

December 2023

Dear Friends,

I hope this letter finds you well.

For the TenClay Family, 2023 was a year of finding a better balance between the intensity of our mission & ministry, and investing in family time that was filled with love, peace and joy. In fact, Petra wanted to share some of those highlights with you in a Christmas card, so she and Tim designed the card enclosed. Let me take a moment to explain some of these highlights.

For Spring Break, our family made a quick trip to Niagara Falls. It is a place Sophia & Petra remember fondly, as we visited there twice when we moved to upstate New York to serve the community of Pultneyville Reformed Church, and would stop at Niagara Falls during car trips to/from West Michigan (where Sophia and Petra were both born while serving the community of Dunningville Reformed Church.)

This summer our family made our first trip back to Italy together since we said "arrivederci" to the country we called home for four years as missionaries (2014-2018). This time we stayed in Rome for a week and walked around the beautiful city, enjoying the architecture and history, the excellent food and gelato, the opera, and conversing with people in a language that once felt so foreign to us but now feels like an old friend.

While living in Palermo, Italy, we noticed (and felt) the lack of bunnies, squirrels, songbirds, etc. that had been present in our lives while living in the Midwest and Northeast United States, so it has been a joy for the past five years to live in a community where they are prevalent, and to live in a house with a backyard where we can sit and enjoy their presence. This year we had multiple bunnies that were born at various stages of the year who delighted us with their presence, munching on the clover, wild strawberries, wild violets, and other plants we've encouraged to grow in our backyard. On some days when my work was really hard or discouraging (or when my office was turned into a bedroom to host a young woman from Ukraine who stayed with us for a few months), I would look up to see one or more of our furry friends visiting, and it brought me much joy. Apparently it was also very meaningful to Petra, as one of the bunnies made the cut of photos for our Christmas card!

And, finally, we've been more proactive in sightseeing in New York, and this year included a family trip to Citi Field Stadium for a concert, and a trip for Tim, Sophia & Petra to the New York Renaissance Faire.

There are many exciting events and family highlights that didn't make the cut for our Christmas card this year, so if you'd like to hear more updates from us (and share some highlights from your 2023), please reach out to me at [jjtenclay@rca.org](mailto:jjtenclay@rca.org). And if you aren't currently receiving updates about my work as a missionary serving refugees and displaced people worldwide but would like to be included, please contact me at [jjtenclay@rca.org](mailto:jjtenclay@rca.org) and I will add you to the distribution list.

With Love and Gratitude,

JJ TenClay (With love from Tim, Sophia & Petra)



LOVE



JOY



PEACE



JJ, TIM, SOPHIA & PETRA  
TENCLAY  
2023



Dear Siblings in Christ,

As we watch the horror of the escalating conflict in the Holy Land unfold, we bow our heads in fervent prayer for peace that surpasses all human understanding.

And as we prepare our hearts and minds in this season of Advent and Christmas, I want to share an urgent opportunity to follow our call as people of faith to be the hands and feet of Jesus in an area of the world that is currently filled with displacement, death, and destruction. **Will you help provide emergency humanitarian aid to people who have been forcibly displaced from their homes in Southern Lebanon as well as residents who have chosen to stay in the conflict along the Israel–Lebanon border?**

Since October 7, 2023, the ongoing and escalating conflict between Israel and Palestine is not only affecting people living in Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank, but also other Middle Eastern countries, including Lebanon, which borders Israel to the north. More than 100,000 people have been forcibly displaced from their homes in Southern Lebanon and have fled north toward Beirut to escape the drone and rocket attacks.

RCA Global Mission is working with Rev. Linda Macktaby (pictured here)—a former student of retired RCA missionary Rev. Dr. Peter Ford during his time serving at the Near East School of Theology (NEST)—who is ordained and serving as a pastor for the National Evangelical Church-Beirut. Rev. Macktaby has assembled a network of colleagues providing direct care for thousands of people (including many children) fleeing Southern Lebanon who are in need of shelter, mattresses, food, clean water, medicine, diapers, and diesel fuel to provide heat and electricity.



Rev. Macktaby has also committed to caring for residents of two predominantly Christian communities along the Israel–Lebanon border, where approximately 300 residents remain and are in need of spiritual care along with the provisions mentioned above.

RCA Global Mission has already sent \$10,000 (USD) in emergency funds raised through the Refugee Care Crisis Fund to Rev. Macktaby, but the need is still great. **Will you join us in supporting our sisters and brothers with basic needs as they flee for safety or decide to live within war zones?** This work cannot continue without your additional financial support.

A few ways you can give today:

**Online:** Give to the Lebanon Displacement Relief Project: [www.rca.org/give/lebanon-displacement-relief-project/](http://www.rca.org/give/lebanon-displacement-relief-project/)

**By phone:** Call Terri Boven at 616-541-0835.

**By mail:** Make all donations out to the “Reformed Church in America” and designate Lebanon Displacement Relief Project” in the memo portion of your check. Please send your check to Reformed Church in America, Attn: Finance Dept., 4500 60th St. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49512, or, in Canada, to Regional Synod of Canada, PO Box 1583 Stn Main, Woodstock, Ontario N4S 0A7

If you have any questions about this project, please contact JJ TenClay at [jjtenclay@rca.org](mailto:jjtenclay@rca.org).

Thank you in advance for shining the light of Christ in one of the darkest and dreariest parts of our world today.

May peace prevail,  
JJ TenClay, refugee ministries coordinator  
Peter and Patty Ford, retired RCA missionaries



November 2023

Dear Friends of The Banquet,

Often in our house, someone looks in the cupboard, refrigerator, or freezer and declares, "There's nothing to eat"! Maybe there is **nothing I want to eat, but** I have been fortunate never to have a day when there was **nothing to eat**.

As chair of The Banquet's Executive Board, I would love to send a letter saying The Banquet is closing because everyone in our community has cupboards, refrigerators, and freezers full of food. But today is not that day, and tomorrow, we still need you to fund, cook, and serve over 180,000 meals. Thanks be to God for YOU!

The Banquet's mission is "To welcome the community to gather and serve each other, feeding body and spirit." Food is only a part of what happens at The Banquet. Community, camaraderie, and care infuse our guests and volunteers in giving and receiving. It is a food ministry, but it is also a people's place.

So, this holiday season, I invite you to do two things. First, consider a financial gift to The Banquet. Your donation will impact thousands of our guests and volunteers by providing nutritious meals, a warm space, and dedicated staff to guide, direct, and welcome the community.

Second, invite a friend to serve. I'm surprised when I encounter someone who has yet to serve at The Banquet! At The Banquet, you are both a volunteer and a guest; you share a meal, a conversation, and a smile. Invite someone to experience the joy of volunteering at The Banquet.

Thank you for being part of The Banquet family. On behalf of our guests, thank you for your time, prayers, and contributions. Merry Christmas! May the joy of Christ be always present in your life.

Heidi Binstock  
President, The Banquet Board of Directors



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P 605.335.7066  
W [thebanquetsf.org](http://thebanquetsf.org)

900 E 8th Street | Sioux Falls, SD 57103-1604

WE WELCOME THE COMMUNITY TO GATHER & SERVE EACH OTHER, FEEDING BODY & SPIRIT



## 2024 WINTER NEWSLETTER

### ❄️ HEART OF CHRISTMAS ❄️

On Saturday, December 10, we held our annual Heart of Christmas event at Faith Church in Rock Valley. Kids aged 3-11 enjoyed carnival activities while parents picked out and wrapped gifts for them. This year we also had a new addition to our event that brought smiles to many faces -- a therapy dog names Onyx! The event concluded with an interactive retelling of the story of the birth of Christ. Registered families also received a family game and devotional, a box of food to make a Christmas meal with, and a bag of hygiene and cleaning products. We are grateful for the many volunteers, schools, businesses, and churches that partnered with Love INC to put this event on and enabled it to go smoothly. We are also thankful for each of the community members that purchased gifts and donated money for the food boxes. Many families were blessed this holiday season as a result of the body of Christ in Sioux County using their skills and resources to serve the Kingdom of God!





## ❄️ REALITY CHECK ❄️

In November we had the opportunity to host a Reality Check for seniors at Rock Valley Community School District! Reality Check is finance simulation for local high school students that prepares them for what to expect as they become young adults. Students were given an income based on a career that they chose, and then went to different stations to pay various bills, such as housing rent, auto insurance, and groceries. They also encountered life's unexpected expenses, such as health emergencies and speeding tickets! We look forward to offering this opportunity to more schools in Sioux County in the future!



## ❄️ LOVE & LEARN CLASSES ❄️

Our spring session of Love & Learn Classes will be on Tuesday evenings at Trinity Christian Reformed Church in Rock Valley starting on Tuesday, January 23. This session we intend to offer Faith & Finances, Boundaries, and Grief Share.

- We are looking for **volunteer mentors** for our Faith & Finance class. We will provide curriculum and training to mentors, so you do not need a background in finances to volunteer in this role!
- We are looking for a **facilitator for Boundaries class**. If you enjoy *Boundaries* by Dr. Cloud and Dr. Townsend and have a desire to help people grow in relational wisdom, this is the perfect opportunity for you!
- We are also looking for some people who would be willing to **volunteer in the nursery** a few times throughout the 12-week session.
- **If you are interested in volunteering or registering for a class**, please call Love INC at (712) 476-5990 or email [ministries@loveincsiouxcounty.org](mailto:ministries@loveincsiouxcounty.org).

1317 Main Street P.O. Box 85 Rock Valley, IA  
Phone: 712-476-5990 E-mail: [ministries@loveincsiouxcounty.org](mailto:ministries@loveincsiouxcounty.org)  
[www.loveincsiouxcounty.org](http://www.loveincsiouxcounty.org)



### Our Vision

Reach and inspire every community through the transforming hope in Jesus.

### Our Mission

Building experiences to encourage and equip every person for everyday life through Jesus.

[www.riseministries.com](http://www.riseministries.com)

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FIRST REFORMED CHURCH BOYDEN  
901 PLEASANT ST  
BOYDEN IA 51234



Dear FIRST REFORMED CHURCH BOYDEN

We're entering our 23rd year of ministry and our vision and passion has never been stronger to reach and inspire every community through the transforming hope in Jesus!

Thank you for your presence and work in seeing 23 years become more than we could have imagined! As we enter this year a prayer and desire has been put forth that God will allow us to host 25,000 +1 people at RiseFest to break a stronghold that was set 100 years ago.

As we've been blessed to travel and share the good news of the gospel, we've run into so many hurting people experiencing grief, loss and feeling broken. And we've been able to tell them it's ok to grieve. Comfort and hope are in Jesus because God's Goodness Outlives Grief. We recognize trials and move through them with faith.

As we look at faith, I want to share with you a joyful outcome of faith that will tell our story in 2024. In June 2024, there will be an official release of my first book: "Broken Still Chosen: Finding hope in Jesus when you feel unloved, unseen or forgotten!" It can be found on Amazon for pre-order now! A journey of 18 years in the making. Thank you for helping me and our team arrive here.

Speaking of story, it's important for me to tell you how the festival was so important to a young wife and mother. The mother was adamant they attend RiseFest as her health was failing. Through RiseFest and the music of Ben Fuller she was deeply encouraged with the reality of hope as she dealt with cancer. God has allowed you and RISE to set the stage for stories such as this.

We clearly understand the hunger for hope in the world today. The good news needs to be heard, and the message that joy and grief can co-exist because of Jesus must be shared!



I invite you to celebrate what God has done through our work together this year. Here are just a few of the many stories of our impact together:

- RiseFest 2023 – more than 19,000 festival-goers!
- The Haven building was remodeled on the RiseFest grounds and is now open for community events.
- Grounds Improvements: 72 new trees were planted in RiseFest camping
- Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) became a core partner and built out their space in The Citizens State Bank Hope Plaza.
- Messages of hope were shared through our podcast Enjoying the Journey.
- Multiple stories were told of those living with hope through the face of adversity in our Stories of Strength video series.
- RISE with Rob & Friends: A Night of Hope through storytelling and music came to life with our friends and partners, Touch of Hope – Haiti and Rosie's Boutique.
- 6 cities: Sheldon, Pella, Worthington, Brainerd, Sioux Falls, and Spirit Lake
- 6 Artists: Mark Schultz, Jason Gray, Mike Donehey, Cade Thompson, Leanna Crawford, and Ryan Stevenson.
- As I mentioned above, I wrote a book with my friend Kathy that will be published this June by Chosen Books.
- Stories of your Impact. Here are some from festival attendees:

*"This was my first-year attending. It was an amazing event. I could just feel the power of our wonderful Lord all around us. The music was spectacular, as was everything else. I will be back next year for certain!"*

*"The testimonials of speakers and Ben Fuller really touched my heart he was so real and raw and I was crying with him, so overwhelmed with GRATITUDE for what Jesus has done in both our lives!! :).."*

*"Risefest is always the place to be when you feel alone lost etc. Every time I go, I always feel the presence of God..."*

*"I don't often get outwardly emotional during worship events, but this time I did. It was when Cory Asbury was performing, and he spoke about God loving me just because I'm His kid and I don't have to prove myself to Him. He just loves me. And that's something that spoke right to me where I'm at and it honestly brought me to tears. It was so beautiful to feel God speak to me (and I'm sure countless others) through soft spoken words on a stage ... in the middle of the cornfields of Iowa haha"*

We are on mission to point even more people to Jesus and we're grateful for the many ways God has allowed this to happen!

Please know how extremely grateful we are for YOU and your partnership with RISE. You, your investment, and prayers are touching lives!

Thank You for your investment to reach and inspire every community through the transforming hope in Jesus!

We are going after greater goals with faith in 2024. One core goal is through RiseFest. Praying that God will allow us to host 25,000+ to break that stronghold that was set 100 years ago here in Sheldon.

As the bible says, "The harvest is plentiful..." The time is now, can we count on your partnership to help with the harvest?!

Because it Matters,



Rob Roozeboom  
RISE Ministries



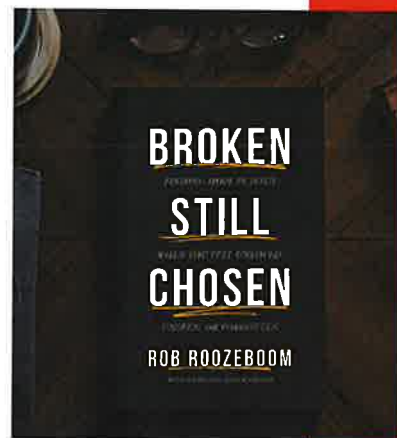
THE HAVEN INTERIOR & EXTERIOR



MARK SCHULTZ ON RWRF SPRING 2023



BEN FULLER AT RISEFEST 2023



ROB'S BOOK - BROKEN STILL CHOSEN



December 2023

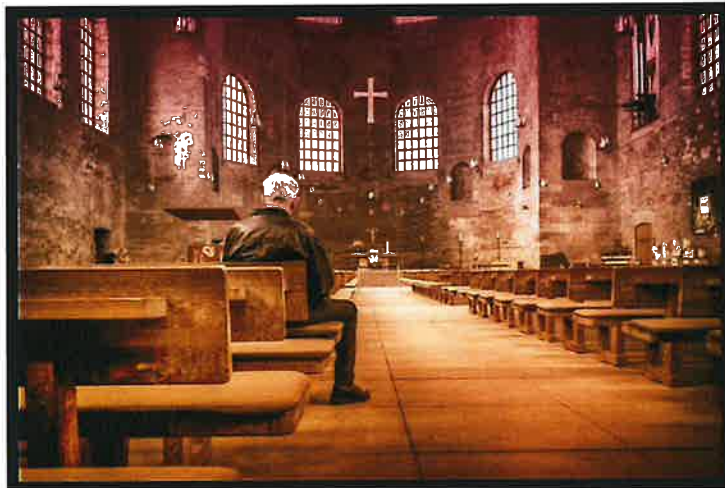
# Center of Hope Newsletter

Sowing Seeds of God's Love...Physically and Spiritually

## Forgetting He Came For Me ... And You by Adam Hofer

As I sit around the table with my family before we eat meals, we pray as a family and we always end the prayer by thanking God for coming, for teaching us His ways, for dying on the cross so that we live life to the fullest reconciled to God, and for all the work that is done through the Holy Spirit. We approach Him with thankful hearts because we know that He came *for us*, taught *for us*, died *for us*, and works in our hearts *for us* so that He is glorified through us. Yet, so often it is easy to forget this reality. Seeing him when life is hard is often difficult. Being disciplined enough to want to hear from Him in those times can be just as difficult. Yet, we know from His Word that we have a God who is always there...in the good times and bad times. Give us eyes to see this reality continually, Lord!

Today, a 31-year-old man was brought to the Center of Hope to talk with me because he was experiencing suicidal thoughts. In our two-hour conversation, we spoke of the Gospel, his innate value in the eyes of God, and that God had a plan for his life outside of the brokenness he currently is going through. Yet, he seemed to refuse to listen to my words and,



like so many others, intentionally chose to stay in a state of hopelessness to stew in his brokenness. He heard everything I said to him before but lacked the strength to press on. All the pains of his life, ranging from his childhood to the present, were weighing on him to the point that he did not want to live any longer. The only thing that seemed to numb his pain was meth, which has led him deep into addiction. I asked him, "**Do you want to be well?**" He replied sadly and without hope, "I am going to die with meth flowing through my veins." The surprising thing is that he has a relationship with God. Yet, through his struggles, he forgot that He came *for him*, taught *for him*, died *for him*, and is currently there *for him* through the Holy Spirit. In his despair, he didn't want to hear it, or at least,

not at first. Thankfully, our long conversation led to prayer twice. The first time I prayed over him. The second he prayed, "**God, I need you more than ever. I am broken. I need you.**" In periods of hardship, we often lose sight of God's presence. We forget He came for us. Yet, we desperately need Him.

The reality is we often forget He came for us, which leads us to lose sight of God's presence in our lives. We lose sight of Him because our eyes are focused elsewhere, on our pains, on our responsibilities, on our families... Yet, that does not change the reality that God came in flesh through Jesus Christ, that He dedicated His life to disciple and teach, that He hung in constant, throbbing pain on the cross to set us free from the bondage of sin and death, and that He unleashed the Holy Spirit to renew and empower our hearts and minds. Why did He do these things? The answer is simple: He loves us, even when we forget. I'm no longer going to forget that He came for me...and for you. Let's spread this message of hope to the hopeless this Christmas season. Thank you, Lord, for coming! Thank you for loving me.



## Clothing Drives— Consider Hosting a Church Drive

We need your help! We have an urgent need for winter gear and clothing, specifically men's and children's coats, snow pants and coveralls, gloves and mittens, steel-toed boots, winter boots, shoes, and belts. We are VERY LOW on these items. Another need is adult backpacks to be used to give out to people transitioning out of prison. The backpacks will contain a felony-friendly list we've been working on all year (VERY COMPREHENSIVE), employment options, local church list, and a Bible.

Donations can be dropped off Tuesday-Friday 9am-5pm at our Donation Dropoff on the north side of our building. Ring the doorbell and we'll help unload. Thank you in advance!



## Thank You—Fall Benefit 2023

We are so blessed to have people who encourage and support our ministry efforts.

Thank you to all who attended our Fall Benefit 2023! Our mission at the Center of Hope is to walk alongside people to promote physical and spiritual health, and ultimately change our community one life at a time. Your financial support helps us live out this

mission with ease. A special thank you goes to our Fall Benefit sponsors: **Kitchens & Windows Unlimited** (Presenting Sponsor), **Brooks Construction** (Silver sponsor), **American State Bank** (Bronze sponsor), and **Security Savings Bank** (Bronze sponsor).



## Let's Connect—Mission Moments, Pulpit Supplies, and MORE!

Out of our gratitude, we want you to know that we value our partnership in ministry. If you are a pastor, elder, or deacon of a church, do not hesitate to reach out to us if you need pulpit supply help or if you want us to update your congregation on what God has been doing at the Center of Hope. We would love to join you for worship! All for HIS glory and honor.

## Mission:

The Center of Hope exists to walk alongside people, to bring spiritual and physical health, and ultimately to change the community one life at a time.

## Vision:

The Center of Hope encourages and mentors people with the hope of redemption through Jesus Christ. Our focus is holistically addressing physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs of individual that can only come through creating relationship and accountability. We work in partnership with community organizations to engage in a consistent and positive interaction with guests.

## Principles:

1. All people are created in God's image.
2. Self sufficiency
3. Holistic Ministry
4. Reconciliation
5. Partnering to Serve

## MEMORIAL GIFTS

*Center of Hope appreciates the gifts In Memory of — Sid Phelps (Brett Rockvam's stepdad), Berdell Langerock, Winora Hallstrom, Ken Klinger, and Gloria Weber (Center of Hope Faith Community Nurse)*

### Your Gifts Change Lives:

**Stock or Commodity Gifts**—Talk to your financial advisor about gifting stocks and commodities to the Center of Hope.

**Make it Double**—Check with your employer to see if they will match your charitable contributions to the Center of Hope.

**Be a Sustainer of Hope**—A monthly gift will bring stability to individuals and families. Give online at: [www.centerofhopesf.org](http://www.centerofhopesf.org)

### Financial Update

Fiscal year runs from April to March, for the year 2023-24

April—To Date. Income  
\$223,461

2023-24 Budget Need  
\$381,265

Help us save on postage by receiving your newsletter electronically! Send your email address to [info@centerofhopesf.org](mailto:info@centerofhopesf.org) Also, please let us know if we need to update your mailing address.



# New Roots Review

December 2023



**NEW ROOTS  
MINISTRY**

## *Their First Calling is Serving Him*

by Fred Wilgenburg

**Singh "Aaron" and Puspa Tamang:** Unlike most Bhutanese refugees in Sioux Falls, Aaron was Buddhist instead of Hindu, and he was initially sent to India rather than Nepal as a refugee. Aaron grew up worshipping the Buddha, which continued as he was in Delhi, India for 18 years, mostly working in a restaurant.

Aaron had a Christian friend in Delhi, so he started going to the friend's Catholic church. The worship and the traditions were confusing but interesting to Aaron, so he continued going to mass, even giving donations to the church. Still, he identified as a Buddhist.

Puspa grew up in a small Indian village in northern India. Like most Indians, she and her family were Hindu. As young adults, Puspa and her sister moved to Delhi, India for work. Her supervisor at work was a Catholic Christian and she invited Puspa to church. Similar to Aaron, Puspa did not give her life to Jesus at that time, but the Catholic church perked her interest.



Having a meal with Puspa (right) and Aaron (middle).

Meanwhile, Puspa's parents came to know Jesus in their small village. (*This is common as Christians visit their fellow villagers who are Hindu or Muslim, do acts of kindness, offer words of encouragement and prayer, and invite them to church.*) Her parents' newfound faith caused Puspa to more strongly consider faith in God. After fifteen years in Delhi, she attended a Pentecostal church, fully receiving Jesus in her life.

Aaron and Puspa met through friends and married in 2000. Aaron eventually followed in his wife's footsteps, surrendering his life to Jesus in 2009. Upon coming into the family of God, they have not looked back spiritually, mutually and continually seeking God's will and call upon their lives as Christian leaders among their largely lost peoples. In 2016, they were able to come with their daughter (now 21) and son (now 14) to the US. Right away they sought to be bi-vocational, both working the second-shift at Smithfield Foods in Sioux Falls, where New Roots Ministry does chaplaincy, along with leading/pastoring in one of the Nepali churches. As there arose strong enough leadership in their Nepali church, they sensed God calling them elsewhere for ministry. Upon praying about and visiting Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Cincinnati, Ohio, and the twin cities of Minnesota over the past year, and seeking to sense where they can be most useful for the Gospel among Nepali people, a few months ago, they sold their home in Sioux Falls, and moved near Minneapolis, Minnesota. They live among a population of Nepali people where there is no church worshipping in the Nepali language. They plan to be bi-vocational again as a couple, working jobs while planting a church from where the Gospel can shine. Their vision as a couple, both in their 50s, is to lift up a new —>



**Merry Christmas to you all! Besides ushering in life at Christmas through the coming of the Messiah, God is blessing our region with warmth—53F on December 6 & 7!**

Continued...

**Donations are always appreciated!**

*Gifts can be given through the mail, or through our website—  
[www.sfnewroots.com/donate/](http://www.sfnewroots.com/donate/)*

Fred Wilgenburg  
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Zerhun Dejene, Chaplain  
**Facebook.com/SFNewRoots**

generation of believers.

A few points to consider: 1) Be kind and pray for those you know, and if you feel your church could be a good fit, especially if they do not go to a church, invite them to your church. If not, tell them about a church which may be a good fit. 2) If they start to attend church, but they seem largely non-committed to God, encourage them to give their lives fully for true refreshment. *It's interesting how long Aaron and Puspia attended Catholic churches without making a life-changing decision for Jesus.* 3) I don't know how possible it is to be bi-vocational, but let's be inspired by this couple's commitment to

serve God wherever and however.

**Million and Merhawit**, husband and wife, came to the US in 2019. After two months of an adjustment-period required by the receiving agency, Million started working for Smithfield Foods in Sioux Falls. Merhawit began working after four months. Million works first shift and Merhawit works second shift, 5-6 days/week. Working different shifts eliminates the need for daycare for their three young children. However, they don't want to do this for too long as they see each other only in passing on weekdays. But, in part, this allowed them to buy a house after just 18 months in the US.

Here's more of their interesting life-story: Both Million and Merhawit are of the Kunama tribe in Eritrea, Africa. Kunama are a persecuted minority in a country that has a longstanding dictatorship. As Million describes, besides being persecuted, life feels futureless and hopeless for Kunama people. If you met Million, and his warm, vivacious personality, you would not imagine he was Kunama, or that the first time he met his dad was when he was 20 and in the refugee camp in Ethiopia. Regarding spirituality, both were inactive (*Merhawit's last name is Mohamed as her ancestors were Muslim.*) until they met Swedish Lutheran missionaries who shared the Gospel in Eritrea. At that time, Million, Merhawit, and others came to Jesus personally, and they haven't looked back. Currently, they are part of a healthy Kunama Lutheran Church, where Million is a leader and an assistant to the pastor, who also works at Smithfield.

Million is excited about the future for his family. They love the US, especially the opportunities for getting good education. Million is taking classes at a technical college to get his GED (*equivalency of a high school diploma*), with a desire to ultimately become a registered nurse. After he achieves that, he hopes Merhawit can pursue her vocational dreams.

While wanting to become a nurse, Million's main sense of calling is as an ambassador of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). He is good at befriending people of all backgrounds, and I have been blessed to witness him effectively sharing his faith with fellow employees. He would like to receive theological credentials, which is why we discuss him possibly taking Timothy Leadership Training with us. With that, he wants to be especially useful to his church, possibly even leading a church plant, which he would do bi-vocationally.

A prayer: "Father, bless us with the enthusiasm that Million and Merhawit have for the life and opportunities You give us, and move within us to make the most of Your blessings, for Your glory and the continual coming of Your kingdom. Thank-you for giving us so much! Through Jesus, Amen."

### What is New Roots Ministry?

**It's "a springboard for new Americans & their churches."**

**This is done through workplace chaplaincy (we provide chaplaincy at Smithfield Foods & we train & place bi-lingual chaplains on commercial farms), through Timothy Leadership Training, through hosting special educational events, through empowering new American pastors, leaders, and their churches, through offering unique Service Opportunities—serve in, or visit, stores owned by new Americans, then hear their stories, through helping people navigate the American system and achieve their goals, like education, through driver training for new Americans, and through Everyday-Ambassador Practicum.**



*Million joined me in leading worship.*





*Your gifts are helping Rebeca share Christ's love with her community in Paraguay.*

## YOU ARE MAKING A WORLDWIDE DIFFERENCE WITH YOUR GIFTS



People are engaged in  
God's Word



Christians are trained  
to share God's Word



Churches are planted  
around the world

## Share the Gospel with a World in Need

God is good! People in more than 50 nations are finding hope in trying times. In 2023, we reached more than 2.8 million people with God's Word. That's an average of 328 people every hour! Your generosity continues to help bring God's Word to millions of hungry souls, leading them to hope in Christ. You're joining God in the work He's doing around the world! Thank you.

With your gifts to provide Bibles and training, you are equipping Bible study leaders, church planters, and literacy teachers to share God's Word. By the power of the Holy Spirit, you are helping people to understand God's Word and come to faith. Thank you for making an eternal difference worldwide. You are a blessing!

## God's Word Transforms Lives

Pastor KG's life is anything but easy. Though raised in church, her family, like many in South Africa, encouraged her to mix her belief in God with the worship of ancestors and witchcraft. At age 19, she underwent an initiation to become a *sangoma*, or traditional healer. She learned to consult spirits and brew herbal medicines, believing she was helping her community.

But even as KG started down a dark path, the seed of faith in Jesus kept working in her heart. Through the 10 years she practiced witchcraft, other people never stopped praying for her deliverance from spiritual bondage.

KG later met a pastor who told her God wanted KG to serve only Him. Sensing the need to quit the traditional ways to follow Christ, she enrolled in seminary. "There, I was in the presence of people of God who were praying for my deliverance," she remembers. "More than I was studying, I was being delivered."

At age 30, KG's life as a sangoma stopped. She smiles, "God started to show

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*KG is using God's Word to pull people out of spiritual bondage in South Africa.*

# God's Word Transforms Lives *(continued)*

Himself, and I experienced His favor. I understood that you can't worship God and [other] gods. It doesn't work!"

Today, KG uses Bible League's Bible studies to minister to young people caught in bondage and addiction. "I'm impacting many lives. The study booklets are weapons that will save people," she explains. KG confidently trusts God to restore lives on a destructive path like hers once was. "Bible League restores hope for the brokenhearted," she says.

## PRAYER REQUESTS

- Pray for our partner Brother Perdomo in eastern Venezuela. He recently trained a group of 1,200 Christians from different churches to lead small-group Bible studies. Pray for a rich harvest from this training and ask God to raise leaders to share the Gospel throughout the country.
- We praise God for the 40 church planter trainees who recently attended the training in Mozambique. All participants were excited about learning and committed to applying the lessons. Ask God to bless them as they teach others to follow Jesus.

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Not too long ago, I had the opportunity to officiate a funeral for an older saint who had gone on to be with the Lord. The day of the funeral proved to be beautiful in the morning, but by early afternoon a winter front had moved in with all the wind, the snow, and all the cold that comes with it. Many of the family members were from California and were not used to such a drastic change in weather. I personally enjoy this time of year with all its' nostalgia. It's hard for me to imagine a Christmas season without beautiful snow, a fire in the fireplace, and a warm cup of cider in hand. It is church on Christmas Eve and time around a tree celebrating with family members. When someone mentions Christmas to me, this is what I think of.

But, for many it is a difficult reality altogether. During this season of the year, we know that getting around can be difficult as people are more likely to travel to family gatherings, and it's frustrating when those plans get canceled because of the weather. Work for farmers and construction workers becomes more difficult, if not impossible, when winter weather starts to move in making tasks difficult to accomplish. Even a small task like watering cattle is made difficult. One of the greatest difficulties we have during the winter months is most seen in what dies and goes gray in the elements— flowers die, trees turn gray and lifeless, animals in the wild always experience winterkill, and humans cannot survive without the blessing of warmth and shelter.

The men incarcerated at Mike Durfee State Prison, and countless men and women struggling on the outside after recent release, experience the cold and isolation that often comes with their station in life. It is their perpetual winter. I have heard many stories about the hopelessness that exists for the brothers inside. A loss of connectivity that comes with separation from family, friends, and community is one of the most difficult of the harsh realities the men face. Being accepted into a community, church or otherwise, is often a great anxiety the men face as they walk out of prison, and in many cases, their fears are substantiated as they take their first

steps. Dealing with guilt and shame over what they did in their lives before incarceration is also a burden, often too heavy to carry. Some might look at these things and say, “they made their bed, now they have to sleep in it.” I would agree to a point that there are consequences—spiritually, civilly, and relationally, but isn’t that a part of what Christ came to reconcile?

When Adam and Eve sinned, it ushered into the world a spiritual sense of perpetual winter, which is why there is so much darkness, despair, sin, and heartache. But I am reminded through God’s word that this does not have to be a reality in the life of a man in a very dark place. Every day I am reminded of the beautiful light shining into that darkness, illuminating the hearts of men. In John 1:1-5 we see the reason that we celebrate this Christmas season when it says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” Perpetual winter does not have to be perpetual at all. Simply put, the darkness we once lived in can be illumined by the grace and redemption that comes through Christ, our Lord. This is the message we bring to the men inside, and to the men and women outside struggling to live it out.

In the cold bite of the winter weather setting in on the people gathered around the gravesite that day, it was a tremendous blessing to share the truth—though everything is gray and dead now, one of the things we know for certain is that Spring is coming, and everything will once again blossom with life. The promise of Spring is certain, and we know that Winter will break. In the same way, Christ is making everything new through a relationship with Him and the grace He bestows.

Thank you all for being a living part of this ministry and its past, as well as in all the future opportunities we have on the horizon. God bless you and yours during this Christmas season, and I would invite you to please keep the men and women behind bars in your prayers during this time.

God bless and Merry Christmas from Living Stone Prison Church,

Pastor Dan Ebbens



Greetings friends,

This Christmas season I have found myself dwelling on the concept of replacement. Things are being replaced around and by us consistently with every passing day. Recently, I changed the light bulb in my mom's basement pantry. She had an older low wattage bulb which I exchanged for a new LED bulb of much greater illumination. The next time my mother went in the room to grab some canned items from the shelves, she was amazed at how much better she could see all the delicious food that was stored there after flipping the switch! She also mentioned that there were old cobwebs that suddenly appeared, which she made quick work of removing.

Shedding light on something can do that, reveal wonderful things with clarity. But then the dingy, dirty things that were formerly hidden come to light.

It was in the 4th century when December 25 first appeared on the Roman calendar as the date in which Christians celebrated Jesus' birth. Some Christians today look at December 25 with concern instead of joy. The origins of our Christmas day had to do with Constantine, the 1st Roman emperor who became a Christian. During his reign the 25th day of the 12th month was set to honor Jesus' birth which replaced pagan (beliefs in many deities) holidays in which there was feasting and gifting. I've heard the question posed by multiple Christians over the years, should we celebrate something holy on a day that was formerly dedicated to things far apart from Jesus? And so, I ponder again this Christmas season, "Is it permissible to celebrate Jesus' birth on December 25?"

That question is why the subject of replacement is on my mind. A good secondary question we could ask is, "Has God in the past replaced things that were formerly evil with something that is good and pleasing to Him?" According to Holy Lands expert Ray Vander Laan, the answer is, "yes". He describes the tabernacle that God had Moses and the Israelites build in the wilderness as being the exact dimensions and lay out as the structures that the Egyptians had used for their pagan worship during the time of Israel's slavery. According to Ray, God commanded them to build something familiar to them, but removed the



pagan elements and instilled worship directed towards Himself. More powerful than that is the way we've seen Him take individuals who were formerly separated from God, living for themselves and the world, come to a place of sweet surrender to the one born in a manger. After that moment, reality of the Holy Spirit living in them means that God replaced the evil nature of their former self in favor of the presence of the Holy Spirit, making them a temple for Himself.

Galatians 4:4-5 says this; But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. (and daughters) This great truth is what I strive to empower people to celebrate on December 25. Perhaps a better question than "Should Christians celebrate Christmas?" is "How should we celebrate Christmas?" Jesus was sent into the world as Light into darkness. (John 1:5) Because of His Light, we can clearly see the goodness of God, not on shelves in a pantry, but on display everywhere in the world around us! Because of His Light, we see the cobwebs of sin in our lives. We see things we want to clean up to better reflect the love of God's Son, who was sent to the world to redeem us. In light of that, I believe December 25 is as good a date as any to celebrate the gift of the Messiah despite what was formerly practiced on that date. My hope for Freedom's Gate Church is that we may not be distracted by the many things Christmas has become, but that we focus on the birth of Jesus, the gift to the world that replaced hopelessness with hope, that replaced depression with joy, that replaced strife between God and mankind with peace.

From all of us at Freedom's Gate Church, to all of you, have a Merry Christmas!

Pastor Jason and Ruth Wiersma