

# Unfinished

A publication of The Mission Society

Christmas 2006 | 35



## Who is the Christ child to me? Proclaiming Jesus in a pluralistic age

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Christmas 2006, Issue 35

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**Our mission:** To facilitate obedience to the Great Commission by the Body of Christ;

**Our strategy:** To create self-reproducing, indigenous, discipling Christian communities by mobilizing cross-cultural witnesses for Christ in partnership with nationals.

*cover photo* by Jim Whitmer

# BRISTOL HOUSE

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### OUR FAITH TODAY

April 2006

#### Leading United Methodists Answer Your Questions

**Q** Why should Christians read the Old Testament?

**A** The simple answer is: for the same reason that readers of the last chapter of Henry's *Fire and Power* need to read the rest of the book. We can read that last chapter with enjoyment, but we grasp the real meaning and significance of that last chapter only if we have read what leads up to it.

The same is true for the New Testament. It is the conclusion to a book which begins in Genesis. The only church continued this when they came to call the great-Christ writings the "New Testament." They were saying that this was the second part of a series—the sequel to the Old Testament "pre-quel."

And both parts of the book are important to the other. Neither one is dispensable. Of course our Jewish friends would have problems at this point, but this is just what both Jesus and the Apostle Paul were saying. They said that when we see the Old Testament as pointing to and leading up to

with God about matters of moral concern. It's telling God what's important in our lives and listening to what God says in our lives. So pray to Jesus' name in a profession that Jesus has the final authority over our requests and desires to our relationship with God. We are submitting to his authority and power because his name is equivalent to his character. It's responsible to the phrase in the Lord's Prayer, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." When Jesus said that 33 minutes, they reported that "even the devil's will be in your name" (Luke 10:17). The name of Jesus is powerful in making God's kingdom real in our world today.

Praying in Jesus' name is not a lucky sign-off at the end of the prayer. It is surrender to his will.

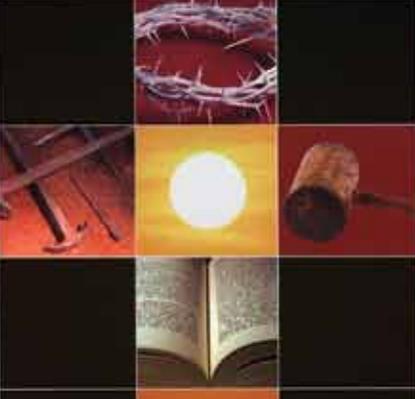
**David** *Book is a pointer to Jesus' Deities.*

**Q** Why is it so important to be in a church?

**A** When we examine the New Testament we find that

### La Estructura de Nuestra Fe

Los fundamentos esenciales de nuestro conocimiento de Cristo



**Harold W. Burgess**  
Editor

## OUR FAITH TODAY

THIS MONTHLY BULLETIN INSERT answers questions about United Methodist practices, the Scriptures, personal and social holiness and more. A new section, written by **The Mission Society** staff, offers informative and inspiring stories from around the world.

**Mission Society** President and CEO, Philip Granger, says, "This bulletin insert is a way to minister to your congregation as you seek to offer the love and message of Jesus Christ in your own community and in communities at the ends of the earth."

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## Jesus, our Home

**A**t Appletree House in Karaganda, Kazakhstan, neighborhood children – many of them, children of alcoholics – get fed one meal a day, five days a week. Some of them trudge through the snow in subzero degree temperatures, with holes in their shoes and with coats only the weight of a windbreaker. They hazard the bitter cold to come to this little house to be given something to eat and to listen to our missionaries tell Bible stories. When it's time for them to leave, the children go off to homes where, in many cases, they are the primary caretakers of their siblings. One of our missionaries described these children, whose tender hearts are so battered by “rotten” home lives. “I’m afraid they think Jesus only lives in that one room where we feed them,” she told me.

This is the sorrow of ministry, isn't it? Where there are children enjoying bread and hot soup five days a week, there is often the ever-present knowing that they will spend most hours hungry for food and affection. Where there is a village receiving medical care from an incoming team of doctors there is the reckoning that there is a neighboring village where people's suffering could be so easily relieved, if only the doctors would visit them, too.

The Kingdom of God on earth has been inaugurated through Jesus, but there are lots of rooms, homes, and communities where He, we might secretly think, doesn't seem to have ever come. We know that Jesus is Lord, that He is supreme, that good outweighs evil. But then there are these stories.

### All homesick – for the same Home

The presence of suffering in a world in which Jesus is King is puzzling indeed, but those who do not acknowledge God's reign have an even bigger puzzle. Where, for example, has all the goodness in the world come from? And why is it that all people everywhere seem to carry around the same longing in our hearts? It is as if we are all homesick – and for the same home. The children of Appletree House, for example, trudge through the snow for an experience of love. The atheist in France is drawn, as if by another world, by his enjoyment of beauty. The Buddhist in Shanghai (or, for that matter, nearly anyone you can think of) wants to be virtuous. Our cravings for love, beauty, virtue – like a trail of breadcrumbs through the woods – begin leading us Home. “There have been times when I think we do not

desire heaven,” writes C.S. Lewis, “but more often I find myself wondering whether, in our heart of hearts, we have ever desired anything else.”

This longing for Home shows up in other worldviews and religions. And, says Sri Lankan evangelist Ajith Fernando, “human aspirations reflected in the other religions find their fulfillment in Christ” (*see pages 5-11*). Neal and Mari Hicks, our missionaries in Japan, told me, “When Japanese receive Christ, the light that comes into their life is so strong that they, whether they are Buddhists or Shintoists, realize their other hard efforts to reach God were in vain. But in Christ they find great joy.” Islamic professor, Dr. Mathias Zahniser told me, “Muslims who come to Christ have this exhilarated sense of intimate connection with the God that they have admired and worshipped for a long time.” Another of our missionaries in a Muslim nation told me of a little Muslim girl who discovered a Bible in the basement of her apartment building. She had never seen a Bible before, and began reading the gospels. So taken by the person of Jesus, she put her trust in Him before any missionary had ever told her the Gospel message.

All around the world, Jesus is revealing Himself. Jesus, says Fernando, is “God's final revelation to the whole human race.” He is the completion of all other truths. “He is the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End” (Rev. 22:13, NIV). He is our Home.

At Auschwitz, people died by cruelty even more unthinkable than the gas chambers. They were packed into small concrete rooms, the size of closets, and forced to stand upright, pressed against each other until they died. In one of these rooms, today a tiny spotlight shines on a word etched into the wall: “Jesus.”

We live in the time between “Kingdom come” and “Kingdom not yet fully come.” The world, still marked by suffering, has a Home. And the children of Appletree House in Kazakhstan have now come to know Home, as Jesus has used the life witness of missionary David Potts – and other faithful disciples – to reveal Himself to them (*see page 20*). We hope 2007 brings new glimpses of God's Kingdom all around us, and that God will use even this issue of *Unfinished* to reveal Home to us.



# Pursuing Jesus

President Philip Granger bids a deeper plunge into our Christian beliefs

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.”*

*“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*  
 – John 1:1-2, 14, NIV

So begins the Gospel of John, and so begins a struggle to really understand who Jesus is. It is a struggle that consumed much time and energy of the early Church and one that still looms over the faith today. Understanding the person and nature of Jesus is not just an “academic exercise.” In fact, our understanding of Jesus is critical to our understanding of the great gift of salvation that He brings to us. What better time to take a closer look at the historic proclamations surrounding the Christ child than during the season in which we celebrate His birth?

The matter of the incarnation was settled by the church at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. The leaders that constituted the Council, however, were careful not to say that they had “decided” the issue. Rather, they proclaimed their faith and that the faith they proclaimed was the faith received by the Church since apostolic times. In the proclamation of their faith (“The Nicene Creed”), the Council stated that Jesus was “of one Being with the Father” and that He “became truly human.” In other

words, Jesus was fully God, and He was fully human.

Fully God and fully human – how can this be? It is illogical. Something or someone can’t be two things at once. However, Jesus’ being fully human and fully divine is not a statement of logic; it is a statement of faith. It is not a proclamation of the physics of this world; it is a proclamation of the creative ability of God. It is not a statement of what we deem as truth through scientific, rational analysis; it is a statement of Truth that emanates from God.

*Two years into our marriage, Sue became extremely ill and was hospitalized. I felt completely helpless. I could do nothing to make her better. So I prayed, God if you are real, please heal Sue.*

But why is this important? Why should I care? Because without this fundamental, basic understanding, there is no foundation for the Christian faith; the baby born so long ago in Bethlehem was no different than any other baby born in this world. Without the basic understanding that Jesus was fully human, there was no real death on the cross. Without this basic understanding that Jesus was fully God, there was no atonement by the One and only Son of God who existed with the Father since before time began.

## My own pursuit

I was not raised in a Christian home. When Sue and I married, I had no idea who Christ was, except that he was the central character in a little Christmas story. Sue, on the other hand, had been raised in a Christian family and had given her life to Christ at a young age. When we married she was running from her faith, so my lack of belief was no big concern for her.

Two years into our marriage, Sue became extremely ill and was hospitalized. Now for the first time in my life, I (a type-A personality) felt completely helpless. I could do nothing to make her better. So I prayed. I did one of those “fox-hole prayers”: *God, if you are real, please heal Sue, and I will follow You.* To make a long story short, Sue was healed; she returned to her faith, and I promptly forgot my promise.

Several months later, as Sue was reading a Bible story to our little girl, for the first time the idea of Jesus’ being fully God and fully human jumped out to me. I began questioning, which led to long discussions with the United Methodist pastor God had sent to us. The pastor introduced me to Jesus, and I began a pilgrimage that has brought me to where I am today.

## The ultimate quest

The person and nature of Jesus Christ is of ultimate significance. Without this basic understanding there is no need for the Church or The Mission Society – or

any other organization that exists to invite the world to a saving knowledge of Jesus. Without this basic understanding, there is no assurance of an eternity in the presence of a loving God who has wooed us since our birth and in whom we find the very meaning of our lives.

It is my prayer that in the new year each of us will go deeper, that we'll use these days after Christmas to get beyond the "warm fuzzies" we may feel about a cute, little baby born in a stable. May we unwrap the Gift, and understand, not only what Jesus means to us, but what He means to the world. May we remember that many have suffered and died for this faith (and are doing so today), so that countless others can hear and respond to the great love of God in Christ Jesus. May we realize that our faith is an offense to the practitioners of other religions, and not make apologies for it. In fact, we must be willing to offend, so those who do not yet believe can be confronted with the living Christ. It is this that we at The Mission Society are committed to – not only at Christmas, but all year long: Offering the living Christ to the world. †

**The Rev. Dr. Philip R. Granger,**  
*The Mission Society president and CEO,  
is an elder in the North Indiana Annual  
Conference of The United Methodist Church.*

## Want to develop a mission strategy or plan a mission event in your church?

Mobilizing your church for greater outreach can begin with the Global Outreach Weekend. A Mission Society team is available to come to your church and present the six-hour **Global Outreach Seminar**, as well as to minister during your worship services on Sunday. This weekend is designed to cast a greater vision for outreach and introduce effective means of mobilizing the entire congregation.

In addition, three essential strategies that are taught in the Global Outreach Seminar are now being presented in a more in-depth interactive workshop format in 2007:

### **Conducting a Global Impact Celebration** **April 20-21, 2007**

*Atlanta, GA*

This workshop will equip church leaders to plan, promote, and execute an annual high-impact missions celebration event in your local church. Cost is \$99 per person.

### **Developing a Global Outreach Plan** **September 7-8, 2007**

*Atlanta, GA*

This workshop will provide each participant with the training and tools needed to implement an effective missional structure and strategy that will be a unique fit for your local church. Cost is \$99 per person.

### **Equipping Short-Term Mission Leaders** **February 23-24, 2007**

*Myerstown, PA*

This interactive training will equip leaders to develop and execute an effective short-term missions plan, and to train and disciple the members of your short-term mission teams. Cost is \$99 per person.

*For more information and to register online, visit us at [www.themissionsociety.org](http://www.themissionsociety.org) or call 1.800.478.8963, ext. 9046.*



# Who is the Christ child to me?

A discussion of the importance of Jesus to every life

An interview with Ajith Fernando

“Why should we push ‘our religion’ on other people?” If you have ever been asked this question, or wondered it yourself, this interview with Dr. Ajith Fernando is for you. Fernando is a native of Sri Lanka, an island country off the coast of India with a complex mixture of adherents to Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. In this environment, Fernando, whose own grandmother and mother came to the Christian faith from Buddhism, proclaims the Christian Gospel. “What keeps me sharing the Gospel is the fact that Christianity is true,” says Fernando. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, he proclaims, is God’s answer to the human race and to the longing of every heart.



“Quite often what attracts people to the Gospel is the fact that God is a prayer-answering God.”

*photo by Jim Whitmer*

Here in the West, we hear people say that it is arrogant to insist that Christ is the absolute Truth. How would you respond to that?

I think Christianity is totally incompatible with arrogance. Let me use this example: Once Mahatma Gandhi was asked what he thought of [the renowned Methodist evangelist] E. Stanley Jones. He answered, “E. Stanley Jones is a good man, but he’s too proud of his religion.” When Stanley Jones heard this, he said that Gandhi was right according to his own convictions. To Gandhi, salvation was the result of hard work. Earning salvation is as hard as trying to empty an ocean of water with one’s hands. One who earns salvation this way could be proud of it. But in Christianity salvation is something we receive by grace though we do not deserve it. So we cannot be arrogant.

So is there a correlation between the notion that the propagation of Christianity is arrogant, and the demise of a real biblical understanding of Christianity?

I think, yes. When we lose the Gospel of grace, this does happen. Arrogance focuses on oneself; whereas gratitude focuses on another. And once you understand and are thrilled with the Gospel, you are so filled with gratitude you are always focusing on this Other who had mercy on you.

**Do you believe the Holy Spirit is active in other world religions?**

The Holy Spirit can work through any means, so we cannot say that He is not active in other religions. But if the work of the Spirit through other world religions is effective, it leads people to the Gospel,

because the Gospel is God’s final revelation to the whole human race.

For example, a person who seeks to follow the ethic of Buddhism, which is a very noble ethic, may realize that he doesn’t have the strength to follow it. And God may use that ethic to show that person this need for divine assistance that comes through Christ. So that aspiration is fulfilled in the Gospel.

But we must also remember that Satan often uses religions to blind people from the truth. This could be a legitimate application of 2 Corinthians 4:4. The very good things in these religions may be used by Satan to blind people to the Gospel. For example, the good, noble ethic of Buddhism may give people a sense of satisfaction, a sense that they are saving themselves, which really is the heart of rebellion against God. So the good things in these religions may make people feel

that they do not need help from a Supreme Being who offers them grace. So, while the Holy Spirit could be at work through other religions, you must remember that Satan, too, could be working through them.

You've written a book entitled *The Supremacy of Christ*. What does "the supremacy of Christ" mean?

That's a broad question. Let me just tell you this: I had a wonderful pastor, an Irish missionary, who had a big influence in bringing me to Christ. But he was followed by another missionary – a very good man, whose life I admired, but who didn't believe in the supremacy of Christ. This caused me to question, "Can I hold onto this belief that Christ is supreme?"

What I came to realize was that the Gospel is God's answer to the human race. And if it's God's definitive answer, then it must be supreme to all other ways.

As I began to work on this book, I spent most of my time on the gospels, especially on what Jesus said about Himself. And it really shocked me – or rather thrilled me – in a new way to realize how much of what Jesus said furthered the conviction that He is both absolute and supreme. Jesus marched through life with a strong self-consciousness of having come from God with a message that was supreme to any other message.

It sounds as if your assumption is that there is a basic discontinuity between God's answer, which was manifested in Jesus' life and resurrection; and humanity's answer, as reflected in all of the religions of the world.

Yes, I think that anyone who knows the Gospel and the other religions would realize that these religions move on different axes to Christianity. Their aims are different; their basic ideas directly contradict those of Christianity. But I think that there is a

continuity in the fact that human aspirations that are reflected in the other religions find their fulfillment in Christ.

How does believing in the supremacy of Christ influence our daily lives?

One aspect of the Gospel that is very relevant to our daily lives is the idea of spirituality. The Gospel is, of course, rational. God created us as rational beings, naturally the Gospel would be rational. But it's more than rational; it's a deeply spiritual message. I think one reason why Christianity was so long in taking hold in Asia, even after much missionary effort, was that Christianity was presented primarily as a rational message. The whole spirituality of the Gospel (the spiritual disciplines, meditation) was neglected in the presentation of Christianity.

Quite often what attracts people to the Gospel is the fact that God is a prayer-answering God. My wife and I have been involved in the growth of a Methodist Church which consists almost entirely of converts from Buddhism and a few from Hinduism. Almost all of these people began coming to church because they heard that in our church we pray for needs. So the spirituality of Christianity is attractive to people. We need to rediscover it.

Another aspect of the Gospel that has really impressed me recently, particularly as I come from a country that is being torn by racial strife, is in how the work of Christ is associated with the breaking of barriers, such as the race barrier, the class barrier, the caste barrier, the gender barrier.

When Jesus said that He is the Good Shepherd who gives His life for the sheep, and went on to say that He had other sheep (meaning Gentiles) and that there would be one flock and one Shepherd, what a revolutionary statement that must have been to a Jewish audience! In Christ, the great ethnic divide would be broken! In today's world, so divided on

*continued on next page*

## Middle East:

### Jesus, Messiah and prophet

*The Mission Society* missionaries from one Middle Eastern nation describe local Muslims' understanding of Jesus.

Five times a day the mosques in our country blare out "God is Great! God is Great!" With the situation here in the Middle East continuing to deteriorate, Muslims are more readily talking about the end times. They already believe that Jesus is coming back on the day of judgment.

But the same mosque, 100 yards from our apartment, that recognizes God's greatness also often blares out one of the chapters of the Qur'an [Koran] which emphasizes that God is not begotten nor does He give birth.

Jesus is well-known here, but Muslims deny His deity and say that He was only a prophet (and refer to a place in the Qur'an which implies such) and believe that someone else died on the cross in His place. They believe the Bible has been changed.

On the other hand, the Qur'an also says that Jesus is the Word of God, a spirit from Him. There is also a word in the chapter called "Miriam" that means "pure" or "blameless" and it is not used for any other prophet but Jesus. He is often called "the Messiah" here, yet when I ask my Muslim friends what that word means, they can't tell me. Oh, that they would know the meaning of the Anointed One.

Please pray that many here would come to know that "Salvation is found in no one else." (Acts 4:12)

*For more information, see Pillars and Prophets by Carl Medearis, an excellent, concise book written to help American Christians understand Muslims. To order, email [annamedearis@msn.com](mailto:annamedearis@msn.com). The cost is \$10.*

racial grounds, we need to rediscover this [barrier-breaking] aspect of Christianity.

Another way that the absoluteness and supremacy of Christ affects our lives is that it gives us a confidence in the truth of the Gospel which enables us to be gracious. When we realize that Christ is supreme, we don't have to be afraid of other religions. And when we are not afraid, we can approach someone of another religion with graciousness and compassion.

### What are the demands Christ's supremacy makes on our lives?

One of them is the necessity of sharing the Gospel. Once you realize that Christianity is Truth, you cannot help but share. Although today it is unpopular to do this, we must share. Bishop Stephen Neill called this "the awful and necessary intolerance of truth." We, as Christians, are tolerant and respectful of people, but there is an intolerance that comes with

absoluteness. And so we graciously, yet with conviction, share the Gospel.

Another challenge that the supremacy of Christ places on us is to live godly lives, which Christ enables us to live. In the East, one of the most common complaints we hear from people who are hostile to our preaching the Gospel is: Why are you preaching to us when the lives of Christians in the West are so immoral? (I'm not suggesting that we Christians in the East are any better; I think we are as bad. But moral laxity of Christians is a huge stumbling block to non-Christians.) So living godly lives is one of the great challenges the supremacy of Christ places upon us.

### Do we need to believe in Jesus of Nazareth – the historical Jesus – in order to believe in the supremacy of Christ?

This topic has become most significant in recent years. People now are separating

the historical Jesus from what they call "the cosmic Christ" or the "Christ principle." Once you do that, you can extend Christ not only to the statements of Jesus in the gospels, but to other religions.

My problem with this is that people are forgetting that the gospels were written as history. There are different types of religious literature. For example, in Hinduism the stories are not necessarily intended to be understood as historical. So most intellectual Hindus would not object if you were to say that those stories really didn't happen. To them it is the principle, and not the person, that is important.

But to us as Christians, the principle is the person. In other words, Christianity is Christ. And this Christ was presented in a historical way by the writers of the gospels.

### Is it possible to effectively present the uniqueness and supremacy of Christ if the person to whom we are speaking does not recognize the authority of Scripture?



Mozley family

The Mozley family has served in Ghana since 1999. Their passion is to encourage indigenous leaders to carry out the Great Commission. Michael serves as the Mission Society's regional coordinator for Africa, working with The Mission Society missionaries in Ghana, Kenya, and Tanzania. Claire works with Bible Club ministries and trains children's ministry workers. She is also the missionary care representative for The Mission Society's Ghana field.

### Ghana: Jesus, "The Great Rock We Hide Behind"

*Deep in the heart of the Akan culture are "primal" descriptions of God that reflect both the rich culture of the Ghanaian people and the biblical truth that Jesus is Lord, says missionary Michael Mozley.*

**Historical misconception:** In 1910, during a World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland, an anthropologist named E.B. Tylor came up with the term "animism" to describe pagan worship of things that come from nature. What he failed to recognize was that many of these pagan cultures with their "animistic"

beliefs had, for centuries and have today, a deep and abiding belief in a supreme being. Tylor thought that Africans' belief in God was like a tabula rasa (blank slate) with no real understanding of Him. Those misconceptions painted a distorted picture, and it profoundly affected how "Westerners" viewed animistic and pagan cultures. Believe it or not, the idea of Africa being the "Dark Continent" actually came from this missionary conference.

**Present understanding:** Fast forward to the end of the 20th Century – a century immersed in missionary ventures on the "Dark Continent." It paints a completely different picture. Although these "pagan" cultures seem "animistic," the current descriptive word for them is "primal,"

I believe it is. We don't believe in the Gospel only because we believe in the authority of Scripture. We believe in the Gospel because we realize that this is a system that makes sense; it is defensible. In my ministry with Buddhists and Hindus, I just present this Gospel, and I argue for the truth of this Gospel. In presenting the Gospel to anyone, start with where that person is and seek to show that this Gospel does answer the question that he or she is asking.

In our Christian teaching in the West today, are we accurately and adequately presenting Christ?

Although there are some exciting things happening, we will always fall short, because the Gospel is so vast, and our cultures cause us to be blind to certain features of the Gospel.

For example, we are missing the spirituality of the Gospel, as I said earlier.

We are also missing out in the area of the role of community in evangelism. In the Bible, evangelism was done through a community, and people entered as a community into spiritual accountability. The West is becoming less and less community oriented. And even the church, I think, has become too individualistic. Most of our community groups have very little spiritual accountability.

I think the Church in the West must also reflect more on the role of suffering in Christianity. There is a strong link in the Bible, and certainly in church history, between evangelism and suffering. When (in Romans 5 and 8) Paul presented the Gospel, he quickly went on to talk about how this Gospel can coexist with suffering. Western culture is trying to avoid frustration and suffering, so in this area Christians have to be countercultural.

We suffer because we are committed to people. When we can give up on people when they are difficult, when we can ask

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*Tucker family*

**Embracing Jesus in Central Asia:** After blessing their marriage in a special ceremony, Scott was talking with the bride and groom, both students in the local medical academy. The groom's Muslim father had just moved the rest of his family to Saudi Arabia. "If I tell my parents I believe in Jesus, they will disown me, and I will never be able to finish medical school. I don't know what God has for our future. Perhaps we can serve him together as doctors in Africa, where the needs are so great with friends from our fellowship."  
– *The Tuckers serve in a Central Asian country, where Scott, the field leader, teaches classes in theology and evangelism, training national pastors for ministry.*

which has more to do with basic, primary, or elemental, as opposed to animistic or pantheistic. These ancient, African traditional religions actually believed in a supreme God.

There is a classic, small book by an illiterate, farming midwife from the Kwahu hills of Ghana whose prayers and praises of God were recorded by two Ghanaians in the early 1980's which reflect, in primal terminology, the idea of God as a supreme being, and her love, and admiration for God and Jesus. She calls him, "the Python not overcome with mere sticks" (a direct correlation to some of the fables in their oral tradition). She also says He is the "Big Boat which cannot be sunk, The Great Rock we hide behind, the Great Canopy that

gives cool shade, the Big Tree which lifts its vines to peep at the heavens, the Magnificent Tree whose dripping leaves encourage the luxuriant growth below." (Quotes taken from *Jesus of the Deep Forest: Prayers and Praises of Afua Kuma*, Asempa Publishers, Accra, Ghana, 1981.)

One can find brilliance in these "primal" expressions, which describe the supreme being in terms which are unusual and unfamiliar to most "Western" thinkers. Many times the problem of syncretism occurs in "pagan" cultures where the blending of pagan worship with Christian theology creates a confused theological expression. This is altogether different. Afua Kuma brings a fresh and creative way of describing God and Jesus in words that

strike at the heart of her culture and in images that remind her people of their past but hold to the biblical truth that Jesus is Lord, and that there is no god greater than Him.

**Michael Mozley** is presently working on his Ph.D. in African, tribal religions from the Akrofi – Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture in Ghana.

To read from other missionaries about the understandings of Jesus in the cultures they serve, or for more information about any missionaries of The Mission Society, visit our website at [www.themissionsociety.org](http://www.themissionsociety.org).



Hoyt family

**Embracing Jesus during Ramadan:** “Why are you fasting? Christians fast?” We heard this over and over during the month of Ramadan, when we joined the Muslim world in fasting from sun-up to sun-down and then gorging ourselves at large community dinners. It was a joy to explain that we don’t fast to earn points with God (our Muslim friends believe in a literal point system); our security is based on what *Isa* (Jesus) has done. We fast, we explained, to set aside special time for prayer and to remember that He alone is enough for us.

– Adam and Mary Hoyt serve among a Muslim community in Atlanta.

people to leave the church or the Christian organization when we find it difficult to help them, when we can change churches whenever we have problems, this is a lack of commitment. It is commitment that really brings suffering to our lives. We have lost our ability to suffer.

One of my greatest fears for the evangelical movement in the West is that, because the West has become so entertainment oriented, in the process of “packaging” the Gospel so that it will be entertaining, we are not spending enough time reflecting on the content of the Gospel. The most powerful thing we have is the content of the Gospel, the fact that it is true.

Even the advertisements to motivate young people for missions read, “go and have a great time.” Actually missions is not “having a great time”; it’s going and suffering.

And in the midst of suffering, the fact that the Gospel is true keeps us going.

What characteristic of Jesus do you personally find most striking?

I think for me personally, it’s the love of Christ. I live in a country where there is so much hatred. We are living amidst war. People are hurt. There are so many reasons to be angry, to take revenge. And all the time the love of Jesus, especially his love for me (such a rebellious person, even after I became a Christian), gives me strength to be loving to others. Christ’s love consistently challenges me.

What would you want to say to Christians who are embracing theological relativism because they’re afraid of



Datwyler family

After serving with *The Mission Society* in Mexico for the past four years, the *Datwylers* (Tim, Daina, and Kevin) are now opening a new field in Ecuador. They will work with short-term teams to build churches and schools, and will train and encourage pastors of a young Methodist church, working alongside them to help them spread the message of Christ throughout Ecuador.

## Costa Rica: Jesus, Mary’s Son

**During Passion Week**, while we were in language school in Costa Rica, we saw and heard increasing celebration throughout the neighborhood. We watched groups of elaborately dressed people, singing and parading for hours carrying a statue of Mary. It was all quite exciting and went on until Friday evening. Then all went quiet. Nothing more. Sunday was back to normal. The people of Costa Rica remembered Jesus in His suffering all week, then missed the risen Christ. That is the moment we discovered with sadness why throughout Latin America Jesus is often depicted still on the cross, having no power.

Latinos recognize Jesus as Mary’s Son and the Son of God, but many do not regard Jesus as their intercessor and are sometimes resistant to acknowledging

Him as their Lord and Savior. They often do not see the big divide sin creates in separating us from Him, so they miss the need for a Redeemer. We pray God uses us to help people understand Jesus as just and loving and God’s chosen Redeemer. – Daina Datwyler

## Paraguay: Jesus, vying for position

**The Guaraní Indians**, natives of Paraguay, worshiped one god, Ñandejára. Ñandejára means “our owner” (which we might translate as “Lord,” because we do not live in a feudal society).

When the early missionaries from Europe arrived teaching prayer to the saints, Mary, God, Jesus, and Holy Spirit, the natives resisted praying to this host of other “gods.” Eventually they had to give in to the strong pressures used to “convert” them.

appearing to be unloving to people of other faiths?

Look at the gospels; they present Jesus as God. And if Jesus is God, and if this is God's answer to humanity, isn't it the most loving thing to present people with the answer sent from the eternal God to humanity? Once you realize that the Gospel is God's answer to the human race, it becomes unloving not to share it.

Why do you keep telling people about Jesus?

There are a lot of reasons. I think the wonderful experience I had with Christ was the start of it (and that continues), the love of Christ, and the thrill of being called to be His witness. All of these things have

played a big part in keeping me telling people about Jesus.

But sometimes all of these things can be overshadowed by our difficult circumstances – when we are persecuted, when we have political strife and violence in our country, when we are just tired and have been rejected by people. Then our experience may not be as vibrant as we would like. So ultimately, the thing that keeps me going when things are difficult is the conviction that Christianity is true.

And I must say that the Truth of the Gospel has been one of the most exhilarating things in my life. It is thrilling to handle truth. Sometimes I may go to preach when I'm feeling completely down, but just getting up to proclaim the truth fills me with ecstasy, because I'm proclaiming something that is eternally true. †



**Dr. Ajith Fernando**, a native of Sri Lanka, has been the national director of Youth for Christ in Sri Lanka since 1976. He has served as visiting professor

in several seminaries in the United States and often speaks at universities and conferences throughout the world. He and his wife, Nelun, have two children, and are presently leaders in a Methodist church in Sri Lanka which is comprised mostly of converts from Buddhism. Dr. Fernando is the author of 12 books, including *Sharing the Truth in Love: How to Relate to People of Other Faiths* and *The Supremacy of Christ*. Unfinished editor, Ruth Burgner, conducted this interview.

(Refusal to accept Christ as Savior often meant decapitation. Needless to say, after a couple refusals, the population decided to say "yes" to the question they were being asked – usually in Spanish rather than their native tongue. What often grew out of this practice was a syncretistic mixture of Catholic Christianity and the native religions of the area.)

The name Ñandejára is still used to mean God, but in many ways Mary is the main focus for prayers, acting as intercessor.

In the Franciscan temple (built between 1640-1775) in Yaguarón (jagwa rhone) near Asunción, the altar has an incredible "view of heaven." Mary (dressed as a queen, standing on a crescent moon) is half way up the stairs leading to heaven to intercede for the faithful. Peter is at the top of the stairs (dressed as a king) to welcome the faithful into heaven. God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are higher up, but the angels

and patron saints vie with them for prominent positions in the periphery of the picture.

Information provided by the following missionaries in Paraguay. **John and Colleen Eisenberg** serve with the National Methodist Youth Commission, the Methodist Bible Institute, an agricultural development program, and with the Toba Indians. **Ed and Linda Baker** serve in the "interior" of Paraguay in the rural department of San Pedro, drilling water wells to assist the Methodist churches and to assist in planting new churches. They are also responsible for the construction of a Methodist school and construction projects at new and existing churches, and are actively involved in the Tacuapi Methodist church, where they are members. **John and Sandra Carrick** are involved in education and leadership development in Asuncion, where John teaches at the Biblical Institute, and Sandra teaches English in the local church at San Lorenzo.



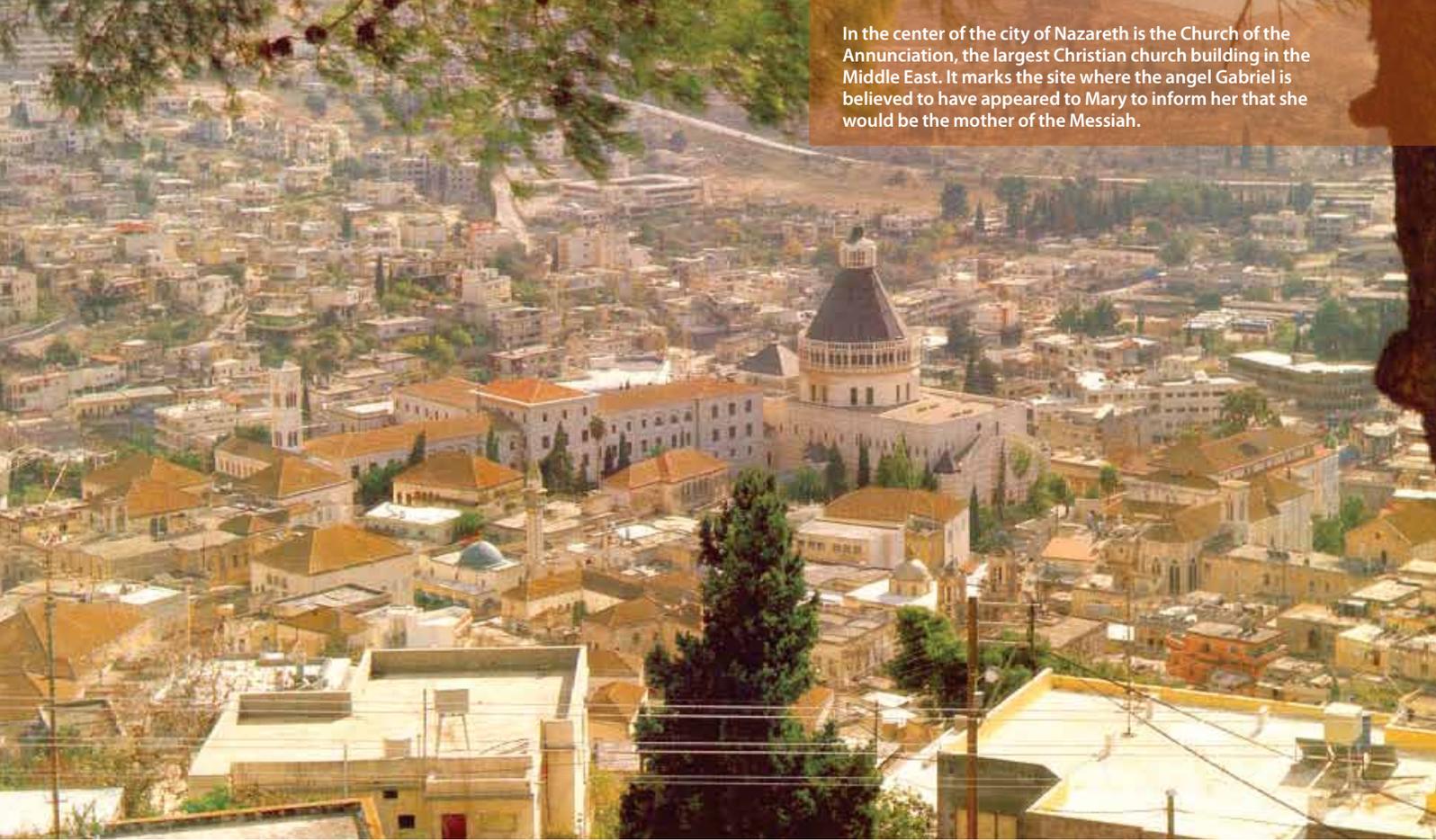
Eisenberg family



Baker family



Carrick family



In the center of the city of Nazareth is the Church of the Annunciation, the largest Christian church building in the Middle East. It marks the site where the angel Gabriel is believed to have appeared to Mary to inform her that she would be the mother of the Messiah.

# Nazareth in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

A Palestinian missionary offers an inside look at the spread of the Gospel in the town where both he and Jesus grew up

By John Michael De Marco

Strategically positioned and empowered by his calling in the heart of Jesus' hometown, Nabil Samara is on a mission to help churches and their leaders unleash the potential promised by this community's most famous resident.

"Serving in Nazareth is a privilege," said Samara. "It is where Jesus lived. But we can sometimes forget what a privilege it is to serve here, because we are so familiar with this place."

A 40-year-old married father of two, this missionary of The Mission Society is one of eight children raised in Nazareth of Galilee. A Christian since age 17, at 22 Samara was called into ministry and eventually found his niche as a Christian educator. After taking some courses and earning a bachelor's degree in

Switzerland, he returned to Nazareth to pastor. Eventually, Samara received sponsorship and support to attend Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, where he finished his Master of Divinity degree in May 2003.

Samara, who currently is enrolled in the international track of Asbury's Doctor of Ministry Beeson Institute program with plans to finish in May 2007, has been in Israel since 2003.

"During our time in the United States, many people told us that 'it is risky to return to Israel, because of the political unrest' and 'it is very dangerous to go there,'" Samara recalled. "But we were convinced that was our calling, and we had to return."

In 2004, Samara became involved with the Light for all Nations Ministry, a television evangelism program that aims to evangelize Arabic-speaking people in the Middle East and

North Africa. It also endeavored to establish Christian unity among the evangelical churches and leaders in the land of Israel, particularly in the region of Galilee.

This involvement enabled Samara to come into contact with most of the pastors and leaders of these congregations, and he often visited during worship services and gained valuable insights. These insights helped propel Samara to launch Olive Branch, a ministry designed to reach emerging church leaders who need skills in the areas of preaching, leadership, church growth, and the empowerment of women.

“The church in Galilee is struggling in these four areas,” he said. “Many leaders have little or no training in preaching. The Bible can be misused in their pulpits. There is also little concept for teamwork and empowering young people and women in most of the congregations. These churches need to be introduced to the idea of decentralized leadership.”

Beyond Olive Branch (*see article on page 14*), Samara also is directly involved in education through his work at the Nazareth Center of Bethlehem Bible College. In addition to administrative duties at the center, Samara visits potential students and teaches four to five classes there each semester that are geared toward training young persons for ministry. (The college’s lack of sufficient preaching, church growth, mission and leadership courses concern him, and mirror the concern that inspired his launch of Olive Branch).

Samara also is engaged in planting a new Church of the Nazarene congregation in upper Galilee, and hopes to do more church planting in the future.

The missionary and teacher acknowledges that all of these combined ministry efforts have brought forth some fruit. “I am pleased to see people come to know the Lord, to develop the right understanding of the person and the work of Christ, and to see young people studying and coming to a deeper understanding of Scripture, so they can minister more effectively,” Samara says.

### Sharing Jesus in His hometown

Considering how 21st Century Nazareth compares with the Nazareth that Jesus knew, Samara notes that the 1st Century town was a small community occupied by Jewish inhabitants who most likely belonged to the same tribe. “They made their living by doing manual crafts, herding, and planting,” he says. “Nazareth of the 21st Century is a city occupied by an Arab population of both Muslims and Christians. It has more than 75,000 people (60 percent Muslim and 40 percent Christian).

The main sources of income in the city are trade and tourism (when the political conditions in the region allow it). Nazareth has heavy traffic.”

The churches in Nazareth, says Samara, especially the Church of the Annunciation, maintain the town’s Christian heritage and enable its historicity to come alive for visitors. However, some have attempted to turn Nazareth into a “Muslim town” by making Friday a day off to coincide with Islam’s day of prayer, and imposing certain Muslim signs along the main roads.

In terms of receptivity to the Gospel in Nazareth, Samara notes that the Christian population is typically nominal Catholics or Greek Orthodox, while evangelicals are a minority. “We, evangelicals, face a difficult time trying to reach nominal Christians for Christ, due to the rumors from some Catholic leaders that evangelicals do not believe in Mary, the Mother of Jesus,” he said. “And there also exists the misconception among those of Orthodox faith that the Christianity of the evangelical churches is only a Western Christianity, that it is not original.”

Trying to reach Muslims, he adds, becomes more and more difficult because of the political conflict between Israel and Palestine. “However, when we have the chance to speak with people about Christ, they are normally open to listening. Facing difficulty does not mean resistance to the Gospel. There are great opportunities at hand, especially after the war with Hezbollah.

“We can sum up the situation of Nazareth in these few words: People are open and receptive to the Gospel if they are approached in the right way; not in condemnation, but in love and encouragement.”

Samara faces many challenges in his various ministry endeavors, not the least of which are having enough time and help, correcting the mistaken notion among local church leaders that leaders do not need training, and finding adequate financial support.

“We are struggling with lack of funding. By the end of this year, the Nazarene Church will cease supporting the ministry of planting a new church. That means we need to have new support. And for us as a family, we will live on half our salary. Please pray for us.”

### Impact of the fear of Islam

Another ongoing and long-embedded challenge is the misperceptions that Western Christians have about their Arab and Palestinian brothers and sisters.

“It seems that most of the people in the West believe that all Arabs and Palestinians are Muslim; that we are not

**“On many occasions, people I’ve met were surprised to know that I am an Arab Christian,” says Samara.**



Modern-day Nazareth is nestled in a hollow plateau some 1,200 feet above sea level. It is occupied by a population of more than 75,000 people (60 percent Muslim and 40 percent Christian). A busy city, the main road for traffic between Egypt and the interior of Asia passes by Nazareth near the foot of Tabor.

compassionate or even friendly people; that all Arabs and Palestinians hate Americans and Westerners,” he says.

The fear of Islam has made the West shy away from helping the Church in the Middle East, says Samara, ignoring the fact that the Church in his region cannot survive on its own. “There are Arab and Palestinian Christians who love the Lord and are willing to serve others as well,” he says. “We are a friendly and very welcoming people, who long to live peacefully.”

“On many occasions people I’ve met were surprised to know that I am an Arab Christian,” says Samara. “Western Church leaders could address this by making contacts, visiting not as tourists but as friends who are coming here to help in ministry, not as spectators but as partners. The church in the West could invite Arab Christian leaders to speak in their churches and present aspects from our lives and ministries.



In addition to work with Olive Branch and Nazareth Center of Bethlehem Bible College, the Samaras have planted a new evangelical church in Ibeleen. Seen here is the first communion at this home church.

on four areas in ministry.” Today, the ministry of “Olive Branch,” as it has been named, is geared toward the following:

- **Helping pastors and ministers develop skills in preaching and teaching the Gospel.** “It is not enough to count on past experiences in performing these two activities,” Samara said. “We believe that, in light of the world situation and the postmodern worldview of the 21st Century, pastors and Christian teachers need updated skills and strategies in these two areas in particular.”

By providing strategic planning and developing church curriculum, we can help nurture church growth.”

- **Empowering women for Church ministry.** “Women are a very vital part of our society. They make up more 50 percent of our population. Moreover, their percentage is much higher in regard to the Church population. Yet, they are neglected and put aside when it comes to leadership roles in the church. Therefore, our goal is to help emerging young women develop skills of leadership.”

## Training Christian leaders in Galilee

“I believe there is a great gap we should not overlook,” says Nabil Samara. “I began to pray, and the Lord granted me a deep desire, not just to help one church or one denomination, but to help all the evangelical churches in Galilee. After four months of praying and seeking God’s direction, I became more convinced of the idea of developing a training center focusing

- **Developing and training emerging Church and Christian leaders.** “The desired aim is to develop young leaders within the Christian Church, who would lead the Church in the future. This would include helping young people discover their full potential through identifying, equipping, and coaching a team of leaders.”

Olive Branch needs regular monthly supporters to enable its training and teaching ministries.

To partner in ministry with the Samara family or with any of The Mission Society missionaries, contact The Mission Society at **800.478.8963** or **info@themissionsociety.org** or write:

**The Mission Society**  
**6234 Crooked Creek Road**  
**Norcross, GA 30092**

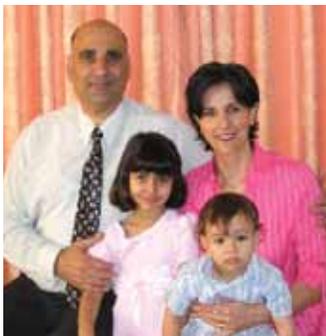
Online donations are accepted by clicking on “Donate Online” at [www.themissionsociety.org](http://www.themissionsociety.org).

- **Providing strategic help for church growth.** “The church is a living organism, which is capable of growth and decline.

“We need the Church in the West to pray for us regularly, to be mindful of us and of our ministries, and to think positively about our people and see us as potential brothers and sisters in the Kingdom,” he adds. “Those in the West could work with us in providing teams to help us do evangelism and outreach, or maybe provide work teams and volunteers to help renovate the physical buildings of our churches.”

### May there be Peace in the land

Looking to the future, Samara hopes to unite with other ministries to become more effective in evangelism, discipleship, and church growth in his region and country. “My vision is for Olive Branch to grow and to influence leadership and preaching, developing leaders who would, in return, influence their people and congregations,” he said. “My dream is to have peace in the land and to build a Christian center for the entire Christian community in the region of Galilee.”



Nabil and Sana Samara with daughter, Janana, and son, Elias

Samara admits that these dreams and visions are bigger than his resources. “But they are not bigger than my God, who is able to provide.

“God is opening doors and we pray to be able to take advantage of these opportunities,” he says. “The people of the land are more and more aware of the existence of the evangelical Church and are not afraid of us as they used to be 30 years ago.”

Despite the many challenges, Samara stays encouraged by his calling. “I believe the One who called me is able to use me anywhere,” he says. “My family and I are here for a purpose, God’s purpose. Out of these difficult times, God is able to bring hope and a bright future that awaits His people. I trust in God, not in the circumstances; for He is the master of all of our situations and circumstances.” †

*John Michael De Marco is a United Methodist deacon and a freelance writer, speaker, and trainer based in Central Florida.*



## Missiles in Nazareth

Hezbollah (Arabic for “party of God”) is a Shi’a Islamist militant and political organization based in Lebanon. It follows a distinct version of Islamic Shia ideology developed by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, leader of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. This summer’s 34-day war between Hezbollah and Israel ended with a United Nations-brokered cease-fire on August 14, 2006. The war was prompted by the abduction of two Israeli soldiers, and the murder of eight others, by Hezbollah forces in July. During the war 1,200 people were killed, and hundreds of thousands were displaced. Nazareth was among the communities hit by missiles during the conflict.

Conflict and fear are regular fare for this part of the world. Shown here is a special bomb-diffusing unit. “Our church contacted this unit, because we had a suspicious object at the entrance of the church,” writes Samara. But even the unrest can be used by God for His purposes. For example, notes Samara, the people of Nazareth have been more receptive to the Gospel since the war with Hezbollah.

# Internships available

The Mission Society's Intern Program provides people interested in cross-cultural ministry with the opportunity to live overseas in order to further explore their call. While shadowing a missionary of The Mission Society, interns will experience the challenges and joys of ministering in another culture. Internships last 1-11 months. An intern must be at least 19 years old and a U.S. citizen.

Internship positions are currently open in France, Ghana, Hungary, Japan, Kenya, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Russia, Tanzania, and Venezuela. For more information, call **1.800.478.8963, ext. 9025** or email **info@themissionsociety.org**. For complete online information, visit us at **www.themissionsociety.org**, click on "About us," then on "Brochures online."



### Leading a short-term mission trip?

See page 3 for information about a workshop designed to help prepare you.

# Missionaries needed in new locations

## Positions available:

### Healthcare workers

Doctors, nurses, dentists, ophthalmologists, and pharmacists are needed in rural settings where very little medical care is available. Offer physical as well as spiritual healing to thousands of patients around the world.

*Ghana, Paraguay, Peru, and Russia*

### English teachers (TESL)

Individuals are needed to teach English as a second language. Relationships formed in educational settings can open doors for sharing the Gospel with students. Instruction in TESL available during missionary training.

*Hungary, Kazakhstan, Paraguay, and Peru*

### Children & youth ministers

Work with missionaries and national workers to provide spiritual nurturing and mentoring for fledgling youth and children's ministries.

*Hungary, Kazakhstan, Paraguay, and Peru*

### Hospital chaplain

Chaplain needed to minister in the Ankaase Methodist Faith Healing Hospital in Ankaase, Ghana. Work with healthcare professionals in this village clinic and minister to both the patients and their families. Hundreds of Ghanaians treated each week. Some pastoral experience required.

*Ghana*

### Orphanage workers

Abandoned children in Russia are in need of persons called to ministries of compassion, evangelism and discipleship. Work in and among orphanages in the Russian Far East.

*Russia*

### Community health workers

Motivated and creative people are needed to help implement a program of community development

among villagers and their families. While there are no medical or professional skill requirements (training in Community Health Evangelism is available), leadership and relational skills are a must. *Ghana, Mexico, and Paraguay*

### Teacher for young missionary

Home-school teacher needed for fourth-grade girl, the daughter of missionaries in Ghana. Other ministry opportunities are available within the village of Ankaase, Ghana to build relationships with national Ghanaians and share Christ through the local hospital and community. Some fundraising necessary.

*Ghana*

### K-12th grade teachers

K-12th grade teachers are needed yearly for a variety of grades and subjects in several schools overseas. Classes are taught in English, and a modest salary is provided. Share your faith through building relationships with students and their parents in this strategic ministry.

*Hungary, Kazakhstan, Mexico, and Paraguay*

### Literacy teachers

Act as a teacher's assistant to missionaries teaching both English and native literacy. Students learn their own "mother-tongue" reading and writing skills while reading the Bible. Education majors and TESL teachers especially encouraged to apply.

*Ghana and Peru*

### Director of short-term teams

Coordinator of short-term mission teams needed to organize and communicate with teams traveling from the United States. Highly organized and motivated person desired to minister to teams and facilitate projects to help the community.

*Paraguay and Peru*

### Pastors and theological teachers

Opportunities abound to teach courses, seminars,

and conferences in local seminaries throughout several nations. Leadership development training of pastors and other theological leaders needed. Applicants should have pastoral experience and/or seminary-level training.

*Ecuador, Ghana, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Paraguay, and Russia*

### Agricultural missionary

Seeking an agricultural specialist with the responsibilities of maintaining relations with national agriculture specialists, working one-on-one with local farmers in improving yields, marketing, and soil. Individual will maintain small plot research sites to gather information on crop systems. This individual should be a strong evangelical Christian, self-motivated, with a deep calling to missions.

*Ghana and Paraguay*

### Missionary Training Center director

Couple needed to work in a missionary training center/seminary in Curitiba, Parana, Brazil. Administrative and teaching skills with past missionary experience required. Vehicle and furnished housing provided.

*Brazil*

## Terms of service:

**Mission intern** – 1-11 months

**Mission explorer 1 & 2** – One- or two-year term

**Career missionary** – Five years including one year on homeland retreat

**Global Resource Mobilizer** – Serve on The Mission Society field for weeks to months at a time, consulting on a particular project in one's discipline of expertise.

*If you are interested in these or other positions, please contact The Mission Society. Visit us at [www.themissionsociety.org](http://www.themissionsociety.org) or call 1.800.478.8963.*



## What is it that you *do*?

After 10 years on the field, Jim Ramsay helps answer the question often asked of missionaries

What exactly is it that you *do*? That is a question missionaries find difficult to answer. During our family's years of service in Kazakhstan, this question was frequently posed to me. Now in my new role as director of field ministry at The Mission Society, I find the question can be equally hard to answer. What is it that missionaries *do*, anyhow?

As I become acquainted with the many locations in which missionaries of The Mission Society serve, I realize that answering this question does not get any easier. Our fields vary incredibly based on the local scene and on the types of people the Lord has called to serve there. So what do they do?

A lot of what missionaries *do* is simply to live among the people God has called them to serve. In Kazakhstan, our "doing" often consisted of shopping for groceries at the local bazaar, navigating the city bus system, sitting down to tea with people, trying out that new Russian word, having a spontaneous discussion about faith with a stranger in a train car. In short, much of what missionaries do is to experience the routines of life with those around them. The task of the missionary often is not so much to *do* ministry, but to pay attention to the ministry opportunities that are presented in what otherwise might seem mundane life situations.

Having returned to the United States after serving nearly a decade, I have done a lot of reflecting on those years. What exactly did I do? Certainly I can point to concrete things, such as directing our school, providing leadership for our mission team, preaching sermons, teaching classes, organizing events. But

when I really consider any impact I might have made, I see it in the relationships I built and the investments I made in the lives of the people around me, more than in the institutions I formed and served. Walking to the bus stop with a young man on a cold night after playing soccer together, talking about the ministry, had as much (or more) impact as an organized lecture he may have heard me give. My wife's discussion with a young mother (after our cell group meeting) about being a godly wife and mother was as strategic as any parenting class we may have organized.

True missions is about *being*, about seeing how the Lord wants to use every situation to share His love.

My point is not that one should not organize ministry or create institutions to facilitate ministry, but that a focus on the "doing" of ministry can never be a substitute for the importance of "being." In fact, I would even question the validity of the phrase "do missions." True missions is about *being*, about seeing how the Lord wants to use every situation to share His love. To do this takes patience. It takes learning all we can about the local context. In many cases this means taking on a new language and culture, so that we can share life more fully with the people around us. It means trusting the Holy Spirit to guide us and to create those divine appointments that are rarely orchestrated by us.

Since that is our emphasis, then it is not surprising that what our missionaries do will have a great variety, since "doing" is the means toward a greater end, and the means will depend on the specific setting of ministry. We always seek to do things which will lend themselves to sharing our lives with people, and through that sharing, to introduce them to our Lord and walk with them in discipleship.

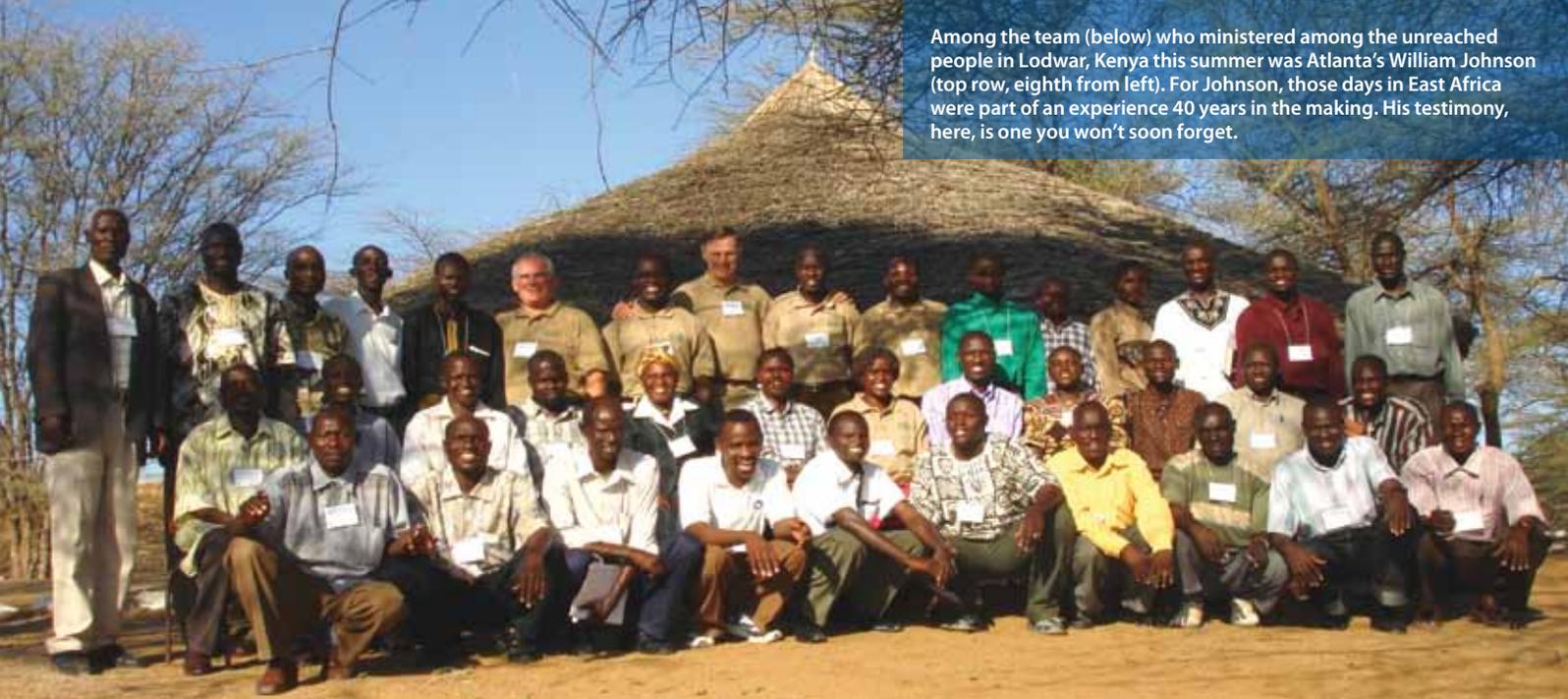
I look forward to seeing how the life of ministry looks on the varied fields of The Mission Society. I want to use this column in future issues of *Unfinished* to share with



you what I find as I become more familiar with our work worldwide. I hope to use this to enable you to get a glimpse into the lives of our missionaries – the challenges and blessings they experience in their daily lives. I hope to help all of us to get a better picture, not so much of what missionaries *do*, but also who they *are*. †

*Jim Ramsay serves now as director of field ministry after having served 10 years as field leader in Kazakhstan. He managed the overall work of the team in Kazakhstan and served as director of Friendship School and professor in the Central Asian Evangelical School of Theology. Since 2004 he also served as The Mission Society regional coordinator for Asia. Jim is a graduate of Asbury Theological Seminary.*

Among the team (below) who ministered among the unreached people in Lodwar, Kenya this summer was Atlanta's William Johnson (top row, eighth from left). For Johnson, those days in East Africa were part of an experience 40 years in the making. His testimony, here, is one you won't soon forget.



## Introducing Jesus to the last unreached tribe on earth

How God is using one Atlanta family's vision to reach thousands of people "at the end of the earth" with the Gospel

*In the fall issue of Unfinished, you read about the two-week East Africa Mission Mobilization Conference. Its goal was (and is) to help mobilize more than 700 churches with 35,000 Christians taking the Gospel to 100,000 people in unreached and least-reached tribes in East Africa. Among the fruit of that event, more than 1,000 people have made new commitments to Christ.*

*This massive effort was envisioned and organized by Atlanta entrepreneur, William M. (Bill) Johnson, who, after a 20-year career of developing 1.2 million square feet of office, retail, industrial, and hotel buildings, answered God's call to re-focus his life.*

*"For most of my life, my career focus was on making money," he says. "Today, our family vision is that we would have helped send the missionaries who introduced Jesus to the last unreached tribe." The clarity of his new life focus came only after a 40-year journey to the "Promised Land" (Deuteronomy 8:2), says Johnson. At a gathering in Florida last spring, he told his story.*

I grew up in a loving Christian family with modest financial resources. When I was 14, I felt as though God had called me to be a music minister. But when I learned how poorly compensated music ministers were, I decided that I could not afford to answer God's call. My sights were set on making a lot of money.

I liken the next 40 years of my life to that of the Israelites in the desert. Remember that God called the Israelites into the desert (their "seminary" of sorts) before they crossed into the Promised Land (where God would use them to make Himself known to other people-groups). Their desert experience should have lasted two years. But, instead, it lasted 40. That was true for me, too.

Finally, in 2000, at the age of 54 (40 years after I felt God's call on my life), He had allowed me to fulfill my dream, by entrusting me with significant financial resources, all of which were dedicated to funding Christian ministry. It was at this

time that I realized I was at a crossroads: either to continue accumulating more wealth or to begin deploying the wealth into Kingdom causes.

My life purpose shifted from "wealth accumulation" to "wealth deployment," using "maximum Kingdom leverage," so that all may know God, love Him, and serve Him. God confirmed this covenant with Deuteronomy 8:18: "For it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms His covenant, which He swore to your forefathers, as it is today."

### How to do it?

My wife and I had had wonderful experiences of giving to our local church, and to other Christian causes. But we had to learn how to deploy God's wealth entrusted to us into the work of His Kingdom beyond our "small world," which had been the scope of our donations. The Lord laid on my heart Romans 10:14-15: "How shall they hear

without someone preaching to them? And how shall they preach unless they be sent?” This scripture created a major breakthrough in my vision: *Even though I am only one person, I thought, I can help train a lot of preachers and leaders, who can reach thousands of unreached people at the ends of the earth with the Gospel.*

But how should we begin to do this? My life verse since 1977, when God put us in the real-estate development business, has been Matthew 6:33: “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness . . .” If we seek, not just His Kingdom, but Him, God tells us, He will take care of the rest. And He has done that.

### Where and how to invest?

My wife and I decided to stop accumulating. In other words, rather than distributing the wealth of our estate to heirs and charities through our wills after we died, we decided to very intentionally be active participants in the deployment of our resources in God’s Kingdom while we’re still alive. This decision was, for me, my “Crossing the Jordan River” experience – beginning to occupy the Promised Land!

In 2000, we created three charitable foundations, endowed by 30 percent of our total wealth (so that we could never change our minds about the title of ownership of the money). God absolutely owns the remaining 70 percent, and we have made provision to change the title of ownership to Him on that remainder.

Our “Kingdom Investments” are dedicated to four strategic purposes:

1. **Training Christian leaders** in Gospel sharing methods;
2. **Sending and resourcing** Christian leaders to reach the unreached and unsaved for Jesus;
3. **Empowering** the local church for global impact; and
4. **Caring** for the least, last, and lost.

Thus far, God has led us to allocate 52 percent of the distributions toward *training*, 24 percent to *sending*, 12 percent to *empowering*, and 12 percent to *caring*. God had given us the *why* and *how* of our strategy. Then He showed us Acts 1:8, which answered the *where* for our “giving strategy architecture.”

“Charity is easing symptoms of distress. Philanthropy is investing in solutions to underlying problems.”

– *Economist*, February 25, 2006  
(quoted by William Johnson at a gathering in Florida)

We discovered that the United States which has only five percent of the world’s population has 60 percent of the world’s wealth, and that 96 percent of all donations made by U.S. citizens to all Christian causes is deployed inside the United States. God convicted us to help change this imbalance of wealth distribution by investing in Christian causes. So 52 percent of our distributions are dedicated toward reaching unreached people at “the ends of the earth.” (Having our priorities defined this way is so

important, because it helps us discern the areas of need to which God has called us to invest and those to which we should not invest.) We understand this is not the only strategy, but it is what God has invited us to pursue.

Deploying so much wealth beyond the United States created another dilemma: How should we effectively deploy what God has entrusted to us? What people groups need our help? Who are their leaders? Are they trustworthy? What are their goals – social and spiritual? Do we work alone or as part of a group? How do we manage the process? etc., etc., etc.

My wife and I quickly realized we couldn’t do this by ourselves. The Mission Society has become one of the bridges God has given us to close the gap between our resources and the spiritual needs of the world. We believe that Romans 10:14-15 has informed our four-pronged purposes and that Acts 1:8 has informed the geographical distribution of our resources, thereby “maximizing our eternal return on investment.”

### Our vision

At this time of our ministry, our family vision is that *we would have helped send the missionaries who introduced Jesus to the last unreached tribe on earth*. It may not happen with our first dollar or our last dollar. It may not happen in my lifetime. Even so, my wife and I are dedicated to doing all we can, in obedience to God’s leading, to see that our children or grandchildren see this come to pass. ✚

At any stage in life, God can give renewed dreams and fresh visions. Begin by seeking Him, says William Johnson, to whom God has given a new “life dream.”



## Vision 50:15: Nigerian Christians commit to an unprecedented mission effort

The Nigerian Church has embarked upon one of the boldest ventures in recent mission history. Vision 50:15 is the commitment by the Nigerian Church to send 50,000 Nigerian Christians back to Jerusalem within the next 15 years. This path will take the Nigerians through North African Islamic nations with the goal of reaching Jerusalem by 2020.

Dr. Timothy Olonade, director of the Nigerian Evangelical Missions Association (NEMA), is spearheading the movement. Dr. Olonade is well-known in international mission circles and has authored and co-authored more than a dozen books on discipleship, missions, evangelism, human resources, and missions strategy.

Eighty different agencies, churches, and organizations have affirmed Vision 50:15 and are participating in various ways. The Mission Society is one such organization. In early December The Mission Society sponsored a conference by Dr. Olonade to raise awareness and support regarding Vision 50:15.

For more information regarding Vision 50:15, visit the Lausanne World Pulse website: <http://www.lausanneworldpulse.com/worldreports>.



Dr. Timothy Olonade



Vision 50:15 is the commitment by the Nigerian Church to send 50,000 Nigerian Christians through North African Islamic nations back to Jerusalem within the next 15 years.

## Losing one of our own: Missionary David Potts

On November 17, 2006, David Potts passed away in Kazakhstan, his sudden death thought to be caused by complications from diabetes. He was laid to rest in the Kazakhstani village of Sergeyevka in a small cemetery. His family wanted him to be buried in Kazakhstan with the people he loved and served so faithfully. He is survived by his wife, Lori, and their 12-year-old daughter, Amanda.

The Potts family joined the mission team in Kazakhstan following a short-term mission trip there in 1998. After having pastored several United Methodist churches in Pennsylvania, David resigned in 2003 to move his family to the city of Almaty, Kazakhstan to live among the people who had so captured their hearts. For the first year David, Lori, and Amanda worked with Teen Challenge, addressing the needs of people recovering

from drug and alcohol abuse. David also taught classes, and he and Lori both led worship for a local church. Many days the Pottses funded meals for more than 40 boys living in the neighborhood who had little or no food.

In 2004 the Pottses moved to Karaganda where they continued in ministry to the people of Kazakhstan. They worked with the Appletree House, a ministry for children of alcoholic and poverty-stricken families. David and Lori also taught classes in leading worship to local churches in the area, and led worship for The Mission Society missionary team.

As one of David's friends said, "I know Dave has heard his, 'Well done.' If he could offer us a few words, I believe he would tell us that he has completed his task, and advise us to press on to the completion of ours."



Many children in Kazakhstan know Jesus because of the faithful witness of David Potts who died, at 51, in the nation where he and his family had served since 2003. "When the Pottses visited Kazakhstan in 1998, the plight of the children was the single most powerful confirmation of their calling," remembers a friend. Among their ministries as career missionaries, David, Lori, and Amanda Potts (above) have been working with Appletree House, among children of poverty-stricken families.

## Campus missionaries offer Christ among U.S. students hungry for “something real”

Often the years spent in college are some of the most transformative in a person’s life. Due to the growing secularism on college campuses, Christian ministries have found a challenging mission field amid the religious pluralism of the classroom.

In recent years, The Mission Society has sensed the need to send missionaries back to “the mission field” of their alma maters. Supported by ministry partners, these missionaries serve among the student population in partnership with local Wesley Foundations.

Campus missionaries of The Mission Society engage students in Bible study, fellowship, worship services, discipleship groups, mission trips, and outreach to the

freshman class. Caren Dilts, a campus minister at the University of Georgia, has noticed an increased hunger in students to have a relationship with Christ. “These students want something real; they aren’t satisfied with surface stuff,” she states.

Through building relationships and sharing their faith with students, missionaries serving at colleges and universities are beginning to see change on their campuses. As the next generation of Christians engages in higher education, The Mission Society is thankful to have a part in offering spiritual formation opportunities to help shape them into the leaders of tomorrow’s Church.



The Mission Society’s campus missionaries presently serve at Florida State University (missionary: Trevor Johnston); the University of Central Florida (missionary: Reed Walters); and the University of Georgia (team seen above): **Back row:** Clay and Deborah Kirkland, Caren Dilts, Tate Welling; **Front row:** Amantha Claxton, Cathy Coburn, Sarah Olds

## The Mission Society explores partnership with Cuba

Three staff persons of The Mission Society, Dr. Phil Granger, Ivar Quindslund, and Frank Decker, visited Cuba in early November at the invitation of Cuba’s Bishop Pereira. There they found that, despite enormous challenges and legal restrictions, the Methodist Church in Cuba is thriving. This very vibrant church has recently experienced explosive growth, accompanied by a renewed awareness of the work of the Holy Spirit.

After the revolution, only two ordained pastors and no missionaries

remained. Forty years later, in 1999, the church had 99 ordained pastors and 150 congregations. Now, over the past seven years, the number of ministers has doubled, and there are 750 churches.

In the next issue of *Unfinished*, you will read about how God is working among the people of Cuba, as well as some exciting ministry partnership opportunities that are developing between the Methodist Church of Cuba and The Mission Society.



Entering Cuba: Morro Castle, built in 1589, guards the entrance to Havana Bay in Havana, Cuba.

With the good news of the Christ child born among us, The Mission Society missionaries and their families minister in 32 nations around the world. We offer their names here. How we thank you for your prayers for them!

**The Mission Society missionaries:**

Michael Agwanda, Ari Arfaras, Sandra August, Ed & Linda Baker, Jose & Audrey Banales, Julianna Barron, Erica Beeles, Jim & Angela Beise, Bill & Becky Bess, Liz Boggess, Reid & Lola Buchanan, Margaret Buell, Debra Buenting, Doug & Brooke Burns, Julie Campbell, John & Sandra Carrick, Chris & Sue Champion, Charlie & Miki Chastain, Amantha Claxton, Cathy Coburn, David & Carol Cosby, Patrick Cummings, Tim & Daina Datwyler, Don & Laura Dickerson, Christian & Angelica Dickson, Caren Dilts, Billy & Laurie Drum, John & Colleen Eisenberg, Micah Eldridge, Sue Fuller, Dan Godwin, Cam & Anne Gongwer, James & Barbara Gray, Dave & Beth Greenawalt, Alicia Grey, Justin Grogg, Florencio & Maria Guzman, Charlie & Chris Hanak, Kevin & Laura Heikes,

John & Katheryn Heinz, Jon & Jeanne Herrin, Neal & Mari Hicks, Ron & Bonnie Hipwell, Ronnie & Angi Hopkins, Andrew & Margaret Howell, Arthur & Mary Alice Ivey, Charles & Becky Jackson, Charlie & Mary Kay Jackson, Andrew & Juliana Jernigan, Trevor Johnston, Wilson Kendrick, Esaho & Beatrice Kipuke, Clay & Deborah Kirkland, Sue Kolljeski, Joetta Lehman, Ash & Audra McEuen, Cheryl McGraw, Grant Miller, Mike & Claire Mozley, Dondoe Nations, Steve Nikkel, Sara Olds, Ron & Michelle Olson, Donald & Carol Paige, Peter & Esther Pereira, Len & Betsy Phillips, Courtnay Picardo, Martin & Tracy Reeves, Leon & Vicki Reich, John & Rosalie Rentz, Ben & Jenny Reyes, Ruben Rodriguez, John & Bess Russell, Mary Beth Sandy, Wendi Schambach, Michael & Jannike Seward, Kirk & Nicole Sims, Rick & Debra

Slingluff, Amanda Smith, Mike & Valerie Smith, Nancy Stelow, Robert & Linda Spitaleri, David & Jennifer Thompson, Ron & Belinda Tyler, Bill & Beth Ury, Reed Walters, Mark & Johanna Waltz, Katie Waser, Tate Welling, Larry Williams, Steve & Heather Wilson, Dai & Neva Wysong

In addition to those listed above, 40 missionaries serve in areas where security is an issue for Christian workers. For that reason, they remain unnamed here. Thank you for praying for these dear brothers and sisters, as they face unique challenges.

For more information about The Mission Society missionaries or fields, visit our website at [www.themissionsociety.org](http://www.themissionsociety.org).

## May we pray for you?

Each morning at The Mission Society, we start by praying. We pray for the world. We pray for our missionaries. And we pray for you. Do you have prayer concerns that you would like to share with us? We invite you to do so. Here's how: Write your request on the response card included in this mailing and return it in the envelope provided, or

- Email us at [prayerrequest@themissionsociety.org](mailto:prayerrequest@themissionsociety.org), or
- Call us at 770.446.1381 (ext. PRAY or 7729) and leave your prayer request message, or
- Write us at: Prayer, The Mission Society, 6234 Crooked Creek Road, Norcross, GA 30092

Your shared concerns will be handled with care and prayed for by our staff and visiting missionaries. Thank you for the privilege of joining you in prayer.