

A woman with short brown hair, wearing a blue jacket, stands in the center of a group of about ten children. They are outdoors on a grassy area with trees in the background. The children are wearing blue and grey jackets. One child on the right is holding a colorful ball. The word 'link' is written in large white letters across the top of the image.

link

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New mission partners

A warm welcome to our newest mission partners! Left to right: **Guilio and Lucy Abortivi** (Milan, Italy), **Jony and Jenny Bertin** (Buenos Aires, Argentina), **Michael Durant** (BUILD Partners, UK), **David and Kathryn-Anne Masters** (Brussels, Belgium), **Ralf and Marie-Christine Wenz** (Leipzig, Germany) and **S and E** (MENA region). Give thanks for each of them, and for more mission partners still coming through, and pray for them as they take God's word to God's world. Find out more about their ministries and how you can partner with them on our website.

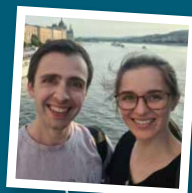


Join us in prayer

Join us at our online prayer meetings. We meet in the evening on Zoom with supporters to hear from and pray for Crosslinks mission partners. Sign up at pletters@crosslinks.org to have the Zoom details sent to you each month.

7 Sep, 7:30pm

with Simon and Abigail Donohoe, serving in Ireland



21 Sep, 7pm

with Matt and Sarah Gurtler, serving in Moldova



19 Oct, 7pm

with Matt and Helen Pope, serving in Chile



16 Nov, 7pm

with Michael Durant and Jem Hovil, serving with BUILD partners from the UK

2 Nov, 7:30pm

with Josh and Cathy Hooker, serving in Namibia



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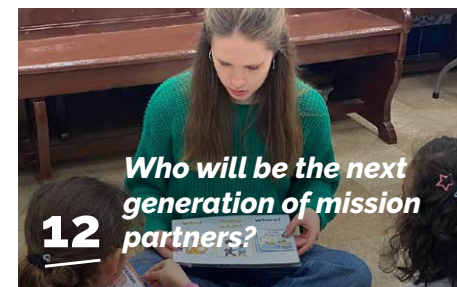
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Walking with confidence

Our stumbling steps of faith, our efforts to share Jesus, can feel weak and foolish. But God chooses to use the weak things of the world and, as Richard encourages us, we can have confidence in his perfect wisdom in doing so.

What is infinity? Why is water wet? Are we nearly there yet? Children ask the most difficult questions. Yet parents who want to do the best for their children face an even trickier question: 'What is best?'

More broadly, every Christian who wants to glorify the name of Jesus and lead others to faith in him must ask the same question. 'I want to help my neighbours, colleagues and friends realise that Jesus is Lord. What is the best way to do that? I try telling people about Jesus, but it comes out sounding foolish, and I end up feeling weak. Is this really the best way?'

The question is even more complicated for mission partners as they arrive in a new place and begin to live among unfamiliar people. They would be the first to acknowledge they don't know everything there is to know, and they don't think straight because, like us, they continue to wrestle with sin. Factor in the additional complexities

of crossing cultures, and they may find it easier to tell you why water is wet than explain *the* best way to do mission.

However, the question becomes an awful lot easier to answer if someone who knows what is best tells us what is best. Moreover, if the person telling us isn't simply speaking from more years of experience or dishing out good advice based on trial and error, then that is a game-changer. If he has exhaustive, comprehensive knowledge and understanding of all that is, then I can be confident that what he says really is best. If he is the one through whom all things exist and by whose decree they all act; if he is eternal, infinite and unchangeable; if he

fills the universe and is fully present at the same time to all creatures, then it follows that he alone knows what is best. His wisdom is perfect. He is perfect. He knows best.

'Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways! For from him and through him and to him are all things.' (Romans 11:33, 36)

... there is no better way to bring about faith and repentance among the nations.

God's perfect wisdom means that when he sent his Son to die for us on the cross, there was no better way to save us.

That was *the* best way. It means that when he tells us to preach Christ and his cross, there is no better way to bring about faith and repentance among the nations. Speaking about Christ and his cross is *the* best way.

As we engage in global mission, whether as goers or senders, the Lord's perfect wisdom is great reassurance. The stories in this magazine and in prayer letters from around the world testify to the fact that none of us are perfectly wise.

... the proclamation of Christ and his cross by people who feel weak and foolish is the best way.

We could all give examples of opportunities missed, conversations botched and relationships damaged. We all know what it's like to reach the end of the day and think, 'I could have done that better.' Yet, his wisdom is perfect, so we take heart. We reflect on our Father's inscrutable wisdom – sending his Son to the cross and then sending us to proclaim him to the nations – and we find it impossible to think, 'He could have done that better.'

So, 'Are we nearly there yet?' Nearly, but let's keep going. Let's keep walking with confidence, step by step. Because the proclamation of Christ and his cross by people who feel weak and foolish is the best way.

Richard Balmer, Ireland Team Leader





Steps of faith and the waterfall effect

As we take little steps and grow in our own faith, how does that impact others? Our mission partner, Janet Webb, describes the waterfall effect she's observed at Lighthouse Academy, the school she serves at in the township of Villiersdorp, South Africa.

Keeping track of how people are growing in faith and love for Jesus, is like trying to take stock of water droplets as they tumble over cascading rocks towards the misty ground. How mighty are God's acts! In God's mercy he challenges us as sinners. As we repent and turn to him in faith, he powerfully changes us – while working through us to help others in their faith. Our own steps of faith are interwoven in the mighty river of kingdom growth. Here I've tried to capture some tumbling droplets.

Recently I've been challenged by a sin pattern of seeking the approval of others, rather than trusting in God's acceptance. The truth about God I belittled is that I have been 'brought near by the blood of Christ' (Ephesians 2:13). God accepts and hears me. I have been brought near not only to God, but to God and his people, by the Holy Spirit: 'you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God' (Ephesians 2:19). A deepened faith in this truth has orientated my heart to value the security we have in being

God's children, in turn changing my desire for approval into a desire to treat the family God has brought me into well.

... the principal and I intentionally disciple teachers. When teachers grow in their own faith, it rains into the children's lives.

This stride closer to God has flowed into other areas of my life. I found myself being generally more grateful. Increased belief cascaded into my discipling relationships, strengthening them. At Lighthouse Academy, the

Principal and I intentionally disciple teachers. When teachers grow in their own faith, it rains into the children's lives. They teach the Bible daily in class, they're the children's spiritual role models and touch points with the gospel. Read some of their comments below.

What wonderful evidence of God's power at work in and through us, like a cascading waterfall.

Janet Webb, Mission partner

'In preparation to teach about Jesus calming the storm ... "Do not be afraid", comforted and calmed me ... I felt my heart take a small step of faith.' 7-8 year olds teacher

'We pray together daily as a class, sometimes with prayer dice ... popcorn prayer ... a quiet whisper prayer. M (6 years old) ... [has] grown in her understanding of prayer ... she used the opportunity to say thank you for specific things, related to what we learnt in the Bible lesson, and asked for forgiveness.' 6-7 year olds teacher

'I came to appreciate our Bible meetings ... talking about Scripture and praying together ... That makes a huge difference.' 4-5 year olds teacher

'Our Grade 2s have lots of questions and are intrigued by God's love for them.' 7-8 year olds teacher

'The way I react to certain situations has really changed since we learnt what it means to not take God's name in vain ... making sure I don't drag his name through the mud.' 3-4 year olds teacher

Same country, new calling

John Paul and Sue Aranzulla have served in Bologna since 2008, where they planted Forte Torre church in 2010. After months of reflection, conversation, and prayer, they believe the Lord is leading them to move to Genoa, the capital of the Liguria region, in early 2027.

JP and Sue's desire is to make themselves available to the Lord to plant a new gospel work from very few resources – much like the early days of Forte Torre. They share three reasons why they believe it's right to take this step of faith.

The future of Forte Torre

After more than 15 years, we are deeply thankful for all the Lord has done at Forte Torre. The church is financially stable, owns its premises, and has established the healthy practice of funding its pastor. When we arrived in Bologna, there was very little evangelical witness; today there are several faithful churches in the city. The Lord has workers here.

At the same time, we increasingly sense the next stage of growth requires Italian leadership to step forward more fully. Two of our former deacons have already planted churches. John Paul has invested greatly in the next generation, but we're aware that our continued long-term

presence could unintentionally delay a necessary transition.

For this reason, we have carefully planned a gradual transition period from November '25 to January '27, through which we have developed a training course called *Leaders for God's Church*.

We are encouraged ten men are receiving instruction, and we're already seeing signs of genuine willingness to step into greater responsibility. Our hope is that the course will help both individuals and the fellowship discern clearly whom the Lord is raising up for future leadership.

A continued calling to Italy

Our move is not retreat, but a renewed commitment to Italy. For years, at our daily prayer meetings and on the annual day of prayer for Italy, we've prayed not only for Bologna but for every region of this country, especially the regional capitals. We have long desired that Forte Torre would be sending out workers into

Italy's harvest field – a church that holds the nation in its heart.

We feel we have spent nearly two decades sowing, praying, and labouring in Bologna! Now we sense the Lord giving us the opportunity for a second season of service in another region. The timing also feels significant. In 2026 we'll be 54-55 years old. Considering the time needed to settle, build relationships, and patiently begin a new church work in Italy, we believe that if we are to do this, it needs to happen soon. The window of opportunity is limited.

Spiritually, we also recognise that it is healthy to begin again 'from scratch' – to lay down recognised roles and salaries and trust the Lord afresh. We go not seeking security, but desiring to see the same gospel take root, in new and needy soil.

A door opening in Liguria

Liguria is a region with very limited evangelical witness, even by Italian standards. In particular, there are very few churches of strong evangelical conviction. Over the past year we've had encouraging conversations with Lux Evangelica Church in Genoa, including time with pastor Matt Johnston. Through these meetings, a genuine partnership has begun to emerge, with shared theological and ecclesiological vision. Having always wanted to work in close collaboration with an existing trusted church in the region, we are deeply grateful to God for his evident provision. This extended hand of gospel fellowship has brought us joy.

The aim would be to work closely: Lux Evangelica continuing its ministry in central east Genoa, while we would likely focus on the western side (Genoa's population is 570,000), praying that over time faithful churches might develop along both the eastern and western coasts of the region.



Leaders for God's Church training course

We have also been deeply encouraged by Rocco and Desy, a young Italian couple who know Genoa well and are willing to join us from the outset. Their readiness strengthens our faith that this step is of the Lord.

Please pray for wisdom as John Paul works closely with Forte Torre through 2026 to manage the transition well. Pray for clear and recognised leadership to emerge within the church, and for the Lord to provide both for Forte Torre and this new venture in Genoa.

JP and Sue Aranzulla, Mission partners

Celebrating another year of **God's faithfulness**

Back in June, mission partners, supporters, trustees, and Crosslinks staff gathered in central London for our annual Summer Gathering and AGM. It was a wonderful opportunity to share some of the many encouragements from around the world and publicly testify to the Lord's sustaining of Crosslinks.

The Board's perspective

Underpinning our frontline ministry around the world is the work of our staff teams and trustees, supporting our mission partners and looking after all the practicalities of running the society. Vicky Widdows, the Deputy Chair of Trustees, gave the Chairman's Report, highlighting some of the significant things the Board has been considering over the last year, including:

- securing new premises for the Ireland Team
- determining the future of the former premises at 251 Lewisham Way, as well as the archives which are currently stored there
- undertaking a comprehensive safeguarding review: there was no particular incident that prompted it, but the review has helped identify areas where our processes and policies can be strengthened over the coming year.

Vicky finished by thanking the staff and senior leadership team (SLT) for their 'clear commitment to the central task of taking God's word to the world, while also ensuring that Crosslinks maintains the highest standards in areas such as finance, safeguarding, personnel and recruitment.'

As ever, we recognise a generous Lord who provides for his work.

We also heard from our treasurer, Nick Winther, about the Board and SLT's positive decision to actively invest in ministry and the support of it. Only a small proportion of the budget (3%) is spent on raising funds, demonstrating our focus on frontline ministry. Nick concluded with this excellent and encouraging summary: 'We have seen a year of slightly reduced income, increased investment in mission, and a resulting planned deficit. And yet, we also see continued generosity, faithful stewardship, and the ongoing ability to



Mission partner, Matt Pope, presenting at the Summer Gathering

support gospel work across the world. As ever, we recognise a generous Lord who provides for his work.'

The Mission Director's perspective

John McLernon has the privilege of spending much of his time with Crosslinks mission partners around the world, church leaders in the global church who are keen to receive support and partnership from churches in the UK, and men and women here in the UK whose churches are preparing them for overseas ministry.

He invited us to join in rejoicing that we now have 99 adults serving in a variety

of ministries across 26 countries. Some long-standing mission partners have changed role, including Luigi Palombo who returned from Italy after 10 years of service, Mark and Jane Oden who returned from Italy after 13 years' service, and Janet who returned from Thailand after 15 years' service. Janet retired from her role as a music teacher in England and chose to spend her retirement teaching English to students in an outreach ministry in Chiang Mai. She has been an inspiration to lots of us and we pray that more people would be willing to serve the Lord as a second career after retirement!

We're also excited about some other moves and changes and all that they

represent! Neil and Sharon Watkinson moved to Australia, an excellent base for Neil's training in Asia Pacific. Matt and Sarah Gurtler moved from being associate mission partners to mission partners and have relocated within Moldova to serve in a new church. Trevor and Andrea Watson returned to Sweden following a stint in Northern Ireland. Josh and Cathy Hooker have returned to Namibia after Josh's placement serving the Diocese of Down and Dromore. And Julian and Nicky Milson have left the IERE and started a new church in Valencia, partnering with the Anglican Convocation Europe (ACE).

Every individual represents a miraculous work of the Lord and is an answer to prayer!

We're delighted to see new workers raised up too, including Michael Durant who will serve alongside Jem Hovil with BUILD Partners, and Ralf and Marie-Christine Wenz who are serving at a church in Leipzig, Germany. Jony and Jenny Bertin became local mission partners in Argentina; Giulio and Lucy Abortivi became associate mission partners with plans to serve in Italy; and David and Kathryn-Anne Masters have joined in a new category of service for us, mission partners in training, and have just enrolled at the Brussels Bible Institute.

We also have people at various stages in the recruitment process whom we hope will be serving in the next couple of years. They are enquiring to serve

in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Kenya, Sweden and Czechia. Every individual represents a miraculous work of the Lord and is an answer to prayer!

Preparations for our 2027 gap year teams are well under way ...

We continue to recognise the huge role short-term mission trips play in raising up long-term gospel workers. Preparations for our 2027 gap year teams are well under way, and we thank the Lord for his provision of enough team leaders for two teams as well as individual short-term placements in Italy, Kenya and Argentina.

Finally, we rejoice in our training ministry, particularly the Schools of Biblical Training that have run in Nepal, Egypt, Nigeria, Uganda, Thailand and the Philippines, and our BEST programme (Bursaries Enabling Strategic Training) which has enabled 123 study partners to receive theological and ministry training in 36 different colleges!

As we stand back and reflect on the last year of ministry, we are amazed at how the Lord has enabled us to support 243 people and ministries across 44 countries, from the Arctic to Argentina to the Middle East! We're humbled by his work across the world and excited to walk by faith for another year.

Claire Walford, Communications Consultant

Missed the Summer Gathering and AGM? Read the full reports at crosslinks.org/annual-reports

Pathways to mission

In recent years, you may well have heard nervous talk in Christian circles about the 'pipeline'. With fewer people coming forward for full-time ministry, who will be the next generation of church leaders? Youth workers? Overseas mission partners?

Earlier this year, we surveyed our mission partners to try and understand their journey into long-term mission – the people, resources, and experiences which inspired them to go, the barriers and fears that might prevent us from going, and the rewards and challenges of overseas mission today. They responded with a wealth of surprising and valuable insights. The result is *Pathways to Mission*, a new report which we launched at our Summer Gathering.

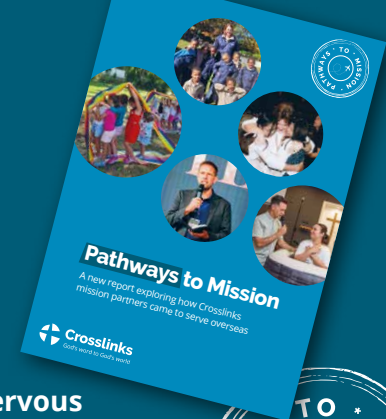
One of the most striking statistics to come out of the report is how long it can take to go from an initial interest in serving overseas to actually getting onto the mission field. For 65% of our mission partners, it took at least seven years. For 16%, it took 16 years or more. The process of discernment, prayer and training is clearly not a short one! We need to be getting alongside and investing in people who are interested in mission now, bearing

in mind it could be several years before they're ready to begin long-term service.

Where does it all begin? For some, it was simply hearing from mission partners in their churches – realising they were ordinary people serving where there are needs. 76% went on a short-term mission trip – some on as many as 10 trips! Others were inspired by biographies or books on mission, or sermons and talks they heard along the way. How can you make the most of mission partner visits to your church? Who could you encourage to go on a short-term trip? Do you have a favourite book on mission you could share with a friend?

Keep an eye out for more insights on our blog and social media. Download your free copy at crosslinks.org/resources.

Dan Reid, Communications Lead



Finding your cultural penguins

As mission partners step out in faith to serve overseas, one of the great challenges is understanding the culture around them so they can share the gospel effectively. Rachel Symons, who serves alongside her husband Andy in Zambia, writes about some surprising advice she received, and the penguin who's helped her along the way.

I've always found Ephesians 2:19-20 encouraging, but living as an 'alien' in a foreign land has brought these verses to life in a different way.

We attend a multi-cultural church. I think I can say that it is the most culturally diverse church in the wider Mkushi area. There are people from Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, South Africa, Kenya, Sri Lanka, the US and the UK. As a consequence, there are a lot of aliens at our church! The encouraging thing about this is that we can call ourselves brothers and sisters because the Lord Jesus Christ makes us into one new people.

Earlier this year, we held a bring-and-share dinner at our house and each of these countries was represented. It was such a joy to be able to welcome people and say how thankful we are to be able to live in such a diverse community. (And the food was good too!)

But is it always easy navigating so many cultures? And what about the actual Zambian culture? How do we learn about it, reflect on our interactions and grow in that? Is there only one culture here in Zambia? When is it ok to be 'me' and when do I need to 'rein' that in for the sake of being culturally acceptable?

When we attended our orientation with Crosslinks back in 2018, they had arranged a talk from a lady who came to teach specifically about culture. She said something that has remained with me: find your 'cultural penguins' when you arrive in your new country.

A 'cultural penguin' has the ability, much like an actual penguin, to do a deep dive – not into water, but into their own culture. They can then pop up the other side and help you to understand an element of the culture that you find yourself questioning or perplexed by. This is no mean feat; most of us don't



A bring-and-share dinner at our house, with people from all the nations in our church represented!

think about why things are the way they are and when we're asked to explain something, we often struggle to get past 'that's just the way it is!'.

... she has helped me to navigate life here in a way that recognises the culture but holds it in light of God's word.

We have had the real privilege of having a couple of 'penguins' in our lives during our time in Zambia. They have faithfully answered our questions and gently helped us to see why our reactions to different situations may not be understood the way we intend.

One of my penguins and dear friends is an amazing lady called Namasiku, who has been the source of such support and wisdom for me in times when I have felt a little lost at sea. And the best bit of all: she has helped me to navigate life

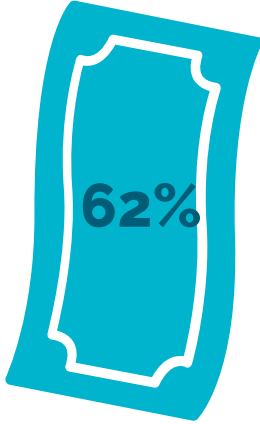
here in a way that recognises the culture but holds it in light of God's word. In any culture there are things that reflect who God is and our likeness to him, and there are things that don't reflect him or bring him glory. Then there are the grey areas that are actually neither good nor bad, just different. I am so thankful for the people that God has placed in our lives that have helped us and will keep on helping us to build bridges across cultures here in Zambia.

There are times when we are so conscious that we will never really understand the cultures around us, and never truly fit in. But, in those times, we can hold fast to the knowledge that all Christians don't really fit into the world, but instead should consider themselves fellow citizens with God's people wherever they find themselves!

Rachel Symons, Mission partner

We asked ...

What are the top barriers to going as a mission partner?



Financial cost of going



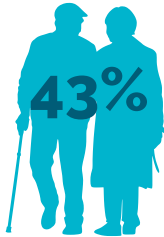
Impact on children



Language learning



Living in another culture



Impact on wider family



Future impact



Lack of teaching



14%

Friends/family not supportive



11%

Lack of awareness



8%

Fear of loneliness

Percentage of respondents for whom the issue was one of their top three

Ever wondered

... what the pathway to mission for an individual or family looks like and where it often begins? Find new insights and statistics in our new report.

Find out more in *Pathways to Mission*
crosslinks.org/resources

