

Annual Report to Mission Partners

2019

Gary & Joy Peiss
Bratislava, Slovakia



SUMMARY

The Peiss' are doing well! 2018 was a year of long, hard work in raising support, preparing to leave our home in the United States and deploy to Slovakia, and readying ourselves for the transitioning to life on the mission field!

In early 2019, both Gary and Joy transitioned out of work in the US – Joy from 4 years in retail and Gary from a 30-year career in technical sales for the plastics industry. We feel that the Lord both prepared us for, and carried us through, each of these transitions. In fact, He did so in a way that made them largely free of challenges and difficulties.

We are both adjusting to our new pastoral roles at an English-speaking congregation called Bratislava International Fellowship (BIF). The new rhythms of weekly teaching and leadership training are developing, but they are proving to be very fun and fulfilling as well. We are also adjusting to our roles as missionaries serving and supporting other missionaries and pastors here in Europe. We love what the Lord has called us to!

We are experiencing a new “season” of being together often in our marriage. It’s really a good thing, but it is taking some learning and adjusting as well. We celebrated 33 years of marriage in September of this year and could not be more excited to be doing together, the ministry that God has blessed us with!



We hit the ground running with a part of our ministry as we arrived. Installed as pastors of BIF 5 days after we landed, the Lord has given us a great leadership team (that was already in place) and we are all feeling our way along with the vision God is creating for us as a church and as a team. We know that the BIF leadership team is thankful to have pastors leading them who are here for an extended season. And they are getting used to our teaching and pastoring hearts and styles.

Within 60 days of our arrival, we already had opportunities to assist the FMI Area Missionary and to serve and bless two different missionary families. It was not long before we had invitations to serve other families through the balance of the year, and we are so thankful that the Lord continues to be faithful to give us opportunities to serve as He has called us!

DETAILED MINISTRY UPDATE (Looking Back)

JANUARY

2019 – the year of our deployment – started out fast and furious! We continued our support-raising work and attended our final (2-week) deployment training with FMI in Los Angeles. The deployment training helped to put the final pieces in place for our preparation to go, and our monthly support continued to rise to 85% of our budget. With our committed support where it was at, and the additional momentum we were expecting, we asked for, and FMI gave us, the “green light” to deploy at the end of March. We felt that this timing was important so that we could join other missionaries at the Fellowship of European Foursquare Churches (FEFC) gathering in April, and celebrate, with them, God’s faithfulness in getting us to Europe to serve them!

So very special to us was our ordination at the Bridge Church on January 6th! Family and pastoral brothers and sisters from our arrival in 2014, Pastors Ryan & Johanna, Pastors Rick and Angel, and the entire Bridge Church team, have exceedingly loved, supported, and encouraged us in our roles at the Bridge and our calling as missionaries. We count it a lifetime honor to have been able to celebrate this event at, and with, the Bridge Church!



FEBRUARY



February was a whirlwind of packing, selling, and moving activity. With a plan to depart California by the end of February, we quickly moved into a mode of sorting, selling, and packing. Two phases – one for the shipment of goods by ship, and one getting rid of or selling everything but the additional items we were taking with us – took their toll on our strength and endurance. Add to that the unexpected, but welcome (get er done before we have no insurance!) orthoscopic knee surgery for Joy, and to put it mildly, it was a long, hard month. We are SO thankful for those who helped us survive.

Gary continued to “finish well” with his employer and would continue to provide transitional assistance and training for his replacement through the month of March. Our two boys, who had been living with us in California, weathered the transition somewhat emotionally, but well. They have both now relocated, separately, to new “digs” in Southern California, and our youngest, Ben, was married in Tennessee in August!

Our monthly support continued to rise to 88% of our goal, and the Lord continued to add faithful partners to our team! Their prayers and encouragement were deeply needed, and tangibly felt, during what was probably our most challenging month!

We also had the privilege of being prayed over and “sent” by the Bridge Church in Rancho Santa Margarita, CA, and by Eastpointe Church in Bonney Lake, WA. That these congregations would take time to honor and commission us into our missionary call meant so much to us! To transition from leading Missions in both of these church families, to partnering in Mission with both of these families, was both emotionally challenging and deeply rewarding. Our hearts would be more deeply broken if we did not have the privilege of continuing our work with each of our partner churches across the Atlantic for years to come!

MARCH

We departed California at the end of February and spent our final three weeks in the United States in the state of Washington. There, Joy’s brother in Vancouver assisted us in setting up a “USA Base” where he will monitor our mail, banking details (if necessary), etc. We spent precious time with our daughter, Emily, son-in-law Chris, and grandson Callum. We also continued our support-raising efforts



with both individuals and churches. At the time of our deployment our monthly support stood at just under 90% of our budget.

March was deployment month as we flew (us and 6 large suitcases) from Seattle to Vienna where we were picked up by our new friend Sheldon Armitage, a Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada missionary in Bratislava. Sheldon’s wife, Anna, is Slovak, and they have three delightful girls – Mia (14), Livia (11), and Stella (8). Of course, they have become fast friends and, really, are the first missionaries that the Lord is allowing us to serve and support! Thank you, Lord!



And March was also the month we officially became pastors of Bratislava International Fellowship. Welcomed and loved are the two words we would use to describe how we were received ... as missionaries, as pastors, as friends. Predecessor pastors, leadership team, members of the congregation, members and leaders of Bratislava City Church ... were all present to welcome, support, and encourage. We are blessed with a new community!

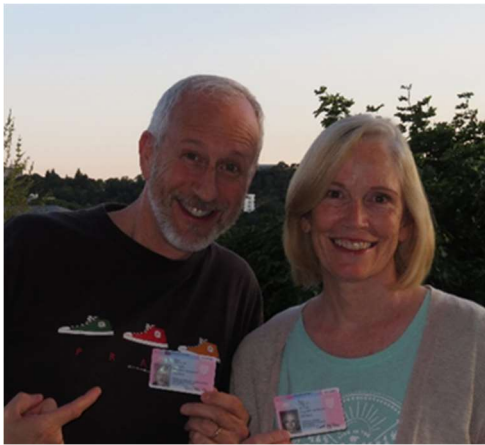
APRIL

We had the opportunity, as we had prayed, to be at the FEFC annual gathering in Kyiv, Ukraine. This is an annual gathering of European Foursquare Church National Leaders, Pastors, and FMI Missionaries. It was, indeed, a “calling come to fruition” moment as we celebrated our official arrival in Europe with the same missionaries who, three years earlier, we told about our heart to come and serve them. God is so faithful, and our hearts were so full!

Our trip to Kyiv was extra special for Gary as his Jewish paternal grandparents – Alexander & Rose Peysakhovich – immigrated to the United States from a nearby Ukrainian village, nearly 100 years earlier. They were escaping the persecution of the Russian Revolution. Gary believes it is possible that he is the first of their descendants to step foot on Ukraine soil since their departure. What an incredible testimony – a departure under persecution and a return under promise! God is so good!

The balance of April was a swift swing into the rhythm of life in Bratislava and pastoring at Bratislava International Fellowship. Gary and Joy started their preaching rhythm with Gary sharing a message of Jesus Beyond the Cross at BIF on Palm Sunday. What a joy to celebrate our first Good Friday and Easter Sunday with the BIF family!

We began to understand the bus system, navigate the grocery stores, buy stamps and mail letters at the post office, and learn enough language to get by with the day-to-day necessities! Although we had to work our way through purchasing a year’s worth of health insurance (no, they won’t bill monthly). We did this being able to speak very little Slovak and the insurance agent able to speak very little English! Thank you, Google translate! Hope we didn’t buy insurance for our dog instead! 😊



We also began the tedious process of securing our temporary resident visas. The first trip to the Slovakia Foreign Police met every expectation of experiencing life in a former communist country – arrival before dawn, “unknown” list in place from people sent to “manage” the queue, waiting for hours only to be told there are no more appointments for the day! Wow! But we were persistent and able to get Gary’s paperwork submitted early in the month and Joy’s a few weeks later. Both Gary and Joy have received their temporary resident visa cards – Gary in May and Joy in June. Thank you for your prayers, and thank you, Jesus, for answered prayers!)

MAY

Having been on the field for only a little over a month, we hosted our first missionary guests – Matt & Abby Edwards and their girls Kylie, Madeline, and Audrey. They are FMI Missionaries serving the Foursquare Church in Linz, Austria with work in youth and children’s ministry. They are a gift to the church in Linz, to the city of Linz, to country of Austria, and to the kingdom of God! It’s not a long distance from Linz to Bratislava – only 3 hrs. drive. But getting needed time away from missionary life and the continual challenges of living in a different culture, language, etc. is important for the emotional and spiritual health of missionary moms, dads, and kids! It was our honor and privilege to host them, feed them, bless them, laugh with them, and to send them back to Austria with the knowledge that we are nearby and ready to help at any time and in any way.



We also had a very special Sunday at BIF on May 5th where we shared our testimony and the story of how the Lord has brought us to Europe, to Slovakia, to Bratislava, and to Bratislava International Fellowship. It is amazing how the Lord is always working on multiple fronts to accomplish His plans and purposes. As we had learned, two years prior to our deployment, during our visit to this city when we were praying and asking the Lord for direction on where in Europe to live, He said Bratislava! At the same time in 2017 the BIF congregation was praying for pastors to be called to shepherd their flock as the current pastors were planning to transition out in late 2019 or early 2019! We serve a God of purpose!

JUNE

Both May and June were foundation-building months at BIF. We felt the Lord leading us to do a teaching series on the Fruit of the Spirit. And He truly blessed us (pastors and congregation alike) in all that He taught us! The series took us all the way through the end of July as we took a week to look at each fruit included in Paul's list from Galatians 5:22-23.

We were also able to give Sheldon and Anna Armitage some needed time away together as a husband and wife! As pastors, missionaries, and parents of three amazing girls here in Bratislava, their lives are fast-paced and full! It was really an honor to bless them and a joy to spend time with their girls Mia, Livia, and Stella!

JULY

We truly "broke ground" with our language learning as we immersed ourselves in the A1 Slovak Intensive course – 4 hours per day, 5 days per week, two weeks! Gary loved the pace – Joy will choose to digest her language learning a little slower in the future! It was a great foundation course with awesome teachers and delightful fellow students – from Russia, Australia, France, and Iran. We had them all over for an International BBQ ... American style! We continue to work on getting to the A1 language competency so we can move to A2. Some days are great, and some days you feel like the batteries in your brain need to be changed! Fortunately, all our Slovak friends are happy to help us out!



We also traveled back to the USA at the end of the month for a very quick (1-week) trip for our son and daughter-in-law's wedding in Nashville in early August. It was a long way to travel with a connection through Istanbul to Atlanta. Then rental car to Nashville ... wedding prep ... wedding ... some very brief sight-seeing and a little bit of awesome BBQ ... drive back to Atlanta ... and home via Istanbul once again! Our time in the USA was strangely different, however. Although we were in our home country, it was already beginning to feel less like home. Feelings that both of us are trying to understand and work through.

We were asked, a couple of times, why we didn't stay in the US longer. It was our feeling that Bratislava International Fellowship has needed a season of faithful and continuous leadership – something that had been absent for several months before our arrival. It was with this heart and leading from the Lord that we made the decision to make our



first trip back to the US a quick one. We were blessed, however, with a little more time with Ben and Tanja as they traveled to Europe on their honeymoon and found their way to Bratislava along the way!

AUGUST

We had the privilege of welcoming a short-term intern – Bekah – for two weeks in August. A young lady from Seattle who was preparing to start on her Master's degree in counseling in the fall. Her desire was to get some current exposure to life on the mission field and we were very happy to give it to her! We road-tripped together to work with FMI Missionary Anna Marie Mazzone in Bielefeld, Germany. Anna Marie is an amazing single woman who is making a huge impact for the kingdom – both with the Foursquare church in Bielefeld, and with her "Street Church". Weekly, she and her team do an outreach to the homeless, addicts, and immigrants in the main park next to the Hauptbahnhof (train station) in Bielefeld. We have such admiration and respect for Anna Marie, and for what the Lord is doing in and through her and those she is working with. It was an ideal connection for Bekah to see how the Lord is using powerful single women in the mission field! We are tentatively scheduled to return to Bielefeld in March to help Anna Marie host a short-term team from the USA.



Bekah also joined us on a 2nd road trip to the Bratislava City Church (BCC) 2019 Family Camp in Krompachy (pronounced "krom-paw-hee") near the famous castle ruins of Spišský hrad (castle). It was a big language challenge for all of us as most of the people of BCC are not English speakers. But as He always does, God makes a way! We worked with those who could speak

English, to minister with and to those who didn't. Gary and Joy were able to do some powerful prayer ministry and Bekah bravely took on leading the "twens" who were there. So proud of her! And the kids were so blessed by her love, her wisdom, and her leadership. Just as it is ours, Slovakia is now forever in Bekah's heart!

The summer in Bratislava brought a new rhythm to Bratislava International Fellowship. In 2018, BIF took off every other Sunday. Somewhat due to lower attendance and somewhat due to leadership desire, they spent every other Sunday doing some sort of social activity (BBQ, picnic, etc.) – but did not hold a Sunday service on those weekends. Again, we felt that BIF needed to be available – especially in the summer for visiting English-speaking tourists, etc. So, we created a hybrid model where we held service every weekend, but every other weekend was an abbreviated service (worship with either no message or maybe a very short one), followed by the same type of social activities enjoyed in 2018. It worked well as we welcomed new guests and spent time in the sunshine and warmth of summer with BBQs, river cruises, and more!



SEPTEMBER

Jonny and Sarah Griffiths and their kids, David, Charlie, Ransom, and Glory, are FMI Missionaries to Cheltenham, England. When we did our initial FMI training together in 2016, they were some of the first to affirm our call to serve and support missionaries in the field. At the time neither they, nor we, knew the “where” of our call, but always felt their prayers and encouragement as we journeyed to the mission field just as they did a year prior.

We were excited, then, to travel and help them in September. They had been long overdue for some time to themselves, so we spent a few days with the whole family. Then we hung out and did life with the boys while mom & dad (and Glory) got away for a long 15th anniversary weekend!



Having people you trust – to be with your kids or assist with ministry in your absence – and to do it while navigating a new setting, new city, new country, and new culture, is of high value to missionaries. We are thankful that the Lord has knit us to adapt to different settings and different responsibilities, and we do it with joy knowing the investment we are making in missionary families – moms, dads and kids alike!

September also brought some ground-breaking ministry for BIF with their first ever prayer night. Set aside to gather all those who would come, we spent an evening in prayer for families and marriages in our church community, for the lost in Bratislava, and for the pastors and leadership of BIF. It was a sweet time of putting into practice what we had been teaching through our series on Prayer. Understanding that yes – prayer is an opportunity to share our hearts and requests with Him, but that we should spend at least as much time listening to what He is saying to us!

We also welcomed Jeff Roper to Bratislava and to BIF! Jeff is the Area Missionary overseeing FMI work in Europe. He and Marc Shaw, missionary to Vienna, hosted a group of Foursquare pastors from the North Balkans (Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, North Macedonia) right here in our home city of Bratislava! Jeff and Marc believed our home city would be a great location for their meetings, and asked if we would arrange and coordinate the meeting space, meals, shuttles to/from airports, etc. We were more than happy to make all the arrangements for them to be immersed in Bratislava as they spent time encouraging each other and allowing the Lord to share His vision for ministry in the former Yugoslavia. It was an honor to share a meal or two with these faithful pastors who are bringing the light of the Gospel into a place of much darkness.

Our BIF family also got to meet and connect with Jeff, and Jeff got a great taste of the small English-speaking congregation that the Lord has given us the privilege of shepherding! Jeff will be back ... and will be bringing Debbie with him next time!



Bratislava International Fellowship
Prayer Night
Sunday, September 22, 2019
18:30 – 20:30
Srznevskeho 2, Bratislava

Thank you for joining us to pray as the Lord leads you. The focus of our first Prayer Night is time for you, as an individual, to spend with God. As you pray, be intentional about listening to Him. He speaks to us through His word and through our spirit. He loves you deeply and has much to share with you!

Whether you are from the BIF or BCC congregations, or maybe from another church, please take some of your time with God to pray for and agree with us on these focus points as well.

Marriages & Families
Those in Bratislava Who Don't Yet Know Jesus
Pastors & Leaders of the Church

OCTOBER

The Lord continues to be the Waymaker in so many ways for us! Back in August, in between road trips to Bielefeld and Krompachy, Steve and Kim Cecil sent us a request to assist them in Russia in October. It would be an understatement to say we had a short window to apply for our Russian visas as we had to surrender our passports and then get them back before our trip to Cheltenham, UK. He made a way! With the help of a Russian visa handling office here in Bratislava (it is a capital city, after all), the Lord gave us a path to apply for and receive our Russian visas in just 2 weeks! We were approved for 3-year visas, so we're ready to assist there for the foreseeable future!



So ... it was a joy to serve as we spent a week in St. Petersburg Russia with Conor and Caeden Cecil as dad and mom (Steve & Kim) navigated busy travel schedules both in Europe and in the US. Their two sons are amazing, and they are thriving and navigating every aspect of life in this city of 6 million people! What a privilege to be there and lend a hand with their schooling, logistics, and life! It was an honor to also serve Kim & Steve's home church – Word of God Foursquare St. Petersburg – and their young adults internship program – The Bridge SPB! There is a strong voice for Christ in the youth and young adults of this city, and the Cecil's are fanning the flame!

We also spent 3 days with Carina Greer on the front end of the FMI Fall Missionary Training meeting. Carina is transitioning into the role of missionary care director for FMI, so she wanted to connect with us and spend time getting to know our hearts and our call, and then talk about how we can all partner together to ensure our missionaries are getting the best care at every level of our organization! Carina and her husband Paul (FMI Associate Director) are gems and former missionaries to Papua New Guinea. We had so much fun knitting our hearts together with Carina and we (and all FMI missionaries) are uniquely blessed to have her standing for us and standing with us!



Carina road-tripped with us to the FMI Europe Fall Training in Desenzano, Italy, that brought together 15 missionary families from 13 different countries in Europe. Pastor Gary Dunahoo brought the Birkman assessment and training to our team. It was eye-opening to all of us and has increased our understanding of how God made us each as individuals, and what “drives” and “re-fills” us. This has increased our understanding of the way that we and others communicate. It has better prepared us for working with other missionaries, pastors, and those we minister with in the context of our own settings and cultures!

NOVEMBER

We welcomed our dear friends the Russells from Southern California just before Thanksgiving. When they met us soon after we moved from Washington State to California in early 2014, they heard our longing to finalize the details of our missionary call, and then they stood with and prayed for us through the final 5 years of our life in America. Their trip to Slovakia was indeed a celebration of the Lord's faithfulness in completing the work that He had begun, and of their faithfulness in standing with and encouraging us the whole way!

They brought a great message on the Holy Spirit to BIF, and we all took in much of the sights and sounds of Bratislava ... including the famous Christmas Market! The icing on the cake was the Thanksgiving meal we Americans all put together for our friends from Slovakia, Romania, Canada, and England. Truly an "International" American Thanksgiving!



DECEMBER

That first day of snow in Bratislava is the day we left for Estonia to serve FMI Missionaries John and Anneli Kelly, and their kids Aria (7) and Levi (5). They live in the small coastal town of Haapsalu (hop-sa-loo) on the Baltic Sea. Called to reach both the youth and the elderly, we were honored to serve and support them. One of the highlights for us was having a place at the table for their weekly outreach lunch to the seniors. The Lord is also opening doors for them to reach the disenfranchised youth of the city. With a very conservative religious history, women pastors are rare and looked



down upon by many in Estonia. But the Lord is giving John, and Anneli, a native Estonian and pastor, pathways to impact the culture that cross historical and spiritual boundaries! We are honored to be part of the FMI Europe team with them and look forward to serving them in additional ways in the future!

To cap off the year, we once-again hit the road and drove to Berlin, Germany, to spend a much needed Christmas with our daughters, sons-in-laws, and grandchildren. Where European freeways are populated with many cars and a myriad of construction in the summer, the Lord blessed us by clearing all of that out in December! The separation from friends and family is real – our sons and daughter-in-law were all still in California. But it was good to be with family for our first Christmas outside of the US as we adjust to new life experiences on the mission field!

2019 / 2020 ... LOOKING BACK & LOOKING FORWARD

With 9 months under our belt, we have yet to fully realize all of the aspects of our call as we believe it to be, but elements of every known aspect are already coming to fruition! Originally, we thought we would be investing time each month in Romania, assisting pastors with leadership development and church planting. But Jesus has answered a long-spoken Foursquare prayer for a full-time missionary couple to Romania. And knowing the Lord still has work for us there, we look forward to assisting them in the same way that we will serve and support other missionaries.

Our Area Missionaries for Europe, Jeff & Debbie Roper, have asked us to serve on a Europe-wide ministry team focused on helping and supporting our missionaries serving on this continent! Yes ... our heart! And we could not be more excited and honored to serve with other leaders, and to serve the family of FMI missionaries here!

We felt, and the Lord has confirmed, that He wants us to use our developed inner healing ministry skills here in Europe as well. We have “dusted off” our Sozo ministry and are slowly accepting requests to do this ministry in Bratislava and throughout Europe.

There are no seemingly insurmountable challenges right now. Our physical, emotional, and spiritual health are good – three flights of stairs (inside) and many more (outside) our flat, and the walks to/from public transportation are keeping us active and healthy! And despite the huge challenge of having surgery and recovery in the midst of our packing, moving, and arrival in Slovakia early in the year, Joy’s knee continues to get stronger with virtually no pain or discomfort through the full range of motion now! Thank you, Jesus!

Right now, our ministry “team” consists of the two of us as it pertains to serving and supporting missionaries and pastors in Europe. We’ve been a team for nearly 33 years now and feel like we continue to get better at it each year! But there is a growing spirit of care and teamwork throughout the FMI Europe community and we are excited about the larger ministry team that Jeff and Debbie Roper are assembling to help insure healthy missionaries in Europe! In many ways, this missionary care and support structure is being observed from all areas of the FMI world with hopes to develop similar networks worldwide! God is good – this was part of our vision for missionary care when we started telling our story over 3 years ago!

Our ministry team at BIF currently consists of 4 young adults (1 married couple and 2 singles), mostly in their late twenties and thirties. One additional couple from our team is taking a season “off” as they are expecting twins in early January. But there are others who we feel are ready to lead “in the wings”.

With a commitment to BIF of no more than 50% of our time, we still have some leadership development work and rhythms to work out in the area of our teaching ministry. Joy and I want the flexibility to teach on only about half of the Sundays (we’re doing nearly 80% of it now), so identifying the additional teaching leader(s) and working with them to develop that skill is a hot topic with us! The Lord knows and will give us wisdom to navigate this development!

Our worship ministry at BIF is developing. Our worship director is “on loan” from BCC and doing a great job despite her very busy schedule. Gary has stepped in to assist (playing guitar, leading from time to time, and recruiting other team members to help build our worship ministry). Pray for a commitment from our existing director, or from someone whom the Lord would bring to BIF, to continue to build the team and be part of our core leadership team.

2020 is already lining up to be a busy year. With commitments to assist missionaries and ministry work here in Bratislava already filling up the calendar for January through April, time management will be key! We covet your prayers to know “the size of our tent”, and for effective leadership development to work smarter, not harder.

We are excited that there are already a couple of “visits” on the calendar from friends in the United States. For those who are investing monthly in this ministry, it is an excellent opportunity to get “boots on the ground” to see what the Lord is already doing, and to encourage and bless us with your presence!

Our hearts are full, and we could not be more thankful to the Lord for all He has done in our first year on the field. And we could not be more grateful for the faithfulness of all those who are partnering with us to make it possible!

2019 CALENDER & KEY EVENTS

January 6	Gary & Joy receive Foursquare ordination at The Bridge Church in Rancho Santa Margarita, CA
January 7 – 18	FMI Deployment Training – Los Angeles, CA
February 17	Commissioning service at The Bridge Church, Rancho Santa Margarita, CA
February 22	Shipped goods delivered to Freight Forwarder
March 1	Move out of home in Rancho Santa Margarita, CA
March 2 – 3	Road trip to Pacific Northwest
March 4 – 8	Vancouver, WA for “US Base” logistics planning with Joy’s brother
March 9 – 24	Support raising & final deployment prep in Pacific Northwest
March 17	Commissioning service at Eastpointe Church, Bonney Lake, WA
March 25 – 26	Depart United States & Arrive in Bratislava, Slovakia From Seattle to Vienna by plane, Vienna to Bratislava by car
March 28	First meeting with BIF Leadership Team
March 31	Installed as Pastors of Bratislava International Fellowship
April 3 – 8	FEFC in Kyiv, Ukraine
April 14	Palm Sunday – first teaching weekend at BIF
April 18	Paperwork submitted for Gary’s temporary residence visa
April 19-21	First Good Friday and Easter Sunday with BIF
May 17 – 20	Assist Area Missionary Jeff Roper with planning for Fall FMI Europe Training
May 3	Host Marc & Kathy Shaw, FMI Missionaries to Vienna, for Balkan Nations Foursquare Pastors Fall Gathering (in Bratislava) Planning
May 29 – 31	Host FMI Missionaries to Linz, Austria, Matt & Abby Edwards, Kylie, Madeline, Audrey
May 12 – Jul 7	Fruit of the Spirit Series @ BIF
May 21	Paperwork submitted for Joy’s temporary residence visa
May 30	Gary receives his Slovak Schengen temporary residence visa card

2019 CALENDER & KEY EVENTS (continued)

Jun 14 – 16	Host Armitage girls while mom & dad get needed time away
June 21	Joy receives her Slovak Schengen temporary residence visa card
Jul 1 – 12	Slovak A1 Intensive Class @ International House Bratislava
Jul 30 – Aug 6	Nashville, TN, USA, for Ben & Tanja's Wedding
Aug 18 – Sep 1	Short-Term Missionary Bekah here
Aug 20 – 22	Bielefeld, Germany, serving FMI Missionary Anna Marie Mazzone
Aug 25	BIF's first child dedications
Aug 27 – 31	Krampachy, Slovakia, serving Bratislava City Church @ Family Camp
Sep 1 – Oct 6	Prayer Series @ BIF
Sep 11 – 13	Host Foursquare North Balkans Pastors gathering in Bratislava
Sep 11 – 15	Jeff Roper, FMI Area Missionary to Europe in Bratislava
Sep 24 – Oct 1	Cheltenham, UK, serving FMI Missionary family Griffiths
Oct 8 – 15	St. Petersburg, Russia, serving FMI Missionary family Cecils
Oct 20 – Dec 12	Holy Spirit Series @ BIF
Oct 27 – 29	Carina Greer, Incoming FMI Care Director, in Bratislava
Oct 30 – Nov 4	FMI Europe Fall Training in Desenzano, Italy
Nov 24 – 29	Russells in Bratislava
Nov 28	Host American Thanksgiving Dinner for 12 from Slovakia, Romania, England, Canada, and United States
Dec 2 – 6	Haapsalu, Estonia, serving FMI Missionary family Kellys
Dec 15 – 29	Coming King Series @ BIF
Dec 22 – 28	Christmas with family in Berlin, Germany

FINANCIAL UPDATE

There are two elements to our support budget – our living expenses and our ministry expenses. They are both paid out of our support funds but are identified differently because our living expenses are issued as 1099 income and are therefore subject to USA and Slovakia taxes. Our budget, of course, includes provisions for both type of expenses and all required taxes.

Our tithes and offerings and taxes portion of our budget represents just over 50% of our living expenses budget (Tithes & Offerings – 10%+, US Social Security & Medicare – 15.3%, Slovakia Income Taxes – 25%). Simply put, with 50% of our support income set aside for our giving and taxes, we require \$2 in support for every \$1 required to live on the field.

Our submitted budget is also based on our projected living & ministry expenses multiplied by 1.25 to allow for a 20% attrition in support once deployed. This is in alignment with FMI support-raising policy. However, we are believing that this 20% doesn't represent a cushion for attrition, but the expansion of our ministry that we are expecting over the first 5 years!

Bottom line ... God is so faithful! He is building a support team that is already providing 100% of our budgeted living expenses, and 75% of our budgeted ministry expenses. We continue to raise additional support (approx. \$800 per month) to get our ministry expense income where we believe our expenses will be when we are fully engaged with our ministry outside of Bratislava. We are confident, as He always has, that the Lord will provide what we need to do the work He has called us to!

We are so honored to have many individuals and several churches as Mission Partners, and we are so blessed by your faithful investment!

The funds sown prior to our deployment were a huge financial boost for transitioning to and establishing life in Bratislava. Pre-deployment and startup costs for a missionary can be significant, and ours were no exception – trips for putting deployment details in place, plane tickets & travel to deploy, visa application & processing expenses, Slovak tax consulting fees, shipment of personal goods overseas, housing deposits, household goods and furnishings needed in-country, and ministry tools required for the call. These are all elements that your pre-deployment investment helped to make possible!

The faithful support that all our partners are sowing every month is a practical, spiritual, and emotional encouragement in the ministry work we are engaged in every week! Our daily, weekly, and monthly expenses are faithfully being take care of by God, through the faithful investment of each of the individuals, families, and churches who have said "yes"! Thank you!

We have not seen any significant attrition in our support since deploying to the field, and we have added monthly support as well . To be fair, we believe that there will be some “settling of the rhythms” in giving in this first year on the field. Many on our financial support team have invested before in what the Lord is doing in the nations, and they understand the importance of regular and faithful support.

There are also many on our team who are new investors. We believe the Lord is working powerfully in their lives to help them understand the magnitude of their investment, to assist them in creating a pattern of faithful giving toward His vision for the nations and His heart for missionaries in Europe, and to richly bless them in new ways. We are so thankful that we get to take our team with us as the Lord calls us to serve in Slovakia, and throughout Europe!

Thank you for being part of our team! We could not and would not want to do this without you!

OUR SUPPORT TEAM

Our support team is our family. And as our family, you are always on our hearts and continually in our prayers. And while you are committed to prayer and encouragement of us and what we are doing, our heart and commitment is to pray for and encourage you as well!

Communications is a critical and deeply valued element of our ministry. We continue to invest in monthly communications through printed & Emailed newsletters, through regular connections on social media, and through written correspondence and Skype/FaceTime calls. We understand the importance of sharing the testimony of what the Lord is doing in and through the work we are called to here in Europe, and we will continue to faithfully tell the story!

There is, of course, a healthy tension between remaining on the field and being faithful to where and what the Lord has called us to, and the need to connect, face-to-face, with all of those who faithfully send, pray for, and encourage us! We currently expect to furlough on a bi-yearly basis but will be open to additional trips to the USA as the Lord leads and finances allow. We also hope and pray that our team members will take the time and make the investment to visit and minister to & with us in Europe!

VISION (Looking Forward)

Having just hit the ground in late March or 2019, we expect 2020 to continue to be one of establishing rhythms and of seeing/following the vision that the Lord would lay out for our ministry to missionaries and for the family at Bratislava International Fellowship. We are anxious and excited, but we are also ready to match the pace that the Lord sets. We do not want to run ahead of Him. He will be faithful to give direction, to continually adjust our pace, and to keep us in step with His plans and purposes!

We have a few ministry goals and a few personal goals for the coming year.

MINISTRY GOALS

Our heart is to connect, on some level, with every Europe-based FMI Missionary in 2020. We are relying on the Lord to continue to open doors, and we understand that building trust will precede any meaningful connections with or ministry with/to missionaries. The Lord will be faithful to open those doors! Having already served and established friendships with many, we look forward to how the Lord will unfold the opportunities to serve and support them in new and greater ways!

We also want to lend effective support to the new FMI Europe Core Ministry Team led by Jeff & Debbie Roper. Besides establishing a quarterly FMI Europe newsletter for Foursquare facilitating churches (the sending churches of those serving in Europe), we want to get “settled” in our role on this team and use our giftings to serve and support them as well. In mid-February, we will host this team (4 couples & 2 individuals), here in Bratislava, for our first planning meeting.

With early assessments and stirrings for the direction of Bratislava International Fellowship, we are praying for growth and new fruit in our worship and teaching ministries, and for the establishment and healthy early seeds of a children’s ministry. Young singles and couples make up the majority of our congregation, and the Lord is nudging us to plan ahead to shepherd our children, and for the growth of families.

We are moving to establish leaders in specific ministry areas including Children’s Ministry, Men’s & Women’s Ministries, Prayer Ministry, Administration, and Worship. Our prayer is to have a strong, healthy, and stable worship ministry led by a worship director who is part of core leadership team at BIF.

PERSONAL GOALS

Devotions

Joy and I have had separate, but healthy devotional times. This year, we are setting a goal to devotion together daily. We look forward to growing closer to the Lord and to each other through our devotional time. With the primary teaching responsibilities at BIF, Joy and I also believe the Lord will use this time to knit our hearts together as we lead the BIF family in what the Lord would share with them!

Sabbath & Exercise

We both have a goal to establish rhythms that allow us to sabbath weekly and exercise regularly. We feel that the sabbath goal might be the most difficult to achieve, so we would ask for the most fervent prayers for us to get there! With our shipped goods, including our bicycles, having arrived in Slovakia in late May, we look forward to establishing a rhythm of being on them regularly!

Language

We would both like to develop a basic conversational understanding of the Slovak language before the end of 2020. Having completed our first language learning class last summer, we need discipline for creating language learning space in our schedules, and boldness to go and use the language ... mistakes and all!

MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES WITH OUR PARTNERS

We believe there is a broad landscape of opportunities for our ministry partners to serve with us in Europe. And we take seriously the responsibility of, with our partners, praying and discerning and seeking the heart of the Lord for us serving together! We believe that as our hearts, spirits, and feet are settling here in Slovakia, the Lord will make apparent to all of us, where and when He wants us to serve together. While serving as Missions Pastor at two different churches in the US, Gary spoke often of creating well-worn paths between the US church and its Missions Partners. We could not be more anxious to establish those paths together! Stay tuned!

WHAT WE ARE HEARING

We continue to be reassured and affirmed in His calling to the mission field! We are living and thriving in His call upon our life. And He continues to remind and reassure us of His promises and faithfulness – in His call, in His provision, in His plans, and in His purposes.

The Lord is continually reminding us of His love for the church. His church. And with his continual and loving reminders, our love for His church continues to grow as well. He is speaking to us about a culture of abiding ... in Him. And that through our abiding, we will manifest identity markers which identify us as different, unlike the world, gentle, welcoming, loving ... reflective of the God that those who are lost will be drawn to.

We are anxious for a journey that gives testimony to His continual drawing of the lost through those that love and abide in Him!

PRAYER REQUESTS

These may seem obvious and simple, but those are often the prayers that are overlooked. Thank you for your faithful prayers!

Health spiritual, emotional, physical

Provision ... for living, ministry, and for BIF

Vision for our ministry of serving and supporting missionaries
for the continued development of the leadership team at BIF

Wisdom for leading, teaching, relationship-building

Grace in and with all relationships

Learning culture & language

CONCLUSION

What a year! We could in no way have predicted the powerful way that the Lord would help us to complete our work and our time in the United States. And then pave the way to and establish the amazing landing pad that is here in Bratislava.

Our testimony is one of trusting the Lord and trusting those whom the Lord has put in our lives to support, train, encourage, and equip. Thank you, Lord, and thank you, all, for your trust and for the part you are playing in this amazing story!

God is good!

Gary & Joy

