Preparing for Service in a Creative Access Nation

August’s edition of Serve was written by Erica Burrill. Before their current ministry in Malta, Erica and her husband, Josh, served in a Creative Access Nation in Eurasia.

I remember clearly the evening God began working in both my heart and my husband’s regarding mission work in a Creative Access Nation (CAN). At a family camp, our friends had presented the ministry and country to which God had called them, and they were praying for teammates. That night, lying on an air mattress forcefully wedged between bunk beds where our young boys were sleeping, we could not deny the stirring of God in our hearts.
Pray and Trust

We began to pray! This was not a small decision, and we needed God’s wisdom. There are often many unknowns as one faces the prospect of doing gospel ministry in a country where Christianity is largely nonexistent and sometimes illegal. We were convinced of both the Great Commandment to love God and others, and of the Great Commission to go into all the world and preach the gospel, but God had to lead us.

We knew we must consider the cost. Making responsible choices and trusting God’s leading was our desire, in spite of the looming “what ifs” in our own minds and others. A young family, a baby on the way, and ongoing health issues were all concerns we had, along with the instability and uncertainty of our CAN. But God is bigger! After we spent much time in prayer, reading God’s Word, and seeking His will, God confirmed in our hearts His calling to go.

Visit the Field

Shortly after, we made a survey trip to the field. Firsthand experience gives you a taste of life in that particular country. Learn all you can during this time, talk with those on the field, and consider some of the cultural and practical challenges you will face.

- You may have restrictions in what you can do, wear, and say or even in places you go, particularly as a woman. (I was not completely restricted in these ways, but was extra cautious especially when alone.)

- Learn what kind of culture it is. (Communal, hot/cold climate, shame/guilt based, religious identity, views of women, foreigners, etc.)

- Determine how you will learn the language. Are schools or private tutors available? (I met with a private tutor 2-3 times a week, and my husband attended language school.)

- Find out how ministry takes place in a CAN? (This can vary, but learn what works best for your team and country and how you best fit with your abilities and skills.)
It may be that a job or another “identity” is necessary in attaining a visa/permit to be in the country. (What will you be doing? How will you sustain your stay in that country? Will it require coming and going every few months?)

My husband studied Canadian Immigration during deputation, becoming a certified immigration consultant. This was the business our team put in place to help with our longevity and validity in the country.

Prepare

Moving to a CAN takes much preparing and planning. Consider how you will fit into life and ministry on the field, keeping a willing heart and an open mind.

- Maintain a life of prayer and study. I’ll admit this can be a struggle, with the busyness of travel, planning, and being a full-time mom and wife in my case. But it is God who will sustain you, and it is His calling that will keep you when you feel like losing heart! Build a strong personal spiritual foundation.

- Assess your education or skills (degrees, Bible training and experience, music, teaching, sewing, business, medical training, TESL, sign language, working with special needs, etc.). Look for ways to gain more skills or education that can help you on the field. It is a CREATIVE access nation, after all!
• Read and learn all you can about your ministry, country, and culture. You may have opportunity to meet someone from that country and begin learning language and culture on a personal level.

Serving in a CAN was both wonderful and overwhelming! It was a constant reminder of our dependency on God’s grace to work in hearts and give strength in our weakness. It has grown my view of God and the world, and God has used it richly in the lives of our family. There is such beauty in the unbound power of the gospel, unlimited by borders and laws, where light can pierce darkness even to the uttermost!

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Join us at the BMM Home Office in Cleveland, Ohio, Sept 27-28 for Advance Weekend. This free, informative two-day seminar will equip you with tools for mission involvement. The speaker will address the topic of creative access ministry.

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