

INTO THE DARKNESS



75 Years of Free Will Baptist
International Missions



FREE WILL BAPTIST
INTERNATIONAL
MISSIONS

WELCOME

Into *The Darkness* is an appropriate title for this volume. For 75 years, Free Will Baptists from rural areas, small towns, and the great cities of the United States departed the land of their birth and voluntarily headed *Into The Darkness* to share His Light and Truth. From coast-to-coast, an unrelenting flow of men and women responded to the call to go.

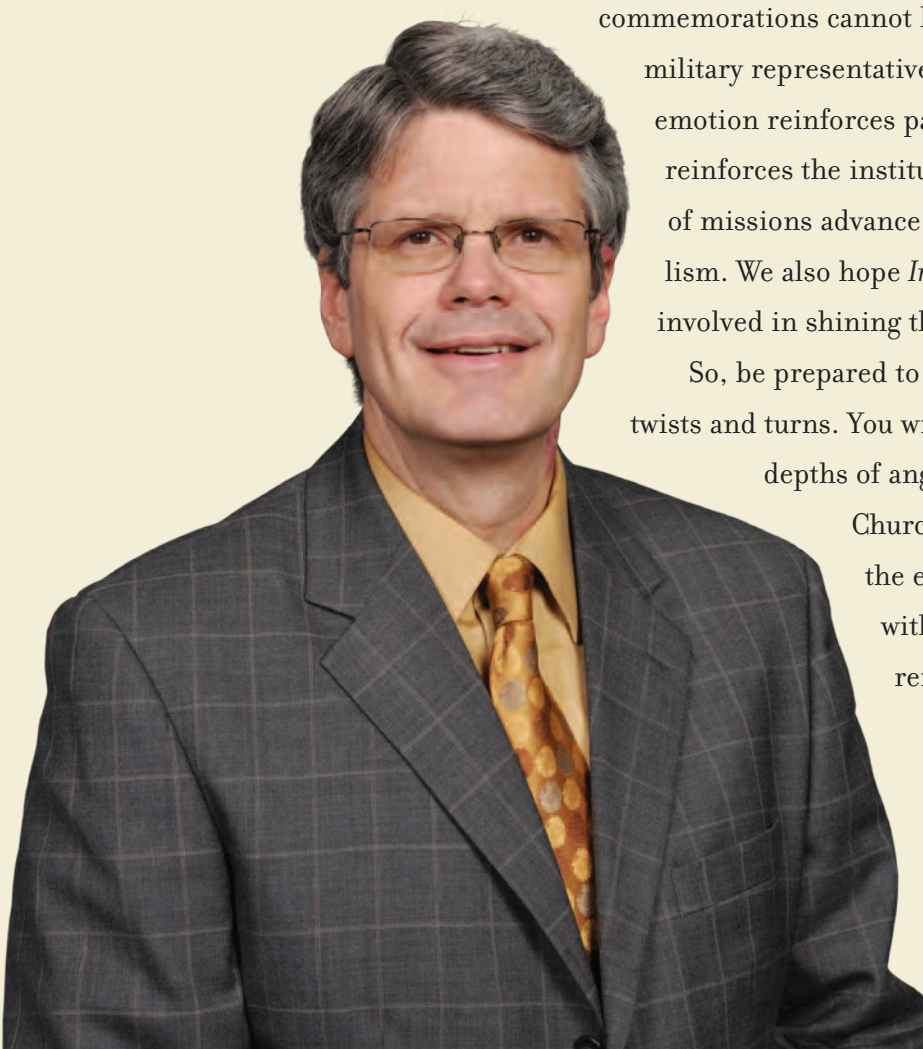
Obedience to God's call led them to tribal peoples in Africa and India. They faced spiritual darkness in the world-class cities of Europe, Asia, and Latin America. With abandon they labored in the midst of civil wars, military invasions, natural disasters, and abject poverty. These intrepid men and women battled discouragement, opposition, and the forces of evil in the attempt to bring worshippers to the throne of God.

In the midst of the darkness *He* has been their Light and Truth. What He promised, He has fulfilled, “. . . and lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20). *Into The Darkness*, therefore, is a book of celebration. We celebrate the faithfulness of God, and of His servants who answered His call. Celebration is important for any group of people. It can be a powerful instrument to reinforce values and beliefs. Celebration even serves as a vehicle to transfer values and beliefs to future generations.

Lloyd Kwast's model of understanding cultures states that our behavior is based on our values, and our values are based on what we believe. Ultimately, what we believe is based on our worldview. In transference of culture from generation to generation, the younger generation realizes what is considered important, worthy, and of value. A faithful reading of Scripture will always lead us to the conclusion that sharing the gospel with those who haven't heard is of ultimate and eternal value to God. We trust *Into The Darkness* will reinforce that truth.

In addition to celebration, the 75th anniversary of Laura Belle Barnard boarding the S.S. *Potter* in New York City provides us a perfect opportunity for commemoration. In any cultural group, whether a hidden tribal people, a college booster club, a branch of military service, or in our case, a denomination, the importance of rituals and commemorations cannot be overstated. We choke back tears when a United States military representative presents the flag to the widow of a fallen soldier. That emotion reinforces patriotism. A 50th anniversary celebration for a couple reinforces the institution of marriage. Likewise, this celebration of 75 years of missions advance reinforces the ultimate importance of global evangelism. We also hope *Into The Darkness* will deepen your appreciation for those involved in shining the Light.

So, be prepared to be surprised. The road *Into The Darkness* has many twists and turns. You will experience the heights of joy and victory as well as the depths of anguish and defeat. In the midst of it all He is building His Church and the gates of hell are not prevailing against it. In the end we hope that this chronicle of the journey will fill you with joy, encouragement, and a passion to reach those who remain in darkness.

James F. Forlines
James F. Forlines, General Director

INTRODUCTION

Ralph Winter, a missionary statesman of our generation, wrote, “[God] has given us a clear and simple task to finish: to see that Christ is worshipped and followed in every people. This is the essential missionary task. This we must do with utmost focus and passion until it is finished” (*Finishing the Task*, Mission Frontiers, June 2000).

Free Will Baptists have manifested their obedience to this task for the past 75 years through Free Will Baptist Foreign, and now, International Missions. The journey *Into The Darkness* began with Laura Belle Barnard on July 5, 1935. According to ship records that was the day she left New York City aboard the *S.S. Potter* bound for Bombay, India. Or, more accurately, we might say that the journey began again with her. One hundred years earlier, in 1835, Jeremiah Phillips and Eli Noyes departed as Free Will Baptist missionaries to a different part of India (now known as the state of Orissa).

From 1835 until 1911 Free Will Baptists had a foreign missions presence. A merger with Northern Baptists in

1910-11 left the scattered and unaffiliated Free Will Baptists without a foreign mission organization, and in many ways, without a missionary vision and zeal. Twenty-five years went by without any organized Free Will Baptist foreign missions efforts. God then sent a single, young woman in her mid-20s to awaken the denomination to this “clear and simple task.”

Former president of Free Will Baptist Bible College, Dr. L. C. Johnson said it this way,

“An entire denomination was without a missionary conscience. For a quarter of a century no one had emerged to give an awareness of this responsibility to ‘the other lost sheep.’ The

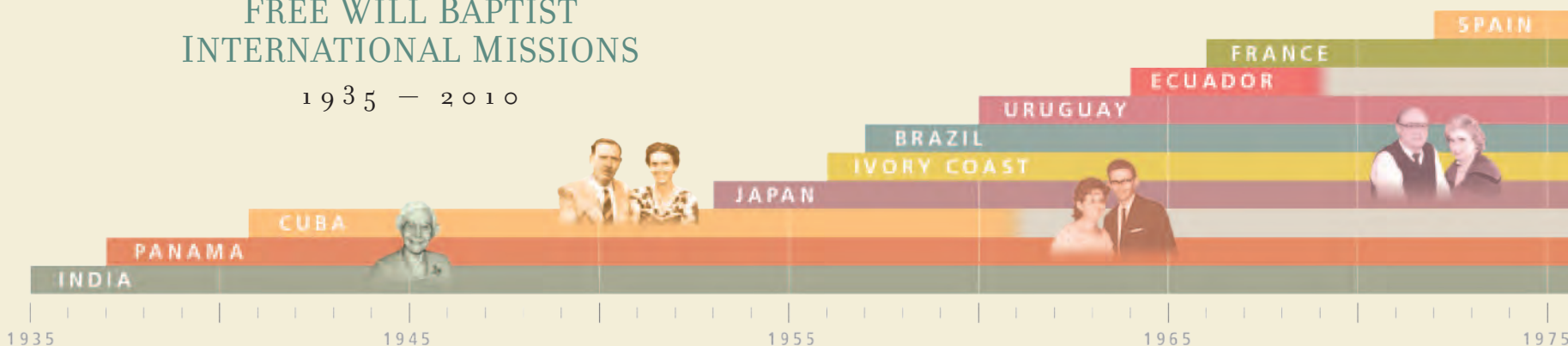
workings of God in Miss Laura Belle’s life, to prick the conscience of an entire denomination, becomes evident even though unusual” (*Touching The Untouchables*, p. 9).

The journey since the *S.S. Potter*’s voyage has been an incredible story of Kingdom advance. More than 300 Free Will Baptist men and women have followed in Laura Belle’s footsteps—leaving their home in the States to take the Light to unreached peoples on five continents around the world. Beginning in the Niligiri Hills of Tamil Nadu in South India, the Light has dispersed and now shines in over 20 countries. In 1935, Free Will Baptists had no churches outside of North America. In 2010, people in over 1,100 overseas churches and mission works worship the Lord Jesus Christ. Nearly 600 national pastors join our current missionary force of 100 in fulfilling our stewardship responsibility of reaching the unreached. Twelve Bible institutes and seminaries around the world are training an additional 400 workers for the harvest fields. This is the story we tell in *Into The Darkness*.

The purpose adopted and pursued by our early pioneer missionaries is still our purpose today. FWBIM has always reached out to unreached peoples with the ultimate goal of planting churches and initiating church planting

FREE WILL BAPTIST INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS

1935 — 2010



movements. In June of 1935, Laura Belle met with the Eastern General Conference in Greenville, North Carolina. She had a clear understanding of their expectations. “I was to make it a definite aim to search out a *needy field* in India where Free Will Baptists would be invited to send further missionaries, develop a work, and *establish churches*” [Laura Belle Barnard, *Touching The Untouchables*, p. 49—emphasis supplied].

The call of reaching unreached peoples (needy fields) has been a defining characteristic of the Mission. It has determined the areas of the world to which we feel called. If another evangelical group is working in an area, FWBIM has chosen to go where no evangelical effort exists. Our goal is not to simply advance the Free Will Baptist denomination, our goal is to advance the Kingdom.

We adhere to the confession of the Apostle Paul in Romans 15:20 when he said, “And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man’s foundation” (NKJV). This is the origin then, of our current purpose statement: We exist to facilitate church planting movements among unreached peoples.

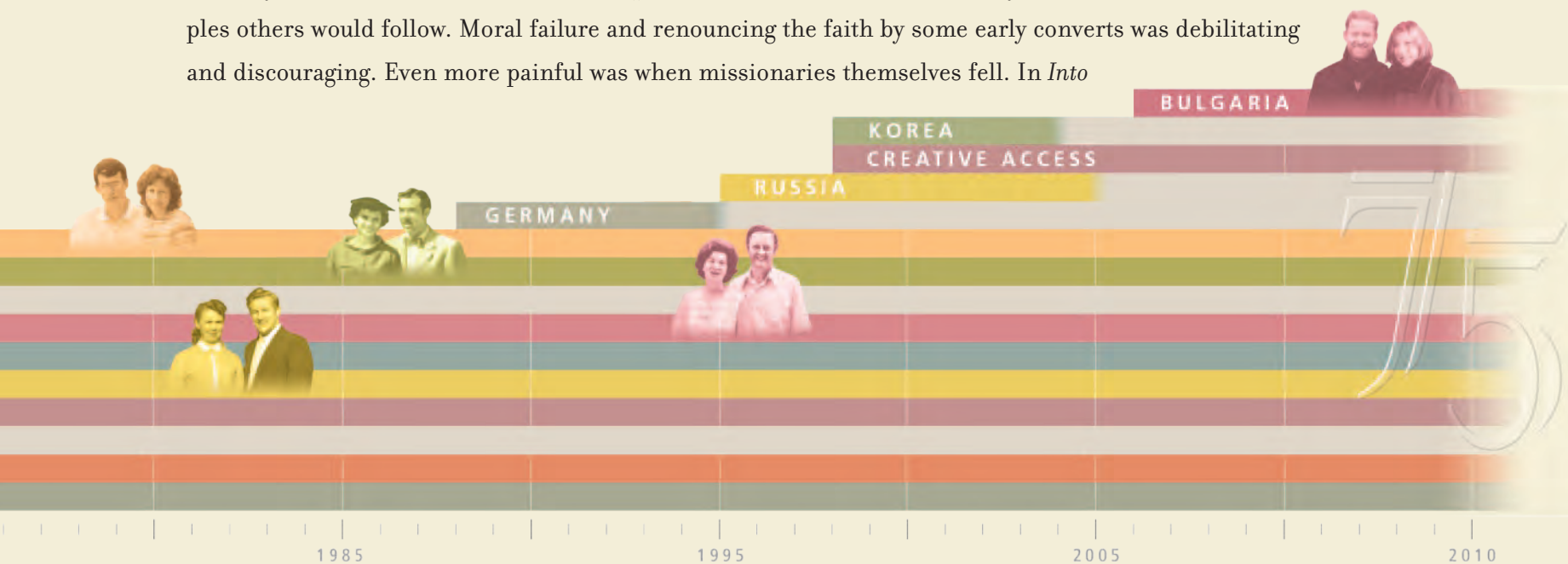
A prime example comes from the experience of Laura Belle Barnard herself. Upon arriving in Kotagiri, South India, Laura Belle learned of an earlier outreach effort to the Harijan (outcaste) people. A Scottish lady, Miss Cockburn, abandoned her outreach in the community. “Apparently, she had become thoroughly discouraged and withdrew, declaring confidently that she had found an ethnic group of subhumans who were decidedly incapable of responding to education or spiritual truth” [*Touching The Untouchables*, p. 15].

This did not dissuade Laura Belle.

When people enter our churches around the world, they usually do not come from the Nazarenes, Southern Baptists, or the Assemblies of God. They come from Animism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Buddhism, Islam, or Catholicism. We do not aim to rearrange the Kingdom, but to advance it.

This has been a laudable, but difficult road. Totally unreached people require much prayer and labor before harvest time. The early years were difficult as our pioneer missionaries painstakingly carved a church from the bedrock of superstition and false belief. Conversions were slow in coming. Leadership training was frustrating at times.

Early converts had few Christian examples within their own cultures. They, themselves, were the examples others would follow. Moral failure and renouncing the faith by some early converts was debilitating and discouraging. Even more painful was when missionaries themselves fell. In *Into*



The Darkness we acknowledge the contribution of those whose ministries did not end well. The message of their early years was true and their sacrifice worth noting.

Crucial to the cause was the willingness of pioneer missionaries who paid the price and remained faithful to the call. Wave after wave of missionaries followed the trailblazers. The promise on which they based their ministries was, “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart” (NKJV).

Praise the Lord, on many of our fields it is now harvest time. The attendance in Free Will Baptist churches outside of North America has more than doubled within the past decade. Around the world, children are born into Free Will Baptist homes with parents who are second- and third-generation followers of Christ. The unrelenting faithfulness of missionaries and national pastors is now resulting in an exponential harvest.

As you read through *Into The Darkness* these are not the only changes you will recognize. Laura Belle would stare in disbelief at a sign on the front door of the church in Kotagiri which reads, “Please turn off your mobile phones.” In her day they did not even have electricity.

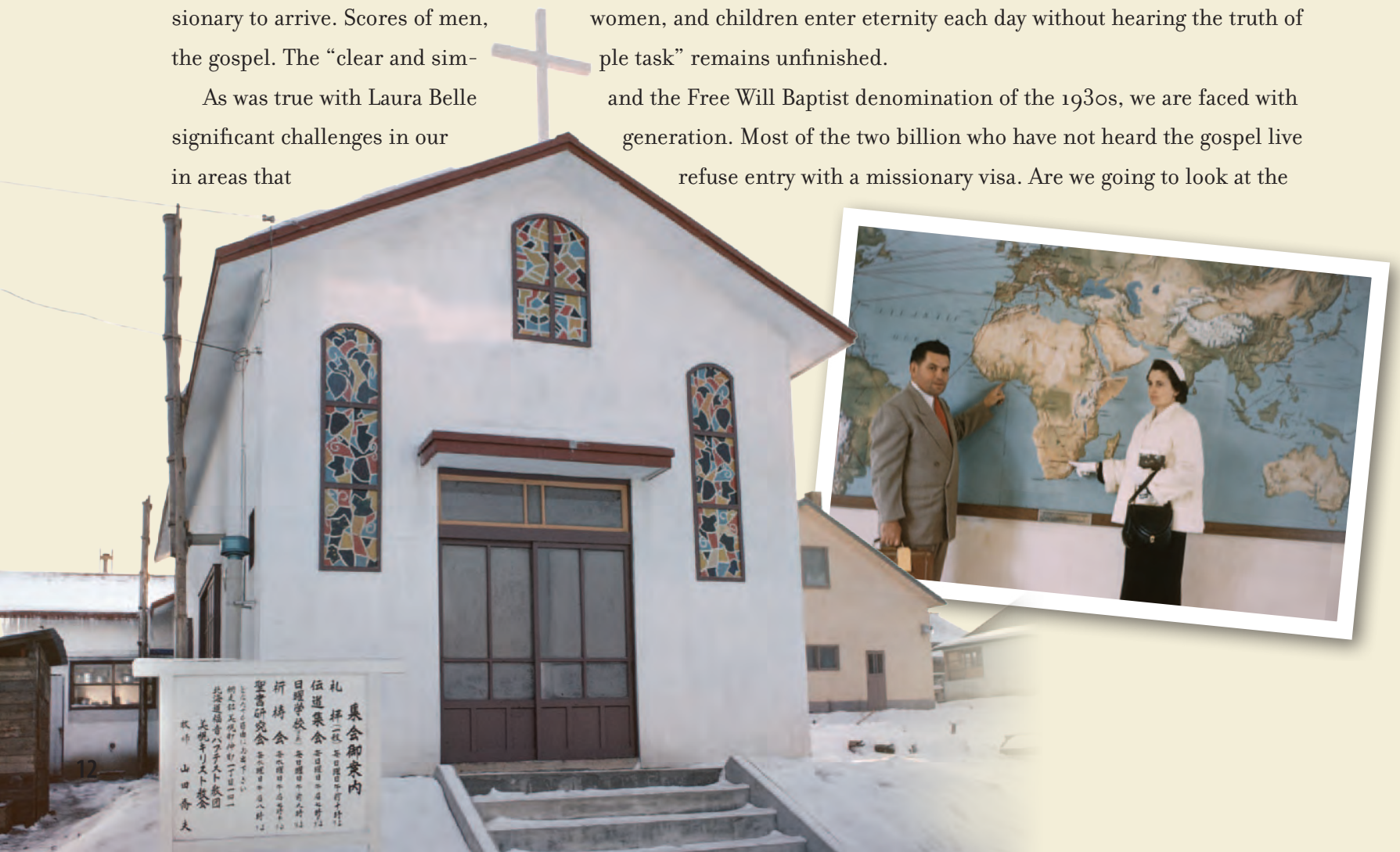
Some of our earliest missionaries served seven-year terms. It was just too expensive to make the long ocean voyages to and from the field more frequently. Visitors to the field were almost non-existent. Phone calls had to be arranged well in advance, or were only made in extreme circumstances because of prohibitive costs. Banking systems around the world were undependable and untrustworthy, making financial transactions and channeling support extremely challenging.

Things have certainly changed. Today, hundreds of Free Will Baptist teens and adults visit, see, and assist the works around the world firsthand. With the advent of the Internet, every missionary now has access not only to e-mail, but also to free video conferencing. Worldwide banking and property laws have strengthened, aiding the advancement of the Kingdom.

But, with all the changes, some things remain unchanged. Almost two billion people still have no access to the gospel. Cities, towns, and villages all over the world are waiting for the first witness, the first church, and the first missionary to arrive. Scores of men, women, and children enter eternity each day without hearing the truth of the gospel. The “clear and simple task” remains unfinished.

As was true with Laura Belle and the Free Will Baptist denomination of the 1930s, we are faced with significant challenges in our generation. Most of the two billion who have not heard the gospel live in areas that

and the Free Will Baptist denomination of the 1930s, we are faced with significant challenges in our generation. Most of the two billion who have not heard the gospel live in areas that refuse entry with a missionary visa. Are we going to look at the



challenges and say, “It’s too difficult?” or, “It’s too dangerous?”

This is *our* challenge. This is *our* calling. *Into The Darkness* is not only an attempt to chronicle the provisions of God and the faithfulness of His people in the past. The book, and the stories it contains, is meant to serve as an appeal—a challenge—to the current generation, and others who will follow, to continue piercing the darkness until the words of Jesus are fulfilled, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and

then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14—NKJV).

This task demands the same spirit, creativity, and tenacity that existed in our earliest missionaries. If governments will not allow missionaries to enter with missionary visas, we will have to find other ways. Some will enter providing humanitarian aid. Others will teach in schools or hold various occupations. Some will start businesses. Some will birth creative alternatives.

Though the means of taking the gospel has changed through the years, and will most certainly change as we head into the future, the purpose itself should not. “We exist to

facilitate church planting movements among unreached peoples.” Winning people to Christ, making them disciples, and gathering them together to form a church will always be the call.

As we face this challenging future, new colleagues are coming alongside us. Free Will Baptists from our churches around the world are sensing the need and answering the call to reach more than their Jerusalem, and are reaching into *their* Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Over the next 25 years, this may be one of the most exciting developments we will see. By the time we celebrate our centennial in 2035, more Free Will Baptist missionaries may originate from our works internationally than from North America. If current growth trends continue, more Free Will Baptists will be worshipping in churches internationally than in the U.S.A.

Perhaps before the next 25 years have elapsed, we will all be gathered around the throne of Heaven to worship the Lord together. The Apostle John had the unique opportunity to see that scene in advance. He records it for us in Revelation 7:9-10, “After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’”

As we look, we will see a Bengali man from India, a Lobi woman from Ivory Coast, and a Frenchman from Châteaubriant. Scanning the crowd further, we will see a former Shinto priest, a mountain villager from Panama, and a senorita from Alpedrete, Spain. Thousands upon thousands of our brothers and sisters in Christ from all over the world will be present because of the sacrifice and commitment of Free Will Baptists who were obedient to send and be sent.

Into The Darkness tells part of that story. Praise the Lord with us for those who will gather around the throne as a result of the labors of those whose story is contained herein, as well as those whose story is being lived today.



FRANCE

The Art of Evangelism

God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.

P S A L M 63 : 1

The Greek colonists found their paradise. One look at the snow-capped mountains and the lush, rolling terrain inland of Gaul convinced the explorers in 602 B.C. they were in paradise. Greek influence in architecture and philosophy began to unfold until Rome claimed the land's beauty for its own in 51 B.C. Hundreds of years passed under Roman rule before greed for gain surfaced again. Invading Franks coveted the land. In victorious conquest, they changed the land's name to France, literally, "Land of the Franks."

Over time, France developed into a sophisticated society comprised of people from the bordering nations of Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and Spain. Following the French Revolution in 1789, it also became the most powerful nation in Europe. Today, literacy rates soar around 98%, with a population over 64 million strong. World-renowned art galleries line picturesque streets, while culinary and fashion giants set new industry standards for the world on a regular basis. France is a modern nation, steeped in artistry, philosophy, and pride with a cultural trend toward intellectual elitism that rebels against most spiritual ideologies.

It is no wonder French people today seem spiritually jaded and disinterested. Along with their heritage of cultural advancement comes a history of bloodshed and violence wrought by spiritual differences. Roman Catholicism held preeminent political and spiritual power over the people for many centuries. During the time following the Reformation, 25% of the population declared themselves Protestant. A horrific battle over spiritual rights ensued, with the Roman Catholic Church leading the persecution and slaughter of thousands of Protestants. On St. Bartholomew's Day



ABOVE: The Arch of Triumph, constructed in 1806 to honor those who fought for France, particularly during the Napoleonic Wars, is a popular tourist attraction.

RIGHT: The countryside is filled with grape vineyards to supply France's renowned wineries.



alone, more than 10,000 Huguenots (Protestants) were slain. Though the Edict of Nantes in 1598 granted religious freedom to Protestants, it was revoked shortly thereafter. More than 2,000 church buildings were destroyed and thousands more believers killed.

Mission Facts

With three established churches and two mission works, the Brittany area of France is showing signs of revival. Several Frenchmen are responding to opportunities to lead in their churches. A new association of churches is uniting the congregations. Outreach to young people has proven effective.

Today, less than two percent of France's booming population claims to be evangelical Christian. Church buildings serve as historic museums and architectural tourist attractions. France's Protestant foundation quietly dwindled, as missionaries trended toward more "pagan" societies in Africa and Latin America. France is now a true mission field, with doors both open and closed. Politically, the government ensures religious freedom for

any group that abides by French law. But French hearts are typically closed. Most people never read a Bible, and many never even see one. Weary of the Catholic Church's manipulation and empty ritual, they abandon what little they hear about God.

Free Will Baptists faced quite a challenge when opening a new work in France. Little to no evangelical work existed in most towns. Not only was the gospel foreign, so also were the concepts of sin and salvation. Past efforts by other mission groups had failed due to lack of funds, prayer support, and personnel, leaving the French with confusion and distrust.

Yet God was at work. In this spiritual desert, a large contingency thirsted for more. In 1966, when Free Will Baptist missionary Dan Merkh and family began a Bible study in Nantes, a city of 400,000, several residents attended. Within a very short time, the church outgrew the Merkh's living room, with 50 people in regular attendance. The Haas family soon joined them but the missionaries longed for more laborers. The need was so great they needed as many as were willing to come.

Over time, more missionaries joined the team and helped establish churches in Nantes, Rennes, St. Nazaire, and St. Sebastien. Though they still battle intellectualism, rationalism, widespread involvement in the occult, individualism, and growing socialist sentiment, God's people are overcoming the powers of darkness one relationship at a time. France is not neglected any longer. It is time

to shed the light of truth—the beacon of God's hope and love—to this embittered and disillusioned people.



ABOVE: Missionary Joe Haas purchases vegetables at a Rennes street market.

FRANCE	
CAPITAL	Paris
LARGEST CITY	Paris
AREA	643,427 sq. km.
POPULATION	64,057,792
CURRENCY	Euro
PER CAPITA INCOME	\$33,200
RELIGIONS	
Roman Catholic	66.9%
Non-religious	19.8%
Islam	10%
Ethnic religions	1.2%
Buddhism	1.0%
Evangelical Christian	0.8%
Unreached People Groups	33

Sources: CIA World Factbook, Joshua Project

THE JOY OF SACRIFICE

The Joe and Barbara Haas Story

And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

I S A M U E L 15 : 22

From his time spent at Free Will Baptist Bible College and Taylor University, Joe Haas felt sure God was calling him to further the kingdom. His future wife, Barbara Norris, agreed to his call, knowing the sacrifice it implied. So when Joe and Barbara married in 1951, they did not settle down to build a life for themselves. Instead, they followed wherever God led.

Joe and Barbara spent the next 15 years pastoring four churches in four states. They also began raising five children: Joe Jr., Trudy, Beverly, Melvin, and Christy. Then, with their hands full with family and ministry, God called them somewhere new: France.

Joe and Barbara, with five children in tow, packed their bags and headed for Switzerland where the whole family began their great adventure, trusting Christ in far-off places with foreign languages to bring the French people hope.

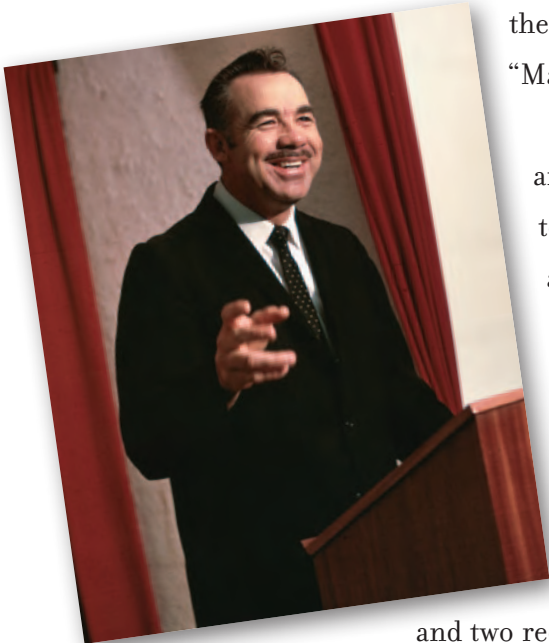
In 1968, the Haas family completed language study and arrived in Rennes, France, to begin their first appointment alongside Dan Merkh. Within a short time, they immersed themselves in student ministries, literature distribution, Bible clubs, and regular church activities. When Dan returned to the States for a short furlough, Joe took on the ministry reins. He experienced his first French wedding, and the thrill of sharing the gospel through the French language. “The house was full and running over!” Joe exclaimed. “It was a wonderful privilege to give them



ABOVE: Barbara Haas teaches a children's Bible class in Rennes.

RIGHT: Joe Haas teaches a course at the Bible institute sponsored by the Rennes FWB Church.





the gospel, and the Lord gave me great liberty in preaching His Word,” he continued. “Many people heard the gospel for the first time in their lives.”

The Haas family found many more opportunities to share Christ with the lost around them, having immediate and long-range impact. One young French school teacher heard Joe’s testimony and was moved. In time, Joe led Gerard to Christ, a conversion which inspired and invigorated his home church in Rennes. Later, Gerard felt called to use his teaching skills in Bondoukou, Côte d’Ivoire, where his positive attitude and witness greatly helped missionaries Jimmy and Janie Aldridge for several years.

In addition to Gerard, many French men and women responded to the gospel through the ministry in Rennes. “At times, it was like a revival atmosphere in the church,” Joe said of the week they saw seven new people receive Christ and two rededicate their lives. New efforts, including a church fair to garner youth interest, as well as a telephone and tape ministry, were launched. As the church prospered, Joe helped locate a building to house worship and the new initiatives. God provided a storefront in a prime shopping center. More than 30,000 people lived within walking distance of the location.

Once situated in their new location, the Rennes church experienced a rapidly-growing Bible club ministry, and a well-received English Bible study developed to reach university students. Simply having a renovated building in the area generated local excitement, prompted questions from the community, and opened doors for evangelism. More than 30 children from the neighboring apartment complex began attending Sunday school, while their parents investigated the services.

The Haas family knew they were taking a risk when they left the security of the States for an unfamiliar country filled with lost souls. But their faith in Christ led to countless conversions, not only in Rennes, but also in every part of the world where their children in Christ continue to go.

They saw and tasted the truth of God’s Word, “to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.”



TOP: Joe joyfully shares the message of Christ from the pulpit in Rennes.

MIDDLE: Many young men received Christ and were disciplined through Haas’ ministry.

RIGHT: Joe and Barbara and some of their children take a moment to pose with student missionaries.

HIS KINGDOM FIRST

The Jerry and Barbara Gibbs Story

*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness;
and all these things shall be added unto you.*

MATTHEW 6:33



Jerry and Barbara Gibbs beamed with joy. Nothing gave them greater pleasure than discipling believers and adding families to the church. On this day, they watched one of their newest converts in the St. Nazaire Free Will Baptist Church soak in the teachings during missions month. But following one of the sessions, Olivia seemed dazed and confused. When Jerry asked her what was on her mind, she replied, “Everything, just everything—I’ve heard so much this morning that I’ve never heard before.”

Jerry and Barbara were first appointed to France in August of 1972. Though both received Christ early in life—Jerry at a revival at age 14 and Barbara when she was only seven—God called them to missions during their time at Free Will Baptist Bible College. Jerry married Barbara Pate, who graduated with a B.S. degree in Christian Education and music. Jerry worked in the circulation division of the Foreign Missions Department while Barbara served the Sunday School Department as a graphic designer for three years before leaving for France.

After a year of language training, they arrived in Rennes, France. They joined Joe and Barbara Haas in an “Operation Mobilization” campaign to rally the city’s youth for a special three-week ministry. Jerry and Barbara were drawn to the French children and teens, and began an effective Bible club in their basement. Though their ministry focused on children, older siblings and parents took notice. Through the mouths of babes God brought the gospel to even more people, as curious onlookers visited the church for answers.

When the Haas family returned to the States for furlough, Jerry assumed the responsibilities at the Rennes Church. Head knowledge quickly translated to experience, as he witnessed God working out several new “firsts” for him in his ministry. “I baptized three new converts for the first time during my ministry. I performed my first communion service, first wedding, and I had my first son,” he remembered. “Considering that I was in my first pastorate, it was a lot of firsts. I even started my first garden,” he said with a smile.





sensation, neighborhood Bible clubs and Bible studies, and relationships forged through purposeful networking, the Gibbs were able to reach the neighboring communities with vital information. Little by little, people who placed the calls or received the mailers came by to investigate the new church.

In time, the congregation grew to more than 50 members. Jerry baptized new converts from all stages of life. Though conversion for these French believers was difficult—many of their family members disowned or ridiculed them—they found a new family within the body of Christ. In turn, they began sharing with their friends and family members, and the gospel work continued. Jerry and Barb enjoyed another first as the church grew. They led the church to construct a new church building—a rarity in France.

For over three decades of ministry, the Gibbs witnessed the gospel's power to resurrect dead marriages. They saw teens, including their own three sons, dedicate their lives to Christ for service. Sadly, they also saw families divided, when some members came to Christ while others turned away.

Jerry and Barb continue on, knowing the God Who called them to this mighty work in France, will build His Kingdom in His time.

FAR LEFT: Jerry Gibbs prepares to baptize a convert from the St. Nazaire Church.

LEFT: Jerry leads the small choir in the St. Nazaire Free Will Baptist Church.

ABOVE: New church buildings in France are rare. Jerry, a few coworkers, youth, and children commemorate their new building by gathering around their new church sign.

RIGHT: Book and literature stands often offer the opportunity to make new contacts and distribute the gospel. Jerry converses with a potential buyer.



With each new experience, Jerry gained more access to the French souls surrounding him. By their second term, the Gibbs were ready to open a new work in St. Nazaire. Utilizing literature distribution, a new biblio-bus (bookmobile) in the market areas, an automatic telephone answering machine that delivered a three-minute gospel pre-

J'CROIS

"I Believe!"

Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

EPHESIANS 6:13

Over several centuries, French sentiment toward God and Christianity was soured through a long history of abuse by errant clergy. Once home to French Huguenots willing to die for their faith, today's French culture finds little worth fighting for. Government leaders, academia, and media push toward a godless society, and many youth are inclined to listen.

But not all. J'Crois, French for "I Believe," is an annual conference held in August for young believers and seekers to learn more about their faith. Each year, many Christian teens from St. Nazaire, Nantes, St. Sebastien, and other suburbs and small towns attend the conference to hear influential speakers, participate in training seminars, and fellowship with other Christians who share their struggles of living out their faith in an apos-

tate society. As they learn how to defend their faith against the humanism and evolution taught in their schools, they eagerly share what they are learning with others.

Through Free Will Baptist missionaries and French Christians teaming together, God is reclaiming lost ground in the battle over teen minds and souls, and changing the community in the process. Will God win the war? J'Crois!

SINGLE PURPOSE

The Patsy Vanhook Story

For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.

ISAIAH 50:7

She was brought up in church. She knew the truth, yet she suppressed surrender. Then, at the tender age of 11, God turned her heart toward Him. Patsy Vanhook was never the same. She belonged to the Lord, and she was determined to give Him her whole life.

Following high school and active participation in her home church in Rogers, Arkansas, God led Patsy to Free Will Baptist Bible College. Focused on her training, she graduated in 1970 as a member of the Delta Chi honor society. Although she spent the next three school years teaching at Pensacola Christian School, her summers were reserved for short-term missions work in France, where she assisted missionaries and gained personal evangelism experience. After missionary internship training in Michigan, Patsy felt ready and eager to begin her own full-time missionary career in France.

Saying goodbye to parents, seven brothers and sisters, and the host of friends she held dear in the U.S. was not easy, but Patsy set her face toward what God had in store for her. She completed language training in Albertville, France, and then headed for the mountains—not of France, but of Switzerland! Not distracted, just determined to be fully equipped for her heart's passion, Patsy studied in the Child Evangelism Institute where she gained invaluable tools and skills for effective children's ministries.

Her full-time ministry began in Rennes, France. Patsy joined the Haas family in their efforts to develop and strengthen the Rennes Free Will Baptist Church, and to kindle interest among the youth. She spent many hours organizing and implementing Bible club programs for neighborhood children, and



ABOVE: Patsy Vanhook teaches a children's class at the church in Rennes.



RIGHT: Patsy makes change for a sale at the Free Will Baptist-sponsored Christian bookstore in Nantes.

teaching and visiting on behalf of the church. Yet with all the effort, little abiding fruit showed. “A wall of unconcern and indifference seemed to prevail,” she said.



minds and hearts. She also began teaching adult women, and forged strong and lasting friendships with many who came to Christ.

Patsy grew accustomed to the long months and sometimes years it took to see conversions take place. Yet the excitement over changed lives never grows old. “I remember that wonderful September when Jacqueline, from St. Nazaire, finally believed in Jesus as her Savior,” she said. “It had taken a year of faithful witnessing and explaining before she was ready. But now, she has expressed the peace and calm she feels when she spends time with the Lord each evening. What a miraculous transformation!”

In 1997, God led her to St. Sebastien where she became involved in Bible studies for women, children’s ministry, and visitation ministries. Then, He opened her eyes to the growing need for Christian literature in Nantes, France, where more than 800,000 people—mostly non-Christians—resided. She concluded that God wanted her to open a Christian bookstore, and God paved the way. Patsy opened her Christian bookstore in 2003, eager to share Christ with her community.

Patsy never knows who will next enter her store or her life. But one thing she knows for sure: she will share the love of Christ her Savior with whomever He brings her way. It is her single purpose until she can see Jesus face-to-face.

“We knew God had to raise up prayer warriors at home to help further our efforts here.”

In God’s time, Patsy did witness the miracle of changed lives through the preaching and hearing of God’s Word—not only in Rennes, but also in St. Nazaire, where she helped open a new work. Bible clubs reached over 100 children at a time, planting seeds of truth in young

EACH ONE TO REACH ONE

The Yannick Kermovan Story

Yannick Kermovan was ready to give up. His family—Catholic by name but not by practice—smiled condescendingly at his innocent questions about God, but always steered him in other directions. Even after marrying his wife Dominique, Yannick yearned to know the Creator.

Meanwhile, another man not far from the Kermovans also felt like giving up. A Free Will Baptist missionary, Don Sexton, sacrificed the comforts of home and years of energy to learn French and initiate evangelism efforts. Despite his efforts, he saw almost no fruit. “God, please send your discouraged servant a sign!” he pleaded.

The doorbell rang before the prayer on his lips was finished. Yannick Kermovan waited on the threshold to sell the Sextons a car. Don invited Yannick inside. After working out a car deal, Don turned the conversation toward God. As Don read Ephesians 2:8-9, Yannick’s world changed. He realized God saves man through faith in Christ, not by man’s works. Yannick was freed by the power of God’s Word.

He faithfully relayed all he learned to Dominique, and both soon became Christians.

In time, Yannick and Dominique felt led to leave their lucrative careers to enter into ministry. Like the Sextons, the Kermovans committed their lives to liberating the lost people around them.



TOP: Outdoor vacation Bible school classes attract a wide range of ages.

RIGHT: Using a whiteboard, Patsy teaches a children’s Bible story.

BELOW: The construction of an evangelical church in St. Nazaire was a strange sight for French people.

RIGHT MIDDLE: Jerry Gibbs stands in the doorway of the completed Free Will Baptist church in St. Nazaire.



ABOVE: Joe Haas and several fathers gather with their children in front of the Rennes FWB Church.

FAR RIGHT: Don Sexton prepares to baptize a convert from the Lorient church.



RIGHT: Dan Merkh preaches in Nantes.

RIGHT MIDDLE: Children proudly participate in a Bible lesson.



FOCUSED ON FRANCE

The Dennis and Carol Teague Story

And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.

J O H N 10 : 4

She grew up in a Free Will Baptist church, gave her life to Christ at age 10, and even enrolled in Free Will Baptist Bible College. But Carol Fowler was still not sure that God was calling her to overseas missions...until she met Dennis.

Dennis Teague, who also attended FWBBC, accepted Christ at age 15. Though his spiritual life languished for a few years following his conversion, he recommitted his life to God when he was 19. God began to burden his heart for missions. During a campus revival, Dennis felt confirmation of God's leading. Following graduation, he spent nine months in France as a student and two summers as a student missionary, working with Joe Haas at the Rennes Free Will Baptist Church. In 1973, Dennis and Carol married, and Carol took her husband's calling as her own.

Dennis pastored a church in Oklahoma for a year before their appointment in 1974. He was excited to rejoin the Rennes church, teaming with Joe Haas again as they worked together to strengthen and build the members and their outreach. The Teagues spent the next three years in Rennes, assisting with youth ministry, Bible clubs, literature distribution, visitation, and general hospitality to new converts and seekers.

In 1978, the couple resigned to further their education. While attending the School of World Missions in southern California, Dennis worked with youth at Sherwood Forest FWB Church. The Teagues returned to France in 1983 to help open a work in St. Sebastien, a suburb of the large city of Nantes. Dennis initiated an annual youth conference to strengthen young Christians. He also seeks non-traditional ways to engage French culture, including coaching a girls' basketball team at a local school. Teaming with other missionaries in the area, these servants of God diligently work to advance the gospel throughout the vast communities around them.



TOP LEFT: Dennis and Carol Teague returned to France with their three sons in 1983, following a hiatus for further education.

LEFT: Dennis preaches at the St. Sebastien church which he and Carol began.



PLANTING SEEDS

The Steve and Becky Riggs Story

What could be more natural than becoming a missionary when you grew up in the home of Raymond Riggs, considered by many to be “Mr. Foreign Missions” among Free Will Baptists? Steve Riggs and his wife Becky served a short term of service in France during the fall of 1980 and were appointed as career missionaries in May 1983. Following language study, the Riggs joined a mission team working in Lorient, France.

Steve and Becky continued in Lorient until 1989, when they teamed with Allan and LaRue Crowson and Charolette Tallent to work in Nantes, the largest city in Brittany. At the time Nantes sported a population of approximately 600,000 people and about 30,000 university students. The gospel message was completely foreign to most of the population. Steve assumed the pastoral role and utilized various programs of outreach, including Charolette’s ministry to university students and Allan’s teaching skills. Fruitful evangelism campaigns were also conducted in cooperation with Operation Mobilization in 1991, and the ministry team from the ship *Logos II* in 1995.

In 2001, as the church grew, Steve led the Nantes congregation to purchase a building. He sought assistance from former Nantes missionary John Murray as well as teams from Spain and the United States to refurbish it. The building was officially dedicated in February of 2003. Fittingly, “Mr. Foreign Missions” himself was on hand to preach the dedicatory message with son Steve translating for him.

Steve and Becky continue to serve faithfully in France. Working with French Christians, the couple seeks to plant new churches in towns surrounding Nantes—towns with no other outlet for the gospel.



ABOVE: Steve Riggs entertains missionary colleagues and MKs during a Christmas gathering.

LEFT: Becky Riggs teaches a children’s Sunday school class in Nantes.

FORGING NEW FRONTIERS

The Dan and Margaret Merkh Story

*I*t was a new frontier for Free Will Baptists, and Dan and Margaret Merkh headed the challenge. In 1965, the missions-minded couple with four years service in the Ivory Coast was commissioned to open the first Free Will Baptist work in Europe. More than 36,000 towns and villages in France lacked any regular gospel ministry. Most French people did not even own a Bible.



Once the Merkhs completed language school, they decided to begin their work in Nantes, because “it was more advantageously located to reach cities around the area.” They found a home just outside the city, secured legal permits to distribute gospel literature, and began the work of evangelizing an enormous community far removed from its Protestant heritage.

The Merkhs distributed literature, held home Bible studies, networked in the market, and prayed. They realized how much they needed God to not only to work in French hearts, but also to move Americans to answer the call to serve in France.

In time, they began the Nantes Free Will Baptist Church. Other missionary couples came to strengthen the work and encourage each other through the slow, tedious evangelism process. Slowly, relationship by relationship, the people of France began to respond. As the Nantes church grew, Dan began works in Rennes, St. Nazaire and later in Lorient, as well. Though the church in each city faced its own obstacles, God used the trials and persecutions to strengthen the new believers. His work continues today.

STUDENT HEART

The Charolette Tallent Story

*S*he often reminded herself, “Judge each day not by the harvest, but by the seeds we plant.” It was a quote that encouraged Charolette’s heart through the long, difficult evangelism efforts she made in a French culture that seemed impervious to truth.



Every once in a while, God reminded her of His hidden workings. University students to whom she witnessed and ministered for years would finally see the light. Slowly, God was adding to His kingdom. And Charolette acknowledged the other truth she learned: “God’s harvest often comes in His tomorrow and not our today.”

Charolette chose France as her ministry focus while serving as a student missionary in the summer of 1974. Later, she spent a year at the University of Rennes, working with Joe and Barbara Haas where her vision as a career missionary in France crystallized, and where she spent most of her time during her first term. Her second term led her to the port city of Lorient, where she teamed with Lynn and Ramona Miley and Jerry and Janice Webb. For the next two terms, Charolette worked with Allan and LaRue Crowson and Steve and Becky Riggs in Nantes, where she counseled and led university outreach.

After 20 years in France, Charolette felt God leading her back to the States. In 2008 Charolette joined the Mission staff, serving as the stateside manager for field operations—a role that combines her vast administrative skills and missions experience to assist new and current field personnel.

MAKE DISCIPLES

The Cathy Crawford Story



Ohio native Cathy Crawford was saved at age 13. Following a time of trial in 1973, she committed her life to Christ for missionary service. After graduating from Free Will Baptist Bible College in 1977, she spent seven months as a short-term missionary in France. Assured of God's leading, she applied for career missionary status and was appointed to France in April of 1982.



Following language study, Cathy spent a short time in a Child Evangelism Fellowship training program to enhance her abilities to evangelize children. Her first ministry in France was in the city of Nantes working with John and Pansy Murray. In 1989, she joined Dennis and Carol Teague in starting a new work in St. Sebastien, a suburb of Nantes. Personal evangelism, writing and distributing tracts, conducting Bible studies, counseling, and youth work keep her busy.

Cathy's efforts in personal evangelism and teaching individual Bible studies are particularly noteworthy. On one occasion she even invited a woman to live with her and study the Bible for a period of time shortly after her conversion. In 2009, Cathy joined missionaries Steve and Becky Riggs and Ledge and Sharon Ferguson in an effort to start a new work in Châteaubriant, France.

FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT

The Tom and Patty McCullough Story



When Tom and Patty McCullough volunteered for missionary service, they had no idea what difficulties they would face. Soon after their appointment and commissioning, Patty was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, yet they determined to answer God's call and received approval from doctors and the board to continue. The McCulloughs moved to France, attended the University of Rennes, and started a student ministry in addition to English Bible studies.



When Jerry and Barbara Gibbs left the field for stateside ministry in 1982, Tom and Patty moved to St. Nazaire and assumed the pastoral ministry of the church. Working with missionary Patsy Vanhook, Tom and Patty saw steady

growth. Patty suffered an attack of MS in December of 1985 which temporarily impaired vision in her right eye, yet she and Tom continued.

The church purchased property in 1987, and Jerry and Tom worked on preliminary plans before the Gibbs left for stateside deputation and fund-raising. Tom oversaw construction, and Jerry returned for a short trip, bringing a building crew. They finished the inside of the building in one week. Patty underwent cancer surgery in the States in November of 1991, and her health led to the couple's resignation in 1995. Her physical battles ended in 2004 when she met her Savior. Tom extended his ministry stateside by teaching missions at Free Will Baptist Bible College for several years and serving on the mission board.



ABOVE: Tom McCullough reads scripture to an ill elderly man.



ALLAN & LARUE CROWSON

transferred from Côte d'Ivoire, West Africa, to Nantes, France, in 1982. The Crowsons worked with the church in Nantes and were responsible for leadership training for French FWB churches. They resigned from missionary service in 1995 and are currently living in Tennessee.



DON & BILLIE SEXTON

(1971–1979) assisted in the Nantes church upon arrival in France then moved to Lorient to pastor the work there. During their second term they started a new work in Nantes. Due to health problems the Sextons did not return to the field after their second term. Don went home to be with the Lord in 1997, and Billie lives in East Tennessee.



K.C. & LIZ KOHN

were approved as career missionaries. Due to challenges of support-raising the Kohn's submitted their resignation never making it to the field.



STEVE & DONNA OLSON

were appointed as career missionaries in 2004. Unable to raise the needed funds, they submitted their resignation in 2007.



ROBERT & JUDY BRYAN

were approved in 1968 to work in Côte d'Ivoire. They transferred to France in 2004 to begin a ministry of leadership development. They currently assist in the St. Nazaire church.



LEDGEL & SHARON FERGUSON

began a support ministry in France in 2006. They are involved in personal evangelism, discipleship training, and concentrated, focused prayer. The Fergusons are currently involved in a new church-planting effort in Châteaubriant.



TIM & DI KEENER

began language study in 2003 and moved to Nantes in 2004. The Keeners are involved in planting a church in Couëron. In 2009, Tim was appointed to serve as regional director for Europe.

FAR RIGHT ABOVE: Joe Haas, Dan Merkh, "Mom" Willey, and J. Reford Wilson congregate with members of the Rennes FWB Church.
FAR RIGHT: John Murray poses with his bookmobile—a vehicle equipped to sell Bibles and Christian literature.



JOHN & PANSY MURRAY

were approved as career missionaries in 1977. They worked in Nantes where John led the people in renovating the church building. The Murrays took charge of the work in Nantes from 1979-1989. They currently reside in Tennessee.



MATT & CRISTINA PRICE

began their ministry in France at the Nantes FWB Church. Currently, they are working to plant a new church in Couëron and are involved in youth and children's ministries.



JERRY & JANICE WEBB

(1974-1984) assisted in starting a work in Nantes. During their second term they worked to reopen services in Lorient. The Webbs returned to the States in 1983 and submitted their resignation the following year.



LYNN & RAMONA MILEY

transferred from Côte d'Ivoire to France where they served in Lorient from 1980-1986. They reside in Alabama.



DAWN SWEENEY

was appointed in 1983 and served briefly in Lorient. She resigned in 1987 due to health issues.

