

BCMWorld

An Inside Look at BCM Global Ministries

Fall 2009



**BCM Philippines: Making
a Difference for Jesus**

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MAKING A DIFFERENCE GOD'S WAY

Short-term missions teams—are they an effective way to build a church, feed the poor, reach children on the streets? Wouldn't it be easier and cheaper to take the funds involved and hire local talent for the job?

Possibly, but short-term missions trips are more than just finances. They are an investment of lives into lives. I have interviewed countless short-term missions team members. Some of their experiences you have read about in past issues. You will read others in these pages. But two responses have been so unvarying I finally banned them from trip write-ups because of redundancy.

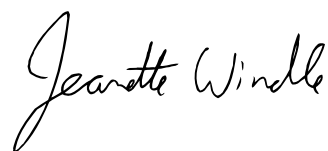
1) "I lost my heart to the people of . . . Peru, Africa, Indonesia, fill-in-the-blank."

2) "I went to make a difference, but my own life was changed forever."

Every year BCM International fields countless short-term missions teams and individual ministry volunteers all over the world. In fact, for every full-time BCM missionary or pastor, dozens of volunteers are working alongside or giving their own time and funds to meet a specific project or ministry need. From the USA they travel to build camp buildings in Bolivia or minister to Orissa refugees in India. From Germany to cook for BCM's Camp Maranatha in Italy. From the Ukraine to fill in at Center Seven in Toulouse, France. From Metro Manila to teach VBS in rural Philippine villages. Short-term volunteers staff BCM camps in more than 25 countries. They reach out through mime and drama on the streets of Peru or Quebec. And so much more.

From those face-to-face encounters with a lost humanity in need of a Savior as well as with amazing brothers and sisters in Christ around the world is rising the next generation of BCM missionaries. By far the majority of all new personnel on any mission field today will share that they are there because they first lost their hearts on a short-term missions outreach and found themselves too changed to settle back into life as before. And that cannot be hired locally!

BCM International has short-term missions opportunities on five continents, ranging from camp volunteers to building projects, street evangelism to disaster relief. In fact, it can be said literally that the sun never sets on BCM ministry opportunities. Check them out. Join us on a God-adventure that will capture your heart and change your life.



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BCM International is a global 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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FROM THE PRESIDENT



“It is not our responsibility to bring the world to Christ; but it is our responsibility to take Christ to the world.”

—Dick Hillis, veteran missionary

BCM ministry leaders have heard me say that everything in the missionary effort is negotiable except for the message. By that I mean that ministry approaches can differ widely and creatively. But to make a difference God’s way, we must deliver the message of Christ and let Christ make a difference in people’s lives.

One thing that gets a lot of air time in Christian circles these days is the high cost of international missions. With the global economy in its current state, this cost is often measured using the standard of a “bottom line” return on a finance-to-ministry ratio. While this has relevance, financial considerations pale when we measure the person-to-ministry ratio, the sacrifice made by sons and daughters of the faith who commit to taking Christ to the world. This may be a “Dream Team” in inner-

city Philly. A soccer (or *futbol*) tournament in Germany. The publishing of children’s Bible curriculum in Myanmar. Short term ministry in South Africa or South America.

This magazine issue showcases BCM ministry fields and committed individuals who are making a difference by bringing Christ to the world through short term missions, longer term service, publishing, and several unexpected ministry approaches. As you read these first-hand accounts of Christ changing the world through His servants, let them make a difference in you. Let your heartbeat for humanity be strengthened and your eyesight for opportunity be broadened that you may feel and see what it is you have been called to do to make a difference God’s way in your world today.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marty".

Rev. Marty Windle
President



EFFECTIVE SHORT-TERM MISSIONS— IT DOESN'T JUST HAPPEN!

by Rev. David J. Parsons, Pine Grove Church

As associate pastor of Pine Grove Church in Lancaster County, PA, I was co-leading a short term missions team headed this summer to serve with BCM Peru in Iquitos and Lima when we ran into trouble. A weather delay in Newark, NJ, had led to missing our Miami connection, springing on us an unexpected 24 hour layover. Our team started praying. A few hours of haggling provided tickets on another airline leaving at 11:30 PM the next evening.

As a team, we rejoiced at God's provision of tickets for such a large a group so early in the morning. After a greasy meal from a drive-thru restaurant at 2:30 AM, my co-leader and I deposited our team in a hotel, then headed back to the airport to confirm our new tickets, reschedule our missed connection to Iquitos and transfer 44 pieces of luggage. Bouncing back and forth from one airline kiosk to another, we finally returned to the hotel around 7 AM, content our trip would continue without problems.

We were sorely mistaken. Arriving later that evening to pick up our tickets, we discovered the flight was completely booked and the ticketing agent had not confirmed our group correctly. Putting our group on the standby list, we called out to the Lord in prayer. My co-leader and I called, talked to and pleaded with everyone we

could think of, but in the end we were 22 teens and adults sitting on the floor of Miami International Airport, praying that somehow we'd make it to Peru. At 10:45 PM the airline supervisor informed me that 22 people hadn't showed up for the flight. Our entire team would be able to board. Cheers and praises to God echoed through the airport as we lined up for our tickets.

We had a fantastic time serving in Peru. Lives we touched and the people and experiences that touched us are still being used by God to conform team members into the likeness of His Son. But the most impactful event of our mission trip never even happened in Peru, rather in Miami. God placed us in a situation where the only solution was Him. God answered the prayers of 22 teens and adults stranded in an airport, and those team members will never be the same again.

I've failed to mention one significant part of this story: our team's response. Through this entire experience, they were never anxious, frustrated or angry. They didn't complain or mutter under their breath. In fact, they exhibited the exact opposite reaction. Our team was excited, thrilled that God was taking them on an adventure, even if they didn't know how things were going to end. We didn't know whether we'd ever get to Peru, but we did know that God was in control and with us every step of the way.

Since returning home, I have been asked frequently, “Why do you think your team responded so well and was able to learn such a tremendous life lesson in trust before your trip even started?”

My answer is simple. We were prepared. Our trip preparation started seven months before saying farewell and kissing our loved ones goodbye.

The New Testament is filled with illustrations relating spiritual growth to farming. Paul talks of his role in seeing Corinthian believers come to Christ: “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.” (1 Cor. 3:6) Jesus uses the parable of the Sower to point different results from the same seed when sown in different soils: “But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.” (Luke 8:15)

I am not a farmer, but I live surrounded by Amish and Mennonite farmers. I’ve noticed over the years that farmers spend great time and effort preparing the soil before actually planting and watering the seeds. They spread manure in the fall. In the spring they spread more fertilizer followed by tilling the ground. They would never consider planting seed until the ground was fully prepared.

As a pastor, when I know lives entrusted to my care are going to be challenged, stripped of home comforts, schedules, culture and language to stand bare before God, I need to prepare them for that moment. Mission trips are definitely one of those moments. I don’t want those under my care responding to God’s challenge with a heart full of stones or weeds. I want them to respond to God with the same embrace good soil gives to the seed. So we start the process early and prepare ourselves seriously for what God is doing in our lives. When the trip is over, we spend significant time debriefing so that we can incorporate the things God has taught us into our lives from that point on.

When I plan a family trip, I get the van checked out. I get maps and look up information on attractions our family might be interested in attending. I rent a place to stay, call the people I want to see, etc. I prepare before I go so that my family and I can get the most out of our time and money when we go away. When I preach or teach, I strive to



proclaim God’s Word in such a way that those listening will be able to put it into practice. I prepare them to live out God’s ways.

In the same way, I believe it is vital to prepare short-term team members for the experience on which they are about to embark. Every trip I’ve led has been different. Each has had at least one time when things didn’t go as planned. Usually there were several “disasters” on each trip. Wallets and cameras stolen. Luggage lost. People becoming seriously sick. Going to a country prepared for one sort of ministry to find they needed us to do something completely different. Cultural misunderstandings. Fights and arguments among team members. The list can go on and on.

But it was in those times of uncertainty and unplanned chaos that our team really pulled together and experienced God’s moving in a powerful way. Or, conversely, that we looked to ourselves and imploded as a team. Over my years of ministry and mission trips, I’ve found that the more time spent preparing ourselves as a team to be flexible servants for God, the better the trip is for our team and our church. Our hosts are also more appreciative to have us serving with them.

Without going into great detail, here are some key elements in preparing our teams I’ve found over the years to be truly helpful:

1. Application and Interview: No matter what kind of trip we’re planning, we require everyone to apply and interview. Part of the application is a contract team members (and their parents if under 18) sign, committing themselves to attend all training and debriefing, even for strictly work projects. It is as important for a skilled laborer to apply and prepare for the trip as for a middle school student. In reality, a church sends either one to invest in the heart and life of the person going, the church and the host mission. Having a skill doesn’t justify the expense of sending that person to another country to serve. Our hosts could hire someone local and get more done with the airfare money than that skilled person could ever accomplish in a couple of weeks. Short-term missions are about investing in people and the kingdom of God. The person with great skills will be



challenged in their faith and relationship with God as much as that teen. Both need to be prepared.

2. Support Raising: We require everyone to write and send out support letters. Each team member must collect a prayer support team of more than ten who will commit to praying regularly before and after the trip and for each day during the trip. Financial support letters are sent to friends and family outside the church. In addition we have special opportunities for the church family to support team members. We started this practice after one of our first trips. Everyone in the church received dozens of letters and were put in the position of choosing who they would support or not support (especially with finances). Giving separate opportunities for those in our congregation to support the team or individuals without pressure or guilt has been a great source of unity within our church body. Even when we've had people fund their own trip, we still want them to have the experience of raising prayer support, which is even more important than the money.

3. Training: Monthly meetings prepare our team for the trip. We study culture, language, geography, and many other things. We bring in someone who has been to the area where we plan to serve to tell us what it is like, how to prepare, and what we might expect. We do team-building activities. We do a book study together, journal, study the Bible and pray together as a team. One way we've found to accomplish much of this in a short time is a weekend retreat a few weeks before the trip. Finding a weekend when everyone can be together is a challenge, but it is always worth the effort. We let people

know when this weekend retreat is during the application process, so they can check their calendar before committing to the trip. Our training phase ends with a commissioning service in our church, in which the congregation sends us off with prayer and the recognition that we are being sent to do God's work.

4. Debriefing: Bringing the team back together for two or three meetings after the trip is vital. Here is where lessons of the trip are internalized and incorporated into a person's life. Our mission team plans and gives a presentation to the church shortly after returning. This helps team members reflect on what God did in and through them during the trip. It is also a great encouragement to the congregation who helped the team accomplish their task and invested in the lives of team members and the mission. Our follow-up meetings happen within a month of our return. These involve sharing stories and pictures of our experience along with how we are living out the lessons God taught us. We pray for each other and monitor any re-entry issues during this time as well.

Short-term mission trips can be one of the greatest opportunities our churches offer to stretch people in their faith and relationship with God. They can challenge participants to be more appreciative of what they have, how they live for God, how they serve others and demonstrate the love of Christ. If we in leadership are diligent in preparing the soil of their hearts before team members ever leave their comfortable homes, I am confident they will be more open to the planting of seeds and watering that others invest in them and ultimately to the growth and fruit that comes only from God.



LIVING FROM A SUITCASE—AND LIKING IT!

by Jennifer Hamilton

Allison Beck has been passionate about the people of Africa for as long as she can remember. That passion took her on a journey she'll never forget to the southernmost tip of Africa for a three-month mission outreach with BCM International.

South Africa is made up of nine provinces, its highest concentration of population along the lush, green eastern coast. Its diversity of African, Indian, European and mixed-race population is reflected in its range of religions, including Islam, tribal African religions, Hinduism, and humanism as well as Christianity. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is a devastating reality in South Africa. Nearly five million people have HIV/AIDS, including a reported 31% of pregnant women. By the 2007 census, South Africa had an estimated 1,400,000 "AIDS orphans," children who'd lost parents infected with AIDS.

In the fall of 2008, Allison flew into Durban, South Africa, a coastal city on the Indian Ocean and the busiest seaport in Africa, with a suitcase full of craft supplies and a desire to make a difference. There BCM Africa director Rev. John Peter and his wife "Aunty Vijay" welcomed Allison into their family with a wide smile and a cup of tea. Rev. Peter's outline of Allison's upcoming ministry schedule was daunting. She'd spend each week in a different city, first in South Africa, then Swaziland, returning to Durban only long enough to do laundry before heading to her next destination.

"I learned to live out of a suitcase," Allison says with a laugh. "And it was so worth it."

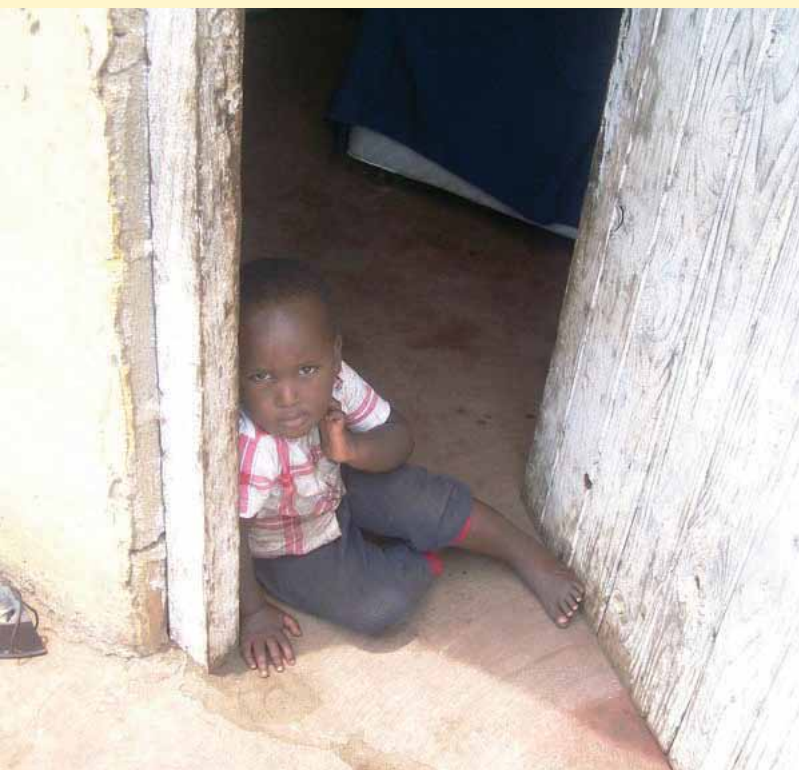
Each city also involved a different area of ministry. Allison began in Sezela, a rural community about 66 kilometers south of Durban, where she worked with a local church going door-to-door for a



community outreach. The following week took her 48 kilometers south to an urban development, Isipingo, where Allison provided food to children in various "squatter camps," settlements of shed-sized shacks made of wood, cardboard, or other scrap material, where entire families live. There is no running water, plumbing or electricity. Open fires are used for cooking, candles for light. In Isipingo Allison visited a Hindu temple, where a man living at the temple paused his walking and chanting to ask who she was and why she was there. Allison was able to share her testimony with him.

After another week working with youth in a rural area called Amatikulu, Allison headed back to Durban to give her testimony at a BCM banquet. When a local Christian radio station asked to interview Allison, her radio host turned out to be a man who'd attended the same North Carolina college as Allison's brother. Who would have thought the body of Christ was so interconnected! Allison then hopped on a plane to a Cape Town crèche (daycare) where fifty children were cared for so their mothers could work. The crèche was one of many places where Allison's suitcase full of crafts came in handy. Children were delighted with a puppet Allison used to tell stories and sing songs.

In total contrast was Allison's next week of ministry in Pietermaritzburg, where she helped encourage a pastor and his family. Allison shares, "Helping that family made me realize that missions isn't just about going overseas, but also helping in one's



own community. This family was struggling because their church was struggling. My ministry for that week was simply to encourage them.”

Next was Verulam, where Allison was assigned to a pediatric ward at a local hospital and an HIV/AIDS clinic. People stood in lines waiting to be seen, often for hours. Orphans waited alone for medical care in those same lines. In Port Shepstone Allison worked at Project Positive Ray, an organization that provides HIV/AIDS counseling as well as awareness training in schools, factories and outlying villages. By now as her time in South Africa moved into its third month, Allison was witnessing more and more the effects of the AIDS pandemic. People were afraid to be tested for HIV because of the stigma attached to an infected person. Fear of being shunned kept those who did have the disease from seeking help. Because of this fear, Project Positive Ray volunteers offered home visits in addition to meeting women openly at the factories on their lunch breaks. One out of three children test positive for HIV, so the need for awareness grows daily.

Last stop on Allison’s African journey was Swaziland, a country bordering South Africa. There she met up with BCM missionaries Sister Martha and Aunty Seko, two women who minister to more than 6000 children each week. Together they visited schools and villages where they held afternoon Bible Clubs. At one gathering at Martha’s church, Allison spotted a little girl in a red corduroy jacket sitting all alone. Joining her, Allison began coloring with the little girl, then read her a Bible story and gave her stickers for the craft project. The little girl’s face lit up. Putting a flower sticker on her forehead, she then reached over to put one on Allison’s face. As the little girl’s arms went around Allison’s neck for a hug, Allison discovered how hard it was going to be to leave Africa behind.



“It broke my heart to have to tell her goodbye and ride away, not knowing what will happen to her,” Allison expresses. “However, I know God is watching over her. You always think missions deals with you impacting others. But the people I encountered while in Africa impacted me far more than I could have imagined. They were so loving, and no matter what their situation, they praised God and let Him have control. Control is a big issue for me and seeing these people worship God and give what little they had to God and the people in their community was such an encouragement. One couple with a little baby girl were refugees from Zimbabwe and had left everything behind in fear for their lives. But they have formed a new family with their church community. Instead of dwelling on the tragedies they’ve been through, they look forward to what God is doing and how He has protected them throughout their journey. They were so inspiring to me to have gone through so much and remain confident in God’s love. It changed my whole attitude on really trusting God and knowing His hand is holding and guiding me.”

Allison left South Africa with a suitcase now empty of craft supplies, but a firm confirmation of God’s call on her life. She is now headed back to college for a Master’s degree in Social Work/Public Health with a focus on HIV/AIDS. Would she recommend her BCM missions experience to others? “I would really encourage you to go on a missions trip if you get the chance, because missions is what God’s heart is, and it should be ours as well. If you are scared or nervous about going, do not worry, because God has everything under control.”



SOCCER + JESUS CHRIST = TRUE WINNERS

by Dawn Moore

The BCM Germany field has a heartfelt burden for sharing the gospel in a country with great financial wealth but an equal measure of spiritual poverty. One solution? Using Germany's fierce loyalty to their national sport as an evangelistic outreach.

That is what happened in Hünfeld August 15, 2009, when enthusiasm for a soccer competition between the city youth center and BCM Germany's largest church plant, Bibelgemeinde Nordrhön (Bible Church of the North Rhine) grew into a full-fledged local tournament. Six teams participated—one team from the youth center and five church teams, though unchurched players also participated on church teams.

"We saw this as an opportunity to reach out to many young men in Hünfeld and other towns who did not know the Lord," explains Dale Sigafoos, European Director for BCM. "Our theme of the day was, 'Who are the only true winners?'"

Good weather and good sportsmanship marked five and one-half hours of soccer games. A grill party packed with food and fellowship time capped off the event. Awarding trophies to first, second and third place teams was followed by the spiritual part of the program. This included an evening devotional and a film about the testimonies of three Brazilian soccer players who are believers in the Lord Jesus. Viewing pictures from the tournament concluded the day's festivities.

"We are thankful to the Lord for a very blessed day where He was honored and those attending had the opportunity to see our lives lived out for Christ in our actions," says Dale.

Of Germany's 82 million population, 70% describe themselves as historically Christian. But less than 10% attend worship services and less than 3% could be categorized as born-again, Bible-believing Christians. More than half of German churchgoers are over the age of 50.



With an aging population, it is critical to reach the nation's younger generation if Bible-believing churches are to survive, so much of BCM Germany's outreach effort is directed at the youth. Key elements of BCM Germany's vision for church growth are friendship and personal testimony. In order to reach Germans for Jesus, believers within the church must lead testimony-in-action lives which glorify God. Make a friend. Be a friend. Bring a friend to Christ.

BCM Germany is headquartered in the Bibelgemeinde Nordrhön church in Hünfeld. Ministry includes Bible Clubs, youth outreaches, men's and women's ministries, a children's ministry to area refugee camps, a Russian-immigrant outreach. The church also houses offices of the Konferenz für Gemeindegründung (KfG), a ministry coalition for planting and developing Bible-believing *freie gemeinde*, or "free churches," a term used for any church not sponsored by the government or state-controlled denominations.

Overwhelming feedback from soccer tournament participants is that they are looking forward to having the event repeated. And that makes the day a winner for everyone.





BCM PHILIPPINES: MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR JESUS

by Jeanette Windle

An ambulant vendor from a Metro Manila slum, Naldo was both a drunkard and violent husband and father when he came in contact with a BCM Philippines area pastor. Through him, Naldo met a personal Savior, Jesus Christ. Today Naldo is a BCM cell group leader, his wife and children all involved in the praise and worship team of their local church. A transformed life has led as well to a transformed economic situation. Naldo now has his own business, a motor-driven tricycle for hire, and a home in the suburbs. His wife is employed, his children also all employed or students.

When Rose came to Christ at a BCM Philippines church, she began praying for her husband Jun, known well for his foul language and heavy smoking—two packs a day. When Rose's pastor and cell group reached out to Jun, he came to Christ. Three years later swearing and smoking are now both in Jun's past, and he is training to become a cell leader.

From a traditional Muslim family, 19-year-old Rashid Abdul felt purposeless and restless in his soul when a friend invited him to a youth event at a BCM Philippines church. That same day he responded to an altar call and accepted Christ as Savior. Now he



knows well his purpose in life as he shares his faith through the church's Creative Arts Ministry.

BCM Philippine's vision statement is "Let's Make A Difference for Jesus Christ," and that is just what they are doing in life after transformed life.

An island nation in the western Pacific Ocean near Indonesia, the Philippines is made up of more than 7000 islands with an estimated population of about 92 million people. The largest island, Luzon, contains the capital city of Manila. Reflective of several centuries as a Spanish colony, the Philippines' religious heritage is predominantly Roman Catholic. But its second largest island, Mindanao, has a large Muslim minority, especially in the south adjacent to the world's most populous Muslim nation, Indonesia.

BCM ministry in the Philippines originated in the Metro Manila area when two missionaries of what was then the Bible Club Movement, Rev. Sonny Acocoro and his wife Ruthy, began home Bible studies and children's Bible Clubs in their district. They were joined by Rev. Mauricio "Mars" Fuerte, son of a pastor and grandson of a tribal chieftain in Mindanao. Under his leadership, the home Bible studies developed into three organized churches along with numerous cell group outreaches. In 1988, the three main churches were incorporated as Bible Centered Fellowship Inc, or BCF.

But Mars Fuerte's heart was back with the tribal people of his native Mindanao. In 1991, he passed on the shepherding of BCF's three founding Metro Manila churches and their outreach ministries to pastors Mers Driz, Roman Vecino and Vernon Wayne de Jesus and headed with his family back to Mindanao.

Mindanao is home to more than 40 different tribal groups, mostly scattered among rugged mountain ranges inaccessible to modern transport. By horseback, hiking steep mountain trails, on motorcycle, Rev. Fuerte and a growing number of BCF pastors and lay leaders have made tribal ministry their focus in Mindanao.

Today BCM Philippines, known locally as BCF, is an association of 93 churches with 109 full-time church workers as well as hundreds of volunteer lay-leaders and 3 training centers. Of the BCF churches, 63 are in Mindanao, only four of these in urban locations. In April, 2005, Rev. Mars Fuerte turned over leadership of BCF to Pastor Vernon de Jesus, but he remains active in BCM's Mindanao outreach.

This includes church planting, children and youth ministry, and evangelistic outreach to Muslims through a sister organization, Love Your Neighbor Foundation (LYN). Youth outreach involves a radio ministry, conducting "True Love Waits" seminars, and the Kahayag Team, which is a tribal group advocating redemption of tribal culture and arts.

Rev. Fuerte, who himself delights in showcasing ethnic tribal outfits, explains why he feels it is so important to encourage tribal youth to express their faith through their own unique ethnic arts and music:

"In BCM we are in the process of restoration. And so we believe that our culture and the special things that are part of our culture are God-given, and we shouldn't forsake it. Our art, for instance, is a God-given ability that should be appreciated and redeemed for the sake of the kingdom of God."

Mindanao is also home to BCM Camp Espanola, a three-hectare compound used by BCF churches for conferences, training events, retreats, as well as children and youth camps. Camp Espanola houses as well the Short Term Bible Institute, BCF's training school for tribal and rural church workers. STBI Students must be at least 17 years of age and are mostly elementary and/or high school graduates from BCF churches across Mindanao. The training, including lodging and food, is free, but students contribute by helping with camp upkeep.

Mindanao has long been a hotbed of civil war with both Islamic separatist and communist guerrilla groups, and BCM's ministry there has not gone untouched [see accompanying article]. At least two BCF pastors have been murdered. Mocsin Hassim was doing evangelistic outreach in a strongly Muslim region when he was



waylaid, ordered to recant and shot a dozen times. His daughter was also murdered. Villalon Moralo, a BCF district overseer as well as pastor, was entitled as a tribal chieftain to more than a hundred hectares of land, part of a government peace accord. When that land was discovered to be rich in mineral deposits, Pastor Moralo was murdered by land-grabbers. Because BCM outreach in Mindanao involves isolated regions, bandits and guerrillas as well as political unrest are a constant danger.

BCM ministry leaders haven't allowed themselves to be intimidated. In fact across the Philippines, BCF leadership has come together to commit themselves to an action plan dedicated to accelerated church growth and leadership development. BCM Philippines field director Vernon de Jesus explains that the core of BCF strategy is a cell group model of church planting and evangelism along with an intensive discipleship and leadership program to consolidate Kingdom gains.

Appropriately for a mission founded on reaching the 4-14 Window, one exciting area of BCF growth is children's ministry. All BCF churches have ministry outreach among children, including VBS, Sunday school, Bible Clubs and weekly meetings on different sites. So far this year 563 children have prayed to receive Jesus as their Savior.

Gerlyn De Jesus, wife of Rev. Vernon De Jesus, is children's ministry coordinator for BCM Philippines. She attributes the effectiveness of children's outreach to the implementation of BCM's *In Step with the Master Teacher* training program. This year alone, 157 children's minister leaders have finished *ISMT* training and are now putting it into practice in their home districts.



One graduate expressed her gratitude to the *ISMT* trainers: "We were like the paralytic [Mark 2:1-8] before *ISMT*, while you are like the four friends who sacrificed to bring us where the Lord wants us to be as children's workers. Now, like the paralytic, we are ready to stand up, take what we have learned and go to where the children are, teaching and discipling them for Jesus."

In recent months BCF children's ministry volunteers have taken what they learned to almost 2500 children. Since the only place to hold VBS and Bible Clubs is often outdoors, this leads to its own





adventures. One VBS team arrived on-site to find the creek in full flood with their pupils trapped on the other side. Unwilling to miss out, the children simply waded the creek each day, attending VBS wet from the waist down. Holding classes in the rain is a regular prospect, which makes the Philippines' warm tropical climate come in handy.

VBS students wrote in to express how much they appreciated BCF volunteers coming to their communities. Eleven-year-old Nikko Pearl Suna sums it up best: "I accepted Jesus to be my Savior because you cared enough to tell me about Him and His love."

"Faithfulness" is the theme BCM Philippines leadership chose for their ten-year action plan. Field director Vernon de Jesus explains that choice:

"Much has to be accomplished. But with God's enabling we will endeavor to keep on being faithful – doing and obeying the Great Commission until Jesus our Lord will come again for His church and usher in His eternal kingdom."





MINDANAO: A WAR WITHOUT A HORIZON

by Chris J. Martin

Early evening last December, Bible Centered Fellowship pastor Villalon Moralo was found lying dead with multiple gunshot wounds. His murder took place in close vicinity to the BCF (BCM Philippine's church association) church where he'd preached for the past five years. Beyond his ministry, Pastor Moralo was also a Mindanao tribal chieftain whose ethnic group had been awarded 100 hectares of mineral-rich land by the Philippine government. Many eyes, some belonging to powerful local figures, looked covetously on the land grant. After the murder, Moralo's relatives, some of them members of regional paramilitary groups, demanded vengeance for Pastor Villalon's death. Only the quick intervention of BCM missionary and BCF founder Mars Fuerte prevented more blood from being spilled over the tragedy.

From an outsider's perspective, Pastor Villalon's murder is just another case of religious hostility seething under the surface of Mindanao, second largest island in the Philippines. However, it is a grimly complex situation. To grasp it, one must understand the war that has been waged in Mindanao for over thirty years, the second oldest internal conflict in the world.

Since the 1970's, an exhausting guerrilla campaign has been waged against the Philippine government by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front with aspirations of transforming Mindanao into an independent Islamic state. Full-out civil war has erupted

sporadically, saddling Mindanao's 18 million residents with a high cost as instability has spiraled the lush island into the poorest region of the Philippines. For its inhabitants, peace is an ideal mentioned in political speeches. Despite generations of violence, the end of conflict is still nowhere on the skyline. This is a war without horizons.

The current fighting is only the tip of the iceberg. Deep-seated tension has existed in Mindanao longer than the United States has been a nation. Unlike the Christian majority that exists elsewhere in the Philippines, Mindanao is inhabited by the Bangsamoro. This multilingual ethnic group originates back to the 13th century when Muslim Arab spice traders used the lush island as a resting point on their route north towards China. Through their influence, Islam spread throughout Mindanao, a religion the Spanish were unable to quell by force when they claimed the island as their own 300 years later. For many centuries Mindanao's Muslims were the majority population. But aggressive government-planned Christian settlements shrunk the Muslim dominance to about one-third the island's population. As result, fierce sentiments of prejudice and resentment have been nurtured on both sides.

Last August saw the region erupt with renewed violence after the Philippine government ultimately rejected a peace agreement between various armed factions. The fighting has uprooted approximately 600,000 individuals, one of the highest number of internally displaced people in the world. As one walks through evacuation centers hastily erected for thousands of fleeing families,

the true face of the conflict emerges. It is not difficult to sense the hopelessness of these families' situation, crowded against each other under a sea of tattered blue canvas provided by international aid organizations. Many are rice farmers, and they can do little but wait for the firefights to move away from their homes as their rice crops rot in the fields.

Norodin Kayao, a lean young man, is one of them. He was shaken from his afternoon siesta by pounding shells landing only 30 meters from his house. He could see the explosions and feel them shake his home. Fearing for his wife and six children, he fled together with his neighbors, carrying few personal belongings. While hiking out, government soldiers directed them towards the nearest evacuation center where they now reside. Fortunately, there were no human casualties, though one neighbor's water buffalo was killed in the attack. But due to ongoing violence, no one has been able to return home.

It would be easy to blame religious dissension for the devastation that has wreaked havoc upon Mindanao. Both Philippine and international newspapers run articles that report bands of Muslim and Christian vigilantes who have taken the war into their own hands. And there is no denial that religion plays a key factor in igniting disputes between Muslim Bangsamoros and their Christian-heritage counterparts.



However, the war in Mindanao has evolved into something far more complicated and darker than either side anticipated. No longer a mere war of religion, it is as much social, political, and economical. Opportunists from all sides are using the region's instability and violence as tools by which to gain power, influence, and wealth. Only two years ago the Philippines was named one of the most corrupt countries in the world by Transparency International. These days the war has become a veil in which to conceal killers

who will murder a man for his faith. Or his rights to land property. Or his position as a tribal chieftain.

It has been close to one year since BCF Pastor Villalon Moralo was found dead outside a church that BCM International aided in planting. Tragic as his death was, it is only one in thousands of murders that have taken place in Mindanao without any repercussion. No one has yet to be brought to justice for his murder, and recently several of his relatives have been threatened with the same fate. Please continue to pray for his family, the island of Mindanao, and all the Christian workers who risk their lives to bring the light of Jesus Christ to a land where no horizon of peace is yet in sight.

Author Chris Martin was raised in the Philippines as son of New Tribes missionaries and spent time as a journalist in Mindanao evacuation camps.



Evacuation Camp

FATHER TO THE FATHERLESS

by Dawn Moore

How do you reach thousands of children for Jesus Christ in inner-city Philadelphia, PA?

Go where they are.

Bible Centered Ministries International got its start in 1936 when Miss Bessie Traber organized what was then the Bible Club Movement to carry the gospel to children of inner-city Philadelphia. Seventy-three years later, BCM International missionaries, Lorraine Stirneman and Christine Wigden, still take time to drive up and down North Philly streets, writing down addresses where they find groups of children playing outside. In the summer, trained short-term missionary teams go back and conduct five-day Bible Clubs on those streets and in the housing projects.

This past summer, one such team consisted of university students Mark Levingood, Eva Hall and Ashley Reed who shared the love of their heavenly Father with approximately 1,000 North Philly youth. Neither persistent rain nor constantly changing ministry responsibilities dampened the spirits of these three young adults as they shared their testimonies, taught Bible lessons, answered thought-provoking questions, and evangelized neighborhoods of children.

Perhaps that's why Lorraine refers to them as her Dream Team.

"Within the first week of training, I knew what jewels these three young people were, so I began to refer to them as my 'Dream Team,'" shares Lorraine. "It was a dream to have capable, reliable young people who loved the Lord and bonded well together as a team. To give them an assignment and know they would be prepared and do a good job. And to have three young people helping for six whole weeks!"

Eighty-five percent of those who accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior do so between the ages of 4-14, less than ten percent after age 19. With just under 40% of the world's population under the age of 21, what has become known as the 4-14 Window is a prime age group to reach. The Dream Team came to North Philly with that vision in mind. Challenged by rain as they taught outdoors, Ashley, Mark and Eva sought vacant houses with porches, held up tarps, or gathered children into their van to keep dry while they taught Bible lessons from the open door, getting soaked in the process. Thunder and lightning posed a real threat, especially for Mark who is blind and Jeter, his seeing-eye-dog, whose harness is leather covered metal.

"I don't mind working in the rain," Mark said. "But, it's especially dangerous to work in the lightning. Jeter's a walking conductor."

Born with sight, Mark was blinded as a result of surgery to mitigate a brain tumor. At first he had difficulty getting close to the children because many of the inner-city kids, familiar only with guard dogs trained to attack and protect, were afraid of Jeter. But as they became

comfortable with the friendly animal, Jeter became a bridge that helped the children open up to Mark. In inner city Philadelphia, a majority of these children have no father or father-figure in their lives.

"And most don't know where their mother is at any given point in the day or how to get a hold of her," adds Mark. "The fact that they don't seem to have any parental influence in their lives means they're raised by their peers and the ways of the street."

The Dream Team understands well that the only hope for these oft fatherless inner-city kids is coming to know Christ. Mark refers to his own family before he became blind as once-a-week Christians who had no saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. On his most frustrating days, Mark reminds himself that his eyesight is a small price to pay for him and his whole family coming to know the



The "Dream Team"



Lord Jesus. He consoles himself with the surety that “the next thing I’ll see will be the face of God.”

Eva, whose earthly father had been absent from her life since before her earliest memory, came to realize that making a decision for Christ wasn’t just a heaven or hell decision. She explains, “I slowly began to see that being saved was a full-on, huge and magnificent relationship between me and my heavenly Father.”

Ashley, who grew up in West Philadelphia, has witnessed first-hand the damage that poverty, discrimination, abuse, broken homes and addiction has on kids. She empathizes with their hurt, anger, bitterness, and shame. “It doesn’t matter what you’ve done,” she says. “God wants you any type of way.”

This personal and heartfelt understanding of their heavenly Father’s love and compassion impelled the Dream Team to shower North Philly children with the love and attention they were starved for. They taught five-day Bible Clubs in housing projects and on streets. They taught Adventure Clubs to kids who had participated in the year-round Bible Clubs. They helped run a VBS for an inner-city church and pitched in for a Mothers’ Cookout.

And ministry proved to be a two-way street for the Dream Team. They share how the kindness of one little seven-year-old girl from a housing project heartened all of them when she approached Mark, who was having a rough day, to say, “Mr. Mark, you shouldn’t worry because you know what, you have Jeter, and you have an amazing

God who loves you and wants to take care of you.” The team felt as though God had sent a little angel to remind them that He is Father to all, in all and through all.

Housing for the Dream Team’s summer ministry was at the Bible Club House. A 101 year-old, 15-room house with 8 bedrooms and 27 beds, the BCH is administered by BCM missionaries Ed and Ellen Carwheel and is an integral part of BCM-Philadelphia ministry. It is used for monthly overnight retreats for faithful Bible Clubbers, for lodging and training out-of-town groups assisting with Five-Day Bible Clubs as well as church and para-church groups that come into the inner-city for ministry. It hosts weekly adult Bible studies, prayer, committee, and missionary meetings and an annual luncheon for mothers of Bible Club children. Local groups also rent the facility for seminars, youth functions, various fellowships and planning meetings. During summer months the Bible Club House is used as a bus depot for children and youth going to BCM’s Camp Streamside up in the Pocono Mountains.

“The BCH has a comfortable, homey atmosphere where intimacy with God may be experienced,” Ed Carwheel says. “Many spiritual decisions have been made here by people of all ages over the years.”

Loraine Stirneman thanks God for the impact of this summer’s Dream Team on BCM’s inner-city Philly ministry. “The three worked well together as a team, but also blended in with five church youth groups that came to serve.” And the best part? “In all more than 130 salvation decisions were made during the five-day Bible Clubs, Adventure Clubs and VBS.”

Prayer requests for this ministry:

- God to send workers to train and equip.
- The Lord to open doors for weekly clubs to follow up the children during the school year and hostesses for these clubs.
- Increased funds to pay the camp bill which was over \$6,000.





IT ALL STARTED WITH A BOOK

by Esther Zimmerman

It is only fitting that the story of a publisher should begin with a book. Many years ago in the jungle-cloaked mountains of a lush, green nation called Myanmar, a young man named Zen Za began reading a book named *Pilgrim's Progress*. The book was written by a man called John Bunyan, who was a prisoner for his faith in Jesus Christ. Through his reading, Zen Za trusted Jesus as His Savior. He went on to marry a young Christian woman and establish a Christian home. When his son, Jacob, was born, Zen Za raised him to love books and, more importantly, to love Jesus.

Zen Za's story was an unusual one, for few Christian books are available in the languages of Myanmar. Once known as Burma, Myanmar is the largest nation on the Southeast Asian peninsula of Indochina, nestled between Thailand, Bangladesh, and the Bay of Bengal. Between 80-90% of its 50 million people are devout Buddhist. Despite rich agricultural and mineral resources, Myanmar is currently one of the world's poorest nations. Few books have been translated into regional languages of the people and even fewer into the majority language, Burmese.

When Zen Za's son, Jacob, became an adult, he desired to give others in his country the opportunity to meet Jesus as his parents and Jacob in turn had many years before. Following several years of study in

India and an internship with an India literature ministry, Jacob established a Burmese Christian publishing house in 1991. God has greatly blessed Jacob's step of faith. Eighteen years later, over 100 Christian books have been translated and published in Burmese—no small accomplishment! God has also allowed Jacob to see lives being changed as people encounter Jesus through the written word.

One such changed life was Sandar. A successful, highly educated professional, Sandar was also a devout Buddhist who was earnestly seeking truth. She shares, "I had been longing to get peace that is long lasting. But the peace I got wasn't lasting. It just came and



Jacob Mung and family

passed over me. The more I got to know the world, the more I was confused.”

Sandar was introduced to the personal God of the Bible through a piece of literature published by Jacob. She began to seek the God she read about. Little by little, God revealed Himself to her. She shares, “By the grace of God, after seven months of searching, I accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Savior. This day was the most joyous day in my life. I became a follower of Jesus and a new person in Christ. All my thoughts were changed and I got the peace that had been long missing in my life.”

Sandar’s story doesn’t end there. Several years later she and Jacob were married, and Sandar joined Jacob in the ministry. As the literature ministry grew, so did the number of new believers and churches established. Since the beginning, these churches understood God’s heart for children and sought to share the love of Jesus with children around them. Jacob tells of one little four-year-old boy who began attending the church’s Bible club. His mother was very young and his father was often drunk, but week after week he would come home singing about Jesus and sharing Bible verses with his family. His parents watched him fall in love with Jesus and soon became curious themselves. They came together to ask the pastor what their son was learning. Eventually, they too trusted Jesus as Savior and were baptized.

To Jacob it was clear that ministry to children was close to God’s heart, but little curriculum was available to help those wanting to teach children about God. When Jacob saw a copy of BCM’s Bible teaching curriculum *Footsteps of Faith*, he was convinced it could meet a real need in Myanmar. Recognizing its strong Bible content and emphasis on discipleship, Jacob committed to translating and publishing seven volumes of *Footsteps of Faith* in Burmese. A grant from Tyndale House Foundation made that commitment a reality.

The road has not been an easy one, and there have been great challenges along the way. The cyclone Nargis demolished large portions of southern Myanmar in May, 2008. Work on *Footsteps of Faith* halted temporarily as the publishing staff scrambled to provide whatever aid they could to the hundreds of thousands left destitute in the wake of the cyclone. Jacob and Sandar themselves have encountered significant health problems that unexpectedly delayed work. The reality of daily life in Yangon has also slowed progress. Just getting a steady supply of electricity to complete computer layout work has been difficult.

Despite the many challenges, two volumes are published and already being used by teachers to share God’s Word with children. Another four volumes are rolling off the press this fall, and the final volume is scheduled for completion by the end of 2009.

Jacob’s story started with one life that was changed through one book. Pray that these seven teaching volumes of BCM’s *Footsteps of Faith* in Burmese will be used by God to change many lives of children and families in the country of Myanmar.





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