

BCMWorld

An Inside Look at BCM Global Ministries

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BCM Camping: Not Just a Hike in the Woods

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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 Editor

My earliest memories of Bible camp involve a dugout canoe ride down Colombia's Magdalena River. A concrete rural schoolhouse for campsite. Rolling out esteras, the straw mats villagers used for bedding, girls in one empty classroom, boys in another. Bathing was the brown, turbulent river, bottom silt kicked up by countless small feet temporarily displacing piranhas and stingrays. I don't even remember the lavatory arrangements.



But relay races with new friends, singing around an evening campfire, Bible stories and missionary biographies were experiences familiar to campers of any geographic location or generation. That camp suffered a minor disruption when my younger sister stepped on a stingray, necessitating the main speaker (my own missionary father) to rush her downriver in the canoe to the nearest clinic. I can't remember who stepped in, but camp week did not miss a beat.

Fast-forward twenty years to my own first experience as camp director, this time in the Bolivian highlands where my husband Marty and I were serving as missionaries. The location was a repossessed colonial hacienda rented out by local government. As more than two hundred children rolled out their own straw mats in spacious salons that once housed aristocracy, the caretaker casually informed me there'd be no water for the week.

The scramble that followed involved metal barrels, pickup trucks, a nearby river, and strict water rationing. But as with my own early camp memories, the children's recollection of that week was too full of fun, new friends, and the exciting revelation of a God who loved them to even notice panic going on backstage.

Not long ago I received a Facebook message from one of that week's campers. Neither internet nor reliable postal service existed when I left that poverty-stricken Andean region, so I hadn't heard from Gorge in fifteen years. Now he'd discovered my own brand-new Facebook account.

"Do you remember that when I was ten years old, you were the very first person to tell me I had the gift to become a pastor someday?" Gorge wrote. To be honest, I didn't, though he was definitely one of my star campers. "I just wanted to send you a picture of my church. I am the senior pastor."

Each year Bible Centered Ministries International reaches more than 25,000 children in camping programs around the world. Countries, cultures, and camp experiences may vary widely. In southern Ireland, historic Castledaly has become BCM's newest camp. In Recife, Brazil, favela children welcome a week's respite from slum life's daily violence, drug wars, and hunger. In Albania, a communist government facility now hosts a Christian family camp. In the USA, new directors bring fresh focus to BCM camps.

What does not vary is campers coming face to face with God's love and the Person of Jesus Christ. In this issue of *BCM World*, let us introduce you to some of their stories.

FROM THE PRESIDENT



On October 25, 2010, BCM inaugurated its new International Ministry Center offices in Suite #260 of the Granite Run Corporate Center, located at 201 Granite Run Drive, Lancaster, PA.

Such a move is not a first for BCM as ministry needs have changed over the last seven and a half decades. From two rooms graciously lent by Philadelphia Biblical University, BCM moved in 1941 into its first full-scale headquarters in the Schaff building in downtown Philadelphia. 1965 oversaw a move to Upper Darby on the outskirts of Philadelphia. This center served BCM well for more than three decades, and many are the fond memories of ministry there. But deteriorating neighborhood conditions and rising crime had made this location an increasingly insecure hub for what was now a global ministry organization when in 2001 a corporate building formerly housing a pre-press printing facility became available to BCM in the small nearby town of Akron, PA.

With its 52,000 square feet, the Akron IMC has amply met BCM's needs for these past nine years. It has provided office and church space to numerous other Christian ministries. But changes in business culture, including the increasing cyber-interaction of 21st century communications, have greatly reduced the physical office space necessary to maintain an international headquarters. At the same time, with a sluggish economy, climbing expenses of property upkeep, and the time and financial investment necessary to managing tenant space, it became clear to leadership that the Akron property had ceased to be an asset to BCM's primary focus of reaching children and developing the church worldwide.

All of which led to the decision to place the Akron building on the market. For almost four years BCM has been praying as a mission for God to provide the right buyer. In April of this year God answered that prayer when a local manufacturing company made an offer on the Akron property. The final purchase closed on November 12th, 2010. What are the advantages of this move for BCM?

- Elimination of our sizable mortgage and interest payment obligations, releasing more BCM resources for frontline ministries.
- A "right-sizing" in occupied office space from 16,500 sq. ft. down to 5300 sq. ft., providing a commensurate savings in operational budget expenses.
- Freedom from maintenance, repairs, and capital investment projects on 52,000 square feet leased largely to non-BCM entities.
- A huge time savings in invested ministry hours on the part of IMC personnel in property management.
- A strategic relocation to an office within ten minutes of Lancaster Bible College, where we are doing increased activities in missions awareness and recruitment among the student body.

BCM's international board and IMC personnel are excited about what God is making possible with this move and what the future holds for BCM. Please continue to pray for the IMC as we settle into our new location. If anyone is concerned about an interruption to mail and communications, don't be! For the convenience of missionaries and donors, BCM will be retaining its current mailing address for the immediate future along with the new address. Headquarters internet and email addresses will also stay the same. Phone numbers have changed; in fact, here is our new number for your address book: 717-560-9601.

Let's praise God for His answered prayer as we celebrate this milestone event together!

Blessings,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martin Windle". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Dr. Martin Windle



Sowing Seeds of Transformation in Brazil's Favelas

by Jeanette Windle with Maria Aparecida Gusmão

The young teens from a Recife, Brazil, favela expressed many reasons for coming to *Ministerio Centralizado Na Biblia* (Bible Centered Ministries) vacation camp. Free food. A respite from unrelenting violence, fear, and grime that was daily life in the slums. The swimming pool, a recreation new to most. Lush greenery, music, games, a caring staff. For some, a yearning to learn more of a God of love they'd heard about in the Bible Clubs BCM Brazil volunteers conducted in their neighborhoods.

Anderson knew exactly why he'd chosen to come. To hide. A seasoned drug-runner at age fifteen, Anderson had killed three people in a narco-transaction gone bad. Now their family had a contract out on him. And since one of the camp rules was leaving drugs at home, Anderson was growing increasingly agitated from crack withdrawal.

"I explained how Jesus could give freedom from crack so Anderson could live for Him," BCM Brazil missionary Maria Aparecida Gusmão describes. "His response was that he'd never be able to live for Christ, because once he left camp, he would be killed."

Maria could empathize with such lost, desperate children as Anderson because she too remembers a childhood filled

with fear and poverty. The youngest of thirteen siblings, Maria grew up in a poor rural village not far from Recife, Brazil's fourth largest city with a population of more than four million. As common in Brazil, her mother's devout Catholicism was heavily mixed with occult practices of *santería*. Assumed to be spirits of the dead, demonic manifestations were a terrifying reality of Maria's daily life. Each time these spirits seized control of Maria's older brother, a sister, or other household members, they would threaten to kill the family, demanding alcohol, cigarettes, and sacrifices. When prayers to the Virgin Mary didn't help, the witchdoctor was summoned to cast out the spirits.

Maria's mother was adamantly opposed to the evangelical Christians who occasionally stopped by to share their faith. But one night when Maria was 12 years old, her mother had a dream. A vast hand coming down from heaven was tossing seeds across the ground. A voice told Maria's mother to pick up the seeds. Somehow she knew the voice was Jesus.

Later that day a passerby tucked a booklet under their front door. On the cover was the image Maria's mother had dreamed of a hand scattering seed. The booklet was the Gospel of John, the cover graphic from the Parable of the Sower. Only the local evangelical Christians gave away such Bible material. Maria's mother knew Jesus was telling her to seek them out. Nearby was a tiny church where first Maria's



Recife favela



Maria with favela children

mother, then Maria and her sister came to accept Christ as their Savior.

But demonic manifestations continued oppressing their household. At that time Maria knew little of spiritual warfare. But she shares now that it took years of prayer and fasting and spiritual growth before the influences dabbling in the occult had brought into their home were completely vanquished. Today one sister who suffered so much demon possession is herself a missionary. But at the time, the family decided to flee that house and seek a new life in Recife. There the family found a larger church to attend.

For the first time, Maria now had a Bible and was eagerly studying all she could of God's Word. But she was hungry for more, and a desire was growing in her to reach others, especially children, with the gospel that had so transformed her own life. Graduating from high school, Maria did not make the cut for Brazil's highly competitive free university system and had no funds for private schooling. What to do now with her life?

Then Maria saw an advertisement for Word of Life's one-year Bible Institute in Recife. What could be better than an entire year studying God's Word! But such studies were not cheap, and once again she had no funds. Maria sought advice from a missionary she'd come to know in Recife. The missionary waved a hand at a nearby river, parkland, trees, flowers. "Do you know who created all this?"

"Of course, God did," Maria answered.

"Then don't you think He can supply for you to attend a Bible Institute?"

That was all the assurance Maria needed. Enrolling in the Word of Life Institute, she reveled in her studies. But toward

the end of the year, the administrator called her in. "Maria, you still haven't paid your tuition. Unless you pay your bill, you can't graduate."

Maria had been so sure her Creator would provide, she hadn't even thought of finances. She was stunned. "But didn't God pay?"

The administrator explained that wasn't how things worked. Sadly, Maria told the administrator she would leave without graduating, then get a job to pay back the institute. But the very next day the administrator called Maria in. "I have news. Someone has paid all your debt."

"God paid it!" Maria informed her firmly.

One year had only whetted Maria's desire to study God's Word. Now she dreamed of attending Word of Life's full seminary in São Paulo. This was even more expensive than the Bible Institute, and again there were no funds. But seeing God's miraculous provision had strengthened Maria's faith. Maria arrived at the Word of Life seminary with only ten percent of the needed funds. Getting an on-campus job, she worked and studied. But once again, the end of the semester brought a summons into the campus office. More than half Maria's tuition payment was still lacking. She would have to return home until she had funds.

This time Maria was devastated. She'd convinced her family and pastor that this was God's will for her life, traveled thousands of kilometers from northern Brazil, spent funds that could have helped her own needy family. How could she return home and admit God hadn't provided? As she began to pack, she paused to check her mail, hoping for an encouraging letter from family or friends in Recife. Instead she found a plain white envelope. In the envelope was exactly the funds she needed to clear up her delinquent account.



Returning to the office, Maria slapped the envelope down on the desk. “Here it is. God sent the money. Please take it.”

The office personnel shook their heads in disbelief. “God must really want you to stay!”

Maria’s own faith no longer held any doubt. “Of course He does!”

Each semester God continued to supply Maria’s needs. Graduating, she returned to Recife, still with no idea what she would do with a four-year Bible degree. Applying again at the university, Maria made the cut this time and began studying physical education. By now she was working as well as a BCM volunteer.

BCM ministry in Brazil had begun in 1988 through a single Brazilian BCM missionary, Rev. Lecio Wanderley, who developed an outreach of Bible Clubs, camps, and other programs to Recife’s street kids and underprivileged favela children. A decade later, a merger with the Pocket Testament League added new missionary staff involved in open air evangelism and scripture distribution in the state of São Paulo. One such PTL couple, Daniel and Nilvana Rezende, now serve as BCM missionaries from Brazil to Portugal.

Maria had been helping as a camp counselor while she finished her Physical Education degree. Rev. Lecio encouraged her to consider becoming a full-time BCM missionary. But with graduation, Maria’s life again reached a turning point. The university administration called her in to offer a prestigious scholarship for master-level studies in Portugal.

With the scholarship came a guaranteed and well-paid future government job. For a young woman born into the poorest segment of Brazilian society, this was a dream come true. And not just for Maria. Of thirteen siblings, Maria alone had been privileged to attend university. Now her family insisted she seize this opportunity to begin helping the rest of the family.

But Maria knew God was calling her to use her Bible training in fulltime ministry. When she showed up to the scholarship interview, she found herself turning it down. Though her family was furious, she never regretted the decision. Over the next two years Maria traveled to the United States to attend BCM candidate school, officially becoming a full-time BCM missionary in 1995. While helping in BCM North America camps and children’s outreach, she began the more arduous task of traveling and speaking to raise necessary support for ministry in Brazil. When she encountered little response, Maria chose to return anyway to Recife, arriving home in 1997.

Maria’s heart was especially burdened for millions of children growing up in the vast, congested labyrinths of ramshackle shacks that were Brazil’s infamous favelas or urban slums. Devoid of electricity, clean water or sewage disposal, the favelas also lacked virtually any amenity of education, medical care, or law enforcement. Organized crime and drug trafficking offered the only profitable employment. Small boys of five or six were already experienced drug mules, known as “aviãozinhos” or “little airplanes.” Young girls were forced into the sex traffic well before reaching puberty. Drug addiction was rampant, dead bodies in the streets a daily occurrence.

Maria started a Bible Club in one favela, then another. But she needed to find a way to cover her expenses. Though she’d already received excellent job offers, none would provide enough spare time for serious ministry. But as Maria had witnessed God’s faithful provision in the past, so God did not fail now. One by one, she began to receive word from churches and individuals with whom she’d shared her vision back in North America, pledging support for the Recife ministry.

Today Maria heads up BCM ministry in Recife. She and her staff of nine full time workers and numerous volunteers conduct almost 200 weekly Bible Clubs in Recife slums every week with a total attendance of about 6000 children. Each





Fabio, a BCM Brazil worker, ministers to children in a countryside evangelism program.

year eight weeks of camp held in a rented Christian retreat facility reach hundreds more children, the highest percentage of them from the favelas.

Working together with Maria as BCM associate missionaries are Rev. Elicir Brito, pastor of a sizeable Recife church, and his wife, Rozanna. With volunteer help from their own church body, they spearhead a variety of neighborhood programs and camps for disadvantaged children and teenagers within Recife as well as evangelistic outreach, church planting, and humanitarian ministry to rural villages and several indigenous groups in the surrounding countryside.

Another high priority is raising up local church leadership well grounded in Scripture. Maria's own past experiences have shown her the urgency of solid teaching about spiritual warfare. The BCM Recife team holds regular church leadership seminars, both at their own training center and in local churches, focusing on spiritual warfare, Christian Education, and godly leadership, as well as such practical skills as drama-theater for evangelism outreach. An annual conference brings together regional pastors, their wives, and other church leaders for four days of intensive teaching.

Maria admits sadly that not all nor even most of those reached through the favela Bible Clubs and camps go on to turn their lives around. The hold of drug addiction, physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, the lawless freedom of the streets can be powerful. Even finding volunteers willing to work with these kids is not easy, since deep-rooted traumas often manifest themselves in severe behavior problems and hostility.

But over these last thirteen years of ministry in Recife, Maria has also witnessed literally thousands of children and adults transformed by the same gospel that transformed her own

life. Like nine-year-old Marquinhos, who has a staggering repertoire of memorized Bible verses and faithfully brings his tithe each week, even if just a few pennies. At age seven, he was earning a successful living couriering drug packages when he first walked into a BCM Bible Club.

Marquinhos gives his testimony at camp: "I used to be an *aviãozinho*. But now I have accepted Jesus in my heart, and I no longer sell drugs. Now I go to church and want to study the Bible."

Others who were once teen prostitutes currently serve as volunteers in the Bible Clubs and at the camps. Then there is Anderson, who did accept Christ as his Savior. He wasn't killed when he left camp only because the police grabbed him first, placing him in special protective custody in a juvenile facility. Today he is involved in a Christian youth program at the facility and is actively sharing his faith with other teen inmates. He will be eligible for release when he turns 17.

Maria's mother once dreamed of a heavenly Sower scattering wide the divine seed of God's Word. Maria now finds herself part of that vision's fulfillment. Despite all her team's busy ministry, she is conscious they are currently reaching only a fraction of Recife's needy children. Her next goal is to raise up sufficient full-time staff and volunteer teachers to reach 150,000 children weekly. With that in mind, BCM Brazil is now planning their own first missionary candidate school for 2011. Pray with Maria and her team for candidates committed to being channels of God's unconditional love within the favelas of Brazil, so that the seed being sown may reap a heavenly harvest of transformed lives.

Looking Back and Learning Forward: BCM's USA Camps

by Dan Schmidt

A tall sign made of tree branches spelling “Camp Mandaville” went up a few months ago to mark that property’s entrance. In contrast, Hemlock Lodge where kids sleep and eat has been there since Mandaville’s beginning. In both facilities and programs, this BCM camp in upstate New York blends old with new.

Likewise at Camp Sankanac, located west of Philadelphia. The first BCM residential camp in the USA, Sankanac has a chapel used by the grandparents of today’s campers. It also displays a new fleet of kayaks near the recently constructed waterfront boat launch.

Travel to western New York where Bliss Summit Camp operates, and you’ll see an enclosed gym kids have used for decades. But its large outdoor scale model of our solar system was built just last summer.

BCM’s camps in North America and abroad have a rich heritage reaching back to shortly after the mission began in 1936. For more than half a century, staff and supporters have invested time and resources in facilities where children and young adults would learn about the Lord, enjoy each other’s company, and develop skills and interests that would encourage them as followers of Jesus in their home communities.

Each year in the USA alone, thousands of children attend one of BCM’s eight camps for a summer week. Thousands more benefit from programs and facilities offered during

spring, fall, and winter months. A similar story is true for Canada’s two camps as well as BCM camps in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. Even as BCM camps honor the past, they head boldly into the future. While they remember what is important to those who come every year, and what faithful ministry partners have supported with prayers, labor, and funding, they benefit from adding new elements as well.

This “new stuff” may involve a program element or facility change. Or it may result from new people. Three of BCM’s USA camps— Big Sky (MT), Cortland (NY), and Streamside (PA)—have gained new directors recently. While such shifts in leadership are bound to create changes, each of these new leaders also holds a firm commitment to preserving traditions at the camps they direct.

Big Sky Bible Camp

Jamy Landis was on staff at Victory Bible Camp in Alaska before coming to Big Sky Bible Camp outside Kalispell, MT, not far from Glacier National Park. He loved the outdoors, recruiting workers, and supervising programs for campers, and he knew that camping was his calling. When some



Jamy Landis, Director
Big Sky Bible Camp



Big Sky Bible Camp

Montana friends shared the need for a director at Big Sky, Jamy immediately responded.

Jamy brings to Big Sky a strong interest in outdoor education, which includes clearing trails, opening campsites, and watering the mud pit. That interest is also reflected in expanding Big Sky's ropes course. Adding the Eagle's Roost and Dangle Duo along with a zip line across the lake ensures Big Sky's challenge elements will delight and stretch both summer campers and local school kids who participate during fall months. Such new elements complement Big Sky's established programming that emphasizes Bible teaching and leadership development.

A key aspect of Big Sky's summer program is Camp Promise, geared to people with disabilities. Jeff & Emmy Ort, long-time BCM missionaries who developed and lead that program, have appreciated Jamy's enthusiastic support for such ministry. Camp Promise has now grown to the point where future goals include adding a specialized year-round facility for this service on the Big Sky Bible Camp property.

Speaking from his office in the CL Trading Post (named for long-time missionary and camp supporter Charles Lawrence), where he can see much of the property, Jamy reflects on the people whose lives have been impacted by Big Sky. "This summer during our Friday night sharing time, I heard third to sixth graders talking about what they'd learned about God. It's so encouraging!"

Jamy adds, "We're benefitting too from the interest of local churches. A lot of church members around here are involved and want to see Big Sky succeed."

Cortland Bible Club Camp

After more than a dozen years on staff at various New England camps, Dan Rhoda joined BCM last spring to direct Cortland Bible Club Camp. He brings the enthusiasm of a

new recruit with the experience of a seasoned professional. One of his early additions to Cortland's summer program was the Gaga pit, an octagonal wooden "corral" for playing Dodge-ball that became an immediate favorite for campers. Another was "Mini-Camp," a three-day experience for six- and seven-year-olds who want a taste of camp excitement they've heard about from older siblings and friends.

But Dan Rhoda recognizes also the value of CBCC's long history. In his first summer as director, Dan consciously drew on that tradition by making sure his staff included young adults who had grown up there.

"I was thrilled to work with long-time summer staff that provided leadership at the pool, with maintenance, in the office, and at chapel," Dan says. "These people have a history with many campers and their families and insured that CBCC's important traditions would remain intact."

Area churches have always been important for CBCC's ministry, and they have warmly welcomed Cortland's new director. One of Dan's goals is to build on CBCC's established traditions by offering new ways for people to enjoy the camp facilities in the "off-season."

Dan Rhoda shares: "There is growing excitement among camp supporters about possibilities of using the facility



Cortland Bible Club Camp



Streamside Camp

for leadership development, building up the local church, and spreading the gospel.” He looks forward to working alongside so many who have invested in Cortland Bible Club Camp so that even more can be blessed by its ministry.

Streamside Camp and Conference Center

Nestled in the Poconos of Pennsylvania, Streamside Camp feels as though it is on the back edge of a wilderness—even though the camp actually sits just a few miles from a bustling commuter suburb to New York City. That juxtaposition is not lost on Streamside’s staff, whose chief ministry focus lies with serving young people from inner city Philadelphia.

Last winter, Craig Vincent moved with his family to Streamside from Cleveland, where he had been involved with an urban ministry for more than twenty years. Streamside’s emphasis on city outreach was a good fit for him, and Craig is

eager to position the camp for even greater impact.

“During visits to Philadelphia,” Craig says, “I’ve met so many people whose lives have been touched by Streamside. It’s exciting to see how the camp has touched people over the years. This place has an awesome legacy!”

Streamside is a busy place year-round, since many come for retreats and other

events during the school year. But the heart of its ministry is summer camp. In looking forward to 2011, Craig explains, “We hope to increase the number of inner-city children who benefit from this ministry by expanding camperships and donations. We’re also collaborating with other like-minded agencies such as Star of Hope, because that’s a good way to bring more kids here and make sure there’s follow-up with them afterwards.”

Streamside’s staff also enjoys serving groups who take advantage of its facilities in the fall, winter, and spring. Craig Vincent wants to see this aspect of the ministry re-energized and drawing from an increasingly diverse population. “Whether it’s a suburban ski trip, a church from the Bronx, or non-English speakers looking for an inviting place to worship and grow, the people who come to Streamside will have a rich experience and meet a staff committed to serving with the love of Christ.”

Honoring the Past While Welcoming the Future

Bible Centered Ministries International’s ongoing commitment to its camping programs stems from knowing how much good can happen during a single week in a beautiful setting where people—whether full-time, part-time or volunteer—demonstrate the grace of God in a variety of ways. Much of this impact benefits from programs and ideas that have stood the test of time being coupled with fresh approaches to reaching kids and their families. By honoring the past and welcoming the future, BCM’s camps are well-positioned to plant seeds of spiritual growth and transformation in thousands of new and returning campers each summer, as well as to nurture those who serve on staff throughout the year. The impact of BCM camps is worldwide and will continue to spread as people participate in this life-changing ministry.

For pictures of BCM’s camps in action, visit their websites at www.bcmintl.org





Jim & Fran Lines

Albania: From Atheist State to Vibrant, Growing Church

by Jim and Fran Lines with Jeanette Windle

Jim and Fran Lines were young missionaries in the late 1970s when they sat across the Albanian border in Greece and prayed that God would one day crack open the tightly sealed borders of this fanatically communist state to the preaching of God's Word. They never dreamed three decades later would find the couple spearheading a Christian family camp hosted in a former communist government retreat. Or sitting behind thick walls and steel bars of an Albanian prison, sharing a gospel message.

A small country of three and a half million population directly across the Adriatic Sea from Rimini, Italy, where Jim and Fran serve as BCM missionaries, Albania is known for majestic mountains, tall forests, a rich biodiversity—and a troubled history. Albania's Christian heritage extends as far back as the Apostle Paul who stated that he had "fully preached the gospel of Christ" (Romans 15:19) in Illyricum, Albania's name at the time. Christianity was its state religion during the Byzantine empire. It remained a stronghold of the Greek Orthodox church until conquest by the Turkish Ottoman empire in the fifteenth century, when most Albanians were forcibly converted to Islam.

But the fall of the Ottoman empire brought communist rule instead. Then in 1967, the Albanian communist regime outlawed all practice of religion, proclaiming itself the world's first atheist state. Italy had close historic ties with Albania, dominating its economy during much of the 20th century, even occupying its territory as an Italian protectorate during WWII. Since many Albanians spoke Italian, they kept in contact with the outside world by listening to Italian radio and TV. Albanians fleeing the atheist state often found sanctuary in Italian refugee camps. There they came in contact with Italian Christians who were friends of Jim and Fran.

The Italian Christians took in Albanian refugees, helped them find work, and shared the gospel with them. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, followed in 1991 by Albania's own communist regime, Italy again became a major influence in Albania, investing heavily in the small nation's reconstruction. Meanwhile, the Italian churches that had helped the refugees were among the first to send missionaries across the newly opened borders. Their Albanian friends begged them to make contact with families left behind. Doing so, the Italian missionaries found their Albanian contacts hungry for spiritual truth after decades of enforced atheism. A small building was purchased as a ministry center in Tirana,

Albania's capital city, and a church was born. Other church plants were started in outlying towns.

But as hundreds of Albanians began coming to Christ, a need became evident for raising up strong Albanian Christian leadership and appointing Albanian elders to oversee the fledgling churches. The Italian missionaries contacted Jim Lines, well-known in Italy for his ministry in leadership training and Bible teaching. Jim's first visit to Albania in 1993 was to assist in an intensive training program with a group of men who showed potential as future Albanian church leaders.

Over the next years the Albanian church continued to grow, and not just the ministry with which Jim and Fran Lines were involved. Numerous evangelical missions groups were now working in Albania, churches springing up in every part of the country. By now the Tirana church was overseeing a dozen church plants. They had started a Christian radio station, orphanages, work among the Roma people (known commonly as gypsies, but mostly settled now in urban ghettos), and even outreach into Kosovo. Participants in Jim Line's first leadership training course were now mature, active leaders within the Albanian church.

In 1998, Jim was invited back to train a fresh group of leaders. This time Fran was invited along to train Sunday school teachers and children's ministry leaders for the growing number of churches. Over the years since, Jim and Fran have been invited back numerous times by the Albanian evangelical community. Their ministry in Albania has included speaking at evangelistic crusades and a youth conference as well as leadership and Christian Ed training, teaching in-depth Bible to Roma women, tent-to-tent evangelism in a Kosovo refugee camp, and even prison outreach.

Part of Italy's reconstruction aid had included renovating Albania's dilapidated prison facilities. In 2005, the growing Tirana church made an offer through its Italian contacts to help with religious education in the prisons. The administrator of Albania's maximum security facility in Peqin, about fifty miles from Tirana, agreed to provide a room to serve as chapel. The positive change in prisoners' lives as they came to Christ was so marked that when the administrator was transferred to the Tirana prison system, he invited the believers to start a prison outreach there as well. Visiting the Peqin prison in 2007, Jim shared with over forty prisoners the story of the Prodigal Son. As they began to weep, Jim found tears flowing down his own cheeks. Not long after, he received news that three of the prisoners had accepted Christ following his visit.

But since 2007, BCM Italy's own busy ministry had not permitted Jim and Fran to travel to Albania. So it was with delight that they found themselves able to accept an invitation as main speakers for the Albanian church family camp held the first week of September, 2010.

Arriving in Tirana, Jim and Fran first visited the prison ministry. While Jim taught a group of twenty-five male prisoners, Fran shared the story of the Good Shepherd with a



Peqin High Security Prison



group of women prisoners. After a time of prayer, one woman tearfully approached Fran. “I keep seeing in my mind your picture of the shepherd carrying the little lost lamb.” Fran explained to her gently that Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, would be happy for her to be that lost sheep on his shoulder.

The next day Jim and Fran drove high into the mountains where more than 120 adults, teens, and children had gathered for family camp. Built by Albania’s atheist rulers for their own personal diversion, the luxurious vacation center now rang with praises to the very Creator God whose worship not so long ago had been considered a criminal activity. While Jim spoke to youth and adults, Fran ministered to the children. During free time, a group of more than twenty interested in children’s outreach took advantage of the Lines’ visit for training sessions in BCM’s *In Step With the Master Teacher* Christian Education material.



Cristina & grandmother

to travel to Italy for treatment. Though still confined to a wheelchair, her beaming smile gives evidence to the far greater freedom she has found in Christ through the loving outreach of those believers.

And people like Elder Enver, a former schoolteacher, and his wife. Thrown into the street by their Muslim family when they accepted Christ, they soon found themselves without employment as well. Living on the street, going without food for days at a time, they still displayed a vibrant faith. When Enver was chosen for Jim Line’s first church leadership training, his wife insisted he go for the provided meals as well as the teaching. “One of us must eat and remain strong.”

Jim Lines remembers well Elder Enver’s reluctance to enjoy the delicious meals, knowing that his wife was at home

Today Jim and Fran Lines are thrilled to be part of God’s answer to their prayers for Albania three decades ago. But it is the Albanian people who draw them back again and again. People like 14-year-old Cristina, one of family camp’s youth campers. Left paralyzed from the waist down through an Albanian doctor’s error at age nine, Cristina could get around only by dragging herself across the floor when she came to the attention of Tirana believers. With help from the Italian churches who sponsor the Albania ministry, she was able



without food. The believers, most of them very poor as well, came together to help the couple. Today they are in full-time Christian ministry. Enver along with another elder heads up the Tirana and Peqin prison outreach.

Then there is sister M* who chose family camp to share her public testimony of baptism. And Lefter, the language teacher who translated Jim and Fran’s Italian into Albanian for the family camp. A leader in the Albanian church with a deep burden for bringing the gospel to Albania’s children, he became so excited at the *In Step With the Master Teacher* workshops he was translating that he is now spearheading a project to publish the ISMT curriculum as well as BCM’s children’s Bible teaching material, *Footsteps of Faith* and *Tiny Steps of Faith*, in Albanian.

Life is still far from easy in Albania. It is a desperately poor country. Muslim countries have poured their own aid and missionaries into the one-time Islamic state, refurbishing more than 900 mosques and financing Albanian youth to radical Islamic universities abroad. Persecution of evangelical Christians remains ongoing, often from their own family members.

But less than two decades since the fall of communism’s Iron Curtain opened Albania’s borders, an atheist state that in 1991 had not a single operating church today estimates 6% of its population as evangelical Christian with one of the highest church growth rates in Eastern Europe.

And if their own involvement in Albania has taught Jim and Fran Lines one thing, it is that prayer does indeed move mountains, topple regimes, and tear down walls.

***Real name not used for anonymity**



Historic Ireland Guesthouse Becomes BCM's Newest Camp

by Jeanette Windle with Joe Dukes and Richard Thompson

BCM Ireland Director Richard Thompson can hardly remember a time he didn't know BCM. He was a young boy in the late 1960s when a visit to cousins resulted in his attending one of Ireland's first BCM Bible Clubs. Sometime later back home, a neighbor ferried Richard, his younger brother, and other local children to a monthly BCM children's meeting. Here at age eleven, Richard placed his faith in Jesus Christ.

A distinct country from Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom, Ireland covers five-sixths of the island of Eire with a population of 4.5 million. BCM outreach there began in 1965 with the arrival of two young American missionary women, Claire Burford and Alice Lloyd. Over the next decade numerous Bible Clubs were established in different counties. Many of these, such as the Kilkenny club, started by local volunteers Mervyn and Joyce Young and the Harper family, still continue today.

In 1970, Alice and Claire initiated a Bible Club for boys at the Curragh Army Camp in County Kildare. Within a few

years more than 250 boys were attending. That same year BCM Ireland held its first summer camp at Curragh. At age 12, Richard Thompson and his younger brother were among those first campers. The brothers had never been apart from their parents so long, and Richard tells now how the two boys cried as the vehicle that brought them pulled away from camp. At week's end when the same vehicle picked them up, there were more tears, but this time for having to leave new friends.

Since then Richard remembers only two summers he hasn't spent at BCM Bible camps, a summer of farm work in his teens and the summer he married his wife, Joan, whom he'd met as a fellow BCM camper. Which of course means the couple's wedding anniversary is invariably spent at camp! Once Richard became too old to be a camper at age nineteen, he volunteered to help around the camp. He assumed this would mean cleaning toilets and other handyman work. But when he arrived, he was handed a dorm full of boys and informed he was in charge. Since then Richard has performed virtually every camp role from dorm parent to director.



By this time BCM Ireland's ministry had grown considerably. Several more missionaries including Debby Johnson, Martha Wunsch, and Rosemary Hyde arrived from the USA, Canada, and England, bolstered by hundreds of local Irish volunteers who have served as trustees, regional committee members, teachers, helpers, and camp counselors. Bible Clubs expanded to ministries to clubbers' parents, which in turn resulted in BCM Ireland's first church plant, Newbridge Bible Fellowship Church, by two American missionary couples, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Lenahan and Mr. and Mrs. Brian Duffield. A children's ministry leader training program was added, using BCM's curriculum, *In Step With the Master Teacher*.

As years passed, Richard and Joan Thompson were not only both working secular jobs, but extensively in BCM ministry, including directing the camping program. As several of the original missionaries retired, more and more of the BCM Ireland oversight fell on Richard. In 2003, Richard resigned his position as an architect to become a full-time BCM missionary. With Joan now taking on the brunt of supporting their family of five, Richard admits the decision was a major step of faith for the couple. But neither Richard nor Joan had any doubt this was God's calling, and in the years since, God has always provided their needs.

An ongoing difficulty for BCM Ireland was the lack of a permanent summer camp facility. Typically, each season includes four weeks of camps ranging from ages 8-18. Since early years at Curragh Army Camp, changing landlords, skyrocketing rental prices, and other obstacles have resulted in numerous shifts of camp venue. The BCM Ireland team

began praying that God would open doors to purchase their own facility. Two impediments were the high costs of Ireland real estate and housing requirements necessary to accommodate 100+ campers and staff.

The BCM Ireland committee had put in a bid on a property, but the owner was delaying in making a decision. One means of putting on pressure was to let the owner know the committee was considering other options. It was only because he didn't want to lie, Richard Thompson shares now with a grin, that he began a desultory internet search for other properties. That was where he came across a listing for Castledaly Manor.

A recently renovated 18th century Georgian guesthouse right in the heart of Ireland, Castledaly boasts 25 bedrooms, 4 reception rooms, and large circulation areas along with converted stables, walled-in formal gardens, and a millpond, all set amidst beautiful parklands. By the time the committee toured the facility, that former dallying property owner had lost his sale.

But the sale price of €1.95 million was still well beyond BCM Ireland's budget. Negotiations brought a final bid of €1.525 million. With funds at hand, zero interest loans from various churches, and a bank mortgage to cover the final two-thirds, the committee determined they could swing the purchase. Then a new difficulty arose. The bank announced they could not risk higher than a fifty percent mortgage. BCM would need to raise further funds or convince the owner to facilitate a personal mortgage.



2010 UK conference attendees at Castledaly Manor

Retired BCM Ireland committee chairman Mervyn Young shared with Richard that he was praying in faith for a single donation of €100,000. It seemed a staggering amount. Then one night Richard received a phone call. The caller asked how the Castledaly financing was progressing.

“We’re still €200,000 short,” Richard shared.

“Put me down for half,” the caller told him.

Despite the late night hour, Richard immediately called Mervyn Young to share how God had answered his prayer. Mervyn jokes now, “Why was my faith so small? I should have prayed for double.”

When the check came, it was for €105,000. Other gifts began to come in. One American camp volunteer returned home to get married. In lieu of wedding gifts, she requested donations to mission projects, including Castledaly. Another sent in a gift of \$1500. The committee went back to Castledaly’s owner with a new offer. If he could offer them a mortgage, they could stick to the original bid. But with a 50% bank mortgage, the highest they could commit was €1.3 million. The owner agreed to settle for €1.3 million cash-in-hand.

An added bonus, the facility was handed over “turn-key ready” with furnishings, linens, kitchen and dining equipment all included. Even before the final papers were signed, BCM Ireland was running this summer’s camps for the first time at Castledaly. The biannual BCM UK conference was hosted there as well October 28-31, 2010. Already requests are pouring in from church and ministry groups.

As BCM Ireland director, Richard Thompson shares a twofold vision for the future. First, to create at Castledaly a high-quality facility that will serve as encouragement to the entire Body of Christ in Ireland. Castledaly Manor is currently Ireland’s only Christian facility with hotel-standard accommodations. At the same time, Richard is committed to offering a kid-friendly environment for camper fun.

“Castledaly is way above anything we ever imagined or even prayed for,” Richard says. “We are delighted to share this facility with other Christian ministries and churches and to be able to do so at a competitive price they could not get from a hotel.”

The second aspect of Richard’s vision was the theme of this year’s BCM UK conference: the passing on of the baton through raising up a new generation of BCM Ireland ministry leaders. He explains, “We don’t want to see ministries stop because the missionaries retire or leave.”

Here too Castledaly Manor is already playing a key role. Just as Richard himself began his ministry at camp, he has seen a growing core of teen and young adult volunteers taking on leadership roles in every aspect of camp. Some have gone on to other BCM outreaches. Others are now using the skills they’ve learned in other Christian ministries.

“These young people are the future,” Richard concludes. “If we can get them involved now, they will continue the vision of BCM Ireland.”

Learn more about BCM Ireland at <http://www.bcmireland.ie>



Singing Through Tears in Zambia

by Eric Hoke

Another smoldering hot day in the Zambian bush. Seated in the dirt, a skinny tree my backrest, I stared down at my shoes. They were covered in grime from the dusty roads my feet had traveled each day. My hair was oily, my beard overgrown and itchy. I hadn't taken a hot shower in 3 weeks. The tension I felt only added to my discomfort.

Dozens of Zambians sat all around me on the packed earth of this burial grounds several kilometers into the wilderness from their community of scattered mud huts. We were mourning the death of a boy who'd died a few days earlier. A leg swelling disease had spread to his heart. Even though the village had a health clinic, lack of medicine and trained professionals had kept the boy from receiving proper treatment before the swelling disease took his life.

He was four years old.

My own anxiety was because the elders of the local church had asked me to preach the funeral for this boy. I felt entirely inadequate for such a daunting task. As the group sang several hymns in Bemba, the official language of Zambia, I prayed for courage and that God would give me words to share.



The singing finished, I rose to my feet, dusting off the dirt, and gazed out over the crowd. The faces of the people were stiff, somber, curious as to what I was going to share with them. What could I possibly say to this community about the Lord after such a traumatic event? Especially to this child's mother whose tears streamed down her face as she buried herself against her own mother. She'd wept, flailing and yelling in despair, during the singing. How could I offer this inconsolable woman comfort?

After all, I was only 22 years old.

It was at this point I truly realized that I'd stepped into a very different world than any I'd previously known.

It was September 1, 2009, when my life took a radical and dramatic change. I'd been a senior at a large Christian university in Virginia, living in an apartment with friends, working at a skateboarding park, volunteering in a youth group, finishing up a degree in Religion.

My first exposure to Bible Centered Ministries International was at a lunch meeting with their Short-Term Ministries Director, Dave Smoyer. I'd shared with him a call I felt on my life to do a short term missions trip to Africa after graduation. He in turn shared with me BCM's ministry there, especially in the field of indigenous church planting. Since this was my own top interest in international missions, plans soon came together for me to spend a three-month mission working and living directly with BCM Africa national personnel.





September 1st found me traveling alone to Southern Africa with nothing but a duffel bag full of clothes and a backpack containing Bible, notepad, camera, and other items. I spent the month of September ministering with a BCM pastor in South Africa's Eastern Cape, then hopped a quick flight north to Lusaka, Zambia's capital. There in a tiny, concrete, two-room airport, I was greeted by BCM Pastor Eddie.

A landlocked country in Central Africa, Zambia is best known for Victoria Falls and game reserves hosting the Big Five (lion, elephant, Cape buffalo, leopard, and rhinoceros). But despite beautiful scenery, clean air, friendly people, and lush countryside, Zambia is also a nation whose needs are rampant and urgent. With a life expectancy of only 39 years, many Zambians we ministered to during my visit had lost loved ones to sickness, above all HIV/AIDS.

Many more were unemployed, forced to live without clean water, electricity, and with little food. Less than 50% of children receive primary education while only 20% of those who do move on to high school. With minimal education and



employment opportunities, bored youth often turn instead to promiscuity and drunkenness.

While Zambia prides itself on being a Christian nation, there is a lot of syncretism in the churches, mixing pagan animistic rituals with Christianity. Even many who have professed faith in Christ will also turn to the occult for their needs. Because of this, a pressing need within the church is the training of pastors in sound doctrine and the purity of the gospel.

Seeing these needs, BCM Africa is currently partnering in ministry with two Zambian pastors, Pastor Eddie and Pastor Titus. Both of their ministries include extensive traveling, multiple preaching points, the training of Sunday school teachers, youth outreach, hospital visits, encouraging the downtrodden, laying hands on the sick, public school ministry, rural church ministry, marketplace evangelism and open air preaching.



Pastor Eddie, who had picked me up, was a young married man with a 3-year-old son. Well-educated, he supports his family and busy ministry vocationally as a businessman. I'd arrived in Zambia on a Saturday afternoon. By Sunday lunch, Pastor Eddie already had me preaching three different messages.

The following day he took off work to drive me to a different location for an open air evangelism event. We stood in a busy marketplace with a drawing board and some markers, sharing the gospel of a loving God with the local people. Several adults as well as youth prayed to receive Christ. We then met with the local church leaders, encouraging them to follow up with those who'd made decisions to follow Christ.

After two fruitful weeks of ministering alongside Pastor Eddie, he drove me some 400 kilometers to the town of Chingola, where we met up outside a grocery store with BCM Pastor Titus, an older man and father of five. We headed to his house, where his wife served up nshima, a maize flour boiled with water into a stiff porridge that is eaten with different relishes. After we ate, we prayed together and said goodbye to Brother Eddie.



The next day Titus, along with his 18 year old son, took me in a taxi cab down a long and twisty dirt road to a bush village church made of mud with a roof of straw. After several lively hymns in the Bemba dialect, the pastor called on me to preach while Titus interpreted. After my message I sat back down, and we sang some more. In the middle of the second song, Pastor Titus nudged me. “Eric, you’re going to preach again.”

This was news to me. I flipped open my notebook, praying for another message. A few minutes later I was back in the pulpit sharing God’s Word again. After I closed in prayer, the church elders shook my hand and smiled, so I assumed we were now finished. Instead we sat back down to sing another hymn. After a few more songs Titus gave me another nudge and asked me to speak again. Three sermons and several hours later, the service concluded with a large fellowship meal.

Pastor Titus has a deep concern for the youth of his city, and we spent many days visiting schools from elementary to high school, where we shared the gospel as well as taught on abstinence. We walked to people’s homes, praying and encouraging them. I found myself teaching an all-day seminar on how to effectively lead a Sunday school, ironic since I’d never led a Sunday school class myself.

Pastor Titus also connected me with one of the rural pastors he’d trained, Pastor Friday, who took me to his bush village of Muchinshi. There we stayed in a simple, mud-brick house designed for orphans and widows. There were no toilets in this village, and some of the young children had never even seen a mzungu (white man) and would run away whenever I approached.

It was in this rural, isolated location of shacks, dirt roads, and stray dogs where I found myself standing before a crowd of mourners, at a loss for words and overwhelmed with emotion. Performing a funeral for this 4-year-old boy brought home the reality of Zambian life, affording a small glimpse at the struggles these brothers and sisters in Christ face every day.

God did give me words. After my message on God’s goodness and His love for children, we began our walk back from the

cemetery to the village. Within minutes, conversations had struck up. Jokes were told. People began to laugh.

I asked Pastor Friday why the atmosphere and demeanor of the funeral attendees had changed so quickly once the service ended. He informed me that with disease so prevalent and medicine so scarce, his church performs 3-4 funerals a week. “Death is so common we’re not even bothered by it anymore.”

After 31 days of preaching, teaching, visitation, and evangelistic events, my month in Zambia had ended. As I boarded a plane back to South Africa, I did not leave unchanged. My time in Zambia will forever mark my heart with a passion for the poor, oppressed, exploited, hungry, and hurting. And with a deep love as well for the Zambian Body of Christ.

Zambians have so little of material possessions, many living with no electricity or sanitary water. But I found the Zambian believers among the most faithful, hopeful, and hospitable people I’ve ever had the pleasure of knowing. I never once had to do my laundry, cook a meal, or even make my bed. The Christians went out of their way to serve me, host me, make me feel as comfortable and loved as though I was one of their own.

Despite poverty and hardship, the churches were full of love and joy, their members serving the Lord with incredible commitment and contagious fervor. The BCM Zambia pastors with whom I was privileged to serve were an inspiration to me in their unstinting ministry and their love for Christ, for His Church, and for the lost.

I would encourage every Christian to invest time in a cross-cultural ministry experience. The lessons that I learned while in the field were priceless, beneficial, and lasting. I went to Zambia to bless. I ended up being blessed, challenged and edified, but most importantly, knowing that Jesus was exalted.

Eric Hoke is the Assistant Pastor of Washington Assembly of God in Washington, NJ. He oversees middle school, high school and college ministry. He is engaged to his camp crush, Sarah Schwarz, and they plan on marrying Summer 2011.





Anderson Heard

Mailbox Bible Club: Displaying a Heavenly Father's Persistent Love

by Jeanette Windle

"Because of my studies in God's Word, I've learned I don't have to let the past haunt me. God loves me and wants to hear from me." MBBC member, New Jersey prison.

BCM missionary Lenny Ferm was a factory worker active in his local church when he got involved in "Our Father's Persistent Love," an outreach ministry to inmates in Trenton State Prison. A prodigal from God himself until his mid-thirties, Lenny was burdened for other prodigals searching to return to their heavenly Father. Dozens of prisoners were coming to Christ. Some would never leave the harsh environment of prison. Others would soon be released and need to start life anew on the outside. How could he disciple

these new Christians so that they would not fall back into wrong lifestyles that had landed them behind bars?

Lenny was still searching for an answer when he met the visiting mother of another church member. Known affectionately as "Aunt Bea" to all her correspondents, Betty Majors was New Jersey coordinator for the Mailbox Bible Club, an outreach of Bible Centered Ministries International that provided free Bible correspondence courses for all ages. Her materials proved just the solid Bible teaching Lenny's prison students needed.

At first Lenny submitted names for Aunt Bea to send material. But before long he was involved himself in the MBBC outreach, not just with New Jersey prisoners, but across the US. In 2000 Lenny and his wife, Thomasine, took over the

MBBC outreach, now named the New Jersey Bible Club. In 2007, Lenny joined BCM as a full-time missionary. In the last decade Lenny and Thomasine have been able to minister to almost two thousand men, women, and children across the USA.

Just what is the Mailbox Bible Club?

Doug and Marianne Schuster, who currently serve as facilitators of BCM's Mailbox Bible Club program, describe MBBC simply as a Bible Club by mail. Founded in 1972 by former Congo missionaries Myron and Bea Schuit, MBBC uses as its basis of evangelism and discipleship a series of seventeen courses provided through Source of Light Ministries. Courses are scaled from children four years old all the way through teen and adult.

Enrolling necessitates just filling out a registration card, either for oneself or for a friend, family member, neighbor. Each course lesson arrives in the mail. When finished, it is mailed back to the sponsoring MBBC, where volunteers grade the lesson, then return it along with the next lesson. At the end of each course, the student receives a Certificate of Completion.

But Mailbox Bible Club is far more than a long-distance correspondence school. It is the personal involvement of MBBC volunteers in their club members that impacts lives. Each leader commits to write personally and pray for each member with whom they correspond. Myiel, a twenty-five-year-old prisoner from Pittsburgh, PA, is only one of hundreds who write to express how much this means in their lives:

"You may not know this, but you help me out a whole lot with these lessons and little notes you send to me. I would like to thank you for praying for me, I need that. Being in jail is not an easy thing, being away from family and loved ones and living with all of these negative people. I'm just really grateful to have this Bible Club and someone as nice as you to pray for me and help keep me learning about God."

More than just a correspondence school

Homemade gifts tucked into letters. Special get-togethers. Roller-skating parties. Field trips. Ways to personally impact MBBC members' lives are limited only by the creativity of MBBC volunteers. BCM missionaries Pat and Dick James already had a mission project of collecting toys, food, household items, clothing, and money for hundreds of low income families and fire victims. At Christmas and Easter they also distributed decorated bags filled with fruit, cookies, a Bible story book, and candy canes. So when Aunt Pat & Uncle Dick added a Mailbox Bible Club to this ministry in 1973, the club became known as "Candy Cane Mailbox Bible Club."

Hundreds of past Candy Cane clubbers still remember picnic suppers for Mailbox members in the James' yard and meadow and the roller-rink skating parties to which clubbers could invite family and friends. In September, 2009, Richard "Uncle Dick" James, age 79, stepped home to glory. But "Aunt Pat"



Pat & Dick James

James continues to spearhead the Candy Cane Bible Club ministry, which today has 30 volunteer leaders and over 1500 active members across the USA and other English speaking countries.

Who are the members of Mailbox Bible Club?

Initially, the Mailbox Bible Club was directed primarily to children. The program proved an excellent discipleship follow-up to children reached through Vacation Bible School, summer camps, inner-city programs, and more. Many Amish and Old Order Mennonite children with little other access to Bible teaching material and activities have been eager participants. Others are senior citizens requesting lessons because they cannot get out to church and want to learn more about the Bible. Lessons are also available in Spanish, so MBBC is now reaching a number of Spanish-speaking immigrants, especially within the prison outreaches.

Beyond solid teaching of God's Word, MBBC has proved popular because it meets two longings common to most people, especially children. One, the desire to belong to a group. Secondly, the pleasure of receiving mail just for themselves.

BCM Canada Director Bill Ricketts shares of a promotion their Mailbox Bible Club program runs each Halloween where churches are invited to hand out MBBC registration cards along with candy to children coming to the door. Shortly after one such promotion, Bill received a letter from a 13-year-old girl recently immigrated from southeast Asia. From a Buddhist family, she wanted to receive the free Bible lessons to learn more about the Christian faith. After the first course, she wrote to say she'd asked Jesus to be her Savior. She also enrolled her parents, brothers, cousins, uncles and aunts to receive the lessons, many of whom also began doing the courses. As a result of one card handed out to a trick-or-



recruiter. Lenny Ferm, who estimates more than 90% of his MBBC members are inmates, now receives letters from prisoners in Hawaii, Kansas, New York, Pennsylvania, and many other states as well as New Jersey. As he'd once prayed, Lenny has seen steady spiritual growth and discipleship through the MBBC program. He's seen many become MBBC's own volunteer missionaries within the prison, sharing Christ with cellmates and fellow inmates with each new move and encouraging other prisoners to sign up for courses as well.

Martin, an inmate from Elizabeth, NJ, is using the MBBC lessons to lead his own Bible study among other prisoners. He wrote recently: "We will be meeting tonight for Bible study and discussing these [lessons]. There are quite a few men who have joined our group, so the number has doubled in just two weeks."

Ronderence, age 37, writes from Indiana, PA: "I've been blessed to share this last booklet with my roommate, and he likes it too. I have several people who want to get these lessons too."

Nor are other prisoners the only ones being evangelized through MBBC. Inmates often request that spouses, children, and other family members outside be enrolled. One prisoner writes, "I have been sending all of my lessons home to my wife so she can review them along with me. I continue to cherish and will save all of them forever."

A female prisoner, only twenty-five years old, writes, "I thank God every day all day for giving me the strength to get through. I have three children, and you may send them lessons too."

Over and over, prisoner letters express how much it means to them, not just to know they have a heavenly Father who loves them, but brothers and sisters in Christ who care enough to reach out beyond prison bars.

A PA prisoner writes, "Each time I receive my lessons and your letters, it brightens my day. I really enjoyed the little booklet on John 3:16. It reminded me that God loves me with no

treater, an entire family was introduced to the truths of the Scripture.

One of Lenny Ferm's favorite MBBC clubbers is also his youngest. By the time Anderson Heard (picture page 20, top) was two years old, his family had moved over a thousand miles from hometown, family, and friends. A small local church congregation became the Heards' family away from home, including "Uncle" Lenny and "Aunt" Thomasine. When the Heards signed up to get lessons from the New Jersey Bible Club, Anderson became their youngest ever member. Since then, the Heards have moved several times, but they always make sure to keep the Ferm's up to date with their latest mailing address, currently in Louisiana.

Anderson's mother wrote recently, "Anderson just turned five years old and is very much loving each lesson. He loves the latest 'Tippy and Tessie' lessons for his age-group. He also loves getting his own mail in the mailbox, opening it, reading it together, writing the answers by himself, putting them in the envelope, and putting them in the mailbox. I am truly thankful for people like Lenny and Thomasine who are obedient to their calling to spread the Word of God."

A Heavenly Father's love in the darkness of a prison cell.

But by far the fastest growing demographic of Mailbox Bible Club are members of the USA's 2.3 million prison population. Because inmates move often from one prison system to another, word of mouth has become MBBC's most effective



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reservations, totally, and forever. And believe me, someone in my position needs to know that because most people hate me for what I did. God knew, of course, I needed people to help me in my walk, and I thank Him for sending you.”

Don, an inmate in Pittsburgh, PA, writes: “Thank you very much for taking the time to help me study the word of God. It’s great that there are people out there like you who understand that a person may have done something wrong but still needs help to get in touch with his Father in heaven.”

Unlike those who teach a regular Bible Club, MBBC volunteers often never get to meet their clubbers in person. Lenny Ferm shares of the joy of helping paroled prisoners integrate into a biblically-sound, loving local church family. But a large percentage of inmate MBBC members will never walk free in this lifetime.

Darren, age 41 from PA, sums up what so many have written: “You have been a great friend. I wish I could have met you [in person]. But I know one day we will meet in Heaven. That day I owe you a great big hug.”

Today BCM facilitates more than sixty different Mailbox Bible Club outreaches involving hundreds of volunteers across the USA as well as Canada and reaching as far abroad as the Caribbean, Netherlands, Australia, and Singapore. Among sponsors of Mailbox Bible Clubs are local churches, Christian camps, inner-city ministries, and just groups of dedicated local Christian volunteers. Last year more than 31,000 lessons were mailed.

What is the eternal impact of Mailbox Bible Club?

Over the years, thousands of children and adults have professed receiving Jesus Christ as their personal Savior through the Mailbox Bible Club. Recently an elderly long-term volunteer Louise Tritt informed her students she would finally be retiring from Candy Cane Mailbox Bible Club. Not long after, she returned home from an errand. On her porch she found a flower arrangement. Its accompanying note came from a prisoner who wanted to say thank you for all she’d meant to him through her many years of correspondence with the Mailbox lessons.

But children grow up, families move away, prisoners finish courses and move on. Often MBBC volunteers do not get to see in their lifetime the impact of their prayer, dedication, letters and long hours of service. And that’s okay.

“Only eternity itself will tell us,” Lenny Ferm summarizes sagely. “When we see Jesus, then we will see just how many lives were affected by this ministry.”

If you would like to get involved in or donate to Mailbox Bible Club, contact Marianne Schuster at: mschuster@bcmintl.org.

Letters from the Inside

Below is a selection of letters to Mailbox Bible Club leaders from prisoners impacted by the ministry:

Dear Aunt Bea:

I have been blessed by the Lord Jesus Christ, and it came right in time. After being in prison for so long, I have continued to pray for Him to release me from this place of bondage (prison), and that I would go out into the world and try my best to save sinners like myself and bring them with the help of the Holy Spirit to Him forever.

Surprisingly, I was called to the office the other day. The administrator told me that for some unknown reason I was being released. I don’t know what unknown reason it could have been, for it sure is not close to my time to be released. After reviewing every possible way, I said it was a blessing from God to see if I was going to keep my promise to him. Praise to God for giving me a chance to prove myself. So when you send my courses, send the next one to this address...

—Jerry, Illinois.

Being in prison can be one of the loneliest journeys anyone could ever experience, but it has also been one of the greatest blessings I have ever received as well. God loved me enough to stop me from continuing on that path of destruction. He loved me enough to show me a much better way and one that would bring me nothing but joy. These [MBBC] Bible studies have guided my walk with my Lord and Savior! Thank you so much for all your help, guidance, and compassion.

—Vicki

I look forward to completing all 25 lessons with you. I’m in prison, have been for the past ten-plus years and probably will be here when I die. Only by God’s grace, if he sees fit to release me will I be released. Even though I am punished by man, I ... have been forgiven by God. I will be with Jesus after I leave this life that I must live.

—Joseph, Coal Township, PA



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BCM Camping: Not Just a Hike in the Woods

This summer BCM camps around the world hosted thousands of children of all ages in a summer filled with fun and learning. Be sure to check out the stories of our Brazil, USA, Albania, and Ireland camps in this special issue.

Below: Chapel time at Streamside Camp and Conference Center

