February 2025

MISSIONS

Battling Spiritual Poverty amid Natural Splendor in Norway

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When Invisible Needs Became Visible in Colombia

A Celebration to Win Hearts in Paraguay

THINKING IT THROUGH

BY GEORGE BRISTOW

Finishing Well by Overcoming

What does it look like to finish well? It seems that too many of the Lord's followers, including missionaries, do not finish well. The Lord sets before each of us a different race to run with endurance (Hebrews 12:1). Your course is not mine, nor is mine yours. But we are called to persist. Paul, knowing the great difficulties facing him toward the end of his life, told a group of elders of his desire and determination to finish well: "None of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy." (Acts 20:24)

I recently spoke at a retreat where we looked at five servants of the Lord who overcame great obstacles and completed their races well: Job, John the Baptist, Peter, Stephen, and Paul. Using their examples, let's consider what sort of things we might encounter.

The Lord might allow us to endure great loss or physical suffering as Job did. He overcame Satan's attacks by worshipping God: "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job 1:21) God may call us, too, to serve in a spiritual conflict (even without knowing it). Job wrestled with his unexplained suffering while his friends maligned him, he pleaded with God, and he repented for speaking out of turn. God vindicated him as "My servant Job" and restored his blessings when he prayed for his friends (42:7–10).

We might face unmet expectations when our ministry does not turn out as we had hoped. John the Baptist, the Lord's forerunner, had proclaimed Jesus as the One who would burn up the ungodly "chaff," yet wicked King Herod ruled, and John languished in prison (Matthew 3:12). He expressed his disillusion to Christ: "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (Matthew 11:3, ESV) Jesus called him to not stumble and then praised him highly (though John didn't hear the praise). He finished well as he was cruelly beheaded. Many believers throughout the world today must overcome as martyrs (Revelation 12:9–11).

We may taste the bitterness of great personal failure as Peter did. Despite being a fervent follower of Christ, Peter denied three times that he knew the Lord. He overcame his failure and grief only because Christ prayed that Peter's faith would not fail and met him alone after rising from the dead (Luke 22:32; 1 Corinthians 15:7; Luke 24:34). God can restore us and call us to serve Him again (John 21:15–19). Peter finished well and glorified God by the death he was granted to die.

We may be confronted with the challenge to defend our faith to leaders and rulers as Stephen was. As one full of the Spirit, he willingly served tables to help resolve a church conflict, boldly proclaimed Christ with other believers, used the whole Bible to expose the Jews' persistent rejection of God's chosen ones, and was stoned to death while seeing the Son of Man at God's right hand. He finished well, praying for his murderers and entrusting his spirit to the Lord. His death glorified God, who used the persecution that arose after to move His witnesses out of Jerusalem (Acts 8:1–4; 11:19).

We may endure long years of service with much opposition as Paul did. He trained the next generation of workers and entrusted them with the Gospel. He pressed on to the end with hope and faith, despite spending long years in prison and being deserted by many coworkers. He wrote the motto of those who finish well: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (2 Timothy 4:7)

> God calls us all to overcome as Christ's servants.

Most of us will not finish our race as martyrs as four of these five witnesses did. But God calls us all to overcome as Christ's servants: "He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son." (Revelation 21:7) Each of us has a unique race to run. The Lord says to you and me, "You follow Me." (John 21:22) Let's set our hearts to finish our courses and the ministries we have received from the Lord Jesus. ■

George Bristow, Other Overseas Service (MPH Day 27)

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COVER PHOTO: Trollstigen, a mountainous road, in Norway—Photo by James & Grete Attwood

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A SOURCE OF THANKSGIVING

Believers Spread the Gospel in Chad

BY TIM & JOY BEER

In our missionary care role with CMML, we are privileged to visit American missionaries where they serve the Lord. This is part of our work to communicate with, pray for, and encourage them in their service. Our latest trip, covering four weeks at the end of 2024, included Chad, a nation in central Africa. We spent time getting to know Jim Roberts (*Missionary Prayer Handbook* Day 1), his ministry, and his fellow believers in Chad. Now, we rejoice over the Lord's work we witnessed there.

A growing percentage of believers

It is generally believed that, by the 14th century, Islam had spread widely through parts of Chad, having been introduced by Muslim traders traveling through the area centuries prior. From 1900 to 1960, the country was a French colony, whose administrators discouraged the spread of Christianity in the early years.

In 1926, the first Brethren missionary, a New Zealander, arrived in Chad with a consuming desire to present the Gospel to Muslims.[1] He became fluent in several African languages, some of which he translated the New Testament into. He was a fervent preacher of the Gospel, and many nationals who were saved led others to Christ.

In the ensuing years, several other Brethren missionaries labored in the country, including Europeans who targeted the Guéra region in central Chad. Today, Chad has an estimated 2,000 assemblies, most of which are in the south.

Sunni Islam continues to dominate northern, central, and eastern Chad. Operation World estimates that 52.8 percent of Chad's population is Muslim and 38.5 percent is Christian, of which 10.1 percent is evangelical.[2] The government is secular, resulting in religious freedom. Christians experience opposition, though, in some areas of northern and eastern Chad.

All things local

When we arrived in N'Djaména, Chad's capital, our first impression was a lack of development compared to other African countries. But, during our visit, Jim guided us through the city, showing us daily life there and explaining his ministry.

Select photos courtesy of James Roberts.

Jim has served alongside SIL Global (Summer Institute of Linguistics) for 34 years—initially in Cameroon (1990–1996) and since then in N'Djaména—to help with the countries' linguistic needs. There are 130 languages in Chad, of which 15 have the whole Bible and another 28 have the New Testament. Translation work for several more languages is in progress.

Using his linguistic abilities, Jim studies an unwritten language and its sound system (phonology) to devise its spelling and writing rules (orthography) and discover its grammar. This leads to the formation of a basic dictionary and then a primer so the people can learn to read in their language. With this important foundation, the language's Scripture translation can achieve accuracy, clarity, and naturalness.

After relocating to N'Djaména in the late 1990s, Jim taught linguistics at its university for 20 years. He gained contact with lots of young people, some of whom he went on to mentor.

To give us a taste of life in Chad, Jim took us to the local market. He buys his groceries there and has developed good relationships with the vendors at the various stalls. We heard lots of bartering—standard procedure in this part of the world—being done in Chadian Arabic rather than French. Thankfully, most of the market was covered to protect us from the hot sun, but due to recent flooding, the walkways were muddy.

There are around 90 assemblies in N'Djaména, so it was our pleasure to visit one on Sunday morning: Berea Christian Assembly, where Jim fellowships. It started to break bread in 2011 as an outreach from another assembly that Jim had previously attended. Today, he serves in the assembly's leadership and is involved in teaching and mentoring the believers.

An afternoon with Albert and Annie

One day, Jim introduced us to Albert, a keen believer and a doctoral student in linguistics whom Jim met through his lectures at the university. Jim has had the joy of mentoring Albert academically and spiritually. Annie, Albert's wife, is studying obstetrics, and together, Albert and Annie desire to serve the Lord with their skills. They kindly invited us to their home, where we spent a good afternoon together. We enjoyed their eight-month-old son, Samuel, whom Jim lovingly refers to as his grandson.

Recently, Albert has been working in the SIL office, helping Jim and others. It appeared to us as visitors that the Lord is preparing Albert for a work like Jim's, which was encouraging to see.

A strong vision

We briefly visited the headquarters of the Chadian Christian assemblies, where we learned of the believers' vision to evangelize the whole of Chad. Currently, they are targeting the area along the Chari River (south-central Chad), which is home to several unreached people groups. A source of thanksgiving is the 200 Chadian missionaries who work in that area. They receive very basic support from the assemblies as they seek to evangelize and establish local churches.

One of the unreached people groups is the Mawa in the Guéra region of central Chad. Jim's burden for these Indigenous people led him to meet Adida, an evangelist who had lived among them for several years. This man had communicated with the people using Chadian Arabic and established a good relationship with them. After discussions with Jim and time in prayer, Adida agreed to return to that area with his wife, Elisabeth, and family. Currently, they live about 19 miles away. God willing, they will soon move back to the village.

From the headquarters, we went to the Evangelical Cultural Center, which provides training courses in various practical skills for young people. On behalf of the assemblies, the center oversees a primary school and a camp for children and young people.

We were also privileged to briefly see some of the Emmaus work in the country. An amazing 100,000 courses are distributed to about 100 centers annually. God is clearly at work through this ministry.

Prayer for Chad

We thank the Lord for the commitment of the 200 Chadian missionaries and other believers, such as Albert and Annie and Adida and Elisabeth. Please pray for them along with the ongoing work of translating God's living Word into Chad's many language groups. Pray, too, that God will raise up workers who will share the Gospel with the Sudanese refugees in Chad—thousands live in refugee camps in the east. ■

Tim and Joy Beer are part of CMML's missionary care team. Previously, they served in Zambia for 25 years.

[1] Dr. Frederick A. Tatford, *The Muslim World*, volume 4 of *That the World May Know* (Bath: Echoes of Service, 1983), 125.
[2] Operation World, "Pray for: Chad," n.d., OperationWorld.org/locations/chad/.

Learn more about the Mawa, one of Chad's unreached people groups, on p.22.

Opposite page (clockwise from top left): Berea Christian Assembly has been meeting since 2011; Jim buys groceries in this bustling market; Joy, Tim, and Jim appreciate Chadian hospitality courtesy of Albert and Annie (center and right); Animals are an essential part of life in Mawa communities; Jim shows Tim and Joy around N'Djaména; These two linguists, Albert and Jim, love serving the Savior with their skills; Adida and Elisabeth reach the Mawa people, including the women and children pictured here.

When the Invisible Becomes Visible

Meeting the Needs of Venezuelan Migrants in Our Town

BY BILL & ANGELA LOUDON

"For the Lord . . . administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." (Deuteronomy 10:17–19) At the beginning of 2024, little did we know that the Lord would call our small church in La Calera, Colombia, to invest our time, money, and energy into obeying this verse.

Our assembly, called Family Church, has existed for five years, which have been an exciting time of growth in maturity and number. We are still a small group but have tripled in size since the COVID-19 pandemic almost wiped out our, at the time, one-year-old baby church. Since recovering and solidifying the group, we have spent the past couple of years asking the Lord to show us how to serve our community in tangible ways, not only sharing Jesus's message but also being His hands and feet.

La Calera is a small mountain town a 45-minute drive from Colombia's capital, Bogotá. The town itself is mostly lower middle class with many people just managing to make ends meet. However, the surrounding countryside has many wealthy gated communities. On the whole, La Calera is a plain, traditional Roman Catholic town with less visible poverty than you would see on the streets of Bogotá. As a result, when we were asked to start a free lunch program for kids, we doubted we would find families in need of such help in our neighborhood. But, after we overcame some hesitation through prayer, we decided to take a step of faith.

An introduction to Jesus

We kicked off our kids' club in April 2024. Every Friday at 12:30 p.m., we serve children a hot lunch. (Colombians eat their main meal of the day at noon.) Colombian public schools run from 7:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. every weekday, so the children come straight from school. The program's goal is to meet the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of our community's vulnerable children, and the focus is always on Jesus and the Gospel. We emphasize quality over quantity, so we aim to feed 15 kids each week. About 50 children passed through over the first six months, but we are getting to know a steady group of 10 children well.

Three women from our assembly (including me, Angela!) take turns cooking and delivering the food. We've partnered with a nearby Christian discipleship school, and we share the costs and volunteers. The weekly team serving the food and running the activities comprises members of our church and students of the discipleship school. As the children eat their lunches, we chat with them about their school week and anything new in their lives; we also share about ourselves. We have multiple opportunities to teach them table manners and social etiquette.

After lunch, we and the children sing and play games. Then, we settle them down for a Bible lesson followed by a relevant hands-on activity. The topics covered last year were the "I ams" from the Gospel of John and then several of Jesus's miracles. The goal was introducing the children to who Jesus is. Between 3:00 and 3:30 p.m., parents, siblings, or neighbors pick up the children, and our brief but full three hours with them come to a close.

The need realized

When we started the club, we assumed we would work with Colombian children. Not only had we underestimated how much poverty was out of sight in our town, but we also hadn't realized how many migrant Venezuelans lived in La Calera. Ninety percent of the children who attend our kids' club are Venezuelan by birth or descent. Over the past decade, one in every five Venezuelans has left his or her country, which amounts to over 7.7 million people. Of that number, 3 million are in Colombia (the rest are mostly in Latin America and the Caribbean, but some make it to the USA and Spain).[1] These Venezuelans are fleeing poverty, violence, and food and medical shortages.[2] The majority that we meet sim-

From left: After each lesson, the children complete Bible-themed activities, such as word searches; Not only are José and Ingrid Diaz uniquely equipped for this ministry, but they also love it; Ingrid teaches a lesson on Adam and Eve; Every kids' club meeting includes a delicious hot meal.

ply desire to make a better life for themselves, seeking stability and a future for their children.

The children we have met through our kids' club have broken our hearts with many of their stories. Almost none of the children live with both biological parents. Most live with one parent, while the other parent likely remains in Venezuela. Some have stepparents who generally treat them unkindly. Many of the children have had a period of separation from the parent they currently live with because the parent moved to Colombia first and sent for their child later. For example, one girl spent five years with a grandmother before joining her mother in Colombia. As a result, the kids' relationship with their biological parent may be unhealthy.

Immigrants coming from a country falling apart, especially those from its poor population, tend to be focused on survival. Finding enough money to pay for a rented room and food consumes the parents' thoughts and time. The children may end up suffering neglect on many levels—affecting not only the food and affection they need but also their education. Most of the Venezuelan children we have met are academically far behind their Colombian counterparts. Thankfully, the Colombian education system provides them with schooling, but catching up is a struggle.

All this shows the great need that was right in front of us; we just couldn't see it. God wanted us to take a step of faith, and once we did, the children in need of a good meal, love, and support started coming.

God's perfect provision

Years before the kids' club launched, we as a church had been supporting a Venezuelan missionary couple serving in Colombia, José and Ingrid Diaz. They had gotten stuck in Colombia during the COVID-19 pandemic and, instead of returning when things opened up, sensed the Lord's call to stay and serve the poor in Bogotá. For several years, they had active ministries in downtown Bogotá. Late in 2023, through no fault of their own, they could no longer continue with the organization they'd been serving with and found themselves praying about what to do next.

We approached them about heading up the kids' club, and they accepted. Our invitation was an answer to their prayers, and now that we've seen them in action for over six months, we realize what a godsend they are for us. Not only do they have the time and energy this outreach demands, but they also have the cultural background to minister more effectively to the Venezuelan population. Their role includes managing the administrative aspects and visiting and ministering to the children's families throughout the week.

Opposite page: Ingrid cares about each child who attends.

Above (from top): As a result of the kids' club, one family participated in Family Church's retreat; Some children and their siblings have even started attending church.

From left: The kids receive a fun surprise: sunglasses; The club's mascot brings lots of joy—and friendly hugs; This boy works on a Bible-based activity book; Three girls enjoy the stuffed animals and crafts they received at the kids' club.

Much joy but some heartbreak

As with many evangelistic efforts, the seed is sown, but seeing the fruit can be hard. We trust that the children who have come through the kids' club and experienced Christ's love will turn to Him at some point in their lives.

However, we have been blessed to see some fruit: Several children faithfully attend our Sunday meetings. One entire family joined our church. They also attended our family camp toward the end of 2024. An older brother of one kid joined our youth group and has been attending church regularly. It has been a joy to watch the Lord work in their lives.

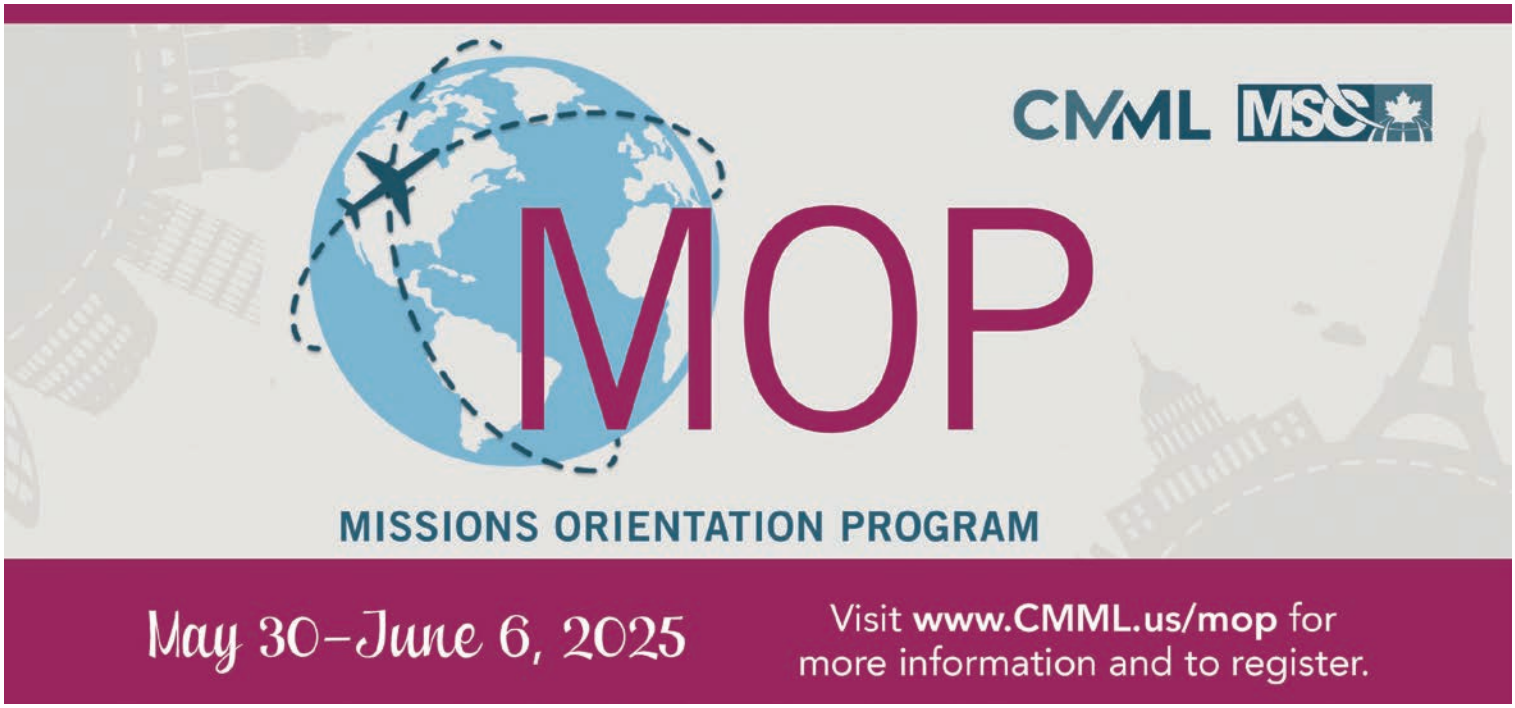
It has been a joy to watch the Lord work in their lives.

There are also those who reject the offers of love and the way of Jesus. They break our hearts and leave us praying for them to return.

It has been a challenge for our Colombian brothers and sisters in Christ to step out of their comfort zones and serve cross-culturally in their town. Although our efforts may be a drop in the bucket temporally, we all feel so blessed and privileged to help these Venezuelans find a safe place in their new country and an eternal home with the Lord. ■

Bill and Angela Loudon are commended from Westminster Bible Chapel in Westminster, California.

[1] Sevil Omer, "Venezuela Crisis: Facts, FAQs, and How to Help," World Vision, 14 August 2024, WorldVision.org/disaster-relief-news-stories/venezuela-crisis-facts.
[2] USA for UNHCR, "Venezuela Humanitarian Crisis," n.d., UNRefugees.org/emergencies/venezuela/.



CELEBRATING HEARTS TO WIN HEARTS

A Valentine's Dinner Reaches Unbelievers and Encourages Believers

BY ROSEMARY KONKOL

In 1999, Dale and I moved to Paraguay to serve the Lord. For the first few months, we lived in Asunción, the capital, while working on our residence permit and studying Spanish. We also fellowshipped with a nearby assembly. In February 2000, we and another couple from the local church had the idea to host a Valentine's dinner and invite neighbors. We felt Valentine's Day was an appropriate time since it focused on love and couples. We decorated and then welcomed our visitors; we offered some snacks and shared a short gospel message. With that event, the tradition of a yearly evangelistic Valentine's dinner was born. As each year passed, the objective remained: to invite people—believers and those who haven't made a commitment to the Lord Jesus—to a low-key event with an opportunity to present the Gospel.

Now, some 25 years later, we serve in the town of San Juan Bautista but continue the tradition in our local church. We try to have a nice meal, including desserts, and decorations, music, and games. We always share a message about true biblical love or the relationship between couples and the Gospel.

Sometimes, Dale gives the gospel message. But, over the years, the speakers have included other missionaries serving with CMML and Paraguayan church leaders. Inviting these guest speakers gives people in the San Juan Bautista assembly the opportunity to meet and get to know other Christians.

We can't say that someone has accepted the Lord because of the event. Nevertheless, it has many benefits: Youth not in relationships help serve the meal, which involves them in the church's work and encourages them. Couples enjoy a nice night out, which is very special for some. A few church members are married to unsaved spouses, and the Valentine's dinner is the only time they attend a meeting at the church building. And, finally, the event provides an opportunity to present the Gospel and speak on topics related to marriage and biblical love.

One year, a dating couple got engaged at the Valentine's dinner. They have now been married for about 13 years, they have three children, and they continue participating in the local church. They have, at times, been involved in helping to organize our annual event.

Lord willing, another Valentine's dinner will take place this month. Please pray for the event and especially for the nonbelievers who might attend. ■

From top: Dale and Rose enjoy the beautiful decorations; The speakers have included missionaries Joe and Ramona Kay Marquez (MPH Day 21); Each year, couples such as these attend the dinner. **Below:** The organizers and helpers pose for a quick picture.

Rosemary Konkol and her husband, Dale, are commended from Mountain Ridge Bible Chapel in Berkeley Heights, New Jersey.