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NEWS

LEAVING RAKE MARKS

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Missionaries are an independent breed. It just goes with the territory. However, living in cross-cultural settings, often with no familiar personalities to interact with and having to make all decisions on your own, can lead to the mistake of becoming detached and sequestered.

Of course there are biblical teachings that show us how to avoid these missteps.

A recent article entitled “Why Did Jesus Send Out His Disciples Two by Two” by Mark Roberts gives a wonderful example of why Christ employed the strategy of shared ministry. “Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits” (Mark 6:7). Shared ministry can be identified in many ways. Married couples, missionary collaborators, team sending, accountability partners, and mentorships are practices by modern missionaries to prevent seclusion and isolation that often leads to missionary burnout.

When Donna and I arrived in the Philippines almost seven years ago, we benefited from the work of many missionaries who had gone before us. Each left his or her own individual legacies and we quickly picked up on those we would benefit from most. Things like an established local, regional, and national association structure and mission planting embedded into the DNA of every local church. Donna and I have certainly had a “shared” missionary strategy. We’ve worked side by side, complementing each other in our particular areas of God-led ministries. Serving with BMAA missionaries Doug and Diane Lee also inoculated us against the infectious “rogue missionary” virus, which plagues many missionaries. We’ve discovered that partnering with Filipinos, helping them with tools and not getting in their way, has been the most fulfilling of our Lord’s shared ministry formula.

Establishing an exit strategy is important for shared ministry to be successful. Without one, missionaries invariably assure ultimate mission failure. Having an exit strategy was certainly one of the foremost topics in our early pre-field preparations. I remember then International Missions Director Phil Knott saying, “The most beneficial thing you can do is to know your exit strategy now, before you arrive on the field.”

We knew our term on the mission field would be short compared to those “lifers” like Doyle and Linda Moore, Ray and Faye Freeman, and Don and Linda Newsom. So maybe for us it was easy to go in already thinking of our exit strategy, knowing we had a short seven-year window. But modern missiologists now coach missionaries to plan everything they do with an exit strategy in mind, even twenty,

thirty or forty years down the line.

In Christian mission if you don’t have a plan you can be sure the devil does. No missionary would ever desire that their life’s work for Christ would end with their departure. Here is a story I once heard about a park ranger whose job it was to clean up camp sites after the campers left:

Bill, why don’t you follow me around today and let me show you the ropes? “Sure thing,” he answered. Bill observed the seasoned ranger’s attention to cleaning the grills, removing charred wood from campfires and raking leaves and trash from every used site. Coming up on one site, obviously not used, Bill expected to keep walking on to the next location. With no trash to pick up and no ashes to clean out, the older ranger proceeded to take out his rake and scrape across the dirt of the camp site. “What’s all the fuss?” Bill asked as he continued, “This place wasn’t even used.” “Well Bill, people just like to know someone’s been here by seeing the rake marks in the dirt.”

That is what our exit strategy has been about, preparing our field, or camp site, so that those who follow can pick up where we left off and advance the cause of Christ for the next generation. How did we do it?

Church planting is the best exit strategy. While we’ve been here we’ve partnered with many of our local churches, helping with their local church planting. We are so glad to have partnered with the following churches:

- Karis Baptist Church in E.B. Magalona and their missionary in Mandalag
- Dos Hermanas Baptist Church, Missionary Kevin Berayo, and his three missions in the mountains of Ahgu
- New Testament Baptist Church in Sullivan, Missouri, along with New Testament Baptist Mission and Missionary J.R. Suico in Tigbawan, Leyte
- Ati Baptist Tribal Church and Pastor Roter Sinceda
- First Missionary Baptist Church in Talisay and now daughter church in Badiang with Pastor Ezra Leyson
- Miranda Grace Baptist Church and its new mission in Mandalagan with Missionary Pastor David Perez
- Kusol Mission in Hinigaran and Pastor Loreto Lopez

We didn’t have to come and reinvent the wheel. We found some “rake marks,” recognized someone had plowed before us, and picked up the rake to scrape out some new streaks.

Being part of the teaching ministry of the Baptist Missionary Association Bible College is an example of using our exit strategy to prepare this invaluable institution to continue to train future missionaries, pastors, and teachers of the Philippines and even the entire Asia Pacific region. Achieving accreditation for the college, refurbishing and even rebuilding well-used facilities, and partnering with the Baptist Missionary Association Theological Seminary in America to upgrade our teachers’ credentials with masters degrees has all been part of securing the legacy this institution has meant to the Lord’s work here for many years to come. An exit strategy we developed, even before leaving for the field, was a plan to secure the Bible College’s financial future. The Darlene Carey Christian Academy is part of that plan. The academy, in just a few years, will be in a position to provide at least a third of the Bible College’s budget and will certainly be a huge part in the Christian education of thousands of Filipino children.

Finally, our shared ministry will be part of our exit strategy too. Even though we no longer will be living in the Philippines, for the rest of our lives Donna and I will be working to promote missions and always with a focus on the work God called us to and the people God gave us a love for. Third John 1:4 will be our clarion call: “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.” And maybe, prayerfully, someone will come after us and find our “rake marks” left behind.



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NEWS

MISSIONS WORK IN MINNESOTA ENTERS NEW PHASE

BY: Michael Strong, Church Planter
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Greetings, brothers and sisters in Christ! I am excited to report back to you about the work God is doing in Minnesota. We are seeing people come to Christ, others commit (and some re-commit) themselves to Christ, and a growing group of people from diverse backgrounds take new steps of faith as they prepare to meet King Jesus face to face one day. It has been an honor and a pleasure serving as your partner to these beloved Minnesotans.

We are currently working in Minneapolis, and God is helping us begin to reach the 31,397 people that live in our ZIP code. Our primary means of reaching people is through relational evangelism that results in Bible studies. We consistently kept roughly 20 different Bible study and discipleship groups active over the last year. The number continues to grow as more of our people step out in faith and start new groups. We expect that number will continue to increase exponentially. Some of the more exciting results in the last year include eight new salvations accompanied by baptism. Almost 100% of those baptized have followed through on their commitment to Jesus by joining intentional personal discipleship groups led by our church leaders.

We are also broadening our missional scope by reaching out to the community through various service projects. We take being the hands and feet of King Jesus seriously and look for ways to love our neighbors and equip and mobilize our people to do the same. We have been teaching the church how to serve the people closest to them and how to share the hope of the gospel of Jesus Christ with them. This has broadened our impact and is leading to growth in missional interactions. We live as a family and do a lot of life-on-life together. This allows us to serve each member's family and friends together. The uniqueness of our blood-bought community showcases how different the church is from the world. We are seeing a growing number of people who are beginning to associate with our group and attend functions we host.

God is giving our people compassionate hearts. They have been speaking up in recent months and we have heard them loud and clear: They want to use their gifts to serve their neighbors. Some desire to cook. Others desire to help with house repairs. Some desire to share their testimony at schools. Some desire to help with the children in the church. One member has increasingly embraced the role of greeter! They clean up, share, and volunteer in the community in many ways. As you may imagine, their hearts are bigger than their pocketbooks. We have been relying on partners to provide the necessary supplies to reach out to the community. The need and desire is growing in our church. We are praying for new partners and increased commitments from existing partners in the coming months as we deploy our people in groups to reach the city and call lost sheep into the fold.

We have been intentionally small to this point because we wanted to invest significantly in the core group of the church. We believe in regenerative church membership. Our worship services are focused on helping believers see and worship God in the Scriptures. We also use those times to equip these saints to experience spiritual maturity and to form Christlikeness in them. After our services we send them out full of the gospel and encouraged to share the hope they have with others. We believe this will result in a disciple-making movement that will lead to a church planting movement as we raise and train up leaders. We are now at a point where growth could happen a bit more quickly, and this will bring new challenges. We are excited about the opportunity to seek God and rely on him in the coming months as he helps us navigate the changes he will bring into our church and our lives.

I am so thankful to share what God has done in 2022 with you and I look forward to updating you in the near future on what God continues to do. If you are interested in partnering with us or receiving our newsletter, please reach out to me via email: mike@nncmpls.com. Thank you for partnering with us to take the gospel to Minnesota!



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NEWS

Ordinary Faithfulness in Church Planting

BY: Thomas Mobly, Church Planter
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Have you ever been waiting for God to do the “next big thing” in your life, in your church, in whatever context you’re in? When my wife and I moved to Oklahoma City in 2017 (where I am originally from) with our friends Nathan and Lynzie Brewer, there was so much excitement in the anticipation of what God was going to do in this new chapter of our lives. We had never helped plant a church before. We weren’t even the ones who came up with the idea to plant Grace Harbor Church in OKC. We were the ones invited in. Nevertheless, we were willing and eager to go and be a part of something new and exciting!

Over the past five years of planting a church we’ve been blown away many times by how God moves in big ways. There are so many stories I could tell you that would probably leave you speechless and in awe (seriously, ask me sometime). These big displays of God’s greatness fill us with excitement and wonder, and they humble us, as they should! But over the past five years not every single day has been filled with the big displays. There has, by no means, been a lack of God’s greatness, but the truth is that much of church planting work requires faithfulness from us even in the days that are seemingly ordinary.

There’s something about the ordinary that may cause ministry to seem disenchanting at times. Things can become routine and stale when the big displays aren’t always right in front of us. But I believe God has not called us to become complacent in the ordinary. The work of church planting is sometimes a long season of digging up dirt, putting down seed, and watering.

It’s the kind of work that allows us to walk alongside a mother and wife who is suffering from an illness that never seems to go away despite how many doctors she sees. It’s the kind of work that lets us witness this family grow in their faith through suffering as they and their small group continue to pray for healing.

It’s long term relational investment in meeting with our Afghan refugee neighbors right here in OKC. It’s working with an Afghan Christian man God brought to our church with the vision of planting Afghan churches here in town. There are about 1,000 Afghan refugees in OKC. About a quarter of those are within five miles of us.

It’s ministering to a brother in Christ who is struggling to find purpose in his life right now because his work is just not providing it, and everything in his world is changing around him. But it’s also seeing him faithfully serve his family and church family, using his gifts to minister to others behind the scenes.

Ordinary ministry work is walking with God-fearing parents who have a child that is dismissing faith in Christ completely. It’s prayerfully and consistently building relationships with neighbors in our city and right

next door, living out and speaking the truth of the gospel. It’s making sure we don’t forsake the discipleship happening right at home with our own families.

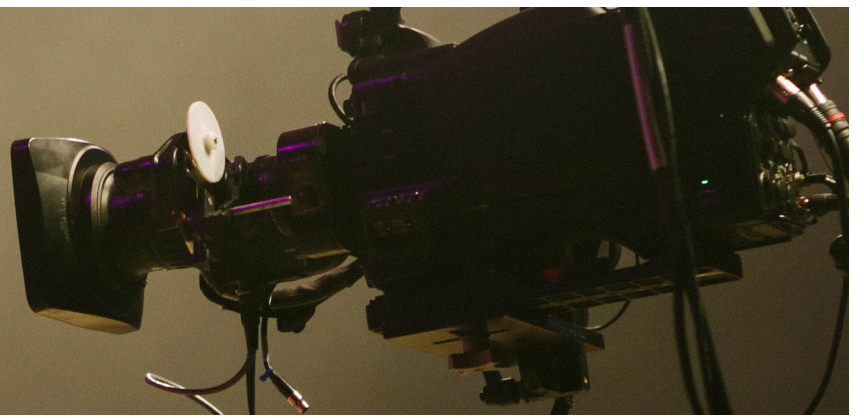
There is an older brother at our church named John who has spent most of his life in the work of ministry and pastoring. He’s now retired and ministering in a different way here at Grace Harbor. John grew up in Illinois on a farm. He often tells us that the work of ministry (and in my opinion, church planting specifically) is similar to farming. He says sometimes the work we’ve been called to do is to plow and pursue. We plow in the fields God has given us, planting and watering, all the while eagerly pursuing the will of God and waiting to see him give the growth.

Church planting, I am finding, requires faithfulness in the little things—in the ordinary. But I am also finding faithfulness in the ordinary brings joy and fulfillment in our work. Because while we have been called to be faithful in the ordinary, God’s faithfulness to build his church is anything but ordinary. In addition to the big displays of God’s greatness, it’s within the small, sometimes unattractive and difficult, uneventful times that God is working in extraordinary ways as well.

When we started planting we did have a somewhat big vision for Grace Harbor Church. But thankfully God has graciously course-corrected us in that vision while sustaining us in our slow growth over the past five years. For some the sixth year of a church plant is when the vision you began with is coming into full bloom, but in some ways for us we believe God is giving us a new and fresh vision for Grace Harbor Church—one that he has cultivated and faithfully grown within us and the people here at Grace Harbor.

It’s because of God’s grace, faithfulness and never-ceasing love for us that I am so very thankful to be doing the work of church planting, pastoring, and ministering here in Oklahoma City . . . even in the ordinary.





Overcoming Opposition in Myanmar

BY: Heather Harrison
Lifeword
lifeword.org

Despite extreme hardships and uncertainty in Myanmar, God has been faithful to Lifeword's global partner, Rama, in his efforts to share Jesus Christ. The military in Myanmar, since staging a coup in 2021, has carried out a brutal nationwide crackdown. This has made sharing the gospel message difficult, and many believers have been killed. Most forms of communication are tapped and commandeered by the military, but Rama and his team are able to send and receive Lifeword programming to a playout center in Singapore to beam the programming back into Myanmar. Even though they are not free to gather and worship, they are still meeting in small numbers, leading Bible studies in nearby villages, sharing gospel tracts, and visiting people house-to-house. In the midst of such opposition, there are still many who are being baptized and discipled.

Rama continues to share the message of Christ through YouTube, Facebook, and the radio. He has heard from several who, after listening to his messages, have repented of sin, idolatry, and false beliefs. As Rama has been faithful to the call to minister to these people in spite of such opposition, God has also been faithful to his work and to show Rama some of the impact his efforts are having on the people.

Allow us to share some of that fruit with you:

One man from the Yangon Division called Rama and said he's been caught in a cycle of drinking and disconnection from believers. He listened to their radio program, felt the conviction of the Holy Spirit, and asked for prayers that he could change, telling Rama, "Your radio program is a blessing." Another man from the North, who had been listening to the radio program for several years, came to the mission church for worship for months, declaring his faith in Jesus Christ and rejecting all other gods. He passed away shortly after his conversion. Rama praises God that this man's eternity is forever changed.

One man, clearly caught in sin, reached out to Rama after hearing his message on Facebook about the thief on the cross. "If I repent before I die like the man on the cross, will God forgive me?" he asked. They continued discussing forgiveness and how life is unexpected. Another man who was also listening to Rama's messages on Facebook came to faith in Christ and contacted Rama to say thank you. They were even able to talk over the telephone. Two other men contacted Rama through Facebook asking how to be saved and came to know Christ as their Savior. One woman messaged Rama through Facebook saying that she had been doubting her salvation, but after hearing his message she gained assurance of her salvation and felt such peace.

As you can see, Rama and his team are living through unimaginable difficulty, but the message of Christ is still growing and changing lives. This is just some of the fruit of Rama's partnership with the faithful God who called him. We are grateful for your partnership with Lifeword which enables missionaries like Rama to proclaim Jesus Christ to a broken world.

