



### **Why is March Multi-Cultural Month?**

When we consider that we are specifically instructed to make disciples of all nations, we all must be obedient. This year, I join the efforts of Outreach North America and name March as Multi-cultural Emphasis Month. Below are devotions for every day in March to help our denomination turn our focus toward prayer for our friends from other cultures.

*"And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:30-31)*

By God's Grace,  
Phil Williams, Synod Moderator

### **March 8 Rev. David Vance Deut. 10:18-19**

*God loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.*

There are many refugees in the Bible. For some, it was because of famine, as with Jacob and his sons. For others, it was displacement in wartime, like Jeremiah. Still others had to flee violence in their own land, like Joseph, Mary, and Jesus who fled for refuge in Egypt to escape a murderous tyrant. We are often reminded that it was hard to live as refugees in a foreign land apart from the extended family, which also functioned as the support, welfare, and hospital system of the day. Refugees typically started a new life with only what they could

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carry. Such “strangers” were almost never liked anywhere in the history of the world. Not all strangers were refugees, of course, but all refugees were strangers. Yet, what is God’s heart toward such? It is love, a love that issues in practical care.

"God loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore love the stranger..." (Deut.10:18-19). God’s people were to learn God’s heart by loving and caring for strangers too. For example, the families of Israel were to forsake some of their income and welcome the strangers into their fields to reap the corners and glean (Lev. 19:10; 23:22; Deut. 24:19-22; Ruth). They would be given a portion of the third-year tithe (Deut. 14:23-29; 26:12-13), a fair wage on time (Deut. 24:14-15), and a proper Sabbath-day’s rest (Exod. 20:10; 23:12; Deut. 5:14). There was one law for citizens and foreigners alike (Deut. 1:16-17; 24:17-18; 27:19), and there were special provisions for them in times of hunger (Lev. 19:9-10; Deut. 14:28-29; 24:19-22). God frequently warned the people and the rulers not to turn away from them or oppress them. "I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, against adulterers ... and against those who turn away an alien—because they do not fear me" (Mal. 3:5). If such people converted, the Torah describes how they could worship and join the congregation of Israel; but even if not, the heathen stranger was to be lovingly provided food and clothing, work and rest, justice and mercy among the people of God.

God’s people are to have special sympathy for the stranger’s situation, remembering that we were strangers. To Israel, God said, "Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Deut. 10:19). Similarly, Peter reminds us that we ourselves now live as strangers in a strange land (1 Pet. 2:11, Phil. 3:20; Heb. 13:14; Eph. 2:11-22). As we consider the plight of refugees today, let us remember that we are all refugees, those who have left, as Bunyan put it, the city of “Destruction” where we were born and have fled take refuge in Christ Jesus our Lord. "We ... have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus" (Heb. 6:18-20).

### **March 9**

**Erik Meberg, World Witness Muslim Ministry Coordinator**  
**Acts 17:26-27**

*And [God] marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from any one of us.*

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In addressing the people in Athens, Paul underscores that it is the Lord who sovereignly establishes the times and places for all people. This is seemingly obvious, but Paul attaches an incredibly significant reason for this fact: the salvation of all peoples. Our Lord is still at work today in moving people across borders and oceans so that they may have the opportunity to hear the gospel. How amazing!

Recently I spoke to a group of Bulgarian Turks living in France being served by a South African missionary. Truly, our world today is multicultural and increasingly interconnected. We can either see this as a threat to our comfort, or as Paul did: a God-ordained opportunity. Laurie and I have seen firsthand how ARP and World Witness affiliated churches in Turkey, Germany, Scotland, and America have cared for refugees and unreached peoples in their communities. This was because God had already strategically equipped and placed His people to share the love of Christ.

As we look at the immigrants and refugees coming into our communities from all around the world, let us remember that it is ultimately God who is bringing them to our doorsteps. And He is doing it so that they may seek Him and find Him – even through you!

### **March 10**

**Rev. Frank Van Dalen**

**2 Corinthians 5:20 – 21**

*We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

“Ambassadors” – the word conjures up the idea of a powerful man standing before a foreign power and delivering a message that is listened to carefully because it might change the course of history.

But, if you consider many missionaries who have been sent as emissaries of Christ, you might think that Paul's description of them as “ambassadors” is inappropriate. John the Baptist “*wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey*” (Mark 1:6). Simon and his brother Andrew were fishermen (Mark 1:16). Most missionaries do not impress the world.

Furthermore, when Paul refers to himself as an ambassador, he is actually in prison. He asks the Ephesian church to “*pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains*” (Ephesians 6:19,

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20). An “ambassador in chains” is hardly a positive image to describe the missionary outreach work of the Church.

And yet, Paul has a purpose in using the term, “ambassador.” What does that image tell us about the work and life of a missionary?

The key word here is “reconciled.” Paul had been given a “ministry of reconciliation.” His message is simple but life-transforming. The conflict between God and man can be healed, and the relationship can be restored. And so Paul appeals to us “*on Christ’s behalf.*” For it is through Christ and Christ alone that we can be reconciled to the Father in heaven. “*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved*” (Acts 4: 12).

This is what you must sincerely commit to if you are to be an effective ambassador for Christ. Your service is to Him. Your message is about Him. He is your reason for serving in this role. He is your resource for the task He has given you. May the Lord give you the privilege of being His ambassadors to the world that needs Him.

**March 11**  
**Jonathan Cowan**  
**Isaiah 19:23-25**

*In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, “Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance.”*

So often we assume that mission began with the book of Acts. But as Isaiah and Jonah reveal, God has always been concerned with the nations. Egypt and Assyria were two oppressive superpowers. Egypt had enslaved Israel and murdered their infants. In Isaiah’s day, Assyria was invading and threatening Judah’s sovereignty. Yet God declared, through Isaiah, that these hated nations along with Israel would be a blessing. With these words we are reminded of God’s inclusive promise to the nations through Abraham. Abraham and His descendants would be a blessing to all the nations. We know through scripture that this is fulfilled in Jesus. Ephesians 2 declares it is through Christ that Jews and Gentiles are made into one body.

We live in a day where ethnicity and nationalism still create strong divides. God’s intent has always been one people united through His Son; one people from every tribe, language, people, and nation worshipping the one true God (Rev. 5:9). Why is multicultural ministry important? Why should churches strive to overcome ethnic and cultural barriers? Why should you desire to reach out to the immigrant across the street? Because that has always been the Lord’s intent. God’s people are brought into unity not by our ethnicity or nationalism, but by the

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unity of the Holy Spirit given to us through faith in Christ. One body united by one head, Christ Jesus our Lord. Will we obey our great and exalted King and declare His glory to all we meet regardless of race, language, or culture?

**March 12**  
**Rev. Heiko Burklin**  
**Revelation 7:9-10**

*After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"*

Have you wondered lately what the Lord is doing? The ongoing crisis in the Middle East and especially the continued war of attrition and violence in Syria is causing many to wonder how this brutality and inhumanity gels with the sovereignty of God. Words fail to describe the viciousness of warring factions and we cannot comprehend the callousness of those who are bent on destruction. There are no easy answers, but this we continue to affirm: God is sovereign, He is in charge, and He is not surprised.

So, what is He up to? Could it possibly be that the Lord is using these events, these massive movements of people, to bring many unreached people groups to a place where they can hear the gospel, perhaps for the very first time? Many of these refugees, running from war, violence and serious threats to their very existence, are running **from** "closed" countries (where no pastor or missionary is allowed to enter legally) and making their way **into** regions or countries where the gospel can be freely proclaimed.

Our hope is that these tortured image-bearers of God and famished souls will be welcomed by openhearted and compassionate followers of Jesus, who share God's love and are prepared to help them with their unimaginable array of needs. Let's not forget that from start to finish, the Bible talks about taking care of the sojourner, the refugee, the poor, and the forsaken. As believers in Jesus Christ, we should welcome refugees, love them, minister to them for the sake of the gospel so that the prophetic culmination in Revelation will indeed be realized: "*from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.*" This includes people from the Middle East and other Muslim countries. God is doing some neat stuff. ARP, let's be part of it.

**March 13**  
**Rev. Jac Coad**

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### **Psalm 133:1**

*Behold, how good a thing it is and how becoming well together such as brethren – in unity to dwell.*

Who would have imagined the joys and blessings that have come into my life through helping to plant and establish the Tampa Chinese Presbyterian Church? I became pastor of Trinity ARP Church in Tampa in 2004. About ten years previously, five grown Taiwanese siblings and their families joined Trinity and were active in the life of the church. With the strong support of Pastor Probes, Trinity's session, and the congregation, we started a service in Mandarin. The group was organized as a mission of Florida Presbytery, and we called Junjian 'Jeff' Liu to be Trinity's Associate Pastor to do mission developer work with the Chinese church.

The mission church grew from attendance in the 30's to 80's within one and a half years. Many of these were new converts. I assisted with the baptism of a retired communist official and his wife who were visiting their family. In his testimony, the new believer commented how impressed he was that one of our young deacons would come out to their car with an umbrella during a downpour and assist this couple into the church.

There have, of course, been some difficulties. But the joys so outweigh any hardships. I could tell you examples of sticking my cultural foot in my mouth (but I won't), and vice versa. Instead, let me relate the beauty of our annual combined Christmas worship service, joint picnics, combined Sunday school classes and Vacation Bible School. The daughter church has grown to a sister church. And the associate pastor that I was supposed to mentor is now my close associate and friend.

### **March 14**

**Jeffrey Allers, World Witness Missionary, Berlin, Germany**

### **1 Peter 3:15**

*But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.*

When observing current events, we might feel that the world is becoming increasingly hostile to Christianity, and perhaps personal experience even confirms this. In Berlin, an extremist Muslim attacked a Christmas market, while many atheists condemned all religions as sources of extremist violence. And even in our more tolerant circles of friends and acquaintances, our beliefs are

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shrugged off as comforting fairy tales or something that “must be nice for you.” Some of us might be tempted to invest our energy in trying to change the world in order to make Christianity more culturally accepted.

The Apostle Peter, however, knew that following Christ would always be counter-culture. He experienced opposition to the gospel first-hand from the very beginning, and he knew how to respond to it, because he had Jesus himself as his role model, the One who “humbled himself...taking the form of a servant.”

When we are put on the defensive, our instinct is either “fight or flight.” However, Peter tells us that we are to always be prepared to give a defense, as that is a vital part of sanctifying Christ as our Lord. Flight is not an option.

Neither is fighting the correct alternative. The passage does not call on us to argue with non-Christians on social media, nor to become more vocal in the so-called “culture wars,” but instead to give our answers with “reverence and respect” towards both those who would attack us and with those who might genuinely be open to listen.

We are to take the moral high ground, even when we find ourselves under verbal or physical attack, resisting “fight or flight” instincts, embracing suffering and injustice for our Lord’s sake, and following His example of love and humility in the face of opposition.