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THINKING IT THROUGH

BY ALAN PARKS

Choosing to Give Our All

Recently, my thoughts have centered on giving. Whenever that happens, it all comes back to our great Exemplar, the Lord Jesus, who gave His all. What initially prompted these thoughts came from 1 Chronicles 29, where David, concerned for his son Solomon, addresses the people. In the passage, Solomon is young, tender, and inexperienced, yet God has chosen Him to build the temple, a dwelling place worthy of the King of Kings. He would need vast supplies of precious metals and costly materials to build the temple to God's divine standards. David's appeal begins with himself. He will not ask the leaders and people to do what he wouldn't, so he offers a promise: he will give from his personal treasury 3,000 talents of the gold of Ophir and 7,000 talents of refined silver.

David's gift to God was staggering. If a talent weighs between 75 and 125 pounds (34–56.7 kilograms), as scholars estimate today, he contributed approximately 100 tons of gold and 260 tons of silver. When we consider that, at the time of writing this devotional, gold is worth \$2,917 (US) per ounce and silver is valued at \$32 (US) per ounce, the sum is nearly impossible to fathom. "Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small."¹

We must remember that while David gave much, there was undoubtedly more left—a stunning amount yet partial. We think again of our Savior; He gave His all. In 1 John 3:16, we read, "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

Do you agree that when we hear about giving, it's usually about finances? While important, that's only one part of our giving. We must also commit to giving our time, talents, gifts, and even ourselves to the Lord.

Still, though we aren't bound by the tithe, we are expected to submit to Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 9:7: "So let each one

give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver." History is replete with individuals known for their philanthropy; heaven should be filled with those who properly regarded things temporal versus things eternal and chose correctly.

Luke recorded our Lord's words on the practical aspects of giving: "He answered and said to them, 'He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.'" (Luke 3:11) In the church, the gifts given to us when the Holy Spirit sealed us are also critically important. Gifts given freely are never meant to be buried. "As each one has received a gift," 1 Peter 4:10 teaches us, "minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

We see a pattern through all of this: others. Our giving is always for God first and then others. In contrast to our self-centered society, God has given us a great many teachings on selfless giving, with one example above all.

Our Lord left His eternal home for one purpose: Others. Us. His life, ministry, teachings, and service were living gifts. His suffering, shame, crucifixion, and bearing of our sin in those agony-filled hours of redemption were the greatest dying gifts ever given. This is our great Example, the One of whom Paul could say, "Just as I also imitate Christ." (1 Corinthians 11:1)

Giving is not just a large subject to study; it must be a life choice. It has made me wonder—quite a lot, actually—how does my life measure up? It is a question not to be taken lightly.

It's easy to sing the words "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my heart, my life, my all." It's much harder to live them, isn't it? May God shake us from any carelessness and make us seriously consider the giving of our hearts, our lives, and, indeed, our all. ■

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Alan Parks is a commended worker based in Texas.

¹ Isaac Watts, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," 1707.

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OBSERVATIONS FROM A TRIP TO MEXICO



Generational Teamwork Facilitates Church Planting in Michoacán

BY JIM FLEMING

It seems we hear a lot of bad news about Mexico in the media: Border issues. Gang violence. Drug cartel wars. Accusations of political corruption. But come on a trip with my wife, Sharon, and me to Michoacán, Mexico. You'll get a completely different view.

Before we dive in, what and where is Michoacán? It is one of the 31 states that form the United States of Mexico and sits between two of the country's largest cities, Mexico City and Guadalajara. Much of Michoacán rises above 7,000 feet in the Sierra Madre Occidental mountain range covered with beautiful, green forests. It's nothing like the stereotypical desert and cactus on postcards.



Every morning at Campamento Bera, where we spent nine nights, the temperature would be in the crisp upper 40s (Fahrenheit). The mountain cold permeating the uninsulated rooms would

make us want to stay under our four thick blankets a little longer and then dress at record speed. By lunchtime, the bright Mexican sun would have us peeling off layers down to our shirtsleeves.

We traveled to Michoacán and Campamento Bera at the invitation of missionaries Ted and Priscilla Clark (*Missionary Prayer Handbook* Day 16). Priscilla grew up in Guatemala, where her parents served with Central America Mission (CAM). She and Ted met at Moody Bible Institute in the early 1980s, knowing they were headed into missions. After they married, they joined CAM in Mexico, but on frequent trips to Texas, they

became involved with assemblies in the Dallas area. Eventually, Centerpoint Church in Mesquite, Texas, commended them.

Thirty-five years later, we got to experience Michoacán with the Clarks and met their children and families and the seven CMML missionaries who work alongside them. This group is hard at work planting assemblies in many towns. It's a complex and amazing story of cooperation. It's a movement of God's Spirit that I will try to simplify into sequential phases.



Phase 1: The start



Let's begin with Bard and Pam Pillette (MPH Day 30), who were brilliantly saved out of homes antagonistic to spiritual things. They preceded the Clarks, arriving in Mexico in 1980 under CAM. Bard taught at a Bible school for a time and then began planting churches in several cities. Bard and Pam entered the assemblies through Believers Chapel while Bard completed graduate studies in Dallas, Texas. They helped plant McKinney Bible Chapel north of Dallas. After returning to Mexico, they established a church in Irapuato and began an evangelistic outreach in Salamanca.

Enter Ted and Priscilla Clark. They arrived in Salamanca and got involved in the efforts there. Helping in other towns, they joined the growing work in Morelia, Michoacán's capital—a ministry that Denny and Arlene Norris (MPH Day 30), with CAM at the time, had started.

Left: Mountains and valleys surround Campamento Bera. Right (from top): The entire Clark family is involved in the ministry; The Pillettes began serving in Mexico in the 1980s.

Phase 2: The switch

Then, the Pillettes, Clarks, and Norrises left CAM. They were already involved with assemblies in the States and had become convinced of the New Testament principles of church gathering and missions. They were happily commended to Michoacán in the early to mid-1990s.

Phase 3: Campamento Berea

While serving in Morelia with the Norrises, the Clarks bought a large, inexpensive piece of land about an hour outside town. They have since developed this beautiful hilltop acreage into a thriving ministry center, Campamento Berea. Ted is a phenomenal leader, motivator, and encourager who exudes Christ's love, a love for people, and evangelistic zeal from his perpetual warm smile. Priscilla is caring, strong, and hospitable, tirelessly supporting the next project or activity Ted's vision has drawn them into. The results are visible in their extended family, at Campamento Berea, in nearby towns, and in the lives of countless people affected by the Gospel.

A large church in Arkansas has invested in developing the complex. Over the years, five homes have been built going up the hill to the camp complex on the flattened hilltop. The complex can accommodate over 500 campers in tents and cabins. It is complete with a huge auditorium and dining room with an efficient kitchen that can serve the 500-plus people in 15 minutes.

The family camps, retreats, and discipleship programs held at Campamento Berea produce spiritual results. An assembly has been planted on the property. Young, married workers who live on the property are mentored spiritually and practically to be sent out to plant churches.



Phase 4: Teamwork

Historically, an inability to work together has been a major factor in missionaries leaving the field prematurely. What Sharon and I observed in Michoacán was the opposite. The team members range from 21 to 78 years old. Many started at Campamento Berea but, once equipped, spread out to plant assemblies in other towns.

Their evangelistic method, AMOR Divino, is teamwork par excellence. Annually, the whole missionary force, plus some from the USA, gathers in one town they have prayed for and does a door-to-door blitz with gospel literature. Conversations lead to

offers of Bible studies. Once those start, a newer missionary takes the lead and soon moves to that town to watch the Lord raise up an assembly. To date, they have planted 10. Three more are in progress. Praise God for this expansion through biblical teamwork!

Phase 5: The Oregon connection

Let's briefly return to Bard and Pam Pillette. In 1994, they returned to Oregon and, soon after, planted a Hispanic assembly in Medford. The Spanish-speaking population was open to the Gospel, and the work grew. Over the years, a network of Hispanic assemblies has expanded to Grants Pass, Eugene, Cannon Beach, and most recently, Brookings. The Oregon team includes Denny and Arlene Norris in Cannon Beach and Alejandro and Adriana Chavez (MPH Day 29) and Monica Sernatinger (MPH Day 30) in Eugene. All had been in Mexico. There is much communication, travel, and cooperation between the ministries in Oregon and Michoacán, which brings us to the next phase.

Phase 6: The next generation

The Oregon–Mexico connection is growing. Oregon assemblies are commending the next generation, several of which grew up in Mexico and have returned to Michoacán.

In 2007, Cabe and Christine Pillette (MPH Day 16) became the first commended from the Medford assembly, the one Cabe's parents planted. They and their four children serve in a church-planting ministry in Pátzcuaro, Michoacán.

Michael and Sofia Clark (MPH Day 16), Ted and Priscilla's second son, were commended from Cannon Beach in 2020. They are planting an assembly in Ciudad Hidalgo with their family of five children.

John Mark Norris (MPH Day 16) arrived in 2023, commended from Cannon Beach. As an MK, he already knows the language and culture, and he uses his creative and scientific interests to effectively reach out to children and youth.

Over the years, CMML workers from other states and countries have joined the work. Martin and Hansy Tuohy (MPH Day 17) grew up in the assemblies in Denmark and the Faeroe Islands respectively. Martin earned a master's degree at Dallas Theological Seminary, and in 2010, Community Bible Chapel in Richardson, Texas, commended them to Mexico. Currently,



Left: The missionaries who live at Campamento Berea enjoy dinner with the Flemings. **Right (from top):** Michael and Sofia Clark serve in Ciudad Hidalgo; The Tuohys support the assembly in Puruándiro.

Martin, Hansy, and their children are involved in a church plant in Puruándiro, Michoacán—a result of an AMOR Divino outreach.

About four years ago, Luke and Emily Rathke (MPH Day 16) were commended from Cedar Rapids Bible Chapel in Iowa. With their two sons, they work alongside Cabe and Christine Pillette in Pátzcuaro.

Phase 7: Our amazing visit

Michoacán is only a four-hour flight from Chicago. On our first day, Michael and Sofia Clark took us to see Pátzcuaro, a colonial town where the Pillettes and Rathkes started an assembly. Then, we traveled to Uruapan to have lunch with the Clarks' youngest son, Nathan, and his wife, Keyla. They recently settled into their life there, and their ministry is in the Bible study stage.

On Saturday, people arrived at Campamento Berea for a family camp over a long weekend. Over 400 people attended, coming from assemblies up to four hours away. They brought unsaved friends too. The program mixed four messages each day with periods for snacks, sports, special events, and delicious Mexican meals. Five people, including myself, did the teaching, and the audience was very receptive. Three adults decided to follow Christ over the weekend, and six were

baptized on the last day. What a joy it was to meet so many new friends in Mexico!

Camp emptied Monday afternoon, but the joy overflowed for the next three days. About 60 people from the Michoacán team spent time in thanksgiving sessions around the roaring fireplace, cooked favorite dishes, played a lot of volleyball, and relaxed. Some of the Michoacán missionaries were in the States at the time: Cabe and Christine Pillette, John Mark Norris, and Luke and Emily Rathke. We missed meeting them. However, Bard and Pam Pillette, who had switched places with Cabe and Christine, joined us. Another nice addition was Marcus and Jen (MPH Day 15, last name withheld for security), who work among an Indigenous people group in Orizaba, a few states over. Since they do not have any colleagues, I asked if they could join the missionary retreat. They drove nine hours, were warmly welcomed, and had a blast.

The main event, a special dinner, was cooked in a huge metal box lowered four feet underground into a pit full of charcoal. The process started on Tuesday. Then, the fire was ignited on Wednesday evening with a huge blast. Lots of gasoline and fireworks were involved. The men had a great time linking all the explosives! When the charcoals were ready, the food box was lowered in and covered at 2:00 a.m. on Thursday. Twelve hours later, it was unearthed, and the results were mouthwateringly delicious. What a feast—Michoacán missionary style!

There is so much to thank the Lord for in Michoacán. We praise Him especially for the hardworking, cooperative, visionary, church-planting, family-oriented team that is now blessed with Christ-centered assemblies in more and more Mexican towns. ■



Jim and Sharon Fleming serve on CMML's missionary care team.

Left (from top): The Flemings toured Pátzcuaro's colonial architecture; The 400-plus attendees listen to a message; The missionary retreat encouraged these workers. **Middle:** The team cooked a special meal in an underground fireplace. **Right:** Missionaries sing around the fireplace.

Interview with Carlos & Anna Grace Cruz



New Missionaries Share about Daily Life

In 2023, Carlos and Anna Grace Cruz followed the Lord to Colombia, South America. With commendation from Overbrook Gospel Chapel in Greenville, South Carolina, they began supporting the existing assembly work around Bogotá. Since the Cruzes' arrival, their efforts have developed to include preaching and teaching, discipling growing believers, leading a home Bible study, and helping with church ministries. Alongside their work, they're raising their two sons, Agustín (2) and Josías (11 months), and praying for God's wisdom as they consider where He wants them to serve in the future. Please pray that God will guide the Cruzes, encourage them in their ministry, and continue equipping them as parents.

What is your area of Colombia like?

We live in Chía (think of the chia seed), a small town on the outskirts of Bogotá. Bogotá is a huge city with a population of about 10 million people, while Chía has a population of about 160,000. We enjoy living here because the pace of life is slower than in Bogotá and there's much less traffic.

What is the weather like?

Since we're on the equator, we don't have seasons. Chía is in the mountains, so the climate is pretty mild, around 60 degrees Fahrenheit. We've noticed that the weather can change very quickly. It may be sunny in the morning but, within a few minutes, may start raining very hard.

How do you get around?

We're grateful for the car the Lord provided when we moved here. It's a seven-passenger vehicle, so it has space for our family and allows us to give rides to other people.

What foods do you eat?

We eat a lot of chicken and rice as well as fresh fruits and vegetables, which are cheaper here than in the States. When Anna Grace was pregnant with our second son, she got cravings for Papa Johns pizza—thankfully, that's available here!

What's a cultural difference you're adjusting to?

Colombians are very spontaneous in hospitality. Sometimes, people show up without notice. At times, that can be a little inconvenient, but we've also learned how the cultural attitude helps us develop relationships with people. Even if you hadn't made plans, you might end up at

someone's house eating *onces* (basically a snack), or you could end up preparing *onces* for someone whom you didn't expect.

How do you get to know people?

Having little kids helps. We have a few neighbors with children, so we spend time with them while the kids play outside. Carlos also plays soccer every week with a group of guys in the community. We've also met several people through Carlos's family.

Do you speak, or are you learning, Spanish?

Carlos is from Colombia, so Spanish is his native language. Anna Grace learned Spanish in high school and majored in it in college. She's now learning Colombian colloquialisms and slang and is already using some of them!

What does a typical week look like for you?

During the week, Carlos spends a lot of time studying and preparing material for church. He also teaches once per week at a local seminary. Anna Grace takes care of the kids and the house. We try to spend time with Carlos's family, our neighbors, and people from church, and we host a weekly home Bible study. On the weekends, we often have events at church on Saturdays and then spend Sundays at our home assembly or visiting other assemblies.

What do you like to do for fun?

We both like reading books and watching movies and historical documentaries. We also enjoy spending time as a family, going to parks, and eating ice cream.

Do you use any personal hobbies in your ministry?

Carlos plays soccer every week and uses it to build relationships through which he can share the Gospel.

What's raising two young boys in Colombia like?

Since Carlos is from Colombia, our kids are very involved in the culture through his family. Auggie is two years old, and he has started to say words in English and Spanish, which is fun to see.

Josías was born in Colombia, and we've noticed cultural differences in how Colombians treat pregnant women and newborns. For example, after birth, the mom and newborn are expected to stay at home for 40 days while the grandmother makes food and cares for them. A week after Josías was born, we as a family went out to have ice cream, and people were shocked to see such a small baby outside. You must learn to be sensitive to people's opinions on matters like these, even while you do things differently.

What do you miss the most?

We miss family and church friends. We're grateful we can stay in contact with them through technology. Anna Grace also misses certain foods that can't be found here, such as sweet tea and Chick-fil-A. However, we're thankful that we can find things such as peanut butter and bagels.

What is challenging? And what is exciting?

Traffic in Bogotá can make it hard to spend time with people from church outside of the church context. It takes a long time to get anywhere within the city.

It's exciting that there are many opportunities and needs in our assembly in Bogotá and in the surrounding towns. To avoid the stress of the city, and thanks to the option of working from home, many young families are moving to towns outside Bogotá. Some of these towns do not have a sound, biblical church. That's a great ministry opportunity we are willing to take if the Lord leads us in that direction.

Do you feel settled?

We do. Carlos's family lives right down the road and has been a huge help with the adaptation process. We're also grateful for other missionary families in the area that have supported us in our move.

How can we pray for you?

Pray for God's direction as there are many opportunities and needs around us. Pray, too, that we as a family will grow spiritually, that we will love God and people more, and that we will raise our children with wisdom and grace. ■



From top (and L-R): Carlos speaks at a kids' camp; Every week, the Cruzes host a home Bible study; Carlos and Mike Dubberly (MPH Day 20) baptize a young woman from their church; Carlos preaches at his home assembly; Church friends hang out after playing soccer.

The Directors, Staff, and Volunteers behind



For the past 104 years, CMML has been committed to advancing the spread of the Gospel globally by serving US assemblies and their missionaries. We support New Testament assemblies as they commend and care for their missionaries; provide strategic services that enable those workers to fulfill their God-given ministries; and encourage all generations of believers to be enthusiastic missions supporters. God has equipped our team with unique skills, and we are privileged to serve Him and His people.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

CMML is blessed with leaders who seek to honor the Lord in every decision they make. The board meets quarterly to discuss CMML's direction and goals, and its committees meet periodically.



Robert Sullivan, president

Serving on CMML's board since 2018

In fellowship at Bethany Chapel in Yonkers, New York



Joel Hernandez, vice president—communication

Serving on CMML's board since 2014

In fellowship at Concord Community Church in Anderson, South Carolina



Allan Wilks, vice president—technology

Serving on CMML's board since 2004

In fellowship at Terrill Road Bible Chapel in Fanwood, New Jersey



Stephen Swaim, secretary

Serving on CMML's board since 2007

In fellowship at Kenilworth Gospel Chapel in Kenilworth, New Jersey



John Collette, treasurer

Serving on CMML's board since 1979

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Eric Barton

Serving on CMML's board since 2018

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Serving on CMML's board since 2008

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Serving on CMML's board since 2009

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Kenneth Switzer

Serving on CMML's board since 2012

In fellowship at Bethany Bible Chapel by the Sea in Satellite Beach, Florida



Thomas Turner

Serving CMML's board since 1997

In fellowship at Monterey Chapel in Leola, Pennsylvania

OFFICE & BUILDING STAFF

CMML's office and building staff comprises full-time and part-time employees who serve assemblies, missionaries, and supporters daily. Their tasks range from finances and communication to maintenance.



John Peasland, executive director, is responsible for CMML's day-to-day operations and staff oversight. He also implements strategic decisions and enhances CMML's communication with assemblies and supporters.



Heather Zappella, office manager, handles financial and organizational tasks to ensure the CMML office runs smoothly. She also coordinates the production of the *Missionary Prayer Handbook*.



Helen Brown, housekeeper, cleans and tidies the CMML Missionary Guest Home so each missionary's stay is comfortable.



Russ Click, building maintenance, helps keep the CMML facility functioning and well cared for.



Alan Coburn, facilities manager, plans, implements, and supervises regular maintenance and improvements to the CMML Missionary Guest Home and office.



Sarah Dunlap, *Missions* editor, plans, coordinates, and edits each issue and manages its administrative tasks, including subscriptions. She also helps produce the handbook and other communication.



Jennifer Evans, donor relations coordinator, processes donations and mail and answers donors' questions. She also organizes special projects and schedules visits to the CMML Missionary Guest Home.



Craig Fritchey, assembly relations and missionary care liaison, arranges the missionary care team's logistical side, communicates with US assemblies, and helps maintain CMML's website.



Jean Garcia, digital media editor, manages CMML's social media accounts, creates conference materials and videos—including the monthly "Missions Update"—and helps with CMML's website.

VOLUNTEERS

CMML has many faithful volunteers who sacrificially serve the Lord. We appreciate each one. The following volunteer regularly or have leadership roles:

Christine Coburn, donation processing and office assistant

Judy Gallagher, magazine and office assistant

Peg Hart, office assistant

Marilyn Ridsen, clothing center manager

Sean Stoddard, building maintenance

MISSIONARY CARE

As part of our staff, the missionary care team serves US assemblies by communicating with, visiting, equipping, and praying for their missionaries. The members are commended to their roles.



Tim & Joy Beer use their experience as missionaries in Zambia to support the workers in Africa and Asia. They are commended from Ardsley Bible Chapel in Ardsley, Pennsylvania.



Jim & Sharon Fleming served in Latin America and now care for the CMML missionaries there and in the Caribbean. They are commended from Hillview Bible Chapel in Cupertino, California.



Phil & Mary Parsons, who served in the Philippines, care for the missionaries in Europe and the US. They are commended from Fifth Avenue Chapel in Belmar, New Jersey.

THANK YOU

We are grateful for the many people who make CMML possible: assemblies, missionaries, supporters, and our team. Besides the names listed here, other believers contribute to the work, whether offering their skills or prayers. We appreciate that many *Missions* readers faithfully pray for our team (especially on Day 31 of the *Missionary Prayer Handbook*, where we are listed) and humbly ask you to continue upholding us in prayer. Above all, we thank the Lord for His faithfulness and praise Him for His work around the world. ■

CMML MSC

MOP

MISSIONS ORIENTATION PROGRAM

May 30–June 6, 2025

Visit www.CMML.us/mop for more information and to register.

Tomorrow

By Krista Besselman

“Tomorrow I’ll get serious.”
But now I see—with sorrow—
Today was just another day;
Today was not tomorrow.

“Real soon I’ll seek the things of God.”
But Time and I are traitors.
For as we make our merry way,
How soon the “soon” is later!

When all my days are yesterdays,
And all tomorrows scattered,
May I have learned to live my life
For all that really matters.

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