32 Years to Close the Loop

Stoney Abercrombie

The journey started in September 1986! The mission was to travel to the mountains of Copan, Honduras to build a medical clinic for a young Honduran physician, Dr. Roman Cruz. A team of 15 traveled from Upstate SC during Labor Day week and built a medical clinic in Aqua Caliente, Honduras. The small medical team treated 1500 patients during the week. From this trip, Volunteers in Medical Missions (VIMM) was birthed.

Since the initial trip, VIMM has ministered around the world with over 360 trips in the past 32 years. As founder, I have participated in 64 trips with VIMM since 1986. In 2018, the opportunity to return to the mountains of Copan, Honduras to work with Roman and Elsa Cruz presented itself. A team of 19 Americans from Upstate SC joined Dr. Cruz and his two sons, physician Dr. Jonathan Cruz and dentist Dr. Francisco Cruz for a wonderful reunion trip October 6-13, 2018. Needing more healthcare providers, Dr. Jonathan Cruz recruited another Honduran physician and Dr. Francisco Cruz arranged for two additional Honduran dentists to join our team. A physician friend and former host to a VIMM team to Uruguay, Dr. Silvina Gonzales-Barrera and her psychologist husband, Dr. Guillermo Barrera from Argentina joined our now international team of 28 members.

This eclectic team ministered to 1,055 medical patients while the dentists extracted 250 teeth. 200 pairs of reading glasses were distributed to grateful patients who could now read their Bibles. Our team did two children’s vacation bible school programs at the local church with 50 children. The good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ was presented in multiple venues and 500 adults and children made a confession of faith! What an outstanding spiritual revival.

Tremont Church of God in Greenville, SC co-sponsored this trip with 18 church members as part of this team. A construction group completed three huge building projects at the local church in La Entrada where South Carolina missionaries to Honduras, Steven and Candace Day, worship. Coming from so many different backgrounds, the individuals meshed into a cohesive team that addressed multiple needs in the communities we served. What a special blessing to again work with my friend, Dr. Roman Cruz and his lovely wife, Elsa. Both of us are no longer young, idealistic medical doctors. Both of us have also become ordained ministers. We are now in the late autumn/early winter of our careers.

This trip allowed us a moment to reflect upon the past 32 years and see what God has accomplished through our faithfulness. Dr. Cruz has built a beautiful three story medical complex in San Pedro Sula where so many people are able to receive care. He and his sons still provide free medical rural clinics on a regular basis. I feel like the loop has been completed. The work in Honduras continues now with a new generation of medical providers stepping up to write their chapter of this fascinating story. I am so pleased to have helped write the first chapter of this saga in 1986.

Look what a simple step of faith in 1986 has produced! With God, nothing is impossible. All glory goes to His faithfulness. What steps of faith are you looking to make? Walk in the path of His light and see where He will lead you. Someday you may be able to close your loop!

Drs. Abercrombie and Cruz pray with a local Honduran pastor
Whatever you do, do with all your heart as if you’re working for the Lord! Having the opportunity to serve in Peru, and carry this message of Colossians 3:23 to the people of Amazonas was a deeply fulfilling mission that I will forever cherish. To work alongside other faithful missionaries with the same goal is a blessing I am so fortunate to have experienced. More often than not, our team was tested with extreme heat, bugs, cultural differences, language barriers, and sickness. Seeing our team rise above all and come together, staying focused on the mission of providing testimony through love and our actions is a feeling that one cannot describe, but only witness. While I am initially motivated by the medical aspect of the trip, the sense of community and stewardship that I feel during these missions allows me to get through, and deepens my own spiritual journey. I am blessed to have served in Peru, and the wonderful people I met along the way will forever be in my heart. Our time together spent in clinic and in prayer will stay with me, and the testimonies shared will always move me to tears. While this wasn’t my first medical mission trip, it was my first with VIMM and I am proud of the work we did and the Peruvian family I have gained! God’s grace was present throughout our journey, and I’m so happy to have been able to attend this amazing journey to the Amazon!

- Christie Ferrari, RN

Left side: Peru October 2018 team - Answering the Call
Right: Christie Ferrari holding a 6 day old infant with a fever in Amazonas
Sri Lanka 2019

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:10 God has made us what we are, and in our union with Christ Jesus he has created us for a life of good deeds, which he has already prepared for us to do. I shared this verse with our team and our Sri Lankan hosts the first night of our mission there. We are the sum of our experiences in life, good and bad. God had prepared us for this mission in many different ways.

Our Sri Lankan hosts, Bethel Christian Centre, had been praying for a medical team to help their nearby mostly Buddhist communities so that they could tangibly show the love of Christ. Enter our VIMM team. Up until a month before our trip, our team did not have a host for the trip. God connected us in a beautiful way to work together to show the love of Christ.

As an 8 time VIMM trip leader, I am always amazed at how God puts teams together to do these “good works”. This team was no exception. Only God could connect a Georgia chicken farmer (me) with a medical director from Canada of Sri Lankan descent, Dr. Damian Gunaratne, a pediatrician from California of Croatian descent, Dr. Karla Strazicich-Cain, a South Korean born doctor from Ohio, Dr. Gordon Kim, an 83 year old nurse practitioner who had been to 60 countries, Shirley Martin, 6 nurses from Alberta, Canada, Ohio, NC, SC, MO, a pharmacist from my hometown, a builder from Texas, a real estate agent from New Mexico, a phlebotomist from Missouri, and an accountant from Ontario to accomplish what he prepared for us to do on the other side of the world in Sri Lanka. What a wonderful God we serve!

As the team leader, I also marvel at how so many people are involved and used by the Lord to make these trips a success. A local high school Spanish teacher helped us obtain 1300 toothbrushes. Dr. Michelle Patterson-Morris helped with the ordering of medicines. Restoring Vision helped immensely with 870 reading and sunglasses that were distributed to needy people in Sri Lanka. A huge need in Sri Lanka considering a pair of reading glasses there costs about $50 if one can find them. I also wanted some Bibles in the Sinhala and Tamil languages for the churches in Sri Lanka to distribute. God provided 243 Bibles in advance of the trip through two Christian brothers and a contact in Sri Lanka!

God prepared the way for us in Sri Lanka. Our hosts were fantastic. They provided for all of our needs. The pastor was on a trip to Japan so he gave us his house where we slept. They cooked delicious Sri Lankan food for us. They organized the clinics. They even killed a 7 foot king cobra snake a couple of days before our arrival in the garage of the house where our group slept!

So glad they did!

God also prepared the hearts of the people to receive the love of Christ expressed through our actions and words. When I had the opportunity to preach in a service at the Church on the Rock in Panadura, 6 people responded to the invitation to receive Christ! In Elpitiya, a rural area, I was thankful to have the opportunity to pray with several people including a Buddhist couple and a Hindu mother of a small boy who requested special prayer. I was also thrilled to be able to minister to a couple of specific needs there. I was able to help a new Christian couple who had a recent stillborn baby. And a couple with 2 small children who I later found out would not have had any supper to eat that evening. Their tears of gratitude at God’s provision for their particular situations truly touched my heart. How grateful I am that we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works which he has prepared for us to do!

- Kirby Phillips, Team Leader

His Workmanship
Sri Lanka, a beautiful tropical island located Southeast of India and is home to many cultures, languages, and races. It has a population of approximately 22 million, of which 75 percent are Buddhist, 10 percent Islam, 10 percent Hindu, and 5 percent Christian.

Our team of eighteen people was sent by God to Sri Lanka February 7 - 17, 2019. Our errand was to do those things, in a small way, that Christ would have done had He been there in person. The only hands Christ had for kindnesses was our hands. The only feet He had for running errands was our feet. The only voice he had to speak cheer to the lonely, sick, and troubled was our voices. This team responded to what God had sent us to do in a remarkable way. Everyone worked at the job they were given and never complained.

We were hosted by Bethel Christian Centre, located in the capital city of Colombo, Sri Lanka. They provided housing and cooked our meals while we were there. They are beautiful, caring people. We visited The Church on The Rock on Sunday, Feb. 10. Our team leader Kirby Phillips preached and there were 6 decisions made for Christ. We praise God for those decisions. We visited another church on Tuesday in Eliptiyya called Smyrna Church. Our leader was able to pray with quite a few patients there, including a Buddhist couple and a Hindu mother with a small child.

For the week our team saw 782 patients, gave out a total of 870 reading and sunglasses. Glasses were in demand, because we were told that a pair of reading glasses in Sri Lanka costs about $45-$55, if they can be found. That is almost equivalent to house rent for a month in some locations of Sri Lanka. We also did some health teaching as patients were waiting to see the doctors. The people were very attentive and seemed to appreciate the information. During the teaching we were able to distribute over 1300 toothbrushes. On Thursday afternoon, we visited City of Hope Orphanage. We enjoyed visiting and playing games with the children. They were sad to see us leave, and we were sad to leave.

It was a wonderful week. Each of the 18 team members was sent by God on an errand all their own, with some special blessing entrusted to them which if they did not carry, would never reach those for whom it was prepared. There has never been a group of Christians with as many resources, as much information, as much freedom, as those of us in the United States of America now possess. To be part of what God is accomplishing around the world, we need only respond to His call. These 18 people from all different walks of life responded to the Call of God. The results of that call will only be revealed in Eternity.

- Kay Medlin, RN
VIMM’s Faithful Servant

After 17 years of administrative service, and 4 years as Executive Director, Kathy Cater has retired from Volunteers in Medical Missions. Her last day was January 31, 2019. Kathy played a pivotal role in Volunteers in Medical Mission’s work around the globe since 1998. As a team, Kathy and her staff worked faithfully to assist the Board of Directors, team leaders and team members in providing excellent bookkeeping, great customer care and access to information throughout the years.

Here are a few quotes from staff members and VIMM founder, Dr. Stoney Abercrombie:

“Kathy Cater has been the steady oar for our VIMM boat for 20+ years. Through various waves that tossed our boat, she has remained the steadfast, loyal force to see us through to better days. I shall miss her faithful dedication to ensuring that VIMM remains afloat and sailing toward our destination.” – Dr. Stoney Abercrombie

“Kathy was always a pleasure to work with. When there were duties that needed to be done, Kathy would jump in and help out! She is truly an intelligent and Godly woman.” – Vickie Burns, Administrative Assistant

“Kathy was a kind and compassionate Executive Director. Her patience and loyalty are qualities I greatly value and appreciate.” – Megan Gensler, Trip Coordinator

We want to thank Kathy for 21 years of exceptional service. We are grateful for the dedication, passion, and motivation she gave to VIMM. The organization has benefited from her daily contributions.

While her lovely presence will be missed in the office, the great work she completed at VIMM ensures that she will not be forgotten anytime soon. Thank you for being a tireless professional, helpful coworker, and a good friend. We wish Kathy all the best in her retirement. Now go and relax!

Above: Kathy Cater enjoys a retirement luncheon in her honor, courtesy of Dr. Fred Marcinak

VIMM Welcomes New Executive Director

We are pleased to announce the recent hiring of Msiba Dalton as VIMM’s new Executive Director. She is a long time resident of Seneca, SC, and North Carolina native. Msiba earned her bachelor’s degree in Speech & Communication Studies from Clemson University in 2002. Msiba comes to us with experience in the municipal, higher education and non-profit sectors and over 15 years of learning and applying best practices in fundraising and administration. The City of Clemson, Clemson University and Tamassee DAR School are where she has distinguished herself as a team leader, corporate and foundation collaborator, developer of successful small shop fundraising campaigns that increased overall annual and major donations.

Msiba will work with and report to VIMM’s Board of Directors. VIMM Founder, Dr. Stoney Abercrombie, had the following to say about hiring the new Executive Director, “I am so thrilled to have Msiba Dalton join our leadership team. Her professional background has prepared her to steer VIMM into new unchartered waters where there will be new challenges but greater potential for growth and additional success.”

Msiba says that she is excited to be apart of such a great Christian organization, “This opportunity is an answer to prayer. The entire process has been nothing but a “G Thing”, G as in God, that is. I look forward to working with the Board of Directors, office staff, team leaders and team members. I pray that the knowledge and skills I have accumulated over the years will be a good fit to meet VIMM’s needs, highlight priorities and foster its mission of sharing the gospel and love of Christ by providing free medical care to individuals with little to no access to healthcare in developing countries.”

MAKE A DONATION

If you would like to honor Kathy Cater and her 21 years of service, please make a donation to VIMM on her behalf! www.vimm.org/donate or return the enclosed envelope with your honorary gift
VIMM
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In Memory of:
Bill Lasher by Peggy Lasher Bentley

2019 Trip Schedule

TRIPS
Honduras *
Peru (Quillabamba/Cusco) *
Peru (Huaraz) *
Honduras (La Cuesta)
Honduras (La Esperanza)
Honduras (Olanchito)
Peru

DATES
May 25-June 1
May 30-June 6
July 7-16
July 7-18
July 14-21
August 9-17
September 13-22

* trip is FULL

Visit our website for applications, specific trip details, costs, and donations/payments.
www.vimm.org

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