

“Wait right here,” said Getch, as he disappeared into a crowd of people. So, there we waited. It was my first mission trip. Ever. And, I was nominally in charge. A small group from my church, Christ the King, had flown into Nairobi and, after a quick nap, began a long drive north. As we circled Mt. Kenya, the landscape changed from lush and green to arid and brown. As Mt. Kenya faded in our rear view mirror, the road, which I found lacking to begin with, disappeared altogether. For the next six hours, we bounced around in Getch’s car over washboard dirt roads, around crater sized potholes, while avoiding thundering “Lorries.” As we continued north, the landscape became more and more strange, and people less and less frequent. At one point in the journey, as evening was fast approaching, our car began making strange sounds. We stopped, got out, and discovered that our car, due to one too many enormous pot-holes, was literally falling part. Undeterred, Getch untied our luggage and used the rope to lash some parts of the car together. “Bush Mechanics!” he said, as we climbed back in.

Finally, much later than anticipated, we arrived at our destination: a little town in north central Kenya named Marsabit. It was dark. It was dusty. We appeared to be the only non-locals in the town center. There, Getch dropped us off, saying “Wait right here,” as he drove away to take care of some unknown detail. So, there we waited, four people, who twenty-four hours earlier, had been sipping coffee at a Starbucks in Alexandria, VA. I recall looking at my fellow team members one by one and then saying, “I have never felt so far from home.”

Thankfully, Getch did return and we enjoyed a wonderful trip. We visited with other members of his team, the Eleventh Hour Network. We worshipped and prayed together. We enjoyed the generous hospitality of the Bishop Martin and his wife Sue, the first Bishop of the newly formed diocese of Marsabit. After a few days, we made the long journey back home, but I have returned numerous times, as have many from Christ the King, including my wife, and two of my children.

Getachew, “Getch” is one of the plenary speakers at The New Wine Skins Conference 2019. He is the founder of the Eleventh Hour Network, a group of pastors in who evangelize, disciple, and plant churches among unreached communities in Northeastern Kenya. I have known Getch for the past ten years. He has become a close friend and we have developed a meaningful partnership. As uncomfortable as those first few minutes in Marsabit were, I am convinced that it is good to occasionally be “far from home.” I want to share how our friendship began and then comment on some of the fruits of our friendship. I hope our story will encourage you to engage in meaningful missional partnerships.

How we began. Christ the King, a daughter church of The Falls Church Anglican began in 2007. Prior to launching Christ the King, I served as a curate at TFCA. There, I witnessed the many global connections within that church and the positive impact of those connections. It seemed that almost every month TFCA sent some missionary team somewhere, or received an exciting mission report from someone. Although I could not have explained why at the time, I knew I wanted these relationships to be part of Christ the King.

Soon after our first worship service, Barb Nelson, a founding member and I decided to find one overseas missionary partner for the church. We thought one was enough for our church and would allow us to be deeply involved with one, rather than broadly involved with many. This faithful member made a list of potential partners, the first of whom was Getch. After one cup of coffee, I called Barb and said, "Stop looking. We've found our partner." And we did!

Getch and his family are loved by everyone at Christ the King. Members of the church line-up to host him during his yearly visits. Recently, he made a special trip to celebrate with us at the church's tenth anniversary. Members of Christ the King visit Getch yearly and while there, we do our best to support and encourage his work. Personally, our families have become good friends as our boys are the same age. Our partnership is healthy in part, because we began intentionally and we have remained focused.

While we have reaped many, many benefits from our partnership with Getch, two things stand out. First, our partnership with Getch helps us develop a "global vision." Second, our partnership with Getch ensures that the fire for evangelism remains lit in our own setting. So, two benefits: vision and fire. A brief word on each.

Vision: "Jonah" is the subject of one our Sunday School classes. He is a curious character- a reluctant prophet who has no concern for the people he is sent to, the Ninevites. The book ends with the prophet grumbling about a worm that killed a plant that gave him shade. His concerns were his comforts, his gaze so nearsighted that he

focused on a little worm. God corrects Jonah's nearsightedness and asks him, "You pity the plant for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow... and should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons..."¹

I think we have the potential to be like Jonah. Most of us, myself included, are mostly concerned with our own comfort, often at the expense of our concern with other parts of the world. If we are not careful we, like Jonah, can let our gaze drop until we look at nothing except the ground in front of our two feet. Our limited focus can often lead to narrow thinking. We can start to think our problems are the only problems that matter; our way of doing things is the only way to do them.

Our partnership with Getachew has been a helpful antidote to our myopic tendency. Through our partnership, we have experienced other cultures, other nations, tasted other foods. We have been exposed to Christ's one large church, worshipping in many, many different ways. When we "Lift up your heads,"² as the psalmist writes and shift our gaze away from our immediate concerns and from the ground under our two feet; when we consider the expansive horizons of God's activity in His great big world, our problems seem a little smaller, and we hold our way of doing things a little less rigidly. John Stott wrote, "We must be global Christians with a global vision because our God is a global God." Our partnership with Getachew has helped us develop a global vision.

¹ Jonah 4:11 (English Standard Version)

² Psalm 24:7 (English Standard Version)

Fire. Second, our partnership with Getch has kept the fire for evangelism burning. Through my pursuit of a Doctor's of Ministry at Catholic University, I have become more familiar with roman catholic writings and "Apostolic Exhortations" than I ever imagined! While still an Anglican through and through, I have found some of the distinctions in that tradition very helpful. John Paul II distinguished several different situations which require the missionary efforts of the church. First, there are places and people groups where the gospel of Christ is not known nor is the church established. This is the *mission ad gentes* or the church's mission 'to the nations'. This is the first and primary mission of the church, established by Christ when he said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..."³ and modeled by the continual outward expansion of the early church into new places and new people.

But, there are other situations, namely situations like ours in the modern West. Places with deep Christian roots in which many if not most lack living faith. Situations like ours require a re-evangelization, or as it is more widely known in the roman catholic tradition, a new evangelization.

Two different situations: One in which the gospel is unknown, one in which the gospel is forgotten. These two different situations call for two different missionary efforts. And while these different missionary efforts are interrelated, they are distinct from one another, and one gives fuel to the other. "Without the mission *ad gentes* (to the nations)," writes John Paul II, "the Church's very missionary dimension would be

³ Matthew 28:19 (English Standard Version).

deprived of its essential meaning and of the very activity that exemplifies it.”⁴ In other words, a church that does not go to the unreached places, will eventually cease to be missional in its own place. The mission *ad gentes* or ‘to the nations’ fuels the fire for our mission at home.

In my very limited experience, I have found this to be true. The Rendelli are a people group in Northeastern Kenya. Although Christianity has made some inroads with the Rendelli, they are, for the most part, an unreached people. The Gospels were just translated into their language in 2018 and the Old Testament has yet to be translated. It seems strange to me that Jesus Christ is still unknown in large parts of the world. Our world seems so modern, connected and informed. But this is simply not the case. “The mission *ad gentes* (to the nations),” writes John Paul II, “is still in its infancy.”⁵ And, due to our friendship with Getachew, we have experienced just a small taste of that mission. I, and others from the church, have visited with some of the Rendelli pastors, studied God’s word with them, and prayed with them. We have seen their nascent efforts as they establish a church for their people.

And while our time with the Rendeilli is very brief, our exposure very limited, the impact on us is very great. Upon return, I am more energized, more passionate, more creative, more fearless about the work of evangelism here in Alexandria, VA because of my exposure to Getch’s work among the unreached. Our active involvement in the

⁴ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Redemptoris Missio* (On the permanent validity of the Church’s missionary mandate), Dec. 7, 1990, no. 34, accessed February 10, 2019, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html.

⁵ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, no 40.

church's mission to the nations keeps the fire burning for the work of evangelism at home.

Like Jonah, it is easy for us to focus on our own comforts and to forget about the rest of the world. It is easy for us to let the fire for evangelism at home fade. We need good global partnerships to help us develop a global vision; good global partnerships that inspire us to remain faithful to our own evangelistic work by exposing us to the church's primary evangelistic work to the nations. Your church may be small- many are in our young movement. So, start intentionally and remain focused. You will find, as we have found, that you receive far, far more than you give.