

Updates From Around the World

July 1, 2018

Pastor Scott Austin

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[Music Intro]

[Male voice] The following is a presentation of Artisan Church in Rochester, New York.

[Voice of Pastor Scott Austin]

Well this morning we have. A few different types of special sharing and for the first part of that I'd like to invite Carolyn and Ryan Klejment-Lavin come up. A lot of you know Carolyn and Ryan personally, but some of you only know them from seeing their faces on the little card that we have on the welcome table and from the emails that we we share of their news. So Carolyn and Ryan have been serving as missionaries in Asia from Artisan in one form or another for I don't know, how many years now? Seven years? Seven years now. And so they are here today to give us an update on how things are going, and I am going to get out of the way and let them do that. And I just changed the batteries [Indicates Microphone] so it should last through your whole thing.

[Voice of Carolyn Klejment-Lavin]

Hello, good morning church! So as Pastor Scott said we have been serving overseas for seven years now. And we initially, when we left we were serving in Indonesia. We were working with a relief and development organization there, and through our own experiences and the experiences of just other workers who we were there with, we noticed a real need for support of cross cultural workers in the region. It was just sort of under supported. And out of that came a vision to start a nonprofit organization that supports those who are working in cross cultural ministry in Asia. So that is what we're doing in South Korea now. The last time we were here was two and a half years ago, which is crazy. So a lot has changed for us, we have a new person! [Holds up infant] Had a nice Lion King moment there and. Let's see...I also finished my master's in counseling and then - because we need to constantly be in school - Ryan started his Ph D. in inter cultural studies. Also many of you may have known from the prayer list, I went through a lot of health issues with my liver. So while there was no miraculous healing those are under control through medicine now, which is a great answer to prayer. And our organization is growing a lot which Ryan's going to talk a little more about, and he'll talk a little more about what Footstool does.

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[Voice of Ryan Klejment-Lavin]

So....Footstool! We exist to be a base camp for missions to the 10/40 window which is the area between tenth degree latitude and forty degree latitude which is most of Asia. It is the most under-reached place in the world. A lot of closed countries where people cannot openly practice any religion. And it is also one of the most underserved, where people - where missionaries - actually don't go to serve because it is so difficult. And so in some senses, it's hard, it's the hard places. So we exist to support those serving in those hard places. We do this through four ways: So Footstool - I'm the director for Footstool, by the way, Carolyn is the member care coordinator, and we have three other people on staff with us, soon to be four, so we are growing. And we are located in Seoul, so we're actually in the middle of the ten forty window actually. Yeah so that's home, and this is Fin's first time to the US actually so he's been he's been loving the fries actually. Can't get enough of those fries. So at Footstool we do four things to support ministries and missionaries in Asia. The first is through training. We host different types of training events. As many of you know, Artisan was a church plant. How many years ago? Thirteen years ago, right? So actually one of the trainings we host, we actually have a lot of church planting trainings for people who are starting to plant churches. Because word is on the street - Scott can attest - maybe it's not easy. I don't know, that's what I've been told.

[laughter]

So we host something like that for trainings, and then training for people going into different ministries. The second thing we do is called Fiscal Sponsorship, where we actually have an online platform where people - donors - can give in the U.S. like with their credit card or Pay Pal who or whoever. And we're connected with a bunch of different ministries throughout Asia. So for example: we have one of our partners is an AIDS orphanage in Thailand, and so people give to us online and we actually send the money over. We have, like, crisis pregnancy centers, we have ministry we support with people with girls coming out of sex trafficking, churches, all sorts of different organizations that people can give to us and we end up sending the money to them. So it's a way to connect these ministries that are doing good work, justice work, ministry work, with funding. The third thing that we do is called networking. Which is we just host, like, networking meetings for different people in the same ministry. For example, you can have two homeless ministries working in the same city, you know, major city in Asia, and they don't know each other at all. So we try to get everybody in the same room, you know we throw meals, so free food, people come. And then ministries and these organizations start to meet and they're able to actually coordinate together, so it's really, really a beautiful thing. And then the fourth thing we do is called Member Care, which is offering counseling services for those serving in these hard places because a lot of these people are alone. They can't even speak

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openly. We have a lot of friends serving in places like North Korea and China and they can't they can't even communicate with each other freely while they're in there. So there's a big need for people to have a space to process. So that's one of the things we do. Carolyn is our on staff counsellor. So those are the four main ways that we try to do our ministry.

Coming up this the rest of this year, we have some exciting things coming up. We have a new family joining us. They're raising support right now, and they're going to come live with us in August. And then they're going to be joining our team. And then we have, this is actually really cool, as all of you guys know North Korea's been in the news lately. It's always in the news, right? But we have, we're helping to co-host a summit in Seoul called Kairos. The Kairos summit - Kairos is a Greek word in the Bible for like, a specific moment, like a special God moment - and we're saying this is a Kairos moment. So we're trying to get workers from North Korea, church leaders, people who are interested from around the world all together to say what can the church do to engage North Korea in this time? Through justice work, through missions work, what what can the church actually do right now. So that's coming up in July. So that will be very exciting for us and then we have a lifestyle Missionary Training co-hosting with an organization called The Tribe in October. With the idea that not everybody is called to be a full time minister, and people can minister, or be salt and light wherever they are. So we want to just have a training that kind of, like, unpackages that for the lay person. And then we have our next Member Care Retreat which Carolyn will talk about because you may have heard about our Member Care Retreat which is kind of like the the one of the really big things we do.

[Voice of Carolyn Klejment-Lavin]

So like I was saying people that are serving in this area of the world are really under resourced and they're also in these really hard places. Like, a lot of people are actually - they're not with organizations because of the sensitive areas they're in. So they're really just completely on their own. So what we do, every year now, is we do a Member Care Retreat which is just a space for those who are working in these regions in Asia to come. It's completely free for them. They can receive plenary sessions, they can receive counseling, just really be encouraged to learn self care behaviors. We have chiropractors, and do manicures, and haircuts, and just really love on these people, offer them a space to process to be cared for to be loved on. To really encourage them as they go back to their work. And it's yeah, it's totally free but it is a humongous undertaking that we do. We get a lot of volunteers, and so already we have to start working on that because of just the size of it. So that is, yeah, that's the Member Care Retreat and that will be in January, we do that every January.

[Voice of Ryan Klejment-Lavin]

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So if you guys could be praying for us, specifically for some of these things we mentioned: our team coming, our team growing, please be praying because you know, team dynamics when you add a new group in and we're small team so adding one family actually changes the dynamics quite a bit, and then for the Kairos summit. Praying that it goes well, but also for security which is very important for these events, in anything dealing with with North Korea. And finally, if you could be praying for our Member Care Retreat, because we have to raise about thirty five thousand dollars and we have to get a lot of volunteers who are who are, we kind of crash course train them to run this retreat so... Oh yeah, for us too! Yeah a good lot of good stuff, but we're kind of exhausted and these are two reasons why were exhausted. [gestures to young children on stage] Reason number three might be the PhD decision - which might have been a bad decision and ambitious. A little over ambitious, and then that and then obviously the ministry and everything. So yeah if you could pray for us, that we would have a good work life balance and be able to find places to rest. So thank you for all your support guys, we love you, we love Artisan. [hands microphone to hesitant young child]

[Voice of young child] THANK YOU.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

OK so could we pray for you in the room now? Would some of our Carolyn and Ryan's friends come around them and if you are a new friend of Carolyn and Ryan you could come around them as well. And I'm going to ask Del Ippolito, one of our leadership team members, to offer prayer for Carolyn Ryan and their family.

[Voice of Del Ippolito]

Father, thank you so much for the way in which you invite us to do good in the world. Thank you for Carolyn, Ryan, Finn, and Noah, and for giving them this vision of supporting those who do work in places that are hard. But I also think about them, and who supports the supporters. And so we pray Lord for them. We pray for the good work life balance. We pray for the upcoming Member Care Retreat that they're in charge of, and we ask that you would raise the funds for them. And we also ask that you would help them to train the volunteers well. We thank you that you've given both Ryan and Carolyn a mind for learning. And so I just asked that you would be with him in particular with his PhD program and in discerning how fast and hard to go with it. And Lord finally I pray for Carolyn's health. Thank you that medication is working, and I just pray for ongoing stability with the meds and that she would be well enough to continue to counsel missionaries that come to her for that safe space. And finally Lord thank you so much again for bringing them here and to remind us that you are all over the world

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doing service through people like Ryan and Carolyn. And we ask that you would be with them in Jesus name amen.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

So Carolyn and Ryan one more question. If you do accept like, financial support from individuals as well as churches? Right, so the church is supporting you, but you know, you do accept gifts if an individual wanted support you on their own? Can you tell individuals in the room how they might do that?

[Voice of Ryan Klejment-Lavin]

Yeah if you want to support us financially we actually do it online and have support cards that we will leave... anywhere? We'll leave them with Scott or on the welcome table up there and on them there is a link for where to support us. And then if you want to take it to just to pray for us too please please do that because we love the prayer.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

All right thank you so much. I can't believe - you said seven years and the church, this church, is thirteen and a half years old which means that for more than half of our life you have been sent out from from here which is astonishing to me that it's worked out that way. So our next update is going to come from Elliot and Anna Vos. Elliot and Anna were our delegates at the Annual Meeting of our denomination the E.C.C.. Evangelical Covenant Church is our denomination, you may hear us say E.C.C. , you may hear us say covenant, but they all work. But they have an annual meeting every year and because we're congregational it governs. The votes of them the member churches are how things are get get decided and so we sent two delegates which is the maximum we can send for the size of our membership. Anna and Elliot were our delegates and I wanted to have them - and if I can pitch in too because I was there - give a little bit of a report from that experience and so you can kind of know what's happening in the in our broader family of churches. So I want to start with this question which is: what were some...let's say this: What is an awesome ministry that our denomination is doing that people might not know about? Maybe that you didn't even know about and so you went and heard a report about it at the annual meeting? Who'd like to answer?

[Voice of Elliot Vos]

So. If you were around last year when we came back you might have heard us talk about the Bezalel Project that "Love mercy do justice" - one of the mission priorities of the ECC - and they're rehabbing houses to make them affordable homes in Dalton, Illinois and a

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neighborhood in Detroit, and I think they're expanding as well. But you know, that ministry is still going very well they're hiring people who need jobs in the area and in providing affordable houses for people who need housing. That's an exciting project that we learned about last year, but the "Love mercy do justice" mission priority is actually doing a lot of good work a lot of different interesting projects. And we did hear a talk from somebody who was in Minneapolis where they found that a lot of public school children were stealing food from the school so that they wouldn't go hungry over the weekend, and they were coming in to school on Monday completely unable to concentrate because they were starving. And so some of the churches got together to actually donate food and discretely provide food to students who were going hungry. And that was a pretty moving talk, and that was just one part of it.

[Voice of Anna Vos]

It's gone from one church helping one school to, I think, one hundred eighty churches in the greater Minneapolis area helping, like, one hundred eighty schools. So really really good work.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

So what were some of the highlights for you of just being there in the Twin Cities area, people that you met? There is a lot of awesome people in our denomination, or a fun time you had.

[Voice of Anna Vos]

Yeah I think so, if you were fortunate enough to come to the Enneagram workshop, we got to hang out with Kristen Throckmorton a little bit, she lives out in Minneapolis, and meet some of the fantastic people who she goes to church with. Her pastor is just ordained and their church was officially, like, welcomed into the covenant. So that was really exciting just to see their hard work pay off. And then also to make connections, I mean there's like you said there's tons of really amazing people out there, we actually did.... just to remind you you're not allowed to move to Minneapolis!

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

So this became a running joke for us because like, all of my closest colleague friends live in the Twin Cities area. And I literally could have gone to five different churches on Sunday when I was in Minneapolis last week, and I had to decide which one to go to and like well if I had more time out here I could I'd love to, you know, visit all these churches and and then they scolded me so I would stay here.

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[Voice of Elliot Vos]

Yes and we made a lot of connections, spent a lot of time with people from other churches who are inclusive and working for bettering LGBTQ inclusion in the covenant. So it was great to make some face to face connections with a lot of those people kind of in and around the meeting itself. There were a couple of opportunities for us to gather and commiserate and plan and think about how we can support each other.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

You know so that's what I want to transition to actually, so it's a great segue. One of the things that's on everybody's mind, in our denomination and in our congregation going into this meeting was questions about human sexuality of particularly LGBTQ inclusion. And this is in part because we, as a local church, have articulated a policy of inclusion that places us a little bit outside the mainstream of the Covenant in some ways. And also because the entire denomination is kind of in a struggle about this topic right now. And so what would you like to report about any or all of that?

[Voice of Elliot Vos]

Yes. So, I mean, if you were following along with any of the updates that I've been posting or if you happened to look around you may have seen some news that that might have gotten you discouraged. But I would say, as a quick recap, there were probably almost three times as many people at this meeting as normal, and there was a lot of anticipation that there would be discussion or votes on the topic of sexuality, or around a couple pastors who had been suspended, or a church that is there in the process of you know, questioning whether this church should get kicked out and what not. All of the questions about clergy and that church have been deferred. There was no action on on any of those people or churches at this meeting. There were two clergy that had been suspended, one of whom spoke here, Judy Peterson. She had been suspended and she's now mostly, somewhat restored. She can do ministry - she's kind of like on probation or something, I don't know, they're making stuff up as they go. So none of that actually happened at the meeting itself, but there was a motion presented at the beginning of the meeting. A motion to amend - this is parliamentary stuff, but - a motion to amend the agenda, to discuss a motion. Yeah to create a task force to discuss the topic of sexuality and provide a recommendation for the *next* meeting. This one, this particular task force I think was for one year. And there was discussion on whether to amend the agenda and eventually did get voted down. By a about two thirds to one third. So it was disappointing to hear that so many people in the cabinet did not want to talk about this. They felt that this issue was closed twenty years ago and whatnot. But on the other hand there was a third of the

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people there who were willing to try and keep the discussion going. And so we're trying to... I say we... Mission Friends for Inclusion is the organization that I'm on the board of as well. Is trying to, you know, galvanize that third of people who want to keep talking. And this is a a long... a long thing. It's not working out now, this isn't going to be settled, you know, this year, next year but there is a strong minority of people who do want to keep this discussion going and aren't ready to close the books twenty years ago, and and so I found that discouraging and yet still somewhat encouraging.

[Voice of Anna Vos]

I think one of the a couple of the good things that came out of that too ,and I should say to you it's very easy to feel discouraged in fact I was like literally having a panic attack that morning while we were listening to all these things, because some people were in fact discussing the benefits of adding something to the agenda and some people were just discussing the benefits of or you know the fact that we shouldn't be discussing this at all because of X. Y. or Z. their opinion or interpretation of the Bible. So it very quickly became not just a discussion of like procedure or should we add this or not. It was very much like there was there was some anger and fear palpable, I think, in the room. But it did allow to give a time at the mic for some people to speak and tell stories that maybe someone had never, you know, met an LGBTQ person and now there's a person here as a delegate who's speaking and telling their story so I think that was it that was good. I think we also eventually found out too that there were some people who were like oh well this is not an appropriate venue for this kind of discussion. But it turns out this is how they want us to have these discussions and so we were able to have some good conversation. Elliot, mostly, was able to have some good conversations with people who just didn't realize that this is the kind of thing that the annual meeting should even be taking up.

[Voice of Elliot Vos]

And I also want to add that you know, that that's what happened during the meeting itself, but there was a lot of opportunity outside the meeting where we had a lot of one on one conversations with people that were beneficial and I think planted seeds in some people's hearts. You know many of us were there - there was one woman there who whose wife came out as trans last year and she was talking she held a sign that said "Ask me about my surprise same sex marriage" and and some other things and she had some very good conversations with people and and yeah I think it was a very fruitful time.

As well there was there was also - there were several important elections that happened while we were there. The first woman president was called to North Park University. And the first African American pastor was called to be or elected to be the executive minister of the order of

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ministries. So, the person in charge of the ministerium and oversee a couple other things related to clergy in the denomination.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

And the first African-American woman superintendent, yes, happens to be Dominique Dubois Gilliard's mother, Catherine Gilliard, that was pretty cool.

[Voice of Elliot Vos]

Yeah and I think I would say to that Executive Minister in Charge of the Ministerium, you know we had some several really good conversations with him where he's coming from a traditional position but he has an open heart for justice and I believe that you know we're we're... we're having good conversations with him and challenging him on some things and he's hearing us and so I think things are going well.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

One of the highlights for me this week, and you both were at this event, was on Wednesday night I got to meet with some of the leadership of Genesis Covenant Church, the church that Anna mentioned a minute ago, whose pastor got ordained. And which church was formally adopted into the covenant and they're a church that wants to do something like we have done - which is publish an inclusion statement. And they wanted our wisdom on how we did that in a way that allowed us to be quite broadly inclusive without placing us out of harmony with our denomination entirely. And as you know if you've been part of this story with us, that was a quite a long and arduous process for us. So to be able to share with them the gift of describing that process and where, you know, things pitfalls to avoid and steps to take and that kind of stuff was really wonderful. And so that's a gift, in a way, that all of you gave to Genesis Covenant Church and they are deeply grateful let me tell you. They were effusive in their thanks. So the fact that we have gone down this road together as a congregation is a way that we can serve sister churches, sibling churches in the covenant so that was a real highlight and a special time for me, and to have you both there with me at that was awesome too. Alright so let's say thank you the Vos family because it was a big imposition on their lives.

[Voice of Elliot Vos]

Thank you! Thank you all of you make it possible for us to go and especially to Aaron and Sarah Sevedge who watched our kids all almost the entire time and several others who came to help out.

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[Voice of Pastor Scott]

So in closing before we come to Communion, I want to read one of today's lectionary passages. Today we've been a little lighter on scripture than we should be for a Christian worship gathering, but we've had lots of updates to give. And this is the passage from the book of Lamentations. The book of Lamentations a set of poems in the Jewish Bible - what we call the Old Testament - about the destruction of Jerusalem. If you know the history of the region, the Babylonians came through and conquered basically everybody in the sixth century. Late six century, and five eighty six B.C. was the fall of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was of course the holy city and the center of religious understanding and community life for the entire religion of Judaism and for the entire people of Israel. And the temple was destroyed and they were entirely displaced. And I know that some of you have had your entire religious center displaced by one thing or another. Maybe it was a life crisis, maybe it was a faith crisis. Maybe it was a terrible experience you had in church, maybe it was coming to understand that the way you have understood faith isn't going to work for you anymore. That is over and your Jerusalem has been destroyed. And so you could read the whole book of Lamentations and probably find a lot of ways to commiserate and to have the ancient people commiserate with you in some means as well. It's not a happy book, it's called Lamentations - that's a hint. It is in some places quite hopeless and bleak but I know that some of you feel that your life is quite hopeless and bleak right now and I think it's actually incredibly beautiful that the Scriptures give us something like this to read in times like that. That the inspired authoritative biblical text handed down to us from generations before from the church gives us something like that... it's not - and I don't want to go too far with this we're almost done - it's not the kind of thing that you would include in the Bible if you were trying to put together the collection of spiritual writings that would be most convincing to people who don't share your religious beliefs that they should share your religious beliefs, right? Wouldn't you choose books that were like "Come to God and everything will be fine and your temple will never be destroyed"? But that's not true, it's not reality. And I think it's a great gift to us that this is in the Scriptures is what I'm trying to say. So it is bleak but there are there are glimmers of hope within and that's what I want to do right now, because I want those of you who feel hopeless and bleak to receive this glimmer of hope and understand that it comes from a book that not all sunshine and roses. OK this is in the middle of the whole book of Lamentations. This is what it says. [Lamentations 3: 22-33]

22 The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,

his mercies never come to an end;

23 they are new every morning;

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great is your faithfulness.

24 “The Lord is my portion,” says my soul,

“therefore I will hope in him.”

25 The Lord is good to those who wait for him,

to the soul that seeks him.

26 It is good that one should wait quietly

for the salvation of the Lord.

27 It is good for one to bear

the yoke in youth,

28 to sit alone in silence

when the Lord has imposed it,

29 to put one’s mouth to the dust

(there may yet be hope),

30 to give one’s cheek to the smiter,

and be filled with insults.

31 For the Lord will not

reject forever.

32 Although he causes grief, he will have compassion

according to the abundance of his steadfast love;

33 for he does not willingly afflict

or grieve anyone.

This is the word of the Lord for you this morning, thanks be to God. I'd like to invite you now, if you'd like, to come and receive Holy Communion. We offer communion and celebrate communion every Sunday when we are together. And it's an open table. All who are seeking to

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follow Jesus in this place are invited to participate. You don't have to be a member of our church or of any church. We practice intinction which simply means you take a piece of the bread and you dip it in one of the cups. We have regular bread, gluten free bread, we have juice, we have wine. Use whichever is the combination that works best for you and as you come may it be food for your hungry souls. May it be the real presence of Jesus. An act of remembering his body and his blood broken and shed for you. May it be an act of unity with each other, with all those covenant churches around the world, and with all the Christians throughout history who have celebrated the sacrament that unites us as one. If you prefer not to take communion that's fine nobody will look sideways at you. You can sit and think or ponder pray. If you would like to receive personal prayer there will be a member of the prayer team in the back of the room who'd be happy to pray with you in this time. We're going to sing a couple songs together, the first one is a new communion song that Doug and Crystal have brought to us, I encourage you to sing it as you catch the melody. Let's continue to worship God in song at the table and in prayer. Amen.

[end of sermon]

[Male voice] For more information visit us at ArtisanChurch.com