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The magazine of  **INTERSERVE**
International

Third Quarter 2009

Recapturing the passion: Radical mission in a turbulent world

Got to go:

Simon Guillebaud
on the urgency of
mission

Risky living:

Mission in the
crosshairs

Tattered mission:

God's grace in the
midst of suffering

"Lives and communities transformed through encounter with Jesus Christ"



Recapturing the passion

My wife and I recently travelled around Pakistan visiting people working there and and getting a sense of whether God is calling us there in the future. One of the many highlights of the trip was meeting a Christian from a Muslim background whose life story reads like the book of Acts: a tale of suffering, miracles, grace, and faithful witness in the face of persecution. We returned from that wonderful country positively bouncing with enthusiasm to serve a God who does such things.

Last Sunday I was chatting to a man at our church in England about our trip and about our plans to work in Pakistan. His response was fascinating: he rolled his eyes, patted me on the shoulder, and said "Well, good luck!". His tone of voice made it clear that he thought we were either being stupid, foolhardy, hopelessly optimistic, or perhaps all three. You could almost hear my ballooning enthusiasm popping and deflating slowly in the corner.

From a human point of view his response is completely understandable: after all, why would anyone move to a country which is currently suffering from armed conflict, terrorism, and the largest refugee crisis in fifteen years? Why would any sane individual choose to serve overseas in the full knowledge that mission workers are occasionally murdered? Furthermore, the church in the "global south" is rapidly overtaking the church in the west. Much more sensible to let them do it.

One of my favourite verses in the Bible is Acts 8: 4. Saul was persecuting the church, so how did they respond? "Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went". The passion of the early Christians was so all-consuming that no amount of persecution could distract them from their goal. This is the same passion that can be seen in people who go to the most war-torn countries in the world to bring healing and wholeness (pages 4-5), who watch as their friends are gunned down on the street (pages 10-11), people for whom kidnappings, bombings, and murders are omnipresent realities (pages 12-13). Furthermore, the great commission is completely unequivocal: it doesn't contain get-out clauses saying "...unless it's a bit hard, in which case feel free to give it a miss", or "...unless more energetic Christians from south America and Nigeria do it instead, in which case, sit back, make a cup of tea, and relax".

No, I don't think so. There are plenty of earthly reasons for not engaging in mission, but one compelling Biblical reason for giving everything we have to this cause: because Jesus commands it. "Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things". Time to get the fire back into our churches and out into the world.

Matt Vaughan

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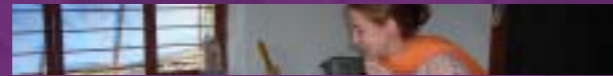
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Thanks to all those who contributed to the making of this issue.

Photos do not necessarily relate to articles for sensitivity reasons.

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Opinions expressed in Go are those of the author, and do not necessarily represent the views of Interserve.

Got to Go (1)

Amy Carmichael, a giant of the faith who gave her life in service of the poor in 19th century India, wrote the following from her precious adoptive homeland:

"The drums thumped all night, and the darkness shuddered around me like a living, feeling thing. I could not go to sleep, so I lay awake and looked; and I saw, and it seemed like this:

That I stood on a grassy sward, and at my feet a precipice broke sheer down into infinite space. I looked, but saw no bottom; only cloud shapes and unfathomable depths. Back I drew, dizzy at the depth.

Then I saw forms of people moving along the grass. They were making for the edge. There was a woman with a baby in her arms and another little child holding on to her dress. She was on the very edge. Then I saw that she was blind. She lifted her foot for the next step – it trod air. She was over, and the children went over with her. Oh, the cry as they went over!

Then I saw more streams of people flowing from all quarters. All were blind; all made straight for the precipice edge. There were shrieks as they suddenly knew themselves falling, and a tossing up of helpless arms, catching, clutching at empty air. But some went over quietly and fell without a sound.

Then I saw that at the edge there were sentries set at intervals. But the intervals were far too great; there were wide, unguarded gaps between. And over these gaps people fell in their blindness, quite unwarned; and the green grass seemed blood red to me, and the gulf yawned like the mouth of Hell.

Then I saw, like the pictures of peace, a group

of people under some trees, with their backs turned towards the gulf. They were making daisy chains. Sometimes, when a piercing shriek cut the quiet air and reached them, it disturbed them. And if one of their number started up and wanted to go and do something to help, then all the others would pull that one down. "Why should you get so excited about it? You must wait for a definite 'call' to go. You haven't finished your daisy chains".

There was another group. It was made up of people whose great desire was to get some sentries out; but they found that very few wanted to go, and sometimes there were no sentries for miles and miles at the edge. Once a girl stood alone in her place, waving the people back; but her mother called and reminded her that her furlough was due; she must not break the 'rules'. And, being tired and needing a change, she had to go and rest awhile; but no one was sent to guard her gap; and over and over the people fell, like a waterfall of souls.

Then through the hymn came another sound like the pain of a million broken hearts wrung out in one full drop, one sob. Then thundered a voice, the voice of the Lord. And he thundered, "What have you done? The voice of thy brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground."

What does it all matter, after all? It has gone on for years, it will go on for years. Why make such a fuss about it?

God forgive us! God arouse us! Shame us out of our callousness! Shame us out of our sin!



Got to Go (2)

Simon Guillebaud has been working in Burundi for many years and is a renowned speaker on mission.

Many Christians nowadays find the previous story crude and offensive. The imagery is too vivid and coarse for us because our sensitivities have been tempered by political correctness and compromise. But I believe the truth of Carmichael's words from the depth of my being. The coarse, crude, offensive demonstration of costly love on the cross was so much more than just a demonstration – it was a terrifying necessity, the ultimate intervention of a compassionate God. Such a realisation will propel us into the mission field, far or near, because there's so much at stake.

Jesus died for all. The relevance is for all. The invitation is for all. The urgency is for all. The call is not for the few. All of us are called to go! Maybe our question is where, and maybe the answer is unclear, but we can be sure that God knows and will reveal his answers to those who seek his face in humble dependence.

Going to Our Nation

We simply have to go, and go in Jesus' name. He commissioned his disciples in Matthew 28:18-20, "Go therefore... and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of age" (New King James Version). But as the quip goes, there's no 'lo' without the 'go'. The promise that he'll accompany us is conditional on our going somewhere that merits his accompaniment. Before his ascension Jesus declared prophetically, "You will receive power (Greek 'dunamis' – from which we get 'dynamite') when the Holy Spirit comes, and you will be my witnesses (Greek 'martures' – from which we get 'martyr') in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." So we're told in this verse that we'll be blessed with power from God through his Holy Spirit. But we're blessed in order to be a blessing to other people, not to be self-absorbed, self-preoccupied, or self-centred.

The Church is the one organisation that exists for

those outside of itself. We can't allow ourselves the luxury of playing safe behind closed doors in cosseted pious huddles, immersing ourselves in rapturous worship, assessing the expository skills of the pastor, or getting diverted by inconsequential and peripheral issues. The Church isn't a building but a living, growing, dynamic, organic movement of Jesus people. And Jesus calls us to go and be his healing hands and feet in a sick and dark world.

That's what radical going will mean to most of us. He calls us to go across the street to a lonely neighbour, to go across the office floor to an exhausted colleague, to go across the lecture hall to a disillusioned fellow-student, to go into the derelict housing estate to the struggling refugee – to bring meaning and fulfillment and eternal life to those who are perishing.

Radical living will involve going anywhere, be it near or far, convenient or inconvenient, in comfortable or inhospitable climes. For some, this will mean 'going' within our own 'Jerusalem', for others it will mean further afield to different 'Judeas' and 'Samarias', and for still others, it will be to the ends of the earth. If that last one is you, don't let anyone stop you. Come out and join in the worldwide harvest. Reject the 'sensible' advice and 'common sense dictates' of well-intentioned loved-ones, because in all probability they simply aren't listening to the Voice who's calling you onwards and upwards. The main thing is that we don't stay, hoarding the blessing to ourselves, and preventing others around us from sharing in its immeasurable benefits.

Going to the Nations

When I left the UK aged twenty five, I didn't know for how long it would be. I was going to a dangerous land, so maybe I would die as one of the many casualties of the protracted war. Or maybe I would live to enjoy my grandchildren. At least I expected to see my homeland again.

Such wasn't the case for the regularly newly-appointed Archbishops of Sierra Leone in the nineteenth century. When they boarded the ship at Southampton and said goodbye to their loved ones they knew they would never see them again. They had a life expectancy of just eighteen months. Diseases accounted for most people's lives within a few months of arrival. So these bold and sacrificial missionaries would pack all their belongings in their coffins, knowing the latter would bring their bodies back soon enough.

We may not even live to see the fruit of our endeavours, but that's fine – we're not called to success, but to obedience. Mother Teresa was once asked, "How do you measure the success of your work?" She looked puzzled for a moment and then replied, "I don't remember that the Lord ever spoke of success. He spoke only of faithfulness in love. This is the only success that really counts." Indeed God may call us to go to places where 'success' won't be immediately forthcoming. Some people groups are very hard to reach for Christ.

The task may seem overwhelming. So how shall we go about it? We could identify and invest in singles or couples in our churches who are radically surrendered to God and give them a ten or twenty year commitment as we work towards the goal of their going with the light of Christ into dark satanic strongholds. We could get behind gifted and zealous local believers and empower them through our finances to reach out more effectively than what can be achieved through the lengthy process of sending one of our own cross-culturally. All of these cost money, so if we're desperate for the kingdom rule of Christ over the nations, it will require a mass mobilisation of the people of God to go themselves or empower others to go through their giving.

All of us watched in horror as the twin towers of the World Trade Centre crumbled to pieces, killing many innocent people. Yet every day the equivalent of fourteen towers collapse as fifty thousand people die among the unreached of our world without ever having heard of Jesus; and Jesus watches them with the same horror that we felt on September 11th 2001. He pleads with us to wake up from our own slumber and wake others up so that we address these issues with urgency instead of casual indifference. If we're disinterested in world missions, it can mean one of only two things: either we're plain ignorant, or we're plain disobedient. God cares so much about the non-Christian world that we can't afford to ignore it.

We have the keys of the Kingdom. Let's use them! It's time to go."

Simon Guillebaud is the founder of Great Lakes Outreach (www.greatlakesoutreach.org) and the author of "For What it's Worth", a highly-recommended book on radical discipleship from which this article is taken. To buy a copy, please visit the Great Lakes Outreach website.



Dreams and Integrity

The challenge of keeping integrity in mission, and the miracles that result. By Colin, an Australian Partner in Central Asia

When I am asked, 'What is it like living in Central Asia?', I'm sometimes lost for words. It's almost as if I'm expected to give a story about aliens from another planet. The truth is: people are people wherever you go. From another planet? No. Live in a different place? Yes. Speak another language? Yes. Have different culture and values? Yes, and No.

To live in another culture successfully doesn't mean losing our own. In fact, it's when we retain who we are and let another culture be as it is, allowing God to bridge the gaps, that we learn to live as God's people wherever we are.

Integrity is a fundamental part of being a child of God. Integrity is not always a matter of knowing the right answer or getting it right all the time. It is how we respond in a godly way to whatever we find ourselves doing, thinking or saying – sin, warts and all.

I trained a group of students wanting to start a micro processor business. Timbek (not his real name), like all the others in the group, saw the possibility of making a business to provide work and income for local people. They all studied and worked hard at passing. Towards the end of the course it became obvious that Timbek, who knew what we were trying to do, had his own motives of personal profit and gain. He was with us all the way, did the same things, and appeared to be just like us until the end came and he didn't pass. It was disappointing and stressed us all, but it was for the best that he didn't pass. Integrity was maintained.

Integrity is an issue in modelling. Our focus is to help people be more Christlike, not more 'Western-like' or 'denomination-like'. Our values are: 'We do not change culture, we facilitate culture change as God's word infects it.' We're not trying to clone Lutherans, Baptists, or anything else! When people in Corinth were divided and saying, 'I follow

Paul, I follow Apollos', Paul said, 'Who is Paul, who is Apollos?'. I usually add, 'Follow Jesus, read the Bible'. The challenge is to help locals see that godly men like Calvin and Luther can give us advice, but they are no substitute for knowing Jesus and reading the Bible. I tell locals that I am a Christian who is happy being in a Christian Protestant denomination. Being a Christian always comes first.

At times it is so much easier to stay within our own comfort zones, whether within Australia or overseas. We now see God bringing people to us from different cultures and countries, when we don't or can't go to them. This often results in a major "clash of cultures". If our identity is not rooted in Jesus alone we tend to find our identity in other ways – ways that are more "convenient" to us and to others. This creates confusion when we meet people from other cultures: do they see us modelling Christlike values or Western cultural values? We are called to be God's people irrespective of the expectations of our native culture. Living overseas has brought this challenge into our lives. It has challenged us to our very core, where we have learnt that everything begins with our 'me-to-God' personal and spiritual life with him. So the challenge for us living in another culture and place is: 'Are we willing to live as God's children in thought, word and actions?' Borders don't affect this or make one place more important than the other. Living as Christians wherever we are, 24/7, without regard to importance of location, worldly achievement, status or person, leads to our witness, our opportunities and a godly life.

I rang a local person one day to thank him for the wonderful help he was to us. His response left me speechless. He said, 'Thank you'. I asked for what, and he said, 'You led me to the Lord Jesus Christ'. Truthfully, I had no idea I had done that! Our lives are formed by our vision: 'we love, honour and serve everyone whom God brings into our lives'. I will add, 'no matter how difficult it may be!'



Recently, our neighbour died. Traditions and expectation surrounding death undergird this culture in a very oppressive way. Everyone does what is expected so that no one else thinks badly of them, and so that they can feel accepted. Families will go into a lifelong debt just to provide for a lavish funeral where all the relatives and family simply say, 'Good Job'. After this, they spend the rest of their lives paying off an unmanageable debt. Then there's the killing of a sheep, cow or horse, sitting, eating, praying to Allah every week so that the relative is remembered for up to 50 days, and the expectation that we as foreigners will attend and 'pay respect' to tradition. The neighbour's brother doesn't respond to me now as I didn't attend one of the meetings. It's very restrictive and binding. If you are thinking how terrible this sounds then stop a minute and realise that it is exactly how our culture is going in the west; the only difference is that we simply have different expectations driven by our own culture – the right possessions, the right car, holidays, a good job, the right partner, good kids, respect from the community, and so on. We've all lost our way.

A few days after our neighbour died my wife had a dream. In this dream the dead neighbour was pleading with her to tell his family and neighbours about Jesus, so that they wouldn't end up in the same place he did. It was so real for her that it woke her. It was exactly like the story of the rich man and Lazarus! Is this only for the neighbours? I don't think so. It is also for us, as we need to realise what we are doing and where we are going in our lives. If we know the Lord, and his spirit lives in us, then we have eternal life. I always think about the scripture, "Lord didn't we do this or that for you?", and he answers "Go away from me you evil doers, I never KNEW you." It is our work to offer the opportunity for people to get to KNOW Jesus; our other works follows on from this.

As we live every minute of every day as Christians in close relationship to God and his word, we not only find peace in ourselves, but we also find people and work that God puts in our way. This is deeply fulfilling, even when it seems impossible. God be with you.

Prayer point: Please pray for all our Partners as they maintain their Christian integrity in the face of corruption and suffering. Pray that their integrity would shine in the middle of the darkness.



From our correspondents

News and views from around the Interserve world

Orissa persecution backfires Partners on how the BJP lost the Indian election

"The month-long Indian national election is finally over and the relatively peaceful process and the result seem almost miraculous! The Christian community in the country is really encouraged by the rejection of the right-wing Hindu BJP party. The Prime Minister is highly respected as an Economist and a man of integrity and it has led to only the second ever re-election of an incumbent party. This brings an encouraging measure of stability to the country. Pray for a the new government to work for justice and prosperity for all sections of Indian society.

"Pray that the thousands of Christians in refugee camps in Orissa will be helped and protected and able to return to their villages to re-build their lives. It is encouraging that the ruling party in the area has broken its links with the BJP and become independent. It seems that last year's sad events of persecution against Christians have had an impact on the election, so we are praying that there will now be positive action."



Pakistan in turmoil Bomb attacks and war in Swat – what next?



"Pakistan continues to suffer from instability and war as the conflict between the government and the Taliban escalated in recent months. After the government launched an offensive against the Taliban in the Swat Valley, forcing thousands of civilians to flee their homes for inadequate refugee camps, the Taliban retaliated with a number of bomb attacks in Peshawar and Lahore which killed scores of civilians. A Taliban spokesman also threatened further attacks in other cities across Pakistan.

"At least 2 million civilians were forced to flee the Swat Valley as the army offensive continued, and most of these are now living in refugee camps. The UN warned that the situation could develop into the largest refugee crisis since Rwanda in 1994, with many people living in crowded camps and houses across the region.

"Crucially, the offensive has received strong support from the Pakistani people who are believed to be sick of the violence and extremism of the Taliban. Please pray for peace and stability to return to Pakistan and that Interserve's work in the country would continue unhindered."

Mongolian elections From Graham Aylett, an England and Wales Partner in Mongolia

"The Mongolian Presidential election took place on 24th May 2009. The previous week there was a live broadcast on national television with the two candidates responding to questions sent in by the public. It gave an interesting insight into the issues Mongolians are most concerned about, including:

- * the economic situation; unemployment and job creation; fair prices for raw materials like cashmere; food security.
- * more development for provincial centres far from the capital.
- * reform of the justice and legal system.
- * reform of the whole electoral system, especially after the rioting last year on July 1st, that black stain on Mongolia's history.
- * re-negotiation of agreements with international mining companies – and who will benefit from Mongolia's vast resources?
- * the whole system of government and the major problem of corruption;
- * the needs of herding families, and laws surrounding ownership of land; *the preservation of Mongolian traditions and culture.

In the event, the elections took place peacefully and without issue.

Although many countryside areas backed the former President, Enkhbayar (Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party candidate), it was the Democratic Alliance candidate, Elbegdorj, who was elected. He had campaigned for "Change". Please pray that he will work for the good of all Mongolia, and address the major need for reform."



What's the state of Nepal? By Ron, a Partner in Nepal



"The country has plunged into a fresh political turmoil as the Unified CPN-Maoist quit the coalition government on 5 May when Prime Minister Prachanda resigned after less than nine months in power.

"The present crisis began with the Maoist decision to sack the army chief despite opposition from other political parties that were part of the Maoist-led government. The Maoists have been giving the excuse of "civilian supremacy" over the military in firing the army chief. All the political parties would have gone along with the Maoist move if that concept really were at stake. The Maoists, critics felt, were planning to bring the Nepali Army under their firm grip. Their concern was reinforced by the release on national television of a video of Prachanda

speaking to Maoist soldiers in an undisclosed forest location. The tape revealed that they were intent on embezzling state resources to 'fund' a proletarian revolution, Maoizing the Nepali Army and other state institutions, and hoodwinking the the international community.

"The present crisis in the formation of the government has undoubtedly hampered the constitution-making process, which is of paramount importance if the country is to find a way out of its current instability. Every day I'm encouraged by the thought that the Lord will not abandon the works he has started in this country. He reminds me in Psalm 138:8 – 'The Lord will fulfil his purpose for me; your love, O Lord endures forever – do not abandon the works of your hands'."

Tattered mission

Partners from Interserve USA reflect on the cost of mission and on the extravagant grace of Jesus.

When I was a fourth grader, I looked forward to Flag Duty at my local school. With patriotism's seeds taking root, I found great honor in being selected as one who, morning and late afternoon, attended to Old Glory flying high over our small town in rural Wisconsin. I learned all the ways to care for our national flag. One of the conditions under which the flag was not to be flown, but rather, decommissioned and disposed of properly, was if the flag become "tattered".

"Tattered" may also describe a rope of three strands which has come unraveled and of which one strand is usually the strong one, keeping the whole rope from deteriorating. After all, life with Christ has been likened to "a threefold cord [which] is not quickly broken". My wife and I know that our lives intertwined with Christ have been a tri-cord cable, the kind of suspension bridge proportions. That truth resonated boldly last fall.

It was then that our good friend and housemate was murdered in broad daylight on a dirt road near our home. Gayle's death, and the community's response to the violent act, brought a severe change to our lives. We spent the following weeks and months grieving. We had to continue seeking our Father in this situation. We do not know why He decided to take Gayle from us, but our hearts drew comfort knowing she was now living in the presence of our LORD and Savior.

For the following month and half the two of us walked through the valley of death. Because of our friendship with Gayle we were very much involved in her funeral preparations and meeting with her family, besides being extra-vigilant in assessing our daily routine. Two prominent leaders in the Christian community abruptly passed away due to natural causes. And, unrelated to Gayle's terrible fate, one of our household staff passed away on the night of her murder. A week after Gayle's funeral, we found out I was pregnant.

This sweet elation was quickly dashed by the news that our baby was not developing correctly. Eight weeks later, in the course of our agonizing emotions, our baby miscarried.

Grace. Yahweh's Grace. Christ. He is the One who walked alongside us through this valley of death – even carried us through it all. Our hearts cry out to know more and more of Him and His love for us. Rather than finding out more about how God can bless us, we want to treasure Him alone and above all else.

Through it all, we do see Yahweh's hand in things. Even in Gayle's death, we see how He was preparing her to be in His presence. Gayle had recurring dreams in which a large tree was cut down and countless new shoots grew up in its place. At first, Gayle grew fearful in thinking about this dream. What if she were that tree? What if she were to be literally cut down? As the months went on she began to think about this dream with peace – peace coming from knowing our LORD was in control, even if terrifying nightmares became realized. Gayle told us that if that was what He meant to do with her life, so be it. She began to spend more and more time in prayer and worship with our Father.

Two weeks prior to her death, our community said goodbye to another who had dedicated most of his long life to our Father's work in this country. After his funeral at the British Cemetery Gayle commented that if she were to die, she was content to be laid to rest here as well. Gayle had made plans to join friends on a trip to Mongolia to participate in a Christian conference. At the last minute her plans changed; Gayle's permission to go was rescinded. I remember asking her about this change and if she was disappointed. She responded, "Ach, yeah, I would love to go. But, God is good. There is a reason He wants me to stay here". Just four days after this group left,

Gayle was shot dead.

Tattered. Even so, Christ alone.

Was Gayle the tree in her dream? We don't know for certain. Nevertheless we see the dream as the Lord preparing her heart to be in His presence. We pray that through her death our Father will produce the fruit, as promised in her dream, and cause many new shoots to grow in the fertile ground from which that large tree was cut!

Two fresh graves lay next to each other in the British Cemetery. One marks the grave of a faithful servant who forsook much to serve his Christ. The other represents the life of a vibrant woman of God who loved others and brought unwavering energy to all that she did. One grave reminds us of a life of decades carrying a cross; the other, a life prematurely – according to our human understanding – ended.

There is no grave in that cemetery to mark the death of a baby not even born from the womb.

O grave, where is thy sting? Death, where is thy victory? Our Savior is Victor over the grave, and through Him, we have an inheritance that has been sealed by His Holy Spirit, and a promise of eternal life with Him in all His glory!

In coming to these conclusions, we do not seek nor desire that our Father would restore to us our previous life. Gayle will not return to this old earth. Nor will our unborn baby. We might never receive a "miracle" baby for which we have been praying during these past years of infertility. But He has told us not to look for the miracles He can perform, nor the blessings He can bestow upon us, but, rather, to seek Himself alone, to place Him first in our hearts and lives.

We revel in how our Lord does not "decommission" us when we become tattered. Rather, He gives strength and refuge during events and emotions full of life's difficulties, surrounds us with His lavish love, fills our hearts and minds with the peace that passes understanding, attends us as we walk through the trial prepared for us, promises to be an ever-present help in time of need, and pours out His grace upon us. We serve an eternal God, unchanging, mysterious and longing to be known by His own.



Gayle Williams, shortly before she was killed

Risky living

The challenges and joys of mission to the hard places.
By James and Mary, Canadian Partners in Central Asia.

“We are targets. We ARE targets.”

That phrase kept repeating itself in my mind after a terrorist attack that interrupted our lives for many months. The period of post traumatic stress that followed was an enriching time of processing our theology of suffering and risk.

My husband and I serve in a creative-access country where traditional mission work is not acceptable. We work with an international non-governmental organization in an English language teaching project. We minister wholistically through our lives and project work as we interact with the local population in class, in the market, and in our daily lives.

There are various reasons why our country is not an easy place. However, the harshness of our location does not take away from the effectiveness of witness. Rather, it seems to enhance it, in God's mysterious and unexplainable way of working.

Our location is tough emotionally because of the security issues and the real physical danger we face. Explosions, fighting, kidnappings, murders, and robberies are part of life. We have security guards, security training, and security updates. Obviously safety is not the main motivating factor in our lives. We live and work among people whom God loves and who are lost and needy.

They also have security to worry about, and where do they go when they want to find safety and a refuge?

Secondly, we are in a spiritually hard place. We are in enemy territory. The majority religion has a strong hold on people, and there is little response to the good news. If there is some positive response, the enemy of our souls attacks. There can be threats to the Christian worker, with implications for his or her project and company. There can be threats against the local person who has made a profession. A local brother's decision to change his faith might be with mixed motives of wanting help to leave the country or to have a better life. It can seem that all our work has no fruit, and discouragement and darkness prevail.

Living here is physically hard. It is a harsh environment. Our country is beautiful with breath-taking views of snowy mountains and vast barren deserts, yet the challenges of travelling and living in a developing country that lacks the facilities and infrastructure for convenient living are not in place. We would appreciate reliable electricity, clean drinking water, paved roads, responsible government, and dependable transportation. Many little things can go wrong in our daily lives and lots of energy is used in the effort it takes to live here.

It is also socially challenging because of the transience of colleagues with whom we serve and share fellowship. Many do not stay for long. When their aid or development projects are done, they leave. It can be wearing to keep saying hello and goodbye so often. Relationships and friendships can become superficial, and deep fellowship and the resulting edification of each other is hard to find.

All of these added together constitute for a life of unrelenting bombardment of feeling overwhelmed. Why stay in this place?



Risky living

Yet for some reason there are many workers here who find it difficult to leave, especially if they have been here longer. Why? I think one reason is precisely because it is a hard place! It is a challenge to be here, and yet seeing how God undertakes and sustains and pours out His grace is an incredible joy. There is encouragement from the visible evidence of how our efforts in aid and in developing the country and people, helping bring them some hope in a bleak place. Things can improve, even if it is on a small scale.

Though there are seemingly unending challenges in a hard place, there are also many open doors. We serve to meet needs in a wholistic manner – physically, emotionally, spiritually and socially. At one Easter party we had for our English students, we were discussing how Easter is celebrated and why. In response to some students' question, one of the students mentioned the Christian website in their language where they could find more information!

People are curious about foreigners and will ask questions. So we often pray for divine appointments, and God provides them. Peoples' needs give us opportunities to listen to them and pray with them. We can share our message discreetly, in small steps, learning to be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves. There are many times and places we can share about what God has done for us. Our testimony of “God moments” in our daily life (rather than comparing and contrasting our religious systems, like fasting or worship or sacred books) is easy to talk about with our local friends and neighbours. In our conversations we can give examples of how God has provided answers to prayer, how we are not afraid to live here, and how we keep learning about the local language and culture. These are simple things they can relate to in their life as well.

So we *are* targets but not like we think. We are noticed like salt and light. An example is our watchman asking us one day if in our culture husbands don't beat their wives. Wife-beating is not uncommon in our host culture. Our character and lifestyle send a message.

It is a privilege to be unworthy servants in a hard place. We are nothing more than weak vessels with a message we are ready to share when the opportunity arises.”

Living here is physically hard. It is a harsh environment.

Suffering and redemption

Bethany, an Interserve USA Partner, on working with children with HIV in India

Purnata Bhavan, a project of Oasis India, is a home for women and children affected by HIV and AIDS. The home is an amazing place where miracles happen. It is also a place where individuals walk through suffering. Two little lives have recently taught me that suffering and redemption are themes that often flow together.

Vijay is an 8 year old boy who lives with HIV. He is a thin little guy with a big sense of humor. The last few months, his life has been in a very precarious position. All his medical tests came back with ominous results. Cries of pain echoed from his room and it seemed like the infections were going to win. Communicating the reality of his situation with the others at the home was awful. Tears streaked down many cheeks, but each person responded with a common desire: "I want to show him love." Soon Vijay had special meals, a wall full of pictures, a hand held video game, a loaned teddy, and visitors to sit and pray. Each one reached out to Vijay in his suffering. Slowly Vijay began to improve, and one day the pain just seemed to disappear. The women, children, and staff of Purnata

Bhavan were in awe. They saw how God reached down in Vijay's suffering and healed him. One girl recently whispered to me, "Look! Vijay is riding his bike again, God made him better." The tests still come back with little reason to hope, but all of us have been taught through Vijay's life that God can redeem and restore life.

A year ago we said goodbye to a very special girl named Priti. When she came to us she was on the verge of dying, but miraculously for 8 months life filled her body and she enjoyed learning to write, to dance, and to laugh. Her voice brought joy to all of us and at Christmas she was the star of our pageant. After Christmas her body began to deteriorate and the last months of her life were spent fighting for survival. One day she had to be rushed into intensive care. For the next two days we came around Priti singing to her, praying with her, and telling her about the amazing house that God had ready for her. Two days later she passed away. Being involved in her life reminded all of us at Purnata Bhavan of our purpose: to give HIV sufferers the opportunity to find life and then to move on to what God has for them, whether it

is life in heaven or life here on earth. Priti's smile blessed us all, we miss her; but we are so thankful that she is no longer in pain and is in the best hands she could ever be in.

Walking through suffering with Vijay and Priti has been hard and painful. Some days it all just didn't seem to make sense, and I asked God lots of questions. These two little lives brought to me some of the answers. God allows suffering; he uses it, and then redeems it. Vijay and Priti are testimonies to the way God's redemptive love prevails even in the darkest of pains.



Not so obvious:

In medicine we have a saying: 'Common things occur commonly'

In missiology we might say: 'The big things God does are big!'

Yes, there is no disguising some of the remarkable things that the God of mission is doing in His world. Some of the 'big things' that obviously stand out include:

- The growth of the church in all nations. This was underlined on the last Sunday of May when believers from 220 nations celebrated the Global day of Prayer!
- The extraordinary re-birth and multiplication of the church in Muslim majority nations, frequently accompanied by remarkable signs and wonders.
- The shift of Christianity to the nations of the global south. The vitality, joy, zeal of many of these worshippers is living proof of the apostolic testimony, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is God's power for the salvation of everyone who believes." (Romans 1:16)
- The internationalisation of cross-cultural mission, a beautiful response by the worldwide church to her missional God.

Yet there are other 'big things' happening in our world that are more puzzling, more difficult to understand. They are not obvious.

One of the big things that affects us all is the global economic crisis. Plenty will no doubt continue to be written about the causes and effects of the 'mettdown'. But how do we interpret it missiologically.

It is easy to blame sin-flawed systems and sin-filled sinners. Yet such explanations do not fully satisfy. We believe that history is His story. Rather than blaming the systems and powerful, we, the church of God, are called to discern God's word. It may be one of correction, of discipline or of challenge to our confidence in God who provides.

The economic crisis obliges us in cross-cultural mission to review the way in which we engage in mission. Could it be that God is pressuring us to re-align with Him in some ways? Maybe some of our models of mission need reshaping. Some big things God does are clear. This one is more challenging to understand. Let's pray together for the humility to bend before the Lord of mission and sensitivity to respond to the sovereign Spirit of Mission.



Interserve is an international evangelical mission with over 800 Partners in a wide range of ministries in more than 30 countries in Asia and the Arab World and among those of other faiths in Western countries. It is voluntarily supported and staffed by Christians from Asia and the West. Partners are normally seconded to churches or other bodies which supervise their work, while Partners maintain fellowship and pastoral links with Interserve.

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ISSN 0258-4726

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urgent job opportunities

> **Orchestra Teacher, Arab World**

Orchestra members and teachers are required for a prestigious national orchestra in the Middle East. This is an urgent and strategic placement providing a unique opportunity to work alongside people of other faiths. The role provides a salary and an allowance for return travel to the location. Applicants must have at least a Bachelor's degree in a specific instrument and must be willing to train locals.

> **Computer Teachers, Arab World**

Computer and English teachers are required to teach at a very remote and isolated area of the Arab World. These are unique and pioneering opportunities to provide education to people who would otherwise not receive it, and require passionate and committed applicants with a vision to transform lives for the better. A knowledge of Arabic would be useful but is not essential.

> **Care Worker, Central Asia**

A Care Worker is required to work at an outreach project working with children with cerebral palsy. This involves working alongside professional carers, helping with daily therapeutic exercises, running a teenagers' club, and organising visits to orphanages to spend time with underprivileged children. There is also the flexibility to be involved with other outreach opportunities.

> **School Principal, West Asia**

A Principal / Headteacher is required for a secondary school which serves children of many different countries, catering for both the US and UK education systems. This strategic opportunity would enable Christian workers to devote themselves full-time to their work rather than having to educate their children, thereby increasing their impact.

> **Mechanical Engineer, India**

An engineer with specialisation in mechanical design is required to help provide guidance in developing conceptual designs and to do structural and kinematic calculations. Experience in the manufacturing sector would be an asset. This position (and several other similar ones) are urgent and are also salaried posts.

> **Project Manager, Central Asia**

A Project Manager is required to run an agronomy / community development project in Central Asia. The project focuses on irrigation management, infrastructure management, and agronomic improvements. Would suit a family or individual with a keen desire to help local people and to see a church planting movement started in this remote area of Central Asia.

> **English Teachers, Pakistan**

How about serving God by teaching English in the capital of Pakistan? Join an international team teaching English to displaced Afghans and building life-changing relationships with enthusiastic students!

> **Medical Staff, Pakistan**

Come to the rural heart of Pakistan's North West Frontier Province and treat a wide variety of patients, perform urgent operations and show Jesus' love to nomads and Pashtu people in your profession as doctor or nurse. Also needed a manager and administrator!

**For more information, go to www.interserve.org
or contact your National Office.**

People for the hard places...