

MESSENGER

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER & PRAYER GUIDE



DO WE BELIEVE THE SAME? by an EMM worker who served in Asia*

“We believe the same!” My friend energetically interjected with a smile and a tap on her desk to reinforce the point. The almost weekly refrain sometimes felt like an indictment that I had failed miserably in communicating the basics of my faith.

My friend, Joy*, an administrator at a local school, wanted to improve her English skills, so she asked me to meet with her in her office for

conversational lessons. Our conversations grew longer by the week, often relegating news articles and vocabulary words I had prepared to afterthoughts.

Instead, we worked our way through all sorts of other topics, including local happenings, world events, and the latest drama at the school. Rather than an English tutor, I felt more like a trusted confi-

dant or counselor — a safe outsider with whom she could share frustrations or wrestle with how to address the problems she faced in her position. Our conversations frequently veered into the spiritual, and surprisingly often, at her initiation.

Joy was a Buddhist. Most of the Buddhists I met in the city were nominal, more like Christmas-and-Easter Christians, visiting

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a monastery once or twice a year to have their astrological signs read, and to fix any “destiny” issues.

But Joy, in contrast, was one of the most devout and enthusiastic Buddhists I had met. She rose extra early every morning before the marathon slog through wall-to-wall traffic in order to meditate and chant scriptures. Her office showcased various Buddhist devotional objects. And she had the local monks at the monastery down the street on speed dial. Whenever bad things happened at the school, she called them in to perform rituals to repair the grounds from any negative spiritual forces or karma and ward off future breaches.

As a sincere Buddhist, Joy was mindful of spiritual things, and the importance of pursuing a virtuous life; she was eager to talk about the values we held in common. Buddhist doctrine explicitly teaches that all religions are essentially the same; you’ve likely heard some version of the saying, “We’re all climbing different paths up the same mountain.” For many American Christians, this produces an immediate compulsion to set the record straight and to clarify that what we believe is fundamentally different and at odds.

But in the Asian contexts where I have lived, I learned a long time ago that the goal of conversation is often different than for us more

direct, truth-at-the-risk-of-conflict Americans. In more harmony-seeking contexts, the goal is first and foremost to establish commonality in the relationship; people are wary of getting into divisive debates which are sure to cause a loss of face. There are different, more appropriate means of conveying truths and ideas. So when someone uses the line, “It’s all the same,” I try to discern whether they are actually intending to make a theological statement, a social connection, or if they are feeling an uncomfortable tension because we are speaking too explicitly about our differences.

My friend Joy generally wasn’t trying to make a deep theological statement. She usually said it to signal her sense of connection and appreciation for my values, morality, and strong faith. It was relationship-affirming. I didn’t want to insensitively stomp on her gesture. Sometimes, I smiled and we moved on. At other times, I would share a story of Jesus that came to mind. And sometimes, I took the opportunity to explain in greater detail about my faith. I avoided the direct contradiction of saying, “It’s not the same.” If I learned nothing else about the art of communication in Asia, stories are great for expressing things indirectly. She often found the stories strange, but intriguing and got a little more insight into

who Jesus was and what he taught in an inoffensive way.

That particular day, when Joy exclaimed, “We believe the same!”—she followed up with the Buddhist idea that we have to depend on ourselves to be good people. I felt a prompting to not let that one pass. I smiled and told her that I was glad she felt confident and strong in herself, but I did not feel so strong. In fact, I know that I am too weak by myself to do the things I know are good. Joy winced on my behalf at such an embarrassing confession. But that is why I follow Jesus. If we take refuge in him, he promises the gift of his Holy Spirit. His Spirit can cleanse and transform our hearts from the inside, and he walks with us, giving us the wisdom, understanding, and power to do what we cannot do on our own.

Joy was quiet — a rarity in our conversations. She finally responded, thanking me for sharing. She had never heard that before. I could tell it was a profound and perplexing idea, and one that she was taking in slowly. I don’t know if she will ever let go of her devotion to Buddhism, but I pray that those conversations and stories will continue to intrigue and cause her to search out more, and lead her to faith in Jesus.

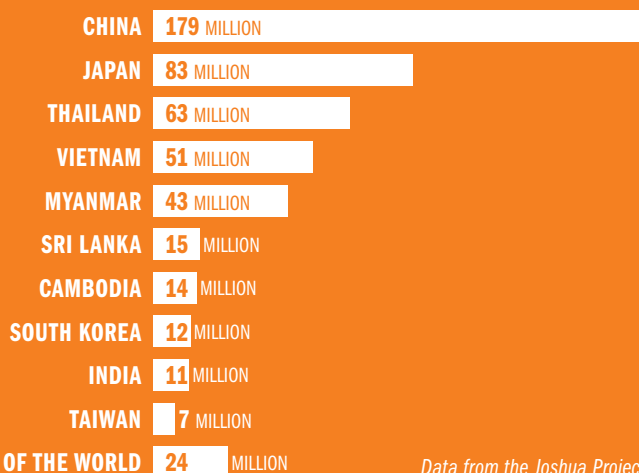
This worker served with language education in Asia.

**Names changed or omitted for sensitivity reasons.*

BUDDHISM IN ASIA

Buddhism began in the 6th century B.C. in what is now Nepal. A young prince, Siddhartha Gautama, became compelled by a quest to understand human suffering and how to eliminate it. Today, Buddhism has more than 500 million followers around the world, with the vast majority living in Asia. The 10 countries (shown on the right) with the largest Buddhist populations in the world make up 95 percent of the global Buddhist population.

There are three main schools of Buddhism: Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. As is the case with any religion, within these groups there are many additional sub-sects and influences from various traditional ethnic religions.



Data from the Joshua Project

AUGUST DAILY PRAYER

1 FRANCE | Pray for Jennifer Weaver during her support-raising process. May God provide supporters who can come alongside her prayerfully and financially as she serves in France.

2 WEST AFRICA | Pray for individuals and families to be called to join the work of leadership development and church planting in West Africa.

3 U.S. | Pray for Advance Global participant Ana Borntrager. Pray that her heart and mind will be impacted by the Holy Spirit as she engages with the upcoming Advance training.

4 U.S. | Pray for Michael and Ruthy* as they serve on the EMM Christian-Muslim Relations Team, resourcing Christians and churches for sharing Jesus with Muslims.

5 WALES, U.K. | Pray for Alan and Carol Wert, who are currently in the U.S. Pray for good connections with family, friends, and supporters. Pray for them as they return on the twelfth and pick up their responsibilities in Wales, U.K.

6 GLOBAL | Pray for young men to respond to God's call to the work of short-term missions.

7 KENYA | Pray for Jonathan Bornman and other Christian-Muslim Relations Team members as they attend the Peacemakers Confessing Christ International (PCCI) conference, July 28–August 15.

8 CZECH REPUBLIC | Pray for God to soften the hearts of the Czech people to be open to the gospel.

9 ALBANIA | Pray for Sonya Harnish as she settles back into her ministry and responsibilities in Albania after her sabbatical.

10 U.S. | Pray for the EMM Board of Directors to be filled with the Holy Spirit's wisdom as they meet this morning.

11 CZECH REPUBLIC | Pray for additional prayer and financial partners to join Karen Hess as she prepares for her assignment in the Czech Republic. Ask the Lord to provide clarity and focus as she trains a co-worker to cover her work responsibilities.

12 CHILE | Pray that Michael and Nancy Hostetter would be faithful in the discipleship of local believers who in turn will disciple others. Pray for the children's programs on Tenglo Island, Chile, and those serving there.

13 THAILAND | Pray for Jeremy and Jennifer* as they spend time in Canada this summer. Pray for them as they return to Thailand and resume their involvement in anti-trafficking work.

14 U.S. | Pray for God to call volunteers for the programs at Neighbors Community Center, at Hub450, our building in Lancaster, Pa.

15 CENTRAL ASIA | Pray for Evan and Faith* as they continue to prepare for their assignment. Pray for peace and wisdom as they have faced some unexpected challenges.

16 CAMBODIA | Pray for workers to be called to the work of young adult outreach and discipleship in Cambodia.

17 SOUTHEAST ASIA | Pray for Will and Nina* and their family that they will be blessed and encouraged in all their hard work and that the local people they work alongside will also be richly blessed.

18 U.S. | Pray for Advance Global participant Sarah Forry. Pray that her heart and mind will be impacted by the Holy Spirit as she engages with the upcoming Advance training.

19 GERMANY | Ask God to strengthen, encourage, and protect formerly Muslim Persian migrants who have come to faith in Christ. Pray that they will be bold in reaching out to others.

20 GLOBAL | Pray for God to call individuals to serve least-reached people in Central Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Europe, West Africa, and refugees in Lancaster, Pa.

21 SPAIN | Pray for rest and renewal for Paula* who is currently on sabbatical.

22 CENTRAL ASIA | Pray for God to send workers to the field to work in business for transformation and teaching English.

23 COSTA RICA | Pray for Wendell and Melanie Nofziger as they give leadership to the VidaNet program and to other EMM workers in the region. Pray for their daughter Bekah as she begins her senior year in northwestern Ohio.

24 KAZAKHSTAN | Ask God to encourage and protect the Muslim-background Kazakhs who have chosen to follow Jesus. Pray that they will begin to boldly share the gospel.

25 NORTH AFRICA | Pray for Andres and Angelica*, who are currently in the U.S. for home leave. Pray for meaningful connections with family and friends and times of refreshment. Pray for safety as they travel and speak in churches and for the needed funds.

26 GLOBAL | Ask God to provide for the Impact Fund through the generosity of his people.

27 THAILAND | Join us in prayer for Mark and Sarah Schoenhals and their daughters. Pray for Heidi and Hannah as they begin school this month. Having completed Thai 6th grade earlier this year, Hannah will now join her sister for a Western style of schooling. The girls travel to another part of Thailand one week each month for studies. Pray for health, smooth travels, good friendships, and spiritual growth for both girls.

28 THAILAND | Pray for God to call pioneer church planters into the harvest field of Thailand to join the team there.

29 U.S. | Pray that Joe and Yvonne Garber would be filled with the Holy Spirit as they connect with churches in their roles as church partnership coaches.

30 GERMANY | Pray for Nick Eberly as he begins his mission internship. Pray that he would be encouraged and strengthened by the goodness of God and "prepared for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:17).

31 U.S. | Pray for Marty and Glenna Sollenberger in their continued work with Wycliffe. Pray for those who are involved in the translation of God's word, giving people access to the gospel.

CELEBRATING LEGACIES



Wilma J. Gingerich, 89, of Harrisonburg, Va., went home to be with the Lord on May 19. She and her husband, Ray, served with EMM in Luxembourg from 1961 to 1969.



Ernest (Ernie) M. Hess, 81, of Lancaster, Pa., went home to be with the Lord on July 15. Ernie participated in Summer Voluntary Service with EMM in Honduras in 1964, and served with his wife, Lois, in Tanzania (1965–68) and Kenya (1982–83). He also served as LMC's fraternal representative to Africa, on the EMM Board of Directors (2006–08), and with the Friends of the Mennonite Theological College in Eastern Africa (2018–24).

*Names changed for sensitivity reasons.



Eastern Mennonite Missions

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RADIX

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CURRENT COURSES

- A THIRD OF US
- BECOMING 5IVE
- HERO MAKER
- PRAYING WITH THE LORD'S PRAYER
- WHAT IS APEST?
- YOU TOO CAN LEARN A LANGUAGE
- ZUMÉ ENTRENAMIENTO
- MORE COURSES COMING THIS FALL!

SAVE THE DATES FOR THE EMM BANQUET

NOVEMBER 14 AT 6 PM
WYNDHAM RESORT, LANCASTER, PA

DECEMBER 3 AT 10 AM
LANDIS HOMES, LITITZ, PA

FEBRUARY 12, 2025 AT 12 PM
SARASOTA (FL) COMMUNITY CHURCH

REGISTRATION OPENS SEPT. 2 AT
EMM.ORG/BANQUET

THE IMPACT FUND FOR 2024 NEED IS **\$1,099,487**

When you support EMM's Impact Fund, you enable us to recruit, equip, and send EMM workers around world.

\$692,968 RECEIVED AS OF JULY 7

\$1,792,455 GOAL



EMM.ORG/GIVE

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