A VIEW FROM THE COUNTRY
by Brian Wechsler, Executive Director

Dear Friend,

In the country, a handshake says a lot.

There was a time when "a man's word was his bond." That included men or women, of course. When an agreement was sealed with a handshake it was a done deal.

It's still like that most of the time here in the country. We're neighbors and we depend on each other. We're together in good times and bad.

And that handshake? It still speaks volumes. It says, "I know you, your family, and your friends. We're connected. And we'll be there for each other in the days to come. You can count on it."

That handshake and all it stands for is what every Village Missions family signs on for when they settle into a small community.

For years we've said each Village Missionary is there to "Preach the Word and love the people." They recommit to this with every handshake with every neighbor they meet in their new town.

Behind that country pastor's handshake is his commitment to be there for this new flock. He'll preach and teach the Word of God and do his best to live it every day in between the handshakes. That's important on those happy days when brides walk the aisle or on sad days when families walk back from the cemetery.

A handshake...a commitment...the Word...and New Life in Christ. It's a deal we want to make with more and more neighbors living quietly in the country. Plain and simple, it's our calling.

Keeping Country Churches Alive,

Brian Wechsler
Executive Director

Our Commitment to You

Prayer is an important matter at our International Service Center in Dallas, Oregon. We begin each morning together with the Word of God and prayer, seeking God's way, His plan for our lives and how He would like us to minister to people who live in the rural areas of North America.

We pray each day for the needs of specific Village Missionaries and the people in their communities. We also pray for our ministry partners, friends who have expressed an interest in keeping country churches alive.

If you have a need and would like us to pray with you, please send your request in the enclosed envelope. You have our commitment that we will join you in prayer for your specific need...

We understand God's power to lovingly touch hearts, lives and entire families and communities. For more prayer opportunities, please visit our website, www.village-missions.org, and click on Prayer Spotlight in the top banner.

To Our Readers...

You have received this copy of Country Matters because you've indicated an interest in the ministry of Village Missions. We want you to understand the issues facing often-forgotten country churches and the small communities they impact. We hope Country Matters helps you pray with greater understanding and deepens your concern and involvement. If for any reason you do not wish to receive this or any other information from us, please let us know.

If you know of a country church that needs help, please call us:

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On the Cover: Airplane image courtesy of Quest Aircraft Company
Later in the day, we invited the community to a benefit for a wonderful lady in our church who was diagnosed with cancer two months ago. Over 100 people showed up. Unfortunately she was unable to attend because of her condition.

Our little church has had several direct hits affecting our “young members” under sixty. These direct hits include spleen rupture, car accidents, deaths, brain surgery, a three-wheeler accident, kidney failure, cancer, two expulsions from school and snapped tendons in both legs...

All these events seem very discouraging. But there is a silver lining in this cloud. The community is rallying to help. Farmers are coming together and enjoying each other as they help those that are down. It’s a real opportunity for our church to show the love of God in very tangible ways.

It is the worst of times. It is the best of times.

That’s the kind of thing that happens in a small town. It’s not easy; it’s just real life. And there are lots of opportunities in the midst of these moments to share God’s love, His forgiveness and the hope of a full life in Jesus Christ. And the results? Spiritual growth and maturity in the lives of wonderful people.

God is faithful, and He cares about what happens to people in rural places like Akron, Colorado. And he cares about the folks in thousands of other towns like this one.

Thank you again for faithfully standing with us, caring about the people and places God cares about!

Keeping Country Churches Alive,
Brian Wechsler
Executive Director
In Alaska today . . . there are 135 small communities with populations of fewer than 1,000. There are only 54 Protestant churches serving these small towns.


It’s an isolated place, Galena. In Alaskan terms, Galena is “off the grid.” That means there are no roads to or from this small village in central Alaska. It’s on the Yukon River, which means for a couple of months each year a barge can travel the 270 miles from Fairbanks to Galena. And, of course, airplanes make it in and out, weather permitting.

Walk down by the cemetery certain times of the month, and you can see small bonfires burning. Seems odd on a sub-zero winter day . . . but it’s important to many of the local people. They’re burning food that will go into the sky and provide nourishment for the dead. Animism is practiced in this community.

They have a church building in Galena. They have a parsonage. And in this isolated area where most of the people earn their living from trapping, fishing, hunting and service industries, they even have enough funds to help pay a pastor. But they don’t have a pastor.

Galena Is a Gateway Community in Alaska

Galena is a hub-location. As isolated as it is, it’s still a key place in central Alaska from which to get to the even more isolated places. The small charter planes fly through Galena. Commerce runs through Galena. And it’s also an educational center for an area larger than states in the lower 48.

There are strong Christian leaders in Galena. And even though they don’t have a pastor, they are still involved in Kingdom work. They are actively involved in the lives of students from around the state who attend Galena Interior Learning Academy. And each summer they minister to teens at Kokrine Hills Bible Camp.

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A small group of Christians are praying and waiting in Galena. They need a pastor today.
These ministries are strategic, in that they are sharing Jesus Christ with young people who have their entire lives ahead of them. And these teenagers will carry the Gospel back to their small towns and villages. Places where it is unlikely there are any churches either.

**A Request for Prayer**

Today there are three couples that have approached Village Missions about serving in Alaska. We are carefully considering their applications and praying about placing them in Galena and two other locations in central Alaska.

In order to get them in place during the summer thaw - allowing transportation of their household goods by barge - we need to move quickly. And we need to be sure of God’s leading.

These are isolated, challenging ministry locations. It requires the right Village Missionaries with adequate prayer and logistical support.

Locating Village Missionaries in Alaska is a huge task . . . but it’s for a great cause. In Alaska, as in every place in North America, we must keep country churches alive.

No one walked down the courthouse steps a winner at the end of the day. Two dear people in our church decided to end their marriage. Small things that had bugged Sam and Jenny for a long time became big things. And over time they’d both decided they weren’t going to “take it anymore.” Their wonderful children suffered the worst collateral damage.

Everyone in town knew some of the details . . . and I figured maybe I should preach about it.

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I started by talking about my kids who are now grown. Over the years, they’ve provided us with moments of great wisdom. When they were very little, Rick used to say that his sister, Rachael, had hit, bit, scratched, pinched or such “on purpose.” Rachael would always claim it was somehow “on accident.”

After the fight, I’d watch to see how long it took for Rick to forgive and resume having fun with his sister. Whenever Rick was sure it really was “on accident,” things got back to normal quickly. Other times it took longer. In all fairness . . . this could have had either of them being the inflictor of pain. But they both found a lot of forgiveness in their hearts growing up.

I explained to the group there on Sunday that each of us, as we grow up, continues to face the problem my kids faced . . . What do we do when we’re hurt by the people we love? How do we handle the pain that comes from people who mean ill to us? Most of us have had people in our lives who have taken shots at us “on purpose.” We know the pain. And it’s good to know we’re not alone in this.

And it’s good to know we’re not alone in this. Jesus understood this kind of pain. He’d experienced the love and rejection of Judas, a follower he’d hand-picked. A relationship gone terribly wrong, you could say.

I think everyone thought of Sam and Jenny at that moment. But I said that wasn’t there to talk about things that had fallen apart. There aren’t any easy answers for why people go different directions, like Jesus and Judas or the Apostle Paul and his first ministry partner.

And sharing God’s views on divorce that day would have been like closing the barn door after the cow was gone . . . But there was plenty of livestock left in the barn if we could expand our thoughts beyond divorce.

Sitting in church that day we were husbands and wives (many of us); we were also sons and daughters, friends and acquaintances, employees and employers, and citizens of our town and country. We all had relationship responsibilities. And we’d all suffered at the hands of loved ones.

And most importantly we were followers of Jesus. I said, “Our task in life as Christians is tied to Jesus. As followers we have one simple job: Follow our leader’s example!”

At this point, there were some “amens.” The people were with me. But we were still at a thinking level. This lesson needed to get into our hearts . . .

I asked Dick, sitting in the front row, to roll in the cart with the TV and video player on it. As he plugged the TV in, I explained that we were going to take a quick trip back 2,000 years to see how our Lord handled pain.

We watched about four minutes of the classic film, JESUS. The room wasn’t as dark as I would have liked, but everyone could see Jesus being beaten. They knew the story But somehow, seeing it made it more real for each of us. The crown of thorns . . . the nails . . . the hammer . . . Everyone gasped as the cross was dropped into the hole with a thud of finality. We understood at a deep level the pain Jesus was enduring, suffering for us.

Then Jesus spoke those amazing words, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” I turned off the TV. The church was silent except for a few sniffles.

It took me a minute to be able to speak. Then I asked each person to think of the worst thing anyone had ever done to them, “on accident” and “on purpose.” Than I asked, “Are you willing to be a radical follower of Jesus? Are you willing to follow his example and forgive? If your answer is ‘Yes,’ you can start today. You can ask God to forgive them. And then you can ask Him to help you forgive, too.”

That’s what Jesus calls us to do. Forgive. After the pain of betrayal, forgive. After your trust has been violated, forgive. In spite of the dishonesty, lies, treachery, deceit and loss, forgive.

We ended our service reciting the prayer Jesus taught his disciples not long before he endured the pain of the cross.

As we got to the words “… and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us,” it was no longer a message from God for our heads. This was a message for our hearts. My prayer was that each of us would find God’s power, enabling us to love like Jesus loved. And to forgive like the One we claim to follow forgave.

There was one family absent that morning. I silently prayed that Sam and Jenny and their kids would find forgiveness in the midst of their pain. It would take a miracle . . . But isn’t that what God is ready to do every day?
What if you could gain... GREATER FINANCIAL SECURITY AND PROVIDE FOR YOUR VILLAGE MISSIONARY WELL BEYOND YOUR LIFETIME?

You CAN. Let us explain how today.

That is just what a Village Missions Charitable Gift Annuity does for you and for your Village Missionary. You make a gift of cash or securities to Village Missions, and your gift can provide you with a guaranteed annual income for the rest of your life.

And your gift will continue to give even after death. You have been a good steward all your life. Here's a way to continue your legacy of stewardship and support for a Village Missionary even after you go home to Heaven.

For more details, please contact the Village Missions Stewardship Department at (800) 617-9905 ext. 113.

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