



Taste & See

Vision Trips give young adults a close-up and personal look at cross-cultural ministry overseas.

Photographs by Natasha Schmale

In late summer 2009, Jessica Dempster, the 27-year-old Eastern Canada co-ordinator for Wycliffe Canada's NextGen Ministries department, took six young adults to South Asia for three weeks. They were participating in a Vision Volunteer Work Trip, an excursion she has led several times. Word Alive Editor Dwayne Janke asked Jessica about these life-changing experiences.

How did these Vision Volunteer Work trips originate?

The trips were really born out of one of the most common questions that students ask, "What exactly does Bible translation look like overseas?" I am convinced one of the best ways to find out is actually to go and see the lives that are being transformed by the gospel as it is being translated. My personal journey into involvement in the Bible translation movement included trips like these, and when I joined the NextGen team in 2007, I hoped that we would be able to facilitate young adult-focused overseas trips.

King David exhorted us to "taste and see that the Lord is good"—there is something that is compelling, real and important about experience. We as the younger generation of the 21st century rely as heavily on experience as we do on information as a way of knowing and determining reality. So this becomes a critical factor in deciding to take students overseas to gain experience and to "taste and see that the Lord is good" in the context of global ministry.

Why do you think it is an important program?

When a participant is faced not just with stories, but also with real-time, real-life involvement in new culture, and has the opportunity to witness the social, economic and spiritual transformation that is taking place in language communities, Bible translation is not just an idea or an ideal, but it becomes alive and personal. In this context, decisions about personal participation in the global Bible translation movement take on new life and often beg some kind of involvement.

The focus of these trips is not to just "do" and to assume that in a few weeks we can actually do anything incredibly significant for the field. But we can be honest about the fact that we can learn, understand, see, catch vision and consider what our

More On The Web: For more information on Wycliffe Canada Vision Trips, visit <www.wycliffe.ca/nextgen/> or email <jessica_dempster@wycliffe.ca>.

response to the global Bible translation movement is. The focus post-trip then does not become what we accomplished while we were overseas or sharing

with others what we did. But rather it becomes a focus on what our continuing involvement should be and sharing the vision we caught with others.



(Previous two-page spread) Participants in the Summer 2009 Vision Volunteer Work Trip to South Asia, tried traditional dancing with a group of tribal people. (Above) Six young adult Vision trippers were able to see firsthand how Wycliffe's fieldwork operates in association with a local agency to start mother tongue language schools and preserve community traditions and customs. Children, here being read to by their teacher, learn their own language so they can become literate in the national language. Said Sarah Barnes, from Moncton, New Brunswick: "I saw how much this helps people's self image—giving them self confidence about themselves versus when they couldn't read because they did not even have a written language prior to translation."



Aaron Slabysz, the 28-year-old co-leader on the trip, greeted several men in the Bethlehem Church congregation, after a brief service where Aaron gave a short message of encouragement to the believers in the South Asian village. The 150 church members have endured persecution, a church burning and beatings from family and surrounding community members who adhere to Buddhism. One family fled their home 18 times to avoid the wrath of relatives angry about conversion.



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Jessica Dempster, team leader of the Vision Trip, gets some pointers from a Presbyterian church leader on how to wield a large knife to split open a coconut. Jessica (Eastern Canada co-ordinator for Wycliffe Canada's NextGen Ministries) and the team were presented with fruit and flowers following the church service. Though the villagers wished they could give more to the group, such simple gifts provided the Vision team with opportunities to interact with the local people despite a language barrier.

"My heart felt overwhelmed by the poverty," said Meghan Peacock, a member of a previous Vision Trip team. "It was only towards the end of the journey [in the South Asia nation we visited] that I realized the country is not as poor as I think it is. It is rich with God's love. The hospitality and friendliness that the people shared with me was incredible."



While Vision Trip members spend considerable time in small, isolated villages, they also experience the hustle and bustle of large urban centres, where rickshaws carry them over some of the many hundreds of kilometres they travel during their three-week overseas visit. Exposure to daily life and culture, which the visitors would face if they served with Wycliffe in Bible translation projects overseas, is an integral part of the insightful trip experience.

How do you see the Vision trips fitting into the overall ministry of Wycliffe Canada and its NextGen Ministries?

In our ministry of mobilizing this student generation to take seriously the mandate of the Church to go into all the world, and share the love and healing of Christ, we find it to be an extraordinary opportunity to actually be a firsthand witness and participant in this enterprise!

For example, you can *know* that there are 40 language communities in a country that need Scripture translation and language advocacy. But when you actually visit one of these communities, you can no longer just *know* the facts. The facts become personal and life transformative. You meet the people; eat rice and dhal with them. You sit under mango trees watching village women crowd together with their pencils and workbooks, learning how to read and write in their own language for the first time. You hike through rice fields and pineapple groves, and cross rivers on

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bamboo stick bridges to visit small communities of Christians who have been violently persecuted for their faith and don't have resources to disciple the church in their own language. You sing with sponsored slum children as they attend a school dedicated to multilingual education; you visit radio stations that broadcast Bible stories and music in indigenous languages.

Jesus' life example is built upon the premise that encounters make a transformational difference. He met, talked with and shared with people, and their lives were changed. With that same notion, we also believe that participants' encounters with cross-cultural ministry and personalities will make a lasting impact on their lives.

What is on the agenda before, during and after the trip itself?

The elements of these trips are intentionally implemented to capture a sliver of what it would be like to serve long term overseas. So raising support, doing

anthropological research before departure, spending time in Scripture and in prayer, developing spiritually as a team, and learning about all the kinds of ministry opportunities all work into the purpose of exposing and challenging students to longer term involvement in global missions. The post-trip opportunities, intentionally sharing the vision and stories they have learned and gleaned from their trip, are so important because it is their fresh passion and fresh stories from overseas that will capture the hearts of their community to get involved in this ministry as well.

What is included in the volunteer work component of the trip?

Our work in South Asia was primarily to assist and encourage the missionaries and local church in whatever way possible. We helped to bridge connections between Scripture impact teams and local indigenous churches, by sharing messages and testimonies in churches identified as potential key centres for indigenous language ministry.

We participated in round-table discussions on the plight of indigenous people worldwide with an indigenous non-governmental organization that exists to promote socioeconomic development and preserve local culture and language. We participated in a round table discussion on missions and evangelism with Christian university students. We shared drama, music and helped facilitate programs in churches and ministries to Muslim youth and children who live in the slums. We also shared messages and testimonies with schools for indigenous children.

Why have you chosen to go to South Asia specifically for these trips? Part of the reason is because the continent of Asia has the largest concentration of indigenous languages that are in need of Bible translation and language development. Research has shown that the participants in short-term trips tend to return long term to the location to which they first visit. If this is the case, then we need to be taking students to places where we really need long-term workers.

Also, our colleagues in some countries in Asia have been pioneering new strategies, focusing on the holistic impact of Scripture translation and language development. The focus there is not just on the translation and the production of Scripture. Rather, success can be measured better when movements are started and indigenous people are using Scripture and garnering support for global missions among their community.

I think it is helpful to expose young adults, as the incoming generation of workers, to new and innovative strategies that are being espoused by Wycliffe worldwide.



Don Lowe (foreground) and other Vision Trip team members got mud washed off their feet by villagers, a humbling experience, but completely normal for those visiting the community. "Going to South Asia has reassured me that I am able to go and serve overseas," said Lowe of Santa Barbara, Calif., a student at Fuller Theological Seminary. "So I feel a lot more comfortable in pursuing that. I am planning on pursuing long-term mission after I finish my seminary education."



(Top of page) A pastor introduces the Vision Trip team to his congregation, consisting of Christians from the Chakma people group, shortly before Don Lowe shared a message to buoy up the congregation. "It thrills me," said Lowe, "to see people on the other side of the world, who speak a different language, worshipping the same God, and feeling the love they have for us as fellow brothers and sisters."

(Above) Coral Brodzki and other team members hand out Canada-oriented stickers and toys to children from a Christian school. (Left) Afterward, Sarah Barnes jumps the language barrier to interact with the children by skipping rope with them on a foggy day. (Right) Sarah and a local pastor sing and clap to a recording of a song in his local language played from his cell phone, while travelling to the school—a 55-km trip taking four hours and interrupted by a dozen military check stops.

"I thought that by going [on the Vision Trip]," explained Barnes, "I might get more excited about what Wycliffe is doing and perhaps get guidance as to whether this was actually where God was leading me." It did—Barnes has since joined Wycliffe, now serving with Jessica Dempster to mobilize other young adults.

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(Left) Kelly Mak extends a comforting hand to Coral Brodzki, after angry villagers jostled their team's van. The people were rioting over the death of a local girl **(left, at bottom)**, which they connected to ongoing conflict with a neighbouring ethnic community. Driving by in the tension-filled scene, the Vision team was incorrectly linked by the angry mob to the foreign aid helping the other group. The rioters reacted by surrounding the van, yelling and beating on its windows.

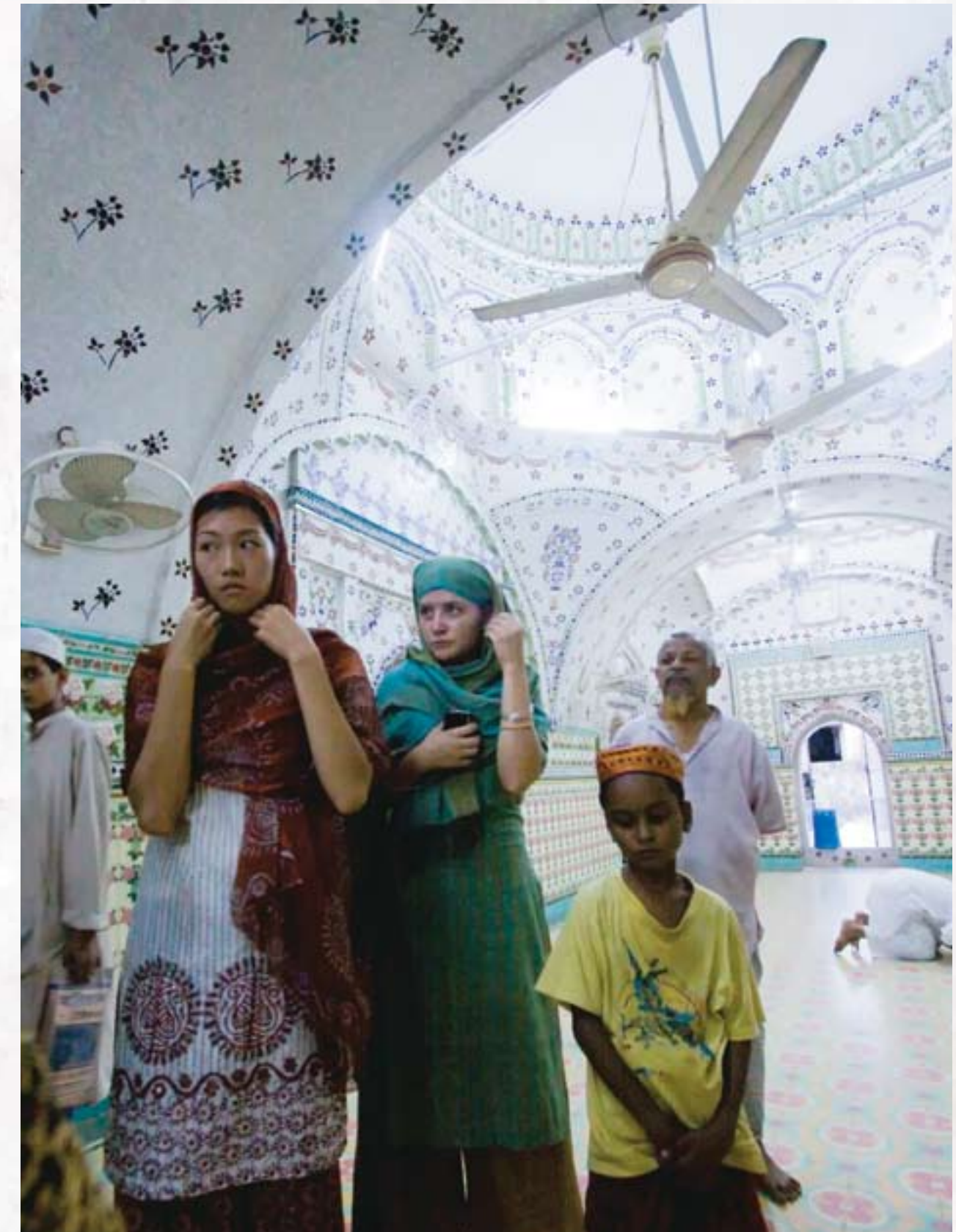
Several picked up stones to throw at the vehicle, but were stopped just in time when military approached the group.
 "I definitely think," said Mak in a pre-trip team blog, "God is going to challenge me greatly, not only in the big things, but the little things. And I believe He will use me to tell others of His goodness and glory. I am also hoping that God will use me when I come home to push others to be challenged in the same way."



What part of the trip do the participants enjoy most? Participants find interacting with and hearing the testimonies of indigenous believers is most impressive! For example, in August 2009 we met some believers who have been severely persecuted for their decision to follow Christ. Churches were burned, limbs cut off, families disintegrated, believers interrogated and tortured, and believers were unable to purchase food and medicine because of the discrimination toward Christians. These testimonies challenge the participants to stronger faith commitments and to really see the need to support the Christians in these communities—especially the need for Scripture and resources. The interaction with the missionaries serving there also helps the participants to see them as "real people," who have struggles, successes, joys and concerns.

Who goes on these Vision Trips? Participants come from all over Canada and even some from the U.S.A. They are university students, recent grads investigating future opportunities, working professionals, professionals who are investigating the leading of God in their lives, pastors and high school students! They come from a background in Bible colleges, Christian universities, seminaries, and secular universities, too.

What impresses you about the participants? I am always impressed by their openness to hear from God, and their deep spirituality. They are so willing to investigate the deep spots of their soul and really enter the hard places—the hard places in their own soul that are being transformed as they deepen their relationship with Christ, and also the hard places of



A more tranquil, but still unfamiliar experience, awaited Kelly Mak and Sarah Barnes on a visit to the inner room of an ornately designed and decorated mosque. The Vision Trip team got a chance to understand the fast of Ramadan for one day, rising before dawn with the Muslim population to eat and pray, before breaking the fast that evening.

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the world that God may invite them to serve in. I am so impressed by the willingness to do whatever it takes. The level of vulnerability and sharing always inspires me.

I read a lot about the concerns that the older generation has of the emerging generation—so many people have beaten down their faith, commitment. But you know, the young adults who come on these trips totally defy this stereotype! They are committed and willing to follow God however and wherever He leads. It’s pretty awesome to witness. I am so totally challenged by their faith commitments!

They are willing to make major changes in their lives. For example, one participant, Kelly Mak, is willing to sacrifice a future in speech pathology for one in multilingual education. God deeply spoke to her about her future while on the trip—she summed it up in two words “God pursues.” She shared during the trip that she “saw the pursuit of God while here.

“The kinds of things we participated in and saw clearly show that He is pursuing the indigenous people. He is also pursuing me! I have some major decisions to make as I go home and consider my future and God’s will for my life.”

Kelly’s choice to consider her future in the context of global ministry and the concerns of the indigenous people worldwide is extraordinary. That inspires me!

What do you hope the participants will come away with? I pray that the participants will come away with greater awareness of the global mission and the issues that cross-cultural workers face; with a knowledge of the importance of Bible translation; with a vision for God’s global kingdom, a vision for ministry that includes but stretches beyond local ministry; and a challenge to consider their involvement in the Bible translation movement for their own personal futures! 🍁

Armed with first-hand knowledge of the spiritual needs of South Asia, Jessica Dempster, Don Lowe and Coral Brodzki stroll past an old Hindu temple while the Vision team was on a prayer walk through the town with some local pastors.



A Presbyterian congregation waits to welcome the Vision Trip team to their church. Such life-changing visits provide young adult Canadians and Americans with opportunities to connect with fellow Christians overseas, as well as get acquainted with Bible translation and other language-related ministries, perhaps someday to serve in cross-cultural work themselves. “I

have long thought that everyone—no matter what their age—should do travelling overseas,” said Vision tripper Sarah Barnes. “It expands people’s worldviews from the widely accepted view that is taught and accepted in North America that we are all that matters.”