



ALLIANCE FOR VULNERABLE MISSION

[www.vulnerablemission.org](http://www.vulnerablemission.org)

**Alliance for Vulnerable Mission Bulletin  
September 2015  
Volume 7, Number 9.**

**Editor:  
Jim Harries, PhD,  
Chairman of the AVM.**



<b>Executive board</b>	<b>Advisory board</b>	
Jim Harries	Alex Araujo	Chris Flanders
Timothy Reeves	Jay Gary	Stan Chu Ilo
Fred Lewis	Tomas Dozier	Frank Paul
	Jean Johnson	Gord Sawatzky
		Stan Nussbaum

**The Alliance for Vulnerable Mission encourages some missionaries from the West to engage in their ministries using local languages and resources.**

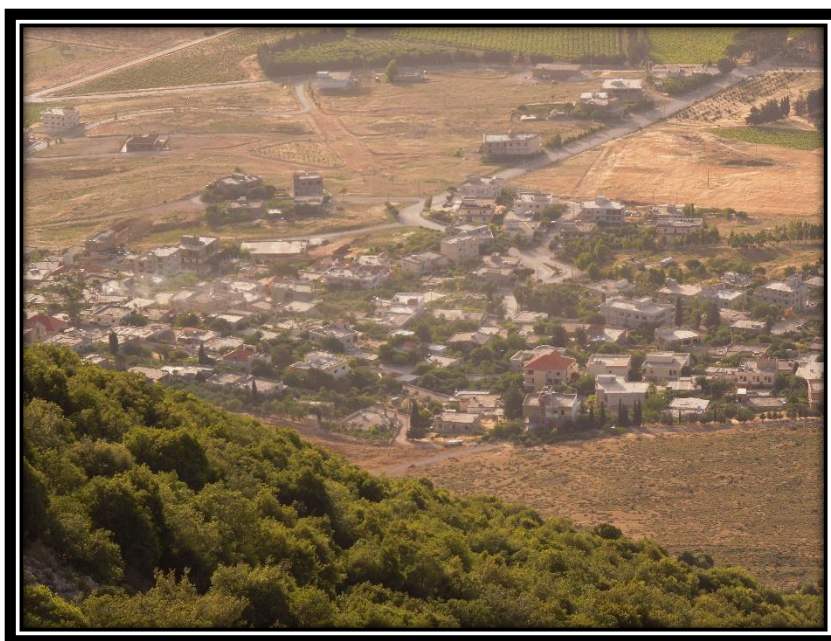
- 
- See this amazing blog entitled: “How to partner with a poor church without screwing everything up” written by Craig Greenfield here: <http://www.craiggreenfield.com/blog/2015/8/18/empowerment>



Craig Greenfield is the founder and director of Alongsiders International. For more details, go here: <http://www.craiggreenfield.com/about/>

**A real recent account of missionary service in MEC (a Middle Eastern Country).**

By Martin Bernhard



*Martin Bernhard's home village in the Middle East*

“We are working with EMA (European Mission Agency – this is a pseudonym). We are mostly happy with this organisation, because they look after us in terms of our pension and finances. They are giving us a lot of freedom of what we are working and support our lifestyle.

For years I was seconded to an originally German orphanage in an area in MEC (Middle Eastern Country). The school is still supported financially by the Germans. I was an unpaid worker and at times responsible for the boarding of 175 students. I have not been well treated by the director or the Germans themselves. Firstly, I was not German, secondly, because I did not support the school financially and thirdly, I was with a mission. They have kept me for years because of the work I did. Each of my services at church was supervised and commented by the director of the school. No evangelistic attitude was allowed because the Germans did not like it and it was a school both for Muslim and Christians. I decided to be better equipped for church work at the school and did a MA in theology. Shortly after I began with studying I was kicked out. The reason given to me was that I was obstructing a worker from his work. Because there were no financial benefits involved for the school I was bullied like the other employees from my boss. This helped me to feel very much with the local people.

Some years I have spent working in environmental work in an organisation called Rock (pseudo name for a missions'/development organisation). Here again I'm working now under local leadership. Because I'm not offering any money to churches my work is being largely ignored. The church here is very much used to function with foreign aid and treat people who bring finances very well. The Rock project is now under local leadership. It is not going well. Yesterday my boss told me, that foreigners always come and start new projects. After some years they leave and the project collapses because of the absence of their foreign leader or the lacking funds. I think this is really true.

In my work I have been operating mainly in Arabic. I got to know the culture a lot through the language. Because I do speak Arabic I do not get the hospitality treatment anymore in way other foreigners get it. I do understand all the gossip and the swearwords of the village people. At times it helps best to close the door when my wife (who is a local girl) has guests from the village.

Living like this has helped me to understand the Bible in a new way, as Arab culture is in some ways relatively close to that of the Bible.

I do think that money played a role in protestant mission. Most converts come from local churches, especially the orthodox one. People become evangelicals because of benefits in schooling, fuel etc. Many MEC people are traders and shop keepers. This obviously affects their attitude about Christianity. Volunteering is unheard of in this culture, which effects church life, where volunteering is often a form of contributing to make a church working.

Working under dictatorial local leadership has been humiliating for me in different ways. The evangelical church is very closely knit and makes it difficult for a foreigner to feel at home. They like to keep to themselves and guard finances not always in a way that we know from Europe. Mission of course is not easy due to the situation between Christians and Muslims. Residence permits for Christian workers have to be sponsored by churches. They do feel that they are doing the Christian worker a favour in helping them to obtain the permits. Evangelical church leaders have a much better living standard than I do. For this reason I cannot invite them to our home anymore. Evangelicals and especially Baptists are looked at with suspicion in the villages. People are not ready to learn from each other and see the similarities instead of the differences.

In our lifestyle we are totally integrated into the village. All people in the village own houses except us, which has created problems for us during the years. We cannot afford to buy a house and are therefore looked down by people in the village. Using and understanding language and culture does not make me into a local. If I use the appropriate language or gestures people are confused because this is not how a foreigner is supposed to act.

I came to MEC on the basis that this was the only place EMA had a place to work for me. I knew almost nothing about the situation of Christians or the need for mission. If I ever felt I was called to mission and if I look back what I did here I would have to say that I was a Christian worker who does not know if he achieved anything concerning the spread of the gospel. Many Christians here do not seem to need Christ.

They seem so confident about their Christian heritage that it might actually block them to see the need for Christ in their life....

I think in MEC money and an affluent lifestyle have perverted Christianity. To be part of this Christianity is not possible or attractive for poor people.

I planned for an environmental project and it was supposed to be located in an area of poor Muslims. My "churchleader" boss thought that the location was not suitable. Looking at the plot of land he was mostly worried that something might happen to his car. His other car got scratched once.

### **More from 'Franco':**

Stan Nussbaum told us about 'Franco', who works in a Muslim country. Here is Franco's response to what Stan shared (see AVM Bulletin August 2015, available here: <http://www.jim-mission.org.uk/avm-bulletins/index.html> )

"I'm new in the country so I don't know everything. But what I heard from workers that are here for longer is that the government care very much for any religious activity, even small informal groups meeting. They did infiltrate many of them.

First they want to check is that they are not some terrorist groups or rebellion feeding groups. In this case, it is very true that if there is no money involved it will be much sooner clear that this group is only "religious".

But their main concern is trouble making: they don't care much that Muslims becoming followers of Jesus, being public about it or not. What they care is if this implies "troubles" in the community. So for example, if there is an honour crime (like a new convert being killed by a family member), the fault will be on the foreign Christians. They will consider that the conversion brought trouble so we foreigners should be kicked out. Also something as simple as an Imam complaining about Christian foreigners could be enough to kick some foreigners out in some cities.

That is also why those that do public ministry (like street preaching, or even part of an official registered church) will have problems with the authority as soon as there is some trouble. Even if the trouble is directed towards them and they are the victim of it.

So we don't need to be as harsh as John the Baptist to have some kind of problems.

In fact, you can avoid a lot of problems by not using foreign money, but you can't avoid problems altogether. But it is ok, Jesus and the apostles also had and promised troubles. What we want is to have problems for the sake of the gospel, not for the sake of money and power."

## **Brief report from Jim Harries following his travels for 5 weeks to 7 locations in Tanzania and Kenya**

Thanks to Stan Nussbaum for guest-editing the last edition of the Bulletin, and for making an excellent job of doing so.

Stan posted my travel schedule, which has taken up the last 36 days, in the August edition of the Bulletin. I am glad to be able to report that I am home again. The whole trip was very inspiring and I think very successful.

I feel that the trip was very pertinent to vulnerable mission concerns. It was ‘a vulnerable mission, mission trip’. This is because all my engagement with African people on the trip was with using languages (Swahili and Luo). I did not offer any finance towards what we were doing, apart from my local-level contributions to the offering plate at church services and fellowships. Working with Luo people enabled particularly deep engagement, Luo being a mother tongue, and my already being very familiar with it.

I was struck after preparing and then presenting a 3-day seminar to a group of pastors, that almost nothing of the thrust of what I taught was even on the radar screen of typical Western missionaries, i.e. theologians and church workers. Instead, my whole seminar-content grew out of local contexts, engaging with the Scriptures. I presented that seminar in Swahili. I do not copy the content here, because translating it into English would so transform it that it could end up generating more confusion than light.

One host often told the congregations that we spoke to that I was ‘easy to accommodate’, or some such phrase. He compared me with other missionaries (White people) who he had worked with in the past. Unlike them, I did not need a translator, I did not need a vehicle, I did not need putting up in a hotel, I did not get tired walking door to door, I did not need special food, I did not really even need advance notice as to what we were going to do. The local pastor realised that he had the ‘power’. I was a follower of the programme that had been designed locally. If there was no programme, then I did nothing.

A test came relatively often, in the form of an appeal for material help, or to be put in touch with someone who could provide material help. I explained how for me to make such a contribution did not make sense and could very quickly be destructive of our relationship. My hosts seemed to understand and to appreciate that I was not going to bring them material gain.

The above had me thinking. Some of the above ‘behaviours’ on my part could be threatening to other Western missionaries. Maybe next time they come expecting to be put up in a hotel, they will be told that Jim Harries didn’t need a hotel. ... I don’t want to be so ‘threatening’ to other missionaries, but how to avoid such? Do I have to avoid sleeping in a dirty mud hut so as not to offend other missionaries? This is a serious question.

- Capturing Courage International Ministries (CCIM) seems to be taking some vulnerable mission principles very seriously. See here: <https://capturingcourageblog.wordpress.com/what-to-expect-from-us/>
- See <http://missioidjournal.com/article.php?issue=md-6-2&author=md-6-2-harries> for a recently published article by Jim Harries entitled: **'Self-Imposed Strictures and the Role of Western Missionaries in Cross-Cultural Mission to Africa'**. Here is the abstract: "The author advocates the voluntary self-imposition of strictures in some Westerners' cross-cultural mission work, especially on the use of outside languages and resources. In a world that increasingly esteems material success, voluntary poverty of Western missionaries working in Africa and elsewhere amongst the poor is easily misunderstood. Yet, understanding vulnerable missionaries' reasons for a self-restricted ministry style, trail blazed by Jesus, is vital for preventing their persecution or derision. Once other missionaries understand these reasons, good relationships between those whose approaches to ministry vary can combine deep impact with a testimony of godly love."
- See here: <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/the-evangelical-recession-and-the-mission-task> for a piece by Jean Johnson entitled **The Evangelical Recession and the Mission Task; Raising Local Resources**, published in *Mission Frontiers*.