

# THE CRY

*for Community*

*Advocacy Journal*

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word MADE flesh  
INTERNATIONAL



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# LETTER FROM THE *Editor*

**Community** has meant different things to me in different seasons of my life. Being new to the Word Made Flesh (WMF) staff, I have been welcomed into a community both small and large. The International Office has shown me grace and love in the transition into my new role. They have also welcomed me into a Christ-like family. At large the WMF international staff has welcomed me into the bigger family, and they have shown me how big God really is and that my brothers and sisters in Christ span across the world.

Christ's desire is for us to be in community and to stay in community. He speaks to the benefits and hardships of being in fellowship with others. In **Romans 12:4-5** it says, "For each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not have all the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."

This verse reminds me that we are not separated by country, by race or by gender. Claiming that we are **ONE** Body and **ONE** community in Christ, WMF displays that **ONEness** in such a soul fulfilling way. You can connect with any of the WMF fields across the world and see a Christ-filled community that fosters love and is inviting the outcasts, advancing and seeking His kingdom in any capacity that they can. Each field and each member of the field is a part of the body of Christ. We are all collectively serving one God and advancing His kingdom.

I pray that this edition of *The Cry* softens your heart and helps you reflect on the meaning of community and the purpose that it serves in the Christian life. In this journal you will hear from the sisters and brothers of our global community. I pray that the words of each author will speak to you as they have me.



KELLY ROHR  
Editor, *The Cry*

**Kelly** just recently started with WMF in May after interning in the International Office since January 2023. She is now the Short-Term Programs Coordinator. Kelly has a passion for serving the world's most vulnerable, and loves coffee, photography, and hiking.

# OUR *lifestyle* CELEBRATIONS

## **INTIMACY**

We celebrate intimacy with Jesus to be our highest calling and our created purpose.

## **OBEDIENCE**

We celebrate obedience as our loving response to the grace of Jesus.

## **HUMILITY**

We celebrate humility before God and humanity.

## **COMMUNITY**

We celebrate community as a means for discipleship and service.

## **SIMPLICITY**

We celebrate simplicity as a privilege in identification with Jesus and the poor.

## **SUBMISSION**

We celebrate submission to Jesus, each other and the poor.

## **BROKENNESS**

We celebrate brokenness as our responsibility in ministry among the broken.

## **SUFFERING**

We celebrate suffering as a willing sacrifice in serving Jesus.

## **SERVICE**

We celebrate service as an expression of our fellowship.





# LIFTING ANOTHER'S BURDENS

BY: ALAFIA COLE

A

s I entered the Alé Alé House of Hope that morning, I was struck by all the drawings and inscriptions that lovingly decorate the walls of the compound.

The illustration of the Good Samaritan stood out to me, and I paused in the middle of my busy morning to meditate on the story of the man who freely gave his time and money to help a stranger. Then my attention shifted back to my schedule for the day, and I joined other staff members for a leadership team meeting on the balcony overlooking the tightly packed shacks of the Kroo Bay Slum Community.



Photo Credit: WMF Sierra Leone

We had just finished praying and reading through our agenda when two girls from Kroo Bay, Grace and Joy, rushed in carrying their sick mother, Kumba. Both girls had grown up attending the WMF Kroo Bay Good News Club, and one of the sisters had faithfully participated in our Lighthouse program, being sponsored through school and currently preparing for law school entrance exams.

The girls' fear for Kumba was palpable, and I shouted at the top of my voice for someone to alert our medical staff. They were soon on the scene, comforting and supporting the girls and assessing her situation.

Because Kumba was quite vulnerable and faced many challenges, Grace and Joy endured a lot of instability in their early years. Later on, when a former WMF staff member found a safer living situation for the girls with a local woman, the girls brought her to Christ.

Now she is a part of the WMF International Christian community in Freetown. Our medical staff decided that Kumba should be seen at a hospital, and I stayed with the girls as we took her to the 34th military hospital, where we were told to seek help at another hospital.



When I finally made it home that evening, my three girls ran to meet me at the door, expecting to hear funny stories about my day and eat dinner together as a family. But then my phone rang. Kumba's condition was deteriorating and she was being moved again to another hospital. The pull of my family was strong, but I knew that that night God was calling me to stand with Grace and Joy. So I left my girls upset and disappointed and rushed back to the hospital.

While the situation was an emergency, the process of getting Grace and Joy's mother the medical help she needed was maddeningly slow. After waiting over an hour, the doctor finally met with us to share his diagnosis, and we learned that Kumba would have to be moved yet again to a bigger hospital with more resources to handle the situation. Once we all arrived at the larger medical facility, it was challenging to get a doctor to attend to us.

When we were able to see a doctor and had more tests done, we still felt like we had more questions than answers and no clear picture of what the problem was. I paid the hospital bills and returned home at around 11 p.m. that night. Despite constant care, support and treatment Kumba passed away two days later.



Photo Credit: WMF Sierra Leone

It was heartbreaking to watch the girls grieve for their mother, but they were never alone. The Word Made Flesh Community and I walked alongside them – ready to offer a listening ear and a shoulder to cry on.

As they said goodbye to one family member, we reminded them through our actions and our presence that their community was also their family and was ready to walk through life's most trying times together with them.



## ALAFIA COLE WMF SIERRA LEONE



**Alafia** came to volunteer at Word Made Flesh Sierra Leone in 2010 and now serves as the Executive Director. After living through struggles with the civil war, a divided family, and his own troubled youth, Alafia experienced transformation through the love of God. Along with his daily involvement with the WMF community, he serves as deacon in a local church and, together with his wife Alakeh, foster three youth.



# THE PARADOX OF COMMUNITY

BY:ANCA-AURORA CHIOSEA

A

Romanian proverb says that whoever does not have an old person in their life should get one. By extension, we could say the same thing about the community:

Those who don't have a community should do something to find one.

Why are we talking about community? Why is it important to give our time and energy to write, to read, to care about what a community means, to want to be part of a community?.

Well, here everyone could have their own answer. What would be mine? I would say, above all, that it is one of those sometimes painful and very difficult things, but so necessary and beneficial. It is kind of like a medicine or even a surgical intervention. If I were to name the most difficult thing on earth for me, I would say, without thinking too much: relationships between people.



Photo Credit: WMF Romania

If I had to name the most beautiful and wonderful thing, I would name the same thing: the relationships between people. What makes us live in this paradox? Why do we need community relationships and why can they be so difficult at times? Maybe because it addresses the deepest need and part of us, that of belonging, of being part of something bigger than ourselves, the need to be loved as just we are, to share our everyday life experiences and deepest thoughts with others.

The community is not or should not be a bubble or an echo chamber.

Hearing my own opinions or certainties confirmed would not help me much to see things from different perspectives or to make changes.

It would just be a warm place that would keep me in an undisturbed status quo. The community is not a universal panacea or a miracle solution for my shortcomings and vulnerabilities. Instead, I should be aware that often times entering a community means entering into a painful process of transformation which leads to growth and healing. This means learning to accept to choose differently. And this is a process that can last our whole life.

But what a great blessing it is to be able to see because the other shows us what we didn't even suspect until now: that we have wounds and need to start healing, that we have needs which we are not always aware of, that our choices can become our obstacles, that we can learn new ways to grow, live, work, love.



The opportunities for growth that a community offers cannot be experienced in any other way or in any other place.

I would say that the community is the best training ground where we can grow in compassion, generosity, and forgiveness. And these do not come naturally, but they need to be practiced intentionally, and consistently if we want them to be part of our lives. The beauty of the community is also given by the diversity and incredible richness of the experiences, personalities, voices, and opinions of our friends.

There is something else that I think is worth considering, namely that each of us, among those who are part of a community, becomes its creator. In a way, our communities are what we make them to be: burdened with cruel pain, endless conflict, fighting or bringing serenity, hope, and joy. The road together can pass through shady valleys, storms, but also through refreshing sunshine.

C.S. Lewis says that love is not a feeling, but an action verb: treat the other as if you already love him. Christ himself tells us the same. And who am I to contradict Him? When I need to know how to live in community, I can look to the Holy Trinity, our ultimate example of a relational community where the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit live in perfect harmony. When I need to feel life in the community, I spend time with my brothers and sisters.



Photo Credit: WMF Romania

There is space in community for tears and hugs, pain and burdens being carried together, or hope and shared stories, for returns and new beginnings.

This is the place to experience love, light, stepping forward in faith, and to know the meaning of “belonging”.



## ANCA-AURORA CHIOSEA

### WMF ROMANIA

**Anca-Aurora Chiosea** serves as Partnership Coordinator for WMF Romania. She likes books, silence, long hikes through the forest, or anywhere else, and meaningful conversations. She enjoys discovering the beauty in people. Recently, she discovered that she really likes working in the field of community development. She says that being part of supporting vulnerable children in Galati, through Word Made Flesh, gives purpose to her life.







## MADLYN'S TESTIMONY IN WORD MADE FLESH SIERRA LEONE

I have been a part of Word Made Flesh Sierra Leone since the age of two, starting with the Good News Club in Kroo Bay and continuing on to graduating from the Light House program in 2018. Growing up in Word Made Flesh has been a truly unique experience. From a young age, I was surrounded by a community of people who were deeply committed to serving others and living out their faith in practical ways.

As a child, it was a vital place for me, I remember spending my days playing with other children in the community, learning from the volunteers and staff, hearing stories about the Bible, and being introduced to the act of prayer. The sense of community was always strong, and I knew that I was part of a safe and friendly environment. One of the things I appreciated most about growing up in Word Made Flesh was the emphasis on education. The team worked hard to provide opportunities for us to learn and grow, both academically and spiritually. I was able to attend school and receive a quality education, something that is not always possible in my neighborhood .

But more than anything, it was the love and care of the Word Made Flesh community that made the biggest impact on my life. The volunteers and staff treated us like family, and I always felt seen, valued, and heard as an individual. They were there for us through the good times and the bad, offering support and encouragement whenever we needed it.

Reflecting back, I realize that sometimes my teenage brain didn't fully understand or appreciate their actions and rules, but now that I am older and hopefully wiser, I can now see the wisdom and care that went into their decisions. As I grew older, I began to appreciate the full extent of the work that Word Made Flesh was doing in our community. Through their various programs and initiatives, they were making a real difference in the lives of vulnerable children and families. And as a member of the community, I felt proud to be a part of that work.

Looking back on my childhood, I am grateful for the unique experience of growing up in Word Made Flesh Sierra Leone. The community taught me so much about love, service, faith, and most importantly, intimacy with God, and I know that those lessons will stay with me for the rest of my life.

# UNVEILING STORIES: *the pages within*

A poem composed by Madlyn

We are all like books,  
We wait for someone to find us and open us to see what's inside.  
Our covers may be pretty, worn, or torn,  
But it's the stories inside that truly matter and adorn.

Some stories may be filled with sorrow and pain,  
While others may be colourful, like a vibrant rain.  
But each story is beautiful, passionate, and true,  
Meaningful in its own way, waiting to be discovered by a few.

Many may flip through our pages so quick,  
But it takes a special soul to truly click.  
To read between the lines and understand,  
The deeper meaning held in our hand.

Let us welcome those who truly read,  
Embrace and give our stories the heed.  
For in their open hearts and curious minds,  
Our tales find purpose and connection that binds.

We are all books,  
Unique and waiting to be explored.  
With each page turned, a new chapter unfolds,  
Revealing emotions and stories yet untold.

So, let us cherish the readers who seek,  
The treasures within, the depths they peek.  
For it is through their understanding and care,  
That our stories find resonance and flair.

In the library of life, we stand side by side,  
With narratives diverse, on this literary ride.  
So, open us up, and dive into our world,  
Discover the magic, let our stories unfurl.



# A LIFE-GIVING PRIVILEGE TO IMITATE CHRIST

BY: CHRISTELLA DUFITUMUKIZA

**F**

or the past three and a half years, I have been finding myself in this beautiful community of women in Word Made Flesh Rwanda.

Together we walk with Jesus who promises to provide abundant life (John 10:10). And He has. Here, in the slums, among these women who in the world's eyes, have nothing, I have really started living. Before I met Christ, I didn't know why I was living, or what my purpose was. After meeting Jesus, I often reflect on Ephesians 2:10, "For we are God's handiwork created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."



Photo Credit: WMF Rwanda

For me, the "good works" has meant walking through life's challenges with these precious women and children. We all struggle. Sometimes they fall. Sometimes I fail. Yet together we share in the hope that Jesus is giving life in abundance to everyone in our community.

God has gifted me with life and love that I share with the families living in Kigali's slums. It is a privilege to imitate Christ as he loves each of us unconditionally. Jesus gave his disciples a new commandment. "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." (John 3:34-35). To be honest, this is really hard! Many of these women do not love themselves. They have never experienced what real love feels like. Yet, by very slowly walking with them over time, we have become friends.

When I came to Word Made Flesh in 2019, I was so challenged by new phrases I often heard from the people in our community. For example, "to identify with the poor" terrified me. It took me a long time to understand what this meant.

Then, I started walking twice a week among the small, dirty slum shacks, visiting the women among whom we served. Even though I had heard about the Kangando slum, and seen pictures in the media, I couldn't actually comprehend the dire situation until I started making friends there.



I am reminded of the sentiment in Isaiah 61, which is re-echoed in Luke 4:18, “The spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free.” For the past three years, I have had the joy of experiencing this. Even when Kangando, the slum where we had been befriending women for six years was demolished, Word Made Flesh quickly relocated to Binunga to be near our friends whose homes had been razed. We are committed to continuing to share life with Jesus among this community. Being in this community has encouraged me.

Being in this community has encouraged me. I have been able to accompany one friend to the hospital when she had no one else to call for help. Together, we have had the opportunity to share a meal with a child who had gone for days without eating, yet still offered us the gift of hope. Sometimes we get to support children who have had to drop out of school.

In all of these difficult situations, I have sensed the Spirit of the Lord was upon me and the community. I have also witnessed the joy of the community through dancing, playing, and sitting together to discuss the Word of God. During our weekly savings group with the women, we plan together what kind of life God has in store for us. He who feeds the birds, and clothes the flowers, tells us not to worry about what we shall eat or wear. He cares for us!



Photo Credit: WMF Rwanda

Recently, during our Bible study for children, I asked what their hopes for our time together were. I was encouraged when one said “Sometimes, when I am troubled, and when my home is in chaos, I believe this will be a good place for me to share my burdens and rest a bit.”.

In the same way, as this child mentioned, the Word Made Flesh community feels like a rest and a home to me. I have been able to experience what true love feels like by walking with people who sometimes seemingly have nothing to offer, only their vulnerability and suffering. This helps me learn about my own vulnerability and come closer to my Savior for His abundant life.



## CHRISTELLA DUFITUMUKIZA WMF RWANDA



**Christella** was born and raised in Rwanda. She graduated from Kepler-Kigali- College with a bachelor’s degree in Healthcare Management and with a concentration in Global Perspectives. Christella felt God was directing her to work with Word Made Flesh Rwanda. She started as a WMF Community Health volunteer in July 2019. She joined a WMF Servant Team September 2019 and became a community member, serving as a Community Health Coordinator in December 2019. She now serves as WMF Rwanda’s Programs Director.



# EMPTY BAGS, OPEN HANDS

BY: BENJAMIN GRIMM

E

arlier this year, I planned a medical outreach with the intent to visit several of our most remote communities and demonstrate techniques for first aid and self-care.

The routes had to be confirmed by our neighbors because some waterways were closed due to deadfalls. The arrangements were not a light undertaking. We had no extra clothes, no food, and only a minimum of bedding and mosquito nets. Our only plan was to go where we were welcomed and visit each place open to us. We were committed to go just as Jesus sent his disciples, empty bags and open hands.



Photo Credit: WMF Papua New Guinea

I have been far beyond my comfort zone these past 5 years, being in a posture that makes me completely reliant on the communities I am living with. I was needy. I am still needy.

**Lesson #1: You have to be needy to be in community.**

It didn't take long to understand that going with nothing meant we were entirely reliant on our hosts for our next meal, water to drink, and a place to sleep. It also didn't take long to notice I don't like sago, a common carb for the locals. I don't like bony fish that are so abundant in these waters. I prefer strong spices that these new neighbors of mine have never heard of. I usually expect my coffee to be made a particular way. But now all we had was instant coffee. I do love the security of a routine and the comfort of knowing what happens next, but this wasn't a place for personal preferences.

After treating dozens of sick people, sharing worship, and returning to our house to relax for the evening, our host came with food for us. He then sat down and ate with us in what I saw as a beautiful gesture of friendship. Dinner was sago glue, bony fish, and some cooked greens. I normally do not choose this type of dinner, but it ceased to be about the food and became something more.

**Lesson #2: Community happens in spaces we don't plan and in ways we don't expect.**

We shared another meal the next morning. After the host generously served tea to our team, he discovered I drank coffee. He then retrieved what I later gathered was the only serving of instant coffee in the house to offer to me. I was moved to be accommodated with such a scarce gift.



**Lesson #3: Hospitality is a precious gift.** Later, when I did follow up treatment for my patients from the previous day, it was particularly gratifying to see the looks on their faces when we pulled bandages off and noted marked improvements. We soon left to go upriver and began a perilous journey up a very narrow tributary choked with logs, vines, and branches. The water flowed very fast making maneuvering exceptionally difficult and we spent a labor intensive few hours working our way upstream until we came to a large tree far too thick to cut through with a machete.

For all our determination, it was easy to see the clear answer of "No. Not this time". We all realized the target village was not in God's plan for us and turned around. Going back down was harder than going up because it was difficult to check our speed, we couldn't use the motor, so we cut spars and poled our way down. A village in the middle that we had bypassed for later became the target for that day.

**Lesson #4: Community is what God puts in front of you.** We sent out word to bring sick folks, and I spent another several hours cleaning and patching infected sores. No service had been scheduled so we shared testimony and talked about the festering feud with the next village. That evening the discussion over dinner drifted to the feud again. No one offered to pray about it, but I had to excuse myself since I didn't understand why these mature men of faith were upset.



Photo Credit: WMF Papua New Guinea

**Lesson #5: Community is messy.** Especially when you are in a space where there is a goal to learn from each other's differences. Coming back home wasn't so much a huge relief but the sanguine feeling of a job well done. I missed my wife's cooking. I returned to the familiar comfort of my four children's affection.

I sat in my yard and was at peace. I shook hands and told stories to my relatives and neighbors. I was back at home base, recharging for the next mission.

**Lesson #6: Community is an invitation, not an end.**



## BENJAMIN GRIMM WMF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

**Benjamin** lives and serves with his family in Papua New Guinea. He uses his experience in health and physical fitness and newfound passion for community development to teach communities about health and nutrition. Benjamin is exploring low-tech ways to improve the quality of life in rural villages. He partners with the Yamano community to attain better access to health resources and to provide education on factors that contribute to health and wellness.





# INVOLVEMENT *opportunities*



# Learn about ways to get involved in some of our **Word Made Flesh** communities!

## BOLIVIA INTERNSHIP

Join Word Made Flesh Bolivia as an intern. In this internship, you will work with our local partners, assisting vulnerable women and engaging with children. This is a unique opportunity to be immersed in Bolivian culture, learn Spanish, and make a positive impact in a cross-cultural setting.

## SIERRA LEONE INTERNSHIP

Make a difference in the lives of vulnerable children in Kroo Bay, Sierra Leone by joining the House of Hope team, engaging in activities, learning the local culture, and participating in the Lighthouse youth ministry. In this internship, you will build relationships, learn from resilient communities, and contribute to youth empowerment.

## MOLDOVA INTERNSHIP

Join the Word Made Flesh Moldova team to make a positive impact on vulnerable children. Interns will learn about the local culture, serve in neighboring communities, support and mentor children in the extracurricular program. This is your opportunity to contribute to community development, learn from resilient individuals, and experience personal growth through service.

## RWANDA INTERNSHIP

Join Word Made Flesh Rwanda for a new kind of internship experience! Be transformed as you dive deep into a study of poverty and community development and engage daily in missional community among the most vulnerable. Engage Rwandan culture through hands-on study, and daily life with a local host family. Transform your worldview as you build new friendships, invest in the lives of the vulnerable, and seek God in the context of poverty.

## NAVAJO NATION DISCOVERY TRIP

Embark on a one week journey to experience the rich culture of the Navajo Nation. As an intern, you will engage with Bodaway Ministries, build meaningful relationships, and learn about Word Made Flesh's involvement. You will broaden your perspective, deepen understanding of indigenous cultures, and foster personal growth through service and relationship-building.

## ROMANIA INTERNSHIP

This is your opportunity to serve under-resourced communities in Romania. Interns will work with children, live with a host family, and learn the Romanian language. This experience will allow you to develop skills in working with vulnerable populations, deepen understanding of Romanian culture, and contribute to sustainable community development.

If you are studying equine therapy, you have the opportunity to intern and apply your equine experience making a real impact, helping vulnerable children in Romania. You will do this by learning and being mentored in equine therapy by local partners of Word Made Flesh.

## PAPUA NEW GUINEA INTERNSHIP

Join the life and work in a village in Papua New Guinea. You can learn about Bible translation and about making God's Word accessible to a rural community (assisting with biblical text entry, type setting, and literacy materials development). You can also help facilitate an adult education program and skills training opportunities at our community center.

Scan or click the QR code to view the application!





# GROWING IN COMMUNITY

BY: TESS HARTLEY  
A TESTIMONY FROM A WMF  
BOLIVIA INTERN

"**B**ut God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.

If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." 1 Corinthians 12:25-27.

These verses, which I have known since my Sunday school days, take on a different meaning after 8 months with WMF in Bolivia. It is one thing to know about community and the importance of the Church from reading the Bible and attending services.

It is another thing entirely to live as a member of a community that truly lives out what it means to be in communion with other beloved children of God as we seek to serve among the vulnerable here in Bolivia.

My time in Bolivia has vastly changed my faith from one solely focused on trying to hear God in my individual times of prayer or Bible study to one that recognizes Christ in my community. I now realize it is not possible to be a Christian alone and it never has been, despite what my hyper-individualistic North American cultural upbringing might tell me.

When I arrived in Bolivia 8 months ago, I arrived at a freshly independent foundation, with a lot of staff turnover in the past year, and truthfully, some institutional growing pains. The departure of 4 more staff members in the following months, including a pillar of a leader, added to these pains.

I had entered a hurting community, one that was still trying to figure out its identity as an independent organization, how to continue its Christian mission, how to truly be a community after so much turnover and institutional departures in the past year, and all of this among a world trying to figure out how to move on and heal after a devastating pandemic.



Photo Credit: WMF Bolivia



And so, throughout my time here I have watched and participated while this community took on the challenge of recentring ourselves in Christ – of recognizing the gifts of all of God’s children, suffering together through trials, leaning on one another as the tertiary trauma of working with women and children affected by sexual exploitation takes its toll, and rejoicing together in times of hope.

Seeing this community grow into itself over the past months has taught me so much about what it means to be a Christian. Christian community had never been modeled with such integrity before in my life.

In this community I see the Church. I see a strong community of believers centered in faith working to proclaim Christ’s Kingdom.

As my time in Bolivia wraps up, I am deeply saddened to be physically leaving the community that taught me what it means to be a Christian.

But I am heartened to know that the work we have been doing and will continue to do in the red-light districts of El Alto and La Paz (and that I will continue to support in prayer as I return to the States) glorifies God not only because we share the love of Christ with the people we serve, but because we hold firm to one another as a community as we do so.



**Tess Hartley** interned with WMF Bolivia for 16 months!

If you are interested in an internship with Word Made Flesh, scan or click the QR code.





# ENCOUNTERING THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST

## MAKING A CASE TO GO TO CHURCH

BY: DAVID CHRONIC  
DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS

**M**

any of us in Word Made Flesh (WMF) have had a hard time going to church. Of course, we know that church is important and connected to mission.

In fact, part of our vision is to see those in poverty find their home in church and for the church to be home for those suffering from poverty. Still, the challenge to attend church is real. Some struggle with significant cultural differences of a church, in which they don't feel spiritually nourished. Others wrestle with theological differences, perhaps about understandings of the role of women church or about justice and care for those who are marginalized and in need.



Photo Credit: David Chronic

The challenges of going to church are not only felt in cross-cultural missional contexts, but as we are increasingly aware, they are part of our larger cultural dissatisfaction with and exodus from the church – especially in the West. And there certainly are legitimate motives for not attending church.

One may have experienced an abusive church culture. Many of us know someone who has suffered child abuse by priests or bullying and misogyny by evangelical pastors.

Some have been let down by the church's lack of sensitivity towards friends of LGBTQ communities, of those of other faiths, and of those with disabilities or from other economic classes. Some are hindered by the history of segregation and ongoing racism, sexism, or hypocrisy of some churches.

Others walk away from church as it has conflated Christian witness with culture wars, political parties or figures, or civil religion. Others are simply left unsatisfied by the therapeutic tone of sermons, the crafting of worship services as entertainment, or the superficiality of Christian relationships.



We should not take these reasons for not going to church lightly. In fact, I advise those in abusive and bad churches to leave them. Some may need a break from church or even a clean break. Leaving may helpfully cause some bad local churches to dissolve. Yet, in the context of a massive exodus from church, I still want to make a case to go to church.

A person celebrated in church history and who has greatly influenced WMF is Saint Francis of Assisi. He lived in a time when the church was in disrepair. The church was involved in sending crusades to “protect” the “Holy Land” from the Muslims. Christians were also waging territorial wars with other Christians. As trade increased in certain areas, inequality grew as did the desire for wealth, exacerbating corruption and poverty. Inside a church building that was literally crumbling, Francis prayed.

He heard the voice of the Lord: “Go and repair My house, which is falling in ruins.” Francis began collecting bricks and selling his father’s fabrics so as to buy construction materials. And so commenced his task of rebuilding the church. In a short time, Francis realized that the church is not the building but rather the people, the Body of Christ.

In dramatic form, Francis renounced his father’s wealth and committed himself to poverty, obedience, and chastity.

He attracted others around him who made the same commitments and then went out to preach good news and serve others. Francis’s life can inspire us and help us find a way to church - even if it means understanding church differently - and being a part of repairing it.

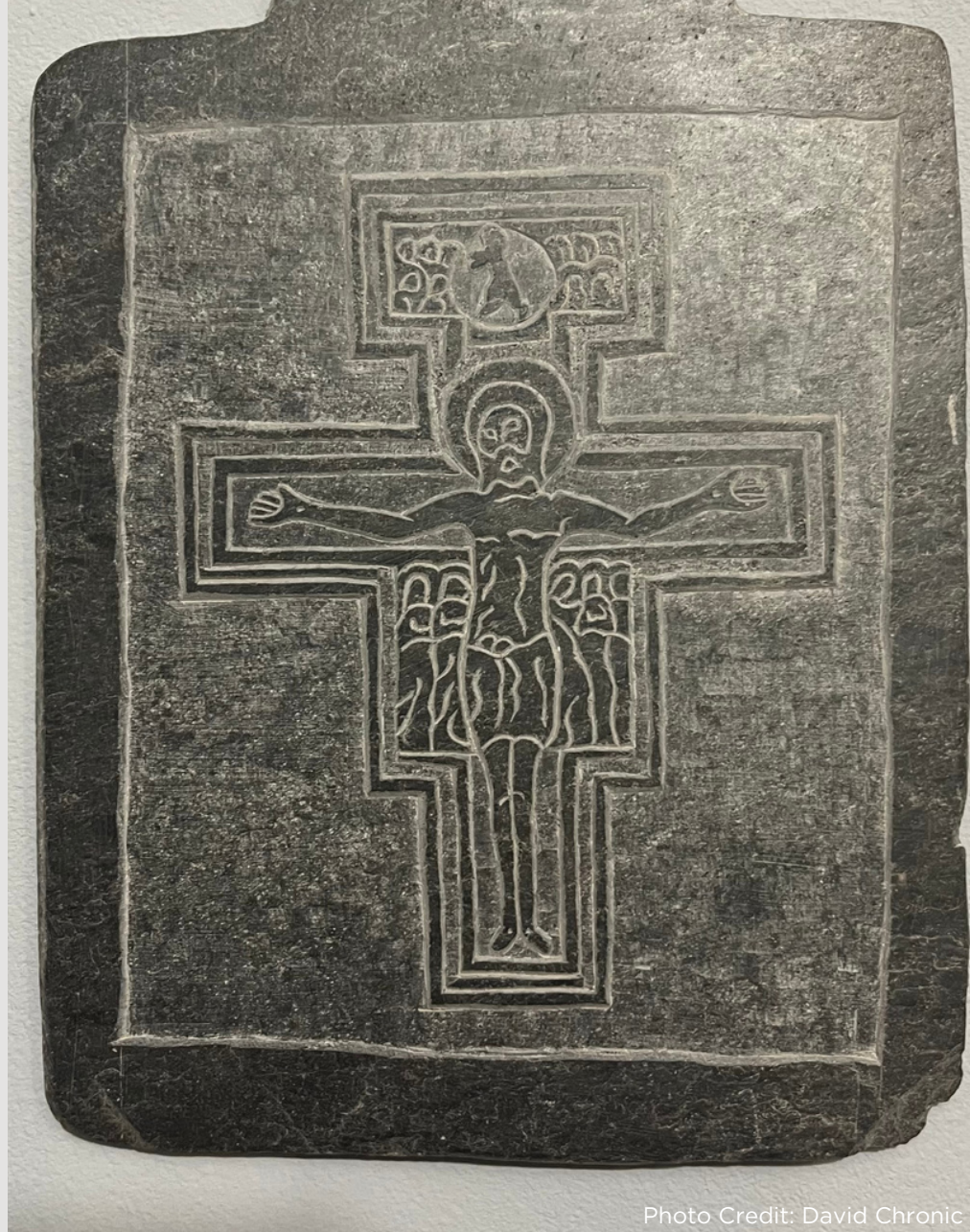


Photo Credit: David Chronic

As I have previously reflected on “What Do We Mean by ‘Church?’,” in this short article, I will address some of the ideas that inhibit us from attending the church and outline some fundamental reasons why going to church is essential for Christ-followers. Let’s begin with some aspects that hinder our going to church.

### **Keeping Us From Church**

#### **Not feeling spiritually nourished:**

Some WMF staff who serve in different countries find that they are not fed in local churches.

Even in one’s own country, some find it difficult to worship in a church led by those of other ethnicities or social groups. In these situations,

we realize that what we thought was spiritual nourishment is actually more cultural. A foreign church or your neighborhood church may not “feed” you, but the invitation to you is to discover how those in that church are being fed and to learn to drink from their wells. So, part of contextualizing the gospel is to see and experience how the gospel has been metabolized by the local culture. In time, you may discover a deeper nourishment for yourself or at least that your pallet has been cultivated.

#### **Assuming that church is a choice:**

The culture of capitalism and consumerism tells us that when we have more options we are empowered and have a fuller sense of agency.



Maybe we have understood repairing the church as our refusal to participate in local gatherings of Christ-followers. Some may want to renounce the church in order to follow Christ – sometimes formulated as being “spiritual” but not “religious.”

But like St. Francis, we need to hear the deeper call: to renounce our culture of individualistic choices that reduces even religion and spirituality to an option, to renounce institutions that fail while cultivating institutions that sustain, and to deal with hurt and potential harms rather than isolating ourselves. This leads us to discuss some reasons why participating in church is essential.

### **The Importance of Gathering as Christians**

#### **Being Shaped by Church Practices:**

As with all human communities, the church is shaped by its practices. (That means that non-participation in church is also a practice, and opting out is not simply renouncing the gathering but also involves taking up other practices that will inevitably shape you. We need to ask: what are the practices of the communities in which we participate and how are they shaping us?).

The practices of the church include the visible gathering, naming, confessing and repenting of sin, forgiving one another, bearing one another's burdens, working out salvation by loving others and especially those who are most vulnerable, harmonizing voices and instruments for lament, protest, thanksgiving, and praise, and prayerfully discerning together how to faithfully hear and follow the person and words of Jesus.



Photo Credit: David Chronic

The church is an alternative society that celebrates humility, service, and costly generosity. These practices hopefully become habits. These are outgrowths from our gathering. In our coming together, we practice at bearing the fruit of the Spirit and anticipate the New Creation of peace, joy, and communion.

**Encountering the Divine Presence:** Although made up of followers of Christ, the church is not simply a human community. Jesus promises that he is present in the visible gathering of two or three in his name (Mt 18:20).

When followers of Christ gather in faith and partake in the life of the Son through the Spirit, there is the real sacramental presence of Christ. This, in itself, is enough reason to go to church. I suspect that this might not be convincing because we really don't really believe that Jesus is really present in and through others.

Our notions of individual will and power and our materialist worldview keep us from understanding our existence as participating through Christ and with others in the world. Still, perhaps we can be moved by Jesus' words.



When we go to church, we are promised an encounter with Christ that only occurs through the gathering in his name and in the Eucharist (1 Cor 11:23-25). We experience Jesus together. This is a deep and mysterious communion for which we were created and to which we are called. The Spirit is manifested to others through you and to you through others. Without you, the communion is incomplete.

We don't only participate in the church for the sake of ourselves. It may be a place of our healing and joy, but this is not the only reason we gather. Jesus gives his self for the life of the world and gives his body of believers for the life of the world. You are invited to participate in his life and to share the joy of sharing life with others. In the gathering, each person and their unique gifts are recognized and shared with others, especially the most vulnerable. Here too is a sacramental encounter with Christ who promises that he is present in the vulnerable and oppressed (Mt 25:31-46).

The church belongs and you are needed among the vulnerable. Perhaps it is the Spirit who is prompting great dissatisfaction with the forms and practices of the church today. May the Spirit act in us as God did in St. Francis. Francis sought the Lord and heard his voice from within a crumbling church. He made a tenacious commitment to the church, while reimagining alternative communities of monks, nuns, and laity that ventured on crusades of love instead of violence and abuse.

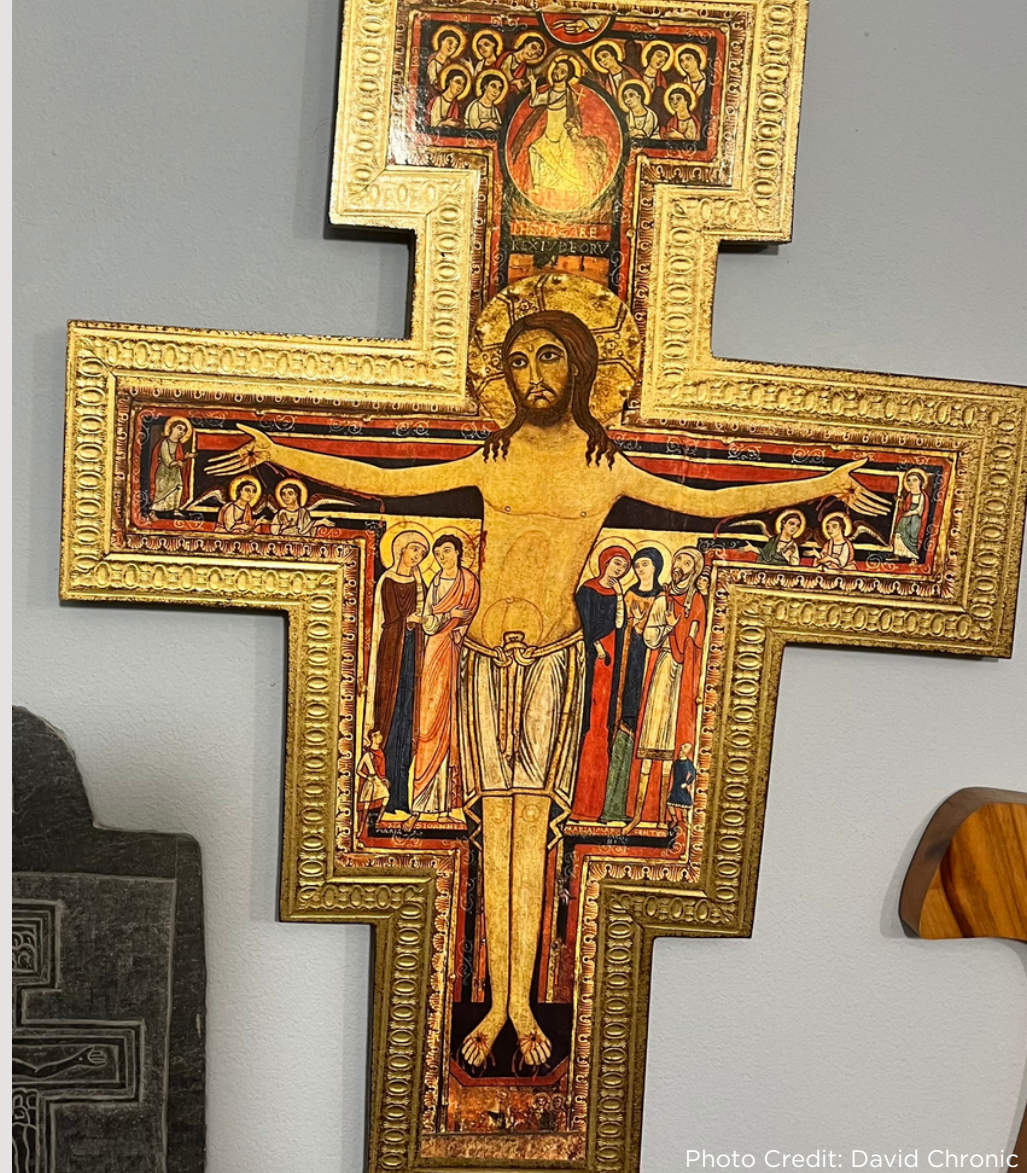


Photo Credit: David Chronic

In fact, Francis, prepared for martyrdom, went behind enemy lines and, at the invitation of the Sultan, shared the gospel. As the church suffered disinterest and corruption, Francis led believers to authentic encounters with Jesus in their daily communal worship, in their awe of God's creation, and in their interactions with those begging and those suffering from leprosy.

In their radical following in the way of Jesus, they experienced Jesus together. I would not offer a prescription for where to go to church or what it needs to look like, but I pray that we, inspired by St. Francis, hear the revolutionary call to repair the church.



## DAVID CHRONIC

### WMF INTERNATIONAL OFFICE



**David Chronic** has served with his wife, Lenuta, for over 20 years among vulnerable families in Romania. He continues to serve as part of the Caretaker Team for WMF while he pursues doctoral studies on child theology and international development at Asbury Theological Seminary. David has contributed writings on cross-cultural mission among impoverished communities in Living Mission, Child, Theology and Mission, and Public Theology for Global Witness.



# WHAT OUR EYES SEE AND WHAT OUR EARS HEAR

BY: CONRAD DAIVES

**I**n the United States, my wife and I do unity and reconciliation work in a 320,000-member city called Lexington, KY, the second-largest city in Kentucky.

According to the US Census Bureau, the demographics of racial identity are statistically parallel to national data, except for its lower Hispanic population which directs our missional focus. Our ministry's vision is to be a catalyst of ethnic unity in Lexington, KY. This can be summarized as "The Offended Restores the Offender."

In other words, through Jesus, God bore the weight of broken humanity, knowing that the cross of Christ is the only catalyst to produce true unity. In our relationships, we believe the offended party can also restore the offender relationally. Thus, in our unity and reconciliation work, we are constantly reminded that the work of the cross is the only true catalyst to bring authentic unity and reconciliation.

We created a seven-conversational model walking Christian communities through biblical conversations that lead toward unity and reconciliation (<http://bereconciledlexington.com>).

The model was initially birthed in 2016; however, during the 2020 ethnic tensions in the US, we noticed many of our brethren in the Lord Jesus still struggling to live by what Isaiah 11 said about Jesus. The culture encouraged judgment based on what our eyes saw. The culture encouraged making decisions based on what our ears heard. Even in our city specifically, churches adopted the culture's vocabulary of how to address injustices.

*"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." — Ephesians 4:3*

Therefore, we knew something was wrong. Our brothers and sisters in the Lord were having the wrong types of conversations together. The culture had hijacked our mandate to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

*"He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness, he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth" Isaiah 11:3-41*

"MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO  
KEEP THE UNITY OF THE  
SPIRIT THROUGH THE BOND  
OF PEACE."

— EPHESIANS 4:3

If Jesus is our standard, many of us have missed the mark by judging life based on what our eyes see or deciding disputes based on what our ears hear. If we are to emulate Jesus, we all have missed this mark in some way or another, including me. We must all remember that Jesus judged, decided, and spoke differently than the culture.

We further created conversations around language use, the human heart, worldview, historical context, character, etc.

We took the Apostle Paul's words in Ephesians 4:1-6 as our guide. We learned that the human heart and its complexity are essential to consider. We soberly embraced that the only way to change is to let our hearts encounter God and His word. Thus, we prayed and examined the scriptures for insightful case studies for unity and reconciliation.

Lastly, we reprocessed our model with other brethren and published *BE Reconciled: A Journey Towards Unity and Reconciliation, The Process Guide* in December 2021. Currently, we run weekend conferences. We have "dinner table" conversations and are developing online resources for believers to learn how to converse about these topics biblically. It's a journey, and we believe that Lexington, KY, along with many other cities, will be catalyzed to establish ethnic unity and reconciliation.



Of our seven conversations, one of them is about our calling. A person's calling is to learn about God's invitation to become His chosen character in His story. Life is not about us but about Him. However, most of us have no framework supporting the pursuit or understanding of our calling and its significance.

As brothers and sisters, we all need assistance and support to work out what we are called to do with the Lord. One helpful resource is my newest book, *Wrestling with Your Calling: Unleash Potential at Your Burning Bush*.

May the Lord help us to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and may He help us walk worthy of the calling which we have received.



## CONRAD DAVIES

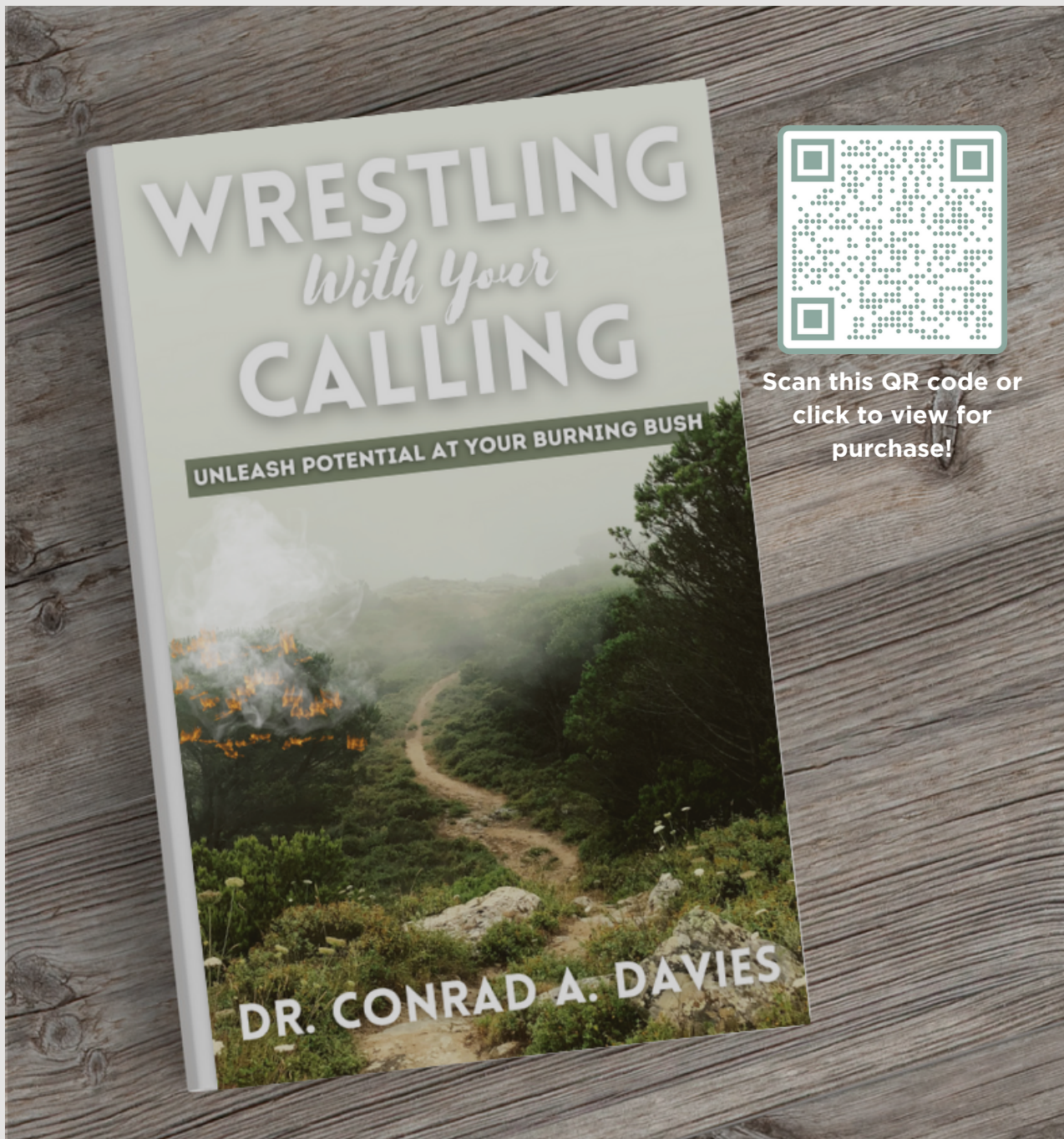
### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Dr. Conrad Davies, Sr.** a member of the WMF board of directors, is an award-winning university educator, executive coach, commissioned minister, entrepreneur, and talent/strengths development coach. He has over 20 years of higher education experience, over 20 years of ministry experience, and more than 10 years of coaching experience. He lives in Lexington, KY, with his wife, Kandace, and their three children: CJ, Levi, and Sarah.



# WRESTLING *With Your* CALLING

Conrad offers further reflection on community through his book on ethnic reconciliation. In this book, Dr. Conrad Davies provides you with a framework of how to wrestle with your calling using the ancient biblical story of Moses at the burning bush to give you some insights.





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