

# ANNUAL MINISTRY UPDATE 2012

Eric & Rebecca Hinderliter, Mission co-workers

---

## “ordinary lives”

Instructions for the annual reports of mission co-workers tell us that the purpose of such reporting is “strengthening transparency and accountability”. We think that transparency and accountability are good standards; in fact, they are Biblical standards. In his letters to the church in Thessalonica the apostle Paul gives an account of his activities. Paul says he was “gentle among you” (I Thess. 1:7). Instead of using authority, we try to use kind and gentle methods with our students. We try to be constructive and encouraging to the people we meet, leading ordinary lives, but lives that make a difference to other people, a life that Paul characterized as “quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and holiness” (I Tim. 2:2). Paul stresses that he is not a burden to his hosts (I Thess. 2:9; II Thess. 3:8). We try not to be burden, giving and not demanding. We are busy doing what we were sent to do—to teach and to be good witnesses to the grace of Jesus Christ. (“Busy” yes, but honestly we don’t “toil day and night”!) In many ways we live ordinary lives here in Lithuania, but lives that are accessible to others. These are simple rules—but challenging standards for us as mission co-workers. Henri Nouwen writes, “Although we tend to think about saints as holy and pious, and picture them with halos above their heads and ecstatic gazes, true saints are much more accessible. They are men and women like us, who live ordinary lives and struggle with ordinary problems. What makes them saints is their clear and unwavering focus on God and God’s people” (*Bread For the Journey*, 1996). Of course, we are a long way off from sainthood—but with God’s help, we press on towards the goal, as Paul would say.

Are we transparent; what do students see in us? We think the best evidence we have comes from the students we teach. Here are the views of four young women, all recent graduates of LCC International University. Sara Dumitrana, from Romania, provided a caption for her graduation picture, take with us: *“with a couple of those incredible professors you will NEVER forget and that have IMPACTED your life MORE than required by their job description. THANK YOU, Eric and Becky, our dear neighbors among other things!”* Elena Dukhnitskaya, a student from Russia, writes, *“Thank you so much for your recommendation letter! I have got accepted to the University of Trento, Italy, for an MA in International and European Studies. I found out about it in July, but was afraid of facing issues getting visa. Fortunately, I’ve got it last week and am flying to Italy on the 10<sup>th</sup> of September. I am very happy and excited about this new page opening in my life. Congratulations to you for the beginning of a new academic year. And thank you for believing in your students!* Mariya Goloshchapov, a 2009 LCC graduate from Russia, wrote us: *“I graduated from my program in Germany and got my MS! I am working in Canada now, Calgary. I do project management for wind integration at AESO (non for profit governmental organization - electric system operator). I am working where I am thanks to you for the most part! Just wanted to express my gratitude in helping defining my life's direction.”* And Aina Jonuzaj, a student from Albania, was pictured in the 2012 PCUSA Mission Yearbook for Prayer and Study. We sent her the article; she responded, *“thank you so much for your email. I was immensely touched by what you had shared in the mission prayer book and the Bible study on work. I would like to ask you if I may share them. I would surely cite the author. I found the prayer of the teacher really beautiful and encouraging. I have often thought if God is calling me to teach (especially in Albania, where teaching has completely taken another meaning these days), but in these last few months my motivation had sunk deeply. Thank you again for what you shared. It encouraged me more than I can say. And thank you for the great example of a motivating and caring professor. I don't think I can ever thank you enough for that.”* The apostle Paul cautioned not to take such human praise too seriously: instead we always ought to thank God for these young women.

Further instructions for the annual report encourage us to “help bring to life the power of World Mission!” We wrote the following article for the 2013 PCUSA Mission Yearbook for Prayer and Study: For six years we have gone to a ‘deserted place,’ a large men’s prison in the deep Lithuanian forests. The

place is called *Pravieniškės*, a Russian word for ‘those who were blamed.’ There are 8,000 prisoners in Lithuania. One young man we tutor has had a rough time recently. He was involved in a *mêlée* in the dining hall and lost all his privileges—he was confined in a special lock-up for five months. He wrote, saying: “Last week I got news that I won’t be able to be in your class. That’s very sad for me. I hoped that your classes will be some ‘getaway’ from my dark days like some spot of light in the night. Life here is pretty tough.” What can we offer in such a place? He sent Becky a Christmas letter: “I thought a lot about you. You spend so much time, efforts and money to make my life better even not knowing me. You never asked why I am here. It seems that it matter to you. (You think) I am worth it.” In a deserted place, one is full of fear, far from the things needed. How could we possibly help? “How many loaves have you?” (Mark 6:38). More than we imagine, if we have faith. Our message closes with the following prayer:

Dear Lord: You give us the bread of life. When we find ourselves in dark and deserted places, keep us mindful that we have more than we think. With faith we can meet needs that appear overwhelming. Remind us that Jesus accomplished much when his disciples thought the situation was hopeless. Take away our excuses. Make us your instruments to those of our brothers and sisters who live in deserted places like prisoners. Help us pass the bread. Amen

Here’s our year in review, our ordinary lives. In March Amgad Beblawi, the PCUSA regional coordinator for mission affairs in this part of the world, paid a visit to Klaipeda to get acquainted with the work of LCC International University, our mission partner. Amgad gave a lecture on the Arab Spring in Eric’s class on the economics of conflict. Students were impressed with his analysis. Eric spoke twice in LCC’s weekly chapel, in the spring on “the holy catholic church”, using Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *Life Together*, and again in the fall on suffering, with the text from Job, “Does Job fear God for nothing?” (Job 1: 9). We help out as faculty with admission recruitment events, including summer classes for students from Latvia, Russia, and Ukraine and with evening programs for high school students from Lithuania. Eric received the faculty award in May (Becky had won the award the previous year as well). We would of course be remiss in not highlighting our daily task: classroom teachers at LCC. We like to say that we are the “customer-facing staff.” We offered courses for nearly 300 students in 2012. As teachers, we had perfect attendance this year—we didn’t miss one class. Classes and students are what we do. We engage with these young people as best we can: we hear their hopes and dreams—and disappointments.

On a more personal level, two events stand out. Our son Paul became engaged to Melanie Crenshaw. Both live and work in Greensboro, North Carolina. A May 2013 wedding is planned. We’re glad for this new relationship. Second, Eric was hospitalized for the first time in 50 years. Unexpectedly one morning Eric experienced problems smiling; the left side of his face seemed limp. For a moment we feared something dramatic had happened. We made a quick trip to a Lithuanian clinic where the problem was diagnosed as Bell’s palsy. The Lithuanian health care system functioned well; care was first class. Eric is now fully recovered. God granted these good things to us in 2012.

We celebrated personal milestones this year. In November we will have been married for 41 years. Hurray! We have now been teaching at LCC for a long time, Eric for 12 years and Becky for 11. Our visits to the Lithuanian men’s’ prison, which began in 2005, continued. To date 12 LCC faculty members have taught at the prison. It’s a Christian witness that resonates with our students and the inmates. This fall we invited a new teacher to go along. Initially, she hesitated but then changed her mind: “*I cannot stop thinking about your prison invitation. It is true that I have too many things on my plate, but this really seems like something very important.*” New rules at the prison are making access more difficult, but we persevere. We never know in advance whether we will be allowed in. Recently the guards denied us entrance, despite the three hour trip to the prison. We waited awhile but concluded that nothing would change, so we started back to Klaipeda. About 20 minutes into the trip, our mobile phone rang. It was our student Ruslanas. He had waited anxiously for us. He told the guards he was certain we were at the main gate waiting; he is our advocate on the inside. Finally he was able to convince the guards that we

were coming. So we were called back to the prison gate and the doors—there are five gates—were opened for us. Providential, we think, to be “called back.”

It looks as if 2013 will be a difficult year for our mission partner, LCC International University. First, faithful teachers committed for a long term (more than three years) is a long-standing and continuing need. Living and teaching here is not as easy as it may seem. This year we experienced painful moments in this community with the sudden departure of colleagues. One long-term teacher from another denomination was recalled by his mission board and another teacher was dismissed. Second, accreditation as a Christian university looms large. Our petition to the Lithuanian ministry will be acted on early in 2013. Over the years we have seen other Christian education institutions in this part of the world flounder and sometimes be forced close. Last year’s closing of the Russian-American Christian University in Moscow was a stark lesson to LCC as it was modeled after LCC itself—a Christian presence in post-Soviet space. It lost its accreditation and is now selling its new campus. The challenge of meeting new European education standards is indeed large. There is much to be done to achieve the educational quality required.

And for ourselves, we want to be faithful witnesses in 2013, always ready to give an account for the hope that is within us (1 Peter 3:15). We are set for mission itineration in summer 2013. We want to make arrangements now for visits to churches. Our needs for itineration are especially for an affordable place to live and for a car to get around. We are preparing for four more years at LCC. We want our efforts to be fresh and relevant in the eyes of our students. We’ll need energy, patience, and God’s continuing gift of faith to carry out our mission. Like Paul, we hope that those interested in our ministry constantly pray for us, that our God may count us worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of ours and every act prompted by our faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in us, and we in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ (see 2 Thess.1: 11-12).

## Appendix

---

- The LCC International University website includes this three-minute video of Eric describing what life is like at LCC: <http://www.lcc.lt/where-you-fit>
- LCC International University faculty award 2012
- Four pictures