

July 2015

Missions

THE ZABBALEEN OF CAIRO

The
Church
and the
Missionary

New Assembly
Work in
Ghana

50+ Years in
Peru



Thinking It Through

ALLAN WILKS

The Savior of the World

"They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.'" (John 4:42)

It is impossible to underestimate the profound effect that an encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ can have. The small Samaritan town of Sychar met Jesus after one of its residents encountered Him outside town at the well of Jacob. This woman initially had trouble understanding that Jesus spoke spiritually when He offered her eternally thirst-quenching water, but she had no difficulty in seeing that there was something very special about this stranger when He showed that He had detailed knowledge of her sad history, scattered as it was with broken relationships.

During their brief encounter Jesus told her that He was the long-awaited Messiah, so it was with a brimming hope that she went back and said to her fellow townsfolk, "Can this be?" But they wanted to evaluate His claim for themselves and so invited Him to rest a while in Sychar.

The result of Jesus's two-day stay in that little village, John tells us, was that "many believed." And what did they believe? That "this is indeed the Savior of the world." This is an astonishing conclusion. Whatever Jesus did and said during that brief visit convinced many of them that His claim to be the Messiah was true.

They already knew that the Messiah would bring salvation; indeed, years earlier, Simeon had said "for my eyes have seen your salvation." (Luke 2:30) But the common prophetic expectation was that the Messiah was to be a king, a restorer, a savior for His people, God's people, the Jews. The believers in Sychar went far beyond this in their proclamation; this visitor to their little village was to be the Savior of the entire world!

The phrase "Savior of the world" is only used twice in the New Testament. The other time is in John's first epistle: "And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world." (1 John 4:14) By the time he wrote this, decades after Jesus's Sychar visit, it was natural for an eyewitness like John to use a phrase like "Savior of the world," in light of the full story of Jesus's life.

But the men and women of Sychar didn't have John's later perspective. They drew their conclusion from spending just two days with this man. What an incredible two days it must have been! Just to be in His presence, to experience His love and grace and wisdom toward them, outcasts from Jewish society, was enough for them to see that if anyone was to deal with the desperate condition of mankind, it could only be Him.

They weren't thinking in terms of the law's satisfied demand or the atonement of the cross or the power of the resurrection. They, and especially the woman, knew through their interactions with Him that He was what they needed, the One they had searched for all their lives, perhaps without even knowing it. And they understood implicitly that if He was their hope, then He was everyone's hope.

How often we reduce the Gospel to a sequence of theological propositions, forgetting that it is about knowing a Person. It is not primarily our theology, but the presence of the loving, forgiving Lord Jesus Christ Himself in our lives that saves us as the Sycharians so easily understood after being in His presence for just a short while.

The woman at the well came back into town with a thrilling testimony, but it wasn't until her fellow townsfolk met Jesus Himself that they believed. I can tell you that He is *my* Savior, but no amount of debate will convince you that He is *your* Savior until you actually come and meet Him. You say "Can this be?" and I say, with Philip, "Come and see." (John 1:46)

Some words from a well-known hymn:

*I cannot tell why He Whom angels worship,
Should set His love upon the sons of men,
But this I know, that He was born of Mary
And so the Savior, Savior of the world is come.¹*

Lord, make me more than just a courtroom witness. May my life so reflect your Son's that those who know me see a shadow, however faint, of Him and so are drawn irresistibly to come and see for themselves that He can be their Savior too. ■

¹ Fullerton, William Young "I Cannot Tell" 1929

Vol. 44, No. 7. Christian Missions in Many Lands (ISSN 0744-4052) is published eleven times a year by Christian Missions in Many Lands, Inc., Belmar, New Jersey. Periodical postage paid at Belmar, New Jersey, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send United States address changes to Christian Missions in Many Lands, Inc., PO Box 13, Spring Lake, NJ 07762. Send Canadian address changes to MSC Canada, 101 Amber Street, Suite 16, Markham, Ontario L3R 3B2. MSC Canada publication agreement Number 40026478. All correspondence, including address changes, gifts for missionary work, and for expenses should be sent by Canadian readers to MSC Canada, 101 Amber Street, Suite 16, Markham, Ontario L3R 3B2 and by United States readers to Christian Missions in Many Lands, Inc., PO Box 13, Spring Lake, NJ 07762. Copyright ' CMML. All rights reserved.

FRONT COVER: Rebecca Atallah—Cave Cathedral entrance, Egypt BACK COVER: Benny Samuel Photography

The Church and the Missionary:

Responsibility and Accountability

BY THOMAS J. SCHELICH

There is no ministry more central to the purpose of the Church than evangelism. Not every Christian is an evangelist (Ephesians 4:11), but every Church should be evangelistic—from whom the Gospel of Jesus Christ should “sound forth” and “go out.” (1 Thessalonians 1:8)

The charge to present the Gospel is from the Lord Himself. The scope and breadth of the opportunity is remarkable—described by Jesus in words like “all the nations,” “all the world,” and “to the end of the earth.” (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8) Paul made it his goal to preach the Gospel where it had never been heard before (Romans 15:20–21).

This is not a responsibility entrusted to a few chosen Christians with a heart for evangelism and a burden for the lost. This is the responsibility of the Church.

There are different ways for a local church to participate under this commission to bring the Gospel to “all the world.” Short-term ministry teams can be sent; money can be raised to fund relief efforts; and support can be provided to home workers. All of these are good and right. But a primary means by which a local church can bring the Gospel to “all the world” is to send missionaries—to take new ground for the Gospel and help build up local churches to hold it.

The biblical model by which missionaries are sent is commonly called commendation by the local church, introduced in Acts 13:1–3. We learn that in Antioch, the Holy Spirit called Barnabas and Saul to missions work, and they were sent out. What is very striking in these verses (but often overlooked) is the role of the church and its leadership—not only in the commendation of Barnabas and Saul, but in their ongoing involvement in that work.

Acts 13 records that the leadership in the Church at Antioch was actively ministering and fasting before the Lord when the word of the Holy Spirit came to them. This calling by God was of Barnabas and Saul, but it was given to the church. The leadership of the church fasted, prayed and laid hands on Barnabas and Saul—a physical and public demonstration that they were going out as an extension of this church body.



to the mission field. It should be public, memorable, and involving the whole church. It is the start of a time of service—but it is just the start. As a marriage is more than the wedding, so the sending of a missionary is more than the commendation.

Commendation is a statement by a local church that this person is being sent out as an extension of us and our ministry. The

The Church at Antioch stayed involved in the ministry. Acts 14: 26–28 reports that at the conclusion of Paul’s first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch, from “where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work.” They “gathered the church together” and “reported all that God had done” and how the doors of faith had been opened. Paul and Barnabas then stayed with the church a long time. Shortly thereafter, when Paul wrote his letter to the

Galatians (likely from Antioch) he styled it as from “all the brethren who are with me.”

In Acts 15:40 the pattern repeats as the Church at Antioch commends Paul and Silas. Paul again returned to Antioch at the end of the second missionary journey and spent considerable time there (Acts 18:22–23).

All of this is indicative of an *ongoing working relationship* between the sending church and those who have been sent: a relationship of responsibility of the church to the missionary and accountability of the missionary to the church.

In Brethren assemblies we often (and rightly) emphasize the process of commendation. We strongly affirm the autonomy of the local church and that the missionary is going out in faith with his or her reliance only upon the Lord. But commendation is an event—a milestone in the life of the person going

the church is giving of itself, not just giving its money to good causes around the world, but literally giving of its own body, its own flesh and blood, to preach the Gospel to all nations. The missionary may be many miles away and in a culture far different than we know, but he or she is still part of our local fellowship and still part of our body of believers.

For a church to commend a missionary “to the grace of God” and send him or her out “in faith” is not a license to forget them or fail to support them. Indeed, James reproves those who to their neighbors would say “depart in peace be warmed and filled” but without giving them the things that are needed for the body. If we should not do so to those around us, how much greater is our wrong to say “depart in peace” to those we have commended, if we do not “give them the things which are needed”? (James 2:16)

Just as the New Testament model requires responsibility of the church, it requires accountability by the missionary. If the missionary is still part of the local fellowship of Christians who commended him or her, they must not think themselves autonomous, independent in their ministry, and beyond the oversight of a team of elders.

Paul made it his practice to report to the Church at Antioch at the end of each completed mission. He returned to the church and “stayed a long time” with them (Acts 14: 28). This was more than a brief return to make reports and raise awareness. Rather, he remained and ministered as part of the church body.

Today, technology advances have greatly shrunk the globe. We are better equipped than ever for the church and missionary to remain in close and ongoing communication—for the church to be a part of the mission and for the missionary to be a part of the church.

Perhaps it is time for the elders at the local church to rethink and renew their commitment to those that are now on the field: to be in closer communication, to be more con-

This is not a responsibility entrusted to a few chosen Christians with a heart for evangelism and a burden for the lost. This is the responsibility of the Church.

scious of needs, to be more diligent in prayer (as was the Church at Antioch), to be more responsive to reports from the field, to make the church more aware of the ongoing work, and to engender in the local believers the care and affection for those on the field that is natural to the heart of a Christian.

And perhaps it is time for some now on the field to be closer to their commending church: to seek guidance and direction, to be genuinely accountable to its elders, to have communication that goes deeper than the monthly newsletter but includes personal contact with that body

of Christians who have commended you, and of which you are still a part.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians that his ministry does not need a letter of commendation but that the work itself, and the fruits of that work, are the “epistle written in our hearts... written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.” (2 Corinthians 3:3) May it be so for each missionary who goes out and may it be so for each church that sends. ■

Thomas Schetelich is a CMML director.

May We Introduce

Laura Messerly
Missionary to Peru

Sitting in my high school Spanish classroom, I stared at a curling yellowed poster of Peru and thought, I want to go there someday. I’m always amazed at how the Lord uses things in life to guide and direct us in His intended path—often without us realizing it.

By God’s grace, I was born to believing parents who shared the Gospel with me. As a young child I realized that because I was a sinner, I needed salvation or I would suffer the punishment. I trusted Jesus to save me. As I grew older I only took what my parents fed me from the Word; I didn’t take the spoon and feed myself. Because of this, I doubted my salvation as an adolescent. I didn’t feel saved. After much anguish of soul I realized that faith is not based on feelings but on facts. Romans 8:34 had the facts in a nutshell; my part was simply to believe that the Lord Jesus had done it all—that He paid for my sins.

After that realization, I started to grow in the Lord, studying His Word and seeking to serve. During high school, the Lord greatly used Storybook Lodge Christian Camp in developing me to serve and share God’s Word. The Lord put His desire for the nations into my heart during my time at the University of Northern Iowa, where I studied Spanish, TESOL and English.

In 2009 I sought to go on a short-term missions trip. As I

read Tom and Carol Clark’s CMML report about a children’s home and school in Peru, my mind went

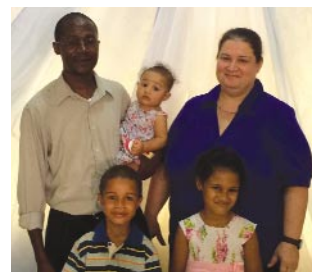
back to my high school Spanish classroom and my Peruvian teacher with her outdated posters. I spent my summer there with two friends, Hannah Gebers and Kristina Howell. I didn’t want to leave but realized I needed to finish my studies. I returned the next two summers. I wanted to go after graduation, but my parents and elders counseled me to teach in Iowa for two years. The Lord taught me so much in those years, both professionally and spiritually, and now I see the wisdom in that decision and am glad I submitted to it. In 2013 the Lord guided my heart and opened doors to return to Peru to teach at Strong Tower Christian School.

I am blessed to not only teach at the school but to disciple young women, work with the youth group and share God’s Word with our neighbors at a kids’ club in the home I rent with Kristina Howell and Crystal Rudy. The Lord has been good and I’m excited to see how He continues to work in my life and others’ lives. ■





A New Assembly in Ghana



BY WILLIAM YUILLE

Assembly work in Ghana has been described by Daniel Webster (*Missionary Prayer Handbook* Day 2) in previous issues of this magazine: “Bringing the Gospel to Ghana” (March 2010) and “Ghana is Wide Open to the Gospel” (June 2012).

The first assembly was Believers’ Bible Assembly (www.BibleAssemblyChurch.com) in Buokrom where Joseph and Heather Frimpong (MPH Day 2) and Daniel Webster have been serving. In 2005 Joseph commenced a kids’ club and Bible studies in Adumasa, another part of Kumasi. The next year the Frimpongs built and moved into a house in that area, while continuing to attend the Buokrom assembly. Then, in January 2014 they started to meet full-time at Adumasa on Sunday mornings.

Since the start of the work in Adumasa, finding a suitable place for meetings has been a challenge, and the believers

concluded that it would be better for them to have their own building. The Lord provided the funds so that they were able to purchase land and build a meeting place. It isn’t quite finished, but they have begun to use this new facility and on April 4, 2015, they convened an opening ceremony. About 500 people were in attendance, mostly children. (According to some reports, half the population of Ghana is under 25!) The meeting was held under tents which, together with chairs and sound equipment, were rented for the occasion. The program consisted of singing English hymns, a review of the history of the work, a message from the Scriptures given in English and translated into Twi, a ribbon-cutting ceremony, and food—Heather and some friends had prepared more than 500 meat pies and some cakes. It was a joyous occasion and a real encouragement for the believers.

May We Introduce

Charlotte Royal *Missionary to Japan*

Charlotte Royal is an English teacher and a freelance artist. She grew up in a Christian home and came to know the Lord at an early age but as a child often struggled with understanding what her purpose in society was. Since Jesus Christ's work had paid for her sin and she would end up in heaven someday anyway, she reasoned, why was she still on Earth at all? Why didn't God just take saved people to heaven right away, where they would be happier and could glorify Him better? In college, while reading John 17, she realized that the one thing a Christian can't do in heaven is share the Gospel and that Christ has His people in the world for a reason! In her own hometown in Georgia, accordingly, she utilized many forms of art and English as an outreach tool to the local community. Through face-painting at clowning events and through teaching, she made connections and offered the Good News of Christ's love beyond her own neighbors and family. A combination of a love of people, an enjoyment of art, and the idea that most people learn better if they have a picture or a parable to remember encouraged Charlotte to employ painting and writing as communication tools rather than as mere entertainment. It seems God will often use an individual's aptitudes and skill sets to further the spread of the Gospel.



During the summer of 2012, Charlotte traveled to Japan with a group of students and faculty from Bob Jones University for six weeks, with the purpose of encouraging missionaries and national believers and creating an extra opportunity for their community outreach. While preparing to go there, Charlotte recognized her increasing desire to help missionaries in their fulfillment of the Great Commission. Before, during, and since that trip, she worked at summer camps and vacation Bible schools, helped with cleaning and construction, presented evangelistic skits in schools and churches, performed songs and "chalk talks," and generally lent a helping hand to the efforts of missionaries and local workers wherever possible.

In March 2015 Charlotte returned to Moroyama, Japan, for an expected 15 months to be a house sitter and a substitute ESL teacher for missionary friends who are on furlough. As she teaches, Charlotte plans to use art as well as education to reach local children and adults for Christ and to encourage the local believers. ■

Pray for the ministry

Please pray that the Lord will be pleased to use this young assembly for His glory, keeping the following in mind:

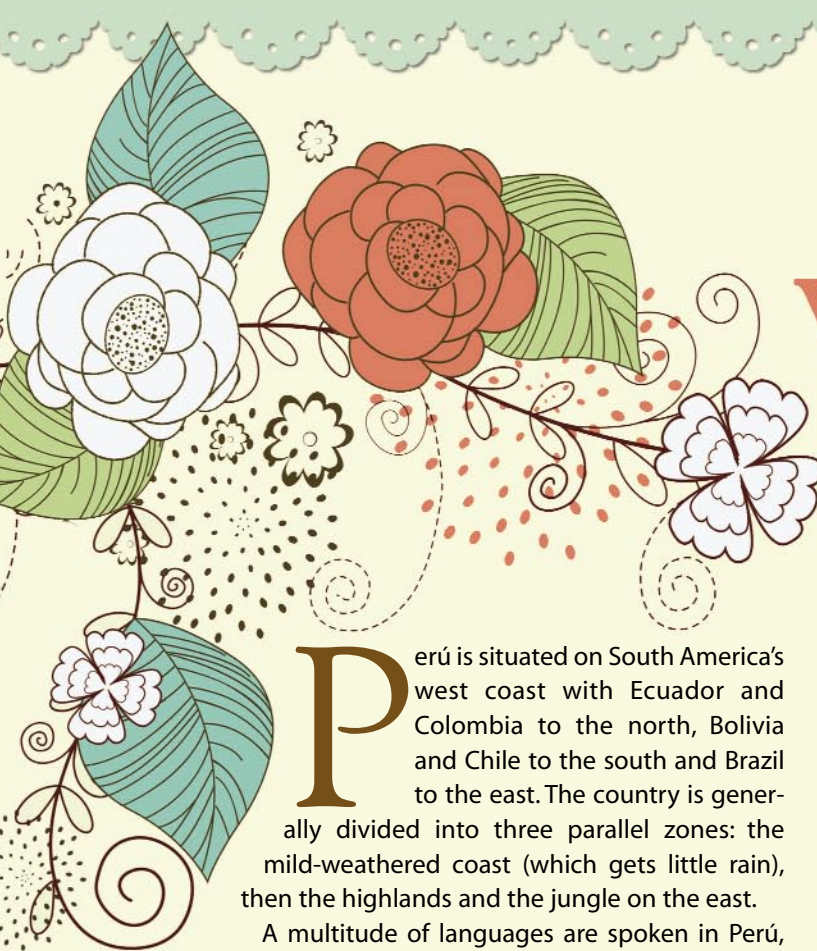
- * Some work is still required on the building, e.g. in the kitchen and washrooms.
- * A large number of children attend regularly. Joseph has the ability to interact well with them, easily switching back and forth between English and Twi and getting a response from the young people.
- * There are a number of women in the group, and last month another 11 were baptized, but there are only a few men. This is a challenge when it comes to the development of leadership and the recognition of elders.

* Poverty is endemic and is aggravated by the absence of fathers in many families, leaving women to try to provide for their children. The Frimpongs seek to help as they are able and would like to do this in a sustainable way such that families are enabled to make a living for themselves.

* Joseph would like to see a radio program in Twi and anticipates that one of the young men at Adumasa would be able to help with that. ■

William Yuille is MSC Canada's vice president.

Opposite Page: (top) New assembly facility; **(bottom left three)** Adumasa opening ceremony festivities; **(bottom right)** Frimpongs.



A Journey with the WAKEFIELDS

Serving 50+ Years in Peru

BY GORDON & FLORENCE WAKEFIELD

Perú is situated on South America's west coast with Ecuador and Colombia to the north, Bolivia and Chile to the south and Brazil to the east. The country is generally divided into three parallel zones: the mild-weathered coast (which gets little rain), then the highlands and the jungle on the east.

A multitude of languages are spoken in Perú, predominately Spanish. Up to 21 dialects of Quechua are also spoken along with many other tribal languages.

Historical references often mention the "Inca Empire," which refers to the time before the arrival of the Spaniards in the 1500s. In 1821 Perú became an independent republic, separating itself from Spain.

The influence of the Gospel from pre-independence days was brought to Perú mainly by British and Argentinian Christians. The first assembly, as far as is known, was established in the heart of Lima and to this day remains as a Christian bookstore in testimony, though not a meeting place.

Our arrival

One of the important events during our 61 years of marriage took place on November 10, 1964. That outstanding day

in our very full and rewarding life was when we, with our three children (Tom 10, Paul 8, and Elizabeth 7), disembarked in Perú from a Chilean freighter that had left New Orleans 10 days prior. The journey was enjoyable and educational as we passed through the Panama Canal. On the 20th of December, 40 days later, we moved into the house God was having built for us (without the owners knowing it!) and in which we live at the writing of these lines.

Then and now

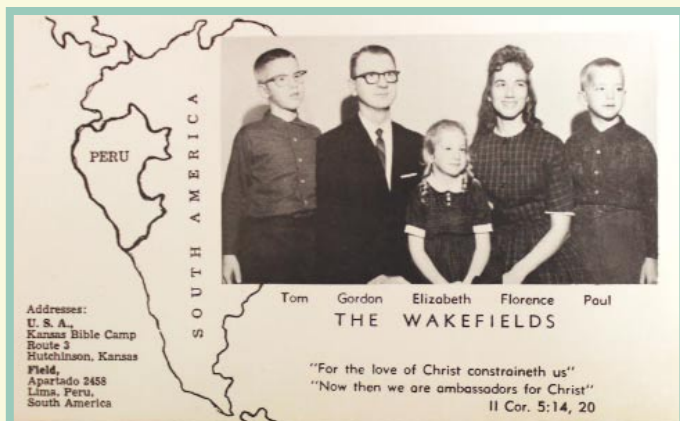
When we arrived in Perú in 1964 there were 27 adult assembly-connected missionaries serving in the country. They were from the U.S., Great Britain and China. During our 50-plus years serving in Perú, 69 other missionaries have come and most have gone (for a variety of reasons). CMMML's 2015 *Missionary Prayer Handbook* currently includes 25 assembly-commended workers serving in Peru at this time.

In 1964 Lima teemed with approximately 1,750,000 souls, the great majority needing to know the true Gospel and the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Today, Lima's population is about 10 million! And, though the best calculations say that the evangelical population of Perú is 10 to 12 percent, this is still a needy country.

Ministries

In a world of specialization, for which we can all be thankful, we personally have had a thoroughly mixed ministry. Gospel teaching, church function, and "go ye" have formed the base of our ministries. Those, along with what all of you do, such as camps, retreats, conferences, gospel campaigns, social aid, assisting national missionaries, and so on have more than filled our time and gifts—and often put demands on areas that are not "our gifts."

Music: Florence has always used her musical ability to the fullest extent in the nine assemblies we have served over the years in and around Lima. A gift of a "military campaign" pump



The Wakefield's prayer card from 1964

organ from a couple in Oklahoma accompanied us to Perú and was worn out from use before the electronic keyboards came along. In the assembly where we presently serve, we have taught the congregation more than 200 hymns.



The historic custom in the U.S. of having at least one child study piano has never been the custom in Perú. We believe this is largely because Perú has never been a country of Christian congregations singing hymns. We currently sponsor piano lessons for a girl who has shown she has musical abilities, but it takes years to work up to being a pianist to help a hymn-singing congregation. Pray for her.

Education: Between the two of us, we have three university degrees in education, and the field of education has filled many hours of our time. We began with the need for an educational system adequate for our own children and soon were led to six other missionary families who had the same need. The result was the formation of a school, first through ninth grade, in which we lent administrative and financial help as well as part-time teaching for several years. Still in the field of education, we have been among the founders and teachers/administrators of a two-hour, nightly class held for two or three-month cycles.



In its 38 years of existence, this nightly Bible school has seen several thousand students, not all from our assemblies, study the Word of God with a variety of missionary and non-missionary teachers. We also taught and had administrative responsibility for a month-long, in-house, seminary held once a year for nine years.

Emmaus: We had the privilege of being the first and only distributors of Emmaus correspondence courses from 1965 to 1989. It was suggested to us by Bill MacDonald as a follow-up after teams of youth blitzed Lima with the Gospel in the summer of 1965. We continued in this ministry till it was passed on to other foreign missionaries and nationals.

Hospitality: To live in a capital city reveals what the word "hospitality" means. Two guest books help us with our reminiscences of new missionaries, short-termers, friends and families of missionaries coming and going, Emmaus summer teams and invited speakers for conferences and retreats for our missionary colleagues. ■

Gordon and Florence Wakefield were commended in 1964 and 1975 by the assemblies in Hutchinson and Lawrence, Kansas.

Meet the Wakefields

The friendship that brought Gordon and Florence together was based on their mutual desire to be missionaries.



Florence Anne Thomas is the second daughter born to Will Thomas and Margaret Bradford Thomas. A Welshman and full-time worker, Will arrived in the U.S. after serving with the Pilgrim Preachers from Land's End in England to John O' Groat in Scotland. Will went to be with the Lord when Florence was a year old. Florence was reared by her widowed mother (a primary school teacher) and sister Charlotte in the farm home of her maternal grandparents in Perry, Kansas, population 300, where there was a tiny assembly visited by many preachers in the 1930s and '40s. She earned her degree in education at Kansas University, interspersed with two years at Emmaus in Chicago. The life and poetry of Amy Charmichael had a great influence in her desire to be a missionary.

Gordon Lee Wakefield is the only son of his mother who died when he was seven months old. Reared till age four by his paternal grandparents and several aunts and uncles, he was the oldest of five children, four of which his father had with his second wife. Considered a "Christian," Gordon was raised in one of the historical and large Protestant denominations. But at age 19 at the University of Kansas, he was led to the Lord by a dedicated graduate student who faithfully "followed him up." In the Christian group on campus there were two events that gave him his interest in missions: visits from missionaries at the campus and the introduction to the small assembly in Lawrence, Kansas.

Left (from top): Florence playing the keyboard for the assembly; Sunday morning preaching at the assembly.

Home with the Lord

Hilda Wielenga

Missionary to Japan • March 23, 1922—November 26, 2014

Hilda was born at home in Zeeland, Michigan, in 1922. She received assurance of salvation when she was 10 years old. The undenominational Bible church that we attended offered a leather-bound Scofield Reference Bible to anyone who memorized 500 Scripture verses. Hilda memorized the 500 verses and received her Bible. When she was 14 she requested baptism and when she was 15 she distributed tracts to customers at the gas station across the street.

When Hilda was 16, our family was introduced to assembly principles and the breaking of bread on the first day of the week. When she was about 17 she read the amazing story of how George Muller obtained funds to house and feed 2,000 orphans on a daily basis, making his needs known only to the Lord. At 20 years of age she worked as a salesperson at De Prees department store. During that time she was impressed with the fact that Hudson Taylor, having a burden for missionary work in China, decided not to appeal for any support but only make his needs known to the Lord, and he found the Lord faithful before he ever left for China. This kind of conviction resonated with Hilda. When she started working as a night nurse at Rest Haven Homes, she requested to not receive a salary. Proving the Lord through those 13 years of dependence on Him gave her confidence that she could trust the Lord to take care of her in Japan, which He certainly did.

The Lord used the West Michigan Missionary Study Class and Adrain Presson, a missionary to Japan, plus some inner promptings, to convince her that it was the Lord's will for her to go to Japan. She arrived there April 2, 1959. A young German worker, Elizabeth, helped her find an apartment, which she used as an open house to reach unsaved and teach and encourage young believers, all while improving her Japanese language skills. She lived very frugally but spent freely in the cause of the Gospel. Later, in Tsurumi, she paid for half the rent for a larger apartment for a Japanese couple so they could invite high school students and others to a Friday night meal and Bible study, which turned out to be a very fruitful endeavor.

There were a few believers in Tsurumi and Hilda sensed there was a need for them to have a place to meet. She asked a real estate agent to find her an apartment with a wooden floor, near the entrance of the building and close to the train station, for 13,000 yen. The real estate agent said "no way" but the Lord worked it out. For five years the assembly met in her rented rooms until they were able to build a building.

Hilda worked with the ladies in the Gospel, in Bible studies, hospitality, encouragement and prayer. If she saw an opportunity in the Gospel she did what she could to take advantage of it or encourage others to do so. There was a real need for someone to act as a "matchmaker" for Christian young people—you couldn't expect Buddhist parents to find suitable Christian mates for their children—so Hilda filled that role in many marriages.

Hilda returned to the States in 1999 and took up residence in a Rest Haven Homes apartment. She continued to try to do what she could, distributing books and literature.

Hilda came down with an illness called temporal arteritis. In her case it damaged blood flow to the optic nerve, leaving her practically blind. Hilda continued to live in her apartment but had to depend on her memory to survive. But even under those frustrating circumstances, folks continued to minister to her.

A thought occurred to me: maybe the Lord allowed Hilda to become blind to provide an opportunity for us to minister to Him. At the judgment seat of Christ, when we see all the "wood, hay and stubble" disposed of, we might feel discouraged, and then the Lord might say to us, "But when I was blind you ministered to Me. Remember Hilda at Rest Haven? Inasmuch as you have done it to the least of these, you have done it unto Me."



PIER WIELENGA, HILDA'S BROTHER

GOD *in the* Recycling Business

The Zabbaleen of Cairo

by Rebecca L. Atallah

The teenage boy standing at our door was so dirty I could hardly make out his features. He wore clothes I wouldn't have even used as rags! The large, decrepit-looking basket slung over his shoulder was almost full of garbage; its weight had already caused him to be stoop-shouldered.

It was the summer of 1980. My husband, Ramez, and I had just moved to Cairo from Montreal, Canada, with our two small children. When Ramez asked the young man what he wanted, he explained that he was our garbage boy and would be coming every day to collect our garbage—he wanted it! This was my introduction to the Zabbaleen, the “Garbage People” of Cairo. Through this boy I got to know a lot about them over the next two years. I came to realize that he belonged to one of the most despised classes in Cairene society, in spite of providing a great service to the city, which had no public garbage disposal at the time. At no cost to the government, and very little to individual citizens, the Garbage People of Cairo not only collected but also recycled most of the city's garbage.

Beginning ministry

In 1982, having finished my Arabic language study, I visited a “garbage village” in Cairo, hidden away in the Mokattam Hills. At the village church I met a Coptic Orthodox Christian named Abuna Samaan. Eight years before, he had befriended his garbage boy, led him to the Lord and finally gone to meet his family. There Abuna found a ghetto of about 17,000 people living in what could



Although they worked and lived with garbage, for the first time in their lives they realized they were not garbage!

Page 12: Children playing in garbage. **Left:** Villiage before 1980.

only be described as hell on earth. They were squatters on a barren piece of land occupied only by themselves, their animals and their garbage—all of these basically on top of each other. No services were provided for them and they had no electricity or running water, no schools, churches, mosques, medical care and so on. They believed they were of no value to either God or man, and, as a result, often resorted to wasting their meager earnings on drugs and alcohol, making little attempt to better their situations.

In spite of the terrible living conditions, Abuna Samaan found the Garbage People were very responsive to him and the Gospel message. His approach was simple: he started by ministering to their inner needs and tackling the root problem, which was their alienation from both God and society. He, in a sense, incarnated God’s love by identifying with the people as much as possible. He ate with them and listened to their cares. Then he brought his wife and young children to live with him in the village during the weekends and summer. By popular demand, and with the conviction that God was directing him, he gave up his job in the printing business to become the first village pastor.

In the next few years things changed rapidly as these people were filled with the love and power of God. They were now motivated to do something to help themselves and to better provide for their families. Instead of simply drinking away their earnings, they began saving their money to build small homes. Although they worked and lived with garbage, for the first time in their lives they realized they were not garbage! They were human beings, like everyone else, originally created in the image of God and able to be remade by Him, as they opened their hearts and allowed Him to work in their lives.

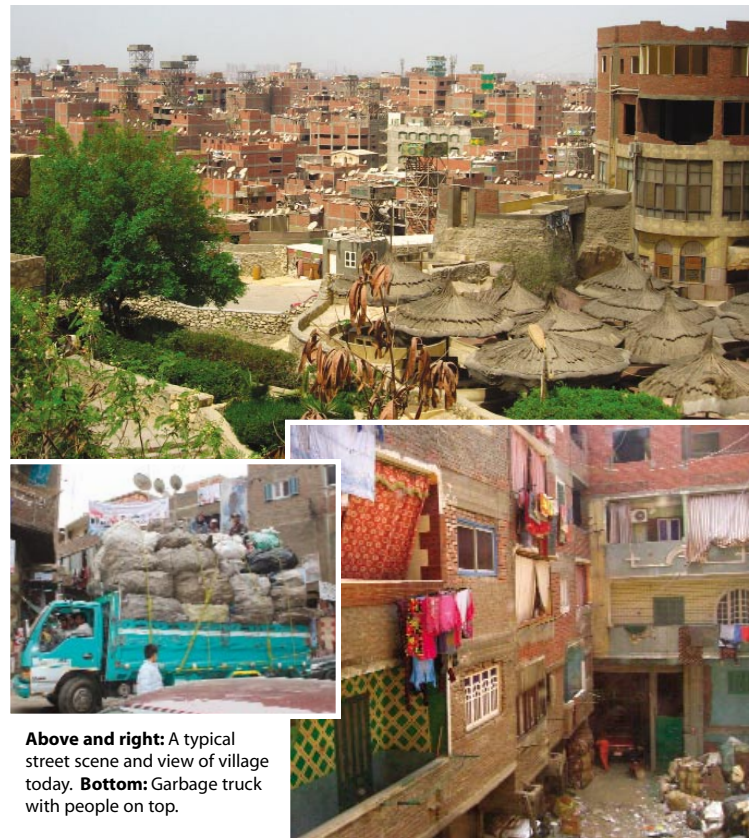
Remarkable change

As the Garbage People began to change from the inside, they realized they could have an effect on their surroundings and even their entire village. They responded eagerly to Abuna’s suggestion to build a church and then a school. In 1982, about eight years after Abuna’s first visit there, my friend Dr. Laila Iskandar (now Minister of State for Environment

Affairs in the current Egyptian government) and I arrived in the village. It was already radically changed; we could even see it in the better structure of people’s homes.

The first school classrooms were in the process of being built, and Laila and I quickly found a place to serve, by helping with the building and organization of that small school. We also helped to train its teachers, all of whom, to this day, come from the village itself.

If you visit the Mokattam Garbage Village (MGV) today, you will find it a large, bustling town of more than 60,000 people. They not only collect and store garbage but also do most of the recycling right there, in small factories and businesses, which provide the inhabitants with many related jobs.



Above and right: A typical street scene and view of village today. **Bottom:** Garbage truck with people on top.

Cave churches

When Abuna Samaan went to work in the MGV, he felt that God promised him that, one day, He would use the inhabitants of the MGV to bless all of Egypt. It



was only when Abuna and others discovered that the mountainous area just above the village had many natural caves that he began to understand how God would fulfill this promise. They started to turn the caves into small churches, planting trees and plants on what had been desert land. Then Mario, a Polish sculptor, arrived and began to carve enormous Bible scenes on the cliffs surrounding the cave churches. He also worked with some MGV young men to teach them a love of art and the principles of sculpture.

However, the cave churches were made famous when the people of the MGV discovered a very large natural cave, which, with the help of some wealthy businessmen, was developed into a church auditorium seating up to 3,000 people. Finally, another cave was turned into the church amphitheater, which now seats more than 20,000, making this the largest church in the Middle East!

The cave churches have put the MGV "on the map," so to speak, as thousands of Christians, from all over the world, come to visit and worship the Lord in these remarkable caves, reveling in the area's natural and artistic beauty.

The Center of Love for children with special needs

Over the years I became acquainted with a remarkable ministry to disabled and chronically ill people in the MGV, called The Family of Love, run by a dedicated group of village young people. I soon realized that the disabled people in the village were the "new poor," as they were the neediest and most alienated group among the garbage collectors. I decided to join the ministry.

After many years of ministry, we started praying about building a center for the disabled. In a miraculous way the Lord helped us to do this on a piece of land owned by the church, situated in the middle of the MGV. Six of the eight floors of the Center of Love are now finished and we've been open and functioning for almost



Kids in cerebral palsy class at the Center of Love.



From left: Cave Cathedral entrance; Cave Cathedral from inside.

four years. This very well-built and beautiful building means that these extremely needy children are being served in the best facility in the MGV. Only God could do something like this!

Now most of my time at the MGV is spent helping at the Center of Love. Here we serve more than 60 children with mental and sometimes physical challenges, with the help of 18 teachers, eight supporting staff and seven volunteers. Apart from the volunteers and doctors, all the staff comes from the MGV, so this ministry is really by the Garbage People themselves. They have come, with God's help, from being the "served" to being the "servers."

The real one being recycled

The last 32 years have, without a doubt, been the most fulfilling and exciting ones in my entire life, and this is mainly due to my involvement with the Garbage People. It's been thrilling to see many of the hundreds of children I've known over the years growing up to become happy and useful members of their community, living at peace with God and their neighbors.

But one of the most important things I've learned through ministering among these people is how badly I need them! As I see their responses to daily trials, which would simply devastate me, I learn to put life into perspective. They've helped me see how important it is to accept my problems as opportunities to grow, learning to trust my Heavenly Father rather than to rebel and demand my rights (as we westerners tend to do). I've also learned, through them, what love is all about, how it comes through being committed to one another and sweating through our difficulties together. It's all about learning from the person I love, allowing her or him to give to me, regardless of their intellectual aptitude, race or financial and social position. I honestly feel that I've benefited more from the poor and needy I work with than anything I have been able to give to them! It seems that God is remaking and "recycling" me! ■



Rebecca and Ramez Atallah were commended in 1990 by Rosemount Bible Church, Montreal, Québec.