

unmistakable fingerprints of God through His people. It was seen in the helping hands that reached across county lines and state borders. Teams from unaffected regions showing up with not just supplies but their skillset – even linemen from Canada! Large parking lots became makeshift command centers, filled with rows upon rows of power trucks, supply vehicles, and emergency responders. Donations poured in, sent from churches and communities hundreds of miles away who simply heard we were in need. The local radio station became the hub for callers to check-in on loved ones they couldn't reach. Every day, new supplies arrived. Every day, someone new offered help. Neighbors hiked through washed-out roads to check on each other. Helicopters and mules were brought in to deliver aid and get to those who couldn't get out. Strangers became friends in supply lines. God moved through the hands of linemen and nurses, in the meals cooked by church members. We were reminded that the body of Christ is not confined by walls or steeples. It mobilizes. It bears burdens. It shows up. And in this long season of loss and recovery, God whispers something holy: that hope does not come from circumstances. It comes from community. It comes from Christ.

As Paul wrote, *“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair... Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.”* (2 Corinthians 4:8–9, 16, NIV).

Hurricane Helene swept through Western North Carolina and left behind a path of destruction whose impact is still unfolding in our community and will be etched in Appalachia history. Now, one year later, the landscape tells two stories. Some homes have been rebuilt, businesses reopened, and routines reestablished. But others still bear the weight of the storm – damaged buildings, lost income, memories washed away in the flood. Some families are still displaced. There are small-town businesses still trying to find their footing. At times, it feels like the rest of the world has moved on, while we remain in the long, slow work of recovery. We need business. We need support. We still need prayer. We need to be remembered. And yet, through it all, there is a stubborn thread of hope. We press on. As pharmacists. As believers. As neighbors. There is resilience in every boarded-up window that's being reopened, in every neighbor helping another. There is care, community, and quiet strength – Appalachia strong. Healing looks different for everyone, and recovery moves at its own pace. It may take years. But the people remain. And so does God.

A closing liturgy:
“Let our rebuilding be not only of walls and roofs and systems, but of hearts knit together in grace and courage.”²

References

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That First Step of Obedience Can Lead to Anything...

By Bryan Hammons

In the Spring 2022 issue of *Christianity & Pharmacy*, I was provided the opportunity to write about how the Lord directed my path to get started in medical missions. It all began through a Bible study of Matthew 28, where I learned that I can use my profession as a pharmacist as a tool in spreading the Gospel.

My first mission trip was to Moldova in the spring of 2008 with Global Health Outreach, the mission arm of the Christian Medical and Dental Association. While the majority of my medical mission trips have been to Moldova, I have also traveled to Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

So how do I continue to serve now? It came from a “random” lunch meeting in the summer of 2011. I was in Moldova with the medical team after we had returned to the capital city of Chişinău for some rest and relaxation before returning home. Our in-country missionary contact introduced the team to his American friend who was in Moldova as part of another mission team. While we were sharing lunch in a small café, we both remarked how there appeared to be a multitude of Gospel ministries but it appeared to be very “siloed”... in other words, there were too many missionaries with their head down and working hard,

but there was no collaboration with other missionaries, and in many cases there were duplicative efforts. We decided to trade contact information and keep in touch.

That fall, the Holy Spirit began to work in both of our lives, and we felt the prompting to attempt to make ministry in Moldova more collaborative and effective. We both gathered some like-minded people with experience in Moldova to join us, and The Moldova Coalition was created in early 2012.

Through many emails, conference calls, video calls, and an in-person meeting, we drafted a mission statement, values, and guidelines. Our mission statement reads: "The Moldova Coalition seeks to provide a structure and forum for foreign missionaries and ministries to be more unified, informed, effective, and strategic in serving the work of Christ in Moldova."

While flat in structure, we formed a steering committee to vet prospective new members. We did not desire to form a non-governmental organization (NGO) or have a website; all of our new member referrals came through word-of-mouth. We limited membership to non-Moldovans to give members a safe space to discuss any cultural challenges they were facing.

We didn't know where this would go, if anywhere. None of us had ever attempted something like this before. We just knew the Lord had spoken to us and we acted upon it.

The membership includes people like me who visit Moldova short-term once or twice a year, along with those who are in ministry full-time in Moldova. The focus of the coalition is to help serve those who are in full-time ministry in Moldova. Slowly our membership began to grow. People began to tell others about this organization which focuses on the individuals serving the Lord in

Moldova. But how, practically, could we support these folks?

Our current method of supporting the missionaries exists in several different forms. Currently, we have quarterly community calls via Zoom. We normally ask long-term missionaries in Moldova (either an individual or a couple) to briefly share about themselves, their ministry, where they are located in Moldova, and any prayer needs. We also host a monthly lunch for missionaries located in the capital city of Chişinău to come together for fellowship, encouragement, and prayer. We aim to connect those who have ministry needs with others who can assist.

By far our most effective tool in supporting those in full-time Moldova ministry is hosting an annual in-country retreat. Some of us in the Coalition who reside in the US and UK travel to Moldova each spring and host a 3-day, 3-night retreat in which we can love on and serve those who give so much of themselves every day through their ministry. We found a great location about 30 minutes outside of the capital so the missionaries can feel like it is a "getaway." We provide childcare workers so that couples can freely attend the sessions or just spend some time alone. In the past, we brought licensed counselors so the missionaries can talk through any issues they might want to discuss. We host a special themed dinner one evening and a game night with multiple board games. Based on feedback we received from post-retreat surveys this year, we invited an experienced Bible teacher who poured into these folks, many of them church planters or pastors. We also give them periods of downtime, which is something very few of them experience in their regular ministry day.

The feedback from the retreat has been tremendously positive. We have been blessed with the ability to provide the space, speakers, food,

and lodging at no cost to the attendees due to generous donors.

As you can see, the way I began serving in Moldova (as a pharmacist on a short-term mission trip) looks very different than my current role of service there. It is so exciting to see that The Moldova Coalition now has over 60 people representing 7 countries!

Do I miss using my pharmacist skills in spreading the Gospel? Of course. But through this new avenue of serving in Moldova, I have met so many fellow laborers in Christ. I'm now a part of their ministry, and I'm able to reach so many more people than I could have during a one-week medical clinic.

I would encourage you to listen to the Holy Spirit... perhaps He is calling you to serve as a pharmacist on a medical team. Or perhaps He is calling you to serve in a different way. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight." (Proverbs 3:5-6 NASB). Let the Spirit guide your path and be open to anything!



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