



Network

MISSION TO THE WORLD • PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA • SPRING 2007

HELPING Third Culture Kids THRIVE

Carter Davis



CHARLIE JONES

When a missionary is preparing to enter the mission field, there are a host of crucial factors to consider. Have I raised enough financial support? Am I spiritually prepared? Are my affairs in order?

But one of the biggest concerns for families entering the mission field is caring for their children during the transition and beyond. MKs (missionary kids) inevitably

trade their relatively stable lives in the U.S. for a future filled with uncertainty, travel, and constant change.

No amount of planning can fully prepare these children for the challenges of living abroad—sometimes in a culture openly hostile to Western influence. As a result of their parents' commitment to God's call, many MKs feel out of place both

on the mission field and back "at home" in the U.S.

Although Mission to the World has long strived to help MKs with this tough transition—which occurs during an already difficult time in their lives—its Third Culture Kids (TCK) ministry has recently undergone an overhaul. ➤

The ministry is now called Youth and Family Ministry, but the changes go far beyond the name change.

Been There, Done That

There is perhaps no one more qualified to lead MTW's new Youth and Family Ministry (YFM) than Eric Larsen, its recently-appointed director.

"I grew up as an MK and a military brat," Eric recalls. "My mom was an MK as well, born in Kanpur, India. My parents served as missionaries with MTW in Africa, where my little brother was born, and we lived in Australia from my 5th grade year until I went off to college. My dad's introduction [of our family] would go something like this: 'I'm an American, who married an Indian, fathered an African,

and became an Australian. We're a true international family.'"

By the time Eric entered 8th grade, he had been through 12 moves, eight schools, multiple states, and lived on three continents.

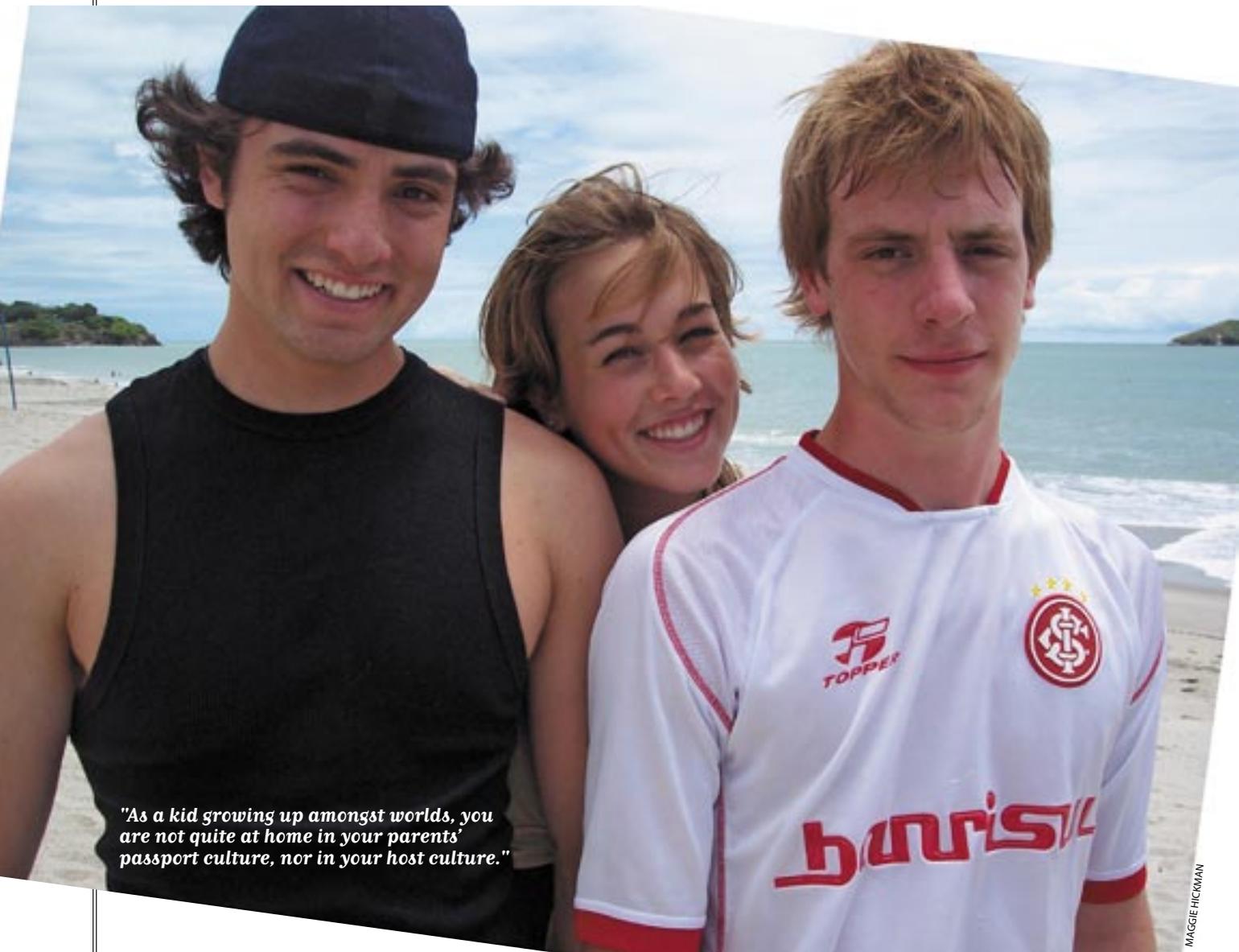
Going through one's teen and pre-teen years is tough enough on its own. Spending those years on three different continents certainly doesn't make the transition to adulthood any easier.

"As a kid growing up amongst worlds," Eric said, "you are not quite at home in your parents' passport culture, nor in your host culture. Rather, you find that your story connects you to a 'third culture'—one not tied to a nation or location, but found in the relationship with others who share your experience; you're a Third Culture Kid."

According to Steve Collins, director of MTW's Spiritual Life Department, which oversees Youth and Family Ministry, "The importance of this ministry can't be overstated. If MKs struggle in the field it sometimes results in the family leaving the field prematurely. But if our MKs have a positive experience on the field, it could result in their returning as adult missionaries and raising their own families in the field. With each succeeding generation that serves, the gospel's influence multiplies."

One-on-One Support

The success of MTW's Youth and Family Ministry will depend largely on how well



"As a kid growing up amongst worlds, you are not quite at home in your parents' passport culture, nor in your host culture."

A LIFE SPENT BLENDING IN

Eric Larsen



As a child in Kenya I had a pet chameleon.

I used to love to watch him catch flies and mosquitoes with his long, sticky tongue and blend into his environment by being very still—not attracting

attention to himself, not wanting to stand out, and even going so far as to change colors to match the terrain. But there was one color I was told my chameleon couldn't mimic—the color red. I was instructed never to put him on this color because it would harm him.

One day, I took my chameleon to school. While playing at recess I unwittingly sat his cage down on a bench—a bench painted red. That was the end of my pet. He died trying to be something he wasn't.

In the years that followed, I found that I became much like my chameleon; I was trying to find life by fitting in—fitting into each culture, each context, each new church, youth group, school, and community.

Like my chameleon, I was trying to find life by fitting in, and it was killing me.

As I write this I can look around my study and see testimonies to God's work—symbols for me to contemplate, each representing stories I'm ready now to share with anyone who'll listen. God has shown me we don't live life by fitting in. We're being fitted for life with Him.

This is the message I long for our Third Culture Kids to embrace.



CHARLIE JONES

it connects with TCKs. Like Eric, many involved in the ministry have a wealth of firsthand experience to share.

Will Meiners—a former MK who spent his childhood in Africa with his missionary family and is now a youth pastor at Providence Presbyterian Church in Murphy, N.C.—is one such leader frequently called upon to help minister to MTW's many MKs.

"MKs often don't have access to the ministries and support they need on the mission field," he said. "Sometimes this produces a greater need for peer interaction and one-on-one support for these kids than for non-MKs. That's why we placed a heavy emphasis on these types of things at the missionary retreat in Panama last fall."

The aim of MTW's Youth and Family Ministry is broad. "One of the goals of this new ministry is to raise up an army of youth workers, both in the U.S. and abroad," said Steve. "And we want to equip those workers to reach our MKs and help them, in turn, reach youth around the world."

Upon returning to the States as a college student, Eric said that he began the difficult process of assimilating back into Western culture, which involved a systematic removal of all the possessions and friendships that reminded him that he'd grown up "different."

"I was determined to find life by fitting in," he said. "And a little more of me died in the process."

But with time, and an unexpected missions opportunity in his onetime home of Australia, came a newfound appreciation for his global roots. Eric's embracing of these roots, and his desire to help foster other MKs through similarly tough times, led him to MTW's Youth and Family Ministry. He is currently raising support for this new position.

"As students living lives of high mobility and growing up cross-culturally," Eric said, "Third Culture Kids know what it is to carry a backpack. Luggage is a key part of life, and God is indeed outfitting them for life with Him—filling their life's backpack with stories, experiences, relationships, and truths that He will use to bless them and advance His kingdom." ■

To learn more about MTW's Youth and Family Ministry, contact Eric Larsen at eric.larsen@mtw.org, or call Steve Collins at (678) 823-0004 ext. 2286.

Kids Helping Kids: Mosquito Nets Save Lives

Michele Harold

In 2002, a church in South Asia approached MTW with an alarming problem. More than 50 percent of their church members contracted malaria every year, and they had just lost their pastor and an elder to the disease. Malaria was devastating their community.

Dr. Ted Kuhn, director of MTW's Medical Department, received the church's request for help and began researching the problem.

"They were being infected with malaria from the mosquitoes," Ted explains. "But because they lived in remote jungles in the mountains, it was too difficult to do anything like widespread spraying to kill the mosquitoes."

Based on his research, Ted decided the best course of action was mosquito nets. "The nets are soaked in a chemical called Permethrin, which is an insecticide. The mosquitoes land on the nets and die in less than two minutes. Because children are the most vulnerable to malaria, we chose to distribute the nets to them."

The mosquito net campaign has been enormously successful—reaching as many as 10,000 children in 19 villages over the last four years—and recently was chosen as MTW's 2007 children's missions project.

This annual project invites children to raise money for a missions need.

"Every year, MTW produces a video for churches to show children," said Ted. "The video highlights a specific field of work and gets kids involved in and aware of mission work that they can be a part of."

The mosquito nets featured in this year's project will not only shield children, but also, by killing the mosquitoes, will protect other families and neighbors nearby. "These nets save lives," said Ted. "And the nets are inexpensive. For just a few dollars, we are able to protect kids and their families for several years."

Another vital element of this project is teaching indigenous people how to soak the nets. "We asked for two people from each village to come to a central location so we could train them," said Ted. "We showed them how to utilize the nets to offer the most benefits." He has taken a group of nurses and community health workers on several trips to provide that education, which is crucial because outsiders are unable to travel with the nets into many remote villages.

More than four years after the mosquito net effort began, many nets need

to be replaced, and more villages in South Asia are desperate for the same support.

This project aims to accomplish those goals and introduce children to mission work at the same time. "It's a really important way to encourage children to be a part of God's mission throughout the world at a young age," says Ted. "They can see that their contributions do make a difference. It really becomes a gift from kids to kids." ■

To order a DVD of this year's children's missions project, e-mail info@mtw.org or check the tick box and return the coupon on page 15.



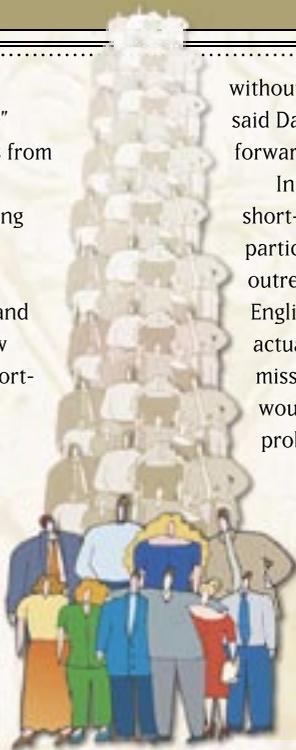
Tithe Your Members to Missions

MTW is embarking on a new challenge to PCA churches, with its "Tithe Your Members to Missions" campaign. PCA pastors recently received postcards from MTW encouraging them to send 10 percent of their membership on short-term missions trips this coming year through MTW.

"Churches that are active in missions grow and thrive," said David White, MTW's director of One- and Two-Week Ministries. "They often gain a whole new dynamic through their members participating in short-term trips."

As a church planter and missionary in Mexico, David and his family hosted dozens of short-term teams. "Often, people would get halfway through the trip and say, 'Hey, I could do a ministry like this back home.' We also saw several long-term missionaries receive their call to the field through a short-term trip."

Short-term missions benefits the field as well. "We planted five churches in 10 years in Mexico, but we would have planted only one or two



without the help of all those short-term missionaries," said David. "Their involvement moved our ministry forward at a higher speed."

In 2006, more than 7,000 people went on MTW short-term missions trips to more than 50 countries, participating in sports ministries, street child outreaches, vacation Bible school, construction, English camps, and medical missions. If PCA churches actually sent 10 percent of their membership on missions trips in 2007, more than 26,000 people would participate. "We would love to have the problem of serving that many people," said David.

Bulletin inserts are available upon request. To learn more, e-mail titheyourmembers@mtw.org, visit www.mtw.org/bulletininsert, or call (800) 270-9932.

DISTANCE EDUCATION: *Transforming Culture*

What if there were a way to cover the basic Christian theological needs of the whole Muslim world? That's exactly what MTW's MINTS Distance Education Project seeks to do over the next decade.

"Everywhere we go in the Muslim world, we hear that people want good theological training," said Frank, regional director for MTW's Enterprise for Christian-Muslim Relations. "Muslim-background believers often deal with an ideological conflict in sharing their faith with other Muslims, so equipping them theologically is important."

The MINTS Distance Education Project, now in its third year, has started with a strategic regional extension program. Its partners include Mission to the World, Miami International Seminary (MINTS), and Third Millennium Ministries (headed by Dr. Richard Pratt).

Via this project, classes are being taught and developed locally for select students who will go on to establish other study centers throughout

the regions. These classes are being videotaped, and other materials—such as Third Millennium's curriculum—are being translated and produced in local languages. Together, these materials provide a powerful boost to help spur the multiplication of local study centers.

But the project doesn't stop there.

"Our larger goal is to equip our theological students to become teachers themselves," said Frank, "all for the goal of planting and growing churches and pastors."

To learn more about the MINTS Distance Education Project, or to order a DVD about the project, contact Debbi Beers at debbi.beers@mtw.org, or check the tiek box and return the coupon on page 15.

MTW Lowers Missionary Budget Costs

MTW missionaries were recently notified that their 2007 support budgets were being reduced, particularly in the areas of health care costs and administrative fees, a step which lowers the amount of money each missionary must raise in order to get to the field or to remain there. A support budget includes such items as living expenses, training, benefits, and ministry costs.

"Such lowering of costs seems to be almost unheard of in missions circles," said Dan Iverson, veteran MTW missionary to Japan. "This is such an encouragement to us and our Tokyo team. We are very thankful for your efforts. We know this did not happen without much work, discipline, and hard choices."



MTW was able to reduce its medical premium by five percent because it had fewer large claims than in recent years. And the administrative fee was lowered by more than four percent by asking office managers to budget as conservatively as possible for 2007 with a specific goal to reduce this expense. (MTW also has slightly fewer staff than it did in 2006.)

"We're pleased to be able lower these expenses," said Bill Goodman, MTW's director of field operations. "This is an area we will continue to address as God blesses."



New Mission Opportunities in Brussels

The religious dynamic in Western Europe is rapidly changing. Amid all the cultural diversity, the United Nations estimates that the Muslim population in Europe has doubled in the last decade, now totaling 15 to 20 million. Though ministry in the Middle East has become difficult, the Lord has allowed a gateway to reach the larger Muslim community by providing a natural ministry ground in Europe.

As the capital of Europe and the geographic center of the European Union, Brussels, Belgium, is a strategic location to reach an ever-growing Muslim population and to train Christians with a heart for Muslim ministry in a non-threatening environment.

The MTW team serving in Brussels emphasizes a relational approach to

ministry. In coming months, short-term missionaries will travel to Brussels to help make new contacts through teaching English classes, distributing literature, participating in outreach activities in local parks, completing service projects around the city, and providing other needed services. Afterwards, MTW workers will follow up on new contacts, building on their existing network of relationships.

By serving Muslims in Europe, Christians can reach a people group that has traditionally resisted the Christian faith and potentially revive a once-dominant region of Christian heritage.

For more information on short-term mission opportunities in Brussels, contact Opal Hardgrove at opal.hardgrove@mtw.org.

Mission Adventure Camp

Mission to the World and Covenant College will host Mission Adventure Camp for junior high students, June 18-22, at Covenant College on Lookout Mountain, Ga. The camp challenges students to live boldly for God through the context of outdoor adventure activities. While being confronted to pursue a Christian life of passion and compassion, students will participate in team-building initiatives, teaching, service, and small group dialogue.

For more information, visit www.mtw.org/mac.

PROFILE IN COURAGE:



PRESSING ON for the Kingdom

By Lloyd in Southeast Asia

*“Through many tribulations, we
must enter the kingdom of God.”*

ACTS 14:22

A few weeks before the training begins, Pastor Nguyen is furiously translating material sent to him to prepare for a weeklong training, representing more than 30 hours of lecture material. Once it is translated it must be reproduced, bound, and distributed to 30 students. The logistical preparations in running these two- to three-week intensive courses are a Herculean task. Yet Pastor Nguyen, MTW's national partner in a work in Southeast Asia, still manages to do it every time. By the end of the training, Pastor Nguyen is tired, weak, often sick, and feeling like he wants to die. Yet he presses on. When others express concern for his health and well-being, he replies, "Whatever God calls me to do, I'll do it with all of my heart."

MTW is helping Pastor Nguyen fulfill his vision for the growth and development of Presbyterian churches in Southeast Asia. This desire keeps him very busy. He planted a church himself in the area in 2002 and continues to pastor that congregation. He is the primary trainer for local Presbyterian churches, and holds monthly training seminars. Out of that training there are currently three small-group Bible studies led by evangelists, and four recently-planted churches. Pastor Nguyen oversees all of these works. He hopes to soon establish a solid Bible school and seminary in Southeast Asia to train future generations of Christian workers and pastors.

Certainly, Pastor Nguyen and his ministry are not without trials and temptations. With every two steps forward, it seems like they have to take one step back. There is opposition from within and from without. One of our church planters recently was asked to shut down his house church meetings. When he refused, the local authorities confiscated his house and land. When he moved his meetings to another church member's house, the police came and, through intimidation, prevented the members from gathering.

Ministry in this context is just plain hard. There are opposing political forces, opposing religious forces (jealousies are commonplace), opposing spiritual forces, and a lot of self-doubt and discouragement. Pastor Nguyen is like the rest of us, who often feel like all our sacrifice, effort, blood, and sweat have produced little. He once shared very candidly with me, "I've been doing ministry for 30 years and I have so little to show for it." My heart broke when he shared this with me, because I see how much he does for the kingdom.

The world may look at Pastor Nguyen and be perplexed at why he works so hard for so little, but when the Lord looks down, He sees one of His servants, a warrior, a general, who has given his life for the sake of the kingdom of God. And on the last day, our good Lord will set a crown of gold on his head and say, "Well done, good and faithful servant, come and enter into your Master's joy." ■

Lloyd serves as MTW's regional director for Southeast Asia.



Navigating the Path to the Mission Field

Susan Fikse

In his early 40s, following 20 years of work in a family business, Morgan Roe experienced a sudden and irrefutable call to the mission field. In November 2003, he and his wife, Patti, were ready to uproot their family from their rural Florida home and step out in faith. They were ready to go! Seemingly, this was the hard part—the decision to surrender to the Lord's calling, give up worldly comforts, and take the gospel to those who needed to hear it. Yet, in many ways, that initial decision was only the beginning for the Roe family.

For the Roes, the first step on their path to the mission field was to determine if the family would go through a missions agency or work directly with a national ministry. Following a vision retreat with MTW in Atlanta, Morgan remembers, "We were impressed that there seemed to be a real servanthood characteristic to MTW. There was a humble attitude of serving God and doing it well," which bolstered the Roes' interest in MTW.

A Sometimes Precarious Path

With their application to MTW, the Roes entered a process that the agency has refined through time and experience to ensure the best possible selection and placement of missionaries. While the



MORGAN & PATTI ROE

journey from initial calling to ministry on the field leads missionary candidates along a sometimes precarious path, that path is designed to ensure the best possible chance of success in long-term ministry, explains Bill Golden, MTW's candidate director. "We try to get as much data as possible going into this process. We don't know of anything else we could add to the mix to help us make a better decision," said Bill.

The initial application process begins with a candidate's application form, a recommendation from his or her church

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session, personal references, a theological exam and confidential questionnaire, and a gospel presentation. Then comes a phone interview and additional testing.

For some, the real test comes with REV—Readiness Evaluation. Immersed in a cross-cultural ministry situation for an intense week of evaluation, candidates experience a taste of the challenges on the field. While REV may be a difficult rite of passage for prospective MTW missionaries, Golden says that it is designed to assess some of the most crucial competencies of missionary candidates. "Not getting along with teammates is the number one reason missionaries leave the field prematurely," explains Bill. During REV, interpersonal interactions are assessed in stressful situations, providing insights into the potential success of a candidate on the field. "All the exercises during REV are tied into a competency model developed to measure success objectively," explains Bill.

For Morgan Roe, REV was a welcome challenge. "It was just an opportunity to be prayerfully considered by people who take the responsibility of assessing missionary candidates seriously," he says. The next step for the Roes included Interview and Orientation (I&O), which consisted of a weeklong assessment and orientation by MTW staff for final interviews and training in support-raising and organizational policies.

The Joys and Challenges of Raising Support

Then it was on to the task of raising support. With MTW approval and a team invitation, the Roes entered the itineration stage, as it's called, with momentum and excitement. But, despite help from their MTW support coach, loneliness and discouragement took its toll. "After nearly a year of support-raising," remembers Morgan, "we were only at 30 percent of our goal. We were thinking 'this is a three-year process,' and we were already fried from the transition." So the Roes prayed that God would enable them to reach 50 percent of their support goal within the following four months. In His provision, God provided 60 percent by

the goal date and 78 percent a month later. Golden explains that support-raising serves an important purpose beyond providing missionaries the needed financial and prayer resources. He says, "Support-raising is a final confirmation of the Lord's calling to missions."

Backed by a support team, the Roes were on to Pre-Field Training (PFT) in New York City. "We expected it to be horrible," remembers Morgan. "We were dreading it—we didn't like the city!" But after the sometimes discouraging process of support-raising, New York City was a great encouragement. "We discovered that New York was a cool place," says Morgan. "The classes, experiences, and activities were great. I had so many light bulbs going on during the training; it was like, 'Wow, that makes sense!'" he remembers.

Friends Around the World

Another encouraging aspect of Pre-Field Training for the Roes was the opportunity to connect with other missionary families. "We have 10 to 15 families around the world who we met through MTW training," says Morgan. In addition to PFT, the Roes attended MTW's Living in Grace conference, where they met many others headed for service overseas. "When things get discouraging, it's easy to miss how God's working," Morgan admits. "MTW gives you an opportunity to sense God's greatness and power and the magnitude of His love by hearing from friends around the world."

In June of 2006, the Roes' path culminated in their arrival at their destination: Tijuana, Mexico. Following six months of language training, they will begin work with the church-planting team there in early spring. Looking back over his family's path to the field, Morgan says the decision to join MTW was the right one. "We have received so much training and encouragement from people who have a lot of experience," he says. "Now, we're happy to have a new place to call home." ■



GLOBAL MISSIONS CONFERENCE

PREVIEW

Carter Davis

2007 Global Missions Conference: Go, Connect, Engage

For anyone unfamiliar with Mission to the World's many callings, there may be no better primer than the upcoming Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) Global Missions Conference, November 16-18, in Atlanta, Ga.

Held every three years, the conference is "a great way for our churches to see what is going on in our world, so to speak," said Carla Cobb, Two-Week project administrator and a co-coordinator of the conference for MTW (sponsor of the event). "There are countless opportunities for pastors and church leaders to learn how they can be directly involved in missions. It's also a great place for more in-depth learning."

As one MTW staffer put it, the conference "covers everything from basic, 101-level subjects to master's level classes. It's nice to have a wonderful time, but the conference needs to be relevant for everyone, not just those new to missions."

In 2004, approximately 2,000 people attended the PCA Global Missions Conference, and nearly 300 missionaries and nationals provided first-person accounts of the challenges they face on the mission field, and how God is working in their part of the world.

Additionally, MTW also sponsored (in part or whole) trips to the conference for 363 college students, and is taking steps to offer a similar number of scholarships this year.

On November 16, some 3,000 church leaders, missionaries, and students are expected to converge on downtown Atlanta for three days of immersion in global missions. The event will

feature a keynote address by Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr., chair of the Old Testament Department at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Fla., as well as an address from MTW coordinator Dr. Paul Kooistra.

"We believe [the missions conference] offers an opportunity for the Church to come together in a meaningful way," said Charles Godwin, MTW's director of church resourcing. "And it provides a way for people to hear what God is doing around the world, to share resources, to encourage one another, and to engage their hearts more deeply in the coming of the kingdom."

An additional benefit of the annual conference is the networking opportunities for both small and large churches. While it's often difficult for churches to find a way to identify like-minded churches of a similar size, the conference brings together a large cross-section of the PCA, providing ample opportunities for networking, brainstorming, and relationship building.

Fittingly, the theme of this year's conference is "Go, Connect, Engage."

"For the church leaders and pastors, we want this to be a fantastic opportunity to develop their own missions focus," Carla said. "This event is designed to move the PCA forward, but we want to capture the heart, not just the mind." ■

To learn more about the PCA Global Missions Conference, visit www.mtw.org or call (678) 823-0004.



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MARCO ESCALANTE

A Missionary Made in Mexico

Susan Fikse



If you thought pioneer days were over, meet Marco Escalante. This Mexican-born-and-raised pastor is pioneering new territory with Mission to the World and the Mexican National Presbyterian Church, expanding the kingdom of God in Mexico. Raised in Acapulco in a Catholic home, Marco came to faith in Christ through

an MTW church-planting project in Acapulco, was disciplined and mentored by MTW missionaries, and now serves in partnership with MTW and the Mexican National Presbyterian Church, planting a church in Monterrey.

"In my mind, a pioneer is one who leads the way," says Andrew Lamb, MTW's country director in Mexico. "Marco has been a pioneer in several ways. He's been an early church planter in Northeast Mexico, and one of the most successful. He's a pioneer by working with MTW as a national church planter. And he's the first successful church planter to come out of the Northeast Mexico Partnership," explains Andrew. "But he's a pioneer in one other important way," says Andrew. "Marco is partnering with MTW in considering how we can raise up the next generation of international missionaries from other countries."

Growing in Faith

Marco's story begins in 1967, when he was born to an accountant and housewife in Acapulco. Although the family of nine attended Mass on Sundays, religion was not an important

component of family life. Still, it was through a family member that Marco came to Christ. His brother, Hector, came to know the Lord by way of Maranatha Presbyterian Church, planted by MTW missionaries in Acapulco. Hector encouraged Marco to attend church with him, and gave him a book that explained the Christian faith. "When I got to the third chapter, entitled, 'The New Birth,' God opened my understanding to my sinful state and to His love that sent Jesus Christ to die for my sins," Marco explains. "On October 12, 1982, I asked Jesus to come into my heart and he began to change my life. I was 15 years old."

Unbelievably, Marco began preaching in an MTW church plant at age 17, only two years after his conversion. "The Holy Spirit was at work in my life," is the only way Marco can explain his speedy maturation in the faith. "It was the desire God put in my heart to know Him," he says. "I wanted to read and learn all I could from the Bible."

While studying at Rio Grande Bible Institute, Marco met his wife, Diana, who hailed from Colombia, South America. Following seminary, the Escalantes joined the MTW team in Mexico City at the El Shaddai Church, working with Larry Trotter and other MTW missionaries. "Larry was influential in my life because he is an excellent preacher, and more than anything, because he took time to help me with my sermons," remembers Marco. "His wife, Sandy, played an important role for my wife, Diana. It was an important time to learn what MTW was doing in Mexico City with church-planting projects."

For Marco, this experience with a missionary team sparked his own interest in planting churches. While working with the Mexican National Presbyterian Church for six and a half years, Marco attended missions conferences at Spanish River PCA in Boca Raton, Fla. "I was moved by the ministry of the pastor, Dr. David Nicholas, and I began to hear more about church planting. Each year I learned more, and each year the desire to become a church planter grew," he recalls. In this way, the Lord prepared Marco for the invitation he would later receive from MTW to join a church-planting team in Monterrey.

A New Model for Reaching Mexicans

Although the majority of Mexicans are only nominally Catholic, a desire for spirituality pervades the culture. Despite this, many of the Mexican National Presbyterian churches were not growing, Marco explains. So he blazed a new trail, exploring a new approach to reach Mexico with the gospel. "We were pioneers," says Marco of his core group of 20 adults and children. Just as the apostle Paul planted churches in major cities of the Roman Empire, Marco sees church planting as the model for reaching Mexico. "There are major cities in the country that are growing rapidly, and there are regions in those cities without a Christian witness," he explains. "New churches are able to contextualize in order to evangelize more effectively."

Reformed and covenantal churches are introducing a new aspect of Christianity that is rarely seen in Mexico, says Andrew Lamb. "The Reformed world and life view that advocates a compassionate response to the world around us is distinct in Mexican culture. For Christians to care about social issues and to reach out in mercy is a powerful testimony," he explains. "Marco's church is not only reaching the upper-middle-class business community, but is also extending a hand of mercy to the poor—it is ministering to people across socioeconomic strata."

Marco's church, Encuentro con Dios (Encounter with God), was launched in March of 2001. Within three months, the church

outgrew its rented office space and moved to a larger facility. Today, this vibrant Monterrey outreach is thriving, yet Marco views the assistance of MTW as vital to its success. "The experience of MTW missionaries has helped in areas where we in Mexico are still growing," he reports. "I also believe that the contact with U.S. churches during summer projects has encouraged local believers." Marco looks to his initial experience at Maranatha Church as formative in his development. "For me it was important to be exposed to an evangelistic and missionary vision by the MTW missionaries at the Maranatha Church," he says. "I believe church planting is important because you must emerge with a vision to reach the lost."

This missions pioneer acknowledges his debt of gratitude to those who initially forged the way in Mexico. "I am the direct result of MTW's church-planting efforts," he says. "And I believe that church planting is the most effective means of growing the kingdom of God in a city." With the goal of better equipping himself for the work ahead, Marco plans to begin a master's program at Reformed Theological Seminary's Charlotte, N.C., campus this summer. "After that," he says, "we will return to begin planting a new church." Continuing in partnership with MTW, Marco will no doubt claim more unexplored territory for the kingdom of God and inspire a whole new generation of missionaries made in Mexico. ■



Marco with his wife, Diana, and son, Marco, along with Al "Monterrey Jack" Couch, member of the Northeast Mexico Partnership, and Ruth Garza (R), wife of national church planter Andres Garza.

VIEW FROM THE FIELD:

JUDY IN
NORTH AFRICABehold
the Lamb

I learned when I was little that if my nose was itching, it meant that someone was talking about me. Children in North Africa are taught a similar superstition, but they believe that if you sneeze that means company is coming.

Recently, I thought the reason I sneezed was because of my allergies. Little did I know how much company was on the way. My husband and I were preparing for a baptismal service with new believers, and a worship service and meal for 20 people at our house afterwards. The men planned to buy a lamb ahead of time and have it roasted, and we women would prepare salads, fruit, drinks, and sweets.

The day began early as we headed to the beach for the baptisms. Nine, instead of five, were immersed! Two of them were related to first-generation believers, and thanked God for the witness of their siblings. "I will never forget this day," one said.

We noticed that our group packed a number of vehicles following us to our neighborhood. When I walked into our apartment, I could hardly manage to get through the room because of the number of guests. It's a good thing I did not know that 46 people would be eating lunch at our house that day. We probably would not have slept well, I'm sorry to say. As it was, we gave it over to God as that hour was upon us. We divided up into three tables of 10 people each, with the remaining 16 around a plastic tablecloth on the floor in the TV room. No one complained.

Throughout the afternoon, friends led praise and preaching, and we took communion with the baptized believers before eating the common dish of *mishwe*, roasted lamb, together. Then, after the fruit, mint tea, and pastries, we settled back to hear testimonies. Out of the nine new believers, four came to know Jesus through the witness of their families. What a blessing—from the beginning we have prayed that families here would come to Christ together.

The brother who ordered the lamb a few days before the celebration had asked for about 16 kilos, thinking that we might have up to 30 people. When he went to buy it, the only sheep they had was 23 kilos, which is exactly what one would order if he knew he would be serving 46 people. God knew.

Please pray for these new little lambs in the Lord, and for the church, that this time of relative peace would be extended for the sake of their growth. May God be praised. ▣



Mission to the World is the mission-sending agency of the PCA, helping to fulfill the Great Commission by advancing Reformed and covenantal church-planting movements through word and deed in strategic areas worldwide.

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Dr. Paul Kooistra

2007: A VERY GOOD YEAR

Sitting in a doctor's waiting room earlier this year, I had a chance to gauge the New Year mindset as we transition from 2006 to 2007. Here we are, seven years after Y2K. There was no mention of that transition, even though the world was still turning after all the hysterical hype back then.

Some things have not changed. The American public still expects gloom and doom in 2007. While they are quite happy with their own lives, they expect things to get generally worse throughout the New Year. The number one concern, if you can judge by the number of news articles, is not war, economics, or social injustice, but rather how to lose pounds in 2007.

As I perused these articles, it made me think about what a difference a biblical approach to the New Year makes. The waiting room I was sitting in is in a major cancer institute, and it made me more aware of the fact that life is a gift

from God. The New Year does not belong to us; it belongs to our heavenly Father. We can make all of the resolutions we want to make, but He alone both knows the future and is the author of our future. The Christian is one who lives by faith. For the believer, the New Year will be a great year because God our Father's plans are far better than what we might desire.

This may be the year we go to be with the Lord. While separation is never an easy thing, and even Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus, the glory of our eternal union with Christ is the hope that we long for. Our struggle with this world and with sin will be over. We will be as we were created to be. Rather than fear death, we realize that death has lost its grip on us, and we will pass from this life to the one that is perfect. If this is what awaits us in 2007 it will be by far the very best year.

But suppose that we remain on earth. It will still be a very good year. This fact is

not found in the events that await us, but rather in the reality that we who remain on this earth still have fellowship with Christ through the Holy Spirit. Our heavenly Father has us here as His ambassadors. Christ's kingdom will continue to advance through the earth. There is a cosmic battle going on in this world between good and evil—between God and Satan. The kingdom of our Lord is winning, and the numbers coming to faith around the world are growing. The greatest joy of remaining on this earth is the fact that we are part of this great victory.

Let us pray that God our Father will give us eyes to believe, patience to wait on His grace, and the will to follow Him.

Paul D. Kooistra



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