Standing on Hope

My heart is overflowing in this season of thanksgiving as I look out on the tarmac on a beautiful fall day at the airport in Madison, WI. Since August, I have visited all 9 states in my region (including North and South Dakota – which is special because they do not have veterinary schools).

A question that I was asked more than once this fall was, “Don’t you want to be out serving on the foreign mission field?”

I get to share with people that no, THIS is exactly where the Lord has asked me to serve right now. I had the opportunity to attend 2 conferences recently where I met many long term field-workers. At CVM’s ShortCourse conference, I actually took the Long Term Missions track to learn specifically about what life and ministry overseas look like. But many of the principles learned can apply to service here in the US as well. Most importantly, we as Christians should always be learning and preparing for whatever God has as our next step. Reading, studying, and falling in love with the Word of God seems like the obvious no-brainer – but why do I struggle with that so often? Between changing diapers, wiping runny noses and corralling runaway cows, we are so “busy.” I was convicted that I must be more intentional about that essential part of my life.

Second, I was introduced to the phrase: “God can’t steer a parked car.” In other words, be active, take steps and do something so that He can lead and guide you! As I met with the students this fall, I challenged them to take action and serve their fellow classmates and community. The Minnesota students are having open fellowship hours on campus with coffee, tea, and conversation. The Wisconsin students want to partner with the Bovine Club (aka the Cattle club – for my non-vet friends and family) to offer a hands-on wet lab that will allow all students to practice their suturing technique. Our students are purposefully creating environments that will welcome visitors and build relationships. As I watch them, I thank Jesus that they are the bold and courageous future of our profession.

When CVM was founded by Dr. Leroy Dorminy in 1976, he was responding to a need that the Lord showed him to “teach others, so that they may do for themselves.” I am reminded that we, too, in US ministry are tasked to teach the next generation so that they will continue to go and proclaim Christ’s love in our neighborhoods and around the world.
My first visit to North Dakota was incredible. I attended the “Steer” conference in Bismarck. Steer, Inc. is a ministry organization that partners with farmers and ranchers around the country. Donors give money for Steer to purchase breeding stock animals (cattle, sheep, etc). The affiliated farmers and ranchers feed and care for these animals. The offspring are then sold at market value and the profit goes to support many different mission organizations around the world (CVM being one of them). One cow, for example could have 5 calves. So that initial investment of $1000 to buy the cow is able to multiply 5-6x with care from the farmer. Young Life, Campus Crusade, FCA, and Wycliffe Bible translators are some of the well-known ministries who are also supported by Steer and the American Farmer.

I met many of these great farmers while I was in North Dakota. They are experiencing severe flooding this year. Many of them have fields of hay that cannot be cut and baled. Much of the alfalfa was not able to be harvested and will have to stand in the field until next year. To those of us in the cities, we don’t understand the strain and stress that this puts on the farmer as well as his cattle who depend on this feed through the winter. I had the privilege of speaking with a rancher named Leo about this problem. He is 92 years old. He is a spry man who has the light of joy in his eyes and the hardship of high prairie ranch life displayed in the wrinkles on his face. Leo’s family had a farm in North Dakota during the dustbowl years of the 1930s. He recalled the daily reality of livestock dying from starvation; saying, “We couldn’t even eat them; they were so skinny.” There were no jobs available and he even remembers the swarms of grasshoppers being so thick that they literally covered up the sun. I asked him what advice he would give to younger generations as we have never seen this type of hardship. He told me very simply, “Never give up, keep trying, God WILL provide a way.” It brought me back to the advice I received at Shortcourse: NEVER give up and KEEP trying because God can’t steer a parked car. It was such encouragement to wrap up school visit season this way. So “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord…” Colossians 3:23. Thank you for the continued much-needed support and prayers!

Be Strong and Courageous,
Elizabeth

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