

COVENANT worldmission newsletter



Faithful Steps in Mission

On September 1, Al Tizon officially started his role as executive minister of Serve Globally. Tizon, an avid Seattle Seahawks fan, and Janice, his wife of thirty-four years, are getting ready for their first Chicago winter. We asked Al about his work in mission.

Who is your role model?

Ronald J. Sider, author of *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, is one of the greatest shapers of my life. I worked with him for nine years, but his influence on me went back much further. One of the many things I've tried to emulate is his capacity to hold things together, such as faith and activism, evangelism and social justice, scholarship and spirituality, the personal and the structural. I admire how he is committed to evangelism and social justice out of his love for Jesus.

How do you define the mission of God?

I believe God wants to redeem the

world and everyone in it. This is the most succinct and practical definition for what I see God doing in broken neighborhoods and despairing hearts all over the world.

What does following God in God's mission mean for you?

It means discerning what God is doing in a context and joining God in that work. That implies that we know that God is already at work—there is no need to invite God to come. So we just need to be asking, "What is God doing and what does God desire?" Then we need to discern what is happening in a situation so that we may respond in a way that is right, just, and merciful.

What gives you hope about global mission and ministry?

I want to turn that question around and say, what gives the church hope is global mission. It is only when we as God's people are engaged in mission that we have any hope at all. Our missional engagement, faithfully participating in the redemption of the world, is our hope.

What does it mean to take your next faithful step in mission?

Mission means we are on the move, but each church and each person is at a different place on the journey. It may seem trite, but for churches and individuals to determine next steps, they need to pray missionally. We need to be a people who offer missional prayers like, "What is happening in our neighborhood or world and how can we be good news in these places?" These types of prayers can help us determine next steps.

For some, it might be to sponsor a child through Covenant Kids Congo; for others, to support a missionary or to plan a vision trip. Some might feel led to become a missionary or to purchase Christmas gifts that can make a difference from the Cov-Cares catalog. It could be as simple as calling Serve Globally to find out how they can engage in mission. But taking that next faithful step starts by praying missionally. As I start out this new role, I am eager to help others seek out what their next faithful step in mission might be. ■

When the Spirit Works in Unexpected Ways

DALE LUSK

The team from Crossroads Covenant in Loveland, Colorado, was planning to return to Guatemala for a second year on a Merge trip. They were partnering with a church there from Santa Apolonia, which had started a mission church in Cojulya, a mountain village of about 400 people. Despite their involvement in the community, the mission church was not growing.

The Santa Apolonia church discovered many of the women in the village were living alone, abandoned by alcoholic husbands. In addition, many of the local children had breathing problems because the women cooked with

wood but had no ventilation in their homes. So the church began a kitchen-remodeling project in the village, supported by the Merge team from Loveland and another from Santa Rosa, California.

As I met with the Loveland

team to help them prepare for their trip, I found out that one of the members was a professional photographer. Many of the students going on the trip were interested in photography as well.

"I've got an idea," I told them. "Let's turn the small church in Cojulya into a photography studio." I explained how most indigenous people living in small villages had very few photos of their family and children—and the ones they had were precious. "Let's invite every family in Cojulya to the 'studio' for a family photo."

The team got excited about the idea. I then talked to the church leaders in Santa Apolonia and they got excited about the project as well.

So the team from Loveland went to Cojulya, worked on the kitchens, spent time building relationships with people, and set up their studio.

The results were unexpected. Virtually

every family of the village came for a family photo. The church people from Santa Apolonia spent hours with the families as they waited. It turned into a community event.

One woman came with a photograph of an elderly woman. She explained that it was the only photo of her mother, who had died recently. "I am now alone," she said, "but if you take my picture with it, at least I will have a photo of me and my mother together forever."

The team processed the photos, put them in nice frames, and gave them to the folks in Santa Apolonia, who then passed them out. The response was greater than we could have imagined. The next Sunday the Cojulya church was packed to overflowing, and the community is now in the process of building a much larger church to fit all of the new people who have come to Christ through the mission.

I sometimes think about that woman in Cojulya. I feel sad that she is alone, but I am thankful we could give her something of hope.

She represents to me the way the Holy Spirit can use our gifts, talents, and skills to lead people to Jesus in ways we would never expect. If only we would allow that to happen even more, even on mission trips. ■

Dale Lusk is executive director of Covenant Merge Ministries.



One woman's portrait includes the only photo she has of her mother.



Youth from Loveland, Colorado, pass out family photos to the community of Cojulya, Guatemala.



A Merge team's photography studio turned into an outreach ministry to a Guatemalan village.

Fields Ripe for the Harvest

ROY DANFORTH



Bernard Bekosso is a mover and a shaker wherever he calls home. He and his wife, Sidoni, raised a large family in a village not far from the farm where my wife, Aleta, and I live in the Central African Republic (CAR).

I first met Bernard in the early days of our ministry when I went to his village to lead an agroforestry seminar on raising fruit trees along with a training session on reaching the Fulani Muslims for Christ. A number of Fulani cattle herders had made Bernard's village their home. An elder in the church, Bernard had a sewing shop and was teaching the Fulani the sewing trade and witnessing to them. I was amazed to see the respect that the Fulani people had for Bernard and his family, and the fellowship they shared. After the seminar, Bernard jumped at the opportunity to start his own personal orchard of fruit trees. He not only started up a group of tree planters, he helped form six other village agroforestry co-ops. Soon those co-ops were harvesting many different kinds of fruits from all over the world.

In 2010, the Center for Experimentation and Formation in Agriculture (CEFA) was formed as a result of farmers near and far requesting lessons on how to take care of themselves and have a better life. CEFA does research on both new species and new methods of raising plants and animals. Even though Bernard had already planted more than 1,000 fruit trees, he wanted to learn more about what CEFA had to offer. As a result, he engaged even more villagers in his area with new crops and animals.

As the agricultural program in that village grew and the need for food security heightened, the Covenant Cares program was launched. Through the Covenant Cares catalog, Covenanters help supply materials and funds for ministry and mission projects throughout the world. Family co-ops received shovels, machetes, hoes, rakes, and other tools as well as seeds and seedlings. The Fulani and other tribal groups were planting vegetable gardens, bean fields, and fruit trees, as well as digging fish ponds and making chicken coops. As Bernard developed closer relationships with the Fulani, he would tell of many wanting to learn more about Jesus. Bernard and his wife's seed-planting efforts were coming into fruition, both physically and spiritually.

However, life changed drastically for the Bekosso family in March 2013. Muslim Seleka rebels took over the country for about ten months before militia resistance rose up and forced all the Fulani and other Muslims out of the country. There was intense bloodshed on both sides. Close to a half a million Central Africans, mostly Muslim,



Women in CAR are excited to receive their Family Farm Starter Kits, gifts from the CovCares catalog.



ended up in refugee camps. Though the town near our home did not experience the violence the rest of the country did, Bernard and his whole village had to flee to neighboring Cameroon. Many of them have stayed together, Muslim and non-Muslim.

When they realized that they wouldn't be able to return soon, they began building homes and planting new gardens. CEFA then moved into action and helped them with seed to plant and tools to work with, again with the help of Covenant Cares.

During the last year and a half CEFA has helped not only this small group, but also hundreds of refugees and displaced families in both CAR and Cameroon. Bernard, with his big heart of wanting to reach the Fulani, not only set up a new sewing shop for Fulani to learn how to sew, but he has helped seven ag co-ops get started! Through our travels and visits to his new village, we were able to bring seed and tools to the seven co-ops and give advice on raising fruit trees, beans, and vegetables. On top of that, we were able to supply Bernard with more scriptural books for the Fulani to read. The fields will soon be ripe for harvest—in more ways than one.

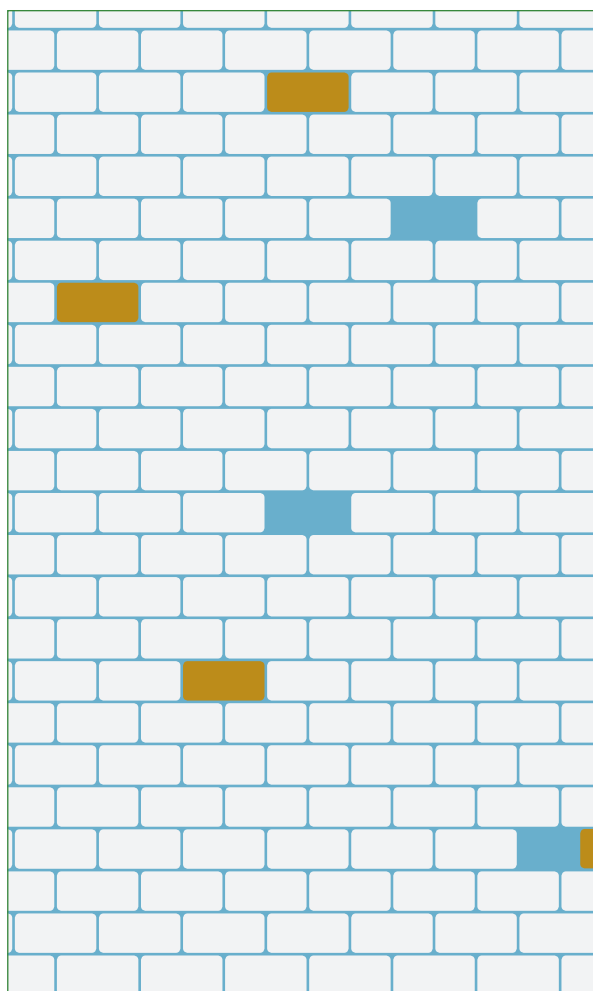
Tragically, Bernard recently lost his oldest son to the fighting in CAR. He knows his country is a long way from

reconciliation, yet he remains hopeful that one day he, his family, and his Fulani friends will be able to return to their home. I can think of no better way to achieve that reconciliation than being salt and light like Bernard among his friends, both Muslim and Christian, as they live together in peace and work together toward fighting hunger and malnutrition, using the tools and seed provided through the Covenant

Cares program.

Useko! (Thank you from the Fulani), and Merci! (Thank you from Bernard and his family). ■

Roy Danforth has worked in Africa since 1978 and has been serving the people of CAR since 1998.



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