

abwe

Message

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NEW HORIZONS

The 2024–2025
New Missionary Class

New Life in the Graveyard
of Missionaries

Healing When
Medicine Fails

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WHO IS ABWE?

ABWE was founded in 1927 as an independent Baptist mission. Supported by a network of more than 450 like-minded churches, we are a global family of ministries, dedicated to fulfilling the Great Commission by multiplying leaders, churches, and missions movements among every people. Currently, nearly 1,000 ABWE missionaries are reaching the lost in more than 90 countries through evangelism, discipleship, church planting, leadership development, and national partnerships.

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Editorial

FROM THE PRESIDENT

It All Starts With the Church

BY: PAUL L. DAVIS
ABWE PRESIDENT



Behind every gospel worker stands a church that had the faith to send one of their best.

I recently visited a small but powerful church with my wife, Martha. With fewer than 150 people in regular attendance, this congregation punches far above its weight when it comes to missions—sending out eight missionaries and faithfully supporting several more.

We love ministering in every kind of church, but we get particularly excited when we see ordinary and sometimes unassuming churches giving and going so faithfully and sacrificially.

In fact, it's often the smallest congregations that we've seen have the biggest global footprint for missions. It reminds me of Paul's words to the Corinthians—that God uses what the world sees as weak to reveal his wisdom and strength to a world in need (1 Corinthians 1:27–29).

Yet for as mighty as the local church is, she cannot do everything on her own. Pastors, elders, deacons, lay leaders, and missions committees are not omniscient. The local church needs trusted allies to help send and support missionaries well. That's why my team and I rejoice in the privilege we have to provide these churches' missionaries with help in training, securing visas, raising financial support, and multiplying their global impact.

This issue of Message is dedicated to these ordinary churches that take the bold step to send. We're celebrating the calling and commissioning of new missionaries—men and women of diverse backgrounds and varying levels of field experience joining us in taking the gospel to the nations.

Each sent worker represents an answer to prayer and a new laborer in the Lord's harvest (Matthew 9:38).

This issue is also a reminder of why we send. Because past missionaries have gone, the gospel is already being proclaimed in cities, villages, and homes that would otherwise never hear the good news. Because churches have sent, new congregations are being planted and leaders raised up in places once barren of gospel witness.

Each story begins with a sending church, big or small, choosing to step out in faith and entrusting their beloved missionaries to God's care. And behind each of those churches stands ABWE, committed to serving, equipping, and multiplying their obedience.

Together, we are seeing the gospel advance to new horizons. Thank you for playing your part in this mission.

Contents

Feature

9 New Life in the Graveyard of Missionaries

Among skyscrapers and shrines, the gospel breaks through Japan's unreachable spiritual strongholds.



Departments

04 CONNECTIONS

ABWE Stories and Updates From Around the World

04 Healing When Medicine Fails

As a woman's life hangs in the balance, medical missionaries help her find hope beyond the grave.

06 Redemption on a Street Corner

Once trapped in gang life on the streets of Nicaragua, Napoleon finds freedom and purpose in Christ as a church planter.

08 A Soul Harvest on a Thai Farm

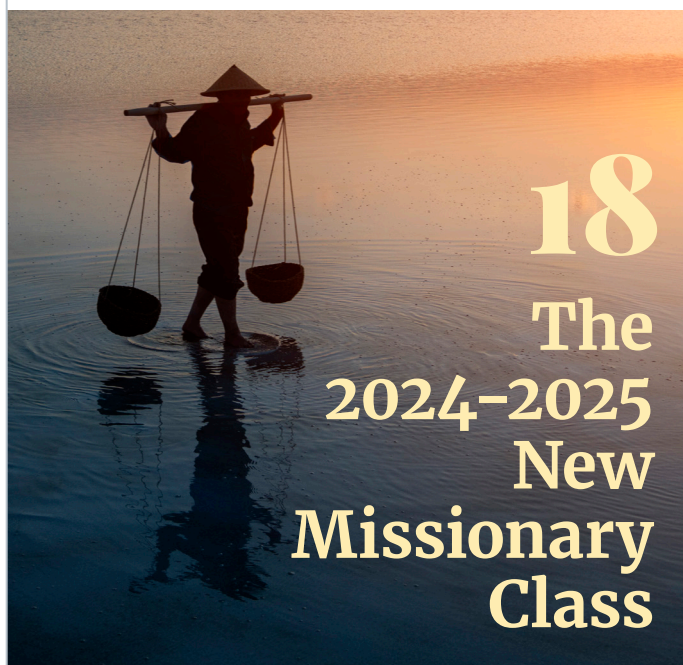
One church's outreach in a rubber tree grove reaps surprising spiritual fruit.

34 FOCAL POINTS

Parenting Prodigals as Missionaries

35 SPOTLIGHT

Crossing the Threshold of Grace



ON THE COVER

A man walking at sunrise passes through a traditional Torii gate at the entrance to a Shinto shrine on Aoshima Island, Japan.

Photo: Brian VanTimmeren

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NATE & LAUREN BELL
South Africa

"Every other Wednesday, Nate has the joy of teaching a systematic theology course at a local film school. Several years ago, the director of the college participated in our home Bible study and invited Nate to give a presentation to the students about Christianity. This year, she asked him to teach a formal theology class to all the film students. What an unexpected and exciting opportunity to proclaim God's Word in an industry often so devoid of righteousness!"



LYDIA NEUMAN
Brazil

"I've been meeting regularly with a small group of teen girls for discipleship and conversations about faith. I was overjoyed as I met with one of them individually one afternoon and she confessed her belief in Christ's death to give her life. The same week, another teen trusted Christ through a different ministry, and so did one of the parents. Moments like these remind me that ministry doesn't depend on me but rather on God at work in hearts."

Connections

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

Healing When Medicine Fails

As a woman's life hangs in the balance, medical missionaries help her find hope beyond the grave.

BY: JOHN GROENEVELD AND KATELYN HAWKINS
LOCATION: TOGO

Ama was rushed to Hôpital Baptiste Biblique (HBB) in critical condition, her limp figure carried through the emergency entrance by two family members and laid on an awaiting stretcher. Nurses gathered to hurriedly collect vital signs and stabilize her, while another questioned her family to determine what had happened.

Ama, a 28-year-old mother, had intentionally ingested an herbicide, intending to end her life. She later con-

fessed that her husband, a Muslim, had recently married a second wife, plunging her into despair.

HBB staff worked to remove as much of the poison as possible, but her body had already absorbed a large quantity. At first, her vital signs and lab tests remained stable. ABWE missionaries and HBB chaplains visited Ama's bedside, providing not only medical care but explaining the hope available through Christ.



Photo: Getty Images



Photo: Judy Bowen

ABWE nurse practitioners John and Tabitha Groeneveld review a patient's chart.

“We firmly believe that HBB is more than a hospital. In the face of tragedy and suffering, people find hope and purpose in the gospel.”

John Groeneveld, ABWE missionary

“We shared how much God cares for her and offered a clear gospel presentation,” reported ABWE nurse practitioner John Groeneveld, “but Ama expressed no interest in the truth of Jesus Christ.”

Two days later, she was discharged in stable condition, only to return to HBB the following day with difficulty swallowing due to the caustic effects of the poison. Her breathing soon became labored. Labs revealed multiple organ failure.

Short-term missionary doctor Joy Smith solemnly delivered the results to Ama, explaining that the poison had won the cruel battle in her body.

“I saw that she was unlikely to survive much longer,” Joy said. “Through tears, I appealed to her to put her trust in Jesus.”

This time, Ama listened. Late that night, a Togolese physician assistant, Chantal, gently reminded the woman of the sobering reality of dying apart from Christ and the assurance of eternal life for those who repent and believe. Ama's heart, once hardened and broken, began to soften at her words.

In the morning, with fading breath, Ama told those at her bedside of her decision: she had placed her faith in

Christ. Only six hours after her conversion, she entered eternity.

“We wept, both at the tragedy of her death and at the providences that opened her heart to believe in Jesus,” Joy shared.

Thanks to the efforts of missionaries and hospital staff, every patient hears biblical truth—even those who, like the thief on the cross, face their final chance before it is too late.

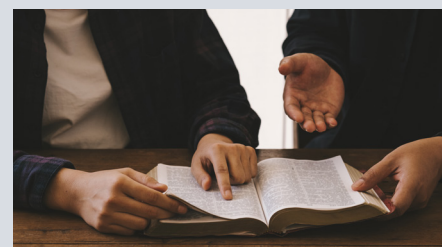
“We firmly believe that HBB is more than a hospital,” said John. “In the face of tragedy and suffering, people find hope and purpose in the gospel.” ■

Editor's Note: Ama's name has been changed for privacy.



PHIL & JAN SMITH
Papua New Guinea

“A multitude of 582 young people and church leaders from all over Papua New Guinea attended our annual youth camp at Goroka Baptist Bible College. When the camp director gave the invitation the last evening, he called for those who had made decisions for Christ to walk to the front of the tent. Almost immediately, one third of the campers publicly demonstrated their commitment to Christ. They are now being discipled in local churches.”



H. & J.
Middle East

“This summer, we helped lead a new church plant comprised of immigrants from closed, Muslim-majority countries while the pastor was away. They meet every Friday night to eat dinner together, worship, pray, and sit under the preaching of God's Word. H. had the privilege of preaching from Acts 4 on Peter and John proclaiming Christ with boldness despite threats and opposition, and it was a true joy knowing that these believers are following their example.”

Redemption on a Street Corner

Once trapped in gang life on the streets of Nicaragua, Napoleon finds freedom and purpose in Christ as a church planter.

BY: KATELYN HAWKINS

LOCATION: NICARAGUA

“I accepted Christ right there, with the person who so persistently kept trying to reach me.”

Napoleon

The preacher approached the overgrown street corner where the young men sat drinking and fixed his piercing gaze on Napoleon.

“God has a purpose for your life,” he declared.

Napoleon scoffed, “You’re crazy!” and unleashed a torrent of insults. *God would never care about someone who does as much wrong as I do*, he thought.

Napoleon had spent his days on the streets since age 10, his mother forced to work all waking hours to support her nine children after his father’s abandonment. He found acceptance in a neighborhood gang. As a teenager, he began using drugs and alcohol and joined in other illegal activities.

“Deep down, I knew what I was doing was wrong, but I thought I would never be able to change my ways,” he later admitted.

When a street preacher appeared at the gang’s meeting place to distribute food and share the gospel—part of Nicaraguan ministry SOS on the Streets—Napoleon mocked him. He refused to listen to the message, even as the man returned, undeterred, week after week.

Meanwhile, Napoleon’s life spiraled out of control. He was arrested and briefly imprisoned. Several times,

his dangerous lifestyle left him on the verge of death.

Finally, desperate for relief, he cried out, “If there is a God, I’m here. I want you to transform my life.” He met the preacher on the street corner and poured out his struggles, listening for the first time to the gospel.

“I accepted Christ right there, with the person who so persistently kept trying to reach me,” he shared.

Napoleon’s new life in Christ compelled him to transform his conduct. “It was a tough process, but, little by little, God gave me the strength to give up those things like alcohol and drugs,” he explained.

He attended a church planted by the founder of SOS on the Streets, Marlon, who himself was saved out of a gang background and trained at ABWE’s Institute of Church Planters (ICP).

Accompanied by church members, Napoleon returned to the street corner he had frequented with his gang. As he nervously prepared to speak, neighbors hurried outside with plastic chairs, skeptically wondering if his life had truly changed.

“Many people, whom I might have harmed in my past life under the influence of alcohol or drugs, came out to



Photos this page: Jeff Raymond

ABWE missionary Bruce Edgar (left) and Napoleon (right) visit church members in Napoleon's community.

hear my testimony," he recalled. "It was there that God put on my heart that just as Christ could change my life, he could do the same for the other people I used to hang out with."

Napoleon began evangelizing the youth in his community. Recognizing his zeal and commitment, the church enrolled him in the ICP for training. The two-year program, led by ABWE missionaries and national partners, provides step-by-step training in church planting for future church leaders.

"The goal of the ICP is to help local churches accelerate the process of planting gospel-centered churches in every neighborhood, town, and city in Nicaragua," explained Bruce Edgar, ABWE regional director for Central America and ICP coordinator.

Even before Napoleon had completed the course, he discovered opportunities to implement the instruction. While driving through their city, Chinandega, he and a friend noticed a property for rent and sensed God's direction to plant a church. They began by providing meals to children in need and organizing soccer leagues to capture the attention of the youth. They soon earned the trust of local families, who, in turn, lis-

tened to the gospel. Before long, they had formed a church.

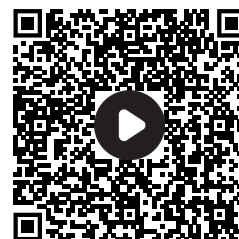
Napoleon continues to witness God transform lives through the church plant. To expand their reach, he is collaborating with Marlon and Bruce to open an ICP satellite campus in Chinandega.

"[T]here are men who are thirsty to be used by God. . . . They need to acquire this training so they can start new churches and ministries throughout the country," Napoleon said.

Many, like him, are passionate about using their own testimonies to bring others to Christ, he explained. "I believe

God has been putting the pieces together at every moment to fulfill his purpose in my life." ■

Watch Napoleon's story of transformation at abwe.org/napoleon.



Napoleon (right) walks to class with another Nicaraguan pastor (left) at the Institute of Church Planters.

A Soul Harvest on a Thai Farm

An unlikely outreach in a rubber tree grove reaps surprising spiritual fruit.

BY: KATELYN HAWKINS

LOCATION: THAILAND

As the truck jostled to a halt beside a large cement block pavilion, the passengers—ABWE missionaries Todd and Jen and a Thai pastor named Boon—hastily began unloading tables, chairs, and teaching materials, transforming the farm’s equipment shelter into a makeshift meeting space. Around them, slender trunks of rubber trees grew in neat lines that extended to the horizon.

Before long, local laborers emerged from under the trees’ leafy canopy. Their excitement grew as they filled the seats, relieved from their fatigue after a long night of tapping latex.

The workers had gathered for one reason: they wanted to hear the gospel.

Two months prior, the owner of the rubber tree farm, a Christian businessman, had invited Boon, known for his passion for evangelism, to briefly present the gospel to his employees while he distributed their yearly bonus gifts of rice. When eight people expressed interest in hearing more, he arranged for Boon, Todd, and Jen to conduct an evangelistic event at the farm.

Todd and Jen had temporarily relocated to the Isaan region of northeastern Thailand from their home in Bangkok to assist Boon and ABWE missionaries Micah and Misti Watkins in revitalizing a church plant. Seeking to equip the handful of dedicated Thai believers for biblical ministry, they provided training in leadership, evangelism, and discipleship.

“It was during the time that we were helping the church find new direction

for outreach that this opportunity at the farm opened up,” Todd explained.

At first, they expected only the eight workers who indicated interest.

“Less than a week beforehand, the owner sent a message that 25 people wanted to come,” related Todd. “Over the next couple of days, the number kept increasing, until we realized that more than 30 were planning to show up—nearly everyone from the first gathering.”

Church members volunteered to prepare food, games, and music for the event. When Boon stood up to teach, the crowd stilled. Most of the workers were about to hear the biblical message for the first time—a rare opportunity in their unreached region steeped in Buddhism and spirit worship.

For the next hour, Boon explained the gospel chronologically, employing the “Only Two Paths” illustrated resource that Todd and a colleague developed

specifically for the Thai worldview. The audience listened with rapt attention.

“Boon gave a clear call to respond to the gospel, and, praise God, five people chose to accept Christ as their Savior that day!” Todd conveyed. “We were especially excited to see men respond, as reaching men can be difficult.”

Since then, a team from the church, including Micah and Misti, has returned to the farm each month to disciple the new believers and lead a kids’ club. The church is not only becoming rooted in the faith but bearing spiritual fruit.

“By regularly going out there, we’re trying to build more connections in the community and praying that a new church will form,” Todd said.

Misti added: “It’s exciting to see the opportunities that have come out of the farm owner’s faithfulness to share the gospel and the diligent work of the Thai believers in Isaan.” ■

Thai believers lead an outreach for farm workers and their families.



Photo: ABWE missionary

NEW LIFE IN THE GRAVEYARD OF MISSIONARIES

Among skyscrapers and shrines, the gospel breaks through Japan's unreachable spiritual strongholds.

BY: KATELYN HAWKINS

LOCATION: JAPAN





Photo: Brian VanTimmeren

Asuka gasped, startled awake by an evil presence filling her room, crushing her chest. The darkness intensified; the demons that oppressed her elderly grandmother were roaming the house.

Asuka's Shinto and Buddhist beliefs offered explanation—claiming Japan as “the land of 8 million gods”—but no relief. Only what she had read in the Bible gave her hope for overcoming the spirits.

Ten years earlier, Asuka had listened to Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, renowned for its chorale “O Sacred Head, Now Wounded.”

What a wonderful piece of music, she marveled. *I wonder whom it's about.* Discovering that the lyrics portrayed the death and burial of Jesus Christ, she found a Bible and, enthralled, read from Genesis to Revelation—repeatedly. After a decade of reading alone, she contacted the only evangelical church in her city, Izumi, to ask if they hosted any Bible studies.

“Of course,” responded ABWE missionary Bill Petite. He and his wife, Becky, planned to offer an evangelistic Bible study alongside a young Japanese pastor, Hiroki Minamida, and his wife, Junko, whom he was training to assume leadership of the church plant. “We wanted to teach them to lead it, and the Lord brought us four people interested in the gospel to do it with,” Bill explained.

Asuka excitedly attended each Bible study, designed to introduce the gospel to a Japanese worldview without any prior biblical knowledge. When they reached the final lesson, Becky asked Asuka if she believed what she had heard.

“I think I should tell you a story,” Asuka replied. One night after visiting her grandmother, she felt a demonic presence in her room. Terrified, Asuka confronted the demons with what she thought the Bible taught: “In the name of God the Father, depart!”

Nothing changed. The darkness pressed in harder.

“All of a sudden, a light flooded my heart,” she related. “I realized, this is my real sin: I've been try-



Locals and tourists alike worship at Sensoji Temple, Tokyo's oldest Buddhist temple and one of the world's most-visited religious sites.

ing to go to the Father on my own. But he says, 'No one comes to the Father but through the Son.'

She cried out, "In the name of Jesus Christ, depart!"—and the demons fled.

A Church in Crisis

In the shadow of skyscrapers and shrines, scores of office workers, students, and laborers stream out of train stations every morning and hurry along tree-lined streets. Order and efficiency rule; respect and social harmony guide interactions. Yet the cultural values that have long fascinated the West conceal a sobering reality.

"Japan is a beautiful country, and it's very popular right now," shared ABWE missionary Katie Madara. "You see all these videos of this perfect country and these perfect people, the neon lights and the cute characters, but there's sin and darkness here, just like everywhere else."

Missiologists often dub Japan the "graveyard of missionaries," not only for the brutal persecution

instituted during its 250-year isolationist period, which prohibited both foreign trade and the Christianity carried to its shores by Jesuit priests, but for the modern resistance to the gospel that often leaves missionaries' vision and plans buried fruitless in hard soil. Japanese national identity is based, in part, on conformity to traditional Shinto and Buddhist beliefs.

Today, the Japanese remain the world's second-largest unreached people group. Believers account for less than 0.5 percent of the population, the Joshua Project estimates—a number that has not much changed for 500 years.

Meanwhile, the Japanese church is fighting for survival.

"The average church has only about 30 members," explained ABWE missionary Ray Kwan. "The church is small, and it's aging. About 70 percent of pastors are retirement age with no successor. The next generation needs to be raised up, or in 10-15 years, there will be a lot of churches with no pastor."

Today, the Japanese remain the world's second-largest unreached people group. Believers account for less than 0.5 percent of the population, the Joshua Project estimates—a number that has not much changed for 500 years.

Photo: Brian VanTimmeren

Commuters hurry through a covered shopping center in Kichijoji, Tokyo.

With few people and fewer leaders, believers in Japan are asking: how can the church endure?

Missionaries and Japanese believers take direction from the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20). They go, make disciples, baptize them in the context of local churches, and teach them to observe Christ's commands—including his command to go and share their faith with others.

"We encourage the Japanese church to be disciple makers, to really be investing in people and training everyone to be a disciple maker," added veteran ABWE missionary Norman Smith. "That's where future pastors will come from, as they embrace the mission of Jesus and recognize they have gifts that the church needs."

Finding Ears to Hear

This vision for establishing the Japanese church led ABWE's first missionary team to an unexpected audience. Voyaging by freighter in 1955, Paul and Vada Shook arrived in Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's four main islands, to streets still cratered from Allied air raids and upheaval in their own family. Just before their departure for the field, they had discovered that one of their toddler twin sons was deaf.

After heartbroken prayer and counsel, they continued to Japan and began church planting in the city of Kagoshima, where, providentially, they found the nation's largest school for the deaf at that time. As the family learned sign language, the Lord brought contacts with deaf believers desperate for fellowship, and their focus shifted to discipling and training them for ministry. They quickly noticed that many of Japan's deaf demonstrated ears for hearing the gospel that other Japanese did not, and the body of believers grew. Two brothers they disciplined went on to establish deaf churches in

Kagoshima and Sasebo, which, by 1988, had flourished into a network of 13 churches and a Bible training school for the deaf, where Paul taught alongside Japanese partners.

The Shooks' legacy impacted generations. When another man influenced through Paul's discipleship ministry, Masahiro Minamida, was appointed pastor of Tokyo Deaf Baptist Church, the Shooks' son-in-law, Bill Petite—who returned to Japan with his wife, Becky, as ABWE missionaries in 1990—preached at his ordination. Pastor Minamida's young sons observed from the audience. As the boys grew older and attended college in North America, they both grew burdened to reach the hearing in their nation with biblical truth.

"In Japan, every locality, every area, has its own god," explained Kohki Minamida. "Some localities might treat the wind or the sea or the sun as gods. So even if you bring Jesus Christ and his gospel to Japan, people might think of Christ as simply a deity or a god from another locality. So what people need to understand, and what we need to teach them, is that our God is three in one—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—our God is the Lord, and he rules over the entire universe. But a lot of people have never heard this truth yet."

Their Christian upbringing, a rare blessing in Japan, inspired both Kohki and his younger brother, Hiroki, to obtain theological training in Tokyo and pursue ministry in local churches.

"My father opened the Bible every day; he looked at the Word and studied the Word," Kohki observed. "He sacrificed so much of his life to serve the church. And I saw my dad's example and began to think that I wanted to do that as well."

Today, Kohki serves alongside ABWE missionary Ray Kwan in Tokyo, while Hiroki has joined Bill in ministry to pastor the Petites' church plant

in Izumi. Both men are being disciplined, mentored, and trained by ABWE missionaries. Both faithfully continue the legacy of discipleship in their own congregations.

“The most important indicator . . . is not how the number of people increases, but how many of those who are saved are now growing and developing in spiritual maturity,” said Hiroki. “We must reveal the glory of God and the glory of Christ.”

The 24/7 Church

As the growing ABWE team followed Christ and his commission into new cities in Kyushu, they encountered additional cultural challenges. In Miyakonojo, missionaries Chris and Donna Sadowitz noticed that attendance in their church plant fluctuated as the members’ long, varying work hours prohibited them from consistently attending Sunday services. Simultaneously, the Sadowitzes became convicted

that the church, as the living body of Christ, should be fully integrated into daily life.

“We think of the church as a 24/7 kind of operation,” explained Chris. They began holding decentralized midweek meetings focused on prayer, Bible study, and encouragement in evangelism. Any church member is welcome to request a meeting at a given time or place, gathering all those available: one morning in a café, an evening in someone’s home, or an afternoon near a local waterfall.

“As our group was growing in their Christian walk and they were realizing their own spiritual gifts, we encouraged them to take leadership of the prayer meetings,” added Donna.

The congregation’s emphasis on prayer revolutionized their relationships with unbelievers. Several Filipino young adults, employed as caregivers in Japanese nursing homes, followed God’s leading to share the gospel with their Japanese coworkers,

Kohki Minamida (left) preaches at Megumi Bible Church in Tokyo while Jonathan Yeung (right) translates.

Photo: Brian VanTimmeren





“God orchestrates all these interactions, and our challenge is to be ready when his call comes.”

Chris Sadowitz, ABWE missionary

Japanese and Filipino church members in Miyakonojo gather for a midweek prayer meeting, led by Chris (left) and Donna (right) Sadowitz.

leading five Japanese healthcare workers to attend church services within the last year. The Sadowitzes encourage church members to invite their unsaved contacts to prayer meetings, noting the communal nature of Japanese culture.

“Western thought often separates evangelism from discipleship. But if you look at discipleship as a whole process, then including people can be one of the ways that Japanese can see the reality of Christianity, not just mental facts. . . . They can see what the community of believers is like, and they can experience the love of Christ,” said Chris.

Often, it takes years of hearing the gospel before a Japanese person is ready to place his or her faith in Christ. Yuria, a 19-year-old college student, first met Chris and Donna as a shy, struggling middle school student. Despite her success as a judoka, she became deeply depressed due to bullying. Her mother, at a loss, mentioned her concerns to a coworker, who recalled how the Sadowitzes’ church had helped her own son through depression in 2017 after the death of his father.

The two mothers brought Yuria to the Sadowitzes’ home and requested that they teach her English. During their first lesson, an evangelistic Bible study, she would not utter a word. Nor did she speak during the second meeting—or for the first month. Yet, she returned each Friday evening for a year and a half and even attended Sunday church services.

“Darlyn, one of our Filipina young ladies, began to spend time with her one-on-one. Friends often disciple friends much better,” shared Chris.

Gradually, Yuria recognized her own sin and need for a Savior—a difficult concept for many Japanese to accept, as the word for “sin” in Japanese also means “crime.” She placed her faith in Christ and was baptized in summer 2025.

“She is growing in her faith,” reported Chris. “Being the first Christian in her very traditional Japanese family, she is receiving some resistance from her grandparents, but she hasn’t given up.”

He continued: “God orchestrates all these interactions, and our challenge is to be ready when his call comes.”



Photo: Brian VanTimmeren

Reaching the Heart of Tokyo

Dovetailing with the faithful ministry of these ABWE church planters and many others in the verdant regions of Kyushu, ABWE launched the Open Initiative to deploy a new generation of gospel workers to one of the world's largest cities: Tokyo.

"Tokyo is a different place," said Ray Kwan, who inaugurated ABWE ministry in Tokyo with his wife, Shelley, in 2019. "It's very densely populated. Life is fast paced. A lot of people walk by each other and don't think twice about who they just walked by."

Here, Ray observes a critical need not only to evangelize the lost but to train believers in sound doctrine to prevent unbiblical aspects of the Japanese worldview from creeping into the church as syncretism. This goal forms the foundation of the Kwans' twin ministries: Megumi Bible Church and the Japan Bible Academy (JBA).

Alongside a core of Japanese believers, the Kwans planted Megumi Bible Church in April 2019 amid the high-rises of downtown Tokyo. "We wanted to have a biblical church in the middle of Tokyo, one that was really centered around the teaching of God's Word," he explained.

Every Sunday, Japanese and international believers joyfully linger through worship services and Bible studies that continue throughout the day. To ensure greater spiritual growth and witness, Ray is training men to be elders and deacons, who will, in turn, disciple others in the congregation.

Two of these future leaders are Kohki Minamida and Jonathan Yeung, whom Ray also mentors as JBA staff members: Kohki serves as dean of students and theology professor, while Jonathan manages translation projects for theological resources and teaches biblical and church history. JBA aims to help fill the void of future pastors in Japan through offering online courses in theology and ministry to pastors and lay leaders.

"We teach our classes in Japanese, which is unique because it's really hard to find good biblical teaching in Japanese," Ray shared. "We're preparing future generations of the church."

A Japanese family bows at the shrine of a Buddhist temple.

Resurrection in the Graveyard

Sitting around the table in Izumi, Becky Petite listened, amazed, as Asuka related her account of dispelling the demons. When she finished speaking, Becky clarified, “So are you saying that you believe in Jesus, that he died on the cross for your sins, and that trusting in him is what saves you?”

Asuka nodded, smiling. “What else would I believe? That’s what the Bible says.”

Asuka was baptized on Easter Sunday 2025—the first baptism that Hiroki conducted as pastor of Izumi Living Hope Baptist Church.

“The Lord prepared the way for these things in his timing,” Bill said. Despite the difficulties, he explained, the Lord is faithfully calling both new believers and new pastors to the Japanese church.

New rays of resurrection glory are dawning in the graveyard of missionaries.

“Why would someone become a missionary in Japan, knowing that it’s going to be hard?” pondered missionary Joel Diffenderfer, who recently moved with his family to Tokyo. “God hasn’t promised us success in terms of ministry, but he has called us to share who he is, and he has promised that he will make himself known and great among every nation, tribe, and tongue. Jesus is worth it.” ■

“Why would someone become a missionary in Japan, knowing that it’s going to be hard? God hasn’t promised us success in terms of ministry, but he has called us to share who he is, and he has promised that he will make himself known and great among every nation, tribe, and tongue. Jesus is worth it.”

Joel Diffenderfer, ABWE missionary



We Can Do More With Your Help

More than 2 billion people on earth are unreached with the gospel. Help us mobilize more laborers into the harvest with a gift to the Global Gospel Fund. Visit abwe.org/givethethegospel.



Meet the Japanese believers who are breaking through centuries-old barriers to the gospel. See how God is using ABWE missionaries and local churches to confront cultural strongholds and establish Christ’s church in Japan at abwe.org/newlifejapan.

Yuria, who came to faith and was baptized through the ministry of a local church, speaks on the importance of prayer.



Photo: Brian VanTimmeren

THE 2024-2025 New Missionary Class

BY: KATELYN HAWKINS AND CALEB GORTON

The same driving passion that motivated the apostle Paul urges the church forward today.

Addressing the church in Rome, Paul declared: “I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else’s foundation” (Romans 15:20 ESV). He grounded this high and holy ambition not only on his divine calling but on the promises of Scripture, quoting the prophet Isaiah: “Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand” (v. 21; cf. Isaiah 52:15).

He knew that untold cities and villages lay scattered throughout the known world, filled with men and women bowing to pagan gods, debating vain philosophies, or observing Mosaic law without the Messiah—as had he himself before his dramatic encounter with the risen Christ.

Yet the mission was not his alone. As he mapped out his intended journey to Jerusalem and Spain, he appealed to the Roman church to support him by providing three things: material aid for the journey, restorative fellowship in their company, and fervent prayer for deliverance and effective ministry (Romans 15:24–32). Only through partnership with local churches could his missionary endeavor succeed.

Today, new generations of faithful believers are picking up the mantle to advance the gospel where Christ is not yet known. Since autumn 2024, 57 new mid- and long-term missionaries have joined ABWE to carry the gospel to new horizons, and eight have joined ABWE Canada. Their stories of calling to Christ and his mission appear in the following pages.

Many are preparing to serve in contexts in which gospel work is opposed. Their identities have been withheld to preserve their safety and effective witness.

Like Paul, each of these new missionaries needs financial support, encouragement, and prayer to continue on the journey. May we, like the church in Rome, consider how we might join in their passion and, together, make Christ known among the nations.



Africa



Joe and Abbey Barnosky

Ministry: ABWE GO and Beautiful Feet | **Location:** South Africa

Track: Long Term | **Sending Church:** Horizons Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0194071

As a missionary kid in Kenya, Abbey met a pregnant woman who lost her baby due to ignorance about maternal care, and she committed to pursuing pro-life pregnancy ministry. After their marriage, Joe, an audiovisual professional who once traveled with a Christian rock band, sensed God leading them overseas. An online search revealed needs in South Africa that fit their skills exactly. Joe will develop media to help churches disseminate biblical teaching, while Abbey will develop pro-life centers.

J. and J. M.

Ministry: Live Global | **Location:** Ghana

Track: Long Term | **Sending Church:** Lifepoint Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0172931

Growing up watching his father pastor a church with limited resources in a predominantly Muslim region of Ghana, J. developed a passion to equip pastors for ministry. After gaining experience with a local missions organization and completing theological training in seminary, J. and his wife, J., have joined Live Global to serve through pastoral development. Their unique combination of Ghanaian and American roots and international ministry experience enables them to bridge cultures for gospel impact.





Marc and Serena Mouser

Ministry: ABWE GO | **Location:** Togo

Track: Long Term | **Sending Church:** Meridian First Baptist Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0193451

For Serena, missions evidences the generational faithfulness of God. Her grandparents and parents both invested their lives as ABWE missionaries in Brazil, a heritage which now continues through Marc and Serena and their children. Marc, raised in a non-Christian home, was drawn to missions to share the grace he had experienced with others. As Christian school teachers, they will educate missionary kids in Togo to raise up the next generation for Christ.

Gabriele and Delia Puopolo

Ministry: ABWE GO | **Location:** East Africa

Track: Associate | **Sending Church:** The Orchard | Vernon Hills

Giving: abwe.org/m/0172971

Gabriele and Delia, Italian believers shaped by small churches with bivocational leaders, have been appointed as missionaries to East Africa. With a passion for equipping local churches, they plan to train pastors and leaders through grassroots programs and higher education. Gabriele will teach theology, while Delia will invest in women's discipleship, children's ministry, and gospel-driven hospitality. Their vision is to multiply faithful leaders and strengthen the African church.



Luke and Stephanie Shover

Ministry: ABWE GO | **Location:** South Africa

Track: Long Term | **Sending Church:** Trinity Gospel Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0173001



Luke and Stephanie both felt God's calling to missions during their teenage years. Luke grew up as a missionary kid in Durban, South Africa, and married Stephanie, who was born and raised in South Africa. Luke has served stateside in pastoral ministries for the past 12 years. Stephanie has worked with at-risk families. They are both committed to returning to South Africa to serve in church planting, theological education, and community outreach.

Africa



Seth Stiles

Ministry: ABWE GO | **Location:** Zambia

Track: Part-Time Long Term | **Sending Church:** Northshore Bible Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0173011

As a pastor who saw the theological famine faced by fellow ministers around the world, 85 percent of whom have no formal theological training, Seth recognized that God was giving him an opportunity to use his experience as part of the solution. Seth is committed to stewarding his education, teaching skills, and passion for curriculum development through training national pastors in Nicaragua and at an institute in Zambia to better shepherd their flocks, to the glory of God.

Ron and Julie Youde

Ministry: ABWE GO | **Location:** The Gambia

Track: Long Term | **Sending Church:** Heights Baptist Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0173021

While leading a mission team to Brazil in 2016, Ron visited believers in a favela and was moved by how their shared faith in Christ bridged vast cultural and economic divides. In 2021, Ron and Julie responded to God's call to serve in Costa Rica, where they evangelized impoverished families and developed language and sports ministries. The Youdes hope to transition to The Gambia to support church leaders and ongoing youth ministry.



Derek Young

Ministry: ABWE GO | **Location:** Togo

Track: Long Term | **Sending Church:** The Bridge Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0172891

As Derek walked into a missions healthcare conference during his second year of medical school, God opened his eyes to see that he exists, he saves people across the world, and he wanted Derek to be part of it. After coming to Christ and growing in his faith, Derek served 18 months at the Hospital of Hope in Togo. He is excited to return and use healthcare to build the church, especially among the unreached Fulani people group.

Middle East / North Africa



Alan and Joan

Ministry: ABWE GO | **Location:** North Africa

Track: Long Term | **Sending Church:** Grace Baptist Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0172861

Alan and Joan had successful careers in American suburbia when they sensed God's leading to unreached Muslim peoples. They explained, "God showed us that he gave us resources and health, not so we would have a good life in America, but so we would have a better life following him." They moved to North Africa 15 years ago and continue to see God transform lives as they build relationships through business and education as a means of planting churches.

Y. M.

Ministry: ABWE GO | **Location:** North Africa

Track: Mid Term | **Sending Church:** Charlotte Chinese Baptist Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0193241

Y. discerned God's direction to become a missionary at a conference in 2019 but quickly rejected the idea. That night, she dreamed that God called her to serve him, but she told him no—she didn't like public speaking. She had the same dream the following three nights and each time gave a different excuse. After the fourth night, she told God she was willing. She moved to North Africa, where she teaches at a school and ministers to refugees.



Asia



C. and A. J.

Ministry: ABWE GO | **Location:** Southeast Asia

Track: Long Term | **Sending Church:** Mid-Cities Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0172771

As a professional musician, C. desired to make a name for himself. When he felt the Lord asking, “Would you be willing to give all that up for me?” his course was radically redirected to Southeast Asia, where he will use his gifts in ministry. A., a preschool teacher, became burdened to serve Southeast Asian women after her own experience with childhood abuse. She will use her skills to build redemptive relationships with families in their community.

K. L.

Ministry: Live Global | **Location:** Vietnam

Track: Long Term | **Sending Church:** Tabernacle Church of Norfolk

Giving: abwe.org/m/0172921

As a refugee in Vietnam, K. spent her early childhood on a boat, enduring pirates and gunfire, until a church sponsored her family’s immigration to the US. The church’s love drew her to Christ. She later returned to Vietnam, and, while sitting in her cousins’ hut, wondered why God had given her a different life. She sensed God asking her in response, “What are you going to do about it?” Today she serves communities through oral Bible training, farming, and business development.





Hunter and Priscilla Mason

Ministry: ABWE GO | **Location:** Japan

Track: Long Term | **Sending Church:** North Wake Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0172981

Hunter and Priscilla's call to missions began in Las Vegas. Living in the city as new-lweds and new believers, they joined a church with a strong missional emphasis. Their vision expanded as they saw God's heart for the nations displayed throughout Scripture and gained experience through short-term trips, mid-term ministry in Cambodia, and seminary. They plan to assist a church in Yokohama, Japan, and partner with Japanese believers to plant a new church where there currently is none.

T. and C. R.

Ministry: ABWE GO | **Location:** Southeast Asia

Track: Long Term | **Sending Church:** Immanuel Baptist Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0172991

T. and C.'s story began overseas: they met on a missions trip to East Asia. After another short-term experience revealed a need for ministry training, they attended a specialized program in western Asia, where they were mentored by veteran missionaries. The Lord used a presentation by an ABWE missionary to give them an indescribable yearning to reach the millions in Southeast Asia currently without access to the gospel, and they committed to serve there.



Ashley Soar

Ministry: ABWE GO | **Location:** Japan

Track: Long Term | **Sending Church:** Centerpoint Baptist Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0172741

Ashley grew up in the church and was saved at age seven. As a young adult, she read Isaiah's words, "Here am I; send me," and sensed the Lord leading her into missions. During a trip to Japan, she watched a woman bow to a statue on display in a museum and felt burdened to bring hope to people lost in an empty cultural religion. She plans to reach women in Japan with the gospel, while building missional relationships and assisting local churches.

Europe



Drew and Harlee Oxendine

Ministry: ABWE GO | **Location:** Portugal

Track: Long Term | **Sending Church:** Providence Baptist Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0172881

Reading the book *Radical* challenged Drew to make his life count for God. Hungry to learn more, he pored over missionary biographies, then the Book of Acts—and responded by sharing Christ with Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims at work. Harlee's burden for their own children inspired her to begin reaching hundreds of other children and families in their community. They will now use their experience as part of a church planting team in Portugal.

Fredrik and Gemma Sandberg

Ministry: ABWE GO | **Location:** Ireland

Track: Long Term | **Sending Church:** Saylorville Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0193191

Gemma is a native to Ireland, and Fredrik was born in Sweden. God's grace brought them to Saylorville Church in the US in their mid-30s, where they came to saving faith in 2015. Five years later, while reading Psalm 96 and John 4, God burdened them to declare his glory in Gemma's spiritually dark homeland. Amid Ireland's complex blend of Roman Catholicism and hyper-secularism, they will support church planting, evangelism, counseling, and discipleship ministries.



Rob and Gayle Upson

Ministry: ABWE GO | **Location:** Portugal

Track: Associate | **Sending Church:** New City Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0194051

After 30 years in the IT industry, Rob and his wife, Gayle, an experienced educator, felt called to dedicate their empty-nest years to gospel ministry. Serving in Portugal with ABWE, they partner with the Lisbon Training Center and Greater Lisbon Christian Academy, supporting missionaries, encouraging children and families, and engaging the local community to help them find and follow Jesus.



Latin America



Lukas and Julia Davoll

Ministry: ABWE GO | **Location:** Ecuador

Track: Long Term | **Sending Church:** Perth Bible Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0172961

As an ABWE missionary kid in Ecuador, Lukas grew up sharing the gospel with friends on the soccer field and assisting his family in the church. Julia also began serving at a young age, first through joining several short-term evangelistic teams in the US and abroad, then later through college ministry. After their marriage, they committed to return to Ecuador to serve in a church plant, disciple young adults, and work with the TACTICA police ministry.

Douglas and Lacey Goncalves

Ministry: ABWE GO | **Location:** Brazil

Track: Long Term | **Sending Church:** Wheelersburg Baptist Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0172871

Douglas, a Brazilian, first heard the gospel at a soccer ministry run by ABWE missionaries Randy and Cindy Richner. Their faithful example and discipleship inspired him to pursue evangelism and church ministry, even in his youth. During a pastoral internship in the US, he married Lacey, who had developed a heart for Brazil during a short-term missions trip. They are returning to southern Brazil to serve in church planting, sports, and women's and children's ministries.



North America



Afrooz Emami

Ministry: EveryEthne | **Location:** United States

Track: Long Term | **Sending Church:** Grace Community Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0173031

Afrooz, born Muslim, was saved while visiting a church near her home in Iran. Upon discovering that her uncle was also a believer but had been afraid to tell anyone, she resolved to share the gospel with her entire family—and was soon arrested, beaten, and sentenced to death. After a church helped her flee overnight, she committed to serving refugees in the US and, through her testimony, now trains churches to effectively reach Muslims for Christ.

Elias and Arelis Garcia

Ministry: EveryEthne | **Location:** United States

Track: Associate | **Sending Church:** West Side Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0172821

For 25 years, the Garcias have served in church planting and multiplication ministries. As missionaries sent from Venezuela, they trained leaders in Mali, Myanmar, Mexico, and the US. Now empty-nesters, they live by the idea that “our lives are not forever but can be a legacy that goes beyond our time here on earth.” They will continue to serve through a local church in Yakima, WA, multiplying the next generation of North American believers and churches.



Jono and Debi Martin

Ministry: EveryEthne | **Location:** United States

Track: Long Term | **Sending Church:** Grace Reformed Baptist Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0172801

Jono's call to ministry was confirmed during a visit to a local prison, where he saw more than 100 inmates praising God. Having seen the life-changing impact of local outreach ministry, he is committed to mobilizing the church to bring the gospel to the edges of society. Debi serves alongside him in training women to study, know, and teach God's Word. Together, they equip and build the local church through evangelism and discipleship.





Rick and Linda Reed

Ministry: EveryEthne | **Location:** Canada

Track: Associate | **Sending Church:** Grandview Baptist Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0172811

After decades of faithfully serving in the local church and teaching around the world, the Reeds will step into a new role to encourage and equip church leaders to engage in effective evangelism in the diverse and growing city of Toronto, Ontario. They will use their expertise in Bible translation, teaching English as a second language, and preaching to support pastors and reach the international community living and working in the city.

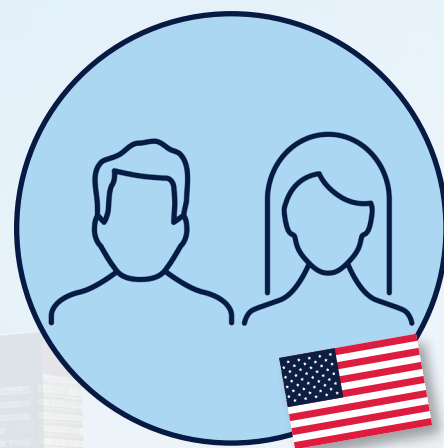
M. and M. S.

Ministry: EveryEthne | **Location:** United States

Track: Long Term | **Sending Church:** Shiloh Bible Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0172911

M.'s ministry at a federal penitentiary introduced him to Muslim inmates who worshiped daily without hope or knowledge of the true God—and his heart broke for them. As he and his wife approached retirement, they desired to invest their senior years in ministering to Muslims. They joined EveryEthne to serve a large community of Afghan refugees in the US, partnering with local churches in evangelism, discipleship, and resettlement ministries.



North America



Todd and Carolyn Skipper

Ministry: ABWE GO | **Location:** Canada / International
Track: Associate | **Sending Church:** Oxford Baptist Church
Giving: abwe.org/m/0193641

Todd had always wondered how to integrate gospel ministry with his 30-year career in banking and financial planning. A church presentation about ABWE introduced him to opportunities to lead financial literacy seminars for church planters internationally, and Carolyn also found needs for her expertise in special education. In addition to their part-time international work, Todd will assume the role of director of advancement for ABWE Canada.

Doug and Deanna Zook

Ministry: ABWE Aviation | **Location:** United States
Track: Associate | **Sending Church:** Trinity Bible Church
Giving: abwe.org/m/0173081

Doug, an entrepreneur and pilot of over 30 years, uses airplanes in business and understands their utility. He and Deanna recently launched a three-year training program on their ranch in Wyoming to prepare missionary pilots and mechanics—both professionally and spiritually—to take the gospel to hard-to-reach places. As the new director of ABWE Aviation, Doug will also work with current missionary pilots and open new bases to expand ABWE's outreach.



Global



C. and T. C.

Ministry: Live Global | **Focus:** Global Partnerships

Track: Associate | **Sending Church:** Devon Park Baptist Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0193371

C. cultivated a passion for exploring God's creation and its potential through his career in engineering and product development. He now plans to use his expertise for eternal impact by helping national partners around the world use business to spread the gospel in creative ways and to provide for their families and churches. T., a perioperative nurse, will assist in evangelistic community development through healthcare education.

E. and C. H.

Ministry: Live Global | **Focus:** Global Partnerships

Track: Associate | **Sending Church:** Cornerstone Baptist Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0173041

During a moment of despair, E. sensed God opening his eyes to the grace of the cross, and he openhandedly gave his life to Christ. Soon after, he began serving on frequent short-term missions trips. He met C., a nurse, as they traveled together to the Dominican Republic. They joined Live Global to connect Canadian churches with national partners around the world, particularly in the Caribbean, and to equip church leaders.



K. and R. M.

Ministry: Live Global | **Location:** Worldwide

Track: Long Term | **Sending Church:** Barberville Baptist Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0172941

Twenty years of full-time church ministry ended abruptly when K. experienced burn-out. As he and his wife, R., sought healing, they prayed for new opportunities. The more they learned about healthy ministry practices, the greater their burden grew for missionaries in high-stress environments. As biblical counselors, they will help these workers recover from difficult personal, family, and ministry situations and proactively develop strategies for effective, thriving ministries.



Global



J. and M. M.

Ministry: Live Global | **Focus:** Global Partnerships

Track: Long Term | **Sending Church:** Countryside Bible Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0173051

J. was working with a human trafficking rescue organization when he heard a young lady request prayer for “a different life.” He could think of no greater life purpose than to share Christ with the hopeless and decided to become a pastor. His life trajectory changed again when he and his wife, M., joined Live Global. They now develop partnerships between North American churches and indigenous churches in poverty-stricken regions of the Caribbean.

S. M.

Ministry: ABWE Healthcare | **Location:** Worldwide

Track: Long Term | **Sending Church:** Harvest Bible Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0172781

When S.’s faith began to conflict with her professional responsibilities as a pediatrician, she considered how to use her training to make an eternal impact instead. She discovered an opportunity to reach people who may never attend church through medical missions. Serving with ABWE Healthcare, she will provide pediatric care to missionary families, lead short-term medical trips, and offer administrative support for evangelistic medical initiatives.



Brent and Megan Neer

Ministry: ABWE Construction | **Location:** Worldwide

Track: Long Term | **Sending Church:** Southgate Baptist Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0172791

Brent thought he was born to be a farmer and never seriously considered missions because he knew he was not a preacher. During a relief trip in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, however, he saw other ways of serving in missions. God continued to work in Brent’s heart to give him a desire to serve Jesus, beyond farming, through his experience in construction. The Neers will join ABWE Construction to help plan and build ministry facilities worldwide.



E. S.

Ministry: Good Soil | **Location:** Worldwide

Track: Long Term | **Sending Church:** Antioch Baptist Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0173071

E. was planting a church in the Cape Verde Islands when he noticed that the biblically illiterate people of the rural mountain village struggled to understand concepts like the Lamb of God. He began searching for resources to teach the grand narrative of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. While later serving in Thailand, he encountered ABWE's Good Soil materials, which he will now use to train believers worldwide in chronological Bible teaching.

Adam and Hannah Sharick

Ministry: Beautiful Feet | **Focus:** Global Partnerships

Track: Associate / Long Term | **Sending Church:** Stetson Baptist Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0193871

Hannah's missionary grandparents instilled in her a heart for missions, leading to her own calling during college. Adam first heard the gospel in college and immediately wanted to share it with others. After meeting on a missions trip to Zimbabwe, they married and served six years in Japan. Their burden for pro-life ministry led to an invitation for Hannah to serve as assistant director of ABWE Beautiful Feet, providing support and training for pregnancy centers worldwide.



B. T.

Ministry: Live Global | **Focus:** Global Partnerships

Track: Long Term | **Sending Church:** New Life Baptist Church

Giving: abwe.org/m/0172831

Growing up in the most diverse ZIP code in the United States instilled a love for the nations in B. When she saw that the work of missions was broader than just long-term overseas ministry, however, it opened her eyes to her place in the Great Commission. Driven by a passion to mobilize and equip national churches, B. will advance the gospel by cultivating relationships between North American churches and ministries across the globe.



Parenting Prodigals as Missionaries

A missionary couple's faith is tested as their daughter journeys from the depths of sin to the Savior.

BY: GARON AND SUSAN HARRIS

LOCATION: TOGO

We often say that missionaries live in two worlds: the home country we left and the one in which we serve. The distance between the two never seemed greater than when our youngest daughter, Whitney, was in crisis.

We sensed God leading us to serve in Togo when our children were young adults. As we prepared to leave for the field, we discovered that Whitney, who was living in rebellion and rejecting contact with us, had started using methamphetamines. With prayerful counsel from our pastor and ABWE leadership, we decided to continue in missions. Six years later, we learned that she was addicted to heroin.

We knew that opioid deaths were skyrocketing, and we pleaded with God to show us what to do. How could we stay in Togo while our daughter was addicted and living on the streets? How could we leave Togo when Susan had a critical role training nurses at the Hospital of Hope and Garon was leading a team of 50 missionaries?

With God's help, we recognized that we hadn't been able to keep Whitney from sin even when we were present, and he gave us a sense of peace about staying in Togo. We clung to the truths that he is sovereign and his grace is sufficient every day, and we chose to trust him with Whitney's life. Looking back, we see how he honored that.

In our absence, a family friend flew to northern California and found Whitney among the homeless encampments. He secured a place for her at a rehab clinic

in San Francisco. On the bus ride there, however, Whitney disembarked during a stopover to get high and found that the bus had left without her. Hysterical, she begged an older man nearby to drive her to San Francisco—and, amazingly, he agreed. The man shared the gospel with Whitney, and they discovered that he knew our teammates in Togo. That was one of many things that God orchestrated along the way.

A month into the rehab program, Whitney faced another crisis: she was pregnant. Alone, afraid, and desperate, she cried out to God for the first time: "I can't do this; God, I need you. Please help me." She immediately felt the Lord impress upon her, "Come with me, and you will never have to go back to your former life again." Soon after, an ex-convict at the rehab center invited her to church. Finally understanding God's forgiveness, she trusted him for salvation.

Her life transformed. She broke free of addiction and began to follow God wholeheartedly. Knowing that she could not provide for a child, she placed her son for adoption with a godly couple in North Carolina. She became a registered nurse and now passionately uses her testimony to share the gospel with the homeless and disadvantaged.

During the 10 years we prayed for her, we sometimes doubted God's faithfulness. He showed us that we needed to trust him to do his work in his way in the lives of our kids. In his mercy, he brought people we would never have expected to change her life and restore our relationship, even from a world away. ■



Photos: Dana Murph (top), Susan Harris (bottom)

Top: Whitney Harris (right) celebrates her graduation from Liberty University with her parents, Garon (left) and Susan (third from left), and her son, Maverick.

Bottom: Whitney ministers to patients while visiting the Hospital of Hope in Togo.



Garon and Susan Harris began full-time ministry in Mango, Togo, in 2012, where Garon served as team leader and developed systems for clean water, and Susan served as a nurse. They now coach prefield missionaries while making regular trips to Togo.

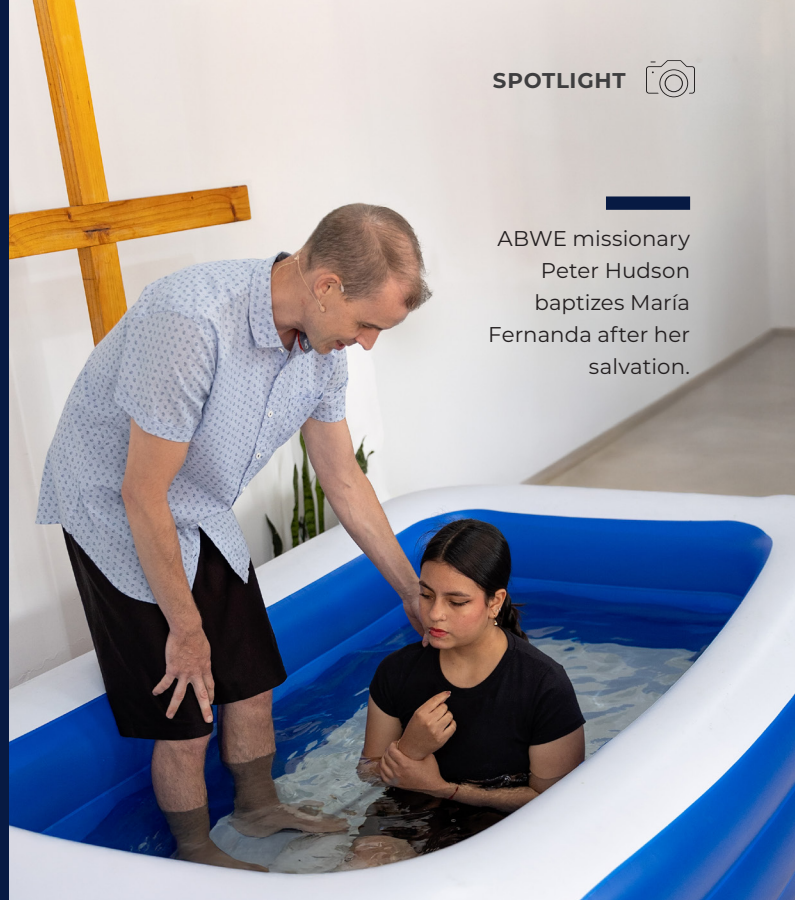
Crossing the Threshold of Grace

Colombian siblings enter a neighborhood church and discover new life in Christ.

BY: KATELYN HAWKINS

PHOTOGRAPHER: MARISSA DICKEY

LOCATION: COLOMBIA



ABWE missionary Peter Hudson baptizes María Fernanda after her salvation.

“I was born into a Christian home that had little biblical knowledge.”

María Fernanda addressed the small congregation from the inflatable baptismal pool prepared at the front of the church. “During my adolescence, I made friends who influenced my life and led me to make many mistakes, distancing myself from the purpose God had for me. . . . While my parents were concerned about my rebellion, by the grace of the Lord, we had the great opportunity to get to know this church.”

Standing beside her in the pool, Pastor Peter Hudson, an ABWE missionary, recalled the first Sunday that María Fernanda, her brother, and their parents had visited the church. Feeling spiritually empty and confused, they had arrived searching for biblical truth.

“Ever since they walked through the church doors, they have become part of our everyday lives, together with the other families we work with,” shared Peter’s wife, Jamie.

The Hudsons established Iglesia Esperanza Viva (Living Hope Church) in 2018, alongside ABWE missionaries Marissa Dickey and Heidi Gott, when their community-based ministry outgrew the Bible studies and discipleship meetings held in individual homes. They strategically planted the church within their neighborhood—a mountainous, gang-controlled sector of Medellín, Colombia—to reach families entrenched in poverty, skepticism, and broken relationships.

“We are grateful for what God is doing in the lives of the Colombians,” said Jamie, noting the several who have embraced Christ and been baptized—including María Fernanda and her brother, Jerónimo. With growing faith, María Fernanda recently enrolled in the ABWE-founded Baptist Seminary of Colombia for training in ministry.

As she was immersed into the water, she joyfully proclaimed, “Today, I can testify that my life belongs to the Lord, and that my deepest desire is to serve him every day and please him.” ■

Katelyn Hawkins is a communications specialist with ABWE. She serves as managing editor for Message Magazine and the ABWE blog. She holds an M.A. in Social Sciences and B.A. in Communications, and has lived in locations across Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.



Marissa Dickey is a missionary serving in Medellín, Colombia, in church planting, evangelism, and discipleship ministries. She also serves as the media specialist for the Baptist Seminary of Colombia and uses multimedia storytelling to share how God is working in order to promote missions movements within Colombia and beyond.



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