



# NEW LIFE NEWS

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## A WARM GREETING AND A LOOK AT MISSIONS IN EUROPE

From Hugh Wessel

The Gospel of Mathew begins with a genealogy. This simple fact places missions into a historical context that must not be ignored. Jesus is not understandable without Abraham or David. Missions in western Europe today is not understood without Irenaeus, Constantine, Charlemagne, Calvin, Loche, Louis XIV or the 'Enlightenment.'

Missions in Europe began in the second century. It would be naïve to pretend that one could do missions in Europe as if one were beginning from nothing, as if our actions could be divorced from a very complex historical setting and as if our contemporaries had not been marked by this history. The collective mentality of a people is not necessarily something of which they are aware and is developed over many centuries, being transmitted from one generation to the next.

Looking at several long periods of history in general will allow us to make some observations and form questions related to current mission practice. The framework will be Christianity in western Europe in order to refer to France today.

In Gaul, the church was present from the second century. Here in Marseille the remains of martyrs from 173 were found in an old quarry. In the second half of the second century Christianity was established in Lyon with Irenaeus as bishop. It is historically significant to note the spread of Christianity from Gaul throughout the Roman Empire. By 312, and while the estimates vary, between 5% and 25% of the empire were Christian. There was no evangelistic strategy. Preaching was not for the masses, and there were no missions to propagate the faith, no prayers for pagans, nor any exhortation to the

faithful to evangelize. On the contrary, it was difficult in that pre-Constantine time to become a member of the faith. Those interested had a period of two to three years of catechism.

How then did the church grow? It was the quality of life of the Christians, both in their private lives and in the community of the church and the teachings of Jesus, particularly the 'Sermon on the Mountain' in spite of the persecutions under Marcus Aurelius.

Turning points for the church were the edicts of 311 and 313 by Galerius and Constantine, and from this time the church grew rapidly. Constantine granted tolerance to all faiths while the spread of Christianity under Theodosius, Clovis and Charlemagne throughout Europe occurred with the use of political and military force. Nevertheless, monastic communities undertook patient evangelistic efforts.

We enter into a period of Christianity that was a one size fits all civilization, at least in theory, which included ethics, economics, politics, philosophy and science. In theory everyone was a Christian, but woe to you if you were Jewish or Muslim. This period lasted for hundreds of years deeply marking Europe. One was born Christian.

The 16th and 17th centuries were the time of reform. Protestants think of the Reformation as a time of theological reflection. But, it also poses the question of mission/evangelization of Europe, as the Church of Rome was wrong.

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Europe, which had one church, was now confronted with a diversity of Christian gospels, which seemed to be mutually exclusive. For Luther the Pope is the 'anti-Christ,' and as far as the Pope goes, Luther needs to be excommunicated. So began a 'competition' for the true 'gospel' with the creation of 'true' churches, Lutheran, Reformed and Anabaptist. Catechisms were written as people understood little of true Christianity. The Church of Rome decided at Trent to challenge these new churches.

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## SHORT TERM MISSIONS

Submitted by Diane Henderson

Short term opportunities associated with Mission to the World (MTW) may be found on their website [www.mtw.org](http://www.mtw.org). Click on "Short Term Opportunities Catalog for 2012" and then click on "download." Mission trips for one, two or three weeks in various countries in Asia, the Caribbean, Central America, Europe, North America, and South America are listed. Medical opportunities are also mentioned. Two of the catalogs are on the missions' wall, and one is in the library. ☛

# REFLECTION ON GOD'S WORD

By Linda Scott

It had been a long, rough week. Christmas Eve and Christmas Day had passed in a blur as I lay curled in bed battling a stomach virus and several significant bacterial infections. Several more days passed before I had the strength to extricate myself from my bedroom cave and hobble out to our back deck, where, unbeknownst to me, "summer in December" had arrived. As the warm sunshine gently relaxed my weary body, I finally lifted my head and gazed at the beautiful surroundings in front of me as I peered toward my neighbor's adjoining property. There stood a multitude of stately trees of different heights and types, leaves open and lovely also basking in the sun, providing a dazzling show of shimmering greens. I was reminded of Psalm 1 and how we are to be "like trees planted by the rivers of water, that bring forth fruit in season and whose leaves do not wither." Feeling neither stately nor

fruitful in my current condition, I was challenged by God's Word to look again unto Christ and His grace and strength made perfect in weakness rather than at my obvious insufficiencies.

In His to-the-point words in John 15:4-5, Jesus reminds us to, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me." And again, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without me you can do nothing." A very significant and important aspect of abiding in Christ is, as Psalm 1 verse 2 states, "delighting and meditating in God's Word (law) day and night." Delighting and meditating upon are terms of endearment. When we love someone we delight to be with them. We will read their letters (or e-mails) over and over. We long to hear their voice, and we mull over in our minds what the implications are of what they

have said. We despise any separation. In light of this, Lord's Day worship, private devotions, prayer, scripture memory, meditation, and fellowship with other believers is not a burden, but becomes my high calling and means of grace. This type of joyful abiding results in our becoming fruitful trees that are fed, nourished, pruned and deeply watered by our precious Savior. Our roots are grounded in Him, who does all things well for our good and for His ultimate glory (Romans 8:28). As Dietrich Bonhoeffer so aptly said, "I expect naught from myself, everything from the work of Christ. My service has its objectivity in that expectation, and by it I am freed from all anxiety about my insufficiency and failure." May we once again look afresh to Christ with thankful hearts for His willingness to be cursed upon that tree in our stead that we may become fruitful trees that live and grow and flourish by abiding in Him. ❧

# THE SAN DIEGO RESCUE MISSION

By John Watt

*"The San Diego Rescue Mission believes in the inherent worth of every homeless man, woman, and child. Our mission is to spread the good news of salvation through Christ by serving the needs of the poor, addicted, abused, and homeless, thus improving the quality of their lives.*

*Our programs provide the rehabilitation and discipleship that allow us to achieve this mission, leading to positive, lasting change – and creating better lives for those we serve, their families, and the community as a whole." (www.sdrescue.org)*

It has been a privilege and joy for New Life La Mesa to be affiliated with the mission for 25 years. Along with many other San Diego churches, once a month we have participated in their daily worship service by providing preaching, singing and praying.

The mission first opened its doors in 1955. By 1990, the mission was providing 27,000 meals and 8,000 nights of shelter every month. As the landscape of downtown San Diego shifted over the years, especially with redevelopment in and around the Gaslamp District, so have the mission's loca-

tions and outreach objectives. There are still meals and daily chapels provided, but the emphasis has shifted more towards long-term solutions such as education, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, vocational training, leadership mentoring, and Christian discipleship.

That is where New Life comes in. For one hour every third Saturday, men and women from New Life participate in a worship service held at the men's facility located at 120 Elm St. The service begins with enthusiastic singing of hymns and praise songs, followed by a time of taking prayer requests and bringing prayers before the throne of grace. Then a message is provided by one of the New Life men gifted in exhorting from God's Word. These are Christ-centered, Bible-rich exhortations of the gospel and our need to live godly lives committed to Christ. Afterwards we greet the men, sometimes just shaking a hand or sharing a smile, but oftentimes we are able to pray or share one-on-one with them. If you are interested in assisting in the ministry of praying, singing, or giving a message, please contact either Evan Bowman, myself, or one of our deacons. We're sure you'll be blessed if you do. ❧

## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

By Oly Omune

I was born and raised in Bangkok, Thailand (formerly Siam), grew up in the early 60's and lived in Thailand until the late 70's. The country was predominantly Buddhist then and still is.

Christianity had a very small footprint in Thailand as seen by its presence mainly in Bangkok and in a few other provincial cities. The existence of Christianity was a direct result of the work of the Portuguese and French missionaries who came to the Kingdom of Thailand to build their missions in the mid 1700's and 1800's respectively, during which time the capital of the kingdom was the city of Ayutthaya, approximately 30 miles north of the present capital city of Bangkok. Needless to say, their attempts to convert the local population were not very fruitful, as they were only able to convert less than one percent of the locals. Even today, Christianity still comprises less than one percent of the total population of Thailand.

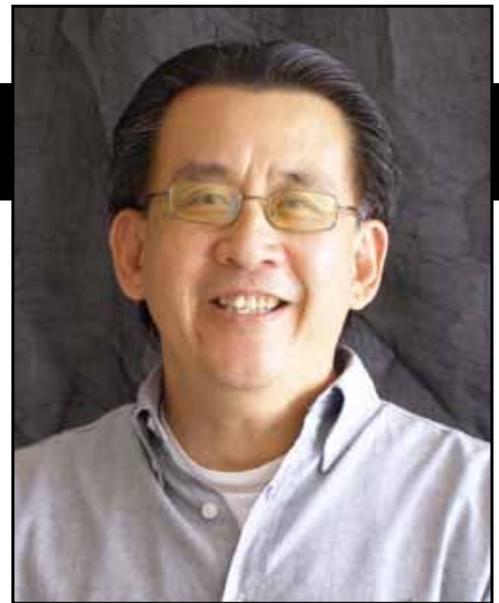
Interestingly however, the Portuguese were able to leave behind their lasting legacy as several of their families actually accompanied the first few groups of missionaries to the kingdom. They were permitted to stay and were given a settlement in Ayutthaya and subsequently in Bangkok when the capital was later relocated. There, they started building their churches and schools, which are still in operation.

I was part of a small group of the population who had the privilege of attending a Catholic school in Bangkok, where I was exposed to Christianity at a very young age. Ironically, in retrospect, I was taught to recite "The Apostle's Creed" without truly understanding the meaning of it or even believing in it. (Even to this day, I keep telling myself jokingly that I don't believe in the holy Catholic church.) Fast forward 30 years to the late 90's in

San Diego. I was invited to accept Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior by a group of friends. Immediately after that, my family and I started attending the First Christian Church in National City where I was subsequently reintroduced to the concept of the Trinity. This concept was not foreign to me at the time, since I had already had prior experience with it. However, we decided to leave and started attending The Rock Church where we remained for a few years.

In the latter part of 2010, I was first introduced to the reformed faith by a member of the Pacific Hope Church in Serra Mesa. I decided to start attending church there. During this time, tensions began to develop within the family, and ultimately my wife decided to worship apart from me.

While attending Pacific Hope, I began to learn about God's sovereign election. I also began to understand that it was God who did the choosing and not the other way around. How-



ever, it wasn't until I came to New Life a year later in Dec 2011 that I began to fully appreciate and understand reformed theology in its fullness. It is here at New Life that Christ's communion with His church is clearly evident.

I thank our triune God for His redemptive plan for justifying and regenerating us and also for the process of our sanctification.

I look forward to getting to know more of you. May God continue to bless you and your families richly, and may God bless our journey together. "Soli Deo Gloria!" ❧

## MISSION UPDATE

From Nathaniel and Alicia Gutierrez

We are missionaries to Huanta, Peru, currently in the Chattanooga area to raise financial support in order to spend a year in Bogota, Colombia before moving to Peru permanently. While in Bogota, Alicia will attend language school, and I will undergo intensive training to learn how to be a team leader. During this year, I will attend classes, work with the current team in Bogota and plant a church there. We are excited about the work ahead in Colombia and for the opportunity for Alicia to learn Spanish.

We need to finish raising funds, find a shipping company to pack and store things for our time in Colombia, fill out a host of paperwork, obtain visas for Peru and Colombia, say good-bye to family and friends, and accomplish those final logistical tasks needed to move overseas. We ask for prayer for strength and wisdom to complete these tasks and face the work it takes to make this big move.

We are incredibly thankful for your support and prayers as a church and are so blessed to have a network of wonderful friends there in San Diego.

Note from Alicia: *We have been so busy with the final steps of leaving for Colombia and just this last week, Nathaniel's mom has taken a turn for the worse in her fight with cancer. We are in a season of life that is taking a lot of strength to go through. We sincerely appreciate your prayers for us.* ❧

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Some regions become Protestant, others remained Catholic, and disputes continued over long periods of time, for example in France.

As each side had the truth, there was little room for dialogue, let alone tolerance. The mission methods of Theodosius, Clovis and Charlemagne did not hesitate to use force to 'Christianize' their territories. Europe of the 16th and 17th centuries saw similar methods. Political powers continued to legislate, that is 'Christianize' entire populations in Geneva, Paris, Rome, or Munster. In disputed territories such as France, when legislation did not work there were no scruples about reverting to war. In fact, there were a whole series of wars before Protestantism was recognized in France. In England, Cromwell and his armies executed a king whose reign was considered to be divinely ordained. Towards the middle of the 17th century after the 30 years war, Europe grew 'tired' of confessional wars and forced 'Christianization,' which did not prevent Louis XIV from revoking the 'Edict of Nantes.' We were still a long way from the gospel.

The challenge that the 'Enlightenment' posed to Christianity was seen

as an intellectual challenge. Because of modern science and philosophy, the gospel was no longer credible. Modern man indebted to Voltaire, Rousseau, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, could no longer believe.

In such a context missions/evangelization became difficult. To be modern, European countries needed to reject 'Christianity.' Add to this the processes of urbanization, industrialization, and secularization advanced and destroyed all in its path, such as a 'religious mentality,' at least as known by medieval Europe. Protestants during the 19th century embraced these changes more readily than the Church of Rome, which resulted in revivals and awakenings throughout Europe.

In the context of the 21st century, Christianity is being pushed into the smaller and smaller compartment of a private faith. One's faith is a matter of personal opinion and as such is excluded from the public domains of politics, education and economics, those very places where we live, work and seek to give witness regularly. What does it mean for the church today to do missions/evangelize?

In a certain sense, we have returned to the beginnings of the historical processes traced thus far. Christianity finds itself as a minority in a world

where relativism and plurality reign. It is remarkable to observe how many think that these are totally new phenomena. In the Roman Empire all religions and every philosophy was permitted as long as the dominant ideology –the divinity of the emperor was not questioned. Today, we live in a paradoxical situation where on the one hand contradictory ideas co-exist without a problem and on the other hand, certain ideas, markets, technology and efficiency are 'sacred.' Another parallel reminds us of the first centuries; there is a dominant culture. It is not 'Pax Romana,' but globalization.

Now while we cannot return to another era, we can recognize that in the collective consciousness the church or gospel (although poorly understood), has already been tried as a solution and having 'failed,' it is excluded without further thought.

Jacques Ellul demonstrates in the corpus of his writing just how the modern world has embraced and is modeled by technology and efficiency. Such a simple observation implies that our desires to develop 'strategies' and 'methods' for global missions are not without problems. These very concepts of 'strategy' and 'effectiveness' bring us close to that of modern ideology and could compromise or falsify the gospel.

'Technology' and 'efficiency' have no need for historical memory, but humans need to know their 'roots.' The steam-roller of 'efficiency' and 'globalization' is flattening cultures causing them to forget history, which is resulting in a rise of 'ethnicity' or national identity as a backlash of people who feel threatened.

The early church permits us to understand how to live as a minority, or perhaps it is a model of 'contextualization,' a minority in a hostile environment, yet able to grow. The church knew its *raison-d'être*; it knew how to break down dividing walls being neither Greek nor Jew, neither slave nor free, neither man nor woman, but all were one in Christ Jesus the Lord and under His Lordship. 🍷

## SUMMARY OF FEB. 16 SESSION MEETING

*Submitted by David Dimwiddie, Clerk*

- We reviewed ten letters received from congregants, mostly about music and issues that came up in the congregational meeting.
- We re-instituted covenant pre-worship singing.
- We will have offertories two times a month in the morning service.
- We rescinded the previous motion of going to two services on April 8, but will continue to develop a plan for going to two services.
- We scheduled a congregational meeting for March 11 to change portions of the New Life Bylaws regarding the calling of an assistant pastor.
- We approved a one-time gift of \$1000 to Sherrene DeLong in support of her teaching trip to India.
- We approved a one-time gift in the amount of \$500 to Lydia Goodhart in support of her mission trip to Haiti.
- We authorized expenditures of up to \$2,167.20 for expenses related to the missions' conference. 🍷