traditionally, Albanians were either Muslim, Catholic, or Orthodox. However, after enduring one of the most brutal communist regimes in history, which closed all mosques and churches and prohibited religious observance, the people were not very religious. Today, an Albanian might identify as Muslim but not observe every practice. For example, Albanian Muslim women typically do not cover themselves with a *hijab* (head scarf).

The leader of Albania's MOPS for Single Moms describes our country this way: "I have seen communism fall, the transition to democracy, and a civil war in 1997 where anyone could have a gun while there were no military or police active. In between,

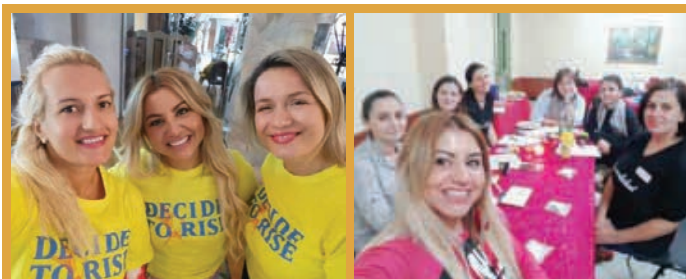
there was destruction, crime, drugs, and the list goes on and on." But I'd add that the beauty and warmth in Albanian people are really special.

### A growing network

MOPS International, found in 90 countries, unites mothers of young children and helps them realize their potential in relationship with Christ and in partnership with the local church.<sup>1</sup> The curriculum emphasizes the Gospel, identity in Christ, and Christian principles for parenting, marriage, and other topics.

MOPS' unique niche is connecting people in the church with unbelievers—who come into the church for MOPS when they wouldn't ordinarily attend other services. In Albania, most of the women in MOPS groups come from Muslim backgrounds. In fact, church planters working in Muslim areas started a couple of the groups. Most of the local churches with MOPS groups also offer a women's Bible study or one-to-one Bible studies.

Through this network, moms in Albania share their joys and struggles and work through those challenges in light of the Gospel. God has used many people and broken down many obstacles to create MOPS Albania.



From left: Both of these women pictured with Bona (center) lead MOPS at a church plant on the outskirts of Tirana, where several people have come to Christ over the last 10 years; Bona encourages a local MOPS group.

## The lies I believed

In the book *Lies Women Believe*, Nancy Leigh DeMoss writes, “When God sent His only Son, Jesus, to this earth . . . He declared the value of our soul to be greater than the value of the whole world. . . . Believing a lie will put you in bondage. Believing the Truth will set you free.”<sup>2</sup>

For as long as I can remember I believed lies: I didn’t matter. I was too small. I would never be good enough.

My sister and I were born prematurely. The words “you are too small” echo in my ears as far back as I can remember. I remember going to violin lessons in my school uniform—a black jumper and white shirt. I would stand in the music school’s cold, dark corridor, violin in hand. I would place the written exercises on a window sill and practice while I waited for my sister to finish. I had already practiced for hours. Day after day, the teacher would come out and tell me: “Your fingers are too small. You can’t do it.”

Throughout childhood, I lived with the message, “You will never be good enough.” I was afraid of disappointing my parents. I was afraid of my relatives calling me degrading names if I didn’t wear the right clothes or if I put on lipstick. I was just as afraid at church—of disappointing the leaders. And my mom would only let me attend church if I had a good rapport with the leaders.

Even on the day of my baptism, I felt a sense of shame. My sister and I had rushed out of our house, barely escaping a beating from my Muslim cousin, whereas others walked confidently into the church.

## Freedom from those lies

Fast-forward to a pivotal moment in my life: an invitation from Jennifer at our church in Chicago. (By this time, I was married to Josh, whom I had met when he was a single missionary in Albania, and we had moved to the US.) When Jennifer spoke, she had a clear, thoughtful, kind voice. She looked me in the eye and said, “I would like to ask you to consider being one of the leaders of the women’s ministry.

*What? Me?* I thought, the warning sirens blaring in my mind. *How can I do this?*

Perhaps Jennifer could read the hesitation on my face. “Bona, I see in you a compassionate heart,” she continued. “You have what it takes to love moms.”

As I began to think and pray about this request, many doubts came to my mind. You see, I was an outsider there. I had just moved from Albania. The other women had grown



MOPS leaders, including Bona, represent Albania while preparing for an international trip.

up in the US. I had grown up in a communist regime. I was from a poor country but was attending church in one of the richest places in America. Many of the women there had earned all sorts of degrees. And me? Albania’s 1997 civil war had interrupted my first chance to enter university. The second time, I gave up multiple scholarships so Josh and I could pursue a dream of serving in Kosovo. Perhaps, most importantly, I felt bankrupt emotionally as a young mom. I had other questions too: *How will I fit in socially? Will I be able to serve in the same capacity as when I worked in Albania or Kosovo? Or will English limit me? What will happen if I make a mistake in English?*

Josh and I prayed about it, I said yes, and the experience of leading this group was powerful—so powerful that when we returned to Albania, my passion was to introduce Mothers of Preschoolers in Albania. God enabled me to do just that in 2013.

## MOPS Albania

I had one person at my side from the beginning: my cousin Blerta. In the early days, Blerta prepared the venue, food, games, and crafts. With Blerta, I was like a woman with a vision *and* a wedding agency behind her!

I remember standing up at the first MOPS meeting to tell my story. Many of us shared some experiences: buying food with ration cards; waiting in long lines for bread and other food, sometimes for hours; marking our place in line with a rock when we had to leave; and returning to see where we were compared to the stones others had left. Most of us had experienced the end of the communist regime and the chaotic transition to democracy.

But we were also each unique. None of these women had grown up in my family. Some had grown up with more affirmation; sadly, some with more abuse. We each had different stories of pain and challenges and how God had shown up.



Bona’s mentor, Heather Silhavy, once told her, “I’m only a phone call away.”



Bona, along with her cousin Blerta (center) and Irena, pose for a photo during a MOPS Albania conference they organized.

I told the women about the day a woman from MOPS, Heather, had come to my rescue. While living in the US, I had rushed our son, Ben, to the hospital for a severe allergic reaction to peanuts. I felt terrified and guilty. Heather brought me flowers, Ben’s diapers, and everything I

needed. When she left, she reassured me with words I'll never forget: "Dear, I'm only a phone call away."

As I told this story, I saw tears coming down the cheeks of a woman who looked about my age. Her name was Valmira, and she later told me, "I was so touched by Heather's kindness to you."

### New groups

A few years later, Valmira entered a store and ran into Vera, another mother she had known for years through their children's day care. Vera's daughter had autism and suffered from a tumor. That day, Vera saw that Valmira was wearing earrings that weren't from Albania.



Bona (second from left) gathers with Anila, Valmira, and Blerta during MOPS Albania's first year—by the end of it, five churches had committed to starting new groups.

"Where did you get those?" she asked. Valmira told her they were from Uganda and explained the Mothers of Preschoolers ministry and the connection with MOPS in that country. Vera started attending MOPS, and she came to Christ. Vera said, "MOPS was the bridge between God and me. MOPS made me realize that I am a beloved child of God, that I am not alone, but He is always there for me."

A few months later, Valmira and Vera started MOPS for Moms of Children with Special Needs. For many women who have been shunned in the past, this group has become a place of belonging where they and their kids are celebrated. It is one of the fastest-growing groups.

### Developments and goals

That has been the story of MOPS Albania—one life touching another, one woman's story touching another, and the Gospel going forth. MOPS came to Albania in 2013. The groups branched into other towns. Today, hundreds of women are involved. This year, we started in two new towns.

One of our 2024 goals is for each leader to have a coleader. The solo leaders, especially outside the capital city, are like church planters, working among unchurched women, planning activities, making connections, and with great courage, enabling the light of Christ to shine in dark places.

As I think about women like Vera, Valmira, and so many others, I long for them to increasingly walk in the truth that sets us free and to believe what God says is true about each of us: you are seen; you are known; you are loved (Luke 12:6–7, Isaiah 40:26–29). ■



From top (L–R): Most of the women in this group, in a community outside Tirana, have been widowed due to blood feuds; Books and materials greet women at a welcome table; Stela, the MOPS leader in Korçë, shown here with her husband and son, has a good relationship with the mayor and arranged a MOPS meeting in a municipal building; Many unbelievers attend the event Stela organized; MOPS Albania leaders participate in a training event in 2022.



Bona and Josh Miekley are commended from Northern Hills Bible Chapel in Cincinnati, Ohio.

<sup>1</sup>"About Us," *MOPS International*, [MOPS.org/about-us/](http://MOPS.org/about-us/). <sup>2</sup> Nancy Leigh DeMoss, *Lies Women Believe and the Truth That Sets Them Free* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2001), 68.



# Captured by the Vision

## Supporting Church-Planting Efforts in Burundi

BY DANIEL JOHNSON

In 2015, the Emmanuel Churches—the name for the assemblies in Burundi—experienced a revival and renewal of vision. They set a goal to plant 80 new churches in five years. Their strategy was simple but profound: each of the 123 assemblies in the country would work and pray to replicate themselves in five years. They hoped that at least 80 of the local churches would succeed. Looking back, the Emmanuel Churches didn't reach that goal, but amazingly, the Lord blessed this vision and step of faith with more than 50 new assemblies planted in Burundi over the last nine years!

This vision of church planting was one of the things that inspired my family—me, my wife, Anne, and our three children—to move to eastern Burundi. We realized that if the Lord was leading the Emmanuel Churches in this direction, then we needed to see where we as missionaries could come alongside and serve—where we could be most useful to the national churches in accomplishing this vision.

After thinking and praying, we saw that the assemblies on the eastern side of the country were the youngest and poorest. In light of this, we felt led to move there and partner with the existing nine assemblies in church planting. Since moving to Gisuru, a town in eastern Burundi, in January 2016, we have been involved, to various degrees, in helping plant 13 churches.

### The vision

As a missionary working with the Emmanuel Churches, I was impressed but also a bit skeptical when I first heard the national believers' vision: *How could we hope to plant 80 churches in five years? Where would the leaders for these new churches come from?* But, as time went on, I realized the wisdom in their vision casting.

My Burundian brothers in Christ thought about leadership multiplication differently than I did. I had thought a church

should not consider planting another church until it had done the necessary work to prepare new, mature leaders. In other words, we must work on discipleship and maturity *before* we can even think about planting churches. However, the approach I came to learn and understand from serving alongside these Burundian believers was that leaders are best prepared when a church-planting vision is already in place. Potential leaders are most easily motivated to step up to the plate and serve when they can see the need for their leadership. When forward motion and a vision of expansion and multiplication are lacking, potential leaders are more reluctant to develop their skills and step into leadership roles.

I have witnessed this approach succeed here. And I recently experienced a vivid example of this success when we hosted a two-and-a-half-day conference for elders' wives. As we counted up all the women we needed to invite, we were joyfully surprised to find 94 elders' wives from 22 assemblies in eastern Burundi. When we moved to Gisuru in 2016, there were around 30 elders from nine assemblies. What a wonderful difference!



This realization was particularly encouraging to me because one of the theme verses of our work in Gisuru is Luke 10:2: "Then He said to them, 'The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore, pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.'" We are thankful that God is raising up laborers for His ripe harvest field in Burundi.



## Our role

Over the years, as this church-planting vision has developed and we have prayed about how we can help, the Lord has led us to several supportive roles. We thank Him that we can be involved in this effort and contribute to the national church's health in the following ways:

### Coordinating seminars

Since the beginning of our work here, we have coordinated seminars and conferences to build up and teach leaders and various groups in local churches. But, last year, we started to be more intentional in this aspect. At the beginning of 2023, we met with a group of 12 gifted, respected Bible teachers in our area and planned 22 weekend trips for the year. We wanted to visit every Emmanuel Church in our area to provide biblical teaching on topics the local churches felt they needed clarity on and help with.

We are thankful that most of the 22 trips in 2023 went well, and we learned a lot from the few trips that didn't go as well. At the end of the year, our seminar team met again to talk through what we did well and what we could do differently and then plan more trips for 2024. We expanded this year's schedule to 33 weekend trips and included some visits to other assemblies a bit farther away.



Every year, we also try to hold a two- or three-day retreat for elders and deacons. This event is a great way to encourage each other, get to know one another better, and spend time together

while being fed from the Word. We also coordinate other annual seminars, such as Sunday school teacher training and women's conferences.

### Organizing and supporting evangelistic endeavors

We accomplish evangelism efforts through two teams. We have one team of about 30 people who are interested in and gifted at personal evangelism. This year, we have six weeklong trips planned for this personal evangelism team.

We also have a film evangelism team of five men who travel with the seminar team to show evangelistic films during the evenings of the weekend seminar trips. Usually, a crowd of several hundred come to watch the films. This year, the team will show films during each of the 33 weekend seminar trips, Lord willing.

### Helping equip leaders

Timothy Bible School in the capital city, Bujumbura, offers Bible training to elders serving in their local churches. Since 2015, 275 elders have attended the school. The program involves 40 courses taught in eight monthlong sessions over two years (for a total of 960 lecture hours).

Year to year, Timothy Bible School has about 12 teachers—more than half of whom are Burundian believers. CMML missionaries Jesse Johnson and Jeremy Bassett (both *Missionary Prayer Handbook* Day 1) teach many of the courses at the school. I currently teach three courses. Another key part of my involvement is showing leaders in our area the importance of receiving good Bible-based training and encouraging them to study at Timothy Bible School.

Another way we help leaders get training is through the Emmaus correspondence course ministry. We promote the work and coordinate the operation of a branch office located

in eastern Burundi. Believers can sign up to receive the courses, and after they complete a course and return it to us, our office grades it, provides feedback, and answers questions.

### Casting vision

We encourage good vision in church leaders by starting key conversations with them regarding the multiplication of leaders. We also ignite conversations about how and where they should consider planting new churches.

### Purchasing and registering property

In Burundi, the government requires each church to own a registered property. We help purchase property for newly planted churches and then help register the properties with the government. At the beginning of 2023, we enlisted a gifted Burundian believer to assist us with the legwork needed to register the church properties correctly. We praise the Lord for him!

### Constructing buildings

Government regulations here also require each local church to own a building. Much of our energy and time goes into helping erect buildings for church plants. We praise the Lord for the skilled construction crew we partner with.

## Biblical conflict resolution

All is not easy and fun in church planting. Growth involves growing pains. We spend a lot of time listening, trying to help counsel and resolve problems. We are thankful that, generally, the churches follow healthy principles regarding problems within the body:

1. Solve it among yourselves on the local church level. If you can't, . . .
2. Call on leaders from nearby assemblies to help advise—especially those from the planting church if the assembly with problems is a recent plant. If necessary, . . .
3. Ask respected, older believers from the region to come and help give counsel.

Praise the Lord with us that, at this time, the fields truly are ripe for harvest in Burundi and that He is raising up laborers for His harvest. Pray that more laborers will answer the Lord of the Harvest's call while the harvest lasts! ■



*Daniel and Anne Johnson are commended from Oak Lawn Bible Chapel in Oak Lawn, Illinois.*



**Pages 6–7 (top, L–R):** The Johnsons help local churches acquire land, register it, and erect buildings; In eastern Burundi, the elders' wives receive new Bibles at a women's conference; Men take notes at an elders and deacons' conference; The evangelism and seminar teams gather for their year-end meeting; In a country with a median age of 16, children truly are the church of tomorrow.

**Page 6 (bottom):** Anne (right) visits and encourages elders' wives. **Page 7 (bottom):** The Johnsons' Land Cruiser transports team members on evangelism and seminar trips.

**This page (from top):** Participants of the annual elders and deacons' conference enjoy good fellowship and sound Bible teaching; Daniel (front left) and the construction crew head home after finishing a building project; This believer carries bricks to help construct her local church building; Daniel meets with church leaders; The assembly near the Johnsons' home recently appointed five more elders, bringing the total to 11.



# PREPARING BELIEVERS TO SERVE

## Online and Residential Learning in Italy

BY DANNY PASQUALE

I grew up in Rome as a missionary kid of veteran missionaries Dan and Paola Pasquale (*Missionary Prayer Handbook* Day 11). As part of our yearly family and church routine, we would participate in the graduation ceremony at the local Bible school, Istituto Biblico Evangelico Italiano (IBEI), or Italian Evangelical Bible Institute. I also attended a kids' camp there when I was eight years old and youth events when I was a teenager. Little did I know that, one day, I would serve full time there!



In 2007, Littleton Bible Chapel, in Colorado, commended me to serve at IBEI as a teacher, and in 2011, the school's leadership appointed me academic dean. In 2012, I married Marti, an American missionary who served with

Cru for many years, and she joined me in the work. Today, I serve as the school's principal and as a teacher, while Marti serves as coordinator of the kitchen and the campus upkeep. But IBEI has a rich history and ministry that began long before 2007.

### From La Spezia to the world

In 1959, missionaries with Greater Europe Mission founded Istituto Biblico Evangelico (IBE), as IBEI was then called, near the port city of La Spezia. The founders desired to offer Italian evangelical churches a tool that would help prepare believers to serve in the churches and reach out with the Gospel.

In 1961, IBE relocated to a villa of Montesacro (a neighborhood in Rome), and in February 1981, the school purchased and renovated an old country house. Located on the outskirts of Rome, near the neighborhood of Borgata Finocchio, it became the institute's new home—as well as a home to residential students. Today, the students enjoy the calm Roman countryside yet remain connected to the city and its evangelical churches.

In 1983, the association Istituto Biblico Evangelico Italiano (IBEI) came to life in order to turn the leadership over to Italians. This association is constituted by believers who elect a council that appoints the executive committee, among other duties.

In the 1980s, IBEI expanded to include a correspondence school—a program that developed into today's online, part-time distance-learning program. In the same decade, IBEI's extension schools were born. The desire of many believers to study the Bible sparked the idea for this innovative educational program. IBEI thus launched a pilot program of weekend intensives in Sesto San Giovanni (a suburb of Milan), and in time, a series of extension schools began: in Turin, Naples, Palermo, Florence, and Rome, to name a few Italian cities. We have also seen some extension schools established abroad: Germany, Switzerland, and Albania.

In 1990, IBEI published the first issue of *Lux Biblica*, its journal. The goal is to make available to Italian believers the work of scholars and specialists in various areas of theology and church ministry. It thus provides accessible and relevant educational tools to believers engaged in Christian service—for their personal lives and ministerial needs. The journal also interacts with cultural issues relevant to the Gospel. I serve as editor, supported by a great team of colleagues.

In 2020, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic's first wave, we launched a new distance-learning program: through this full-time, online option, students can follow the residential school's lessons live from their homes and complete the Bachelor of Theology degree without having to move to Rome.

Our programs are accredited by a European evangelical accrediting agency recognized at a global level. This accreditation opens



From top: The IBEI campus is located in an old country house on the outskirts of Rome; Marti, Lylia, and Danny serve the Lord in Italy; These online students participate in an evening teaching session.



“Besides academic training in the physical or virtual classroom, our students are involved in ministry in local churches or Christian organizations.”

the door for IBEI alumni to continue their studies, should they choose to, in various institutes, such as Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Leuven (Belgium); Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (USA); London School of Theology (England); and Tilsley College (Scotland).

### Inside and outside the classroom

Besides academic training in the physical or virtual classroom, our students are involved in ministry in local churches or Christian organizations. Moreover, each year, our residential students go on a short-term mission trip. For example, in 2022, they went to

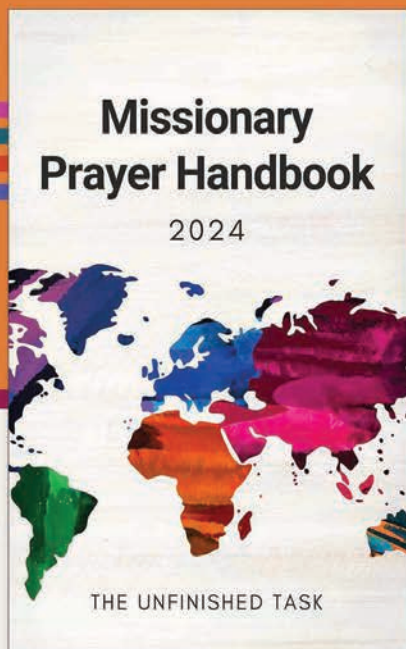


Romania to help a local missionary family reach out to Ukrainian refugees. It was amazing to see the Lord’s hand in this effort, and our students were grateful for the opportunity to serve. In April, we traveled to Athens to help Middle Eastern refugees.

Please pray for IBEI’s students, who desire to serve their Savior. Pray, too, that the Lord will continue to equip and encourage the faculty and staff and provide for the school’s needs, including the financial gap between the yearly tuition and the real cost per student. We ask Italian students—whether residential or distance learning—and their churches to cover the tuition. It is a significant effort for many of our students and their assemblies, even though tuition is less than the actual cost per student and we have a scholarship fund. IBEI continues to support the evangelical churches in preparing believers for service. And we praise the Lord for this opportunity. ■

*Danny and Marti Pasquale are commended from Littleton Bible Chapel in Littleton, Colorado.*

**Top (L–R):** Marti preps food for the students; Danny snaps a photo with IBEI’s 2023 graduating students. **Above left:** IBEI is preparing its 2024 residential students to serve their Savior.



## 2024 MISSIONARY PRAYER HANDBOOK

The 2024 *Missionary Prayer Handbook* features 35 new missionaries and one new country listing.

To facilitate prayer and communication, this vital tool lists more than 750 missionaries commended from assemblies in the US and Canada and includes a description of their ministries and contact information.

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# A Chain of BLESSINGS

Commending Assemblies' Visits to Missionaries Yield Benefits



BY SARAH DUNLAP, DALE HAMILTON, & CONNIE MARSHALL

In 1979, a Colorado businessman embarked on a journey that would take him and his wife to Senegal, Italy, Germany, and France. This itinerary might suggest vacation and leisure, but the man's goal was quite different: to visit missionaries and assemblies.

Four years prior, Lee Moe's assembly, Southside Bible Chapel, had commended Herma Bode (*Missionary Prayer Handbook* Day 2) and her husband, Gerhard (now home with the Lord), to the work in Senegal. He soon realized that missionaries' "letters, photos, and cassette tapes help to close the gap between us but these fall far short of actually being together with them." So he went to the field and, upon his return, concluded, "A furlough can be a time of rich blessing for all concerned and will provide firsthand insights into the missionaries' spiritual, personal, and financial needs. One picture may be worth a thousand words, but one visit will be worth a thousand pictures!"<sup>1</sup>

Maybe you've considered the idea of visiting your assembly's missionaries but questioned the value. Overseas trips are expensive, they present logistical challenges, and they may involve discomfort. But the blessings the visitor and the missionary receive are priceless. Let's explore these benefits—from both perspectives.

## Both sides of the equation

In 2023, Dale and Christine Hamilton (MPH Day 1), who presently serve in the DR Congo, received a visit from Larry and Connie Marshall of Dunning Park Bible Chapel in Redford, Michigan,

the Hamiltons' commending assembly. Below, the Hamiltons discuss their experience first; then, the Marshalls share theirs.

### The missionaries' perspective

A great joy of living overseas is meeting new people. As a pilot, I (Dale) considered a flight a failure if I couldn't arrange at least a dinner with my passengers, particularly when flying people out of the interior to the big city of Nairobi. I remember often telling my wife, Chris, who was flight following (watching the radar) on the other end, "I'm bringing company home" or "Get a babysitter. We're going out tonight!"

We have also enjoyed many visitors throughout our years in Africa. We hosted more than 120 visitors to the islands in Lake Victoria in one year alone! Among the visitors whom we remember most in the last 43 years are those who came from our home assembly. Within our first two years on the field, we received a visit from Jim and Phyllis Wallis—our elder who married us! I'll never forget Mr. Wallis's joy when he visited Nyankunde (a mission station) and met "Yosia Butso, a man I have heard of and prayed for for many years," as he said. Mr. Wallis would almost embarrass us on our subsequent furloughs when he would reminisce about his visit.

Now, 41 years later, we are blessed to have been visited by another elder and his wife, Larry and Connie Marshall. We have not only been friends since our youth, but Larry is now our "contact" elder who stays in close communication with us.

Returning from a short furlough, Chris and I traveled with the Marshalls from Detroit, Michigan, to Nairobi, Kenya. We had spoken of such a trip for years, but Larry always wanted a “project” to be part of. This time, a project was what he got! Larry is a retired fire inspector from Redford Township, Michigan, and the Director General of Fire and Rescue for Tanzania, a country between Kenya and the DR Congo, invited him to teach a course on fire investigation. Oh, how Larry worried, but the course turned out wonderfully! We enjoyed an amazing weeklong seminar with 76 Tanzanian



firefighters—two representatives from every region. Not only did Larry uniquely contribute, but he also experienced firsthand the challenges of cross-cultural engagement. Later, Larry taught a one-day seminar on fighting forest fires to an enthusiastic group of Kenyan rangers.

We spent the balance of the Marshalls’ six-week visit introducing them to many friends and places that they recalled hearing about. They experienced bad roads and border crossings while traveling with us by car, boat, and even floatplane. It was such a blessing to have hours of therapeutic conversations in the very situations we have talked about for decades with the very people that we have spent years of joys and sorrows with. Not all visitors can come for six weeks, but for us, this time was well worth the years we waited.



We missionaries have a unique relationship with our commending assemblies. They send us in obedience (theirs and ours) to the Great Commission of Matthew 28, and we represent them in places that many will not have the opportunity to visit. We then have the responsibility and privilege of reporting back to them about our activities, successes, and failures. The level of account-

ability often depends on the quality and quantity of that communication. Often, this communication can seem to be a one-way street, as the responsibility lies with the missionaries to keep their assemblies informed through newsletters and visits home. However, a visit from someone in our commending assembly, so they can see, hear, and taste what our lives and ministries are all about, benefits this relationship immensely. During such a quality visit, conversations give natural opportunities, if necessary, to express concerns we might have for each other or the assembly’s concerns for its commended missionaries.

We hear from others that Larry and Connie’s enthusiasm continues. We have enjoyed numerous follow-up WhatsApp calls about doctor visits, travel plans, and this or that person or family member—all with a deeper understanding and awareness of real-time life and ministry. Chris and I can’t say enough about the benefits and encouragement of such a visit!

### The commending assemblies’ perspective

For so many years, our dear friends Dale and Chris Hamilton had invited us to visit them in Africa. Dale and Chris and their four children (now grown) have been missionaries in Kenya, Tanzania, and the DR Congo for more than 43 years. This past fall, we made the trip of a lifetime.

Larry always told Dale that if we were to visit, he would want a project to do. Josh Hamilton, Dale and Chris’s son, is friends with the commander of the fire department in Mwanza, Tanzania. After learning that Larry was a retired fire inspector, the commander invited him to teach a six-day course on fire prevention and investigation. The experience was terrific, and the teaching well received and appreciated. Dale and Larry also shared that while the firefighters were in the business of saving lives, we were dedicated to helping Tanzanians know Christ.

The highlight of our time in Tanzania was seeing firsthand how the Lord has used the Hamiltons for His glory among Lake Victoria’s islands. I was awestruck to tears while flying (in a floatplane) over the islands. Josh, a pilot like his father, recounted stories while pointing out the medical clinics, pastors’ houses, churches,



**Left (from top):** Nairobi-bound, the Hamiltons (left) and Marshalls (right) prepare to leave Detroit; The group meets a Tanzanian firefighter; The Marshalls interact with the Hamiltons’ friends, some of whom they had heard about for years. **Right (from top):** Dale shows his friends what a floatplane ride is like; The group visits an island in Lake Victoria.

and a hospital built among the 14 islands in Lake Victoria over a 30-year ministry.

We also traveled to Kenya and took great pleasure in meeting Mike and Janet Adkins (MPH Day 1), whose ministry involves the Kijabe Forest Trust. Mike arranged for Larry to spend a day teaching the forest rangers techniques for fighting forest fires.



While engaging with their ministry, we learned that the Kijabe Forest Trust is committed to protecting and restoring the Kijabe Forest and providing employment all while sharing the Gospel.

The prayer letters and reports we received over the years never captured the extent of the Hamiltons' work, nor the depth of

their love for the people. Only by seeing and experiencing their ministry and love firsthand could we comprehend the scope and vastness of what they're involved in.

We only wish that we had visited 20 years ago.

## Visits accomplished, more needed

As the Hamiltons' and Marshalls' experiences prove, a visit from a missionary's commending assembly, when done in the Lord's will and with proper planning, can result in a chain of blessings—blessings exchanged by the missionary and the visiting believer and extended to the commending assembly. Every year, such visits happen. However, some missionaries have never received a visit from their commending assembly. Has your chapel visited its missionaries on the field? Perhaps the Lord will lead you to support them in this special way.

# Observations from the field

We asked our missionaries if they have ever received a visit from their commending assembly and, if so, to describe the benefits. Several shared the following stories and observations:

## Abigail Harrell—Thailand

A couple from our commending assembly were on a work trip to a bigger city in Thailand when they took a day out of their busy schedule to visit us. Not only were we refreshed and encouraged by their presence, but we were delighted to have extended time to hear, in person, about how the believers back home were doing.

## Angela Loudon—Colombia

Over the past 12 years, we have received three visits from people in our commending assembly. We shared our daily life, our ministry life, and interesting local spots with them. They got to know us and our ministry better—thus sharing their knowledge with others from the chapel, who could then pray with greater understanding. Our most recent visitors were the wife



and son of an elder in our assembly. It was such a good experience for them to see what life is like outside the US, and it was encouraging for our son, Cedric, because he could share his life with one of his American friends.

## Robert Watt—DR Congo, Refocused

We received several visits over the roughly 20 years we lived at Nyankunde in the DR Congo. The visit of Stan and David Madsen particularly stands out: In 1983, the two craftsmen from one of our supporting assemblies at the time, Malvern Bible Chapel (now our commending assembly), helped install an air-conditioning system, as well as some other new manufacturing equipment, in the Central Pharmacy at Nyankunde. They also installed the first pharmacy computer system for inventory control and accounting in that part of Africa. They trained me and the first national staff who ever touched a computer. This was cutting-edge technology for the time!

## Herma Bode—Senegal

One of the elders, Lee Moe, and his wife from our commending assembly visited more than 40 years ago. It was encouraging to have them with us. They could taste a bit of living in a foreign culture: the power cuts, crazy traffic, heat, interesting smells and insects, and constant flow of people coming in and out. ■

To discover tips for visiting missionaries, read the March 2020 *Missions* issue ([CMML.us/missions/archive](http://CMML.us/missions/archive)).



<sup>1</sup>"A Visit to the Bodes in Senegal—and Its Blessings!" *Missions*, February 1980, 3.

From top (L-R): Dale (center) introduces Larry (left) to Mike Adkins (right) and his ministry; The Loudons (right and second from left) enjoy a treat with their visitors.