

**West Valley Church**  
**Michael O'Neill**  
**9/9/18**

## **Guyana: Vision and Reality**

Eva Lounsbury & the Guyana Team shared:

We're here this morning to report to you, our church family, about our August trip to Guyana, but we're also here to reflect on and celebrate this partnership as a whole. We will continue to partner in mission and vision with the Victoria church in the future, but this winter we plan to bring to a close the fundraising period of this partnership. Our February 2019 trip will be a time to celebrate and dedicate the new Victoria Church that YOU have been instrumental in making a reality.



In Matthew 18:20, Jesus said: *“Where two or three come together in My name, there am I with them.”* What a beautiful thing it is when these two or three can gather not only across a city, but also across nations!

In early 2013, Pastor Mike asked me if I'd be willing to serve as the Mission's President for West Valley Church. Little did I know that 5 years later, our church would have sent 8 teams and 59 people to serve alongside our brothers and sisters in Guyana – or that I personally would have had the opportunity to travel to Guyana 4 times.

### **◆ Vision Trip Team**

In 2013, four of us traveled to Guyana on what we called a “Vision Trip”. On this trip, we met District Superintendent Porter and he drove us around the church district. We also met Pastor Fitz and some of his leadership team.



### **◆ The empty Victory Church property**

What we found when we first visited the Victoria Church property was an empty field of grass. I'm confident that Pastor Mike will tell you that from this initial greeting, we felt a connection and common vision between our two churches. And with this, our partnership was born.



◆ **July 2014 team**

In 2014 we sent our first construction and VBS team to Victoria. 23 teens and adults worked on construction, helped with VBS and also ran a soccer camp for boys. Ever since this time Pastor Fitz has been talking about incorporating sports ministry into their church as another way of reaching the youth in Guyana.



◆ **Soccer camp**

Part of the soccer camp was a devotional station where the boys learned about Jesus, just like we do during Upwards Soccer practices here in Yakima. The girls from the village were disappointed that they could not participate in soccer camp, but Pastor Fitz impressed on us how critical it was that these boys have an opportunity to be around positive male role models. Many of them had fathers who were absent, or didn't have a relationship with their father at all.



◆ **Cornerstone**

On this trip, another defining moment in our partnership took place as we all signed a vision document, set this in concrete as a cornerstone on the church and prayed corporately a prayer of thanks and dedication to this partnership and this ministry.

Joel and Chris Hubble had the privilege of housing DS Porter and Pastor Fitz for our 2014 Faith Promise event and finally were able to fulfill their promise to one day visit Victoria as a part of our most recent team. Joel is going to share with us a little bit about being part of a project that is bigger than himself.



◆ **July 2015 team (4 ladies)**

In the summer of 2015 we sent a small team of 4 to Guyana, primarily to help with VBS. During our week there, we also had the privilege of spending one day at the district youth camp. At that youth camp I was able to reconnect with one young man that had I met on our vision trip.





◆ **Eva and Mardock**

This young man came from a muslim family and he'd been routinely beaten for his faith and faced odds that most of us here in Yakima can't imagine, all because he chose to accept Jesus and become a Christian. At one point, he'd even attempted suicide. It was such a blessing to see him there worshipping amongst the teens, still serving the Lord.



◆ **3 pics including girls in dresses**

Although our 2015 team was small, I've come to believe that God knows who needs to be on each team and he has a unique purpose for each person who participates in a Work and Witness trip.









Ray Killorn is going to share with us a little about his experience getting to Guyana this year. At one point, he began to question whether he was meant to go on this trip or not. Ray ...



◆ **prayer partners**

We have always wanted this partnership to be about more than just raising money and doing a project. We wanted our church families to truly bond together. As one way to help build such connections, in the fall of 2015 we established prayer partnerships.

Pastor Casey is going to share with us now a little about his son Judah's prayer partnership with Grandma Layne and what this has meant to his family.

<p>Sis. Layne Doreen</p> <p>Judah Wilkerson is praying for you.</p> <p>Along with his mommy Alyssa, daddy Casey and sister Jordan.</p> 		<p>Judah Wilkerson</p> <p>Grandma Layne Doreen is praying for you.</p>  
<p>Debie and Rollin Caryl</p> <p>Nicklett Powers is praying for you.</p> 		<p>Sis. Nicklett Powers</p> <p>Debie &amp; Rollin Caryl are praying for you.</p>  

◆ **the two teams from 2016, stairs and group photo**

In 2016, we sent teams to Guyana in both February and in July. What used to be just a grassy lawn was really starting to take the shape of a church. One of the great accomplishments in 2016 was the construction of the stairs that lead up to the future sanctuary.



◆ **2017 January Team, & 3 other photos**

In January 2017, our team helped continue the work on the concrete flooring for the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, the sanctuary floor.



◆ **2017 August team**

Another one of our partnership goals was to be able to send families on work and witness trips together. August 2017 was our first official family trip.



◆ **the girls teaching VBS**

Our teens really showed us what they were capable of, stepping up and teaching at VBS, sometimes teaching teens not that different in age than themselves. The adults were hard at work, too ....





◆ **Shelly and Melissa**

While Shelly was making bricks, Melissa sacrificially took on the task of cuddling babies. Melissa's entire family came on this work and witness trip. This trip was so impactful on Austin that he decided to join us again for our most recent trip, where he got to work alongside adults and *perhaps* got away with doing things he wasn't able to do on his first trip.



◆ **2018 team in front of the church**

This year, Austin had the opportunity to gain some "wisdom" from the elders in the Victoria church, and he's going to share with us a little about that.

This August, the men on our team worked building the forms and setting the foundation that the Victoria Church roof will sit on while Chris and I helped teach about 175 children at VBS. I'm honestly not sure who had the more difficult job! Take a look at how far construction of the church has come in these past 5 years.



◆ **the second floor of the church, Ray and Pastor Fitz**



◆ **the forms**



◆ the rear view of the church, with kids playing soccer in the back



◆ the entrance to the church



For myself personally, there was one comment made on the very last day of VBS that has really stuck with me.

◆ **VBS classroom**

Every time I help with VBS in Guyana, if I am honest, it feels like chaos! So many children, in such a small space, with so much noise. But each time I've helped with VBS, the Lord has humbled me and shown me through what these children have learned how even amongst what might feel like chaos to me, God's Word can reach these children's hearts.



On the last day of VBS this year, we gathered all of the children together in one room and did what we called "General Assembly." Some children shared skits, or poems they had written. Some sang. As a part of General Assembly, our team of 6 went up on the stage to introduce ourselves. As I was asking some questions like, "Do you know the name of the city where we all come from?", and "Do you know how long it takes for us to travel here to be with you?" I also asked the question, "Can anyone tell you why we keep coming back to Victoria year after year?" The room seemed relatively quiet to me, and off to my left a little girl shouted out loud and clear, "Because you love us!"



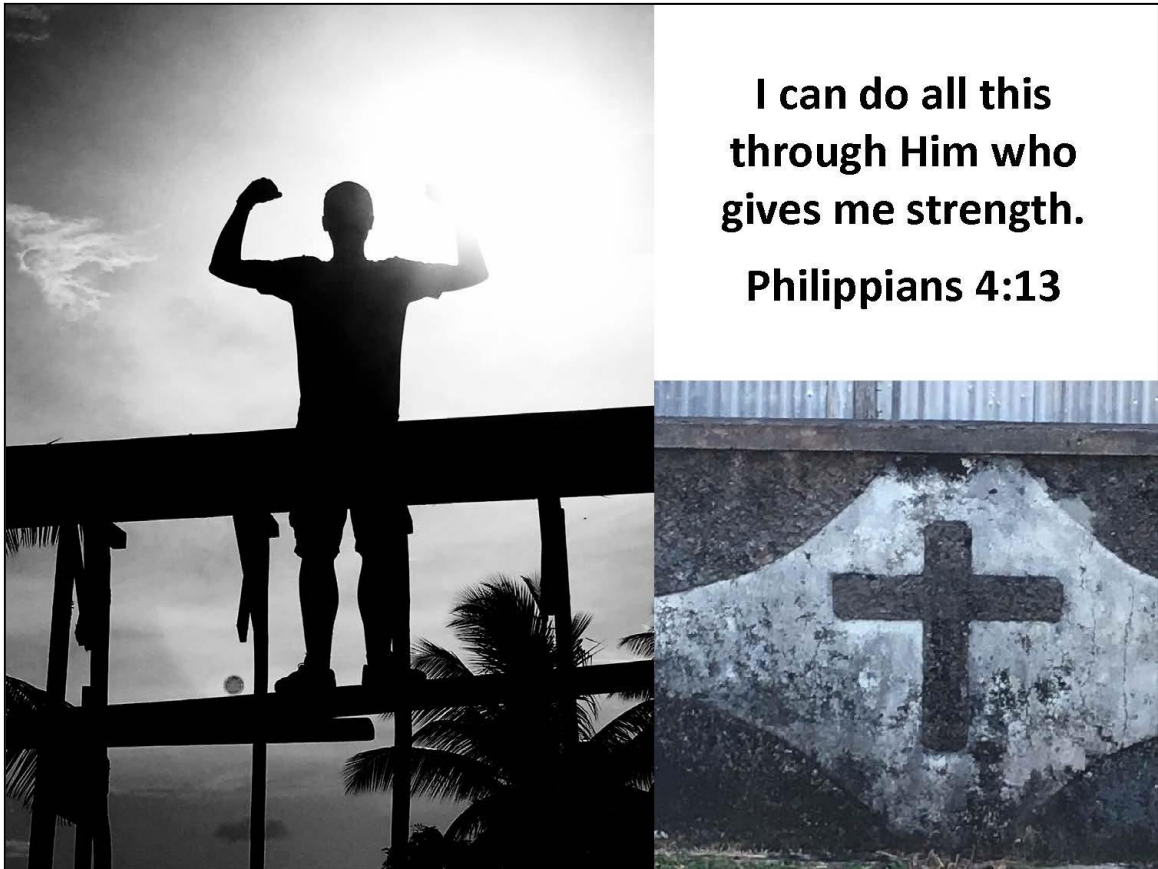


◆ **lots of smiling children**

This is certainly true – we come because we love them. However standing there in that moment, looking out over this sea of children, I almost broke down. I thought to myself, in the years to come, these kids may not remember our names. They may eventually even forget our faces. But if one thing remains, the knowledge that we came because we love them – what a testimony this is! If they know that we came because we loved them, they may also remember that we had the love of Jesus in our hearts when we came. And if someone with the love of Jesus in their heart is willing to travel 30 hours from home just to visit them, maybe they will want to know this Jesus better.

West Valley Church, these children are seeing the love of God through our teams that you have been so faithful to support all of these years. As we prepare to dedicate the Victoria church this coming winter, it will not be **our** hands and feet on the ground in Victoria to continue to nurture these children. The Victoria church will be doing this. And the Victoria church will be better equipped in their ministry because of the generosity of this church.

We come because we love them. We love because Christ first loved us.



**I can do all this  
through Him who  
gives me strength.  
Philippians 4:13**

God called our church to this ministry, and the Lord strengthens and equips those he calls. I want to leave you with one final scripture.

In Philippians 1:3-5 Paul wrote to the church in Philippi: *"I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now..."*

I feel so blessed to be a part of this partnership with the Victoria church, and I am so thankful for this churches commitment to our fellow believers in Guyana. Thank you.

Pastor Mike:

I wanted to share a brief reminder this morning about why we do what we do as a church when it comes to missions, why it's important, and how we can stay committed to doing what God is doing through West Valley Church!

Nine years ago, we were a church that was well known for its financial support of our denominational work in world missions. We generously gave money every year, and every couple of years people from our church would go to a different place in the world for a work and witness trip. In our past, we've been to Africa, Russia,



Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Argentina, Ukraine, Hungary, and several other countries. Each time it was a different place and a specific task, and then we'd leave and not come back. And the reason we were so strong in supporting our denomination in these ways was because we had a large number of a faithful group of people who would give generously and dutifully. The folks who so strongly supported this work were generally from the Builder and Boomer generations.

But we knew that there were younger generations who would no longer dutifully support missions simply because of our denominational loyalties. We knew that these younger generations needed proof – they don't trust institutions as much. They needed to actually *see* that what they were giving to was making a direct difference in people's lives. And the proof, for them, is often wrapped in relationships. In other words, there needs to be a *personal* connection.

So the question for us was, how would we, as a church, maintain our biblical commitment to missions, while at the same time encourage our younger generations to participate in God's Kingdom work? To find the answer, we went where we should always go: we went to Scripture. Specifically, we went to Jesus' own words. We find them in his parting words to his disciples – the last recorded words that Jesus spoke to the disciples before he ascended into heaven. These words need to be ringing in our ears and hearts until Jesus returns. These are important words, and here they are:

Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20, nlt)

That's how Matthew recorded it, and Luke adds to Matthew's account of Jesus' words in the book of Acts:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. (Acts 1:8-9, nlt)

So as we prayed over these passages in order to better understand our responsibilities as a church, there were some things that began to emerge. For sure, there is no question that the top priority of the church is to take the transformative message of the Gospel to all people everywhere, in the hopes that they will respond, allow Jesus' resurrection power to come alive in them, be baptized, become disciples, and grow in their relationship to God and their place in the Church.

We also noticed that Jesus commissioned the disciples, which of course means that *every* believer in Jesus has inherited that calling. To be commissioned is literally that – called to "co" "mission" with Jesus. So we began to realize that our involvement in the work of missions was not exclusively for those who are called to be full-time missionaries, ordained by the Church of the Nazarene to go live in

foreign countries. Don't get me wrong, what they do is important, and we support missionaries, like the Allens and Kerrs who are from our church family. But there is nothing exclusive about the commissioning that Jesus gave; it is for *all* of us. So we knew that whatever we did as a church, it needed to be done in a way that all of us could participate.

Then we noticed that Jesus made sure we understood *where* it is that we are supposed to go and share the Gospel of God's Love: in Matthew, Jesus says "every nation," and in Acts, Jesus says more specifically, "Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and the ends of the earth." So we began to rethink what we call "missions," from being some thing that ordained missionaries do somewhere way over there, to being something that every believer does, everywhere they go. Jerusalem was the center of the world for the disciples at that time. Judea and Samaria were not only the outlying geographical areas, they were also the towns of Jews and then the towns of non-Jews, or Gentiles. For the disciples, the world was divided into two categories: Jews and Gentiles (and in their minds, Jews deserved God's favor, and Gentiles did not. Jews were a part of God's Kingdom, Gentiles were not). Jesus was being clear – the Gospel is for *everyone!*

So we realized we needed to redefine missions from being only "global," and we needed to back up and look at it as "local" and "regional," as well as global.

So we began to encourage involvement in local missions. We encourage volunteers and our small groups to participate at the Union Gospel Mission, Love INC, and Mission Agape. We support all of these every year with money and with services and supplies.

We began to see the school across the street as a mission field, so like any good missionary we began meeting their needs. We do it with backpacks, with volunteers in the classrooms, and now with weekly homework club, with summer science camps, and with science night on Tuesdays in the summer, where kids learn science and hear about God's love and creation. That has led us to reach out further to Mountainview Elementary, with the intent of starting an extended campus of West Valley Church!

But before all that, we also needed to reconsider what "global missions" meant. We dreamt of a genuine partnership. And even though at the time there were very few Nazarene Churches entering into partnerships, we felt that was what God was calling us to do. I spoke with a good friend of mine, Dr. Dan Ketchum who, at that time, was the director of world mission for our global denomination. I asked about the possibility of a partnership. He said that there was very little research or history or precedent at that time – this was about seven or eight years ago. He said the partnerships that did exist involved either entire districts of churches working together, or only churches that were much larger than us. He had concerns, and felt that a church our size could not do much in the way of partnerships.

If you want to motivate the Spirit of God in a pastor, tell that pastor that something can't be done!



Undeterred, we began to establish the priorities we needed for a partnership. There were several: it needed to be strongly English speaking so that there were fewer barriers. It needed to be a different country outside the US. It needed to be safe, so that our teens and families could participate. And it needed to be someplace that wasn't already getting a lot of attention. I initially took an exploratory trip to Cuba, as that country was just opening up to missionaries. My heart was stirred, but it didn't meet our criteria. However, the relationships I built there put me in touch with our leaders in the country of Guyana. That summer, Eva, Jim Cunningham, myself, and Desiree Ferring took a vision trip to Guyana, and it became clear that the Spirit was leading us to the church in the town of Victoria. What we didn't know was that the Victoria Church had been praying for two years – as long as we had been making our plans – praying for God to provide for them a new church, since theirs was torn down due to safety hazards. They had a vision of a church that would be a community center to meet the needs of their village. But they had no resources to do so. In fact, whatever resources they did have, they gave it to other churches in need on their district. Our hearts were wed together over similar vision. So since then, for the last four years, twice a year if we can get a full team, we have helped them build. We've raised money every year through giving, as well as through every penny of profit we receive in our café. And so far we've raised and sent nearly \$120,000!!!

Finally, we are so very close to dedicating that completed building – we're anticipating that will happen in February, and we'll have a live video shared worship service!

Once the building is finished, our partnership will change course, but not location or people. We will help them build programs that partner with the elementary school that is...right across the street from their church! We'll help create adult literacy programs. We'll resource women with job training so that they can provide for themselves and their families (many of them are single parents). We'll help them evangelize their village, and they'll help us do the same with ours! It is vital that we continue in this direction that God has given us until we've completed our partnership.

So how can you be involved? Let's take our cues from Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8 –

From this passage we are given the location – right? Jerusalem, which is local, Judea and Samaria which is cross-cultural or multi-racial, and then global, which is beyond our borders.

Now there are three primary ways that we can participate in the work of witnessing, or sharing the Gospel with others (*prayer, in person, support, or giving*). We can certainly pray for it to happen. It is clear from Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8 that we are also expected to be the ones who do the declaring. By our words and actions, we are to share the Good News with those who haven't heard it or responded to it yet.

Finally, we can find ways to support by giving to those who do it, also. We can provide by giving money so that the ministry can happen, and we can support those who do go. So we pray, we share the Gospel in person, and we give to those who go. Now let's look at who does each of these:

For witnessing where we live, all of us can do all three of them. We all must pray, we all must share with others, and we all must give for the work, primarily through the local church.

When it comes to cross-cultural witnessing, again, all of us can pray, *most* of us can share in person, at least with those we come into contact with, if not go and volunteer at the Union Gospel Mission, Love, INC, Mission Agape, and others. But all of us need to give money to support that work through the local church, and through those ministries.

Finally, when it comes to global witnessing, again, all of us need to pray, but not all of us can go (although I think Ray Killorn has removed anyone's excuse for going to Guyana!). For some, God may call you to full time missions, which has happened and is happening in our church. But still ALL of us need to give to support those who *can* go, through West Valley Church and the the Church of the Nazarene as a denomination.

In fact, I would encourage you to prayerfully commit to all these ways and all these places in prayer and participation. But you might think, well the bucket's already gone by, so at least I don't have to give until next week, and hopefully they'll forget by then. Well guess what? You don't have to wait till next week. You can give today and anytime through the church app, or through the kiosk in the foyer, or you can write a check or put cash in an envelope and put it in the safety drop box on the door to the office right by the men's restroom. Also when you get coffee at the café, you can give extra, because you know that it goes to our partnership with Guyana. You don't have to wait until the bucket is in front you next Sunday!

May we commit to do all we can to pray, share in person, and provide through giving of money on a regular basis, in all ways!

*Stand, Benediction from Psalm 67*

O God, in mercy bless us; let your face beam with joy as you look down at us.

Send us around the world with the news of your saving power and your eternal plan for all mankind. How everyone throughout the earth will praise the Lord! How glad the nations will be, singing for joy because you are their King and will give true justice to their people! Praise God, O world! May all the peoples of the earth give thanks to you. For the earth has yielded abundant harvests. God, even our own God, will bless us. And peoples from remotest lands will worship him.