

VILLAGE MISSIONS QUARTERLY UPDATE - VOLUME 2, NUMBER 2

COUNTRY

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Matters

Brian Wechsler's
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COUNTRY**

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 Village Missions

Keeping Country Churches Alive

A VIEW FROM THE COUNTRY

by Brian Wechsler, Executive Director



The country was once a place
where people could get away from it

You'd never guess just by driving through. You might not see it if you just stopped for gas. And it could be you'd even miss seeing it down at the local diner. But we've got some of the same challenges here that folks in big cities or sprawling suburban neighborhoods face.

Many of the "city problems" have landed right in our country laps. Our teenagers are suffering from eating disorders and hurting themselves in shocking ways, like cutting themselves. Drug labs and pushers operating in the country? You bet! These serious social ills (we call it "sin") are claiming our communities' money, our fragile futures and precious souls.

That's why the church is so important in small rural communities! As followers of Jesus, we shine God's love to those who desperately need to know Him. God uses our churches and our communities to bring His love, grace and truth into the lives of those around us who are hurting.

Village Missionaries seek to love their communities - not just the people in the pews, but also those who avoid church and hide behind their front doors. By meeting new neighbors and bringing love to all members of the community, they're making a difference. They serve not only their own flock, but also those who won't know Jesus' love unless someone brings His gospel to their front porch.

Some of our new neighbors use the country to hide from their pasts, from the law, and maybe even from their families. But God still knows where they are. His love and hope can reach them where they are . . . just down the road from a country church.

Keeping Country Churches Alive,

Brian

Brian Wechsler
Executive Director



“I wish I knew more about that story...”

Have you ever read a *Country Matters* article and thought that? Or, have you ever wanted to contact Village Missions staff members and missionaries, but not known how? Would you like to receive weekly information and prayer updates concerning Village Missions, in addition to this quarterly magazine?

You can! Each of these options is available to you on the Internet! Sign up at **www.village-missions.org** for a weekly e-mail edition of *Country Matters*, which will give you in-depth stories and prayer needs of our Village Missionaries. You can also find contact information for them and even search for the closest Village Missions church by ZIP code! (Great information for travelers!)

Through regular updates from the director, you can keep up to date with what God is doing in small, often forgotten places. Curious about the beginnings of Village Missions? We posted our history and purpose statement so that you can get to know us a little bit better. We've included information for those interested in serving country churches, and for those who might like to have a Village Missionary serve at their church. Also, the web site contains information about our partners and about further methods of financial giving.

Thank you for your faithfulness to Village Missions. We're grateful for all you do to help keep country churches alive.

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

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ALASKA UPDATE

Great News for Galena, Alaska!

Thanks to your faithfulness and God's goodness, Galena, Alaska, will have a pastor once again! While we rejoice for this community, our thanks cannot compare to that of the residents of Galena who have been praying for a full-time pastor.

This month, Jeremy and Tricia Hayek are on their way to their new parsonage, prepared for them by the grateful people of Galena. When the Hayeks arrive, they will be welcomed by their local congregation as well as by members of Arctic Barnabas, a partner ministry that serves the remote Christian community through their missionary pilots and airplane services.

Because of your overwhelming generosity, Galena's believers will

be able to increase their impact on the Alaskan wilderness. Interim associate Village Missionaries and faithful Christian residents helped fill the void of the previous missionary's absence, most notably at the local boarding school and annual teen Bible camp. And they've done a great job! But now even more can happen. Some local Christian leaders are a bit weary from their double load of full-time work and nearly full-time ministry to the community. The Hayeks will be able to lighten the loads of these brothers and sisters, and provide them with the encouragement they deserve.

Although Galena is home to less than a thousand residents, and can be accessed only by boat or plane during

certain times of the year, it serves as a hub to many people who live in even more remote





regions. Also, Galena's schools serve families in an area larger than some states in the lower forty-eight! As the leaders of the Galena church, the Hayeks will influence people through this church's strategic ministry.

Because residents of Galena often cannot travel out of their town, the Hayeks and Galena Community Church provide the only place for local Christians to worship with others. Without the influence of this congregation, Galena would have little or no spiritual influence, and might once again fall under the influence of the traditional religion that some residents still follow.

Through your gifts, God has provided \$23,669 towards the Hayeks' first-year need of \$50,000, which includes moving their household by barge up the Yukon River, as well as their annual salary. The Christian residents of Galena

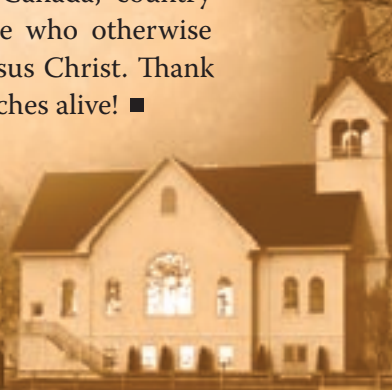
- who rely upon hunting, trapping, fishing and service industries - are providing the Hayeks with a home, as well as

monthly operating expenses for the church

building and parsonage, and the Hayeks' insurance.

We and the believers in Galena are praising God! We realize that without the influence of this strong church, the region's young people might have little or no opportunity to hear the truth of Jesus Christ.

In Galena, in the other rural towns of Alaska and throughout the United States and Canada, country churches bring the gospel to people who otherwise may never hear the good news of Jesus Christ. Thank you for helping to keep country churches alive! ■





THE NEED
FOR
SALARY
SUPPORT
for Village Missionaries

As Darrel tells it, “The wagon broke down and we just stayed.”

Darrel and Cathy Miller arrived in Brown County, Indiana, in 1981 with no idea what adventure lay before them. “If I had known 26 years ago,” Darrel said, “about the neat people that are here now who love the Lord and are involved in ministry, not necessarily at Cottonwood Church, but in people’s lives - I’d have been blessed out of my boots!” Deeply rooted in the community, the Millers watched their congregation grow tenfold over the years, from 12 to 120.

To hear Darrel tell it, the last two and a half decades in Brown County have been nothing but a pile of blessings. Having just sent the last of their five sons off to college, the Millers give unending thanks for their time with Cottonwood Church.

When asked about obstacles he has faced through their ministry in Brown County, Darrel hemmed and hawed a bit before saying, “The people here are fine people. The greatest obstacle, well...” Darrel paused. “I’m going to have to think on that one.” When pressed, he responded,

“I have been blessed with a great group of people and it’s been a joy and a delight. There haven’t been a lot of obstacles other than hard hearts.”

Those hearts haven’t all remained hard. Darrel remembers many of his congregants who once were indifferent to the things of God, who had no desire for Him, and who now worship and serve faithfully as vital members of the church body. Two men in particular leapt to Darrel’s mind. One man, a retired executive, had little desire for God when Darrel first met him. The man and his wife suffered the tragedy of losing a daughter, and he became angry with God.

Yet, over the years, his heart has softened to the point that he now teaches a mid-week Bible study and, in Darrel’s words, “is solid as a rock.”

Another man faced a similar situation when his two sons were in a car accident, leaving the younger one permanently wheelchair-bound and mentally affected.

After the accident, their father became extremely angry with God. As

time passed, however, the man’s heart changed, and the family now attends Cottonwood faithfully. Church members showed their love by building the family a wheelchair-accessible home, as the trailer they were living in at the time of the accident couldn’t support their younger son’s needs.

Despite Darrel’s continued and honest optimism, one gets the idea that he and Cathy had their struggles when they first arrived at Cottonwood. Upon entering the church facility for the first time, Darrel asked himself the question he often asks when walking into a country church building: “Why would I want to attend this church?” Answering his own question, “I had to think about that a lot, I really did. ... [It] needed a lot of work physically, and I thought ‘What am I doing here?’ But anyhow, the people were gracious and kind. ... Today I can say there are plenty of reasons to come as far as a wonderful place to worship.”

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When asked what words of wisdom and encouragement he'd like to share with those Village Missionaries working through the first few years of their ministry, Darrel responded: "I feel spoiled. It's been a delight. I feel as if we were blessed in our situation, and I don't know if the outcome would always be the same. ... Focus on the positive. Enjoy your relationship with the Lord. Focus on that relationship. ... There is always an opportunity for ministry. Wherever you are there is a multitude of opportunities for ministry. Probably the best way to be encouraged is to go out and minister to others. ... That's what kept us here as long as we have. God has been working in people's lives, but there's so much more to be done. That's what's kept us encouraged. ... There's not a Village Missionary out there any more blessed than we are."

The Millers and Cottonwood Church exemplify why country churches matter!

Jesus Christ is building His Church in every corner of the world - including the rural areas of North America. Cottonwood Church numbered 12 regular attendees in 1981, and now serves Brown County through its 120 faithful members, who minister both within the church and out in the community.

Of the 230 Village Missionary pastors, Village Missions provides financial support for 78 families, totaling \$1.2 million a year. Focusing on communities without any Bible-believing church - regardless of denomination - a Village Missions church often gives local residents their only opportunity to worship in a Christian community, without commuting hours from home.

When a Village Missionary pastor arrives in a community, the local church provides housing for the family, and oftentimes covers the insurance expenses as well. Village Missions takes care of the pastor's salary and the insurance needs that the community can't support. As the church community grows, they eventually take responsibility for the pastor's salary.

As Darrel Miller said, "God has been working in people's lives, but there's so much more to be done." Amen! Let's keep churches alive in the country!





LOOKING FOR Relief IN SMALL-TOWN AMERICA

As media influences - such as cable, radio, satellites and the Internet - become faster and easier to use, our rural communities are increasingly exposed to the same messages as the rest of North America. Television shows, radio programs and Internet sites often bring messages of inadequacy to our children. In response, even rural youth are looking for relief from their pain through eating disorders, drug abuse and other harmful behaviors.

The media isn't the only outside influence upon our communities. Rural areas provide ideal hideouts for those on the run from the law, and give them a place to continue their lives of crime where the ratio of police to population is very low. Some of the most dangerous of those hiding from the law are the drug "chemists" who set up methamphetamine labs in rented farmhouses and barns or garages.

Danny and Amy knew their local police officers well. Each of them had been hauled into the police station and county court several times for drug-related misdemeanors. Constantly under the eye of the law, Danny and Amy decided to get out of town to a place with little police presence.

They brought their baby, and their meth lab, with them.

The folks living around Danny and Amy talked about the new neighbors - thought that they were an odd couple, an unfriendly couple. But, deciding to "leave well enough alone," no one knocked on their door in welcome them. When red-eyed Amy visited the local shop to buy groceries, most folks just gave her and her baby a nod before walking right by.

Until the sirens roared through the night, that is. Danny left town for a few days to gather up some more supplies. One night while he was gone, Amy and the baby both fell asleep on their couch.

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When Amy woke up, her baby had gotten into the drug paraphernalia. Desperate for her baby's life, Amy called emergency services, knowing that when they arrived and found the lab in her home, she and Danny would be arrested. She didn't care. She just wanted her baby to live.

But the baby didn't live. Questions of "what if?" will haunt her and Danny for the rest of their lives. The same questions made the members of their new-found community uneasy. They wondered if they could have done something to change the tragic story.

Village Missionaries devote themselves to preaching the Word and loving the community. They knock on doors. They visit strangers. They commit themselves to knowing the names and faces of their community. Maybe a Village Missionary would not have made a difference in Danny and Amy's story. Maybe he would have.

Unfortunately, meth labs aren't the only danger in our communities.

Our teenagers and children have found a new way to relieve their fear, anxiety and depression. They cut themselves, leaving a history of their pain etched into their bodies. These marks serve as evidence of their pain, an outward sign of their

inner turmoil. Many "cutters" say that their internal pain literally subsides as physical pain takes its place. Whether the cutting begins as a suicidal gesturing, as an attention-seeking action or for some other purpose, cutting itself can become addictive. Over time, cutters can continue to slash for the rush of endorphins, the body's natural morphine.

Linda Gustafson, a Village Missionary from Washington state, wrote the following about an experience she had while mentoring a girl addicted to cutting.



She had been observing a picture on the wall for quite awhile. "I wonder if Jesus felt better after He started to bleed," she remarked. An odd statement, but it contained an answer. Jesus is illustrated holding up a disheveled man firmly in His strong arms in the print.

The pain on the man's face is intense. His body language says he has given up. Blue jeans and a T-shirt hang on his limp body. Without Christ lifting him up he would surely fall. In one hand the man holds a spike and in the other a mallet. Blood flows in little rivulets from Christ's wounds through the crevices in the ground and nourishes Easter lilies that are reaching heavenward.

"Why the flowers in the blood?" she asked. "Does the blood have meaning?"

I began to explain to her that both the blood and flowers represent life but in different ways.

She listened intently as I told her that God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son, Jesus Christ, so that anyone who chooses to trust in Him would have eternal life and not be lost. He chose to shed ALL His blood - to give up His life - so she could have a full life, today and in eternity.

The lily, often called an Easter lily, represents the fact that Jesus rose again three days later and is alive today in Heaven.

"You mean other people hurt HIM, too?"

I told her yes and that He didn't deserve it.

***She began to cry.
"There's someone else besides me?"***

I explained His blood was shed so OTHERS would be set free from the pain of their past by finding forgiveness because of Jesus' sacrifice. I explained the shed blood of Jesus would bring peace with God . . . and she'd "feel" better.

Why would I choose to phrase it this way? This young woman is known as a "cutter." She slits her arms, her wrists, her fingers to let the pain in her life out, because it makes her feel better. It is how she deals

with the things that have happened to her, things she didn't deserve.

A door she had kept locked within her began to open.

Slowly, and looking her directly in the eyes, I explained her part in Christ's suffering.

"Would He still want to hold me up like that even though my sin nailed Him down?"

she inquired. Her tears were making little rivulets in the crevices of her face. "Why? If I hurt HIM?" I turned the picture over and revealed the title. "Forgiven."

"How could He forgive?" she pleaded to know.

I explained to her that "He's JESUS" and that He doesn't treat us the way people do. HIS ways and HIS love are so different we can't imagine it because without Him no one can forgive.

She fell to the floor, wailing, "I want this Jesus in my life!"

We prayed together, placing a solid frame around the rough sketch of this broken

woman's life. And her Savior Jesus Christ added the color, transforming it into a portrait of grace. God brought the miracle of new life in Christ to this young lady.

And it all started with a picture and the first color she noticed in that picture that day... blood red. ■



"Forgiven"

*Thomas Blackshear II
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