

Subject: FW: Olomouc Newsletter :: September 2020 :: Post-Sabbatical Plans
Date: Friday, September 18, 2020 at 8:46:42 AM Central Daylight Time
From: Ricky Bittle
To: 'Ricky Bittle'
Attachments: 01_Fellowship_in_Prague.jpg, 02_A_Sample_of_My_Current_Reading_Materials.jpg, 03_Slovak_Amber_Waves_of_Grain.jpg, 04_Sam_Taking_a_Break_from_His_Odraszadlo (Bike without Pedals).jpg, 05_Sarah_in_the_Stroller.jpg

From: mitchs-olomouc-newsletters@googlegroups.com [mailto:mitchs-olomouc-newsletters@googlegroups.com] **On Behalf Of** Mitch Anderson
Sent: Friday, September 18, 2020 7:54 AM
To: mitchs-olomouc-newsletters@googlegroups.com
Subject: Olomouc Newsletter :: September 2020 :: Post-Sabbatical Plans

Hello supporters and pray-ers,

There's a lot to share — about (1) the final phase of our sabbatical and (2) our post-sabbatical plans. So this newsletter will be longer than normal. I'll actually start with our plans, as you'll probably be more curious to hear those, and then fill you in on what went on this summer.

Buckle your seatbelts.

We are nearing the end of my 14th year of ministry in Olomouc. I came here with six great team members, all of whom returned to the U.S. between years 5 and 11. The past year has refreshed me and Monika, who has been connected with the ministry 11 years, and has helped us to understand that it is time for a new chapter in life. Here we have baptized a number of Czechs, have exposed many to the Bible and the Gospel, and have touched the lives of literally hundreds of people with our worship gatherings, classes, camps, and other activities. Going forward, we plan to continue mission work in new ways in this secular environment.

Our sabbatical didn't turn out exactly as we expected. When we planned it we didn't yet know about Monika's mom's cancer, having a baby was a possibility but by no means a certainty, and who could have predicted the worldwide impact of the coronavirus? The result was that we did not get to spend a portion of the last half year in Searcy, Arkansas. Yet, this time has been a huge blessing for us. We feel renewed and are passionate about the plan that has been laid on our hearts.

The main focus of the last phase of our sabbatical was *Realignment*, putting together all the things we'd been pondering and discovering into a plan for the future: one that will be healthy for us and a blessing in God's kingdom.

OVERVIEW. To begin, I'll share the basic points of the plan and then come back to them in more detail. It has four points:

1. **PROVIDE MISSIONARY CARE.** Provide missionary care to missionaries and other Christian workers by providing accommodations and the possibility of debriefing in our home (including reconstructing our basement to make that possible).

2. **LAUNCH AND COACH EXISTING CHURCH.** Have the original Olomouc group meet on its own and provide coaching and guidance to them, joining them on Sunday once a month or so.
3. **START NEW HOUSE CHURCH.** In time we would like to start a new group in our home.
4. **EDUCATE OTHERS ON CREATION CARE.** Both Monika and I have a passion for God's creation and would like to encourage other churches and individuals to be environmentally responsible as caretakers of what God has made. In the minds of Europeans, the environment is a major concern.

MISSIONARY CARE. As you may remember, in mid-November we spent a week on the island of Cyprus at a small retreat center for missionaries and Christian workers. Our time there included several sessions with a Christian psychologist, Beverly, who helped us process our time of mission work in Olomouc and gave us tools to help continue processing and being renewed. It was just what we needed. At that center and at other times over the years, we have received care and have become convinced of its importance to missionaries.

We'd always thought we would eventually reconstruct our basement to make an apartment to rent, but our time of receiving missionary care in Cyprus inspired us to do it for a different reason — to turn our basement into an apartment where missionaries could stay. They could come just to have a place to spend a week and rest or, as with Beverly, their time could include intensive sessions of processing their experiences with us.

In order to have something more to offer than just our own experience as missionaries, we would like to complete a few training programs. For example, I've just begun a one-year online Postgraduate Certificate in Mission Care and Counseling from Columbia International University, a fully-accredited university in Columbia, SC. In addition, I plan to go to an art therapy school here in Olomouc to complete their program (10 weekends a year for 3 years). Both Monika and I have interest in art and creativity and know of its therapeutic benefits with both children and adults. Monika is interested in getting more training as well but probably not until Sam and Sarah are a little older.

We won't wait until we've attained these various certificates before offering missionaries care and housing; we'll likely start as soon as the basement is ready, which we estimate to take a little over a year beginning this fall. These tools — and also my Master's from Abilene Christian University in Christian Missions and Monika's Master's from Palacky University in Humanitarian and Social Work — should make our service attractive and give us multiple ways to help cross-cultural workers. They should also be helpful as we coach and disciple members of the current Olomouc group and new people we may meet.

In addition to providing care in our home, we will likely make ourselves available for online consultation and, in certain circumstances, to visit missionaries where they are.

LAUNCH CHURCH. This step pertains to the existing Krizovatka group and also affects our rented activity center. Our time away was beneficial in that it helped us and the church to see what's important to the current group and what's not.

Rather than at the activity center, they mostly had worship together in their apartments. The moms' group and Friday club were kept going in the fall, but after the new year began, the people who helped with those activities no longer had the time and/or desire to continue doing them, so our facility was hardly used (except for being rented by other groups). Most of them feel the facility isn't needed; based on how things went, that makes sense to us, too.

So we've given notice to our landlord and we'll be moving out by the end of October. We're now beginning the process of organizing, packing, selling, and storing things; some things we will use in the new missionary care apartment. The Krizovatka group will continue to meet in homes or a teahouse for their gatherings. If they or we want to have bigger events in the future (e.g. Thanksgiving or Christmas celebrations), we can rent a space on a one-time basis. In essence, they have transitioned to a house church model, which our mission team originally had planned.

As mentioned above, we want to be involved with the Krizovatka community but on a more limited basis — joining them at regular intervals but not every week, and coaching and advising them as a group and as individuals but without the burden of leading the group or making its decisions. As some of you know, we have had a number of interpersonal and theological differences with some in the group and, though we hope for a fresh start after our sabbatical, those things have not gone away. In addition to remaining connected to and coaching the group long-term, we want to help them in this upcoming time of transition however we can.

NEW HOUSE CHURCH. We would love a fresh start with a new group. However, we know the next couple of years will be very busy during this time of transition for us into missionary care and Krizovatka into independence. As the months go by, we pray we can meet new people, begin new relationships, and begin inviting them into our home for worship.

We want this to be very organic — simple and natural. One burden over the years has been the feeling that we should be producing results. We know intellectually that we can only plant and water the seed but God makes it grow. Yet it's hard not to feel discouraged when those results aren't coming and when the church isn't exactly what we had hoped.

CREATION CARE. In the first chapters of the Bible, Adam and Eve were charged with caring for God's good creation; so we want to be good stewards of it, too, and to encourage others to do the same. We've been praying and pondering about whether it'd be possible to have this as a part of our work. Here are examples:

- **Regional Church Leaders and Members:** Contact leaders from various churches in the Olomouc region and offer to speak with them one-on-one about being environmentally responsible in their buildings and activities; offer to give presentations to their members on creation care.
- **Materials and Optional Sessions:** Have materials on creation care available in our missionary care apartment and offer visitors who are interested a session on creation care.

Each successive point in the plan will likely receive less attention and time than the previous one (especially in the next two years or so when the first two points will require a great deal of attention).

OUR SUPPORT. Pleasant Valley, which has been a wonderful and generous supporting church, will continue to support us for one more year to help as we transition into a new chapter of the Olomouc mission. We cannot say thank you strongly enough to PV and to all of you for your support and prayers which have sustained us through the years.

During this time of transition, we will be seeking support from individuals and would very much appreciate if you'd consider supporting the work here. If you are interested, please let me know and I'll be in touch soon with more information.

MISSIONARY CARE — THE WHAT AND WHY. Missionary Care spans the entire missionary life cycle — recruitment, selection, preparation, sending, ongoing equipping and care, re-entry, and retirement — includes all involved in missions — missionaries, both single and married, their children, and support staff — and addresses all aspects of their well-being — spiritual, emotional, relational, physical, and economic — so that their work can be effective and sustainable and the missionaries and their families healthy and happy.

Moving away from your family, friends, and culture is hard. So is moving into a new culture, learning their language and customs, and creating new connections. There is an initial culture shock, but culture stress is ongoing. You're never totally at home in your host culture (nor are you in your birth culture when you go back). So missionaries need ongoing encouragement. The transitions and stresses can exacerbate personal and marital problems. Children may have a hard time adjusting. Tension with mission team members, supporters, or locals may arise. Health issues, some due to the stress, can come up.

Statistics show that 1 in 20 missionaries leaves the field every year, and that about 71% of those who leave do so for preventable reasons — if they had received better training and care, they might have stayed and been more effective longer. In other words, the availability of good missionary care reduces the financial and personal cost of missions for the supporting church and for the missionary. It saves the Kingdom money, time, energy, and personal pain.

We want to focus on the ongoing care aspect — providing a place to get away and rest. And also a place where there's someone to talk to who understands and who can help process experiences and emotions. This is beneficial both for those who are having problems (like burnout, difficulty adjusting, family issues) and those who wish to prevent problems before they occur. For those in the 'having a hard time' category, we'd be their *first responders*, helping them get back on their feet and referring them to licensed specialists when needed. For those interested in prevention, we'd be there to *provide a checkup* and help *equip them* for further relational, spiritual, and missional development.

LAST PHASE OF SABBATICAL: REALIGNMENT. You may be saying, "Enough about your plans! What'd you do this summer?" If so, here's a quick rundown.

- Sought feedback from friends, mentors, and Olomouc members about our plans
- Wrote about my experiences in missions
- Researched mission care networks, resources, and training options
- Applied to CIU's Postgraduate Certificate in Mission Care and Counseling program
- Reunited with people in Olomouc as coronavirus concerns lessened here (yet numbers are increasing now and are higher than they were at the peak in March)
- Worked on house plans, taking steps toward being able to begin reconstruction
- Read Tomáš Halík's (respected Czech priest) book *Close to Those Who Are Far Away: When Faith and Un-Faith Meet*
- Communicated with Pleasant Valley's missions committee and elders about our plans
- Ended our sabbatical with a weekend visit to the church in Prague
- Sam began preschool on September 1st. **Please pray for him as the transition has been hard.**

Now & Coming Up:

- A month ago I began my Mission Care & Counseling studies — there's a LOT of reading and writing
- Two weeks ago we began organizing and packing up things at our activity center
- Later in the month we'll have a Krizovatka member meeting to discuss future plans

- Soon after that we'll have a farewell celebration to say goodbye to our activity center **TO ALL THE PRAY-ERS**. Years ago, many of you joined our 24-7 prayer vigil committing to pray regularly for our team and the people of Olomouc. Some of you pray for us every week, some even every day. Thank you so much for that! **We hope you'll continue to pray for us and Krizovatka as a new chapter begins.**

Thank you so much to everyone for taking the time to read this long email and for praying for and supporting us. It means a lot! You'll find two pictures attached and below are a couple of eye-opening quotes on missionary attrition (when missionaries move back early) if you're interested.

In Him,
Mitch, Monika, Sam, & Sarah

APPENDIX: STATISTICS ON MISSION CARE

Missionary care helps to ensure the missionary's effectiveness and health and to reduce missionary attrition. The following quotes bring this out, discussing attrition of overseas workers in the business world and applying it to missions:

Attrition is a genuine problem in the secular world as well. Note this insight from the business world: "Approximately 30% of managers from the US return home early from an overseas assignment" (Shames, 1995). Shames observes that the primary factors are personal and family stress. What is the financial cost to business? For a single, middle-level professional, the figure is close to \$150,000; for a senior professional with a family, it is \$350,000 or more. But there are different price tags also. The article goes on, "The human costs defy calculation. Emotional havoc, broken families, derailed careers, and illness are the price of neglecting personal well-being on the global circuit."

Let's take a look at one of the prime findings of the ReMAP [Reducing Missionary Attrition Project] research: In terms of the global missions force, it is estimated that 1 career missionary in 20 (5.1% of the mission force) leaves the mission field to return home every year. Of those who leave, 71% leave for preventable reasons. If we estimate the current long-term, international, cross-cultural missionary force at 150,000 strong — a very conservative number — an annual loss of 5.1% would be 7,650 missionaries leaving the field each year. Over a four-year term, this figure jumps to 30,600. This is the total loss figure for all reasons. Seventy-one percent of those could be prevented, almost 22,000.

Just the financial implications are dramatic and calculable, but the human implications are staggering and incalculable. Can we simply continue to do business as always? Absolutely not!

From *Too Valuable to Lose*, ed. William D. Taylor,
<https://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/mission-frontiers-missionary-attrition-series-part-1>

Similarly:

The dark side of missionary attrition is the enormous cost to the missionary enterprise. Multinational corporations calculate the financial loss of unsuccessful mid-level personnel returning early from overseas assignments in the hundreds of thousands of dollars per individual. This takes into consideration the costs related to training, setup, overseas moves, settling, and later the transfer and retraining of replacement personnel. We can expect that the cost to the missionary enterprise might not scale as high when comparing missionary salaries, but even if it were fifty percent, our costs in missionary attrition would reach millions of dollars per year.

More significantly, we concern ourselves with the human loss, which is, as Bill Taylor puts it, "staggering and incalculable." The problem of preventable attrition is the escalating expansion of impact. The individual suffers and many never recover from the disappointment of failure. Anecdotal evidence abounds in support of the difficulty returning missionaries have to re-order their lives and become effective servants in their homeland. Churches become the victims of severe attrition problems, finding themselves investing counseling and resources into the lives of failed missionaries."

From *Integral Ministry Training: Design and Evaluation*, ed. Robert Brynjolfson, Jonathan Lewis

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