



**Mennonite
Mission
Network**

Missio Dei

Exploring God's work in the world

God's miracle in Mongolia

**Celebrating 25 years of
partnership in ministry**

EDITED BY JAMES R. KRABILL

Missio Dei is published by Mennonite Mission Network to invite reflection and dialogue about God's mission in today's world. Some features in the series focus primarily on the biblical and theological foundations of the mission task. Others present ministry case studies or personal stories of attempts to be faithful to Christ's call. Perspectives represented reflect the passion and commitment of the agency: to declare in word and demonstrate in life the whole gospel of Jesus Christ, "across the street, all through the marketplaces, and around the world."

Executive director/CEO:	Stanley W. Green
Editor:	James R. Krabill
Editorial content:	Karen Hallis Ritchie
Design:	Cynthia Friesen Coyle
Consulting editor:	Wil LaVeist
Special consulting editors:	Laura Schlabach and Char Kellogg
Production:	Lauren Eash Hershberger

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Mennonite Mission Network, the mission agency of Mennonite Church USA, exists to lead, mobilize and equip the church to participate in holistic witness to Jesus Christ in a broken world. With offices in Elkhart, Indiana, and Newton, Kansas, Mennonite Mission Network supports ministries in 56 countries and 31 states.

Mennonite Mission Network is committed as an agency to providing relevant resources for the church. *Missio Dei* is such a resource, inviting reflection and conversation about God's mission in 21st-century contexts. It is offered free of charge to more than 1,500 pastors and lay leader subscribers. Donations are welcomed to cover costs for additional copies.

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God's miracle in Mongolia

Celebrating 25 years of partnership in ministry

It began with a fall that led to a nation's rebirth. In 1990, Mongolia, the ancient society with the rich heritage that had been suppressed by the Soviets for nearly 70 years, was finally opening to the outside world. Founded in the late 12th century by the controversial and complex leader Chinggis (Genghis) Khan, the world's largest continuous empire had once stretched from Eastern Europe to the Sea of Japan. Khan was a conqueror, but was also known for spreading religious tolerance throughout this predominantly Buddhist country in Asia. However, under Soviet atheist-communist influence, the knowledge of God had been stifled.

The fall of communism opened a pathway for various Christian mission efforts. Mennonite Board of Missions (MBM), a predecessor agency of Mennonite Mission Network, began discussions with other mission agencies that eventually led to the formation of a partnership in 1993 that is now known as JCS (Joint Christian Services) International. A nongovernmental organization, JCS provides projects throughout Mongolia in and around cities such as Ulaanbaatar (Mongolia's capital), Khentii, and Khovd. However, the new organization's most pressing need was not necessarily for church planters to be

The fall of communism opened a pathway for various Christian mission efforts.



Photo by Andrew Boddien

Past and present JCSers attending the MMP 20th anniversary in October 2013. Left to right: Bill and Kwai Lin Stephens; Bill and Mary Jane Yoder; Leah, Caleb, Mary Ellen, Drew, and Sophie Robinson; Vicky and Marlow Ramsay; April, Patrick, Aurelia, and Maewyn Hellberg; and Laura Schlabach.

sent out, but for someone with a more practical skill set. JCS needed an accountant to help manage the new partnership.

Some 6,300 miles away, seven Mennonite churches in east-central Ohio heard the call to support God's movement in this Asian country.

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Connected to the churches was Ohio native Laura Schlabach, formerly an MBM Mennonite Voluntary Service participant in San Antonio, Texas. An accountant, she was at first insecure about how her work could be considered mission. Still, she heeded the call and volunteered. The five known Christians in Mongolia in 1990 had multiplied to approximately 1,000 in this nation of 3 million people by the time Schlabach arrived in 1993.

Twenty-five years later, Schlabach—again working with finances in the main office after serving in a variety of JCS roles—is more confident that she has helped JCS play an integral role in the growth of the Christian church to approximately



Photo by Brian Miller



Photo by Brian Miller



Photo by John F. Lapp

Top left: Ohio partner Brian Miller (back row, second from left) has visited the village of Erdenetsogt on every Mongolia visit. Brian and his brother, Stanton, flank Orta,¹ pastor of the Loving Word Church in this Buddhist context. Bottom left: Members of the 2014 Women2Women+2Men team in front of Laura Schlabach's house in Bayankhongor. Right: In 2013, JCS Executive Director Kwai Lin Stephens (right) honored Mission Network worker Laura Schlabach for her 20 years of service with JCS in Mongolia.

50,000 members in more than 400 congregations nationwide. “It’s amazing to watch what God has done!” Schlabach says.

It is for this reason that the participating partnership congregations celebrate in 2018—25 years of commitment through their Mongolia Mission Partnership has served to encourage them to work together and has provided a hands-on experience to an international missions initiative.

At the start of the partnership, church members of all ages—modeling the “parable of the talents”—were given seed money to raise support for the partnership. One child used the seed money to start a lemonade stand. Others used it to plant a garden from which they could sell produce. As people got involved in this way, excitement for missions grew.

At the start of the partnership, church members of all ages—modeling the “parable of the talents”—were given seed money to raise support for the partnership.

¹ Most Mongolians use only one name for self designation.



Photo by Brian Miller

Top left: JCS began work in Zavkhan Province with the Timber Products Pilot Project. This project led to the Reforestation Project in 2002. Top right: the Model Dairy Farm was established in Burgaltai, 2000–2003. Bottom: Laura Schlabach and members of the 2014 Women2Women+2Men Ohio Partnership team, following a worship service with the church in Erdenetsogt.

JCS [has] been instrumental in helping to facilitate a dramatic national transformation by establishing and supporting various service projects, particularly those training needy families to better provide for themselves.

Instead of simply sending money to a large organization, participants could focus on a particular place and people, learn about them, and pray for them in specific ways. This approach also provided a greater sense of partnership with the mission workers in their ministry assignments.

In Mongolia, JCS celebrates its 25th anniversary on May 25, 2018, following the agency's board and annual meetings at its near-downtown Ulaanbaatar office. Local partners are also being invited to gather for a networking opportunity. Although the current focus for JCS is, in fact, with local partners, historically the focus was on projects. During the open-to-the-public 20th anniversary ceremony at the Mongolia Children's Palace on May 23, 2013, Mongolia's former Prime Minister Sh. Gungaadorj was among the dignitaries who praised JCS, saying



FARM (Family Agriculture Resource Mongolia) grows out of the KiGa (Kitchen Garden) Project that started in 1998 and is registered as an independent NGO.

that the organization had been instrumental in helping to facilitate a dramatic national transformation by establishing and supporting various service projects, particularly those training needy families to better provide for themselves.

Among those projects was the Model Dairy Farm in Batsumber, started by Bill and Mary Jane Yoder and their family, who served with Mennonite Mission Network. During the three-year project from 2000 to 2003, the the Yoders built a barn and introduced new techniques to local farmers on how to increase and sustain milk production during Mongolia's harsh winters when temperatures can remain well below -15 degrees Fahrenheit. A Mongolian family now owns the farm, which has been replicated by several local farmers.

"Some barns can be seen dotting the countryside outside of Ulaanbaatar," said Sheldon Sawatzky, a former JCS board chair and

The Model Dairy Farm in Batsumber is now owned by a Mongolian family and has been replicated by several local farmers.



Zangilmaa (left), a student at Union Bible Theological College in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, teaches at a *ger* church in Ikhkheth, Mongolia, during an evangelism trip led by Petrus Handoyo, an Indonesian Mennonite college professor and worker through Mennonite Mission Network.

JCS projects range from counseling services for addictions and help to escape prostitution, to a café with job training, jewelry- and quilt-making initiatives, and sports clubs for youth.

East Asia director for Mission Network during the Yoders' term. The farmers in this community located two hours north of Ulaanbaatar have worked together for delivery of their milk to Ulaanbaatar. Over the years, they have provided consistent, quality milk, and now the dairy in Ulaanbaatar is sending a truck to pick up the milk from the community. "The farm received a national award ... and when the Yoders left, there were 20 believers in that small community," said Sawatzky, affirming JCS's overall approach of promoting God's kingdom by applying "both Word and deed."

JCS projects range from counseling services for addictions and employment opportunities to help escape prostitution, to a café with job training, jewelry- and quilt-making initiatives, and sports clubs for youth. Support from Ohio churches, often exceeding \$100,000



Photo by Petrus Handoyo

Theology students from the Union Bible Training Center, led by long-term Mission Network worker Petrus Handoyo, traveled to the southeastern part of Mongolia to serve the Palace of Prayer congregation. This is the only local congregation in the middle of the barren Gobi Desert.

annually, has been critical. For example, support helped the ArtisAltaï project where women develop life and business skills through creating jewelry and felt products. ArtisAltaï is now an independent cooperative managed by its members. This project has birthed a church that is reaching out into their community.

The Ohio churches have also been hands-on with work teams traveling regularly on short-term visits to help with construction projects, such as a playground for the school in the village of Erdenetsogt. Teams also worked on buildings at the Mongolian Mission Center in Erdenet and the nearby Rainbow Kindergarten.

Mongolia's transition from a socialist to a democratic government, along with its growing mining industry, is rapidly transforming the land-locked nation from a nomadic and rural culture to one that is urban and consumer-driven. Mongolians are moving

Mongolia's transition from a socialist to a democratic government is rapidly transforming the land-locked nation from a nomadic and rural culture to one that is urban and consumer-driven.



Photo by Brian Miller

Worship in urban Mongolia churches is contemporary and enthusiastic!

for job opportunities from the countryside, where many live in *gers*—movable tent-like houses constructed of wood and felt—to high-rise apartments in the nation’s cities. Genghis Khan’s ancient kingdom is rapidly becoming modern and industrialized.

Today, 2 percent of the country’s population is Christian.

JCS personnel have witnessed the positives and negatives of this transition. Wealth has increased and there is broader access to information via TV and the Internet, but the gap between rich and poor has also expanded. Social and health problems tied to overcrowding have increased along with traffic congestion and smog. Alcohol addiction, particularly among men, has long been a major societal ill. Sexually-transmitted diseases are also rising as women are often forced into prostitution to provide for their families.

Former JCS Executive Director Kwai Lin Stephens says the organization will continue to adjust to help Mongolians build their new society. “Mongolia is facing a global economy now,” she notes. “Mongolians have



Photo by Brian Miller



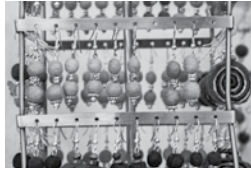
Above: Mustard Seed Café is a ministry of YWAM Bayankhongor Center. Many MMP teams have stayed at this YWAM center. Below: Papa Café was established as a way to train people to run a café, while also providing an alcohol-free, smoke-free environment for students.

to deal with other nations in terms of the economy and international partners.”

This Mongolia is a far different land than when Laura Schlabach first arrived 25 years ago. Then, the Bible’s New Testament had just been translated into the Mongolian language. Today, 2 percent of the country’s population is Christian. The Mongolian Evangelical Alliance—the umbrella organization for local Mongolian churches—aims that by 2020 the Christian population will increase to 10 percent. Ultimately, the Alliance hopes to spread the gospel as far as Khan’s former empire.

Schlabach offers praises for the mission workers who have joined this remarkable effort over the years. “Various mission organizations have prayed for Mongolia and waited for the opportunity to share the gospel,” says Schlabach. The Ohio churches are among those who have contributed to this amazing story, responding faithfully in word, deed, and prayers.

The Ohio churches are among those who have contributed to this amazing story, responding faithfully in word, deed, and prayers.



Photos by Craig Welkott

The ArtisAltai project was started in Gobi-Altai to enable participants to acquire life skills, to increase their income through the development of craft and business skills, and to help them manage this income.

MONGOLIA PARTNERSHIP CHURCHES

Walnut Creek (Ohio)
Mennonite Church



Berlin (Ohio)
Mennonite Church

Smithville (Ohio)
Mennonite Church



Longenecker
Evangelical
Anabaptist
Fellowship,
Winesburg, Ohio

Martins Creek
Mennonite Church,
Millersburg, Ohio



Moorhead
Mennonite
Church,
Holmesville, Ohio



Photo by Craig Walscott

Oyunbold (pictured above with his son, Amaraa) is the owner of Eagle Boxing Club. He uses boxing to offer love to youth who are troubled like he was.



Photo by Craig Walscott

The pastor at the only church in the Buddhist countryside town of Erdenetsogt was given \$1,000 by Korean supporters for his church to use as desired. The church decided to bless the community and the local school with a playground. The church prayed for a year for a group to partner with them in this project. In 2008, the Ohio Partnership sent a 16-member team to work with the local church. Together, they fenced in an area with a basketball court, volleyball court, playground equipment, and covered seating areas where community members can gather.

Timeline

1993

Mennonite Board of Missions (MBM) is a charter member of Joint Christian Services (JCS) International when JCS is registered with the Mongolia Ministry of Trade and Industry.

1995

JCS addresses poverty among herdsman in Gobi-Altai by improving livestock management.

1996

JCS begins work in Zavkhan Province with the Timber Products Project, leading to the Reforestation Project in 2002.

1998

Early Childhood Education Project begins as a way to provide educational opportunities for children of low-income families in Erdenet.

2000

Model Dairy Farm is established in Batsumber. By 2003, it is under full Mongolian management.

2003

VetNet establishes a veterinarian training clinic in Ulaanbaatar focused on training veterinarians in rural areas.

2004

Relief work is initiated in Bayankhongor to encourage herders to stay in or return to rural areas after the winter disasters of 1999–2004.

2008

JCS's Family Agriculture Resource

Mongolia is registered as an independent NGO.

2009

ArtisAltai project begins helping participants to increase their income with craft and business skills.

2010

Papa Café opens to train people to run a café, providing a positive environment for students.

2012

Clean City anti-littering campaign kicks off JCS's 20th anniversary celebrations.

2013

JCS and Ohio partnership celebrate 20 years.

2014

Papa Café spins out of JCS and registers as a business while keeping mission as a focus.

2015

ArtisAltai participants successfully form a cooperative to continue the work of the project.

2017

Work initiated by Compassion and Mercy Associates (CAMA) in the far west province of Khovd is transferred to JCS by CAMA, who joins JCS as a member body.

2018

JCS and Ohio partnership celebrate 25 years. Laura Schlabach began a one-year commitment as the interim executive director for JCS.

Prayers prepared fertile soil

Mongolia was ready for the gospel

By Laura Schlabach

What a privilege to be a part of the work God is doing in Mongolia. Being in the midst of it, I don't always realize the magnitude of what has happened in 25 years—from four or five known believers to 50,000! And from no churches to more than 400 throughout the country! I needed to hear stories from work in other countries to realize, “Wow! God is doing something magnificent here.”

The vision of the Mongolian Evangelical Alliance—the umbrella organization for the churches—is that by the year 2020, 10 percent of the population will be Christian. It is currently less than 2 percent. There is today a Christian presence in every province of the country, and the goal is to have churches in 329 of the nation's counties.

Various times I have been asked why the growth rate has been so fast in Mongolia compared to other countries that have had Christian workers for much longer. The quick answer would be, “It's a God thing.” But that incorrectly makes it sound as though God is not at work in other countries. Reflecting on it a bit longer, the answer would be “communism.” How can communism promote church growth when it abolishes all religion?

When communism fell in 1990, a void was left that people wanted to fill. Buddhism was Mongolia's predominant religion for many years

prior to communism. With God's timing, the New Testament had been in the process of being translated into Mongolian and was ready from the printers in 1990. The *Jesus Film* had also already been translated. With the film and the newly released New Testament, a number of evangelistic teams went throughout the country in 1991 and 1992 sharing about salvation in Jesus. People responded. The truth of Jesus is what Mongolians needed to fill the void they were experiencing. And the ground had been well prepared.

A sermon I heard focused on the "Parable of the Sower" in Luke 8. Yes, there were seeds that fell on the path, on the rock, and amongst the thorns, but the pastor's focus was on verse 8: "Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown." How do we find good soil? "By praying," the pastor said. All that we do should be prepared with prayer beforehand.

As he was sharing, I thought of a story I heard about a woman from the imperial family, named Chabi. She was the wife of Chinggis (Genghis) Khan's grandson, Kublai Khan. Chabi was a Christian and prayed for Mongolia. These prayers were part of the preparation for the fertile soil. Many people, such as members of the Mongolia Mission Partnership churches in Ohio, have been praying for Mongolia for many, many years—even before the fall of communism in 1990.

It has been humbling to be a part of God's work in Mongolia. Sometimes to plant the seed. Sometimes to water what has already been sown. And sometimes to see the harvest. A few of the young people with whom I worked during my first few years here, when my main involvement was teaching English and building relationships, are now church leaders. "But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop" (Luke 8:15). Please continue to pray for good soil and that we may all persevere to produce a crop.

Why this obsession with collages?

A story of women finding healing and hope

By Shannon Stutzman, member of Martins Creek Mennonite Church

In 2013, I was asked to consider being a part of a women's mission team to Mongolia. The trip was planned for September 2014. From the very beginning, I felt God calling me to Mongolia. I had always wanted to be a part of a mission trip, but due to my teaching career and taking care of my disabled husband, it was a goal I was leaving for my retirement years. I felt so strongly about the call to be a part of this trip that I retired from my teaching job so that I could go.

It was amazing how God removed all obstacles and brought our team of nine women and two men together. In the months leading up to our departure, some troubling things were happening in our world, including the Malaysian plane being shot down over Russia, which borders Mongolia. Friends and family were concerned for my safety and asked if I was afraid. Afraid? My answer? There is no safer place than in the center of God's will, and I felt that this was just where I was.

Our team saw God at work in so many ways in Mongolia. One of the programs that we interacted with was "Streams in the Desert," a ministry that rescues women from prostitution and teaches job skills through sewing, jewelry making, running a day care and cleaning service, in addition to modeling a Christ-centered life. We met with these

ladies several times, teaching them about color theory, demonstrating how to knot comforters, and how to make soft pretzels. In turn, the ladies taught us how to make a traditional Mongolian food called *buutz*.

One day a week, the Streams ladies would meet for fellowship and a program. We were responsible for two of these sessions held at the Papa Café in downtown Ulaanbaatar. At the first meeting, the ladies asked if we were going to make collages. I was teaching on color theory, so they made color collages. At the second session, they asked if we were making collages again. What was this obsession with collages? They had even brought catalogs and magazines with them to cut pictures from. The ladies were so insistent that we gathered supplies from the nearby JCS office. It was suggested that their collages be on their life *before* Streams and the life that they hope to have in the future. The ladies worked for about an hour and then they shared about their collages. This is when we saw God at work in their lives. In my journal, I wrote the following about our interaction with the women:

So heartbreaking, touching and encouraging all at the same time. About their past life, they said things like: "My life was meaningless," "I was drunk all the time," "I sold myself," "I was like a dead tree—dead inside." So heartbreaking. The things they wanted for their futures were to save money, have a home, a car, a family, a husband who knows the Lord. So encouraging what they want for themselves.

I asked one of the ladies if I could have her collage to keep, and she gave it to me. She had chosen a picture of a messy girl dressed in black to represent her life before coming to work at Streams, and a picture of a lady dressed in white to depict her life now. The contrast was stark. A relationship with Jesus Christ made the difference. She also had a picture of a man to represent John Koehler who started the Streams in the Desert ministry. About John, she said he kept calling her, calling her, calling her to come work at Streams. He wouldn't leave her alone. That persistence changed her life for the better, for eternity.

When I got home after three weeks in Mongolia, people asked about my experiences. So wonderful, powerful, life-changing. I loved Mongolia! The people were amazing. I have never felt God's presence so profoundly. Some day, I hope to go back because there is still much to do in Mongolia.

New perspectives on life and faith

Lives are changing continually because of our partnership with Mongolia missions. When people return from a short-term mission trip to Mongolia, they often have a new perspective on life and their faith. To experience firsthand the excitement and passion of a country rapidly growing with first-generation Christians will do this to a person. This partnership has been life-giving for so many of our people who come back renewed.

—Jay Conn
*Pastor, Martins Creek Mennonite Church
Chair, Ohio Mongolia Mission Partnership*

The teams from Ohio have had an impact in Bayankhongor Province in a variety of ways. One was practical. In 2009, a team came and together we implemented the “Dream House” project. The visiting team taught us how to build an American style, quality house. Another was service. The Ohio partnership has not only supported us financially, but they helped the local churches to serve together and reach out to the lost. In 2012, Brian Miller and Marc Hochstetler, with their team members, modeled for us how to combine practical action with witness and service. They lent their hands to repair the church building of “Eternal Word” in Zag County, Bayankhongor Province. While doing major

structural repair, they had fellowship with the believers and prayed for them. Now the church is running its activities in this building. This is the fruit of their ministry here.

In 2017, two of us pastors went to Ohio and gave testimonies of what God is doing in Bayankhongor. It was a wonderful time of ministry and fellowship. I saw how the Ohio pastors had partnership with each other and ministered to others from their hearts. We are very thankful to God for the Ohio Partnership sending teams to Bayankhongor, Mongolia, and serving with us. God bless.

—*Pastor Duudei Tsegmed*
Bayankhongor Province, HAB Partnership Development Team

My trip to Mongolia opened my eyes to the vast kingdom of God. Meeting brothers and sisters in Christ on the other end of the earth was encouraging. There was a deep sense of unity felt as we all worshiped God together as a body of believers. The trip established a passion in me that has not gone away. Since the trip, I have decided to study community development. The trip taught me how important community is in the body of Christ and definitely impacted the trajectory of my life in a positive way.

—*Brady Conn*
Participant in 2016 youth missions trip
Martins Creek Mennonite Church

It is truly a remarkable story. The chronicle of the re-emergence of the church in Mongolia is filled with noteworthy accounts of the agency of God's Spirit, the generosity and vision of churches outside of the country, the devotion of faithful servants, and the development of indigenous leaders who shepherded communities of Christ-followers who responded to the good news of reconciliation and hope in Jesus. In reflecting on this amazing story of the growth and maturing of the Mongolian church during the last 25 years, I am filled with gratitude—gratitude for those churches who sensed a call to connect with this story; gratitude for those who were willing to invest their lives in walking alongside followers of Jesus in Mongolia, both those

whose stint was short-term and those who have given the best part of their lives to walk with the emerging church; gratitude for families and for singles who committed to serve the Mongolian church in its new infancy; and gratitude for Mongolian believers who said “yes” to becoming servants and leaders in God’s mission in that land. This is indeed a remarkable story and a worthy celebration!

—Stanley W. Green

Executive Director, Mennonite Mission Network

I am very glad that the teams from Ohio come to us and serve with us. Every time the team comes, they pray for our church members, have fellowship with us, and have even supported our children with school tuition fees. I am very thankful that these people supported and blessed us in many different aspects.

—Urtnasan

Pastor of “Word of Love” in Erdenetsogt County, Bayankhongor Province

After a rough start on my first trip to Mongolia, I muttered to myself, “Lord, I hate this place, let me go home. This was a mistake!” But then I encountered God in an experience like I’d never had before. “This is not a mistake,” God told me. “It is my will and by my design that you are here.” God spoke into my heart. “I have gifted your hands for my work here.” I had worked as a carpenter for 18 years and we were building five houses in Bayankhongor! I was at the time employed back in Ohio by a plumbing/electrical firm, and in Mongolia I was appointed to do plumbing and wiring on those five houses. “Although I have prepared you,” God said, “and gifted your hands for my work here, that is not all I want. I want your heart, all of it. I want you to love the Mongolian people, cherish them, pray with them, laugh and cry with them, be among them, be a voice for them, and build relationships. Use your gifts to bless my people. Do it for me.” The Lord was revealing his plan for me.

That was my moment. Suddenly I had a purpose. I knew that my gifts were worthy, even to the Lord. My whole perspective and attitude was changed in that moment. By the time I got home, I felt I was the

most blessed man alive.

I have been blessed with opportunities to serve the Lord in Mongolia several times since that first trip and each trip has been a wonderful blessing, from working with the Mongolia Mission Center in Erdenet and YWAM in Bayankhongor, to traveling to distant villages like Zag and visiting many other places in Mongolia. My relationships with Mongolian people continue to flourish and grow. On a recent visit to a small village to encourage a friend, I said, “We think of you often and pray for you a lot.” He replied, “We have your family picture pasted in front of our Bible and pray for you daily.” This relationship and others like it are what I cherish—my brothers and sisters in Christ, half a world apart, worshiping the same God. I love this land of Mongolia and I love its people. But it was not love at first sight!

—*Brian Miller*
Member, Martins Creek Mennonite Church

WOMEN2WOMEN+2MEN—The nine women who traveled to Mongolia in 2014 ranged in age from 17 to 84 years! This was a talented, energetic, and joyful group whose goal was to interact with Mongolian women by teaching them various handcrafts, leading in Bible study, learning about the projects in which they were involved, and sharing in their lives through friendship, testimony and worship.

Lovina Brandt from Walnut Creek Mennonite Church was the oldest member of our group. She has been interested in the work in Mongolia for many years. Since retiring from full-time work, Lovina has been providing transportation for members of the local Amish community. As she waits for her passengers, she prays for Mongolia, and she sends her earnings to Mongolia to support translation work.

In Mongolia, Lovina had the opportunity to meet those for whom she has prayed and worked for so many years. She was especially inspired by the deep faith that was expressed in action by those who are our sisters in Christ.

All members of our team, young and old, were blessed and challenged by the hospitality, humility and passion of many of the Mongolian Christian women we met. Ultimately, and in the most important ways, they were our teachers.

—*Char Kellogg*
Member, Martins Creek Mennonite Church

God is raising up a culturally diverse leadership team in Mongolia

By Petrus Handoyo

Indonesian Mennonite worker in Mongolia, 2001–2011

God has created and blessed cultural variety with a very particular purpose. As noted by Brian M. Howell and Jenell Williams Paris in their book *Introducing Cultural Anthropology*, “When God created humans in the garden, living in perfect unity with God and each other, they expressed that perfect unity in the cultural modes of language and culture. God does not redeem humanity by bringing us back together into a single language or culture. Instead, God blesses cultural diversity by sending the gospel out in the diverse languages of the world. Diversity is not a curse, but a blessing to be encouraged, embraced, and enjoyed.”²

Much of the Bible deals with issues connected to the interactions of diverse cultures. God wants us to appreciate and to respect various languages and cultures among us as blessings.³ During my years in

² Brian M. Howell and Jenell Williams Paris, *Introducing Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), p. 256.

³ Patty Lane, *A Beginner's Guide to Crossing Cultures: Making Friends in a Multicultural World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), pp. 138-139.

Mongolia, I saw how God greatly blessed four local churches and their leaders with cultural variety in Baruun-Urt, the capital of Sukhbaatar Province in eastern Mongolia. Baruun-Urt is an isolated city of about 15,000 people. Dominated by the flat steppe, it is located in “the middle of nowhere.” The local church leaders came from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds and worked closely together with one purpose—to preach the good news of Christ to everyone around them. They were truly willing to serve God and to build his kingdom in their communities and in the surrounding steppes where nomadic families lived their daily lives.

Enkhsaruul, in her 30s, pastored Munkhiin Gegee (“Eternal Dawn”) Church. It was a house church meeting in a small wooden home. I traveled with Enkhsaruul and some other church leaders to visit two nomadic families who attended the Sunday service in Enkhsaruul’s church. One of the attendees was 24-year-old Naraa. I saw a Mongolian Bible on the table inside her *ger*. Naraa was born to a nomadic young girl in Sukhbaatar Province and continues her nomadic life until today. For her, Jesus Christ is the Savior and gives her new life. In her home, our group experienced sweet fellowship with her and her family as they prepared to slaughter a large sheep. Then, outside of their *ger*, we ate together *khorkhog*—a Mongolian barbeque dish—and enjoyed the beauty of the blue sky in this lonely steppe.

Enkhsaruul was an open-minded leader and was willing to share her place of worship with another congregation—Uurchlult (“Transformation”) Church—where Dugersuren was the leader. Dugersuren’s group met on Sunday afternoons and focused on reaching out to youth through sports activities.

Another young church leader, Nergui, of the Tal Nutagiin Gerel (“Light of the Steppes”) house church, worked in a collegial way with Enkhsaruul and Dugersuren, and with Munkhbat of Avraliin Naran (“Sun of Salvation”) Church. The four church leaders got together for monthly prayer meetings and understood that the diversity between them and their congregations was a great blessing to all.

In the New Testament we find interactions of various cultures as the apostles and believers experience the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, miraculously touching individuals with different languages and cultures. Today, we see the Holy Spirit doing that same work among church leaders and believers in Mongolia.

Looking to the future

By Matt Hamsher

In the five years since the 20th anniversary, the Ohio Mongolia Mission Partnership (MMP) leadership team has participated in significant conversations regarding its future direction and goals. MMP is committed to supporting its current mission workers in Mongolia for as long as they feel called to serve. MMP is also open to supporting new mission workers in Mongolia if the opportunity arises.

However, MMP leadership has also placed a high priority on facilitating Mongolian leadership and ownership of projects and mission efforts whenever possible. As the Mongolian church and individual Christians continue to mature in their faith, MMP recognizes that our support may be better placed in the training and development of Mongolian pastors and leaders than in the training and sending of additional foreign workers. The hope is that this priority will result in a local expression of faith that is authentically Mongolian and not just a carbon copy of North American cultural expressions of Christianity. Handing over projects to Mongolian leadership and seeking to call and equip Mongolian leaders will hopefully reduce an unhealthy dependence on foreign money and workers that could stunt the growth of the Mongolian church as it transitions from its adolescence to adulthood.

MMP has also taken a couple significant steps forward in recent years in moving toward a more reciprocal relationship with the Mongolian church. The first came in June 2016 when several pastors from MMP in Ohio traveled to Mongolia to attend, among other things, a pastors' retreat with Mongolian pastors from Bayankhongor Province. Despite

the language barrier, this experience gave the American pastors some insight into the relationship dynamics, worship styles, and effect of foreign patronage of Mongolian churches. The trip also served as a reminder that, unlike many of the visiting American pastors who had benefited from pastoral mentors, the Mongolian pastors were first-generation leaders who communicated a deep hunger for pastoral mentors, resources, and training.

In return, MMP hosted two Mongolian pastors, Sundui Nanjid and Tsegmed Duudei, in a visit to Ohio in August 2017. The visit demonstrated some ways in which the churches of the Ohio support group were trying to work together, allowed the pastors to observe different styles of pastoral leadership and congregational worship, and provided an opportunity to continue building the trust and personal relationships that had begun in the visit from Ohio pastors the year before.

These two most recent trips have raised possibilities for how churches in both countries might continue to benefit from a mutual relationship in the future. Until there are second- and third-generation pastors in Mongolia, there will continue to be a need for pastoral mentorship. Furthermore, Anabaptist pastors in North America may be able to model a kind of servant leadership that stands in sharp contrast to more hierarchical forms of leadership found in some Korean and North American traditions that are highly influential in Mongolia.

On the other hand, North American pastors and churches may benefit greatly from the example of the integration of social programs and spiritual witness of churches in Mongolia, and have much to learn from the boldness of the Mongolian Christians' vision of sending its own missionaries to reach all the countries making up the former Mongolian empire with the gospel of Jesus Christ. As we continue to journey together, and the Mongolian church continues to find its own voice, we may discover that we need the gifts of the Mongolian church to revive the North American church as much or more than the Mongolian church has benefited from foreign resources.

Mongolia facts



"Genghis Khan" is actually a title of which the definition is unclear. His real name was Temujin. In Mongolia he is referred to as Chinggis.



The current president of Mongolia, Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj, attended both the University of Colorado at Boulder and Harvard University in the United States.



A *ger* is a movable tent-like house constructed of wood and felt.



Zud is the term for an extremely snowy winter where large numbers of livestock often die of starvation because they can't find fodder through the snow cover.



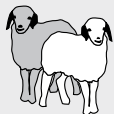
Mongol Khuumii, or throat singing, involves producing two simultaneous tones with the human voice. Go to www.MennoniteMission.net/BeyondOurselves for a link to a video where you can see and hear a Mongolian throat singer.



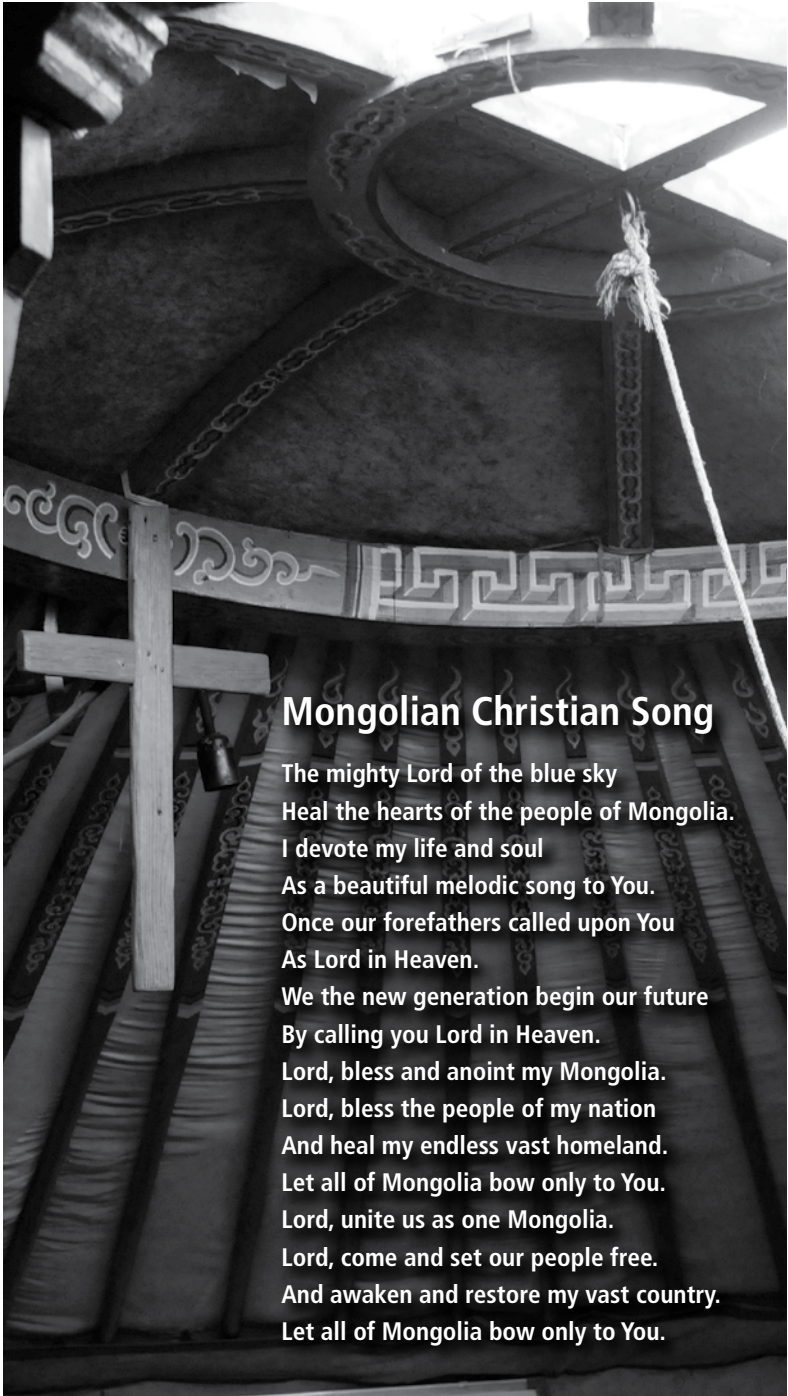
Ulaanbaatar—which means "Red Hero"—is the coldest capital city in the world! Because of the burning of fossil fuels in the winter, Ulaanbaatar also has the distinction of being the most polluted capital in the world.



Winter lasts from November to late April; spring is May through June. Summer continues from July through to September. The average summer temperature is +20c (+65F). The average winter temperature is -20c (-13F) .



Sheep outnumber people 35 to 1.



Mongolian Christian Song

The mighty Lord of the blue sky
Heal the hearts of the people of Mongolia.
I devote my life and soul
As a beautiful melodic song to You.
Once our forefathers called upon You
As Lord in Heaven.
We the new generation begin our future
By calling you Lord in Heaven.
Lord, bless and anoint my Mongolia.
Lord, bless the people of my nation
And heal my endless vast homeland.
Let all of Mongolia bow only to You.
Lord, unite us as one Mongolia.
Lord, come and set our people free.
And awaken and restore my vast country.
Let all of Mongolia bow only to You.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. This booklet is entitled *God's miracle in Mongolia*. What about this story helps you to understand why this title was chosen?
2. There are a variety of themes developed in this booklet. Which of these themes most caught your attention?
 - Transformed lives.
 - The birth of a church.
 - Long-standing relationships.
 - Cultural diversity.
 - Short- and long-term ministries.
 - Contextualized worship.
 - Partnerships between Mongolian and North American believers.
 - Ministry initiatives with youth, women, rural farmers, and city dwellers.
3. Are you or your congregation involved in any initiatives where people are being invited into a relationship with Jesus Christ? What “new perspectives on life and faith” (p. 17) do you have to report from your own experience in this regard?
4. The Ohio Mongolia Mission Partnership is celebrating 25 years of work together with Mennonite Mission Network in the country of Mongolia. Could you imagine a cluster of congregations in your city or region banding together to launch a new ministry in your neighborhood or in some other location around the world?
5. What are you and your congregation doing to inform yourself about the remarkable growth of the church in the “global South”—in Latin America, Africa, and Asia? How does the Mongolia story compare with or contrast to the larger picture of what God is doing around the world?
6. What lessons do you think the church in North America could learn from God's people in Mongolia?

For further study

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LEATHERWOOD, Rick, *Glory in Mongolia* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2012).

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WEATHERFORD, Jack, *Genghis Khan and the Quest for God: How the World's Greatest Conqueror Gave Us Religious Freedom* (London: Penguin Books, 2016).

On mission history: www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/rectifying-the-greatest-missed-opportunity-in-christian-history/

Background to the film documentary "The Eagle Huntress:" web.stanford.edu/dept/HPS/EagleHuntress2016long.pdf

Joint Research Counsel (a partnership of Mongolia Evangelical Alliance, the National Council of Churches, and the National Pastors' Association): www.onechallenge.org/2013/06/03/partnering-in-research-with-the-mongolia-evangelical-alliance/

Mongolian Prayer Movement 24/365: www.jcsintl.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/2015-2018-prayer.pdf

JCS newsletters: www.jcsintl.org/multimedia/publications/newsletter/

The 2018 JCS Prayer Guide: www.jcsintl.org/pray/

The *Missio Dei* series

- No. 1** Calvin E. Shenk, *Understanding Islam: A Christian Reflection on the Faith of our Muslim Neighbors* (2002).
- No. 2** James R. Krabill, *Does Your Church “Smell” Like Mission? Reflections on Becoming a Missional Church* (2003).
- No. 3** Donna Kampen Entz, *From Kansas To Kenedougou ... And Back Again* (2004).
- No. 4** Alan Kreider, *Peace Church, Mission Church: Friends or Foes?* (2004).
- No. 5** Peter Graber, *Money and Mission: A Discernment Guide for Congregations* (2004).
- No. 6** Craig Pelkey-Landes, *Purpose Driven Mennonites* (2004).
- No. 7** James R. Krabill and Stuart W. Showalter, editors, *Students Talk About Service* (2004).
- No. 8** Lynda Hollinger-Janzen, *“A New Day in Mission:” Irene Weaver Reflects on Her Century of Ministry* (2005).
- No. 9** Delbert Erb and Linda Shelly, *The Patagonia Story: Congregations in Argentina and Illinois Link “Arm-in-Arm” for Mission* (2005).*
- No. 10** *Together in Mission: Core Beliefs, Values and Commitments of Mennonite Mission Network* (2006).*
- No. 11** James R. Krabill, editor, *What I Learned from the African Church: Twenty-Two Students Reflect on a Life-Changing Experience* (2006).*
- No. 12** Ryan Miller and Ann Graham Price, editors, *Together, Sharing All of Christ with All of Creation* (2006).*
- No. 13** Michael J. Sherrill, *On Becoming a Missional Church in Japan* (2007).*
- No. 14** Alicia Horst and Tim Showalter, editors, *BikeMovement: A Mennonite Young Adult Perspective on Church* (2007).*
- No. 15** Jackie Wyse, *Digging for Treasure in Your Own Backyard: Reflections on Missional Experiments in the Netherlands* (2007).*
- No. 16** Alan Kreider, *Tongue Screws and Testimony* (2008).*
- No. 17** Conrad L. Kanagy, *No Purse, No Bag, No Sandals: A Profile of Mennonite Church Planters, 1990-2005* (2008).*
- No. 18** Palmer Becker, *What Is an Anabaptist Christian?* (2008). Revised edition (2010).*
- No. 19** M. Daniel Carroll R., *Immigration and the Bible* (2010). Revised edition (2017)*
- No. 20** Matthew Krabill and David Stutzman, editors, *New Anabaptist Voices* (2012).*
- No. 21** Steve and Sheryl Martin, *For God so Loved Afghanistan: Journal Selections from 16 Years of Family Living in a War-torn Land* (2013).*
- No. 22** *Walking Together in Mission: Following God’s Call to Reconciliation* (2013). Revised edition (2017)*
- No. 23** Nancy Frey and Lynda Hollinger-Janzen, *3-D Gospel in Benin: Beninese Churches Invite Mennonites to Holistic Partnership* (2015).*
- No. 24** Paula Killough, *The “M” Word: My personal awakening to God’s work* (2017).*
- No. 25** Brad Roth, *Growing the church in the rural neighborhood* (2017).*
- No. 26** James R. Krabill, ed., *God’s miracle in Mongolia: Celebrating 25 years of partnership in ministry* (2018).*

*Available in Spanish.

God's miracle in Mongolia

Celebrating 25 years of partnership in ministry

Twenty-five years ago, there were only four or five known Christian believers in the country of Mongolia. Today, one can find more than 400 churches with an estimated 50,000 members.

For much of this period, Mennonites—facilitated by Mennonite Mission Network and the Ohio Mongolia Mission Partnership—have provided a presence in the country through long-term workers and short-term mission teams.

As the church in Mongolia has grown and matured, reciprocal relationships have developed between believers across the miles. “We may discover,” writes Ohio pastor, Matt Hamsher, “that we need the gifts of the Mongolian church to revive the North American church as much or more than the Mongolian church has benefited from foreign resources” (p. 24).

This story is an excellent resource for individuals, small groups, and congregations who are interested in learning more about what God is doing through newly emerging faith communities around the world. If this is a new exercise for you as a reader, Mongolia is a great place to start the journey.

—James R. Krabill
Mennonite Mission Network



James R. Krabill served for 14 years as a Mennonite Bible and church history teacher among African-initiated churches in West Africa. Since 1996, he has worked in various administrative capacities at Mennonite Board of Missions and Mennonite Mission

Network and currently serves as senior missions advocate for Church Relations.

Toll-free: 1-866-866-2872
www.MennoniteMission.net

