



A Fond Farewell, But Not Going Far ...



When I accepted the call of God and the Free Methodist Church to lead International Child Care Ministries, I could never have imagined the joyful journey I was about to begin. Eleven years later, my memories are expansive and glorious! My travels have brought me to exotic lands, beautiful cultures, teeming cities pulsing with life, and, most of all, precious people whom I will always love and never forget. ICCM is in my heart and mind forever. I've been delighted by and loved children in more than 30 countries!

On July 17, I was honored and deeply humbled to be elected as one of three new bishops in the FMCUSA.

For several months, I had been prayerfully submitting to whatever decision would be made, ready to receive it as God's will for my life. I have to admit, those months were bittersweet, as I considered the possibility that I would need to hand over "my baby" to another director. That day has come — yet I couldn't be more pleased.

It is now my high honor and deep joy to announce the appointment of Rev. Alma Thompson as director of ICCM. Alma and her husband Brent serve as co-superintendents of the Ohio Conference of the FMC. Brent will continue as superintendent; Alma will begin as ICCM director this month.

Rev. Alma is a graduate of Houghton College (NY) and was ordained as a Free Methodist elder in the Genesis Conference in 2004. She has served as a pastor and also a missionary to Honduras. She and Brent are parents of a mixed-ethnicity family formed through foster care and adoption.

Anyone who has heard Alma preach knows that she's a passionate communicator. She's also a strategic leader and an outstanding developer of people. She's known as a creative mentor and community networker. Her life is always and intentionally cross-cultural.

Behind the scenes, Alma fills her life with neighborhood children. You'll see some of their pictures on page 2 of this newsletter. On the day I called Alma to see whether she would be interested in being considered for this position, she asked me to hold the phone while she answered the door. "It's several neighborhood kids; I invited them over to bake a cake."

On her application form, when asked "Tell us how you would view this job as ministry," she wrote, "Ahh ... what clearer ministry could there possibly be?!" and listed several Bible verses, including Jesus' words, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (*Matthew 18:3*).





The World in My Backyard

Alma Thompson, new ICCM Director

“You can live wherever you want,” they said when they offered us the co-superintendency.

We weren’t yet familiar with the state of Ohio. In the interest of utilizing conference resources well, I asked, “Is there an empty parsonage anywhere?”

Indeed there was — in the middle of 700+ apartment units, “... fields, ripe for the harvest!” We hung a tire swing and set up our Honduras hammock. Pretty soon, children came. Like sweet bees to honey.

“This is a place where we’re learning

to live and love like Jesus,” we say.

We pray this prayer:

May we always keep in mind that all good things of every kind are loving gifts which come from Thee to be shared most willingly.

By the end of the first summer, I had recorded the names, ages and family connections of more than 100 children and teens who had come through “Miss Alma’s Yard,” as it became known.

A microcosm of the world:

- ◆ Muslim, Christian, Hindu, no connection

- ◆ English, Spanish, Swahili, Nepali, Mandingo
- ◆ Snacks, games, bikes, swings, books, hammocks, homework
- ◆ Arguments, fights, gangs, lying, drugs, razor blades, cheating, stealing
- ◆ Learning: kindness with what we say, and what we do ... working it out with words.
- ◆ Stories of Jesus: His love stronger than hate. His life stronger than death. His light stronger than darkness.

And one by one, these children of the world are learning to follow Jesus. All in my backyard.