



Group shot at BCM Netherlands' De Herikon

A Look Back at BCM Netherlands by Jeanette Windle

“I was part of the very first Bible Club.” Wil Buitenweg had just arrived for seniors camp at BCM Netherlands’ Bijbel Club Centrum ‘De Herikon’, but she paused in her unpacking for an interview. “There were only five of us. It was just after the War where everything was so destroyed and bleak, so the bright colors and figures of the flannelgraph were something new and attractive for us. And, of course, the houseboat.”

The Netherlands was still reeling from World War II’s physical and spiritual devastation when an American BCM missionary Anne Punt arrived in November 1949 to team up with Dutch colleague Annie Verboom in bringing the healing Good News of Jesus Christ to Amsterdam’s war-scarred newest generation. A single third-floor room in a canal-front house served as both living quarters and club room. If the first Bible Club drew only five children, it quickly grew. The ‘Annies’, as three generations of Dutch children would come to call them, soon saw

they needed bigger quarters. A whole house, perhaps? But in post-war Netherlands, housing was in short supply. A government permit was necessary to change one’s place of residence, and these were in even shorter supply.

The answer to their prayers only illustrates God’s boundless creativity. If there were no houses for rent, the ‘Annies’ learned of a houseboat for sale. At that time houseboats plied the Dutch countryside’s waterways; they weren’t fixtures of Amsterdam canals. But the city officials had seen Anne Punt and Annie Verboom’s work with Amsterdam’s traumatized post-war youth. A houseboat in the city was a novelty. But if it could keep young people off the streets, why not!

Freshly painted, window boxes bright with flowers, the houseboat was docked on the Herengracht Canal right across from the house where the ‘Annies’ had been living. Along the side, lettering proclaimed ‘Bible Club Movement, Philadelphia, USA’. For

the next decades that boat and its even bigger successor served as BCM headquarters, club room and living space as well as a landmark for the sight-seeing boats motoring past it each day. Today houseboats line Amsterdam’s canals, and a trend that began with the ‘Annies’ creative housing solution is now a major tourist attraction.

Meanwhile, that first group of five clubbers grew to hundreds of children in Bible Clubs and release time classes around Amsterdam. Wil Buitenweg’s fondest childhood memories include hurrying down the street to the houseboat for Bible Club activities, then as she reached her teens, youth meetings and camps. By then she was helping teach Bible Clubs herself.

“I can’t remember a time in my growing up when I wasn’t involved in BCM Bible Clubs and camps,” Wil reminisces. Those

Continued on page 3

From the President



Greetings from my desk here in Akron.

This has been a busy summer. Jeanette and I recently returned from visiting our European missionaries serving in Spain, France, Italy, Netherlands, and Germany. Firsthand we witnessed what God has been doing through His servants in Europe. We talked and prayed about present ministry issues, and planned and prayed about hopes for future ministry. All along the way we saw God's blessings. In Italy, two children were saved at Camp Maranatha during the week we were visiting.

While in Germany we were with a church youth team busy working on the new BCM church building in Hünfeld and a special needs ministry rehearsing for a Christmas program in Bremen. France, Spain and the Netherlands were also busy in ministry events.

This is our sixtieth year of ministry in Europe. BCM missionaries have created a clear legacy of faithful ministry spanning two generations, but the story is not finished. New ministry opportunities are everywhere, and a new generation of believers is on the horizon. They need to catch the vision of reaching Europe for Christ, and be encouraged to action. Let's help them!

This issue of *World* is centered around what God is doing through BCM in Europe. Each article is a witness to God's past faithfulness and that of His servants, an affirmation of God's provision for today, and the promise of His presence for tomorrow as we reach children and strengthen the church around the world.

Read it. Enjoy it. Pray through it. Share it with others.

Oh, and if you need more copies of *World*, feel free to contact us. We want you to have as many as you need.

Blessings,

Rev. Martin D. Windle
President, BCM International

"So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful."

—1 Corinthians 4:1-2

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BCM International is a Bible-Centered Ministry dedicated to making disciples of all age groups for the Lord Jesus Christ through evangelism, teaching, and training so that churches are established and The Church strengthened.

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experiences fostered a desire to serve God with her life. After attending Capernwray Bible school in Glasgow, Scotland, Wil headed to the Philippines with Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF). Now retired, she is delighted to come back to the BCM clubs and camp where she first heard the Gospel and began her own ministry service.

Wil Buitenweg isn't the only ministry leader to come from those early Bible Clubs. Kees Brussel was 13 when the first BCM Netherlands youth camp was held in 1953. "My aunt said to me, how would you like to go to a camp on a farm?" Kees shares now. "I was from Amsterdam and had never seen a farm or cows, so it was a real adventure. We even got to sleep in the barn."

That week Kees accepted Christ as his Savior. It was back in Amsterdam on the houseboat that he met his future wife Nellie, who also attended the Bible Clubs. By the time Kees and Nellie were in their teens, they were part of a growing group of young people who'd come to know Christ and been discipled in BCM's Bible Clubs and camps and who now wanted to serve God themselves. Once a week they met with the 'Annies' to study a Bible lesson. Then in teams they went out to teach the lesson at a Bible Club.

Then came the year Anne Punt and Annie Verboom both traveled to the United States. Kees and Nellie were left in charge of the houseboat ministry. "We had a lot of eyes watching us," Nellie remembers with a smile. "But we weren't interested in each other then, only the Bible Clubs."

That changed. In 1963 Kees was offered the opportunity to study at Philadelphia College of the Bible (now Philadelphia Biblical University) near BCM's international headquarters in Pennsylvania, USA. Before leaving, Kees asked Nellie to marry him. Nellie accepted and waited five years for Kees to finish his studies before they were able to marry. Together they moved to the north of Holland to serve as BCM missionaries.

Camps remained a part of each summer's ministry. By now the first generation of Bible Clubbers were grown with children of their own. They happily sent their children to BCM summer camps, but they weren't about to give up the fellowship and Bible teaching they'd enjoyed growing up. So began the first family camp. Camps for young adults, young married, then older married couples followed. Over the

next decades as those couples reached retirement age, the first camp was started for senior citizens. Today the Netherlands still maintains BCM's only camping program that has, as they like to joke, "something for everyone from the cradle to the grave."

"Literally sometimes," adds Mark Brussel, Kees and Nellie's son and current director of BCM Netherlands, "as older people who grew up in our camps sometimes ask my dad to bury them."

The first camping seasons were held in whatever facility was obtainable. By the early 80s the 'Annies' had relocated to Putten, a town about two hours' train ride from Amsterdam. They began looking for a permanent camp center. The most attractive option was a large historical home set in spacious, wooded grounds. Built in 1903, the property had served as a hotel for German officers in World War II. But the sale price was prohibitively expensive. The property was rented instead to a secular youth organization, who promptly painted over the windows in black. Within a short time its weekend revelries had a reputation for drugs, occult rituals, and trouble with the police. A year later the property was up for sale again—a much reduced price!

"That summer there was no camp," says Mark Brussel, "because we all spent it cleaning, painting, and repairing the property."

The refurbished town trouble spot became Bijbel Club Centrum 'De Herikon', or 'Bible Club Center 'The Lord is King'. In 1989, when Anne Punt and Annie Verboom retired, Kees and Nellie Brussel relocated to Putten to take over leadership of BCM Netherlands and the camp center. 'De Herikon' has never missed a camp season since. Many of those original Bible Clubbers are seeing their grandchildren and even great children at camp.

Why is this so important? Mark Brussel, who took on the leadership of BCM Netherlands in 2002 when health reasons necessitated Kees stepping down to a less strenuous role, takes time from the flurry of senior camp registration to explain. As in so much of Europe, less than 10% of the Dutch population attend any church service while Bible-believing evangelical protestant churches are small and far apart. 'De Herikon' has brought together



De Herikon

three generations of Christians from across the Netherlands to fellowship and study God's Word together.

"A lot of people, especially youth, share how this place has become a home to them where they feel loved and accepted," adds Mark. "Many return to tell us that this is where they've received relevant and practical Bible teaching that has brought the Bible to life in their daily lives."

Currently nine missionaries and many more volunteers make up the BCM Netherlands team. Reaching beyond their own Bible Clubs and camps, their goal is to provide training and support for Bible-believing local churches anywhere in the Netherlands. Already they are using the Dutch translation of *In Step with the Master Teacher* for training Sunday school and children's ministry leaders from a wide spectrum of church groups. A Dutch version of BCM's Bible curriculum *Footsteps of Faith* as well as the Mailbox Club are getting a new look complete with interactive CD-ROM. Leadership training material is in the process of development.

"What are we trying to accomplish?" Mark Brussel goes on to answer his own question. "Simply to teach God's Word and demonstrate that the Bible is still relevant for every day and has something to say about every issue of daily live."

A paraphrase of Psalm 78:4-6 that sums up well BCM Netherlands' vision for the future as well as the past: "We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, His power and the wonders He has done... so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children."

After three generations, BCM Netherlands has every intention of continuing to do just that!

Centre SEPT: A Beacon of Service to France's Evangelical Protestant Community

by Jeanette Windle

“You have one hour to complete the payment, or you'll lose the property.”

BCM missionary Chuck Powers stared at the French bank clerk. “But the money has already been transferred to your bank. See? 7,000 dollars.”

The bank clerk's expression showed no yielding. “Yes, we see the funds have been deposited. But they are in our Paris branch, not here in Toulouse. If you can't produce \$7,000 within one hour, the property will be repossessed.”

Chuck walked out of the bank frustrated and confused. Would their dream of an evangelical protestant ministry center in Toulouse, France, into which they had already poured so much prayer, sweat, and funds, be shattered by something so small as a bank glitch?

Chuck and Cathy Powers arrived in Toulouse, France, in 1988 with a burden for this Texas-sized country so rich in history and culture, yet so devoid of Gospel witness. To the French, religion was tied historically to the political and social authority of the Roman Catholic church. Democracy included throwing off that yoke.

The new France is fiercely secular with only 8% of its 62 million residents attending religious services. Into that spiritual vacuum has exploded the occult with more registered mediums, warlocks, and witches than pastors or priests. While mosques are crowded with Muslim immigrants and converts, fewer than one evangelical protestant church exists per 30,000 population, most under 50 in attendance. Even fewer outreaches exist to reach children with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the French culture, religion is personal, private, not to be intruded on others. The result—an entire generation of French children growing up without spiritual or moral foundation.

A daunting scenario that has contributed to an inordinately high missionary dropout rate. Chuck and Cathy Powers stayed. They started Bible Clubs, children's camps, and teacher training classes to help churches start Sunday schools and children's outreaches. They also began helping a Dutch pastor with a small evangelical church in Toulouse.

Eventually God opened the door to acquire a one-time country estate, now in the Toulouse suburbs. 5,500 square meters of land held a swimming pool, basketball court, and the original vacation home with a large enough kitchen/living area to squeeze up to 100 people for gatherings. Now the Powers were able to hold camps, evangelistic events, and theological training weekends for church leaders. A cell church was started in what was also their home and BCM France offices.



*Centre SEPT: Centre des Services
Évangéliques et Protestantes de Toulouse*

Then one day the Powers received notice that city government would be appropriating the Toulouse church property, part of a demolition plan to make room for a new neighborhood. In compensation, the city was offering the congregation an abandoned elementary school property at well under market value. With 6,000 square meters holding several buildings, a large hangar and storage facility, and plenty of room for future construction, it should have been prime real estate. But over the last three years, the school had been squatting grounds of a gypsy band who'd left it trashed, filthy, and a magnet for troublemakers and addicts. The abandoned school was not only an eye-sore, but a security problem. Maybe a church group, officials suggested, could do something to salvage the situation.

The church had neither use nor manpower for a property that large, though they agreed to take a portion that included two buildings for

their services. What about BCM France? The central location and size would be perfect for an evangelical protestant ministry center as well as outreach to the low-income neighborhoods surrounding it.

It certainly would, Chuck Powers agreed. There was just one problem. However fantastic a deal, BCM France had no budget for the necessary down-payment. But when informed of their decision, city officials begged Chuck to reconsider. How could he say no? In this culture where evangelical Protestants were such a minority they were labeled as a cult, here were leaders of one of France's largest cities asking an evangelical ministry for help.

If Chuck had no peace to turn the offer down, reality said there were no funds nor prospects of raising any sort of a miracle. Still, they could pray. But the deadline came, and they still had not so much as a penny. That day a gentleman who had done volunteer work with BCM stopped by. Chuck explained the situation. “Tomorrow I'll have to give the city our final ‘no.’”

“Take me out to the school,” the man asked. Together they drove over to the abandoned property and walked around it. Despite the mess and piled refuse, Chuck could see clearly in his mind's eye a future training center for pastors, missionaries, and teachers, a youth ministry, a center for Christian arts. So many possibilities were here.

It was then that his companion turned to him. “Chuck, I believe this project is from the Lord. I'm going to go to the bank myself, borrow money and help you make this down payment.”

When God sends the rain, it pours! That same day the evangelical church with which Powers were ministering offered to help. So did another African immigrant congregation. The next day instead of a final ‘no’, Chuck handed over the first installment of the down payment. A sign went up on the street side of the hangar—‘Centre SEPT: Centre des Services Évangéliques et Protestantes de Toulouse’ (Centre SEVEN: A Service Center to the Evangelical Protestant Community of Toulouse).

The BCM France team was not the first to

envision the ministry possibilities of this property. Before the school was abandoned and invaded by gypsies, three neighborhood women with children in the school, the only known evangelical families enrolled there, had begun to pray that someday this property would fall into the hands of evangelical Christians. Walking around the school, they'd prayed that this beautiful, ample facility would become a center for area Christians. Now they witnessed the answer to their prayer as national Christians and expatriate work teams began clearing away rubbish, scraping, scrubbing, cleaning, and painting each building in turn. A former Catholic chapel, which was included with the school, was finished first, and on Christmas Day, 1999, the first services were held there. Little by little, donations trickled in for bank payments and more construction projects.

So now would God allow their investment and labor to be lost to an uncooperative bank official and computer system?

Jumping into his car, Chuck pushed the speed limit to his own personal bank. The teller on duty had come to know the BCM France missionaries over the years. On his desk a sign announced in big letters that a two-day notification was required for any withdrawal above \$700 cash. But when Chuck explained the problem, he immediately counted out \$7000. Rushing back with the cash, Chuck laid it before the bank official with literally minutes to spare.

This wasn't the last time finances tested the BCM France team's faith. The final bank payment of \$12,000 was due, and once more the coffers were empty. Chuck called a meeting of pastors and leaders involved in the Center. The final payment was due the next day, he explained. If the funds didn't materialize, the project was over. But by the end of the meeting, only one pledge had been made.

Okay, Lord, this is it! Chuck prayed silently as the meeting broke up. The group was still visiting over coffee when an expatriate businessman arrived late from work. "It's over," Chuck explained. "The bank forecloses tomorrow."

Pulling out his wallet, the businessman slapped it on the table. "I'm willing to put down \$3,500 if everyone in this room makes a pledge."

One by one, pastors and leaders began writing checks. They were still counting when Chuck called his brother Marvin in Tennessee. "We're

still \$3,000 short," Chuck informed him.

"Well, that's good," his brother answered, "because \$3,000 is all I have."

Over the years since, the vision that began with three praying mothers in a low-income neighborhood of Toulouse, France, has become an exciting reality. Among those present for a Gospel presentation at Center Seven's inauguration was that bank teller.

Center Seven focuses on three main goals:

Training: Teacher training, theology and leadership classes for pastors and church leaders, seminars for worship leaders, Christian musicians, and any other aspect of Christian ministry are made available to the evangelical protestant community of Toulouse and across France.

Evangelism: Concerts, sports events and other outreach activities offer opportunities to share Christ within the community. Children's Bible Clubs and teen cell groups reach not only neighborhood youth, but through them, their parents. An art and music facility open to local artists witnesses through the Center's strong ethics and behavior code as well as the personal witness of Center personnel. A game room that for two years was an evangelistic outreach to neighborhood youth has been shut down for lack of workers.

Ministry to other churches: Training opportunities is not all Center Seven offers the Christian community of Toulouse. Congolese, Arab, Gypsy, Brazilian, Vietnamese, and, of course, French congregations currently use Center facilities for their service. Low rent, great facilities, and office space help churches just starting out with resources to run their ministries.

In the seven years since the Center opened, the chapel finally deteriorated to the point where it had to be closed. Two of the churches have outgrown the original classrooms. The newest project is a multi-purpose building with 500-seat auditorium, classrooms and studios for concerts, conventions and other Christian community events. Again, the funds needed for completion would seem an impossible dream. But Chuck and Cathy Powers and the BCM France ministry team have no doubts it will become a reality. If there's any lesson these last years have taught them, it's that God is still in the miracle business!

ICE SKATES REACH YOUTH FOR CHRIST IN TOULOUSE

by Jeanette Windle

A challenge to a small group of teens has become one of France's largest annual youth outreaches. Chuck and Cathy Powers, BCM missionaries, worked with a small youth group of 15 teens. They proposed to them an ice skating evangelistic event in Toulouse but they would need an attendance of at least 200 to cover costs. For the 15 teens in the youth group, that seemed an impossible goal. But they accepted the challenge and began inviting their friends. On the given night, 250 people showed up at the ice-skating rink. The event proved so popular, it was repeated the next year.

The ice-skating outreach has now become an annual event. Last year attendance was up to 750. While skaters take the ice, Christian contemporary music replaces the usual hard rock, secular music. During a mid-evening pause, Christ is shared through mime, special music and testimonies. Hundreds of New Testaments or pocket Gospels are handed out.

One exciting result, shares Chuck Powers, has been Christian young people meeting for the first time other Christians who attend their same school. At least one young Christian couple met their spouse at the event. It also provides a great opportunity for Christian youth to bring their unsaved friends to a non-threatening evangelical outreach.



BCM Italy: Compelled by Love

by Jeanette Windle

If anyone understands the value of persistent, unflagging ministry to children, it's Jim Lines. Accomplished shop-lifter, burglar, and truant from school before he was eligible for a driver's permit, he worried little about what his parents would say. His mother, profane and immoral, wrote the grocery lists for his raids. Few in his hometown who'd suffered the depredations of Lines family shopping believed the young thief would grow up to stay out of jail, much less end up overseas as a missionary.

But they never took into account God's grace and love displayed through one elderly Christian couple. Oscar and Nancy Bonds drove long distances to take Jim to church, welcomed him into their home, and despite parental hostility and even demands for financial compensation, refused to give up him. At age 10, attending a revival service with the Bonds, Jim accepted Christ. Under Oscar and Nancy's continued encouragement, Jim grew up to attend Moody Bible Institute and Dallas Theological Seminary. By then he was married to high school sweetheart Fran Linderman. When Jim was ordained into the ministry in 1962, his own parents didn't bother to attend, but the Bonds were at his side (for full story, see *Compelled by Love*, available through Masthof Press at www.masthof.com).

Perhaps it was that example of unflagging persistence that led Jim along with his wife Fran in 1963 to Italy as BCM missionaries. Economically prosperous with a proud historical and cultural heritage, Italy was then and remains one of the most closed countries to spiritual issues. Still nominally Catholic, Italians have long since thrown off the Vatican's spiritual and political dominance—and with it any interest in Christianity. Reaching them with the Gospel requires the same patient, long-term investment into lives that Jim received from the Bonds.

Jim and Fran Lines have done just that for forty-four years. In Rimini, a port town on central Italy's Adriatic coast, they got involved with a small group of believers. Through Bible



Campers at Centro Maranatha, Italy

Clubs, children's camps, and Bible studies, they developed relationships with children and their parents. Gradually, one by one, sometimes after years of sharing their faith, they saw people come to know Christ. Italian Sunday school and Christian teaching material was scarce, so they established a publishing house, beginning with the translation of BCM's Bible curriculum *Footsteps of Faith*, then *Tiny Footsteps of Faith*.

"An Italian girl who spoke English would translate one lesson a week," remembers Fran. "Just enough to keep up with what we needed for the next week's Sunday school and Bible Clubs."

Preschoolers scampering around her desk, Fran typed and mimeographed. As her children grew up and production equipment became more sophisticated, those early materials gave way to today's professional and attractive publications, still in demand among Italian churches. BCM Italy's current catalog holds 43 titles.

Early children's camps were held anywhere a facility could be found. By 1980, Christians in the Rimini area were asking for a camp site of their own. Local real estate was outrageously expensive, but Jim and Fran heard about an old farm property in the mountains an hour from Rimini. Its historic stone farmhouse was badly in need of repairs. But there was electricity, water, and ten acres of land. The asking price was an unbelievably low \$30,000. Best of all, the quiet, green mountain valley was one of God's most beautiful corners of creation, its ripe hay fields, sweeping forests, traditional white-washed homes, and distant church bells right out of a 'Sound of Music' movie take. Both Italian and overseas churches helped raise

the purchase price. The farm was renamed Centro Maranatha.

"The original stone building leaked and was falling apart inside," reminisces Jim Lines. "We held our first regional meeting in the hayloft. It was raining hard with water pouring through the cracks. The believers sat with umbrellas over their heads. I held an umbrella over the speaker with one hand and a lantern in the other so he could read his notes."

An earthquake completed nature and time's demolition job. But the stone shell and foundation were solid. Bit by bit the Lines, Italian Christian volunteers, and work teams from North America refitted dormitories, a modern kitchen and bathrooms, chapel and game facilities. Today a second building provides bedroom suites for staff and adult retreats as well as workshop and storage. A basketball court, soccer field, hiking trails, and archery range offer outdoor exercise while games can retreat under a large covered patio when it rains. The addition of central heating now allows Centro Maranatha to be used even during the winter months.

Volunteers from area churches as well as European and American short-term ministry teams provide staff. But within a few years it became clear to Jim and Fran Lines that their Rimini ministry, publishing house, and Centro Maranatha was too much for one couple. That was when God brought Michael and Lorna Ralston, BCM missionaries from Canada, to Centro Maranatha.

"I myself was a product of camp ministry," shares Michael, "which is one of the reasons I feel the Lord has led me to this work. I was

13 when I accepted Christ at camp. Since that time the Lord has left a burden on my heart for reaching children in this way.”

Five years ago, Michael and Lorna took over the leadership of Centro Maranatha. What do they find most exciting about their ministry? Definitely seeing children come to Christ. As the current week of campers dart around, they point out a small boy named “I” (name withheld) and tell his story. When he first came to camp two years ago, he was seven years old. His mother was in the hospital undergoing cancer treatments. His father had long since abandoned them. Angry, defiant, he required constant supervision and discipline. During a swimming excursion, he almost drowned due to disobedience. Michael and Lorna never expected to see him again. But the next year “I” was back—and this time he accepted Christ. Visiting Centro Maranatha today, it’s hard to reconcile the smiling, eager nine-year-old back for his third year with that heartbroken, angry small boy.

Even as Michael and Lorna answer questions about their ministry, they are interrupted. Counselors have found a small girl crying. Lorna bustles away. By lunch-time, another soul has entered the kingdom of God.

But if seeing children and adults come to Christ is exciting, so is watching the difference long-



Craft time at Centro Maranatha, Italy

term Bible teaching and discipleship have made in lives—along with the fellowship of other Christians. With Centro Maranatha now in its 27th year, both the Lines and Ralstons have been struck with how many campers from both Christian and non-Christian homes come back year after year, first for children’s camp, then youth. Many return eventually as counselors and camp staff.

The result is friendships that last a lifetime. If Catholic cathedrals stand empty, evangelical protestant churches rarely surpass 50 people and are far apart. Too many children and

teenagers at camp are the only Christian youth in their churches. Coming together with other Christian youth at camp encourages them that they aren’t alone and forges friendships that last a lifetime, carried on by letter, phone, and email when camp is over.

Not to mention marriages. Jim Lines says he’s lost count of how many Christian couples have met their spouses at Centro Maranatha over the years. “I don’t know how many lives this camp has touched for eternity,” he adds, “but we are so thrilled to be able to build into the lives of people.”

And that includes Centro Maranatha’s neighbors. Some years ago, the camp began inviting community residents to an annual feast and program. That led to an area Bible study. With no evangelical church in the area, the goal is to see a church develop at Centro Maranatha. In Italy’s hard spiritual soil, that will take time and persistence. But the same love of God that prompted an elderly couple to pour time and effort into a small boy that was not their flesh and blood compels both Jim and Fran Lines and Michael and Lorna Ralston to continue investing their own lives that the people of Italy too may come to know the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

A WEDDING, A SEDER, AND A MENU by Jeanette Windle

One never knows how God will use the smallest decision to impact a life. It was Easter Sunday, 2007, when Jim and Fran Lines settled into a verandah table overlooking the gardens of their favorite Italian restaurant, a family-owned and regionally-famous establishment walking distance down the mountainside from Centro Maranatha. They were first puzzled, then delighted as they read the daily menu: ‘Roasted lamb, bitter herbs, unleavened bread’. In the margin was a question: ‘Why this dish?’ Beneath was a reference from Deuteronomy 16 where the Passover was instituted.

Jim and Fran called over the restaurant owner’s daughter. “Daniela, does this mean what it sounds like?”

As a young girl, Daniela had begged to go to camp just up the road. Her father always refused. But above the restaurant in an apartment next to the owner’s own quarters

lived the head cook and his wife, a waitress in the restaurant, as well as their own young daughter. She was allowed to go to camp and loved the stories, songs, and Bible truths she was learning. Years later when she was planning her wedding, she pleaded to have the reception at Centro Maranatha. Though it was hardly convenient, Jim and Fran agreed.

Little did they know the fruit that simple decision would produce. Through the wedding festivities, the Lines developed a friendship with the bride’s parents. Soon after, the parents asked Jim and Fran to start a Bible study in their home—above the restaurant. Their now-married daughter had moved to another town, but she drove the hour or more back to attend the Bible studies. Others connected to the restaurant began to attend, including the restaurant owner’s daughter Daniela. But though the group was eager and faithful, it was difficult to judge how much impact the

Bible study was having on their lives. A public decision of faith was a momentous step in the Italian culture.

Until this Easter Sunday.

“This looks like a declaration that you’ve realized that Jesus Christ is your Passover Lamb,” Jim told Daniela.

“Yes, that is what I meant it to be,” Daniela answered.

Today Daniela is open in her faith, teaching her children stories from the Bible and praying with them. Her husband, who has recently taken over the restaurant from his father-in-law, recently began attending the Bible study. And each Sunday on the menu customers are given to take home, Daniela prints another verse—her testimony of faith in Jesus Christ.

BCM Germany: Ordinary People Serving an Extraordinary God

by Jeanette Windle

“You be an overseas missionary? With your dyslexia and poor grades, you’d never be able to learn the language!”

For Dale Sigafoos, the worst was that friends, teachers, even mission leaders were right. He didn’t even understand English grammar. How could he learn a foreign language? It would be far more practical to stay in Ohio where he and his wife Paula were already effectively ministering in BCM Bible Clubs and camps. Except that neither Dale nor Paula had any doubt God was calling them as missionaries to Germany.

“Lord, I’m afraid. I don’t feel I can do this,” Dale prayed. “If you really want us to go, give me an assurance.”

As Dale went back to the study verses he was struggling to memorize, the day’s assignment jumped out at him. “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10).

“Okay, I’ll go, but you’ll have to handle the language.”

It was 1970 when the Sigafooses boarded a transatlantic liner for Mainz, Germany, where they’d been assigned to work in children’s and youth ministries. But language school confirmed Dale’s worst fears. At the end of two years, Paula at home with their baby daughter knew more German than Dale.

Then catastrophe struck—or so it seemed.

Karen, the BCM missionary the Sigafooses had come to help, was in a skiing accident, leaving her with a badly broken leg. “You’ll have to teach until I’m back on my feet,” she informed Dale.

“But I don’t even speak proper German.”

“You can read, can’t you? Just read the lesson to the kids using the flannelgraph figures.”

Dale reluctantly obeyed. But by the end of the first lesson, the children were shaking their heads. “Just put away the book and talk to us,” they pleaded. “We’ll correct you.”

Dale did—and so did the children. Under their patient tutelage, Dale discovered he was retaining more German than in all his studies. Slowly, gradually, learning as a child does, Dale found himself speaking German.

For the next decades the Sigafooses ministered in Mainz in Bible Clubs and camps. A Youth Cellar they were able to start in the basement of a state-owned church drew in more than 100 youth on weekends. Recognizing BCM’s limited personnel, the Sigafooses began teacher training courses for other churches to begin their own children’s outreach. This led to translation of BCM’s Bible curriculum *Footsteps of Faith* and other material, then church planting with a small congregation in Mainz. Today, listening to Dale teach a home Bible study, it is difficult to imagine him speaking anything but fluent German.

Michael Leister has never had any problem with his German. He was born in a small village outside of Hünfeld, a county center of 15,000 where BCM Germany now has its headquarters. What possible meaning life held—if any—was another matter. When Michael was ten, he accepted Christ at a Bible Club BCM missionary Donna Smith was holding in his village. But by his teen years he’d wandered far from God.

Michael had graduated from college with a degree in Business Administration and

was working for the international corporation Bosch when his search for meaning in his life led him to recommit his life to God, not now just as his Savior but Lord of every aspect of his life. He returned to the missionary who’d led him to Christ. “What can I do to serve God?”

Donna Smith recommended a year of Bible training that took Michael to the Capernway Bible school in British Columbia, Canada. When he returned to Germany in 1994, it was as a BCM missionary. Beyond Bible Clubs and youth outreach, Michael too began a church planting ministry with a small cell group of young Christians in his home region of Hünfeld. But with minimal missionary support and the cell group too small to support a pastor, he was soon faced with a difficult decision—leaving full-time ministry to earn a living.

That was when God opened an exciting new door. Michael was invited to use his earlier business experience to teach a computer course for the employees of an industrial company. Then another. For thirteen years now, those occasional training courses have provided for Michael to remain in ministry as a BCM missionary.

“What in ourselves we can’t do, God can!” Dale Sigafoos expresses.

What both Michael and Dale share is a burden for the local church in Germany. With 82 million residents, Germany is the most populous nation in Western Europe and the wealthiest, its per capita income only slightly below the U.S. It is also one of the coldest spiritually. While more than 70% describe themselves historically as Christian, less than 10% attend services with more than half of churchgoers over age 50. Less than 3% identify themselves as Bible-believing followers of Jesus Christ.

The scarcity of Bible-believing churches brought Dale Sigafoos and other evangelical protestant ministry leaders together in 1983 to form the Conference for Church Planting (**Konferenz für Gemeindegründung** or **KfG**), its goal to help in the foundation and development of Bible-believing *freie gemeinde*, or ‘free churches’, a term used for any church not sponsored or supported by the government



BCM Germany Church, Hünfeld, Germany

‘TO THE LEAST OF THESE, MY BRETHREN’

by Jeanette Windle

During Nazi-era Germany, disabled citizens were categorized as sub-human and expendable, many ending their days in the extermination gas chambers. In reaction to this history, Germany today has some of the world’s most exceptional programs for both mentally or physically disabled. Bremen, a city of 680,000 in northern Germany, has over 50,000 registered disabled residents, in part because of excellent facilities that draw disabled and their care-givers from the entire region.

A Christian woman who taught special education classes in the school system discovered that some of her most difficult students became more manageable when she sang Christian music, told them Bible stories, and prayed with them. Families too noticed the improved behavior, but eventually some coworkers found out what she was doing and filed a protest. She had to stop, but the families begged her to continue the Christian program outside of school hours. So began the first Bible Club in Bremen for mentally-disabled adults.

Eventually the Christian teacher was forced to retire. That was when she approached BCM Germany field leader Dale Sigafoos about finding a replacement for the ministry. BCM missionary Patti Dix, then serving with Sigafoos in Mainz, had worked for a time with BCM associate ministry, Handi*Vangelism Ministries International. She moved to Bremen to work with German BCM missionary Renate Kunde. Today they lead three Bible Clubs, reaching more than 100 mentally disabled adults each week.

Bible Club time includes coffee time, fellowship, lots of singing, celebrating birthdays, and, of course, Bible stories. A church in Bremen has opened its doors and hearts to sponsor two of the clubs, and clubbers love to dramatize Bible stories for the congregation on special occasions.

Comprehension level varies from toddler to a few who have even learned basic reading skills, explains Patti Dix, making lesson preparation and content a challenge. So Patti and Renate were as excited as the clubbers when one girl who’d gone to BCM’s vacation-time Handi-Camp came home and drew pictures to illustrate the entire Bible story she’d heard at camp. Bringing the pictures to Bible Club, she

proceeded to explain the whole story with its salvation message to the other clubbers.

If all the clubbers lack as clear an understanding, their simple faith and love make Patti and Renate’s ministry more than worth the effort. Jesus Christ Himself made clear the value of this BCM ministry: “Whoever receives one such child in my name, receives Me” (Mark 9:37).



BCM Germany Missionary Patti Dix

or state-controlled denominations.

Over the years KfG has grown to a community of some 200 congregations. One of KfG’s founders, Eckehard Strickert, was also leader of the small cell church where Michael Leister ministered. Through Eckehard, Michael became involved in writing and publishing the KfG magazine Gemeindegründung (Church-Planting). When Eckehard died of cancer in 1996, Michael took over the publication.

Meantime the Hünfeld cell group continued to grow. By 1999, they could no longer fit into a home. That year they purchased a run-down three story building on 1100 square meters of land in a central location of Hünfeld and set to work renovating it for a church. The same year Dale and Paula Sigafoos moved to Hünfeld, leaving the Mainz church under independent leadership. Already the Hünfeld church was outgrowing its small meeting room, so they started a building program including a new sanctuary that could seat upwards of 300.

Today **Bibelgemeinde Nordrhön** (Bible Church of the North Rhine) has an average Sunday attendance of 120, a mega-church in Germany. With no other evangelical protestant churches in the area, believers drive for an hour

or more to attend. The church also houses both BCM Germany and KfG headquarters. Dale and Michael both serve on the board of KfG and are two of the church’s three pastor/elders. Dale serves as well as Western Europe Director for BCM.

“Perhaps the connection between church, BCM, and KfG sounds confusing,” says Michael. “But we are first part of the body of Christ, and what unifies us is the person of Jesus Christ, not the three-letter code we belong to.”

Well said! Meanwhile, the local congregation is also reaching well beyond its now-repaired walls. Along with Bible Clubs, youth outreaches, women’s and men’s ministries for their own members, Bibelgemeinde Nordrhön has a ministry to area refugee camps, busing children from Syria, Iraq, Croatia, Serbia or Macedonia to their own Bible Club at the church. Russian-speaking church members are reaching out to Russian immigrant families through home visits, social activities, and a Russian-language Bible study. A third BCM Germany church plant has been started in the city of Traubing. The church has recently commissioned their first missionary, Esther Strickert, daughter of founder Eckehard Strickert, to Pakistan. In fact,

to date BCM Germany has sent 11 missionaries to overseas ministry.

So what is BCM Germany’s vision for the future?

“If you look around today at so many unfinished rooms, flooring, missing paint,” Michael answers, “you get the impression we’re still a construction site. Hopefully in a few months that will all be finished. But we are aware as ministry leaders that as a spiritual construction site, we will never be finished. Germany is very hard ground, and churches here don’t grow as mushrooms. Our vision is to see this church body grow into strong Christians who are able to glorify the Lord with their lives in such a practical way that they are missionaries within their families, their relatives in the villages where they live. Because this is the only way to reach Germans with the Gospel of Jesus Christ—not by big events, but by friendship and personal testimony.”

And by the patient persistence of ordinary Christians like Dale and Paula Sigafoos and Michael Leister who are accomplishing extraordinary things because they serve an extraordinary God.

Raising a Banner High for Spain

by Jeanette Windle

High on a cool, forested mountain slope about 80 kilometers north of Madrid's arid, dusty plains sits a royal palace. Fifteen hundred acres of manicured gardens, fountains, and sculpture make it a showpiece of Spanish architecture. The village of La Granja within its perimeter was established to service this summer residence of the Spanish crown, and many of its residents are still employed there. But at the end of one narrow, cobbled alley, an unpretentious wooden gate set in a high, plastered wall opens into a surprisingly spacious courtyard whose gardens, buildings and residents are dedicated to serving a very different and much greater King.

Centro Bíblico Betel was born of the vision and stubborn endurance of BCM's first missionary to Spain, Maria Bolet (1904-1991). Born into an upper-class home in Cuba, Maria received Christ at age 12 while attending one of the many evangelical Christian schools that proliferated in the pre-Castro era. Eventually traveling to the U. S., she studied at Philadelphia School of the Bible, where her heart became burdened for the land of her ancestors, Spain.

When Maria arrived in Madrid in 1933, armed with a Bible and flannelgraph to teach God's Word to Spanish children, BCM International had not yet been organized as a mission. But a trip back to Philadelphia in 1947 brought Maria into contact with two other women, Bessie Traber and Bernice Jordan, whose passion was also to reach children for Christ. Maria returned to Spain as one of BCM's first international missionaries. She started Bible Clubs, women's outreaches, even a Bible Institute for young women.

Religious freedom at the time in Spain was an off-and-on proposition, especially once *el generalísimo* Francisco Franco began his 39-year dictatorship. Maria was repeatedly expelled from Spain during those early decades, continuing to teach God's Word in France, Tangier, and back in Cuba. She underwent famine during Spain's Civil War and World War II, arrests, and even stoning. But her burden for the Spanish people always drew her back, and in 1968 when religious freedom was declared, Maria returned for good. By now a number of other BCM missionaries were working with her, some of them Maria's own Bible Institute graduates. It was time to look



Centro Bíblico Betel, La Granja, Spain

for a permanent location that could serve as camp and Bible Institute center as well as living quarters and BCM field office.

Maria had held camps for her young Bible Club students a number of times over the years. For two summers, they had even rented a property in La Granja on the summer palace grounds. Then during the second summer, their landlord told them of a property for sale right in La Granja. When Maria and the others took a tour, it seemed perfect for their dream. A large, high-walled garden bordering the palace woods, it had an open area for games, huge shade trees, and living quarters along three sides that could be converted for dormitories and classrooms. But it would take a lot of hard work, and the asking price seemed an impossible mountain to scale.

"We don't know what to think," Maria wrote to colleagues at BCM headquarters. "We were so sure that the Lord would give us a sign that the house was for us! I am perplexed. At times He wants us to trust without any sign, simply practising blind faith, like jumping over a precipice in the dark."

Maria and her coworkers chose to trust—and pray. The camp children, delighted with the proposed location, also began to pray and to give. Then as word spread to BCM Bible Clubs and camps in other countries, gifts started to arrive. Holland, Germany, Japan, India, Panama, and Mexico all sent offerings as did Bible Clubs and churches in the USA and Canada. Local Spanish Christians and expatriate volunteer teams pitched to help build

a bigger building for dormitories and meeting rooms. By 1970 Centro Bíblico Betel, or Bethel Bible Center, had become a reality.

Today Centro Bíblico Betel is one of Spain's best-known Christian camp and retreat centers, not just for the beauty of its location but for its reputation of Bible-focused teaching and ministry. The recent completion of a new building has expanded capacity to 60 campers plus staff as well as allowing CBB to be used year-round for Christian retreats and other functions.

BCM Spain's own summer camping program spans from age five through university and professional young adults. If space inside CBB's four high walls is limited, there are always overnight hikes up the mountain, trips to the local archery range and pool, barbecues and picnics in the palace woods.

But the study and memorization of God's Word remains a priority. One of the BCM missionaries who came to help Maria Bolet at Centro Bíblico Betel was Evelyn Plett. In 1980, when Maria's failing health eventually forced her to move to a lower, warmer climate, Evelyn stepped up to carry on the leadership of CBB as camp director for the next 26 years. Four years later, Isabelle Leitch joined the Betel team, and in 2006, Evelyn in turn passed the leadership baton on to Isabelle. Not that Evelyn knows the definition of retirement! She remains as active as ever meeting camp needs. Both Evelyn and Isabelle are passionate about keeping CBB's program Bible-centered.

"Yes, we want the kids to have fun," says Isabelle. But they have seen only too many campers arrive from unstable or ruptured family situations and struggling with insecurity and deep hurts of their own. "The two things we see impact kids the most are the love of God as transmitted through the counsellors to the campers and the impact of the Word of God on their lives."

For that reason counsellors are expected to share the plan of salvation the very first night of camp. Isabelle shakes her head as she explains. "I don't know what might happen. We've had kids who've been unexpectedly called home. There could be an accident, death, anything. If so, we want to know they've heard a clear presentation of the Gospel."

Encouraging a heart for missions is another

priority. Each summer campers raise an offering for an overseas mission project, often another BCM children's ministry in countries such as Surinam, Peru, India, or Greece.

Neither Evelyn nor Isabelle can count how many young people who have been taught and discipled in God's Word at Centro Bíblico Betel have gone on to serve in ministry themselves. Evelyn recalls one man walking up to her at a church retreat, a small child in his arms. "Oh, hello, Auntie Evelyn," he greeted. She had no idea who he could be. "Don't you remember me? I'm Pedro. I was one of your campers." Married now and a father, he was pastoring a church in Madrid.

"You have no idea," he went on to tell Evelyn, "how many of us who are ministers and pastors across Spain have come through your camp."

"I could tell that story over and over again in different forms," Evelyn adds. A pleasure for both women is visiting churches where they see young people putting into practice such skills as drama, puppets, or black lighting they've learned at camp. A young lady serving with a BCM missions team in Peru is just one whose interest in missions came from their camp years.

None of this would be possible without what Isabelle and Evelyn describe as 'the best staff in Spain'. Counsellors and other volunteers come from churches across Spain as well as expatriate short-term mission teams. Many are former campers themselves.

"I thank God for them because they are 100% sold out for God," adds Isabelle. "They know they're here to serve God, they know we expect 24 hour service from them, and they give everything they have."

Now that Isabelle Leatch in turn has accepted the baton of leadership, what is her vision for the future of Centro Bíblico Betel?

"That this place continue to be what we call in Spanish an *'atalaya'*, a banner or standard held high for Spain," Isabelle answers. "A banner that everyone recognizes as standing for the highest biblical standard in every aspect of culture and practice and teaching here at Centro Bíblico Betel."

Now among that great cloud of witnesses Scripture describes watching the race of Christian life being run at Centro Bíblico Betel and around the world (Hebrews 12:1), Maria Bolet is undoubtedly in agreement.

GLOBAL POSITIONING

by Jeanette Windle

The Hünfeld church was a rabbit warren of narrow hallways and run-down rooms when the congregation moved in. In 2005, a work team from Fellowship Church, Phillipsburg, NJ, Dale and Paula Sigafos' home church, spent two weeks helping remodel and begin construction of an annex and sanctuary.

In June, 2007, 12 teenagers from Fellowship Church, along with Pastor Doug Batchelder and chaperons, returned to Hünfeld. Over ten days they knocked down walls, pick-axed and repoured concrete flooring, and remodeled the attic. "This is a group of kids serious about serving the Lord," affirms Pastor Batchelder.

For further information on work projects in Germany or across our 50 ministry fields, check out BCM's short term ministry program, GPS, at www.bcmintl.org/gps.



Featured web sites in this Issue:

BCM Netherlands (*in Dutch*):
<http://www.bijbelclubbeweging.nl/>

BCM France (*in French*):
<http://france.bcmintl.org/>

BCM Italy (*in Italian*):
<http://www.bcmitaly.it/>

BCM Germany (*in German*):
<http://www.bcm.de/>

BCM Global Positioning Services:
<http://www.bcmintl.org/gps>

STEWARDSHIP CORNER

Looking for creative ways to give to missions and still maintain needed retirement plans? Consider the following options:

1. Any individual age 70½ and older who owns an IRA may through December 31, 2007 make gifts to BCM in an amount of up to \$100,000. Also, if such individuals own other forms of retirement accounts, such as 403(b) (tax sheltered annuities), 457 (government retirement accounts) 401(k), pension and profit-sharing plan accounts, they need only transfer the amount to an IRA to take advantage of this law.
2. BCM's charitable gift annuities can be used to fund some or all of the education of a child, grandchild, etc. As an example, Ann, a grandmother, purchases a BCM deferred gift annuity for her 4-year-old grandson, Peter, who will enter college at age 18. She has Ford Motor stock worth \$50,000, for which she paid \$40,000. When she purchases the gift annuity, she'll receive an immediate tax deduction of \$13,358.52.

Peter in turn at age 18 elects the College Annuity Option, before the annuity starting date, and will receive \$20,187.28 annually for 4 years. Of the \$20,187.28, assuming Peter is in the 15% tax bracket, he will collect \$9,160.32 tax free and \$11,026.96 of ordinary income. Since the annuity payments are to be made before Peter is age 59½, he also will be required to pay a 10% tax penalty, making his annual tax payments \$2,756.74, leaving \$17,430.54 per year for college expenses.

If either of these issues are of interest to you, please call BCM's Development department at 717-859-6404.

Joe MacMichael
Vice President of Development

MISSIONARY CLASS OF 2007



Back row, from left: Dick McCloy, Lenny Ferm, Jorge Morales, Brian Biegert. Front row: Sharon Gale, Cony Morales, Lisa Biegert, Sarvia & Daniel Ortiz.

BCM International is pleased to present our Missionary Class of 2007:

Brian & Lisa Biegert: Serving in Peru doing Pennies for Peru and church planting; maintenance and grounds work at IBYM (Bible and Ministry Institute) (Brian); home schooling and TESL for Peruvian missionary kids (Lisa).

Lenny Ferm: Serving in New Jersey doing Mailbox Bible Club ministry to children & adults in the USA.

Sharon Gale: Serving in southwestern Virginia doing after-school Bible Clubs and character classes in public schools.

Dick McCloy: Serving in South Carolina doing inductive Bible studies and serving as a BCM representative.

Jorge & Cony Morales: Serving in Spain training leaders and teachers; discipleship ministry.

Daniel & Sarvia Ortiz: Serving in Bolivia as the Latin American Director (Daniel); teaching and coordinating leaders and teachers in Bolivia.