

Alumni Spotlight: The Martins Nathan (M.Div. '07) & Brianna (MAME '06)



Current Title: Nathan—Regional Mobilization Manager, OMF International

Family: We have two elementary-aged boys, Caleb and Jonah.

Favorite Professors: Dr. Timothy Tennent and Dr. Sean McDonough

Favorite Classes: Exegesis of Genesis with Dr. Kaminski and Life of Jesus with Dr. McDonough

Favorite Memory: Having Dr. Tennent clearly present both the progress of the church in our Great Commission task and the vast work yet to be done among the nations.

Where are you currently serving as a missionary and what is your work there?

In 2009 we moved from the cornfields of Iowa to the rice paddies of Cambodia to serve as missionaries with OMF International. For 10 years we lived in Cambodia, primarily in a rural district near the Vietnam border. In this district, farmers grow rice, fruit trees, cassava, pepper, and rubber, and it is estimated to be less than 1% Christian. Our team's focus was gospel seed sowing, chronological Bible storytelling, children's outreach and church planting. We also worked closely with the Cambodian Department of Education to run a literacy and library project that helped keep schools open in very rural locations.



Currently, I have transitioned to serving as a regional mobilization manager for OMF International. We are still compelled by the billions of East Asians who have never heard the good news of Jesus Christ. The mobilization work includes coaching new missionaries headed to Cambodia, conversations on missionary life, reaching out to churches and colleges to explore ways to be involved in missions, coordinating short-term missions trips and praying with the church for the world.

Have you always been a missionary, or did you serve in other positions before becoming a missionary?

Following GCTS, we returned to Iowa where I pastored a rural church for three years. That experience was invaluable in growing in the Lord, building our key missions support network through connections with area churches and gaining a heart for pastors before going overseas.

How has God woven together your time at Gordon-Conwell with other life events to lead you to where you are now?

Before coming to GCTS, we had an interest in missions but did not know where or with what people we might serve. Our missions professor suggested we start intentionally praying for the world using Operation World, and sitting in our apartment in Graham Hall God first powerfully stirred our hearts for the Khmer people. We had never heard of the horrendous genocide that happened in Cambodia from 1975-78. At the same time, we started attending a church plant in Lynn, MA, and discovered several hundred Cambodian families living in Lynn. It was during this time we made our first Cambodian friends. GCTS also helped connect us with our mission agency through the Overseas Mission Practicum. We loved the people we worked with and met on that summer missions exploration trip to Thailand and Myanmar. Brianna's mentor for that OMP, Steve Niphakis, is now my colleague as a Mobilizer with OMF!

What do you love about your work? What are some of the hard things about life as a missionary in your context?

Speaking of our time in Cambodia, what I loved about my work was the Khmer people themselves and a growing appreciation of the uniqueness and power of the gospel planted in the Cambodian context. The Khmer people are creative, playful, hospitable and respectful. They have also been through incredible trauma and the wounds are deep. I loved seeing the good news of Jesus Christ lift the heads of those bowed down under the weight of karma, fear and injustice. At this moment in time, I have transitioned to being more like Barnabas and am in the role of coaching and encouraging the next one to go. I love engaging believers in various stages of missions awareness and encouraging the church to press on in our Great Commission work among the nations.

The hardest part of missionary life in our context was isolation and at times feeling like there was slow fruit. We had teammates come and go, and seasons where our family was alone in rural Cambodia. God was with us, but those seasons were difficult. From week to week sometimes it felt like all our prayers and efforts were a drop of water on a hot stone. Looking back with a wider angle, over the years, we were able to see the fruit of the gospel growing and have precious relationships, but they took several years to build.

How has your Gordon-Conwell education served you in your past and current work? Or what has been Gordon-Conwell's biggest impact/influence?

GCTS honestly restored my mission vision. For that restoration of God's call, I will forever be grateful. I had felt called to missions, people had prayed over us and affirmed about that call, but I was wrestling with philosophical questions. The chief question was whether people really needed to hear the gospel. I remember my missions professor, Dr. Tennent, gently guiding me back to the Scriptures. What do the Scriptures say? That guidance combined with GCTS's love for the word of God rekindled my missions fire. I also remember the responses of GCTS faculty to my questions. Their answers were humble, faithful to the Scriptures and compassionate concerning the world. For example, I remember Dr. Kaiser affirming that only those who respond to the gospel can

we know to be saved. He also shared his personal opinion: for people seeking the Lord, God can get them a witness to the good news of Jesus Christ (see Cornelius's story for example).

GCTS also served me well by being unashamed of the infallibility of Scripture while maintaining a beautiful unity in diversity on secondary issues. It was good to see that Christians who are faithful to the Scriptures can honestly disagree with one another on some issues in the church. In our OMF team in Cambodia, we joined fellow workers from seventeen sending nations and from various denominations. Gordon-Conwell was a fruitful place to grow and served us well in preparing us to serve on a diverse missions team.

What piece of advice would you give to alumni who are considering the mission field?

If God has stirred your heart for the nations, it is an important calling worth exploring. Find a mentor with missions experience and ask questions. Find a mission agency filled with people who capture your vision and care for their members well. Build a strong team around you of believers who will fervently pray and walk this journey with you. The early work of partner building is fortifying for the long haul.

As global and as diverse as the USA is becoming, I also think a little missions experience, experience crossing cultures and experience relating to people of other religions will serve you well no matter what your calling. Even if it is not your long-term calling, you could consider going for 6 months or a year, and take the opportunity while you have it.

My last piece of advice is the advice handed down to us—begin by praying for the world. One of my mission heroes, J.O. Fraser, went so far as to put it this way, "I used to think that prayer should have the first place and teaching the second. I now feel that it would be truer to give prayer the first, second and third place, and teaching the fourth." ([Behind the Ranges](#), Geraldine Taylor).

Links:

Learn more about [OMF International](#)

Read OMF's [Mission Round Table Journal](#)

To learn about and pray for specific people groups throughout the world, visit [Joshua Project](#) or [Operation World](#).