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BILLIONS



People

Fiercely living the gospel

How to start a Bible school

ADHD, finance and mission



Places

The Philippines: a rich tapestry of many layers

Stretching into East Asia's Skylands

Wounded and praying across Japan

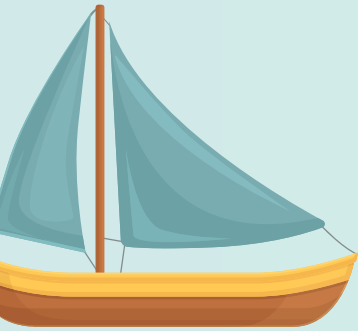


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The gaps we're leaving behind

All I have is not mine

The deadly peril of second best



Philippines

The Philippines:
a rich tapestry
of many layers





Heart for Asia. Hope for Billions.

We are OMF International, founded by James Hudson Taylor in 1865 as the China Inland Mission. We share the good news of Jesus in all its fullness to East Asia's peoples. Our mission magazine, *Billions*, is published three times a year and is available digitally for free at omf.org/au/resources/billions



編者的話

"Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making his appeal through us." —2 Corinthians 5:20

Listening to Vision Christian Radio recently, I heard about Filipino workers in Weipa, a remote mining town in northern Australia. Many are Christians—worshipping, serving, and witnessing far from home. Their presence in such an unexpected place reflects the remarkable global spread of the Filipino people.

The Philippines reports around 2.2 million people working overseas at any given time¹, but the wider Filipino community abroad—those who have settled long-term or moved for study or new opportunities—may now number over eight million. Their contribution to the Philippine economy is huge, accounting for 8.5 percent of the nation's GDP in 2023².

Yet something even more significant is happening. Filipino Christian leaders increasingly see this global movement as a missional opportunity. One writer asks: if churches equipped their overseas workers as tentmaker missionaries, "how far would that go in fulfilling the Great Commission?"³

Wherever they go, Filipinos carry family, culture, and strong community ties—and for believers, the identity of Christ's ambassadors. Gospel seeds planted in the Philippines now take root in workplaces, mining towns, neighbourhoods, and cities around the world.

This is the ripple effect of local discipleship: identities shaped in Christ multiplying across borders. Pray for Filipino believers abroad, support tentmakers, and consider how you might equip diaspora communities around you.

Scott Brown

OMF Australia Communications Lead
au.media@omfmail.com

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2. Christianity Today (2024) 'Overseas Filipino Worker Missions and Tentmaking'. Available at: https://www.christianitytoday.com/2024/09/overseas-filipino-worker-missions-tentmaker-pma-christian-migration/?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Accessed 21/11/2025).
3. Ibid.

AU NATIONAL CENTRE

OMF International (AU)

18-20 Oxford St, Epping NSW 2121
PO Box 849, Epping NSW 1710

T (02) 9868 4777
F (02) 9868 5743
au.info@omfmail.com

omf.org/au

STATE CENTRES

NSW

18-20 Oxford St, Epping NSW 2121
PO Box 849, Epping NSW 1710

T (02) 9868 4777
F (02) 9868 5743
nsw@omfmail.com

VIC/TAS

525 Middleborough Road,
Box Hill North VIC 3129
PO Box 199, Box Hill VIC 3128

T (03) 9898 9922
vic@omfmail.com
tas@omfmail.com

QLD/NT

34 Trafalgar Street,
Woolloongabba QLD 4102
PO Box 8207,
Woolloongabba QLD 4102

T (07) 3391 6777
qld@omfmail.com
nt@omfmail.com

WA

Suite 12 & 13, Hulme House,
32 Hulme Court, Myaree WA 6154

T (08) 9240 8312
wa@omfmail.com

CONTRIBUTORS

Design: Anton Triyanto
Editing: Richard Thamm, Trix Wilkins
Interviews: Melissa Au, Janet Jones,
Trix Wilkins, Melissa Yeung.

INTERNATIONAL CENTRE

OMF International

2 Cluny Road, Singapore 259570

T +65 6319 4550
F +65 6472 2398

omf.org

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AMONG THE MANOBO

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The Philippines:

A RICH TAPESTRY OF MANY LAYERS



Often regarded as a “Christian nation,” the Philippines is actually a complex spiritual landscape marked by significant needs and challenges, observes Paul Jessop



The lovable oaf Shrek once spoke wise words about ogres being like onions. There are many layers, there is complexity. In a similar way, the Philippines is like an onion. It might look a certain way from the outside but the more you investigate, the more

layers you find.

While often regarded as a “Christian nation” with a vibrant evangelical presence and a rich religious heritage, beneath this identity lies a complex spiritual landscape marked by significant needs and challenges. Although the Philippine church has grown remarkably over the past few decades, millions still lack meaningful access to the gospel. Understanding this context is essential for shaping ministry strategies that are effective and authentically Filipino.

Isn't the Philippines already reached?

OMF has served in the Philippines for over fifty years, and we praise God for the growth of the church. Evangelical Christians number about 16 million, gathering in 98,000 congregations.

Yet the task is far from complete.

Ninety million Filipinos still need to hear the gospel in a meaningful way, and half of the country's 42,000 communities remain without a church—most in isolated rural or Muslim areas. In parts of the southern Philippines, shariah law is gradually being implemented, with some groups actively promoting Islamization. Four million Filipinos belong to cults, nearly a million practice indigenous religions, and 88 million adhere to Roman Catholicism. Syncretistic practices rooted in folk religion dilute biblical truth, requiring ministry approaches that are both culturally sensitive and firmly grounded in Scripture.

There remains great need for workers with the right heart and gifts to serve in this beautiful and diverse nation.

Urgent needs among complex challenges

Praise God that many

godly, faithful Filipinos are sharing the gospel throughout East Asia!

At the same time, this rapid growth has created an urgent need. The development of trained pastors and leaders has been outpaced by the growth and multiplication of churches. Many pastors, though passionate for Christ, lack formal theological education. Accessible training, mentoring and coaching are needed to strengthen church leadership.

Three generations of believers are typically required before the gospel deeply transforms a

THREE GENERATIONS OF BELIEVERS ARE TYPICALLY REQUIRED

before the gospel deeply transforms a culture



culture. While progress has been made, many communities are still in the early stages of this journey, with millions of Filipino Christians being first or second generation believers who need discipleship.

At the crossroads

The Philippines stands at a crossroads. The evangelical church has grown significantly, yet vast needs remain. There are unreached communities, undertrained leaders, and a need for societal transformation. With every layer of diversity and challenge, there are new opportunities.

The Philippine church has a unique opportunity to move beyond numerical growth to integrating evangelism with community development to reflect the gospel in every sphere of life, actively engaging in areas such as business, arts, education and social justice.

By partnering with Filipino churches and embracing holistic, contextualized ministry, OMF can help ensure that every community has access to the gospel and that Filipino believers are equipped to impact their society and the world.

The role of mission agencies and foreign missionaries in the Philippines today

Foreign missionaries and mission agencies like OMF still have a vital ministry role in the Philippines—not necessarily as pioneers, but as partners. This includes providing expertise, collaborating on strategies, and connecting local churches with global networks. Effective ministry requires consultation and partnership with Filipino leaders, ensuring approaches are contextualized and sustainable. Humility, patience, love and a heart for partnership and collaboration are essential elements to serving.

As our missionaries engages in diverse ministries across Manila, Samar, Leyte and Davao, may OMF Philippines' vision come closer to fruition each day: "God

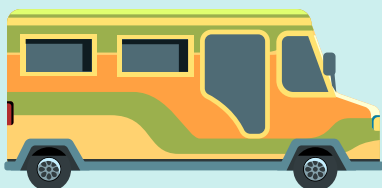
glorified through biblical communities of faith in the Philippines bearing witness to the gospel so that, by God's grace, society will be transformed and the world impacted."

Paul Jessop

OMF Australia National Director

Opportunities to serve in the Philippines

- Theological education, community development, student ministries, English teaching among the Waray Waray people
 - Serving among Muslim communities through language learning, community development, tutoring and medical work
 - Equipping leaders through mobile theological education, mentoring, and discipleship
- Support ministries such as media, communications, training, and member care



HOW TO START A *Bible School*

Co-founder of Koinonia Theological Seminary (KTS) Philipp Schmuki shares how the Lord led him and his family to start the first interdenominational postgraduate Bible College in Mindanao

We were in the Philippines during a period of history when rebel groups were active—some quite militant, wiping out whole villages. When I arrived, I was on a list to be liquidated: number 14. They wanted to kidnap my family and shoot me.

I looked straight into their rifle, but it never worked for them. Our family survived. When rebels took over the region, the people living in our village told us, “We don’t feel secure anymore with you here. If you leave, we would have less trouble.” That’s when we left.

We went to Davao, and I taught at Bible colleges. At that time, there were 34 Bible schools on the island of Mindanao. I realized many teachers held a lower qualification than their students would after graduation. I also discovered many students went on to study in Manila or the US—and didn’t return.

At the same time, I noticed that the Bible schools on Mindanao educated excellent, top-notch church planters. Graduates would plant a church within eight years with 20-100 people. The church started to grow very fast. Philippine pastors needed better tools to handle bigger churches.

For six years, I talked about starting a graduate



school. I asked Bible schools if they would be willing to help. All said, “Yes, we need that, but we can’t do it.” I went to conferences. All said, “Yes we know the need, but we can’t do it.”

On one home assignment in Switzerland, I had such a heavy burden. I wrote, “In 6-8 months, I’ll be back in the Philippines.” We met with pastors, Bible school directors and teachers before we returned. When we got back, all were ready to start the school!

Mindanao’s churches needed to be strengthened and have ownership of the ministry. It took six years to get the first board of trustees going, with two-thirds of members being Filipinos. The KTS board was interdenominational and involved several missions. Having a very broad base was an advantage.

Money came in—the Lord provided for KTS. John Gaisano Jr, a later president of KTS, met me in Singapore. He told me, “It was God’s thing at the right time. You guys were just obedient.” We can’t explain it even now. God will do what He will do.

Philipp Schmuki

Co-Founder of Koinonia Theological Seminary



*Read Philipp's
full story*

EQUIPPING THE GROWING *Church of Mindanao*

Wilson McMahon, Jill Zwuyghuizen and Hefin Jones talk KTS—why theological training is essential for mission, what makes KTS different, and how you can get involved

Why does KTS exist?

Hefin: There are more people here on the island of Mindanao than the whole of Australia, and we are the only graduate school here that is government-recognized and internationally recognized that provides a master's education. We also broadcast our teaching internationally, and that's been a great opportunity to train students both in the Philippines and beyond.

Jill: We want to see God glorified through the church thoughtfully engaging in mission across multiple cultures, both here in Mindanao and beyond. As a seminary we really want to equip the men and women of God who are engaging in mission.

Wilson: Our mission is to equip Christians with reflective, contextually relevant learning to strengthen and equip the church for mission in Mindanao. We offer programs of learning that are appropriate for the southern Philippines, where most of our students live.

What makes KTS a different from other Bible colleges in Mindanao?

Hefin: KTS is valuable for fellowship between church denominations, and important for retaining Christian talent so that people just don't brain drain

out elsewhere. If we can encourage people to live, train and serve locally, they're more likely to be retained by Mindanao's churches.

What are some changes and needs coming up for KTS, and how can we be involved?

Jill: We need to train the next generation of faculty. The college is growing. We need more faculty members and to train up alumni. All of this is completely within the sovereignty of God to do, so please pray that God meets these needs.

Wilson: Our training programs are our primary way of serving the local church; in the last six years we've tripled our number of students. A new campus will provide us with better opportunities to offer hospitality to local churches and leaders, and sends a positive message about the growth of the Mindanao church.

Our prayer is that we will continue to grow, not just in numbers but in impact. Pray that our programs will be appropriate to the contexts where our graduates serve, and that graduates will be godly and competent servants of the church in Mindanao and beyond.

Interview by Janet Jones, editing by Trix Wilkins.



Read full Q&A



How you can pray for KTS

- Pray for KTS to keep their God-given vision to equip the Mindanao church
- Pray for godly leadership for KTS—students and faculty seek biblically faithful leaders





After 36 years of ministry in the Philippines, Andy Smith outlines the ways you can pray for church plants as they baptize new Christians and seek to bless their communities

since sent missionaries to the Waray people of Samar and to several unreached peoples in Asia.

Pray that this mother church in Batangas will continue to make many disciples and to raise up missionaries.

Scattered to other communities: Albay

An ABCCOP missionary planted a church among Bikolanos on the slopes of Mayon Volcano in Albay in 1991. After only a handful of

worship services, the volcano erupted. Since most of the village's residents were relocated, the church closed. A few of the members started attending a nearby ABCCOP church, and others joined a church in the community where they were relocated.

Pray that Christians who are scattered by natural disasters or other events find an appropriate church to join in their new location.

Reaching children and families: Albay

In 1992, I was the final missionary in an ABCCOP church plant among Bikolanos in a rural town in Albay. The church has grown significantly since then. It has planted three daughter churches, and today has a thriving Compassion International program reaching children and families with the gospel.

Pray for local churches to be proactive in evangelizing children and their

From a church to a church-planting church: Laguna

A Baptist church planted a church among Tagalogs in a new subdivision in Laguna province in 1986. It went on to plant several more churches, and became a training base for Baptist churches in the region. Several of its members became church planters, or pastors of the churches it planted.

Pray that this Baptist church will continue to reach out to new communities in its area, seeking to plant a church in each.

Raising up missionaries: Batangas

An ABCCOP church in Batangas planted a church among Tagalogs in a rural village in 1990. The mother church has



families, and at starting churches in the communities where they live.

Sending Filipino missionaries: Quezon City

In the mid-1990s, a church was planted among Chinese-Filipinos in a district of Quezon City. It has grown significantly and now supports a number of Filipino missionaries, including Mangyan workers who serve cross-culturally.

Pray for Chinese-Filipino churches to continue to be a blessing in supporting and praying for Filipino missionaries.

Reaching Filipino men: Albay

From 1996 to 2002, an ABCCOP missionary and I planted a church among Bikolanos in a city of Albay. A few of its key early leaders went on to become full-time workers. Today, the church effectively reaches women and young men, but not many adult men.

Pray for this church in Albay to bear more fruit among men and that youth will remain active, maturing in Christ and reaching out to others with the gospel.

Andy Smith

Former church planter and now trainer with OMF International



How can you pray for Philippine churches today

Andy Smith shares insights gained in conversation with ABCCOP leaders, pastors and missionaries. Join us in prayer for the following needs:

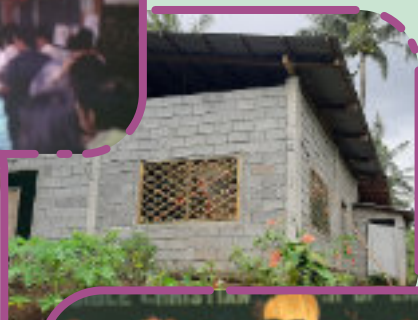
- Most churches are regularly baptizing new believers.
- Many more pastors and missionaries are needed.
- Most churches need additional lay leaders.
- A significant percentage of workers are under-supported.
- Many churches do not know how to address issues of sexuality.
- Many churches do not know how to bless Muslims moving into their communities.

About ABCCOP

The Alliance of Bible Christian Communities of the Philippines (ABCCOP) is an association of churches committed to proclaiming the gospel, discipling Christians, equipping leaders and building local churches. OMF was involved in its formation in 1972. Today, ABCCOP envisions "a community of Bible-believing Christian churches who are growing, resource-sharing, interdependent, dynamic in leadership, socially and politically responsive, committed to missions and church multiplication, and essentially impacting the nation and the world." Find out more: <http://abccop.org/history/>



*Find out more about
ABCCOP*



TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATION

Peema Duque, Andy Smith and Iljo de Keijzer are training the next generation of Filipino pastors and missionaries. What does this look like?

Daniel Learning with Missionaries

Peema Duque

In the Old Testament, we learn that for three years, Daniel and his friends learned the language and culture of the Chaldeans—well enough to serve as leaders in Babylon! OMF's training program for missionaries, Daniel Learning, is named after this integrated program of language, culture, and worldview so that each one can effectively relate to and serve alongside local Christians. As OMF missionaries, we make every effort to build quality relationships, learn languages and culture, live in appropriate ways in our place of ministry, and biblically contextualize our work. I've been in this role for almost three years and I find there's so much I still need to learn to adjust to! Daniel Learning has helped me a lot.

Coaching Filipino Pastors and Missionaries

Andy Smith

I've been in the Philippines for over 36 years. When I first arrived, the evangelical church was much smaller, about six percent. Persecution was very intense and it was politically very unstable. Since then, the church has grown dramatically and there are now 98,000 churches. The government is now relatively stable, which has allowed the economy to grow.

However, there are still 18,000 communities without a church, many of which are in more

isolated, rural areas or in Muslim communities. We want to bless them and would love to see a community of faith in each of those. I coach a few Filipino missionaries, trying to help the number of churches and believers increase in particular areas.

ABCCOP, the Alliance of Bible Christian Communities of the Philippines, is 52 years old now. It's an association of evangelical churches started by Filipinos and missionaries from a handful of agencies, including OMF—and now completely led by Filipinos. We journey with them as coaches, mentors or trainers, when requested.

Training Preachers Across Generations

Iljo de Keijzer

It's been twenty years since I first started serving in the Philippines. Here, many provincial pastors preach every Sunday. I heard from a friend about how Langham's training for preachers was impacting people. So I gathered 70 key leaders in their respective denomination or inter-church groups from different generations and different provinces.

It has grown tremendously over different islands, language groups, age groups, educational backgrounds, denominations. We have pastors with MDivs, fishermen, tricycle drivers, professionals, bivocational pastors—really, everyone. We have trained about 100 facilitators now!

We created a handbook which starts with Nehemiah—where they rediscover the word of God, which leads to repentance and to celebrating re-found faith in God. We show that theology is done from reading the Bible, ask them to think about the context of their listeners. We developed everything in Filipino languages, and make use of local illustrations.

Interviews by Melanie Au, OMF Philippines Field Director. Editing by Trix Wilkins.



*Read longer version
of this story online*



A TALE OF TWO PHILIPPINE PASTORS

Pastors Andy Dichos and Eva Enaje tell their stories: how they came to faith, how they started serving, and how you might pray for their ministries and communities.

I gave my life to Christ on March 26, 1983. It was a night when my mom was reading the Bible aloud in the living room while my siblings and I were in our room getting ready for bed. As I listened, I felt convicted of my sins and knew I needed to repent.

I'm currently serving at Talaonga Bible Christian Church (TBCC) and grateful for the opportunity to disciple believers and train them for the ministry. Of our 63 church members at TBCC, we have 21 preachers—14 of whom are active in our weekly Langham preaching club. It's been instrumental in equipping our church with a team of preachers, and we're seeing spiritual growth among the team.

My husband and I also both serve at Sorsogon Bible Christian Church (SBCC) in the city where we have a student center located near Sorsogon State University. Lord willing, we—along with two missionary couples—will go on mission to Masbate City next year.

Eva Enaje

I was first invited—rather forcefully—to attend a Father's Day fellowship. Later on, I received Christ during a time when I was struggling with deep anxiety caused by my heavy drinking and smoking.

I started serving as a music leader, and later became an elder. Eventually, I was called to serve as the pastor of the church, and enrolled in Langham training because I wanted to grow in biblical preaching and improve in preparing sermons that are faithful to God's Word.

Being part of a group with other pastors is a powerful learning experience. Through prayer, meditation and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, I grew in crafting messages that are faithful to the biblical text, clear and relevant to the congregation, and deeply rooted in God's Word.

Pray that I may be able to train our church members, become more active in the preaching club with other churches, and eventually help conduct Langham training for other churches.

Andy Dichos





Filipino pastor Ricardo Cortez, along with OMF missionaries Matt and Cristelle Nicholas and Mirjam Kuelling, share about ministry among the Waray Waray of the southern Philippines

FIERCELY LIVING *the* Gospel

The Waray Waray are known to be fierce in attitude. The whole of the Philippines knows us as being fierce. What is so exciting is that even though it's seemingly impossible for the gospel to penetrate—when I look at the people who really respond, they will die with it. If you really disciple them and mentor them, coach them, live with them, and understand them, Waray Waray will be fierce in doing the work of God.

I've been serving in Waray Waray ministry full-time since 2007, mobilizing church planting and advocating for mission. One encouragement is that the few who have really come to Christ whom I know have mostly engaged in mission—three of those I discipled are now missionaries.

Ministry among the Waray Waray is like a hard rock. It must be hammered, tipped little by little, by prayer. It takes time. If you can persevere, you can do well. It's long and it's hard, but it will be fruitful by God's grace and strength.

—Reverend Ricardo Cortez, on discipling Waray Waray Christians



*Read more of
Ricardo's story*

THE GRACE OF GOD AMONG *Waray Waray Youth*

One of the strongest traits of the Waray Waray people is their resilience. They experience lots of natural catastrophes. They don't give up; they rebuild their houses, and life continues. They move forward with hope and determination.

I also really appreciate their hospitality and kindness. If people trust you, you are part of their family. If I speak Waray Waray, people will open their hearts.

I've learned to have time for people, don't be in a hurry, just be with people and be a true friend. And if someone shares something, to pray for them regularly. It takes a lot of initiative, but it's worthwhile, and I praise God for many deep relationships that I have here.

—Mirjam Kuelling, on student ministry among the Waray Waray

I am one of those who received the grace of God; He gave us some OMF missionaries. Through Ate Mirjam, I met God in my teenage years. I've learned a lot about His Word, especially about how He works with us and changes our lives. I praying that God will send us a lot of people who will journey with our church, as well as a new generation of youths who will grow and continue to serve God.

—Adilyn, Waray Waray student



*Read more of Mirjam and
Adilyn's stories:*



POINTING TO *God's Word*

The Waray are quite tuned into spiritual things; we need to tune them in to Jesus.

There are about 3 million Waray—95% still do not yet know Jesus. Many are quite open to talking about Jesus, but to commit is very difficult. Material poverty is a challenge; it is hard to build churches financially able to support even a low-cost model of ministry and training.

Our biggest strategy is pointing people towards the Bible. 2 Timothy 3:15-16 tells us that the whole Bible is given to us as God's wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. We point people to the Bible so they can see that it is God pointing them to His salvation.

Success is people you've discipled. If there are some people that you can look at and say, "Yes, I spent lots of time with them, I pointed them to God and the Word of God." Through that, they'll be able to do lots of things, and their impact on other people will be great.

—Matt and Cristelle Nicholas, on ministry success

Among the Waray Waray, we have this strong belief about spiritual creatures or spirits that can inflict illnesses doctors can't see. I was alone in the boarding house once, and felt this heavy presence compressing my chest and heard whispers. Ate Mirjam and Pastor Ric reached out to me, and Ate Cristelle and her family prayed. Though it didn't instantly stop, it gradually did. I thank God for that. It made my faith stronger and reminded me of my identity as His child. God is more powerful than anything, any creature, any spirit. When we have Jesus, we have nothing to be afraid of, we have authority over all things.

—Janeline, Waray Waray local Christian



*Read more of Matt and
Cristelle and Janeline's stories*



How you can pray for the Waray Waray

- Pray that many will be open to the gospel and for poverty to be alleviated.
- Pray for more to come and visit, pray and work; this part of the Philippines has some of the fewest Christian resources and trained ministers in the country.
- Pray for resilient workers willing to commit long-term and put down roots, persevering, compassionate and willing to sacrifice their comfort.



*Join Philippine Ministries
online prayer group:*



Mustard Seed

AMONG THE MANOBO

Where are they now? OMF alumni Liz Chalmers shares the long-term impact of high school and university scholarships for students in rural and poor areas of the Philippines

It was the summer of 1989, and I found myself far from home in the UK, sitting on a bamboo floor of a Manobo village house in the southern Philippines. I was there to learn the Manobo language, wondering whether I would ever be able to say anything beyond “yes” and “no.”

A wood fire crackled in the corner of the small house. Children gathered around and giggled shyly at me, eyes sparkling, noses running. I was handed a jar of sweet coffee and some cassava. It suddenly struck me that none of the children were at school.

“Oh, we haven’t seen the teacher for a few weeks,” said our host, of an empty building nearby labelled ‘School.’ My missionary mentor then explained that teachers often found it hard to live in remote places, and many were fearful to travel in bad weather.

At the time, the Manobo people were all subsistence farmers and extremely poor with very large families. Most villages had no clean water or sanitation. Roads were very poor. Crops often failed and livestock succumbed to disease.

As I spent time with the village women, listening to their stories and writing them down in order, I was felt so sad. They shared harrowing accounts of losing

multiple children, measles epidemics wiping out adults and children alike and young mothers dying in childbirth.

A long-term investment

One morning, a desperate parent brought a very sick child to our door. He was barely alive and needed urgent care. As there was very little that we could do, they travelled on to the nearest medical facility over an hour away. Sadly the child died before they could reach the hospital.

This story multiplied many times across the hills of Central Mindanao and North Davao. It seemed obvious that alongside bringing the good news of the gospel, our church planting team needed to address some of the enormous needs facing the Manobo.

We began to see that the answer to many of the problems was to educate young people to a level where they could become the much-needed teachers, medical personnel and agriculture experts for their own communities.

This goal seemed impossible at the



time. Initially, the team agreed to facilitate a small group of students, some from each church planted among the Manobo, to go to high school. When students finished, they would be sent to college to study midwifery, agriculture or education.

This was the beginning of the scholarship program.

The mustard seed becomes a tree

What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches. Luke 13:18-19

There were risks involved with setting up this scholarship program. Would the students cope? Would there be enough funds? Would the students stay on in the city or move overseas, instead of returning to their own communities to work?

We believed that God had led us to this point and we trusted Him with the results. The scholarship program ran for about twenty years. Over 150 young people from the Manobo churches were able to access a college level education over that time. The majority have returned to their areas and communities to serve with compassion, empathy and dedication.

It has been a joy to see what the Lord has done through the scholars to bring health and hope. Around twenty are now teachers, four head teachers, and two doctors. Many are midwives, nurses, and other medical personnel. Some are serving in animal husbandry and agriculture. Others are social workers, engineers, accountants, community developers, computer experts and secretaries. Some became pastors. The list goes on.

The scholarship program has served its purpose, and doesn't exist in the same form today. Now, former scholars can support the next generation of children as they seek God's will for their lives. May God continue to advance His kingdom through the lives of the scholars, and raise up more who will serve Him as gospel bearers.

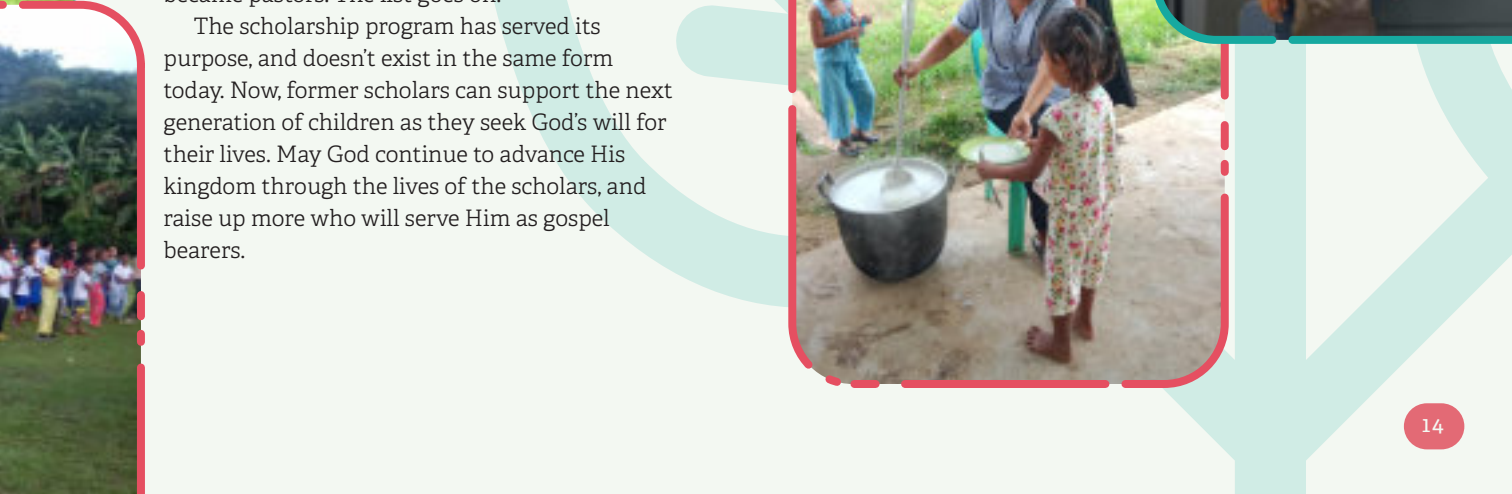
Jun and MaryJean's story

Jun and his wife MaryJean were in the first group of students in the scholarship program. Jun became a teacher then a head teacher, serving all his life in Manobo and Dibabawon schools. More recently, he became President of the Manobo Association of Bible Churches in Mindanao (MABCAM). MaryJean has served as a midwife for many years among remote Manobo communities, and as President of the mothers in MABCAM, ministering to hundreds of women in their vibrant annual conference. Early in 2025, Jun very suddenly went to be with Jesus, and is greatly missed.

Maribel's story

Maribel qualified as a primary school teacher and work in a remote Manobo village. She and her husband travel to the school each week by motorbike over treacherous roads. She often goes above and beyond to meet the needs of the children in her class, and takes every opportunity to share the love of Jesus with the children in her care and their families.

Liz Chalmers
OMF alumni



GROWING UP BETWEEN WORLDS: *Life At and After Faith Academy*

What is life really like for a student at an international Christian school? Faith Academy alumni and OMF Australia creatives team member Lorenzo Ortega just might surprise you...

"You went to an international school? That must have been a really great experience!"

People usually can't quite place where I'm from when I speak. When I tell them I went to an international school, they're right. It really was a great experience being at Faith Academy in the Philippines, studying with classmates from all over the world!

What made it truly special was that my school was a Christian one—a missionary school with a heart for evangelism both locally and globally. Attending Faith reminded me how incredible God is for creating such diversity, and showed me that our unity comes from our love for Jesus and what He has done on the cross—and our proper response to share that with the world.

Belonging everywhere and nowhere

Growing up in a cross-cultural environment can be isolating. Third Culture Kids (TCKs) like me are often described as citizens of everywhere and nowhere. We

learn to create shared experiences with people we've just met and make a sense of home wherever we go!

However, each goodbye is painful. A part of my heart feels torn each time I say goodbye to close friends. Yet through all those farewells, I came to understand that home is ultimately found in God's presence.

Favorite memories from Faith Academy

My teachers and classmates at Faith Academy were some of the kindest people I have ever met, and God's love was evident in how they cared for one another.

I especially loved extracurriculars like All for Jesus, where we reached out to Manila's urban poor, played games with children, and shared God's Word.

Another highlight was Model United Nations, which gave me opportunities to meet students from other international schools and think about global issues beyond my own experience.

I also loved how music brought people together and helped us express our faith in such a joyful way. Singing in the choir in different languages is something I miss most about life at Faith.

Other favorite moments include Wednesday chapel and Monday youth group, which gave us space to pause, reflect on Jesus, and reminded us of what truly matters in life.

How Faith Academy impacted my life

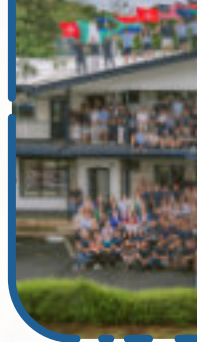
At Faith, I began to understand what it means to follow Christ, and the privilege I had to know Him. Often, our conversations as students centered on storing up treasures in heaven rather than on earth.

The school also showed me the beauty and power of a Christian community—not perfect, but one that lifts you up when you fall, and reflects God's love even when it means stepping out to care for someone who may not reciprocate that same care.

When my grandfather passed away, the school counselors helped me process my grief and reminded me of the hope and assurance that Jesus conquered death.

The identity that matters most

Upon moving to Australia, I found community among people who, like me, lived in the in-between





spaces.

I am from the Philippines—at least, that is what my passport says—but for me, identity runs deeper than nationality. With East Asian heritage in my family, I grew up blending different values and traditions.

I am grateful for all the things that make me who I am, but I am most proud of my identity in Christ.

Storing up treasures that last

All of us are wired with a deep longing to belong. But no matter how good a city, career or relationship is, none can fully satisfy that ache in us—because nothing on earth was ever meant to. We're ultimately longing for the day Christ returns and brings us home for good.

As 2 Corinthians 5:1 says, "For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

Knowing that we're made for eternity has helped me love people wherever I go, seeing places as mission fields rather than idols where I store up material treasures that won't last. It's made me more willing to go wherever God sends, because home is truly wherever He is.

Lorenzo Ortega

OMF Australia creatives team



How you can pray for Faith Academy

- **Transitions** remain one of the biggest challenges for students. Many struggle when returning to their home countries, or moving elsewhere for university or mission work. Pray that they find belonging and peace wherever God leads them.
- **Faculty.** Pray for more teachers and staff who are passionate about both education and mission, people willing to help nurture the next generation of Christian leaders.
- **Unity.** Pray for all students and staff at Faith Academy to continue to grow in love and understanding for one another, using their diverse backgrounds to build God's kingdom together. May their lives be witnesses of Christ's love in the Philippines and beyond.

THE GAPS WE'RE LEAVING BEHIND

Returning to Australia, Hefin and Janet Jones share how much more there is to do in the Philippines—from theological education and media to serving among rural communities

What we did in the Philippines, and a safe place to ask mission questions

Hefin: My role with KTS in the Philippines has been to teach and to train pastors and other Christian workers in how to handle the Bible, especially the New Testament. I help them to be able to teach the Bible to others. I'm hoping to continue relationships with KTS, as many already study hybrid or online.

This year, we'll be spending time at Sydney Missionary and Bible College as missionaries-in-residence, where our role will be more connecting with and having conversations with students about mission. I'm looking forward to this. I'm a Moore College guy, so it's going to be a real cross-cultural experience for me!

Janet: I helped to plan and create media resources to promote in the Philippines what God is doing through our workers and the communities that they serve. We call this ministry "mobilization through media," where people learn about what mission is about—the struggles, the joys, the culture, the context, the opportunities to get involved.

At SMBC this year, we want to be a safe place for students to ask questions like, "What's it like living overseas? What did you find hard? How did you let your parents know? I'm thinking of starting to write newsletters, can you give me tips?" We're looking forward to coming alongside people and encouraging them in their journey.

Puzzle pieces coming together, and other highlights

Hefin: I taught a course in New Testament theology (helping people understand and put together the different things they might know from the New Testament). It was really good to see the penny dropping for a number of people, and how this understanding can help them as they teach in their churches.

Another joy was being in Paul's letters. Wherever the church is, sometimes Christian denominations don't talk much to each other. We were handling a particular part of Paul's letters, which had obvious relevance to this topic. The students were thankful to get to have a conversation about this, realizing that while there are differences of opinion or practice, but it doesn't mean other denominations believe in a different Jesus.

Janet: One highlight was being able to use my professional background to do visual storytelling. I had no idea I would do that before I came to the Philippines. (Ironically there was a lot more creative freedom than in my last two jobs in the animation industry!) I learned about audio and designing videos that really tell stories of what God's doing here. I've enjoyed that because it scratches my creative itch.

Another highlight has been gaining an overview of what missionaries are doing in different parts of the Philippines, visiting them almost every year to hear stories and share them—and seeing the bigger picture of what God's doing. I've also loved getting involved in local church evangelism, making friends and partnering cross-culturally to share the gospel as we reach out to girls in a shelter home.

When subjects aren't taboo, and some things we'll miss

Hefin: I'll miss people's genuine friendliness, openness and willingness to talk about all kinds of things here in the Philippines. We've had fairly open conversations about some things which are often taboo or just difficult in Australia. I'll miss the warmth and hospitality of people, how real they are, how they wear their heart on their sleeve.

Janet: It's refreshing to not face cynicism. Here, it's not taboo to talk about what you believe spiritually. In Davao, there's no one dominant faith. Muslims are quite happy to talk with us about the fact we're Christians. When we tell people we're missionaries, most people are positive and welcoming. There's a willingness to talk about things close to their heart. So go to the Philippines if you want to be able to start spiritual conversations!

Opportunities we're leaving behind (for you to step into!)

Hefin: There are ongoing opportunities for the kind of role that I've been doing in seminaries, for people who are interested in training pastors from grassroots levels upwards (interestingly, many fishermen and farmers pastor churches here). There are always opportunities in theological training and equipping, and for people good with money who can help cash-strapped churches send missionaries in a sustainable way.

Janet: There are opportunities for people who want to reach out to areas that don't have a strong

evangelical church presence—areas that are tougher to live in, that are poorer or more isolated. There remain unreached people groups and languages in need of Bible translation. If you have community development skills such as academic coaching, agriculture and livelihood training, you're also welcome to come!

There are so many ethnically diverse communities here. In Davao alone, there are thousands of immigrants from Indonesia, and there is a significant Indian student population (including about 7,000 medical students). There are millions of Muslim neighbors, and the rest of Mindanao is only an hour or two west.

The Philippines is the largest evangelical community in southeast Asia by a significant margin, with a fair number of Filipinos willing to travel overseas. It's well-placed to be a major missionary sending country.



What can you pray for

- Pray for more workers for the Philippines; while the team has shrunk, there are still many opportunities to serve
- Pray for seminaries involved in training pastors for East Asia, as well as local pastors serving within the Philippines
- Pray for Philippine churches to be empowered, educated and equipped to know how to send missionaries, and to do so boldly.
- Pray for Hefin and Janet as they resettle in Sydney in new roles; for a good school for daughter Rhiannon, and good connections with friends in Sydney.



ALL I HAVE IS NOT MINE

On a short-term media mission trip to the Philippines, Melissa Yeung discovers what the Philippines' various missionaries all have in common, and that all that we have is from God.

Last October and November, I was given a bird's-eye view over pretty much all of OMF's ministries in the Philippines. My main focus was to help with livestream events and create content alongside then media coordinator Janet Jones.

I visited ministries, and saw that each person involved had different gifts, using them in different ways for different groups of people with different needs. The common thing among all the missionaries was their heart for the people: a genuine love for the Filipinos.

Culture shock, language barriers, and things I didn't expect...

From the moment I got off the plane, I knew that the Philippine archipelago was a very different country to Australia. The culture shock was something I had to slowly get used to.

I didn't expect the culture and the language barrier; I speak Australian English, and Filipinos speak American. The other thing I didn't realize is that each island speaks its own language! There are so many languages, sometimes people can use the same word but mean different things, and there are nuances that make language learning complicated.

I also didn't know the Philippines had such a big Muslim community. Missionaries have found ways to bless communities through practical programs such as marriage enrichment courses and after school childcare.

Technical difficulties, prayer and depending on God

Janet and I encountered technical difficulties, especially in Davao and Tacloban.

On our first live stream, a gadget was glitching a few minutes before we went live. We didn't know what was wrong; we had practiced! We prayed—and the glitches were gone.

For the following livestreams, there was always a new issue we hadn't encountered before. We could sense spiritual forces at play. This was a new

initiative, and we were mobilizing people internationally to pray, send or go on mission.

God really taught us that He was the one working, even through technical difficulties. Viewers told us they loved

being able to hear directly from missionaries and local Christians to see a more in-depth picture of the work that they wouldn't quite get in an email.

I don't think it could have been done without prayer. Our experience was definitely a strong reminder of our trust and dependence on God. He's the one who works through these new initiatives for His purposes.

Being present with God

In Tacloban, there a lot of very poor rural communities. What was there was simply the Word of God. I realized that's all you really need.

Church is not about fancy buildings and lighting



and having a set program or even structures. It's the fellowship of enjoying one another and learning from each other as we're listening to or reading God's Word together.

So, I quite liked how "stripped down" it was. God asks us just to be present with Him. Being in Tacloban was a good reminder of that.

A particularly encouraging space

For many students from villages who come into Tacloban City to study at university, it can be quite lonely. An OMF missionary, Mirjam, brings them together so that they experience love and a sense of belonging while also learning about the Bible.

I think that ministry struck me the most. We cooked a chicken curry together, we walked into the wet markets together to buy ingredients. I shared my testimony, and some of the students asked me, "What advice would you have for someone who's finished uni?"

I felt like I couldn't really answer, but I wanted to remind them to not neglect their relationships with each other as they go through life, and to remember that God's always with them, even if things don't go to plan.

Still so much to do...

A word that kept popping up for me was gratitude. God's taught me that none of these things I have are mine. They're truly from Him.

Not everyone's called to leave everything to go on the mission field, but how can we allocate funds to support our missionaries? Or how can we be intentional about replying to missionaries when they write to us? Not just throwing money or ticking a box, but genuinely having a relationship. How can we share our own lives with them—and pray for them?

In Manila, the hustle and bustle of the country, you see such a stark difference between the rich and poor. That was quite confronting.

Catholicism remains very strong in the Philippines, and there are also Christian cults that are prevalent. When I was talking to people about their faith, many would say, "Oh, I was born

Catholic," or "I was born in this religion." Many don't understand what it means to have a relationship with God, even though they may have access to the Bible.

There's still so much to do in a country that we think might be reached.

Melissa Yeung with Trix Wilkins



Going into Battle IN JAPAN

Andrew and Julie share how the Lord showed them that prayer really matters—that's why the Japanese church prays so much!—and how you can pray for Japan

On our first day in Japan (before our prayer trip officially started), we went to the Meiji temple. As an architect, I (Andrew) love looking at great, beautiful buildings.

Almost immediately after we left the temple, our feet started burning and our ankles swelled up. For days, we felt like our feet were on fire.

When we prayed, God gave me (Julie) a dream where He showed me a fresh understanding of idolatry and the battle for our affections, and where we walk. He reminded me we were on a prayer journey and we'd entered into a temple, where people are worshipping foreign Gods. You've come on a prayer journey to contend for this land. Your prayers are powerful. Be ready."

We prayed and repented. Straight away, the heat left. Within a few days, the swelling calmed.

It was really a wake-up call for us. Yes, there is the

beauty of this land, the beauty of these people, the deliciousness of the food—all the wonderful things people love about Japan. But there's a war raging beneath the surface for the salvation of the Japanese people.

In one sense, we were encouraged. This wasn't a holiday. The enemy had noticed our arrival.

We saw that prayer really matters. It's why the Japanese church prays so much.

Praying like your life depends on it

During our prayer journey, we met with about 24 churches and ministries over 12 days—and they were all praying churches. We were deeply moved by how much Japanese Christians pray.

One of the churches of about twenty people were meeting every day to pray for their city to come to faith in Jesus. Whether three people or five or one,

they pray. On a city map they highlight particular streets where they've walked and prayed. In any event, they pray for the church and its ministries every day.

We thought, "What are we doing?!" (As in back here in Australia, do we pray like that?)

True treasure has a cost

Following Jesus wholeheartedly involves a cost. We saw the cost for so

many missionaries. Yet as a minister, I (Julie) felt encouraged that there were others also paying a big cost to see people saved, knowing the love of God and discipleship.

The cost in Japan to missionaries is similar to anyone engaged in ministry around the world.

Isolation; often being one of the few Christians in town; health challenges; giving up dream careers; going without education conveniences, and more. That was an important thing for us to absorb and understand, so that compassion and specifics could inform our prayers.



Be a light where there's none

We met a pastor in northern Honshu of a little church—well, it was a big church for Japan, with about twenty people.

One day, a Christian missionary couple came along who wanted to join the church. He told them, “Rather than adding two more people to our church, please go where there's no church an hour and a half away and be there—so there's a Christian witness in that town.”

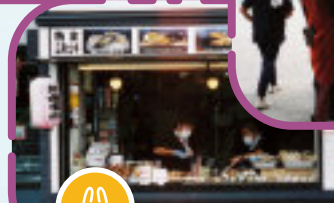
Christian workers we visited shared that while Japanese people are very keen to hear about Jesus, the seeds take a lot longer to grow, because there are much fewer Christians sowing, planting, watering and seeing them grow.

“Why don't more Christians go to Japan?”

A Japanese Christian asked us why more people don't come to share their faith in God in Japan. He said, “It's not illegal, you don't get persecuted, you don't get imprisoned, so why don't more people come?” Another added, “You don't even need the language.”

“It's more important that you have a heart for God,” they told us. “If you come with a heart that's willing to share your faith with others and love the local people in respectful ways, God uses that.”

Andrew and Julie with Trix Wilkins



How can you pray for Japan?

- Pray for the Lord to provide existing missionaries with friendships and encouragement, and help in their language and culture learning.
- Pray for the church in Japan, anticipating a third wave of revival in their country. Pray for this spiritual breakthrough to come; that outreach ministries will be blessed.
- In a hard-working society, pray for Japan's Christians to understand God's grace and live and minister from his rest each day.
- Pray for Japanese travelling to other countries; many in Japanese churches today came to faith in God, while overseas. Pray for Christian fellowship upon their return.



WOUNDED AND PRAYING ACROSS JAPAN

Spiritual warfare started even before Suki Wen got to Japan—and yet, through her whole short-term mission trip, she experienced God's faithfulness, provision and encouragement

After coming to Christ in high school twelve years ago, Suki Wen had been thinking about growing in her faith when “suddenly mission jumped in my life.” She heard talk about mission at church—that it was a global thing, and something Jesus encouraged people to do.

She wasn't really thinking about mission in Japan while she was studying the language for her HSC. (She was thinking more along the lines of, “Why am I doing this?!”) Then in her second year at university, she went on a three-week exchange program to Japan.

It was during this time that she first visited a Japanese church in Tokyo.

“I saw the people had this joyful, faithful expression on their faces, and the contrast was so strong from the people I saw on the street,” Suki recalls. “I saw their new life and how they worshipped God, and I started thinking maybe I can serve in Japan in the future.”

When Suki and a friend from Bible college started looking for short term mission opportunities, they came across the prayer journey to Japan on the OMF website. They enquired, participated in online training, and

filled in the paperwork.

Then came the real training in prayer.

Preparing to pray

Being on a bridging visa while living in Australia, Suki had to apply for a visa to serve in Japan.

Normally, the process takes about two days. For Suki, it took six weeks.

On the day before she was due to leave for Japan, Suki asked church friends and her pastor to pray, as she still didn't have a visa. That morning, she happened to read a missionary prayer letter featuring the story of a newborn child learning how to crawl.

“It just reminded me of our relationship with God, that we can pray and ask. I have nothing I can do. I only can crawl to my God to pray. So that's what I did.”

Later that day, she called immigration (which she had done several times before). This time, she had a visa in 15 minutes! “God just showed me so clearly that He wanted me to go.”

Driven to pray more

On her second day in Japan, Suki was injured.

Although she recovered enough not to have to stay in hospital, she had the wound with her throughout the journey of visiting 17 ministries across 12 cities in 13 days.

“I was very grumpy on the inside, even



though I tried to be normal on the outside—because we're still serving, we're still meeting people," Suki admits. "The wound affected me a lot. But it drove me to pray more. I knew that God enabled me to fly to Japan, so there's no doubt that He is with me. I had that peace from God. Still, I needed to face the challenge of being not flexible because of the wound. That was a tension through the whole journey."

Learning from the faithful

Meeting missionaries was a great encouragement to Suki. "I could see how faithfully they responded to God's calling. They're from different backgrounds, have different stories; some of them even said, 'I didn't want to go back to Japan, but still, I'm here.'"

One particularly memorable encounter was visiting a church and meeting the pastor's wife. Suki, reluctant to admit her cultural heritage, was surprised to discover what an encouragement the East Asian church has been to Japanese Christians.

"She started to tell her story, how she came to believe in Christ—and it related to the East Asian church!" Suki says. "She said she was so encouraged by how the East Asian church asked her to pray to have the faith to persevere. She told me it was so refreshing to her, because generally people want easy things, but they prayed to stand firm with God."

And for Suki, it was refreshing too. "Because we love in Christ, we can support each other in Christ's way."

The heart that only God can fill and change

Whenever Suki and the team visited ministries and asked how they could pray, there was one invariable request: for the hearts of the Japanese to turn to the Lord.

"Jesus always saw people's hearts—how we're

struggling, the core difficulties of humanity," Suki says. "Pray for Japanese people to draw near to God, that they can see that they can reach out to Him and trust Him with their hearts. There's definitely stress and loneliness. Pray that they will be courageous and have hearts that turn to God."

"Prepare your heart before you go," Suki advises those considering short-term mission to Japan. "Be prepared to love the real people—to embrace the imperfection of people, or of a ministry or a team. God will fulfill and comfort us when we love people in His way."

Trix Wilkins

Content Writer and Editor

**JESUS ALWAYS SAW
PEOPLE'S HEARTS—HOW
WE'RE STRUGGLING,**
*the core difficulties of
humanity*



STRETCHING INTO *East Asia's Skylands*

with Kirk and Lynn Matthews*

This April, Kirk and Lynn Matthews will be visiting Sydney for national conference after over 30 years of ministry. They share their journey so far and top tips on preparing for mission*

"Less than 0.1% people in Skylands heard or know Jesus! We must go so that they have a chance to hear the gospel," Kirk and Lynn said, of their journey to East Asia. "We're excited about people coming to faith, sharing the gospel within their own communities."

Kirk and Lynn have served in Mongolia since 1994, first as English teacher trainers for Mongolian secondary and college teachers. They later served as full-time faculty members at Union Bible Theological College (UBTC), with Kirk as Dean of Student Affairs and later Lynn became the Principal. They have taught a wide range of courses over a period of 10 years.

From 2008-2018, Lynn served as the Executive Director of Joint Christian Services International (JCS), an intra-mission organization working in the areas of agriculture, alcohol abuse reduction, community development, education, environmental care, medicine, small business development and sports. Kirk has been reaching nomads in the Gobi Desert and the far west.

Kirk and Lynn's top 3 tips for preparing for mission

1

Be faithful where you are, walking with God. Reach out to people outside your usual circles, people in a different social group to you. Learn to take risks.

2

Gain a profession or learn business skills. Increasingly, non-profit visas are harder to obtain. After language school, you will need a job, and it may not be in a church.

3

Be prayerful. Join a prayer meeting to help yourself learn the discipline of prayer. In mission, this is very crucial.

Meet Kirk and Lynn

In a land where the sky never seems to end, many are yet to know Christ. From the snowy foothills of south Asia, over the peaks of the Himalayas and onto the Mongolian steppes, there are many ways you can bless these local communities. Join former ministry leaders Kirk and Lynn Matthews* at Mission Steps and National Conference this April.

*Names changed for security and privacy purposes



Read more of Kirk and Lynn's story



Join Kirk and Lynn at Mission Steps

ADHD, FINANCE AND MISSION

“We may not have a plan, God always has a plan,” OMF Australia Finance Manager Edwin Lee shares. “All we need is a heart to offer to serve God.”

Growing up, I didn't know I had ADHD. I just thought I was one of those kids who always had trouble concentrating. I struggled with schools and university throughout my life.

While at university, I started building PCs, and switched to full time work and part time university, structuring my studies an hour after work every day. That's when I gained some IT skills. After university, I found entry-level accounting jobs, which opened up many doors.

I've learned through different types of jobs and gained different skills for mission. I have about 20 years of experience as an accountant or supporting corporate from a finance perspective, including 16 years at Qantas. Before that, I worked in kitchens, and dealt with a lot of customers.

My ADHD-brain still kicks in, but as an adult I can manage my time much, much better.

It's like oxygen

Finance is like oxygen coming into our body. Is oxygen important? Yes, of course. But we don't want to be constantly thinking about oxygen! In the same way, numbers mean nothing—they're only meaningful if they tie back into supporting missions.

For OMF, our numbers are never as simple as a surplus or deficit. There's much more. Missionary budgets are made up of different components to carry out ministry.

A tip for the finance and mission inclined

Growing up, most people may tell you to have a plan of what you want to achieve and then work towards it. I've learned that even though we may not have a plan, God always has a plan. All we need is a heart to offer to serve God.

I would like to encourage those of you who feel you want to serve God, but you don't know what to

do with yourself and your life—don't worry. God has found some way to use all the skills that I have acquired over the years!

Edwin Lee

OMF Australia Finance Manager



*Read more of
Edwin's story*



*Learn about Using Your Skills in Finance,
IT and administration in Mission at
National Conference with Edwin*





THE GREAT ADVENTURE *20 Years in Japan*

After 20 years in ministry with OMF in Japan, Steve and Saeko Manders share the biggest lessons God has taught them, and the joys of seeing His faithfulness

Twenty years. Where has the time gone? It seems like just yesterday when we were having our final interviews in March 2006. Just like yesterday, we stepped off a plane in December 2006 into a cold, snowy Hokkaido evening, to begin what would be the Great Adventure. Though our particular adventure really started in a small rural Japanese church in 2004...

I (Steve) still remember it clearly. We had come to Japan to introduce our then eighteen-month-old daughter to the Japanese side of the family. While there, we attended the weekly prayer meeting of Mikasa Christ Church in rural Hokkaido—a church planted by OMF missionaries, in which Saeko had come to faith.

Six people, excluding us, were in attendance. I remember leaving the prayer meeting discouraged that only six people bothered to turn up. In discussing this with Saeko later, I was to discover that those six people made up the entire population of that church.

And then it hit me—they were small in number, but big in faith. A desire was ignited in us both to come to Japan and serve the rural church; to be the hands and feet of Christ in an area which desperately needed more hands and more feet.

The biggest lesson: humility

“If the only thing you do during your first term is learn humility, then it will be a good first term.”

These words, first heard during our Orientation Course in November 2006, have echoed in our ears the last twenty years and remain as a mantra, of sorts, for everything we have done.

It is also the biggest lesson we have learnt during our time here in each of the various roles we have held—to learn humility. Grow in humility. Serve with humility. And to model humility.

We cannot be effective in ministry if we are unable or unwilling to exercise humility.

Ministry must never be about 'us' but about 'them.' It is impossible to truly serve the church until we acknowledge that local Christians know more about how to reach their communities than we do.

But humility goes beyond that, doesn't it? Humility is also about having a heart that desires growth in all areas of our life—in ability and knowledge, but also growth in character.

There have been other lessons as well.

God's plans are bigger

In 2021, as Saeko was preparing to retire in order to care for her elderly parents, Steve was approached to make a significant ministry shift to become OMF Japan's Ministry Coach. In October 2022, Saeko was invited to return to OMF as Japanese staff as the Training Sector Administrator.

In 2025, God revealed an even bigger plan for Steve when he was approached to take on the role of International Coaching Courses Leader. This involved a steep learning curve and an even larger step of faith in a faithful God.

When first we arrived in Japan, we never dreamed that we would ever be in these new and different roles. We came as church planters and disciplers. But God revealed to us that there was another way to serve the Japanese church—through coaching and training fellow missionaries.

God is faithful

The last twenty years haven't all been smooth sailing. The six years we spent serving four churches across the Sorachi area of Hokkaido between 2015-2021, although rewarding, were not easy. Different churches. Different people. Different needs.

God has been faithful. He grew each of those

churches both numerically and in spiritual maturity. We are seeing the few and faithful continue to serve a faithful God. He has provided. He has given us — and always there

Yes, twenty years feels like both a lifetime ago and yesterday, but one thing we know: the Great Adventure is not over yet.

Seeking to serve in Japan? Steve and Saeko's top tips

Come with a heart of humility and open hands. Open hands to maybe doing something you never dreamed of, with skills you don't have yet. Open hands to what God is saying about what it means for you to serve the church. Serve the community in which He wishes to place you.

Steve and Saeko Manders



To Glory

- After writing this article, Steve Manders went to glory on January 16, 2026. He had been diagnosed with cancer in June 2025. Pray for Steve's wife Saeko and daughter Emilie as they grieve the loss of a beloved husband and father.



“THE BEST THING POSSIBLE”: 20 years with OMF

Greg Seymour met missionaries while on holiday, and decided to be one of them. Shireen met Greg while he was on home assignment from mission in Japan. And the rest is history...

How did God lead you to OMF and mission?

Greg: I came to Christ in the early nineties just before going to Japan for a working holiday. While in Japan I encountered many missionaries and decided I wanted to be one of them! I checked out a handful of mission agencies and when I asked OMF, “What do you do?” they said, “Church planting,” which I thought was the best thing possible. So I came back to Australia and signed up for Bible college, and at the same time applied as a candidate with OMF.

Shireen: I first encountered OMF at the Belgrave Heights Easter Convention in 2003. During that year God had been challenging me about completely surrendering my life to Him—whether that be in full-time ministry or the secular workplace. That is, being open to wherever He was calling me. At the Convention, I felt God’s call to serve Him in full-time ministry.

I came across the OMF table and saw that they did work in Japan. God had given me a burden for Japanese people after spending a year working there as a children’s English teacher. At the time the table was unattended, so I left my name and number. A few days later, I received a call and started my missions journey with OMF. Later, I was invited to attend a prayer meeting featuring a missionary on home assignment—that is also how I met my now husband Greg.

What are some of the things you’ve come to love about the places you’ve worked and the people you’ve worked amongst?

Greg: I’ve loved the oneness in Christ that I have shared with my Japanese brothers and sisters. We were challenged by differences in language and culture, but we could always sense the unity we had in Christ.

Shireen: I love when Japanese people discover and place their trust in Jesus. I love seeing their joy in the Lord. I have also appreciated the faithfulness of the people I have worked alongside—their faithfulness to the God who has called them and to the people to whom they were called.

What has God taught you during your years of ministry about Himself and His work?

Greg: I think OMF's 'old fashioned' values of language learning and cultural immersion have proved themselves over the years. While I've seen amazing contributions from shorter term workers, the value of long-term committed mission work cannot be denied.

Shireen: I have had a lot of different experiences during these past 20 years as a missionary with OMF, both highs and lows. But through it all the Lord has taught me that He is Sovereign and in control of all situations—no matter how difficult, no matter how painful, no matter how bleak – He has been, is and will always be in control. And I can rejoice in that, I can trust that and I can hold onto that. He provides the solutions. He can change impossible situations.

What are your top three tips for people looking to serve in returnee focus ministry?

Be assured of its value. Fifty per cent of Japanese being reached for Christ find their way to Him while overseas.

It's all about our volunteers. In Japan, friends can pray and support—in Australia, friends can join in English teaching, hospitality and bilingual Bible teaching.

For ministry either among overseas Japanese or Japanese people in Japan, it is key to evangelize in the context of community. For a non-Christian Japanese to be in loving Japanese Christian community overcomes so many barriers to the gospel.

How can we pray for you in your next season of life and ministry?

Greg: I'd value prayer for energy and perseverance. It can be challenging to constantly be sending new Christians and seekers back to Japan, and then 're-starting' with a new set of friends every year.

Shireen: Pray for God's grace and guidance as we serve; for God to continue to be at work in our

returnees' hearts here in Australia as well as after they return to Japan. Pray for wisdom, patience and humility as we raise three teenagers.



Twists and turns to Taiwan

John and Pam Chee's journey towards long-term mission has been shaped by God's grace through many unexpected turns

From restoration to mission

For Pam, it began in 2011 after a powerful encounter with Christ. Having grown up feeling insecure and deeply misunderstood, she often saw herself as a broken vessel.

When their marriage reached breaking point in 2008, God met her in that darkness, restored their relationship, and rebuilt Pam's identity. He called her His daughter, ambassador, and missionary—and even opened the way for her to study nursing at university.

One by one, Pam's family came to Christ. God pieced her life back together with His grace and love, and her heart now burns for those who feel spiritually or emotionally broken.

This restoration naturally overflowed into missions.

Since Pam's first mission trip in 2011, God led the couple through local outreach, multicultural short-term trips, and later tentmaking ministry in regional Western Australia, where they discipled a small group of East Asians.

Those years revealed the beauty of walking with people in their everyday lives.

Redirected to Taiwan

After Pam's 2022 car accident, the couple sensed God reshaping their direction. During a 2024 visit to Taiwan, their hearts were moved by the warmth of its people—and by the deep needs among Taiwan's 15 million working-class, of whom fewer than 1% follow Jesus.

As an engineer who valued predictability and security, John never imagined full-time missions until God placed a clear burden in his heart—confirmed through a vivid dream of wrestling with an angel and surrendering fears about finances,

family and the future.

"We are excited to walk alongside Taiwanese families, share life with them, and witness the gospel take root in everyday spaces—homes, workplaces, neighborhoods," John and Pam said, of their upcoming ministry. "We pray that God will raise new disciples, restore families, and bring healing to those who feel overlooked or forgotten."

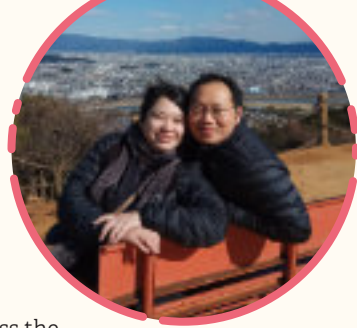
Preparing to go

"As we prepare to serve long-term among working-class communities in Taiwan, God has also been shaping unity in our marriage—especially in communication, patience and understanding," John and Pam said.

While decluttering, John accidentally listed Pam's favorite dress on Facebook Marketplace—without her knowing. He assumed she didn't want it; she assumed he'd never sell her things.

After an emotional-but-honest conversation (and a lot of laughter), God reminded them how fragile unity becomes when communication breaks down (and of the fact they can't read minds!). He's also been showing them how to choose to see each other as teammates.

"We depend on God as our 'superglue,'" they said. "We go with gratitude—knowing the God who restored our brokenness is the same God who continues to lead, sustain and send us."



Pray for John, Pam and Taiwan

- Pray that they would walk closely with Jesus and minister from a place of His love and strength.
- Pray for cultural learning, language acquisition, and humility as they enter a new context.
- Pray for open hearts among those they will meet in Taiwan, and for the Lord's provision and enabling in every step ahead.

"KAIN NA!"

OMF Philippines Guest Home Manager Nicole Harvey reflects on this common Filipino phrase, and how it reveals aspects of Philippine culture, geography and identity

Filipinos have a saying 'kain na' which means, "Let's eat." Filipinos love to share and best place is around a table with food. Here is my reflection on this common saying when I think of the Filipinos I work with.

K – Kindness. Filipinos share because they do not want anyone left out.

A – Attitude of fun. Filipinos would prefer to laugh than cry. They find humor in puns, riddles, games, and in the worst of situations, they make fun to lighten each other's burden.

I – Ingenious. Filipinos will upcycle and find solutions to situations they find themselves in. Whether from making Christmas decorations out of soda bottles or building a trolley to take them from point A to B on the train line.

N – National Identity. Filipino national identity starts with where they were born and where their family are from. It is the province which helps to find a common language, of the 172 living languages spoken in the Philippines, to communicate in.

N – Native treasures. The Philippines across their islands have a large number of endemic animals, such as the Tarsier Monkey.

A – Adobo. This gravy main dish does not have an official recipe. Just like the language, people groups, etiquette, this dish adapts to the needs and preferences to those around them.

There are many ways to measure the greatness of a nation's spiritual needs:

- As many as 100 million Filipinos still need to hear the good news of Jesus Christ in a meaningful way
- 43% of the Philippines' 42,000 communities still lack a church
- 23 local people groups remain unreached, and unreached peoples from elsewhere now live in the Philippine archipelago

Nicole Harvey

OMF Philippines Guest Home Manager



*Learn more about
Nicole's ministry*



The Deadly Peril of Second Best

Thinking of becoming a missionary? Former OMF Queensland State Ministry Leader Nic Crook reveals the top 5 questions to ask yourself

1 Do you have a vital prayerful relationship with Jesus?

To know Jesus is to count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ as Lord (Philippians 3:8). D.E. Hoste, who followed after Hudson Taylor as leader of CIM/OMF, continually emphasized that educational and social advantages were not to be regarded as being of primary importance when selecting missionaries. “The vital thing was that the men and women sent should know the power of prayer.” Oswald Chambers wrote in *My Utmost for His Highest*, “Prayer does not fit us for the greater work; prayer is the greater work.”²

2 Is your calling affirmed by others?

The famous English theologian J.I. Packer once gave several warnings concerning receiving guidance from God, including: unwillingness to wait, unwillingness to think and unwillingness to take advice. Interestingly, his fifth warning was unwillingness to suspect oneself; “we dislike being realistic with ourselves, and we do not know ourselves at all well.”³ Might you be deluded in your call to be a missionary? It’s important to ask those who are spiritually mature and know you well, and be willing for them to assess your suitability for overseas mission.

3 Do you have a deep passion for the lost?

The apostle Paul proclaimed, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). Only Christ is able to save, not our wise words or our appearance. When Paul saw the idolatry of Athens, “his spirit was provoked within him” (Acts 17:16). So too must we be utterly convinced of the lostness of the lost, that Jesus truly is the way, the truth and the life—and that no one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6).

4 Are you willing to be a nobody?

Are you willing to give up your smaller ambitions? Your ideas on how God might work in and through you might not be God’s ideas! The apostle Paul said “though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more” (1 Corinthians 9:19). That means he gave up all ideas of how God could use Him. Though he was a Hebrew of Hebrews and a brilliant Bible scholar, whatever gain he had, he counted as loss for the sake of Christ (Philippians 3:7). Will you be a “nobody” so that more might be saved?

5 Are you an active member of a local church?

OMF is committed to working through the local church—both in Australia and overseas—because the church is Christ’s answer to a world corrupted by sin. Are you actively participating in church ministry? Someone once told me that the kind of people churches send out as missionaries are the very ones they most don’t want to lose. Such candidates need to have a consistent ministry track record and seek to attract others to Christ—just as they would in active missionary service.

Being in the center of God’s will

Renowned English preacher Stuart Holden, later OMF Director in England, once spoke at a large

Christian conference and said, “The second-best which God allows us in our folly and willfulness to choose is often the kindest way He can take of showing us our own hearts and of redeeming us from their waywardness.”⁴ The end result of choosing second best, said Holden, is “leanness of soul.” Holden warned us not to fall into the “deadly peril of the second best,” but proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Years ago, when I was considering mission to Japan, I met a missionary from South America. He told me, “If God calls you to be a missionary, don’t lower yourself to be a ‘king!’” You will never know Jesus in a deeper way unless you are willing to sacrifice your all for Him—including all your dreams. Far too many of us are only willing to give Jesus half of our lives, keeping the other half for ourselves. But halfway Christians miss out on the best half. There can be no higher ministry than to be in the center of God’s will. As we seek God’s will in such things may we all, like Christ’s disciples, seek to “increase our faith” (Luke 17:5).

Nic Crook

Former OMF Queensland State Ministry Leader

Notes

1. Thompson, Phyllis., D.E. Hoste, A Prince with God (London, CIM) pg., 112.
2. Chambers, Oswald., My Utmost for His Highest (Westwood, Barbour and Company) pg., 215.
3. Packer, J.I., Knowing God (London, Hodder and Stoughton) pg., 268-271).
4. Holden, J. Stuart., The Peril of Accepting Second Best

To Glory

Shirley June Carmichael 1935-2025

The life and ministry of Shirley June Carmichael

Shirley sought to bring the message of Jesus to the Malay people of South Thailand, the vast majority of whom were Muslim. We thank the Lord for her “beautiful feet.” (Isaiah 52:7)



*Read more of
Shirley's Story*





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