

FIND A CHRISTIAN MISSION 2016

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Faten Qunqar with some of the children she has helped in the Philippines

ORTHOPTICS: *Eye opening in more than one way*



“I’m an orthoptist.”
 “That’s so cool, so you work with feet?”

“No, that’s orthotics. I work with eyes.”

“Oh, so you’re like an optometrist?”

“Not exactly...”

Every time I meant someone new, I have the same conversation, full of confusion and questions. I’m sure you’re reading this thinking, ‘well, so if you don’t work with feet and you’re not an optometrist, what exactly do you do?’

Let me set the record straight. Traditionally, Orthoptists were specifically trained in, as the name suggests, Orthoptics. Orthoptics refers to the assessment and management of the eye’s muscles and visual development; ensuring that correct treatment is undertaken to first and foremost improve



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From there, they came rolling in: grandchildren bringing in their grandparents, mothers with their children, fathers struggling to provide the only source of income for their families. **They would fill up a community centre and patiently wait for their turn to be seen in the hope to be on the receiving end of some good news.**

and preserve vision and that the brain recognises both eyes working together. Where possible, exercises can also be prescribed to help with the cosmetic appearance of an eye turn. This meant that Orthoptists were mainly in charge of eye exercises and patching therapies for children. However, in today's day and age, with an increase in both the ageing population and eye disease such as macular degeneration, glaucoma and ocular impacts of diabetes, Orthoptists have had to expand their scope of practice to encompass support of treatment in ocular pathology. Because of this, Orthoptists work in *secondary* eye care, i.e., specialist clinics, alongside an ophthalmologist and surgeon. Optometrists on the other hand, play a very important role in *primary* eye care and being the first point of call and screening patients before being referred on.

A lot of us take our sight for granted. It's something we assume by default we'll always have. Yet at the same time, a lot of us would say that our eyes are the most sensitive part of our body and we would do just about anything to protect them. Even subconsciously, we close our eyes in sudden light, in a windstorm or when something is coming directly at us. As much as we say we would be lost without our vision, how many of us have truly thought about this possibility as more than just a fleeting comment?

In my final year of study (Bachelor Health Science/Master Orthoptics (Honours), La Trobe University, class of 2013), I was blessed enough to be one of four students sponsored to participate in the Rotary Club of Canterbury's annual Eye and Ear Screening Mission in the Philippines. In conjunction with the Cataract Foundation of the Philippines, their aim is to 'eliminate avoidable blindness'. Such generosity from the members of the Rotary Club of

(as they would be the go-to people and only ones present with eye-knowledge), but also gives them a taste of mission work in a third-world country and a deeper appreciation into Australia's health care system. On the surface, a free trip to the Philippines doing what you studied so hard for? Sounds like such a novelty and something worthy of bragging rights! Compared to the life you have in Australia, you'd have to 'slum it'. Deal with the high possibilities of limited to no running water, high heat and humidity with no way of cooling off and limited hygiene all while saving people's sight? Such prideful humility. Yes, that's all true, but how can you brag that even in rough conditions you still have the

fed by the poorest of provinces as their continuing sign of gratitude for your presence or still have a bed to sleep on in the hotel you have the luxury to be provided with?

The province screened in October 2013, the Island of Masbate, is considered one of the poorest in the Philippines. Health care and medical attention is almost a mythical concept. So when the town heard that free eye checks were being given with the prospect of sight-restoring surgery, it was almost too good to be true! It is without wonder that it was first approached with suspicion and hesitance. Who are these foreigners and what do they want? However, it didn't take long for word-of-mouth to spread that these foreigners (some blonde-haired, blue-eyed 'barbie dolls' as the girls would giggle and whisper) aren't so scary.

From there, they came rolling in: grandchildren bringing in their grandparents, mothers with their children, fathers struggling to provide the only source of income for their families. They would fill up a community centre and patiently wait for their turn to be seen in the hope to be on the receiving end of some good news. Not only was their patience admirable, they had such a level of gratitude that is almost unheard of in a first world country. From a child's embrace over the joy of being handed a clip-on koala, to seeing a mother's face light up with a sense of relief and accomplishment that she can offer her family some form of medical attention. One memory that broke my heart was assessing school children in a classroom and seeing an elderly lady looking in through the window with such longing eyes if she too could be seen. She had sun-related growths on both her eyes that if not surgically removed, would render her blind. Pushing through the language barrier, we managed to acquire her details, but

Canterbury allows the students involved to not only put their studies into practise

privilege to afford to drink bottled water instead of getting sick from tap water, are

God only knows if she was appropriately followed up.



Above: An older woman slowly going blind with cataracts; Below: The Orthoptics team

Even working in the eye field, it's always a little difficult to accurately gauge a person's vision before you assess them, but in some of these instances, where the elderly were being carefully led by the hand to a chair or when you could clearly see a reflection of white matter (most likely, a cataract) staring back you, it doesn't take an expert to realise there's something wrong.

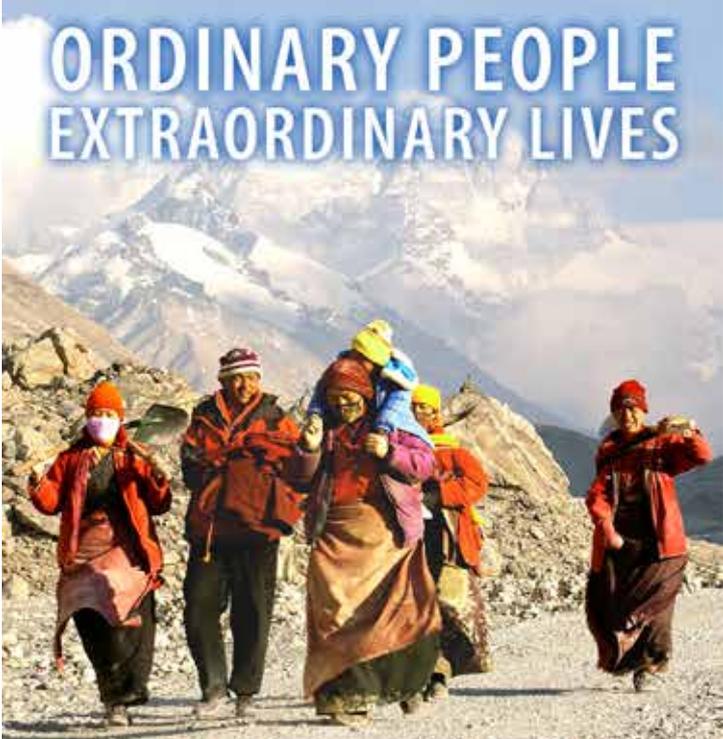
One of the main eye-openers in the Philippines in regards to vision, was what was considered acceptable. With such a limited range of equipment, there were really only two levels of vision; 6/18 and 6/60. To try and put things into perspective, the minimum vision required to hold an Australian driver's licence is 6/12 (better than both the visual readings previously listed). In Australia, if vision is worse than 6/12 and cannot be corrected with glasses, the person is clinically considered to be visually impaired, and those with vision worse than 6/60 are classified as legally blind. Because our job was to filter out patients for the surgeons according to visual ability, it was gut-wrenching to have to gesture a thumbs-up and tell someone their 6/18 level of vision was 'very good', when you knew that if they lived in Australia, no one would stand for it. Sometimes, ignorance is bliss.

The people I met in the Philippines had such a strong spirit of happiness and content, which could only come from the unwavering faith in knowing that God will provide. Sometimes it's when we're down to nothing that we start to look up. I was always worried about how I could use my degree and my educational experience for the Glory of God. I want to include Him in all that I do and did, not just for two-hours on a Sunday. I am grateful for my opportunity to not just give back to the world, but to use the talents that God has given me in a way that would be pleasing to Him. We are all called to be saints and '... the salt of the earth [and] ... the light of the world' (Matthew 5:13-14). Our talents were not given to us by ourselves; even those who have worked hard for their success were given the gift of determination and drive. It is only right that we use our God-given talents to serve those around us in worship, honour and praise of His All-Holy Name, for 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me' (Matthew 25:40).

Faten Qunqar is a Melbourne (Australia) based Orthoptist and a member of Orthoptics Australia.

Faten is part of the Saint George's Anitochian Orthodox Church in Thornbury and is an active member of her community.

For information about the volunteer work done by Orthoptist's visit: orthoptics.org.au



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Lives and communities transformed through encounter with Jesus Christ

Bob Mendelsohn gives some good advice when deciding which mission to support – there are many things to consider!



Supporting a (good) Christian Mission

Choices are never easy. From the type of ice cream after dinner to the choice of a mate, to clothing for the party, life gives us constant options. This magazine about Christian missions brings us again another choice; that is, finding a good Christian mission. I find this problematic and yet solvable. Maybe this brief article will help you as well.

THE PROBLEMS:

Wouldn't it be nice if this title were redundant? If all Christian missions were good (reliable, fruitful and worthy of your support), then this article would in one way, be unnecessary. In fact, if all things which are titled *Christian* were just that, an adjective that reflects the person and work of Jesus - that would make life so much simpler. If every Christian church were Christian, and every Christian music group and every Christian speaker and every... you get the idea.

But unfortunately that's not the case. Some Christian missions are barely missions. Some are barely Christian. Some are barely anything. I've seen the best and worst of missions in my 40 years of walking with Jesus and of traveling the world, even in the Holy Land. The old saying *used to be*, 'there are more missionaries in Israel than Christians'. Just because someone says they are a mission doesn't make what they *do* to be mission.

THE DEFINITION:

Therefore a definition is warranted. A *mission* in the dictionary is either 1) *An important assignment carried out for political, religious, or commercial purposes, typically involving travel or* 2) *a group of people taking part in such an assignment.* (Dictionary.com)

For our purposes I define *Christian mission* as an enterprise which seeks to make the Gospel clear to people by providing a service representing or extending the Kingdom of God.

Stephen Neill's quote is so important in this regard: 'If everything is mission, nothing is mission'.

Of course, then there is another problem: that there really are *too many* good Christian missions for me to support and thus I need to narrow my focus and considerations to the ones I can actually support in a worthwhile manner. One simply cannot be generous to everyone who asks or to every

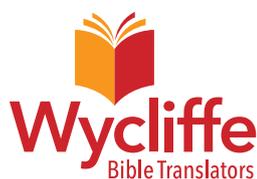


Life without a Word

Imagine - life without a word from God. If that seems unthinkable, then consider this. Lots of people live their lives that way, because millions of people don't yet have a Bible in a language they can understand.

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charity and poor person and project that requests our support. What's a Christian person to do?

THE SOLUTIONS (HOW TO CHOOSE):

To evaluate a mission, you have to know the field in which the missionaries are working, and measure with sound judgment. A person working among Muslims in Pakistan will not have the same numbers of people attending Bible classes as say, a Spanish-speaker working among Catholics in South America. To measure one of those against the other, without considering the cultural factors involved, would be unfair to both. A missionary who hands out food or medicine will be more welcome in a town than a church planter with a simple evangelistic message of Jesus in a post-Christian European village.

Measure against reality, rather than their own measuring stick. For instance, if they are about literature distribution, and want to hand out say 1,000 tracts a month, in the middle of New York City, and they are satisfied with this number, you need to know that one missionary in NYC can hand out almost 1,000 tracts in two hours, so the question is raised, "What did they do the other 29+ days of the month?" What if the missionary says, "I tried to ring 50 people last

month?" That would be great unless you know that ringing 50 people can be done in two hours, unless they REACH 50 people on the phone and have significant conversations with them.

So be on guard against words like, "We did a lot of ministry" or "God really moved." I'm sure they know what they mean, but I prefer raw data to evaluative commentary.

Once you have chosen:

Give yourself to the mission as well as you can. Be a reader of their literature and websites. Read blogs and photo journals. Listen to sermons and Bible talks. Be aware of what matters to the team you are supporting. Being informed gives you the heart of the mission and that's significant.

Volunteer to help the mission in ways that you find comfortable in your situation. There might be a prayer meeting in your suburb you could attend, or they might run a thrift store or shop at which you could work fortnightly. They may need someone to tidy after meetings or during special programs they run. A children's outreach always needs help in a dozen little and big ways: baking, driving, arts and crafts, and so much more. You may be able to fill in a blank the mission didn't even know existed!

Finances are a usual and appropriate method of support for a mission. Make sure you support your local home church first, but if you have extra and want to help the mission of your choosing, then it's right to do so. Give to a specific cause they might mention, or even better, give to their general fund to go 'where most needed'. That gives the treasurer the freedom to apply your generosity to things as required by the CEO.

Speak well to people and to God. Speak to God directly (pray!) about needs and concerns of the mission, of the missionaries, of the projects and personnel about which you read. And speak well to others, in your church, in your neighbourhood, in your sphere of influence, and who knows; you might just be the 'champion' of the mission to others.

Finding and supporting a good Christian mission is a great thing to do in these days, and throughout your days.

Bob Mendelsohn

National Director
Jews for Jesus
jewsforjesus.org.au

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