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THINKING IT THROUGH

BY NATE BRAMSEN

Five Miles to Bethlehem

Across the stages of our Christmas plays, backgrounds of our nativity scenes, and pages of Advent-themed books, there is an ominous absence: a group of characters whose example should cause every life to take inventory. In many ways, they had a front-row seat to Christmas but didn't show up.

Enter the chief priests and scribes. Matthew's Gospel introduces us to their role in the story of Christ's birth. When the Magi arrive in Jerusalem, they ask, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?" (Matthew 2:2) Herod summons the chief priests and scribes, and they know the precise location, quoting, "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel." (Matthew 2:6)

Yet here is the shocking reality: not one of them is recorded going to Bethlehem to see the newborn King. These men were steeped in Scripture, were able to recite it from memory, and had the right answers, yet when the most significant event in history happened a mere five miles away, they stayed home.

In light of this irony, let's consider three questions as we celebrate Jesus Christ's birth.

1. Am I content with deeply knowing the Scriptures while rejecting Christ's invitation to walk closely with the Savior?

I understand the primary readers of this devotional are believers in the Lord Jesus, yet the warning stands. A vast chasm exists between accumulating knowledge and walking in wisdom. Between the copious amounts of literature and the enormous capability of AI and internet search engines, knowledge is readily accessible, though Paul warns it "puffs up." (1 Corinthians 8:1)

Wisdom, however, comes from our response to knowledge. As we walk with Christ, who is "wisdom from God," may we never be content to merely sit in front of the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 1:30). Rather, may we always respond to the Spirit who speaks through the Scriptures.

This brings us to our second question.

2. Am I willing to point others to Scripture's authority while personally refusing to surrender to the Spirit's conviction?

As the father of three daughters, I often hear my voice exhorting my children to forgive "as God in Christ forgave [them]"

while I recognize envy or bitterness in myself (Ephesians 4:32). Such irony prompts reflection: Am I guilty of knowing and pointing others to the truth while refusing to make the five-mile journey to Bethlehem myself?

The tragedy of the chief priests and scribes' actions doesn't end with Christ's birth narrative. Fast-forward to His death, and you find the same chief priests now bribing Roman soldiers to propagate the message that Christ's disciples had stolen His body (Matthew 28:11-13). Why would these religious leaders, who knew the Scriptures and even remembered Jesus's prediction of His resurrection (which His disciples seemed to have forgotten), go to such lengths to cover up the truth?

Here, we uncover our third question.

3. Am I eager to point others to Scripture when it serves my interests while simultaneously compromising the Gospel's truth to preserve my comfort zone?

The chief priests pointed the Magi to Christ when it suited their needs. But, when Christ threatened their preferences and position, they avoided the truth and led others away. If Jesus had truly risen from the dead, their entire religious system—centered on sacrifices, the temple, and their authority—was at risk. Christ's resurrection didn't just disrupt their theology; it threatened their relevancy. Their ministry was their comfort zone.

We are faced with the same dilemma: when God's Word challenges our personal ambitions, security, way of life, or status quo, we can choose to resist or unconditionally surrender.

The truth of Christmas cannot merely rearrange our life. Jesus doesn't come to be part of our life; He is our life (Colossians 3:4). Following Jesus isn't just about knowing the right things—it's about responding to the One who was once wrapped in "swaddling cloths" and is now "at the right hand of God" interceding for us (Luke 2:7; Romans 8:34).

In light of such glorious truths, may we relinquish our insistence on spiritual titles, positions, and preferences when they come at the expense of ignoring the trek to Bethlehem. ■

Nate Bramsen serves in Special Areas.

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COVER PHOTO: Podgorica assembly property—Vladimir Cizmanski





A Young Work in an Old City

The Local Church Grows in Podgorica, Montenegro

BY VLADIMIR CIZMANSKI

The Brethren work in Montenegro began a little more than 30 years ago. In April 1992, the country formed a federation with Serbia, and by November, a coworker and I, as a 23-year-old Serbian missionary, moved there to share the Gospel. The world we entered was totally new to us. Serbia's Brethren work had started around the turn of the 20th century, but Montenegro had no evangelical church of any kind.¹ The climate was very, very difficult for gospel work. Due to wars in neighboring countries and throughout the Balkans, the people were in fear. Propaganda told them that there were dangerous sects in our town and that they should avoid any contact with the groups. But God was with us.

Today, we are a small body of believers in the capital city, Podgorica. There are about 300 believers in the country, and because they are first-generation Christians, we are still in the pioneering phase. Besides preaching the Gospel and reaching Montenegrins for Christ, we desire to construct the first evangelical church building in this country—a place where the assembly can meet and a base for gospel outreach and various evangelistic ministries. The work moves slowly, but we praise God for all He is doing.

A bad problem and a good one

For 19 years, we used the same property for our services and other ministry activities. It was located in a convenient area of Podgorica's "old town." In the beginning, it was a large space for our 20 people. We were thankful for our landlord because he was hospitable and polite to us. At that time, landlords were reluctant to rent space to us, the group that the community had marked as a cult. Our landlord's relatives and neighbors criticized him, but he stayed firm and kept us in the building.

Because of this good relationship and convenient location, it was difficult for us to cancel our lease several years ago, but one bad and one good problem forced us to make the move. The bad problem was street construction in front of the building.

A dredged trench for sewerage made it very difficult to get to our place and even dangerous for older people. We hoped that the work would be done in a couple of months, but then, it prolonged indefinitely.

The good problem was overcrowding. The premises became too small for all the people coming to our church. For a while, we searched for a new location, but the available properties were either too expensive or inconvenient.



Eventually, we found a somewhat satisfactory solution. We asked another evangelical church in town to rent us their premises. The size was similar to our original building, but the access was much better. The church agreed, and now, we use their facility. However, we are still searching for a better, bigger solution.

A lesson in patience

About six years ago, God enabled us to purchase land in a prime part of Podgorica. We would be very happy if we could say that we already started building our own facility. We had high hopes that construction would start a few years ago when the local city government and state ministry responsible for zoning plans promised they would work on our request. Nothing came of it, and then, the political party in power lost its



The whole assembly, kids and adults alike, helps on moving day; The Podgorica assembly sends love from its property.



On a nice day, the church meets outside on its property; During a back-to-school service, kids sing a song with Marijana Cizmanski's help.

position. It took time to establish a new one. Since then, a few elections have turned around, often bringing in new governments, and our request remains at the table, unanswered. We learned that other people from our area are also waiting for answers. So, although we are not alone, it is frustrating that the process takes so long. We hope the current officials can make a decision before the next change of government.

On top of everything, the money we saved for the building lost much of its value, so that is an additional frustration. However, we believe the Lord has His timing and He is teaching us patience—and to trust Him more.

Now, there is the possibility of a new development on our property. Another type of construction that we here call a temporary building could be of help while we wait for our planned permanent building. In essence, such a structure is made of steel beams and metal sheets with insulation between them. There is the possibility of assembling and disassembling it as needed. The permission for this kind of facility is much easier to obtain. This solution may be very practical, nice, and convenient. It doesn't mean we are switching from our original plan; we are simply exploring a faster solution that we can continue to use even after we build a permanent structure.

A growing church

As we wait on the Lord to provide a permanent building, we are so encouraged that the church is growing—with small steps but we are moving forward nonetheless. We are appointing deacons for the first time. This process is longer than expected, but we think it is better to prepare the path well than to have regrets later. We see that it doesn't take much for our Enemy to stir up something that causes people to raise questions and create confusion. So we are approaching this matter carefully.

New people have been coming to our services and staying to hear more of the Gospel. Recently, some people requested baptism. It happened that they, by themselves, recognized it would be better to let their roots grow deeper into faith first and then be baptized with more understanding and clarity. In September, three people were ready to confirm their faith and commitment to Christ: Julia, Valer, and Slavo.

Julia came from Ukraine and was a longtime believer but had never been ready for baptism. Finally, it all came together. With a proper understanding of who should be baptized and why, she declared her commitment to Christ.

A few years ago, Valer, a young Frenchman, was an atheist living a worldly life. Then, he came to Montenegro to do business with his brother. A believer from church met the men in a gym and invited them to attend our Sunday service. Being new to Montenegro, Valer and his brother were bored because they didn't know anyone. So they came to church out of curiosity. But they stayed and started to listen more and more. Soon, Valer understood who Jesus is, he became aware of his sinful state, and he asked the Lord for forgiveness. It is very encouraging to observe a person and see how great their desire to live wholly for the Lord's glory is. Recently, Valer said, "No more waiting. I want to get baptized." So we did it.

Slavo is also a young man. A native Montenegrin, he is a very sweet and tender person. He has always had a sensitive conscience. While speaking with him about his decision to be baptized, I asked how he came to the conclusion he was in a sinful state when he was so diligent in making sure he was not doing wrong things. He replied that even though he was careful to avoid sinful practices, he was aware of his sinful mind. It convicted him of guilt before God. Slavo's father saw a positive difference in his son's life and wanted to check out where his son was going and who was influencing him in such a good way. So his father started attending the meetings too.

We expect to have more requests for baptism among those who have expressed their faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

A testimony despite obstacles

Our church plant in Kotor, a city about 55 miles from Podgorica, is a small but stable group. We are thankful for Srdjan and Ruth, who are faithful to the task of caring for the group. The work can be disappointing due to difficulties in making contact with people who will continue attending church.

Through the years, we have learned that the Montenegrin community may be polite and welcoming but very private when it comes to personal issues or problems. Additionally, nationality can be a problem. Even though I have lived in Montenegro for more than 30 years, the nationals will never consider me a Montenegrin. In their eyes, I am a foreigner and



Despite obstacles over the years, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the effort to spread tracts across Montenegro continues.

always will be. Srdjan, on the other hand, is Montenegrin by nationality but is not considered as such since he was born and raised in Bosnia. He came to Montenegro as a refugee during the Bosnian War.

These dynamics are additional obstacles to overcome in forming relationships with the local people. We can't dictate these things, but our Father knows all things and can manage everything for His glory.

Conversations and camps

We try many ways of reaching Montenegrins with the Gospel. For example, we held a concert in our city a few months ago, and there is an effort to spread tracts across the whole country, city by city, village by village, house by house. But it seems that the best way to reach people is through local, natural-born Montenegrins—when one local, whether in Podgorica, Kotor, or another city, converts and then shares the Gospel with another.

This past summer, we and Child Evangelism Fellowship organized kids' and teen camps. It was a great blessing because we had kids and teenagers from nonbelieving families who heard the Gospel and saw it portrayed. These camps are already est-

ablished, having taken place throughout the years, so now, they have more and more influence. It is good that the people who live around the camps recognize us as people who are positive and do good things.



Prayer for the work

Please pray that the Lord will give us wisdom in how to approach people with the Gospel. Pray, too, for the government's decision regarding our prospective church building, for unity in our church, and for the process of appointing deacons. Thank you so much for your diligence in praying for the body of Christ regardless of locality. ■



Vladimir Cizmanski and his wife, Marijana, are commended from Oakwood Bible Chapel in Windsor, Ontario.



Vladimir baptizes Slavo.



Besides Bible lessons, teen camp involves activities such as rafting and hiking.

Kids and counselors enjoy time outside at the beautiful camp.



The teen group meets on the chapel property for games and Bible study.



¹ Neil Summerton, ed., *The Brethren Movement Worldwide*, 2024, IBCM.net.

From Budapest to Salzburg

WATCHING THE CHURCH FLOURISH WITHOUT RESTRICTION

BY PHILIP C. PARSONS

This past August, my wife, Mary, and I visited CMML missionaries serving the Lord in Hungary and Austria. After our week at the European Christian Workers' Conference in Annecy, France, we took a bus to Geneva, Switzerland, and then flew to Budapest, Hungary.

Passionate evangelism

On Saturday morning, Paul Meehan (*Missionary Prayer Handbook* Day 11) and his assembly coworker Jóska Szabo greeted us in Budapest. Paul has been serving the Lord in Hungary's capital since 2003. He went there at the invitation of the late Dr. Frank Sréter, a CMML missionary who founded Jó Hír Hungarian Literature Mission. Its purpose is to translate, print, and distribute evangelical tracts, leaflets, and books throughout the Hungarian-speaking countries of Eastern Europe. Since Frank's passing in 2012, Paul has led the ministry. This work complements his heart for evangelism. Armed with literature and boldness from the Lord, he engages in street evangelism and a prison ministry.

After a busy Sunday, we spent Monday visiting Paul and Jó Hír. Our travel to the office included a short walk in the subway. There, Paul pointed out spots where he conducts street evangelism using sleights of hand to attract a crowd, share a gospel story, and pass out tracts.

Above ground, we took a street car and then toured the office. We met Paul's coworkers, Veronika Kiss and Kati Jenny. Veronika gave up a lucrative career in banking to manage the Jó Hír office, and Kati is a part-time employee. Following lunch, Paul took us on a bus, streetcar, and walking tour of Budapest. The city is marked

by historic churches, monuments, and the neo-Gothic House of Parliament.

Our host, Jóska, and his wife, Vicus, are commended to the Lord's work at the local Dunakeszi assembly. They are also involved with Living Hope Foundation, a

practical ministry to people needing a fresh start. On Sunday, they drove us to Biblia Centrum where, annually, the 14 Budapest assemblies gather to remember the Lord, followed by a baptism. After the morning services, more than 170 men, women, and children followed a path to the Danube River and observed the baptism of six new believers. Then, a delicious meal of authentic Hungarian goulash with bread brought our day to a wonderful end.



A growing church

The next day, Leslie Walt (MPH Day 9) met us at Vienna Central Station in Austria, and together, we boarded a train to her home in Pfaffstätten, Baden. After we arrived, Leslie and her husband, Scott, served a delicious meal on the patio, where we reminisced about how we first met. Our relationship began when Scott and I were speakers at Emmaus University's



Left: Kati Jenny, Paul Meehan, and Veronika Kiss reach Hungary through Jó Hír. Right (from top): Budapest's 14 assemblies gather for worship and a baptism; Elders in the Budapest assemblies pray before baptizing six believers.

Christian Ministries Seminar. Scott and Leslie were helping develop a newly formed Christian school in Vienna, so Scott sought my advice due to my experience at Faith Academy in Manila, Philippines.

The next morning, Scott and Leslie took us on a walking tour of their village that ended at their local assembly, Evangelikale Gemeinde Baden. The large building previously housed a manufacturing center. Over the years, as funds became available, the believers renovated rooms to accommodate the Sunday school classes and a teen ministry.



During our walk, the Walts told us about their work. Besides ministering in the local assembly, Scott preaches and teaches at a Ukrainian church in Vienna, where the congregation includes war refugees. He and Leslie also conduct seminars on family and marriage, and Scott teaches at a nearby seminary, TCM International Institute, which equips church leaders in Austria and Germany.

A cultural highlight of our visit was hosting the Walts at a local *buschenschank*, where we enjoyed schnitzel and a fruit drink blended with soda water. These rustic restaurants are owned and managed by vineyard or orchard growers and must comply with strict regulations. With so many vineyards and orchards in Austria, these restaurants might only be open for a few weeks each to spread out business.

Vibrant children's outreaches

As an added blessing, we spent a day with Carolyn Oates (MPH Day 28) in Vienna, Austria's capital and largest city. With Leslie Walt's help, we navigated the local trains and met Carolyn at the main station. From there, she took us on a walking tour of the notable buildings and told us about the kids' outreaches and camps she helps with in Vienna and Houston, Texas (she splits her time between locations).

Our day with Carolyn concluded with a children's outreach, Kids' Team, at an apartment complex where many Muslim families live. More than 20 children participated. Games followed



by Bible teaching quickly consumed the two hours. Then, it was back to Vienna Central Station for us. The next day, Carolyn informed us that we had walked 18,000 steps during our trek in the capital.

Thriving church plants

While on the train to Salzburg, Austria, Mary and I learned that, due to delays, we would not make our connecting train. It was no coincidence that our train conductor once lived in New Jersey and had an uncle who lived near CMML. He offered us several alternatives and assured us that we would reach Salzburg within one hour of our original arrival time. We had no trouble finding Fred and Peggy Colvin (MPH Day 9) among the throng at the station. After a quick tour of the downtown, we went to their home for a light dinner and a good night's sleep.

The Colvins have served the Lord for about 45 years in Europe, with significant ministry in Austria. Today, although limited due to some physical constraints, they seek to encourage believers and train church leaders. On Sunday we visited several assemblies that they had a hand in starting. Over the years, they planted



several, and many continue to thrive. After the morning services, we were treated to a delicious lunch at the home of the Colvins' daughter Suzanna and her family. Later, we went to an assembly that gathers in the afternoon, which the Colvins' son Hans and his family attend.

Praise and prayer

All in all, we enjoyed wonderful, mutually encouraging visits. Praise the Lord for the ministry of Jó Hír and its staff. In a country where many have little confidence in the church, Jó Hír serves as a bridge to making Christ known. Pray, too, for the Dunakeszi assembly, Living Hope Foundation, and Jóska and Vicus.

Thank the Lord for the 50 assemblies in Austria, a country where fewer than 1 percent of its 9.1 million people are followers of Christ. Praise the Lord that there are no government limitations on spreading the Gospel there. Pray for the ministries of Scott and Leslie Walt, Carolyn Oates, and Fred and Peggy Colvin. ■

Philip C. Parsons, CMML missionary care and security

A Cultural Lesson

In Austria, it is culturally appropriate to greet a woman with a handshake before a man. I was caught off guard twice. When the Colvins met us at the Salzburg train station, I reached out to shake Fred's hand. He politely pushed my hand aside so he could shake Mary's first. Two days later, at the Salzburg assembly, a believer did the same thing. Lesson: research the culture before you go!

Left (from top): A former manufacturing center now serves as Evangelikale Gemeinde Baden's home; Carolyn Oates and a coworker help run a kids' outreach. **Right:** The Colvins' daughter hosts her parents and the Parsons for lunch.

OUR DAILY LIFE IN *Papua New Guinea*

Helping Reach the Nations Day by Day

BY JOHN & KRISTA POIDEVIN



This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. (Psalm 118:24)

Our daily life in Papua New Guinea (PNG), in some ways, is not that different than if we had continued to work and attend school in Canada. So why are we living here? It's not because the weather is pleasant (although it usually is); it's because God commanded each of us to be part of His plan to reach the nations, including PNG.

Our role at Lapilo Mission Station, the headquarters for the Ethnos360 branch in PNG, is to serve using our technical skills. Our work, in turn, enables our church-planting coworkers to serve in their locations, which are sometimes very remote, and reach the unreached with the Gospel. John provides tech support, and I serve through nursing. Let's show you what a typical day looks like for our family.

At the clinic

When I and the rest of the medical team arrive in the morning, we turn on the clinic's lights, start up the lab equipment, and warm up the X-ray machine. Next, we turn on the computers to see what emails have come in with medication requests or health questions. The clinic staff then gather to pray together, and patients start arriving.

If we have a doctor, one nurse works with him or her to screen patients. Typically, another nurse sees another set of patients, giving vaccines, treating warts, or providing wound care. Sometimes, a nurse functions as a nurse practitioner, diagnosing and treating less-complex patients. If staffing allows, another nurse

works in the pharmacy, filling medication orders and answering emails, but may also draw blood, run lab work, take X-rays, or do ECGs.

No two days are alike. Some days, the schedule is full, but patients cancel; other days, the schedule looks bare but then fills to overflowing. Some problems are simple; others end up requiring a medevac to Australia.

Our primary focus is the Ethnos missionaries, but we also provide care for other Christian workers and PNG citizens. It uses a lot of brain cells to talk in Pidgin (also known as Tok Pisin, a creole language spoken in PNG) and discern the patient's problem and then make notes in English to go in their chart. When it is quieter, we also perform preventative maintenance on our equipment, distill clean water, and sterilize equipment for minor procedures.

At school

Our kids—Titus (14, ninth grade), Moriah (12, seventh grade), and Silas (10, fifth grade)—walk out the door at 7:30 a.m. and down the gravel road to line up with their friends for school at Numonohi Christian Academy. In elementary school, Silas studies English (including reading, writing, grammar, and spelling), cursive writing, math, social studies, science, library, and Bible. Some years, the school offers electives, such as PE (or gym), drama, art, and technology. This year, the school day is shorter because there are not enough teachers to run the nonessential

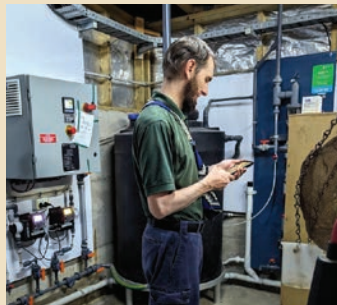
classes. After sixth grade, the school is divided into junior high and high school. Titus's and Moriah's classes range from pre-algebra to Pidgin.

The kids come home from 12:15 to 12:55 p.m. for lunch. The elementary students finish the school day at 2:45 p.m., but the older students have work detail where they dust, sweep, and mop the classrooms for an additional 15 minutes. Because the school year is designed around Numonohi's boarding students, it contains fewer days, but the schedule is intense and includes high homework expectations.

At the office

John walks out our front door, across the road, and into the main office building. His office is tucked inside the ICT (information and communication technology) area. At his computer, John checks the ticket system for official work requests and other incoming emails and then prioritizes what to do. Some things, like the broken X-ray machine at the medical clinic, the alarmingly elaborate water system (which provides drinking water for our whole community), and the store's malfunctioning walk-in fridge, need more urgent attention and result in after-hours calls to our house. Other repairs require him to order parts from Australia or the US and then wait for their arrival.

Some projects are bigger and involve research to find the best solution, which John then puts forward to management for budget decisions. Sometimes, John works on circuit board repairs; other times, it is mechanical repairs; and



occasionally, he tries to assist our bush missionaries through remote consultations.

He is also part of meetings. Earlier this year, both teams he is on (ICT and tech services) had several meetings as their managers prepared for home assignments (six months to one year).

The days John feels most successful are when he gets to complete a project, return a fixed item, and close off a work ticket.

Now that you've heard about our day, we'd love to hear from you: What did you do today? Thank you for prayerfully considering how God would have you participate in His plan. ■



John and Krista Poidevin are commended from Bethel Chapel in Waterloo, Ontario.

Praise and Prayer

- Praise God, for He made this day!
- We thank Him for the normal routines of life and that He is building His church.
- Please pray that God will give us wisdom as we work with fewer staff members.
- Pray for spiritual growth in us and our kids.
- Pray for ongoing transitions in this new school year. Titus began high school; Moriah, junior high; and Silas, fifth grade. I, Krista, also started home-schooling the children in French.

Opposite page (L-R): Krista (third from right) joins other medical staff for prayer each morning; The Poidevins—(L-R) Silas, Krista, Moriah, John, and Titus—enjoy hiking in their mountainous area of PNG; The Poidevin siblings attend Numonohi Christian Academy with other MKs. **This page (from top):** John performs maintenance on the mission station's water system; Lapilo Mission Station depends on the intricate water system.



2024 TAX RECEIPTS

December gifts to CMML will receive a receipt for 2024 income tax returns if they are postmarked by December 31, 2024.



HOLIDAY NOTICE

The CMML office will be closed December 25–27, 2024, for Christmas, and January 1, 2025, for New Year's Day.

MK CORNER

Missions Magazine Chats with Missionary Kids

INTERVIEW WITH THE STURM SIBLINGS Cross-Cultural Ministries in Alaska, Day 30

BY SARAH DUNLAP

Plug McGrath, Alaska, into Google Maps, and you'll learn it's 220 miles northwest of Anchorage and inaccessible by most transportation methods. The Sturm family has called McGrath its mission field for about six years, having previously served in Mexico. They've adjusted to the remoteness, bitter cold, and polar days and nights—the seasons of almost round-the-clock daylight (late April to late August) or darkness (mid-November to mid-January). Recently, I chatted with five of the seven Sturm kids about their life. Although we missed Eaden and Judah, I appreciated the insights of Gabriel, Titus, Deacon, Abram, and Matthias and a few from their mom, Lindsay.

How would you describe your area of Alaska?

Matthias: McGrath. Cold.

Titus: In the winter, it gets to 40 below.

Gabriel: It's very remote. There are rivers there; it's very flat. Lots of spruce trees and birch—

Titus: We don't have a lot of large trees [but] a lot of small black spruce.

Gabriel: And it's full of mosquitoes.

Titus: A ton of mosquitoes.

Gabriel: Our town is 270 people. It was originally founded by people for a base for mining, like a supply camp. Everyone came there to get materials and stuff for mining or hunting. Then, it became a military base during some of the wars, and then, it went back to a supply base.

You live in a lodge, right? What's that like?

Matthias: We have a coffee shop; we sell drinks and baked goods. We have an upstairs that we live in. We have a lobby that everyone goes in. We have, like, a hotel—rooms—at the very bottom. And then a garage.

Titus and Gabriel: We live upstairs.

Lindsay: Yes, but our kitchen is just the hotel kitchen. And our living room is just the lobby. So we kind of share our living areas with the whole community.



Front row, L-R: Titus (13), Abram (10), Matthias (8), Deacon (11), and Gabriel (15)

So your home life and ministry are very intermixed. How do you feel about that?

Gabriel: Pretty much my entire life, I've always had someone there [in our home]. In Mexico, we always had visitors—people coming over for dinner all the time. And, in McGrath, pretty much every night we have someone over for dinner—like from the very night we went there till now. So you get used to it.

What are some common Alaskan foods?

Matthias: Moose and black bear.

Titus: Smoked salmon.

Matthias: Bison.

Titus: *Akutaq.* [He makes a gagging face.] Akutaq is like a Crisco-sugar-fish-sludge-ice-cream thing that a lot of people there like.

Lindsay: It's sometimes called Eskimo ice cream. There's no dairy in it because it's shelf stable. It's fish and berries and Crisco.

What's the flavor like?

Titus: It tastes like Crisco. Everything sticks to the roof of your mouth.

Lindsay: Some people make it well; some people don't. It's like anything. There were good flans and bad flans in Mexico. There's good akutaq and bad akutaq.

Do people in your community speak Indigenous languages?

Matthias: At school, we learned Athabaskan for a while, but I totally forgot everything.

Deacon: Some people know it, but they don't speak it.

Titus: It's not like they *only* speak it.

Do you prefer Alaska's season of daylight or darkness?

Matthias: [Early and late] daylight season because there are no mosquitoes.

Deacon: I like winter better.

Gabriel: I probably like summer better—personally. Summer, we have more activities, more variety. Winter, we have very fun stuff, but it's very limited. It's very inside-centered.

What's your favorite summer activity?

Deacon: Hunting.

Matthias: Dirt biking.

Titus: Vehicle driving, like all-terrain four-wheelers and dirt bikes.

Gabriel: I like driving all those off-road vehicles and then hunting, fishing. My job in the summer is mowing lawns. That's pretty fun because you get to meet a lot of people, build relationships.

Do you have any hobbies or play any sports?

Matthias: Sometimes, we play basketball. [Alaska's capital] Juneau really likes basketball. There's a basketball court in McGrath. We go to that sometimes twice every day.

Titus: I like running.

Gabriel: Abram likes eating—or trying new foods—and cooking.

Deacon: I like playing at the park and running too.

Gabriel: I have multiple hobbies. My job hobby is fixing motors and stuff, and I've learned from a couple of other good friends who work on engines. So, sometimes, I get hired to work on mechanical stuff. And my other hobbies, school-wise, are writing and reading.

Are your friends locals or other missionary kids?

Titus: Sort of both.

Gabriel: In the church, pretty much everyone is friends, but it's small-ish. But, in the community, almost all kids my age I have a pretty good relationship with, both doing jobs together or having the same interests in different stuff.

Lindsay: Almost all the kids in town will hang out at our house for game nights and things when the lodge is open, so we end up collecting kids along the way.

How do you help with your parents' ministry?

Gabriel: Titus and I, we mow lawns. I feel like a lot of people have grown to like Titus and me. Generally, we're pretty hardworking, and we're consistent, which is kind of rare for that area. So it kind of sets the mood pretty good for us children, and so, I guess that kind of helps with our parents' work. And, with all the kids in the community, we get to hang out with them pretty much all day long. It's a lot of just trying to build good relationships.

Titus: And, if heating the place [*that is, the lodge*] is helping with the ministry, we have that job!

What's one plus to being an MK? What's difficult?

Titus: I probably like the opportunity to go to different villages and see people and places and all the opportunity to see different things.

Gabriel: Well, if you're a missionary kid and you're going to

different places, you're not necessarily born in those communities and raised with everybody. So, everywhere you go, you have to re-establish friendships. Whereas if you're just a normal kid living there, you grew up with the communities, so you can get friendships. If you're a missionary kid, you start at an older age, which is sometimes harder. So that's probably a pretty big downside.

What's your dream job?

Titus: Surgeon or doctor.

Matthias: Mechanic.

Gabriel: Mechanic, maybe author on the side.

Abram: Rancher.

Titus: He wants to be a rancher and own a food truck.

Abram: I'd probably want a barbecue food truck.

Deacon: I'd want to be a pilot.

How can we pray for you?

Titus: Pray that we can be more of a light to the community—help encourage and talk to people.

Gabriel: A lot of people stay indoors, so it's hard to interact with them. So pray that they will feel like getting outside.

Deacon: Pray for our sister Eaden as she left the house [for college]. ■



From top (and L-R): The siblings enjoy hanging out with friends at their lodge; Gabriel works on a truck engine; Running a lodge in Alaska involves some unusual chores.

THE NORMALCY OF SPIRITUAL ABUNDANCE

Pursuing a Vibrant Relationship with God

CMML
REACHING
HIGHER

BY CRAIG FRITCHEY

“What do you expect a normal Christian life to look like?” This was the opening question Scott DeGroff (*Missionary Prayer Handbook* Day 29) asked at this year’s Reaching Higher retreat. Fifty young adults joined us on September 27–29 at the CMML Guest Home in Wall Township, New Jersey. Reaching Higher invites young adults, ages 20–39, to come away from the busyness of life and focus on what the Lord would have them do with their lives.

Our 2024 theme was “It’s Normal: The Abundant Life.” The title came from a conversation Scott and Lynn DeGroff had with Mary Parsons, a member of CMML’s missionary care team.

The normal Christian life is an intimate, personal, and vibrant relationship with the living God.

Our 2024 theme was “It’s Normal: The Abundant Life.” The title came from a conversation Scott and Lynn DeGroff had with Mary Parsons, a member of CMML’s missionary care team.

Scott DeGroff’s first two sessions on Saturday laid the doctrinal framework and explained why it can be easily forgotten. The key point was understanding the Greek words meaning “know” in the New Testament: *oida* (intellectual knowledge) and *ginosko* (a familiarity acquired through intimacy, experience, and association with a person). Scott described the difference as a change from identifying with Christ as a servant to relating to Him as a friend (John 15:14–15).

Ginosko is the word used in John 17:3, when Jesus says, “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” In fact, it is used repeatedly

throughout the New Testament to describe our knowledge of the Lord (see Philippians 3, Hebrews 5, and Ephesians 3).

Following Scott’s messages, Ethan Hanlin (Ontario, Canada) shared his testimony of how he came to understand this difference in his life. The day continued with seminars on the practical outworking of intimacy with Christ. Scott and Lynn DeGroff discussed their ministry with Freedom Teams in Watsonville, California; Ethan Hanlin shared how our closeness with Christ affects our prayer life; and I explained biblical commendation and how our walk with the Lord leads to service for Him, locally and abroad.

Saturday ended with a delicious dinner, a rich Q&A session, and a challenging message, in which Scott used Luke 11 to help believers deal with doubt.

On Sunday, after sharing a sweet time of worship and the Breaking of Bread, Scott gave his final message, “A Vision for What Could Be,” from Matthew 14. It included nine expectations, ranging from miraculous provision to victorious faith, for someone who chooses the normal, abundant Christian life. Scott left us with one final question: “If Christ doesn’t thrill your heart now, what’s so special to you about heaven?”

Reaching Higher is a unique opportunity for us to spend an intentional weekend with the next generation of leaders and workers in our assemblies and for them to learn about CMML’s ministry. Please pray for all who attended. May each enter into a normal, abundant life found through knowing, in a *ginosko* way, our Lord Jesus Christ. ■

Craig Fritchey, CMML assembly relations

