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# network

making  
disciples.  
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Mission to the World

## In This Issue

Jesus said to go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20). At MTW, we believe this mission is sustained through the work of the Church and hence our new tagline: **Making disciples, multiplying churches.**

This issue celebrates stories of disciple-making and church-multiplying made possible by the support of our constituents and the grace of God.

Read, pray, and celebrate with us ... and join us for the PCA Global Missions Conference in Atlanta this November! Learn more about the GMC on pages 6-11 of this issue.

making disciples. multiplying churches.



# Resilient Servants: How Persecution Has Led to Radical Growth of the Iranian Church

BY: CHELSEA ROLLMAN

Iranians attending a Bible conference in a neighboring country

## //:shorts

### Buddhist Family Comes to Faith in Japan

An MTW Japan missionary agreed to have a difficult conversation with a Buddhist man with less than a year to live. The man's Christian daughter told him she could not hold a Japanese Buddhist funeral for him, so she asked her father to meet with her pastor about making arrangements for a Christian funeral.

The missionary pastor explained the gospel to the man and his wife, highlighting the differences between Christian and Buddhist funerals. At the end of their conversation, the man asked: "So I don't have to be a Christian to have a Christian-based funeral?"

"No, sir! We would never want you to believe something you don't want to," the missionary answered.

"Well," he paused. "I might as well become Christian."

His daughter and the missionary stared at him in astonishment. The missionary quickly said, "Oh sir, there is really no pressure to ..."

To their surprise the father explained, "I may not look like it, but I am a very prideful man. But when you face death, there is no longer a need to hold on to pride. I listened to your explanation," he said, pointing at the scribbles that explained the gospel, "and it sounds right. I would like to enter into your faith."

Still skeptical, the missionary asked, "Does this mean you want to get baptized?"

"Yes. With my wife as well."

His wife was surprised but nodded in agreement. After a few Bible studies and a baptism interview, the 70-year-old couple got baptized in front of their Christian daughter. [n](#)

### A Prosthetic Gift in Mexico

Months before they left the U.S., an MTW medical team to Saltillo, Mexico, began praying for God to provide someone in need of a prosthetic limb because they had some available for that visit. The two Mexican churches planning to host the clinic didn't know of anyone, but in faith the team continued to pray and brought the prosthetics. After arriving in Saltillo in the fall of 2023, they met Armando.



Armando (center) with his new prosthetic

Armando lost his hand in a work-related machine accident four years ago, costing him both his hand and his job. Armando had come to the clinic for high blood pressure but once he arrived the team asked if he'd like to be fitted for a new hand. When he met with the occupational therapist on the team his first question was, "How much does it cost? I'm a poor man, and I have no money."

Cornelia, the OT, answered, "Nothing! We're here to share the love of Jesus and help with physical and spiritual wounds."

Armando asked, "What kind of God do you serve that you'd come from the U.S. to our mountains and offer me an artificial limb that I had never hoped to own?"

"A mighty and loving God!" Cornelia replied. "In my church our pastor says, 'It's for *you* Christ came, for *you* He died, and for *you* He will come again!'" [n](#)

### It is illegal to convert to Christianity in Iran.

As one of four Islamic Republics in the world, the theocratic government closely regulates all aspects of life to ensure the people adhere to Sharia law. All ethnic Iranians are Muslim by birth. Converting to Christianity is a crime equivalent of treason. There are no visible Christian congregations, and the Bible is outlawed.

Yet by His miraculous power, God has used these conditions to pave the way for Christianity to flourish among the Iranian people. Over the past two decades, hundreds of thousands of Iranians have come to faith in Christ, making the Iranian Church the fastest growing in the world.

### THE PARADOX OF PERSECUTION

Neither MTW missionary Martin Lee\* nor his friend Kamran\* could have imagined the explosive growth that was about to happen in the Iranian Church when they met 20 years ago. Martin was attending a conference in the Middle East to explore a call to missions to the Persian world. Kamran, who was training at the local Bible school to be a pastor, introduced himself to Martin at the conference.

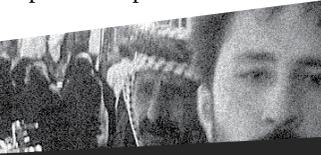
Kamran explained that his father was a Muslim convert who became a Christian. His father served as a pastor for many years until the government arrested him in the 1990s after launching a crackdown on Christianity. They targeted Muslim converts and sought to make an example of Kamran's father.

He was arrested, tried, convicted, and executed by hanging.

His father's martyrdom inspired Kamran to pursue ministry himself. He wanted to take his father's place. He became a pastor

and has walked the same road of persecution as his father. For the past 20 years, government authorities have targeted Kamran. They have physically threatened and arrested him many times. On several occasions, they threw him into solitary confinement. Eventually, the threats became so severe that Kamran realized he would not be able to continue ministering inside Iran. He and his family fled to a neighboring country, unable to ever return to their home.

Kamran's story is common. Iran is one of the harshest persecutors of Christians in the world, often ranking in the top 10 on Open Doors' "World Watch List." Since the 1979 revolution when the Ayatollah Khomeini overthrew the Shah and established the Islamic



**His father's martyrdom inspired Kamran to pursue ministry himself. He wanted to take his father's place. He became a pastor and has walked the same road of persecution as his father.**

Republic, Christians have been watched and monitored. Today, all churches are underground. The Islamic government does everything in its power to squelch all Christian activity. If a Christian is caught, there is a possibility they or their families will be interrogated, arrested, beaten, and even tortured.

Yet, as is the case with so many examples in Church history, extreme persecution has led to the growth of the Iranian Church. Despite the danger, hundreds of thousands of Iranians >>

>> have come to faith in the past decade. Ironically, one of the primary means God is using to open their hearts to the truth of the gospel is the government.

When Khomeini established Iran as an Islamic Republic, the new government promised Islam would bring prosperity and dignity back to Iran after the corruption and social problems the country experienced under the Shah. They have dramatically failed to deliver on these promises. This has left the people disillusioned not only with their government, but also with Islam itself. Much of the population went searching for alternatives to the religion of their oppressive government.

observed and been part of the radical gospel advancement in the Persian world.

While pastoring the refugee church in Europe, Martin developed a close friendship with his language partner—an Iranian man who attended church but did not believe Jesus was the Son of God. This man, like most Muslims, had respect for Jesus but only knew Him as a great prophet.

“My friend was a little older than me. In Persian culture, you can’t tell someone older than you that they are wrong. You have to show them respect,” said Martin. “So instead

He continued, saying, “For Americans you read about one of Jesus’ miracles and you’re like ‘Yeah, that’s nice. I’ve heard that story,’ but for Iranians they’re like, ‘Whoa! That’s amazing! I didn’t know that Jesus could do that.’”

Martin has also seen Christians in Iran courageously live as a witness for Christ. One woman Martin knows regularly goes to the bazaar and meets strangers to get a sense of their spiritual openness. Often, she bravely shares the gospel during that first meeting. Martin has met and trained two other women that this woman has brought to Christ this way. He also knows a taxi driver who meets his house church members at a park. They walk around encouraging one another in their faith and spend time praying in his taxi.

God is also using the context of persecution to mobilize Iranian Christians. Whenever Christians like Kamran flee the country, they do not stop ministering for Christ. “Where these Christian refugees are going out all over Europe, they are sharing the gospel and bringing Iranians to Christ and forming Iranian Christian groups,” said Martin.

The initial problem is access. “If someone wants to be a pastor, they are pretty much on their own. Just them, their Bible, and whatever they see on satellite TV,” said Martin. Many of the resources they can access are full of false teaching and heresy. Then there is the problem of contextualization. Even the good materials come out of a Western setting. They aren’t preparing Iranian leaders for underground church ministry in Iran. Martin’s main focus at the moment is addressing this issue, working with national partners to produce doctrinally sound and contextualized online resources in Farsi.

“Because the situation for ministry is different under persecution, because it’s different coming from an Islamic background ... our theological education has to adjust to that,” said Martin. “A lot of seminary training we do in the West is preparing people to minister in a secular environment ... so it’s a different type of training that they need. The threat is not secular liberal theology. Their threat is Islam. Even Christians are coming from an Islamic background and so they need to be trained how to teach in that context.”

Finally, there are the physical threats. About seven months after the theological training event, Martin learned that three of the women who attended the conference were arrested.

“It’s just another level among the barriers,” Martin explained emotionally. “Just getting [leaders] something. And then getting them something they can use. And then getting them to use it without getting arrested.”

But Martin and other Christians working in the Persian world know that though the challenges are great, our God is greater. The global Church has an immense opportunity to double down and invest in the Iranian Church through prayer and service. Against all odds, God is miraculously calling thousands, if not millions, of Iranians throughout the world to faith in Jesus. These new Christians are hungry to grow in their faith and know Christ better. They love Jesus. For them, Jesus is the one who defends the weak. Jesus was the one who was Himself persecuted. He is the one who stood up to religious oppressors. They are ready to follow in His sacrificial footsteps. At great cost to themselves, they are boldly worshipping Christ and preaching the gospel to make Jesus’ name known throughout Iran and the world. [Explore ways to serve at mtw.org/muslim](https://mtw.org/muslim)

*\*Names and certain details changed for security purposes.*



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According to Martin, the vast majority of the population is opposed to Islam, and many of them are open to Christianity and they are encountering the gospel in myriad ways. They use the internet, social media, radio, and satellite TV to access Western Christian programs. God often uses dreams to direct them to a church or to Scripture. And perhaps most significantly, they learn the truth about Jesus through the witness of other Christians.

### MAKING DISCIPLES THROUGH COURAGEOUS ENCOUNTERS

Shortly after the conference where he met Kamran, Martin and his wife moved to Europe where Martin pastored an Iranian refugee church. After five years in Europe, the Lees returned to the States so that Martin could get a master’s in Farsi. They then moved to the Middle East to train Iranian pastors and church leaders ministering both in Iran and in neighboring countries. During his 18 years of serving among Iranians, Martin has

of me telling him that he was wrong, I wanted to allow the Bible to show him.”

Martin suggested they read the Gospel of John together. For about one month, they met every week and read five chapters at a time. As they studied together, Martin would point out different places in John that illuminated Jesus’ identity—His miracles, His proclamations that peoples’ sins were forgiven, and the Pharisees’ anger at Jesus because of who He claimed to be. By the end of the month, Martin’s friend was convinced that Jesus was the Son of God. He was baptized in Martin’s church a few months later.

“It’s not a really dramatic story ... but it’s dramatic for Iranians because they have never read the Bible before. They have never even seen a Bible before. Every story that we went through was the first time in his life that he was reading that story,” explained Martin.

### THE URGENT NEED FOR SOUND TEACHING

Last year, Martin and Kamran reconnected for the first time in 18 years at a theological training event Kamran organized for Farsi-speaking church leaders. They met in the region with a group of other attendees, all of whom currently serve a house church in areas subject to persecution. They came to hear Martin teach.

A large part of Martin’s work is hosting training events like these for Iranian church leaders. The marvelous and dramatic rate at which Iranians are converting to Christianity has left a huge need for equipped leaders. Martin has been working on theological education and leadership development for the Persian church for 18 years. He said that the more he gets into it, the more barriers he faces.



# Sovereignty, Integrity, Creativity:

*A Roadmap for Evangelism in Any Context*



Rico Tice

Dale Hollenbeck, former MTW missionary and director of our Mid-America Hub, sat down to talk with Rico Tice, a headline speaker for the upcoming PCA Global Missions Conference, London pastor, and co-founder of Christianity Explored. Christianity Explored teaches evangelism to churches, pastors, and missionaries worldwide. Here are excerpts from their conversation, edited for clarity and brevity.

**Q Dale:** *How can training for evangelism in the local church propel global missions and help us finish the Great Commission?*

**A Rico:** Brother, I think all evangelism—everything we do evangelistically—is about three great themes, and it’s why I think 2 Corinthians 4:1–6 is the most important passage on evangelism in the Bible.

*Therefore, since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ. – 2 Corinthians 4:1–6 (NIV)*

And here are the three great themes: sovereignty, integrity, and creativity. So, **sovereignty:** God has to do the miracle and open blind eyes. **Integrity:** We have to teach the truth. Jesus is Lord,

He’s risen from the dead. ... There is a place called hell. We need to be saved from God’s wrath. Repentance is real. But third, **creativity:** What does it mean to reach people wherever we are? Sovereignty, integrity, creativity. That’s what you take from your local situation to any situation.

So, this is how His sovereignty [plays out] here on my street. When we meet our neighbors, we know the sovereign Lord (Acts 17:24–28) has put us there. Who are the people around me? God has placed them there. He’s the creator, sustainer, and ruler. How amazing God has sovereignly placed my neighbors here. So that means as I go out to them, they’re not there by chance: God has put them there to hear the gospel. And His aim is that the gospel goes out. We’ve only been here six months, that’s [holds up journal] every house on the street, just about one or two we’re short of. So, wherever I am, as I’m driving by, I say, “Okay, let’s pray.” And then I pray through the names.

Integrity: How can we tell the gospel truthfully? What do we need to talk about? We need to talk about hope in the face of death. We need to talk about forgiveness. We need to tell people: Actually, you are not what you should be.

Third, creativity. How can we reach them in creative ways? My daughter and I are giving out Easter baskets on the street and

asking people to come for a picnic. And then we pray. ... When [she and I come back from school], as we go past, we say, “Lord, we pray for number two. We pray for number four. We pray for John and Jenny and number 24.” So, we’re praying and reaching out.

So, I would train people with sovereignty, integrity, creativity locally. But wherever you go, even if you end up in Afghanistan, it’s the same three issues. And, find out your neighbors’ names.

**Q Dale:** *And are there next steps?*

**A Rico:** There are four I go through. Number one, celebrate people. Second, serve them. What are the needs on the street? When we went at Christmas, there was a woman three doors down whose husband had died suddenly in the summer and we took her some flowers.

Third, cross the pain line and ask a question. For example, “Do you celebrate Easter? Would you come to church? Would you like to do that with us?” Now, I’ll need to have my identity in Christ as I ask that because it is a bit scary, even just a gentle

**I’m not going to risk this unless my identity is in the grace of God. So whether you accept or reject me doesn’t make me valuable. What makes me valuable is the gospel...**

question like that, because we’re the aroma of life to some, and the smell of death to the others.

Fourth, exit. So that means that if they go quiet, you go quiet. But people are thrilled to get an Easter package. And if a Muslim up the street sent me some chocolates at Ramadan and said, “Here’s a book,” I’d [accept them graciously].

I’m not going to risk this unless my identity is in the grace of God. So whether you accept or reject me doesn’t make me valuable. What makes me valuable is the gospel, is God’s love for me. My value is in that, not whether you accept or reject me.

**Q Dale:** *Why do people still not talk about the gospel?*

**A Rico:** The answer that I found over the last 20 years is: idols So, if we’re not preaching the gospel, if we’re not going to our neighbors, if we’re not speaking to colleagues, it is idols underneath. The first two commandments are: Don’t have other gods. But that’s true for evangelism, too. That’s what stops us from speaking. So, don’t forget with idols that we love them, we trust them, and we obey them. So if I’m trying to find out your idols, I’d be saying, well, what do you daydream about? What are your nightmares? When



do you lose your temper? What are the things most precious? And then you dig those out and then you are aware of the things that often stop you from speaking. And quite often it’s good things that take up all your time. So, for example, the kids’ sports. Now that’s really important, but as I’m doing the kids’ sports, am I looking to reach anyone with the gospel or am I just there for the kids’ sports?

**Q Dale:** *What is an evangelist?*

**A Rico:** That’s a great question. And so many people get this wrong! The evangelist in Ephesians 4:11–12 is there to prepare God’s people for works of service. So, the evangelist is not just to be proclaiming the gospel themselves. Yes, that’s true. But their primary role is to equip the church family to proclaim the gospel. So yes, I might say, “Come and hear me speak.” But my biggest job is to go [help others tell and bring a friend along]. All these people think *evangelism* and say, “I can’t see myself as a great speaker.” They think of Billy Graham in a stadium. >>

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**Well, I want to say we all need to hear about hell again and again and again. ... because in the U.K., particularly in the Church of England, they've stopped talking about hell. And because of that, they've stopped talking about repentance.**

>> Yes, you do need someone who can preach the gospel, but much more you need someone who's working through the church family saying, "Dale, let's talk about your neighbor Cindy and her husband, Max, and what do you think is the next step for them? Can we do a little Easter bag for them? Let's be praying for them. What are their hobbies? What might they like?" That's how we're doing it [in my church].

If you see every situation as a divine appointment, at the heart of evangelism is a real doctrine of God's sovereignty. Do I really believe Acts 17:24–28, that the One who's made the world sustains it? He's the ruler. So, He's put you in St. Louis, He's put me [in London]. And that, I think, is when I see a neighbor on the street and I stop and talk to them and I know their name. God has put them there to meet me. So, that's what I find really exciting because I think God is the great evangelist. ... If you really believe that divine appointment it makes every day the Super Bowl!

**Q Dale:** *Why do people at a missions conference need to hear about evangelism?*

**A Rico:** Well, I want to say we all need to hear about hell again and again and again. So, I think what I've found I'm doing, because in the U.K., particularly in the Church of England, they've stopped talking about hell. And because of that, they've stopped talking about repentance. And how do we escape hell? Well, only through the cross. We need to be reminded of the eternal dimension. And then we need to be reminded that, amazingly, as we preach Christ, God will send His Holy Spirit and do what He did for us, and open blind eyes.

Confidence is what you need. Confidence that the God who saved you could save other people, confidence that the gospel is right, confidence that "this work is absolutely eternal" confidence. That with the [Christianity Explored] methodology we pray, we teach the truth, and creatively we keep reaching for people. And then, how do we best preach Christ? Well, I always say, let's let the gospel tell the gospel. So, we've picked Mark's gospel, the shortest and simplest gospel. And we say you can go through it with three words: identity, mission, and call.

Every word in Mark's gospel is either about who is Jesus, why He came, or what it means to follow Him. So you've got to give people the confidence to do it.

**Q Dale:** *So Rico, if there's one step you would encourage North American pastors to take to lead their churches in evangelism, what would it be?*

**A Rico:** [Years ago when I worked at All Souls Langham Place], I went to John Stott and said, "What do I say to frantically busy pastors?" Because I knew that if they're not modeling personal evangelism, the church family won't think it's important. And John Stott said, every generation needs to relearn the lesson of Acts 6:1–4, where the work of waiting tables was delegated in order that the work of prayer and teaching of the Word could be done.

What do you have to say no to? Good things: say yes to that. And therefore, I would get your elders to put into your diary half a day a week where you are doing a lovely hobby. So that'll

be good for you creatively. But then you are with non-Christians—on their terms. I'm going to be coaching rugby to the under-10s every week. It's just their terms. I'm getting to know the parents. So, you've got to model it.

The speed of the lead is the speed of the team. That's what I'd say if the pastor isn't modeling bringing their friends: The church family doesn't think it's important because it's hard evangelism. It's the hardest one. It's the hardest thing to do—to bring people.

So, there are lots of other things we can give our time to [alongside non-Christians]. And then it's lovely. People from other churches might arrive. Well, that's a lot easier—having sheep from elsewhere—than finding your own lost sheep. We just reshuffle the sheep. No, we want to find new people who are coming to faith!

**Q Dale:** *What is the biggest factor for a church being successful in evangelism? If there's one.*

**A Rico:** When I go and train churches for evangelism, the first thing I say is, "Are we praying?" We've got to preach Christ, but we've got to pray that God opens blind eyes. ... Now it's very important this, I often say: I can't turn the light on, only God can turn the light on. But my job is to pray and to preach Christ. Evangelism is always a subsection of faithfulness. My job is to be faithful.

**Q Dale:** *Is there anything you'd like to say to American pastors to welcome them to ... ?*

**A Rico:** I think my colleagues, my church here in Ealing, the American missionaries from MTW are outstanding. I mean, I really mean it. I've been so impressed with them. And there I was on Saturday coming back from the park run and there were five of them. There was Stacy\* with her little toddler on the street. Charles,\* one of our old elders, Peter, who's 80, Daniel\* giving out booklets on Greenford High Street. And I thought then, they love the church and they get the gospel out. Charles with the Iranians, he's learning Farsi. Stacy, his wife, is endlessly hospitable. They're just brilliant. I really mean it. These guys are really making a difference in this part of the world.

**Dale:** *That's so encouraging to hear. One hope I have is to work in partnership with IPC missionaries so that we can reach even farther and deeper into the world and even closed countries to do that in partnership. And I believe that this work of evangelism is the very foundation to make that effort happen in the future.*

**Rico:** And what's interesting about your note to me, my brother, is everything—sovereignty, integrity, creativity—that clarity. It's always those three things. Then, you get out Mark's



**“Are we praying?” We've got to preach Christ, but we've got to pray that God opens blind eyes. ... I can't turn the light on, only God can turn the light on.**

gospel and it's always identity, mission, call, but that'll mean different things in different cultures. And I've taught this in North India. It's different from teaching it in North Carolina. Who is Jesus, why did He come, and what does it mean to follow Him, [it needs to be contextualized], but the core is the gospel. That's why 2 million people in East Africa have taken Christianity Explored, because the locals get that absolute simplicity. [▶](#) Come hear Rico Tice at the PCA Global Missions Conference November 1–3, 2024.

[mtw.org/gmc](http://mtw.org/gmc)

*\*Names have been changed for security reasons.*





# A Conference With Global Impact

As we look forward to the upcoming PCA Global Missions Conference November 1–3 in Atlanta, we thought we'd look back at its past impact. Register by May 31 at [mtw.org/gmc](http://mtw.org/gmc) to get the lowest rate.



## A Needed Push to Move Toward My RUF Calling

In 2017, I attended the PCA Global Missions Conference on a whim. RUF at University of Central Florida was taking students to the conference, including my roommates and best friends. Though I'd graduated, it seemed like it would be a sweet time so I thought, "Why not?" I took off work, bought a ticket, and hopped in on the trip. I could not have imagined the impact the conference would have on me.

Christ had become so genuine, captivating, and all-consuming to me through RUF. Halfway through college, the Lord put a desire on my heart for vocational ministry—for coming alongside anyone and everyone I could to invite to the abundant life found only in Jesus. My desire was to do that with RUF. Yet here I was, three and a half years later and not working for RUF or in vocational ministry at all. Why?

I realized it was because I had let idols and fears drive my heart. But God was so very gracious and patient with me, and He continued to be as He used the GMC to invite me into His good, sovereign plans.

I felt like I was experiencing a taste of heaven throughout the conference. Mission to the World did such a great job at displaying and celebrating the global Church in each nightly worship and teaching gathering. One night, a woman stood before us and sang "I Told Jesus" acapella—a moment that will stay with me forever.

*I told Jesus it would be alright if He changed my name  
Jesus told me the world will hate you if I change your name  
I told Jesus it would still be alright if He changed my name*

As I listened to not just her voice but her heart fill the room, I was deeply encouraged and uplifted in the truth of those words.

That's merely one moment among many that gave me more fervent "kingdom of God glasses." Glasses, by God's amazing grace, that I haven't taken off since. The Global Missions Conference provided the opportunity to rejoice in what God is doing globally and encouragement and bold resolve to be a part of it. The gospel of Christ is the power of God to salvation, and here were all of these stories of that power working to restore hearts as well as stories of the need for it. As I sat listening to



More than 2,000 worshipped together at the 2017 GMC.

missionaries whose hearts were filled with hope, perseverance, and gumption for Christ, I thought, "Why am I not doing this?" Why am I not walking into places of spiritual desolation, willing to genuinely do life alongside folks and offer them their only hope in life and death, the beauty that is our risen Savior?

I came to the 2017 GMC in Dallas expecting to be encouraged in Christ and His Church with my community and not much else. I left 110% positive that it was only a matter of time before I quit my job and pursued whatever missional or ministry role the Lord had in store for me. The Lord used the Global Missions

Conference to finally, utterly convince me of that call. And I knew, while still on that trip to Dallas, that that call would be for the rest of my life, whatever my gospel ministry capacity would be. I'm still convinced of that today. [\[i\]](#)

>> Kelley Van Haitsma began working full time for RUF in 2018 as a campus intern at UCLA and now serves as the female campus staff for RUF at UCLA in Los Angeles.

## Connecting With My Passion for Business as Missions

I attended the last MTW conference in Texas. We had just become a PCA church (formerly OPC) and MTW was one of the motivating factors for us changing denominations. I attended the conference to check it out myself. I was quite impressed by the number of workshops and booths in the exhibit hall that related to my passion, which is business as mission. Because of this experience we were able to take the business as mission work we were doing in South Asia to whole new levels.

The number of new connections we made at the GMC has been an important asset. To date, our church has established a business training center and an active marketplace ministry to reach the unreached. I can't wait to attend the 2024 conference and intend to bring some of our friends from South Asia so they too can get better acquainted with who is behind us. [\[i\]](#)

>> Kent Kusel belongs to First Presbyterian Church Northshore (PCA) in Boston where he is active on the global missions team. He has served with a BAM effort in South Asia for eight years, taking a team on a 10-day trip annually and working with national partners long-distance between visits.

## From MK to Missionary

Growing up involved in missions in Europe as a missionary kid, it was easy to get tunnel vision. Being so focused and heavily involved in central Europe, I didn't know much about the larger global Church or what God was doing in other parts of the world.

I got to attend and participate in the PCA Global Missions Conference in 2017 with my dad and some other members of the Slovakia team. Attending the conference opened my eyes to see both the need for the gospel around the world and the breadth of MTW's work across the globe. This gave me a deeper sense of the community within MTW and how great our God is.

I always knew I wanted to be involved in missions and serving overseas, but this conference opened my eyes to needs and opportunities in other parts of the world. After attending the conference I decided to study Bible and theology with a missions concentration at Covenant College. Now I'm serving with MTW through the Path 270 internship program and getting to experience missions and see how God is working in three very different and diverse areas of the world. I look forward to attending this year's conference, listening to testimonies, meeting missionaries and those who are passionate about missions, and once again capturing that sense of awe at how awesome our God is and all He is doing around the world and in the global Church. [\[i\]](#)

>> Isabel Gregoire grew up as an MK in Slovakia with MTW. She recently graduated from Covenant College and is serving in Central Asia, Thailand, and Colombia on MTW's nine-month Path 270 internship program.

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# Sharing the Teranga of God:

A New Church Planted Among the Unreached Wolof People

Warm welcome—**teranga** in the Wolof language—is ubiquitous in Senegal. **Teranga** gets first mention in tourist guidebooks as hospitality extended to **strangers & neighbors** alike. It's being **welcomed** to any meal.

It's a door-always-open-so-join-us expectation. It's even in the name of the lauded national soccer team, the Lions of Teranga.

A new church plant is sharing the biblical teranga of grace, one rarely heard in this West African country.

BY: WINNIE SMITH



Friends in Senegal gather around a bowl of rice, fish, and vegetables for a meal together.

Senegalese pastor Moustapha Sene,\* along with MTW church planters, started last year to establish a gospel welcome to the Wolof people, an ethnic group of more than 7 million people who are considered unreached. These people need to hear the holistic gospel, the Word of God as it is given, Moustapha says.

That gospel welcome led to a new church plant.

Moustapha graduated in the first cohort of the Timothy House, a residential ministry training course supported by Mission to the World and the Presbyterian Church of Senegal. Of the four graduates, two serve in urban churches. Another started a campus ministry.

Moustapha, along with MTW's Donnie and Kara Willis,\* went to the dry, red soil of rural Senegal to get to know the Wolof people. The younger generations seem to be more curious, but have little understanding about Jesus. But what moves people isn't just answering their curiosity. The strongest bridge to the gospel is addressing their fears, says Moustapha. The fears of poverty, isolation, and death. These fears may be present everywhere, but Wolof culture heightens them.

"Everybody's story touches on those three fears," he says. When we are able to preach about God as He shows Himself in the Bible, we have ready answers to these fears.

Donnie, team leader and pastor, gets excited talking about it. The gospel offers the very security, community, and peace the Wolof people long for.

Telling people how we are brought into God's family as His children "blows the doors of the gospel open," he says. The sureness of grace is a completely different approach to God. It's amazing to get to talk about the nearness of God, the security of His love through Christ.

## AVOIDING UNCOMFORTABLE TOPICS HAS KEPT THE TRUE GOSPEL AT BAY

Centuries of missionary work have made few inroads into the tightly woven culture of the Wolof people. In fact, Protestant Christians say they are invisible in this region of Senegal, with such little evangelical impact that they are not a threat to any other religious groups. Within this spiritual nation, they make up half of 1 percent, and those are overwhelmingly immigrants.



Senegalese pastor Moustapha is the graduate in the back row on the left, Donnie is on the right end. Jim is at the far left, with MTW team member Collin.

It's not that God is absent. God has always been at work here, says Kara, a church plant team member who grew up in several African countries.

"We see different aspects of God's character in cultures. God's character is already here, and it is for us to discover."

But gospel-preaching churches are barely present. >>

**"We see different aspects of God's character in cultures. God's character is already here, and it is for us to discover."**

making disciples. multiplying churches.

>> For all its beautiful aspects, teranga has brittle places that can't tolerate pressure. This get-along cultural mainstay means that people can't talk about differences, Kara says.

"There isn't open antagonism to Christianity, but a desire to keep everything at peace. Conversations get shoved under this all-purpose rug of not talking about uncomfortable things." So worshipping God as presented in the Bible is a hard and different path, even for the few Catholic villages among these people.



Kara teaches English to a group of church members.

In Senegal there is a popular saying that the population is 95% Muslim, 5% Catholic, and 100% animist. It makes for a form of both Islam and Christianity thickly mixed with regional spirituality.

MTW's Regional Director for West Africa Jim Weber\* adds that there is great spiritual darkness. "Satan is a great contextualizer and has played into fear and taboo. These dark forces continue to enslave people to a deep fear and dark rituals."

On top of this, there is all that comes with poverty in a region that is politically unstable and becoming increasingly radicalized, he says.

"It is going to take time and generations of Christian growth. The gospel has its work cut out for it."

### A CROSSROADS OF POPULATION GROWTH AND FAITH EXPLOSION

But the MTW team sees the gospel doing its work, starting to spread family by family, village by village.

"We are at a huge turning point," Jim says. "Even in this hard context, we have seen more Muslims turn to Christ in sub-Saharan Africa in the past three decades than in the past three centuries."

"We work with a national church of first-generation believers. We now are seeing the beginnings of an all-Senegalese second generation. For the first time, we have covenant kids who are looking to grow their faith. The bench is deepening of men and women who are rising up to lead and serve."

Just as the Presbyterian Church of Senegal is at a turning point, so is the country itself. Because Senegal, like the rest of Africa, is at a crossroad of population and faith explosion.

It is a young country on the youngest continent in the world—most people in sub-Saharan Africa are teenagers. At that growth rate, one in four people on the planet will be African in the next generation.

According to the Pew Research Center, by 2060 four in 10 Christians will live in sub-Saharan Africa, and the share of sub-Saharan Muslims will move from 16% to 27%. This positions the region to become a powerful heartland for the world's two major religions.

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"Since northern Africa is heavily Muslim and southern Africa is heavily Christian, the great meeting place is in the middle, a 4,000-mile swath from Somalia in the east to Senegal in the west," the center reports.

But sociologists note beneath teranga's surface, the apparent tolerance is more complicated. Unity comes through a cemented social structure that runs from ruling class to slave class. Increased globalization is stretching that social structure. And a pressing question is whether its religious acceptance can withstand the increased radicalization happening in neighboring countries.

### A NEW CHURCH GENERATES OUTREACH OPPORTUNITIES

While these global trends are being analyzed in offices and classrooms, they are lived out in semi-arid desert communities that look more sleepy than strategic, communities filled with people who are predominantly young, poor, and restless for opportunity. This is where the team is extending an enduring welcome of grace.

Preaching the gospel as presented in the Bible goes hand in hand with social outreach and helping the most disadvantaged, Moustapha says. So the church plant is located near seven acres of land set aside for a ministry center that will be called Teranga Village. It is a home for girls particularly vulnerable to human trafficking or child marriage. It will also have an agricultural center and visiting medical clinics.

This ministry now has 37 girls at a secure location in nearby Dakar, but the building can't expand and there is no room for farming or work to make the girls' home sustainable. The MTW team is raising funds now to build Teranga Village.

Serving the poor and offering a new type of community could be one of the most critical pieces of evangelism—a way to tangibly show the love of Christ.

### A NEW KIND OF TERENGA

Senegal polls highest in the world for religiosity, with 98% of people ranking religion as "very important" to them. Many people are afraid to leave their religion, which they consider their culture. And if you transgress culture, you're often banished from the family, Moustapha says.

In other words, teranga stops. Some new believers have been forced to attend their own "funeral." Many return to their previous ways of worship rather than face isolation.



Some of the residents living in the girls' home in Dakar.

So a new Christian community has to welcome seekers and new believers from the start.

That kind of welcome means even official church services must adapt to another Wolof attribute: their openness. Kara says in a 90-minute service, 10 people may stop by to say hello or charge their phones. What could be distracting to a foreigner is an important piece of Wolof culture, she notes. Plus neighbors are hearing and watching the church.

"We have to be sensitive as we work with this growing national church," Jim says.

Senegal gained its independence from France in 1960. "The dark history of colonialism and post-colonialism muddies missions," Jim says. "We have to be sensitive that we are not ever seen as a new colonialism wrapped in spiritual garb."

Along the way, the MTW team continues to give and to receive hospitality from the Wolof as they share the gospel. They also see, like Donnie and Kara mentioned, how God has built Bible bridges into Wolof culture that are "theirs to discover." [▶](#)



"As we begin to engage with a new village we stop by first to see the chief to ask permission to be there and to talk with the people," Jim says. "One day we stopped at a village, but the chief was out for the whole day. His son answered the door instead."

"Yes," he told Jim, "Stay and meet people here. If you have seen me, you have seen my father." Jim heard in his words the beautiful echo of Jesus' connection to His Father in John 14:8-9.

"It was a good moment to understand the structure of the village, the relationship between father and son, and to see Scripture through a new cultural lens."



# Compassion Funds for Earthquake Relief Lead to Gospel Growth in Turkey



“I want peace! I want peace! I want to be free from all this fear and anxiety,” a young Turkish man exclaimed to Adem Yilmaz\* who serves as a pastor at a church in southern Turkey.



In fear of aftershocks, many people slept outside.

According to Adem, everybody in southern Turkey shares the young man’s desire for peace. Ever since February 6, 2023, when two massive earthquakes measuring 7.8 and 7.5 magnitude killed nearly 60,000 people and decimated millions of buildings, the people have been functioning on the edge of panic. Stories like one young woman recently jumping out of a building and breaking both her legs during an aftershock encapsulate the people’s emotional and mental state.

Adem and his wife Samira\* have stepped into this atmosphere of fear and anxiety with the peace of Christ. Thanks to the generous

donations to MTW’s Compassion Fund, the couple was able to develop a relief ministry that is already yielding spiritual fruit in the aftermath of this tragedy.

In the days following the earthquakes, MTW workers in the region who knew Samira reached out to her. Samira and Adem had just survived the trauma themselves and suffered great loss. By the grace of God, they and their 4-year-old son survived, but many of their family members were killed. The MTW community, working alongside our national partners in the region, provided immediate support, offering words

**“We would pray in the name of Jesus. When we gave people things we always said, ‘It is not from us. It is from the Lord. Jesus has provided these things for you.’”**

of encouragement, praying with the couple, and sending resources to help the family find their footing in the middle of the devastation.

## THE CHURCH OFFERS AID AND COMPASSION TO THE COMMUNITY

The rapid care and comfort they received from MTW strengthened Samira and Adem to start an outreach ministry. MTW began channeling additional aid and funds to them to distribute to families and individuals in the most affected areas.

For the past year, Adem and Samira have spent their time visiting and caring for people living in seven container cities, which are shipping containers converted into low-cost apartments. Using the MTW Compassion Fund, they have been able to provide housing, medical aid, financial assistance, and basic supplies and services for many in need. During every pastoral visit, they take time to listen and empathize with the people.

“From the very beginning, we were very open with people and told them that we were coming on behalf of the church,” said Adem. “If they were open to receiving us, we would always do three things. We would pray in the name of Jesus. When we gave people things we always said, ‘It is not from us. It is from the Lord. Jesus has provided these things for you.’ And we would always share something from God’s Word that was appropriate to their situation.”

And they have seen the Holy Spirit at work through this ministry. According to Samira, the relief work has changed misconceptions about Christians and Christianity. They have had many gospel conversations with unbelievers that were difficult to come by before the tragedy.

## HOSTILITY TOWARD CHURCH MELTS INTO FAITH

“The Church was there before the earthquake, but a lot of outside people were not that open to it; they were even kind of hostile,” said Adem. “Before the earthquake there was a comfort level. But after the earthquake more people realized their desperate situation and are really in difficult circumstances and are really longing for help and comfort.”

In word and deed, Adem and Samira have shown how Jesus answers longings for help and comfort from all who have experienced such devastation. As a result, more people are attending the weekly church service and Bible studies than ever before. Many of the new attendees are unbelievers. One man has already come to faith in Christ. Five women from different families have put their trust in Christ and desire to grow. Every week they meet more inquirers and searchers like the young man who pleaded to Adem for relief from his fear and anxiety. As Adem did with the young Turkish man, they both answer these desperate cries by offering the lasting peace and security found in Christ.

Though Adem and Samira are the ones on the ground doing ministry, they view themselves as conduits of love and support sent from the global Church. The couple said that the response from the larger body of Christ—particularly from those at MTW—has been a powerful witness to our Savior both to them as individuals and also to the people they are ministering to in Turkey.



Containers converted to apartments offered refugees a low-cost housing option.

“We are so thankful for MTW and how they have come around us. We are the hands and feet that are doing the work but it is through all of us being connected that we are able to do it,” said Samira.

Turkey is just one example of the ways MTW’s Compassion Fund makes a difference in the lives of people around the world who have experienced a disaster. In the past year, gifts to the Compassion Fund enabled MTW missionaries and national partners to quickly provide relief for those affected by fires in Chile, an earthquake in Japan, food shortages in Haiti, an earthquake in Acapulco, civil war and unrest in the Democratic Republic of Congo, poverty in South Asia, and refugee needs in East and West Africa.

Our missionaries, national partners, and the recipients of their aid are grateful for all those who gave generously to MTW’s Compassion Fund. Thanks to Compassion Fund donations, MTW missionaries are able to respond with the love of Christ and establish a foothold for gospel ministry. [Visit \*\*mtw.org/compassion\*\* to donate.](https://mtw.org/compassion)

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# photo feature



In Uganda, missionaries and national partners are actively making disciples and multiplying churches. This image of a Ugandan man reading his Bible during an outdoor, dual-language worship service was taken by missionary Beth Beaver.



## How will you steward God's gifts?



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## FROM THE COORDINATOR

# A More Important Decision in November

This November we have an opportunity to make a decision that could affect all our lives. It will not only affect our lives, but even the world. No, it is not our U.S. presidential election, but it is the decision to participate in the PCA Global Mission Conference, November 1–3 in Atlanta. How would participating in this conference affect our lives, even the world? We are praying that it would reawaken the PCA's mission to go and make disciples of all the nations!

If there is anything that will bring us together in an age of division, cynicism, and doubt, it is rallying behind our common mission. If we are not engaged in advancing the gospel of the kingdom, we will naturally gravitate to building our own kingdom or pursuing a life of entertainment and comfort. It is too easy to lose our way in this world and focus on lesser matters.

In seminary I had a classmate who was from Turkey. At the time there were only a few thousand evangelical Christians in the whole country. While studying in the United States, he interned at a local Presbyterian Church and was invited to observe a session meeting. I asked him what he thought. He said, "It was very challenging for me."

I said, "What do you mean?"

He said, "In Turkey, when the pastor says, 'We need to go now!' we all go and follow. We were living in a context where people would throw bombs into Christian gatherings. At the session meeting I attended here [in the U.S.] they discussed, even debated for several hours, what kind of toilet paper to buy for their bathrooms." I could understand why he was so challenged!

Engaging in global missions helps us to see things from a different perspective. Very often our missionaries and national partners help us see the gospel and our Christian faith in new and powerful ways. *They remind us that we have a common enemy who seeks to thwart our mission. They inspire us to join them in seeing the darkness pushed back, Satan's kingdom destroyed, and the gospel of the kingdom advance through the world.*

So let's make the right decision this November and gather together with our missionaries and national partners to worship, hear what God is doing across the world, and then be sent out to accomplish the mission of our King! [📍](#)

*Lloyd Kim*



Dr. Lloyd Kim



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