



## Discovering my place in God's great family

*Kevin Hast from Caledonia, MI reflects on how he grew in his faith by serving as a CRWM Missions Intern in Guadalajara, Mexico.*

For two months in 2011, I had the opportunity to experience cross cultural ministry in Guadalajara, Mexico. I lived with an American missionary, two Mexican evangelists, and a Mexican family of four -- the family of Marilee and Santos, and their two sons, Santos Jr. and Beto (see photo below). I worked with a youth group created cooperatively by evangelists Jacob Rosales and Melquiades, and CRWM missionary Wayne De Young. My



main ministry was teaching music and guitar to the youth group, in hopes that these youth would someday work together to create a worship team for the house church organization in El Verjel, a slum-like area in Guadalajara.

Living among a Mexican family, not knowing much Spanish, and being alone in a completely different culture

and lifestyle was extremely difficult. Not only was I experiencing culture shock, but I was also trying to figure out why God had sent me there. Nevertheless, after two weeks of observation, I was

***"After just one day, I knew my life would never be the same"***

ready to move in with this family and begin my ministry, and after just one day, I knew my life would never be the same. I realized that the only way for me to make an impact for the Kingdom of God in this city

would be to die to myself everyday and focus on serving that community with everything I had. Each morning I would teach kids ages 6-14 how to play guitar, and then spend the remainder of the day with the youth, experiencing what they experience in the slums. By simply hanging out with these kids, we learned to trust one another and I was able to show them how God was

working in my life, rather than just telling them. We became family.

The thing I remember most from this experience was playing in the park with the kids. We would go there right after practicing guitar for an hour or so, and play soccer until we were too tired to do so anymore.

Then we would come back and simply live together. We functioned like any other Mexican family would. I can say now that when I go back to Mexico, I will be visiting family.



God's family reaches all around the world, and it was an incredible experience to tap into that same family thousands of miles away.

I am extremely grateful for the education and wisdom I received from this experience. I have learned how to be culturally sensitive, and how to translate North American Christianity in a way that Mexicans can understand. Spending time with the different missionaries and evangelists opened my eyes to so many different ministries and I wish I could experience them all, but I know now that God has a specific call for me, like He does for each of us. I am ever watchful for the next door to open.

It would be impossible for anyone to experience what I did and not be changed by it. One thing that continues to go through my mind is the idea that "home is where the heart is." While in Mexico, it took me a while to have that change of heart, from the American home I lived in to the slums of Guadalajara. When my heart caught up to me, it went into the lives of the kids whom I had the pleasure of meeting and living with. You could say I left a part of my heart in Mexico, and it will always be there. My heart is forever at my home, where both God's family and mine are.



A Service and Learning team along with Duane (yellow hat), concrete masons and local children.

*"When a Service and Learning team first arrives on a work site it is interesting to observe the members. The local people are eagerly awaiting the group that will be in their community for 5-6 days to help with a project. The team leaves the comfort of the van and begins to move toward their fellow workers somewhat rigidly. As the week continues the hand signals and basic words become more fluid as people from two countries work side by side. By the last day, the team is very eager to greet the hosts with a hearty handshake and huge smiles. The special week may soon be over but it will not be forgotten and lessons learned by working with people that are different than us can be carried with us back home."*

Duane Postma

CRWM volunteer - assistant to CRWM teams serving in the Dominican Republic

# Ministry Linkages and Activity

Fiscal Year: July 1, 2010 - June 30, 2011

*This fiscal year, ServiceLink volunteers came from across both Canada and the USA, representing 39 of the 47 classical regions. Some volunteers served in more than one capacity.*

## CANADA

CLASSIS	Number of Volunteers	Volunteer Hours
Alberta North	48	4792
Alberta South/Saskatchewan	4	484
B.C. North-West	21	3733
B.C. South-East	5	904
Chatham	38	3170
Eastern Canada	19	757
Hamilton	33	3226
Huron	26	1764
Lake Superior (Canada)	12	864
Niagara	6	2136
Quinte	1	110
Toronto	5	543
<b>TOTAL CANADA</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>22483</b>

## UNITED STATES

CLASSIS	Number of Volunteers	Volunteer Hours
Arizona	1	63
Atlantic Northeast	4	1559
Central California	5	778
Central Plains	11	1040
Chicago South	6	376
Georgetown	7	1020
Grand Rapids East	33	2620
Grand Rapids North	5	697
Grand Rapids South	27	3894
Grandville	63	5230
Greater Los Angeles	1	8
Hackensack	4	261
Heartland	8	448
Holland	36	3252
Hudson	6	344
lakota	12	2832
Kalamazoo	11	880
Lake Erie	3	418
Lake Superior (USA)	1	200
Minnekota	1	328
Muskegon	14	2144
Northern Illinois	3	472
Northern Michigan	5	1348
Pacific Northwest	6	304
Rocky Mountain	17	1256
Southeast U.S.	2	252
Thornapple Valley	12	728
Zeeland	1	64

**TOTAL USA 307 32816**

**TOTAL CAN-USA 525 55299**

*"After my orientation, I started my work with Beacon of Hope, a partner that raises awareness about HIV/AIDS and provides resources and help to those who struggle with the disease and its effects. The work has been eye opening and challenging, but it has also been a blessing to see how God is working through this ministry and through the individuals who are willing to rise up and care for orphans and vulnerable children."*



Jeni Kanis  
CRWM volunteer – Nigeria

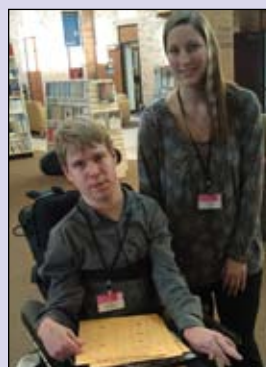


*"My trip to Palestine and Israel definitely changed my life. The Israeli/Palestine conflict is messy, confusing, emotional and the stakes are very high. It is a very sensitive situation to enter into. Perhaps the most important thing*

*I learned though was that despite how difficult the situation is, God is still calling us to enter into it. Often, that means just listening and learning and slowly figuring out what our role is."*

Gerrit De Vynck  
CRWM participant - HOPE Equals

*"I have been volunteering at the CRCNA office for nearly a year now. Once a week, I deliver inner-office mail, pick out Punch Lines for The Banner, and do any other available jobs. In the morning, a group*



*gathers, and we pray together—a time I look forward to each week. I really enjoy volunteering because it gives me a chance to be a witness for Christ and to share my gifts. I am most grateful for the kind and compassionate friends I have made while volunteering. I would recommend to everyone to try to do volunteer work because it's awesome! We are blessed to be a blessing, so go out and serve.*

Paul Buursma  
Disability Concerns volunteer  
CRCNA Grand Rapids office

*"Our short term missions trip is about mutual investment. Although our church has been blessed with many resources, training and time that we can share with the church in El Coylar (Honduras), I would argue that they have much more to share with us. Amidst the poverty and struggles, prayer, friendship, love, support and joy are very evident among the members of the community. Blessed to be a blessing takes on a whole different meaning. This was not a typical short term missions trip. It was a very enriching experience that now allows our church to be more intentional with how we can continue to pray for the community of El Coylar."*



Emily Verseveldt  
CRWRC volunteer - New Westminster (BC) CRC team to Honduras

## Objectives and Achievements

Providing volunteer opportunities that engage people in the transformation of lives and communities.

### Volunteers in CRCNA ministries

<i>"engage in global mission"</i>	Target	Actual
CANADA	230	169
USA	230	242
TOTAL	460	411

### Volunteers in non-CRCNA ministries

<i>"engage in global mission"</i>	Target	Actual
CANADA	20	52
USA	70	70
TOTAL	90	122

### Youth and Young Adult Volunteers

<i>"nurture children and youth"</i>	Target	Actual
CANADA	25	10
USA	35	28
TOTAL	60	38

### Youth and Young Adult Groups

<i>"nurture children and youth"</i>	Target	Actual
CANADA	8	8
USA	15	4
TOTAL	23	12

### Congregational requests met

<i>"create/sustain healthy congregations"</i>	Target	Actual
CANADA	15	7
USA	30	20
TOTAL	45	27

### Engagements of CRC Congregations

<i>"become ministries of choice"</i>	Target	Actual
CANADA	25	21
USA	60	50
TOTAL	85	71

*"Seeing others relying on God and His strength led me to try to emulate them. As I saw Christians dig deeper into their faith I was led to try to do the same - to dig that bit deeper.*

*The wonderful thing is that God is an unfathomable ocean of strength and love, and the deeper we go the more we receive from Him and the greater our understanding that His love is indeed bottomless. I have received vastly more than I have ever given. I thank God for that."*

Dave Carter  
CRWM/CRWRC volunteer in Haiti (three times) and Nigeria



## MINISTRY HIGHLIGHTS

1. The Christian Reformed Church was blessed with many volunteers who participated on various Service & Learning teams this past year – walking alongside local people in the building of homes in Haiti, constructing churches in the Dominican Republic, teaching in China, building latrines in Nicaragua, engaging in urban ministries in New York City and Jackson, Mississippi as well as supporting overseas ministry staff in Guinea at their annual spiritual retreat. In total there were 33 teams sent out this past year, comprising almost 75% of all volunteers. Other countries where teams served included Bolivia, Palestine, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico. ***We give thanks to God for the willingness of his people to connect with overseas communities, to learn from them, to develop relationships with each other, to grow in their understanding of missions and ministry, and to share in the building of his Kingdom.***

2. This was the second year that ServiceLink served as a bi-national program and engaged American churches and volunteers in their ministry. As a result, volunteer involvement increased by approximately 130% (!) in comparison to our first year. ***We thank God for blessing the many efforts involved in promoting ServiceLink and pray he will continue to guide us as we move forward as a bi-national program.***

## Volunteers by Projects • July 1, 2010 to June 30, 2011

Volunteer Project	CANADA		USA		TOTAL CAN & USA	
	No of Vol	Hours	No of Vol	Hours	No of Vol	Hours
CRCNA Office Volunteer	21	2062	17	486	38	2548
CRCNA North America Individual	0	0	2	18	2	18
CRWM Overseas Group	51	3956	108	8421	159	12377
CRWM Overseas Individual	8	1710	34	10671	42	12381
CRWM North America Individual	0	0	2	910	2	910
CRWRC Overseas Group	69	5944	65	4168	134	10112
CRWRC Overseas Individual	12	5958	14	4491	26	10449
CRWRC North America Individual	8	322	0	0	8	322
ServiceLink Overseas Group	11	704	0	0	11	704
ServiceLink North America Group	37	920	70	3840	107	4760
ServiceLink North America Individual	4	718	0	0	4	718
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>22294</b>	<b>312</b>	<b>33005</b>	<b>533</b>	<b>55299</b>



*"God reminded me that when he surrounds us, fills us with the Holy Spirit, and we answer His call, we are no longer ordinary; we become extraordinary. So in Christ there is no such thing as an ordinary girl or boy. It was wonderful to see how God worked through these people and our group to make extraordinary things happen. Through each person I met in West Jackson, I was reminded that when God works through the ordinary, their efforts become extraordinary."*

Charise Bos

*Charise Bos and her family joined her church's youth group mission trip to Jackson, Mississippi with 'Voice of Calvary'*

*"Participating in an internship in community outreach was part of my discernment journey for ministry – as I feel called to ministry, but am in the process of letting God reveal to me where he wants me to serve Him. During my time in Halifax (NS), I volunteered in various aspects of outreach – from serving people in food banks to being a part of campus ministry. This was one of the most transformative, life-affirming experiences I have encountered and it was a period of very intensive healing and growth. One of the things that I have come to understand is how important community is to the overall health and vitality of an individual. The desire for us to be a part of each other's lives has been placed in us by God – as he is very much a God of relationships."*

Karen Long

*ServiceLink 'All Nations CRC' volunteer – Halifax, Nova Scotia*



*"Serving as CRWM volunteers has been a life changing experience. Leaving our careers behind 10 years ago, Bill and I headed for Nigeria, wondering what God had in store for us. We have been richly blessed through the people we have met and worked with, as well as the many Nigerians who have taught us much. They have taught us what contentment looks like, how trusting in God's providential care changes everything, how to experience joy and delight in little things, and what the communion of the saints ought to be. Through them, we have a much wider and deeper sense of what the church of Jesus Christ looks like."*

Ko Spyksma

*CRWM volunteer - Nigeria*

## Epilogue

If one looks on Wikipedia for the definition of the word "epilogue" then we read that it "is a final chapter at the end of a story that often serves to reveal the fates of the characters."

As you have read through the stories in this report, you will undoubtedly join with us at ServiceLink and the agencies and ministries where our volunteers have served, to thank and praise God for the transformative work that took place in the lives of these particular "characters" who are all part of God's story. You were given a glimpse of the roles they played and the lives they lived for the short chapter of time they served God's family in a special way.

But an epilogue one could write at the end of these stories is not about fate or destiny, but more about openness to



additional chapters God will write for each of them - chapters about applying a new learning into lives at home, or witnessing for Christ and encouraging others to do so, or walking through new doors to answer God's specific call or additional chapters of how the Holy Spirit is working through the lives of ordinary people. Some exciting stuff for the characters of God's story – and for the story of the Christian Reformed Church as it continues to engage people in its various ministries at home and abroad.

We hope you enjoy the stories and information of this report and ask for your prayers as ServiceLink continues to serve the denomination in the area of volunteerism.

*Carol Sybenga*  
Program Manager