

Things have been hopping for the last few months... so much so that by the time we are settled down to share a story, we're right in the middle of the next one!

As we celebrate the victory over sin and death and the ongoing life of our Master, we are empowered to go forth boldly into the world in witness and service. As we do, God is faithful to show us more of his heart, his passion, his wisdom.

We have news to share on the family front (LOTS of it!), about developments in Roma ministry in Europe, about Jim's recent trips to Cyprus and to Florida about the just-concluded Spring Break trip to The Mill. Stay tuned for more!



Say Hello to the newest resident at The Mill Pond!

We know from the Bible that God is glorified not in our strengths, but in our weakness. All too often (with me, at least) this can get translated to a "false humility": I do something I do well (like [sit in on harmonica with the band](#)) and then wave off compliments with a "Praise God," and something like "It's all God's doing..."

The SERVEurope Catalyst Team had a wonderful opportunity to see this principle in 3-D, in flesh and blood at the Global Access Conference sponsored by Joni and Friends. For the better part of a week we were immersed in a world where physical and intellectual ability or lack thereof literally DID NOT MATTER. God was glorified in those who worship and serve him, plain and simple.

As artist Hyatt Moore painted a [wall-sized mural](#) in the central hall, depicting his vision of the Banquet to which Jesus compares the Kingdom in Luke 14, we participated in such a blessed unity in diversity. This was not just pleasant... it was transformative. The sort of experience we shared during that week in California SHOULD be the experience of the Church. But, alas, all too often it is not.



As I was impressed by a fresh experience of The Body that looks and feels and sounds more like Luke 14, I was also chastened by the realization that – to the best of my recollection – the only reference to disability in the "Pastoral Duties and Church Administration" course I took at seminary was a discussion on how to pursue "opting out" of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. Ouch. Put another brick in that wall...

From the very onset of the conference, where [Joni Eareckson Tada](#) shared, "God is up to something big... He is using people with disability to wake up the Church," we felt God powerfully present.



Really? THIS guy was "fearfully and wonderfully made"? God "knit him together in the womb"? YES! Absolutely! God makes no mistakes! Make no mistake about THAT!

There were highlights from the platform:

Hearing Joseph D'souza share about how the “epic struggle” for [Dalit emancipation](#) in India connects with the struggle for access for the disabled – which lines up perfectly with what God is showing us among the Roma in Europe!

Hearing fellow-Virginia native [George Denehey](#) – his Twitter handle “@ThatArmlessGuy” sums it up – play and sing “Not Abandoned”... a song that hearkens back to his infancy in a Romanian orphanage

The premier of the video “[Ebenezer](#),” about the 100,000th wheelchair provided by “Wheel for the World.” If you can access only one link in this update, PLEASE make it [this one](#)!



There were just as many highlights from personal interaction:

Getting long conversations with folks we've read and been blessed by over the years – people like [Amos Yong](#) and [Jeff McNair](#) - about disability, the church and mission,

Connecting with ReachGlobal colleague (and former Kyiv team-mate) Oksana Elsinger to discuss ways to build together upon what we have been learning and seeing on our respective journeys,

Meeting people who already know folks on ReachGlobal Europe City Teams (like a Romanian church planter with a heart for disability work that lives literally around the corner from our City Team Leader in Bucharest),



And a very special visit with [Mary Jane Ponten](#) of [Mephibosheth Ministries](#), (pictured above) who has a vision to educate pastors (locally and globally) about disability and inclusion. “God’s call to salvation is to all people, including those with physical and mental challenges,” she told us. That’s also true of his call to mission.” She should know. She’s almost 90, but is still active in ministry. (Since we saw her last, she’s been to Ghana and back, catalyzing disability ministry. Upon learning that she attends an Evangelical Free Church and that we work with that denomination’s mission, she enthused, “Well, I suppose we’d better get started with our own denomination, shouldn’t we?” We couldn’t agree more!

Please join us in prayer that these relationships can continue, grow and bear much fruit.

So, why are we writing about disability now? Is this another “hot button” or something? Heavens, NO!

As we pursue our Catalyst Team mandate to find ways to “Navigate complexity, see Kingdom opportunities, and maximize Gospel impact” we see – both practically and theologically – that engaging the issues of disability, Church and mission are critical. We cannot expect God to honor our prayers to raise up “100,000 disciplemakers in Europe” if we are unwilling to remove the barriers of exclusion that keep the vast majority of the 80 million(!) people in Europe living with disability from the life of the church... let alone the MISSION of the church. At the very MOST, we MAY decide to “serve the needs” of the “handicapped” around our church. But we don’t have a vision of INCLUSION that affirms the image AND the calling of God upon EVERY individual. And we certainly don’t seem to have gotten the idea that those with physical and intellectual disabilities could be numbered among the disciplemakers. If Jesus came “not to be served, but to serve” what does that mean for us in the church? We are not even SERVING our brothers and sisters with disabilities well... when our goal should (must!) be to equip them to serve. We came away with a conviction that there are many doors (to the church, to mission) that human hands have nailed shut against which the fist of the Spirit is pounding.

Brothers and sisters, we have some work to do.

At recent meetings of ReachGlobal’s Europe Division Leadership Team (EDLT), I was able to share some of what God has been showing us... as we presented, shared, discussed and then prayed together and in small groups, there was a sense that (as [one of the participants](#) summarized it) “**We want to see people with disabilities welcomed as workers to our ReachGlobal Europe staff.**”



Please pray for us and the Catalyst Team as we seek to bring a vital concern to bring the Gospel and the love of Christ to ALL people, and to seek to bring ALL into the “obedience of faith.”

To be frank, a dream has been birthed within me: To see ReachGlobal become the *most accessible mission* for those with physical and intellectual disabilities who want to respond to God’s call to global mission. Whether this is a concrete **goal** to which God is actually calling us isn’t yet clear – but it IS clear that this is a critical area where our proclamation and living out of the Gospel in the world could be dramatically upgraded. We welcome your prayers and input as we continue to follow Jesus into the world.

By His grace,

Jim and Liz Baker

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