



Karamoja, Uganda

James & Ester Folkerts and Mark & Carla Van Essendelft

Early Rains

“As they go through the Valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools.” (Psalm 84:6, ESV)

Since October we have little to no rain in Karamoja. The scorching equatorial heat and wind, combined with dust has makes these seminomadic people and missionaries at times feel dried out and rather “sandblasted” in more ways than one. By the end of dry season, the soil and people are thoroughly baked and looking forward to “akiru” (rain).

Psalm 84 speaks of pilgrimage and of life-giving rain. Pilgrimage has seasons – some that are challenging – like the valley of Baca. I suspect many of us have experienced some of these trials this past year.

This month though, things are changing – a least the weather! With April and March come the life-giving “early rains”. These sporadic downpours renew life. They allow the concrete-like soil to become soft enough to sink a hoe into it. Even early this morning as I write I can hear men shouting at the oxen ploughing the fields. Early rains bring in a season of hope, hard work, and planning for another year of survival. This season also is a time where last year’s food supplies are diminishing and spoiling. It is a time of looming hunger and often of begging and stealing in order to get by. There are blessings and challenges that come with the early rains.

On the mission here we are also continuing with the farming project. Mark Van Essendelft leads that work. Since we don’t have a tractor yet, much of our farming is done by hoe or with oxen. So far, we have planted a few acres of corn and peanuts, with plans to plant cotton and sorghum, some of which will be used to support local needs in the community such as orphans



Folkerts family



Van Essendelft family

and widows. Our main focus, though, is to cultivate redemptive relationships with the laborers, as well as teaching various agricultural principles and experimenting with different methods of farming.

We are also praying for the “early rains” on the sin-hardened and hurting hearts of the lost so that the Word can find good soil to germinate. Only the Spirit can do this mighty work. Sometimes it feels as if we are hoeing concrete. We do praise God for the changes and growth we see in some people. Please pray for them. People are slowly returning to church after it has been closed for half a year due to Covid regulations.

We recently took a group of believers from here in Karamoja to attend our mission’s conference on worship at Knox Theological School in Mbale. They were so joyful and thankful to be able to attend, and felt very encouraged by the teaching, sharing what they had learned with whoever would listen upon their return. Our mission will be hosting another conference in Mbale later this month, on the dangers of Pentecostalism.

Please join us in prayer for this season of ministry! Pray for early rains to soften hearts, that gospel seeds might find good soil to germinate. Pray for love, trust, patience, and perseverance in the season we are in. Join us in thanksgiving for the work God is doing in people’s hearts and lives. Whatever the season, the psalmist ends Psalm 84 encouraging us in the way of blessing. What is that way? “O Lord of Hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in You.”

 **Ajax, Ontario**

Pastor Brian & Karen Zegers



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Urban Missions Part 2

By Pastor Paul Murphy, church planter in NYC

MISSIONS IN REVERSE

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations...”

All are familiar with the above words of Jesus in the Great Commission. They have sparked the Church through the ages to send missionaries to the ends of the earth with the glorious good news about Jesus. However, a tide has turned, and the focus of missionary interest is turning. Urban missions is garnering ever greater interest among those concerned to make disciples of all nations. Why? Because God, in His providence, is bringing the nations to the neighborhood. God has brought them from across the world to across the street. The nations are now here, not there. This is what I term MISSIONS IN REVERSE.

This pattern is obvious to me as one living in New York City. All you have to do is walk the street with open eyes and ears to know that urban populations are teeming with immigrants. In [one zip code](#) in N.Y.C. there are 133 different nationalities and 150 different languages! That is 2/3 of the world's nations represented in one tiny area of this city. In many areas of New York City, you won't hear or see anything of the English language. I routinely travel in sections of New York where this is so. In fact, the NY Times recently had an article about Coney Island Avenue, a street in Brooklyn that runs from Prospect Park in the North to Coney Island and the ocean at the South. On just that one street there are five different populations - Russian, Muslim, Jewish, Hispanic, and Greek – all with their attendant languages, dialects, and sub-cultures. Do you want to make disciples of all nations? Go no further than right here.

Consider the following statistics:

The population of N.Y.C. is 1/3 foreign born with immigrants and their children accounting for 60% of the residents. There are more Jamaicans in NYC than any city in Jamaica, more Jews than any city in Israel, more Haitians than the capital of Haiti. There are 400,000 Russians in Brooklyn alone and Brooklyn is only 1 of 5 boroughs (or counties) that make up NYC.

Are you getting the picture? Bringing the gospel to NYC is *missions in reverse*. There is more of an opportunity to reach the nations in this city than there is on any mission field in the world. N.Y.C. is literally the Research and Development unit for world missions.

Why are cities an important mission field? I have mentioned previously the cultural centrality of cities. They are the main place for cultural development as seen in arts, scholarship, communication, philosophy, commerce, etc. Also, as can be seen in the previous statistics, cities are the place for a global connection. In other places the gospel can go to only one people group while in cities multiple nations and languages can be reached at once. It is common for me to take literature in three languages (Chinese, Spanish, & English) with me as I go door to door in our church neighborhood.

Thankfully God has supplied us with members who also speak these languages. In fact, we have just begun translating our worship services and Sunday school classes into Spanish because some of our attendees are from nations in the Caribbean and Central America. They are thankful to hear the Gospel in their own tongue. Additionally, we have two attendees from mainland China (but they can speak English).

The pattern prevalent here in N.Y.C. is duplicated in cities large and small across North America. I just returned from Salem, Oregon which, along with neighboring Keizer, comprises a population of 250,000. Yet there are over 35 different nationalities represented there. The numbers are less than NYC, but the pattern is evident. Immigrants are filling our cities. This presents an unprecedented opportunity for the Christian Church and the Gospel. It is one we should seize upon.

What are needed are more Churches, Christian day schools, and workers to reach these peoples. “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” Is there anyone who wants to move to New York?