

## Unlikely "Dream Team" Travels to Mexico

by Amy Glass



Ruth Garza had a goal: putting together the first-ever leadership retreat for women in Protestant church plants in northern Mexico. But Ruth Garza also had a problem: there were not many available teachers who could provide the women ministry leaders with some much-needed Reformed doctrinal teaching.

Ruth Garza's solution: to trust the Lord as she invited total strangers from the PCA to lead the retreat. Can you

imagine recruiting more than 30 women for this historic event, having only one woman's assurance—and she, a near stranger—that it could be pulled off?

The woman providing that assurance was MTW's Sue Harris. Sue had met Ruth in February 2008 and learned of her need for teachers. The next month, Sue had lunch with Sandy Hartley of First Presbyterian in Chattanooga. Sandy happened to tell Sue that her heart's desire was to teach

other women, and that she would love an opportunity to do that worldwide.

And thus, God pulled it off. Sue and Sandy set up a few meetings with women in the Tennessee Valley Presbytery and soon, God had recruited a "dream team" of eight teachers who raised support to travel to the rustic retreat in the mountains overlooking Monterrey, Mexico. Half the team had never been on a missions trip, and five were grandmothers.

## Connecting the Dots

Sue, who works at MTW in Church Resourcing, lives for these partnerships. "I meet so many people, both on the field and in our churches, that it is very easy to connect people so that ministry can happen," she explained. "Of course it is under the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. He moves, I go places, and we pray, and God has already been at work—in those churches, in the people's hearts who go to those churches, and on the field. The bottom line is, I'm a four-year-old playing connect-the-dots with a crayon."

Maybe that's an over-simplification, but sometimes work is easy when God is using your gifts. Sue is great at communicating and networking. Ruth, who serves as an MTW church planter with her husband Andres, is a gifted leader and visionary. She wants to build a local network of encouragement, love, and exhortation so that northern Mexico church planters' wives and women ministry leaders can lean on one other.

Most of the women who came to the retreat are church planters' wives, like Ruth. It is a challenge, because even though most are Mexican, they are usually ministering far from home. They're still missionaries, on their own, and ostracized from the general Catholic community. And—as is often true in the U.S.—during the early stages of a church plant the husband-and-wife team bear most of the responsibility. These

women are giving, giving, giving, and no one is pouring back into them.

## A "Dream Team" Is Formed

That's where Sandy and her team came in. Sue called it the "dream team," because of their compatibility and mix of gifts. For a three-day weekend in February, the eight women taught 35 women from eight local churches (through translators), worshiped corporately with them, took questions in small groups, and enjoyed free time together.

Amy Bristol, who is part of the Monterrey church-planting team, attended the retreat. "It was just delightful!" she said. "It was such a blessing to hang out with other Christian women, to hear their stories, and to be encouraged by them. To pray with people and get to know them intimately was such a privilege," she explained.

The dream team from the States was also blessed, and they grew in many ways. Sixty-nine-year-old Dottie Ness of

Christ Covenant Church in Knoxville, Tenn., wrote to her supporters, "What has God taught me through this experience? Lesson number one is that I have been carrying a burden of luxury and comfort—what we often call God's 'blessings' on us. And I am crippled by this burden. I must throw off everything that hinders me and the sin that so easily entangles me, and run with perseverance the race marked out for me" (Hebrews 12:1).

## On to Better Things

Ruth Garza couldn't be happier. "The team was excellent," she said. "They





Retreat organizers Sue Harris and Ruth Garza

that in all of the eight church plants that participated in the retreat.

Colleen Pfund, a first-time missions trip participant who was sent with the help of East Lanier Community Church in Buford, Ga., said it best. "I know that in my head I had thought that we were going to bless them; instead, we were the recipients of love and care. ... Empowered by the precious Holy Spirit, I found that culture and language were no barrier against God's love. He filled me up as I gave His love away—amazing!"



were one with the women." Many have asked her if they're coming back.

But better than that, some of the nationals at the conference have been inspired to share the gospel with their unbelieving friends. This, says Ruth, is unusual in the Mexican Christian culture, which tends to be legalistic and self-protecting. "They saw something different in this team," Ruth explained.

To her delight, two of the local churches have begun women's ministries because of what they experienced at the retreat. She is ready to replicate



To learn more about opportunities in Monterrey, Mexico, contact Ruth and Andres Garza at [agaraayala@aim.com](mailto:agaraayala@aim.com).

Read Dottie Ness' first-person account of her time in Monterrey on page 12.

# Opportunity Knocks

by Brian Deringer



*W*hat happens to the Church and to missions in challenging times? Not surprisingly, the Church often becomes stronger, bolder, more disciplined, and above all, more reliant on the resources of God. Isn't it interesting that we pray more when money is tight or life is difficult than when it is not? Don't we often look back on difficult times and see that God has done far more than in times of relative ease?

The staff, leadership, missionaries, and donors of MTW are praying fervently and regularly for the provision of God. In spite of the present economic downturn, we have not ceased to mobilize the Church for growth. In fact, interest in missions is as steady as ever—perhaps even stronger. New sites are opening in India, Latvia, Mexico, and more. In addition, the January MTW readiness evaluation event for prospective missionaries saw its largest attendance ever. Observing these trends, we believe that 2009 is not a time to hold back or withdraw. Instead, it is an opportunity to refocus, reinvest, and to celebrate the Lord's provision.

We are, of course, seeking the Lord's wisdom as steward of the resources He continues to provide. The actions we have taken include: a five percent pay cut for all MTW staff; a tight budgeting process which includes a 10 percent reduction in all expenses; a freeze on hiring new staff; a temporary freeze on missionary salaries; and an ongoing careful watchfulness of economic events and trends. At the same time, we are also renewing our efforts to tell the story of MTW and the Great Commission through refreshing our communications, visiting churches, and above all, by saying "thank you" to the Lord as well as to our donors and prayer warriors.

In one of Paul's letters to the Corinthians, he called them to consider the grace that God had extended to the Macedonian churches, for whom during "the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity" (2 Corinthians 8:2). This is a stirring time for the Church to meet the events of the season in a manner different from the world, to demonstrate trust rather than fear and anxiety. It is a time to reflect on "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). It is a time to pray and to encourage one another, but not to shrink. It is a time of opportunity. ■

**Brian Deringer is the director of Global Support Ministries for Mission to the World.**

# "Jan's Home" Underway in India: The 2009 Children's Mission Project

by Melanie Benedict



In Bangalore, India, a number of wide-eyed, barefoot boys, in grubby, tattered clothes smile brightly as a photo of them is taken outside their home. Their smiles and playfulness make it difficult to believe that for these boys, home is the city's train station. Can you imagine living in a train station?

MTW is working to change that for some of these children. And kids across the PCA will be joining that effort as they learn, through the 2009 Children's Mission Project, about efforts to help the lost boys of the Bangalore station. Funds from the project will be used to help build a permanent home for street boys, to be named in honor of Jan Kooistra (wife of MTW coordinator Dr. Paul Kooistra), who passed

away in 2008 after a lengthy battle with cancer.

"Jan was always touched by the children whose lives were being changed through MTW's StreetChild ministry," said Tom Stewart, director of MTW StreetChild. "So it is fitting that StreetChild in southern India would choose to name this home after her."

The idea for Jan's Home grew out of a church in Bangalore whose pastor has worked closely with Mission to the World. He felt the church needed an avenue for mercy ministry and turned to StreetChild for help. A drop-in center for these boys has already been established, and a home will be an extension of that ministry.

"Jan's Home will make all the difference in the world to these boys once it is built," Tom said. "They will

go from not having a family to living in a home."

The goals of Jan's Home will be to provide a clean, safe environment for the boys to live in, regular meals, the opportunity to go to school, loving care and oversight by live-in house parents who will provide both physical and emotional care, and a chance for the boys to be involved in the local church.

"The boys living in the home will not only hear about Christ's love for them, they'll experience it day in and day out," said Tom. "This would literally give them a hope and a future."

## Educating Kids

MTW's annual Children's Mission Project is an opportunity for children to learn about missions and

the compassion of Christ. They also learn to pray and give money to help children who are just like them, but live in vastly different circumstances.

Many children get their first taste of missions by watching the Children's Mission Project video. The 2009 five-part DVD, entitled *There's No Place Like Home*, can be shown in sections or as a whole at vacation Bible school, in church services and programs, in small groups, or individually. ■

**To request a copy of the 2009 Children's Mission Project DVD, *There's No Place Like Home*, contact [info@mtw.org](mailto:info@mtw.org) or check the tick box on page 15.**



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# LIVING THE GOSPEL IN CHEROKEE

by Katie Weaver

"I've been hearing your name and somebody said I should come to your group," said Dorothy as she walked into a women's Bible study led by MTW missionary Tammy Jackson in Cherokee, N.C. "I know a lot about the Bible," Dorothy said boldly, "but I decided to come anyway."

Tammy is Cherokee Indian, and has ministered to Native American people for nearly 18 years, so she recognized Dorothy's "strong, Native American woman" quality. While strength like Dorothy's is often the glue that holds communities together, Tammy knows that this perceived strength can also be a barrier to women understanding the gospel of grace.

Through Tammy's steady discipleship, Dorothy's rough exterior began to soften as she shared honestly about her life, marriage, and family struggles. "God revealed her anger at her husband and her control issues," recounts Tammy. While Dorothy, like many Cherokee, had heard about the Bible and Jesus, the true, heart-changing message of the gospel had never affected her like it did through her relationship with Tammy. Dorothy is now one of three Cherokee women who are leading Bible studies on her reservation.

## Meeting Deep Needs

Discipleship in Cherokee is more than just Bible studies. "I would say 60 percent of my ministry on the reservation is counseling," explains Tammy. Problems like drug abuse, alcohol abuse, domestic violence, and suicide are pervasive

in the community; thus, many Native Americans struggle to grasp the gospel amidst such difficult circumstances.

"What people want to know," explains Tammy, "is 'How do I now live?'"

Tammy knows she is making a difference in lives like Dorothy's, but she also understands her limitations. "My hands are full," Tammy confesses, "and I need a team." In particular, Tammy sees a great need for male mentors and role models since so many of the children and youth in Cherokee grow up without positive male influences. She also has a vision for seeing more Cherokee involved in serving one another. "Many Native American people are happy being recipients, but they also need to be challenged to minister to their own community." Tammy hopes that with a more robust ministry team in place and more Native Americans involved in serving, the foundation would be strong for a church to eventually be planted in Cherokee.

In the meantime, 681 short-term missions team members will travel to Cherokee this summer to serve the community's families through Bible clubs, youth activities, elders ministry, and construction projects. "Of the 11,000 Cherokee who live on the reservation, we estimate that only 1,000 attend church," explains Tammy.

"As the only Native American serving within MTW, I feel a great burden for my Cherokee people," said Tammy. "Please pray for long-term missionary support here so that more people like Dorothy can experience the healing message of God's grace." ■

To learn more, contact Tammy Jackson at [tammymj1200@yahoo.com](mailto:tammymj1200@yahoo.com).



# WHY WE NEED LEADERS

by Susan Fikse

**W**ant to be a leader? Look no further than Amazon.com. Big names peddle their leadership savvy: Rudy Giuliani, Coach Wooden, Colin Powell. Or, take your pick of: *Quiet Leadership*, *Engaged Leadership*, *Primal Leadership*, *Servant Leadership*, *Monday Morning Leadership*. Perhaps you'd rather check out the *Leadership Secrets of Santa Claus* or *Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun*? The constant presence of leadership books on the bestseller list

seems to prove the difficulty of attaining this most-coveted skill.

Yet, whether you're talking government, business, or ministry, leadership is essential to successful organizations. "Ministry always requires leadership," says Bill Goodman, MTW's director of field operations. "But we are living in very interesting times in terms of the changing role of missionaries and missions. Where is God leading us? Where are we headed as a missions

organization? We need leaders within our own context to help us figure that out."

That's why MTW recently developed a leadership training program to help equip MTW staff to lead in new ways. "We are willing to invest in leaders," says Bill. "To me, it is as much a discipleship issue as a leadership issue. Because of the time Jesus invested in leaders, when He left they were able to carry on the ministry. We need to create that same model for MTW."

## A Changing Mission Field

The next step is to take relevant parts of that training to the field, where ministry is changing just as rapidly. "One of the most significant trends we're facing now is the developing church around the world and what God is doing," explains Bill. "Almost anywhere we go in the world today, we don't go in just by ourselves to start new ministries. We can often hook up with local believers where we are going. God is already at work and we can partner in ways that weren't possible before."

This changing face of field ministry requires different leadership skills among missionaries. For example, Bill says that a sense of humility and the mindset of a learner are more important now than ever. "One of the big implications is that now missionaries must be able to equip others, mentor others, and see themselves in a facilitative ministry role," he says.

## Leading Leaders

Ken Matlack, MTW's international director for Europe, points to MTW missionary David Stoddard as one who has demonstrated the leadership skills required in this new style of missions. Arriving in Germany eight years ago—only two years out of seminary—David had little pastoral experience in his background. But Ken laughingly explains that David experienced a brutal method of leadership training when Ken returned to the States unexpectedly, leaving a brand-new church plant in the hands of this novice. David proved persistent, opening a seminary branch, leading the church plant, and overseeing a network of small groups.

"His beginning times were fairly rough because he was young and an American," explains Ken. "But he faithfully loved the people and hung in there. Over time, he won their trust, respect, and love."

In addition to learning German quickly and experimenting with creative outreach methods, David's openness to learning has helped him develop as a leader. "He has pursued learning and growing and finding answers," Ken says, which has enabled him to develop from a novice thrust into leadership into an experienced and respected leader with MTW's national partners in Berlin.

## National Leadership Shines

As national partners become more essential to the mission of MTW, so does developing strong leadership skills among this important group. "A critical aspect of leadership is the development of national leadership in their own context," explains Paul Kooistra, MTW's coordinator. "Our goal is to serve alongside nationals, to provide what they need and ask for, and ultimately to serve under their leadership."

Paul Taylor, MTW's international director for Asia, sees LK as the type of national leader that MTW hopes for when establishing new partnerships. "LK has proven to be an exceptional leader," describes Paul. "He is trusted by his denomination in South Asia. Even though he is one of the youngest pastors, they even made him moderator—the highest role in the denomination."

MTW has been working with LK since his denomination, the Presbyterian Church in South Asia, sent 11 missionaries to another unreached group in South Asia. Today, they are reaching a total of five unreached people groups and the ministry has grown to 2,500 believers in 25 rural churches. Much of that success Paul attributes to LK and his co-leader, who have orchestrated the ministry over the past six years. "Normally, I don't see co-leadership working," says Paul. "But these men have treated each other with respect and made it work in ways it doesn't in other contexts."

In fact, the type of leadership required in Asia is very different from that needed in the West, explains Paul. "It's not a directive type of leadership, but a participative, consultative style. LK leads through relationship and consensus," he says. "He understands the context and how to lead in that context."

## All Shapes and Sizes

Because MTW works all over the world, leaders must adapt to the context—whether they are missionaries acclimatizing or nationals born into their culture. "Leaders come in all shapes and sizes," says Paul Kooistra. "We don't have a personality profile in mind for a leader. Different circumstances and cultures call for different kinds of leaders."

"The biggest challenge for us at Mission to the World is finding key leaders who are sensitive to God's call on their heart, who are open to the ministry of the Spirit in their lives, and willing to follow God's call to be an effective leader," says Bill. In other words, MTW needs leaders who are committed to following the tested principles of leadership taught by Jesus, even when they don't make the bestseller list. ■

# Making Progress in

# UGANDA

by Carter Davis



*Hollenbeck doing agricultural outreach in Mbarara.*

Quite often, missionaries are either in the early stages of working toward an ambitious goal or are finally reaping the fruits of their labors in the service of Christ. It's rare to find a missionary with a foot firmly planted in each camp, but that's exactly where Dale and Kathy Hollenbeck, MTW missionaries in Mbarara, Uganda, who partner with Africa Inland Mission (AIM), currently find themselves.

After eight years of helping develop the Uganda Bible Institute (UBI)—a university designed specifically to train Ugandan pastors and send them out to spread the gospel across Africa—to a level where it can be turned over to national leaders, the Hollenbecks are now free to focus their attentions elsewhere, and that's exactly what they're doing.

"In one sense, we've got a great success story in UBI being handed over to the national church, and we could go and work in other education institutions," Dale said. "But, we aren't confident that that's the most effective thing to do in order to prepare the church here to face the future."

Part of this hesitation stems from the unique spiritual climate in Africa, according to fellow MTW missionary Mike Boyett, who, with his wife, Susan, has worked alongside the Hollenbecks for several years. "You're dealing with an expression of Christianity where it's hard to discern how much is submissively woven into the existing worldview. You think you're making progress, but you come to realize that your words are being absorbed into a different worldview, and they're understanding things in a way that you never intended."



*Diploma students at Uganda Bible Institute.*

So instead, the Hollenbecks and Boyetts are moving into uncharted waters—trying to empower the national church to be the church without needing Western assistance to sustain them. "That's a good thing because it promotes a healthy model of the local church," said Rick Gray, MTW's missional resources director for Africa. "At the same time, there has been a movement away from needs assessment to asset-based assessment, where you go in and say, 'What is here? What can be done with the local resources?'"

The Hollenbecks' ambitious plan could have long-lasting and far-reaching effects on Christianity that could ripple far beyond Mbarara, Uganda, or Africa as a whole.

## Out of the Classroom and Into the Community

The plan, though still very much a work in progress, is being designed to move missions work out of the classroom and into more practical settings, using the assets of the surrounding communities—focusing on several key areas, including agriculture, education, and business.

For example, the agricultural outreach will center around a new form of discipleship training called "Farming God's Way," which teaches stewardship of the land and distills

new habits in people as they learn to care for the earth that sustains them.

Also, the team will begin to focus its efforts on an outreach on the campus of Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST), which provides many opportunities to directly impact the lives of Africa's future leaders.

Mike compared the current flux of the Mbarara ministry to that of a home renovation: "Our 'house' is a bit messy," he said, "but we would love to show you the drawings of what we are hoping it will look like. At one moment it withers us to think about what we're embarking on, but the Lord is the one who initiated this, and He's already put so much on the ground to where we see this thing taking on a life of its own."

Proving this observation is the infusion of doctors, nurses, and physical therapists (in addition to missionaries with farming or entrepreneurial experience) who are either already working in the area or are soon on the way, imparting firsthand knowledge of their respective trades to a people ready—and in need—to receive it.

## Giving the Gospel Traction

"We believe that as we bring the gospel into agriculture, business, and education, we will be giving the gospel more traction in peoples' lives," Dale said. "We'll be

integrating why a person should be working and how God has given us a call to work diligently to glorify Him in everyday work. That's the plan in a nutshell."

"Uganda has the fastest growing population in Africa," said Mike. "This growth is going to stress the agriculture, education, and medical sectors of society. [Our church-planting team] is strategically located in this area of East Africa to provide focused discipleship in these three areas of concern to raise up leaders who can lead not only the church through an uncertain future, but the nation."

In addition to the realization that change often comes not in a classroom but through hands-on experience, the Hollenbecks, Boyetts, and many others are bracing for an uncertain future in Uganda, but all are bolstered by a relatively simple but long-term plan, and a desire to see God at work.

"Our population is going to double in the next 20 years," Dale said. "It doesn't take a genius to see that something has to be done [in Uganda]. So, we need to develop the education in this area. We need to develop the agriculture. Someone's going to do it; I want the church to be on the forefront. Let the gospel have as big an influence as possible." ■

*Dottie Ness was a member of the “dream team” of eight women who recently traveled to Monterrey, Mexico, for a missions outreach to church planters’ wives. Here, Dottie, a 69-year-old grandmother, describes what she learned from her first missions trip.*



VIEW FROM THE CHURCH:

# DON'T WASTE YOUR LIFE!

by Dottie Ness

*I* have returned from my first missions trip with so much to report. Though I expected it, I am still amazed at how the Lord moved and worked during our trip and how He has changed me.

What has the Lord taught me through this experience? Lesson number one is that I have been carrying a burden of luxury and comfort—what we often call God’s “blessings” on us. And I am crippled by this burden. I must throw off everything that hinders me and the sin that so easily entangles me, and run with perseverance the race marked out for me (Hebrews 12:1). These burdens will have to include my time and money and whatever they are being used for that is not advancing the kingdom of God.

Happily, I think our trip was a real blessing to the church planters’ wives who attended our retreat. Each member of our team taught a session, and then we gathered in small groups to discuss questions of application into their lives.

Later in the week, we went to the city of Saltillo, an hour and a half southwest of Monterrey, to visit a year-old church plant in that city. We attended a banquet which was an evangelistic outreach to women who needed to experience God’s forgiveness and compassion for their sins—many of them for the sin of abortion. We saw more than one woman weeping through the presentation. They expected 40 women, but 56 showed up! May God bless this outreach and this new church as it ministers in Saltillo.

The women I went to Mexico with were all mature Christians with years of teaching Bible studies. I was the oldest chronologically, but the youngest in experience. This was another way in which I was crippled—crippled by years of taking my faith for granted and failure to study the Word of God and apply it to my life.

Please don’t waste your life! Plan to go on a missions trip, and be willing to stay if that is your calling from God. But the work of missions also desperately needs “senders”—people who work to support missions from home. When we realize how burdened and crippled by our comforts and luxuries we are, and we purpose to lay these burdens down, then we will be better able to truly support missions from home. ■

**Read more about Dottie’s trip to Mexico in the cover story of this issue.**

## 2010 World Cup Soccer Evangelism Project

Three million spectators at 10 venues; 25 million fans at public viewing areas; a cumulative TV audience of 25-30 billion; people from 205 countries watching 32 international teams whittled down to one final match. It is the World Cup, the *pièce de résistance* of soccer and the biggest sporting event in the world. Cape Town, South Africa, will host it in June 2010, and MTW is already there, building sports ministry partnerships that will share the gospel story at this month-long pilgrimage of soccer fans.

"Ministry flows out of relationships, and sports provide a unique type of life-coaching relationship," said Brad Wos, MTW's 2010 World Cup Soccer evangelism director.

MTW is launching a sports ministry that will build on the foundation of its university ministry and theological education relationships already in place in Cape Town. "Churches and Christian organizations all over Africa are working together to share grace globally during World Cup 2010," said Brad. "Building Christ-centered relationships is our ultimate goal."

Currently, MTW is recruiting six-month interns, evangelism teams, prayer/counseling teams, university soccer teams, and sports training teams to serve from two weeks to two months during the World Cup in 2010.



To learn more about  
World Cup 2010 opportunities,  
contact [bwos@mtwafrika.org](mailto:bwos@mtwafrika.org).

## MTW Aids New Hospital in Sudan

One night in central Africa, a hyena attacks a woman while she is sleeping. She's badly injured but grateful to be alive. Now, she may be able to be evaluated by top U.S. surgeons in her hometown and have facial reconstructive surgery at a larger medical center nearby.

MTW is recruiting a surgical missions team to train physicians in a new hospital built by Partners for Compassionate Care in southern Sudan. This partnership has provided an unusual opportunity for MTW to reach into this impoverished, war-torn area of Sudan to care for people in need.

"The medical needs there are immense," said Oscar Aylor, MTW's director of mercy ministries. "But we hope to meet both medical and spiritual needs by making inroads into the community to eventually plant a church there."

The newly-opened, 14-bed hospital features two operating rooms, a laboratory, x-ray and ultrasound, and other amenities. But the crucial need right now is for medical supplies and additional staff to support the two full-time physicians in place. In November, MTW will send a medical team to this hospital to provide training and clinical support.

"It's an amazing opportunity—this is a great combination of medical and church-planting strategy," said Oscar. "We are trusting God for at least one new evangelical church plant in the area."

**To learn more about the MTW medical team traveling to Sudan, contact Hope Williams at [hope.williams@mtw.org](mailto:hope.williams@mtw.org).**

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# VIEW FROM THE FIELD: “Do You Remember Me?”

by Roberta Brown

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"Roberta, Roberta. Do you remember me?" Here was a woman at my front door, whom I was searching my mind to identify.

As I continued to look into this woman's face, my mind flashed back to four years earlier. This same woman would walk her four toy poodles on the road in front of my old house. One day, while I was out tending to my lawn, she walked by with her dogs. She stopped and we chatted, first about the weather and then about where in America I was from, and then about the reason I came to Japan. After a slight pause, the conversation gradually became deeper as she shared with me about her daughter living in America, dating an American man (who was a Christian) and the struggles she, as a long-distance mom, was facing. The topic turned toward faith many times, and throughout the conversation her fears and worries showed in her tears as we stood and talked beside the road that day. That conversation stood out in my memory, as God had providentially put me into her path to encourage her. I began to pray for her.

Since that time, four years had passed. I came home to the U.S. for home ministry assignment, had returned to Japan, and recently moved into a new house about two blocks away. Though I had kept an eye out for the "poodle woman," I had not seen her.

Recently, the owners of my house had an appointment to come and do some fix-it projects. Since it rained all day, only the husband came in the evening to introduce himself.

This morning, when I opened the door to greet him to work on the house, he introduced me to his wife. She greeted me with, "Roberta, Roberta. Do you remember me?" Here in front of me was the "poodle woman." I had been praying for her and for the owners of this house, not realizing they were one and the same. What a joy to see her again, and to be encouraged in realizing how God constantly interweaves the paths of our lives.

As I helped her with her home (my house), she once again spoke of her daughter's marriage, and how her daughter had now become a Christian, too. Her daughter told her how much she desired her mother to become a Christian, and had given her *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis to read. "Have you read it?" she asked me. As we pruned the front tree together and talked, God was again able to use me to encourage her.

What interesting paths our lives take. I find myself wondering what path God will open up tomorrow to share with these neighbors, to pray for them, to point them to the way, the truth, and to the life found only in Christ. Please pray that God will build His church in Japan through multitudes of everyday encounters like these. ■

**Roberta Brown is an MTW missionary to Japan.**

# CONNECT



SUMMER 2009

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Dr. Paul Kooistra

# MISSIONS IS ALL ABOUT THEOLOGY

Recently I had a conversation with some men who suggested that theology had very little to do with church planting or the advancement of missions. In fact, they seemed to think that theology may be a real hindrance to the process. Nothing could be further from the truth. The problem is how we think about theology. If theology is only information contained in thick, dusty books or the stuff that theologians contend over, then there may be some truth to the position of these men. If, on the other hand, theology is one's pursuit of the knowledge of God and a personal relationship with Him, then theology is the bedrock of all that we do.

When we as believers wake up in the morning, the thought that should come to us is: "This is the day the Lord has made." This is theology in practice. When we struggle with things throughout the day, we ought to

remember what suffering He endured on the cross to save us. When God causes pleasant things to occupy our hours, we ought to remember what Paul says: "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say rejoice."

Ministry is a biblical mandate, and it must always be done in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. If that is not central to everything we do, then all that we do may look good but its impact on people's lives is hollow and short-lived. Theology is not dusty and ethereal speculation. It is the process of inviting God into our lives in significant and practical ways.

The economic crisis we are facing is a good case in point. Had we kept the gospel before us, we would have challenged the greed that is so prevalent in all of our hearts. The gospel teaches us that you cannot build prosperity by borrowing too much, lending too much, and spending too much. Sadly, we're now

going to try to solve this crisis by repeating the same mistakes. There are so many passages in the Bible that teach us that it will not work.

Paul applied lessons related to this issue in his own life when he writes in Philippians 4 that he had learned how to live when he had much and he had learned how to live when he had little. Then he teaches that this is not simply an economic lesson, but it is a matter of theology. He writes one of the best known verses in the Bible, one that we use in so many other contexts, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." It is Christ who guides us. It is Christ who continually reminds us of our sinful and fallen ways. And it is Christ who forgives us and brings us back into a personal relationship with the Father. This is what theology is all about.

*Paul D. Kooistra*



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