

# **Annual Report to Mission Partners**

## **2021**

**Gary & Joy Peiss**  
**Bratislava, Slovakia**



## SUMMARY

In many ways we feel like we began to hit our stride in 2021. Oh yes, there were continued challenges with Covid and every way in which it affected our lives. But in a sustained season of challenges, we have learned better to see the subtle ways in which we can overcome or navigate around those challenges. 2021 was one such season.

Still respectful of ways in which the governments across Europe set guidelines and restrictions to help protect people and economies, we were able to find pathways and opportunities to do our work that were not present in 2020. Yes, we sought the Lord's wisdom and confirmation before walking through any open doors. And we continue to always be very careful in how we go about our work – both in Bratislava and across Europe. But barriers to ministry that were present just months ago, have been, in many cases, eliminated.

We credit the Lord and you, our team, for praying for us. Like halfbacks relying on a great offensive line, we believe your prayers and encouragement have opened up and are keeping open holes and pathways that have allowed us to move forward in life and ministry in the midst of a very challenging world atmosphere. And the individuals, couples, and families that the Lord has invited us to join Him in supporting are being richly blessed by your support and the work it enables us to do here in Europe.

Your faithful support was also a key factor in our being able to furlough this year – our first extended trip to the United States since deploying in March of 2019. We share some of the details of times in the states in the pages that follow. What a blessing to have this extended time with our support team (individuals, families, communities of faith), and our family (kids, grandkids, aunts, uncles, cousins, and siblings)!

Paths to ministry were challenging to forge again this year. Restrictions and limitations continued to affect ministries across most of Europe through the first half of the year, and then again in the late fall and early winter. Slovakia, unfortunately, is one of the most restrictive countries in Europe when it comes to how it allows the church to gather in the midst of the pandemic. Like most European countries, Slovakia is also giving greater privileges to the vaccinated and recovered, which in turn restricts others. So, our heart continues to be to operate safely while creating access for as many as possible, while being respectful to the lead of the larger Slovak church (City Church Bratislava). We are not breaking laws or defying government regulations, however we've been liberal at interpreting guidelines (that leave room for interpretation) in favor of the BIF community.



Relationship and communications are a high priority for us. And with the distance between us and most of the other FMI Europe workers, we are thankful for technology and tools that allow us to see faces and hear voices in order to stay connected. We are very thankful for our 7 care cluster leaders who are using the same technology to maintain each of their cluster relationships. Likewise, we make 3 (or 4) Zoom calls each month (depending on the month) to stay connected with each of our 7 Care Cluster leaders. These regular and purposeful connections have allowed us to continue building relationships with our leaders, even in months we are not able to travel.

And care continues to grow in importance for all FMI global workers here in Europe. As they see the effect it has on their lives and the lives of others, momentum builds for relationships to become even stronger and more resourceful. In fact, care will be the focus of the FMI Europe Fall Training this year. Something we are very excited about!

Locally, we continued to have challenges with our online services. We stayed with pre-recording our Sunday services on Fridays (9 days ahead), and then pre-editing and “premiered” them at our usual Sunday service times on YouTube. This was the approach we had been using since the 2<sup>nd</sup> wave forced us back online in December of 2020. It was a relief to all when we were able to meet in person once again on June 20. When forced back online in December, though, we finally stepped up to streaming live (Facebook) so that our worship, media, and teaching teams could continue their normal Sunday morning rhythms, even when in-person gathering was not allowed. Then, for those who couldn’t catch it live, the full service was available on the BIF Facebook page, and the edited (sermon only) video was placed in the library on our website.

As we look ahead, we are seeking ways to make all of these technical details easier – particularly for a weekly setup and takedown church. We are in desperate need of a new media computer, so this and the need for upgraded streaming equipment and capabilities are becoming a hot topic. We are getting technical assistance from the City Church team, and from others. And we are praying for the provision to purchase these.



And speaking of BIF (Bratislava International Fellowship). 2021 was its last year! No, the community we pastor isn't going anywhere, but as the other City Church congregations have united under one common name (City Church Bratislava, City Church Pezinok, etc.), we too have elected to do the same. Beginning January 1, 2022, Bratislava International Fellowship (BIF) officially becomes City Church International!

The Lord continues to invite us to join Him in His work, both in caring for global workers across Europe, and in pastoring and leading a wonderful community of believers here in Bratislava. You are a critical element of both ministries! We continue to be honored and humbled by your trust, and incredibly blessed by so many of you who also faithfully affirm our call through your prayers, encouragement, and financial support. Thank you!

## DETAILED MINISTRY UPDATE (Looking Back)

### JANUARY

We welcomed 2021 quietly. Unlike in 2020 (when every freedom still existed and we had no idea of the pending storm that was coming), we entered 2021 under the 2<sup>nd</sup> strict (and longest) lockdown since Covid entered the world. So yes, there was some familiarity and expectation of how things would be, but this lockdown (initiated in December of 2020) would last much longer. For Bratislava International Fellowship (BIF), it would mean a full 6 months of online church with no ability to meet face to face.

You weren't allowed to have people over to visit, but you were allowed to go out into "nature", as regional parks or the forest is called here in Slovakia, or to go outside walking for exercise. So, we did this often! And as "coincidence" would have it, we found ourselves at the same places, on the same days, and at the same times as many of our friends from BIF. A huge blessing and so good for our (and their) souls!



We continued the online recording of our Sunday services. We hadn't yet gone to live streaming, so we were pre-recording all our services on Friday evenings. Exemptions for "work purposes" allowed us to have up to 6 people in PS4 ("prednaskova sala štyri" - lecture hall 4), so we found ourselves balancing numbers with 3-4 on worship, 1 on media, 1 on video recording, and whomever was preaching that week. Everyone present was required to carry

paperwork from Bratislava City Church showing a purpose and approval for "working".

We knew that the Soviet-era performing arts center where we met – Istropolis – was cool, but had no idea how cool it would actually become! The clock? We bought it to keep track of the time during our Sunday services in PS4, but we ended up using it as a temperature reference (9.6° C. = 49° F.) as the building management turned the heat off to our section of the building during the Christmas holiday, and ... well ... never turned it back on. If we remembered to come in around noon the day of our recording, we were usually able to get the temp up (using several space heaters) to 15° C. (59° F.) by our 7:00 p.m. recording time! Plenty of motivation to make our worship rehearsal and recording time efficient!



Testing ... testing ... testing. No this isn't a continuation of the story about worship rehearsals. Slovakia also adopted regular testing as a way to combat the virus. In fact, if you wanted to work outside of the home (the recording of our services at Istropolis fell under this category), you were required to have a negative Covid antigen test (government administered) no older than 7 days. So, Gary & Joy began weekly Sunday afternoon "dates" ... walks to our local Covid testing center to have cotton swabs jammed up our nose! Romantic, huh? We're convinced we've each lost brain cells as a result of the length of the swabs and the aggressiveness of the testing personnel!!

## FEBRUARY

Our FMI Europe work was also pushed to the online spectrum. Having begun the online wave in the spring of 2020 as well, the FMI Europe family was already connecting regularly via Zoom for both social and "business" gatherings each month.

But this second wave was a great opportunity for the FMI Europe Care Clusters, introduced in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2020, to begin gaining momentum through the same online connection channels (Zoom, FaceTime, etc.) We initiated the Care Cluster structure with 6 groups or "clusters", made up of 3-4 FMI Europe units (a unit being an individual, a couple, or a family). One of the units in the Care Cluster is the Cluster Leader and takes the initiative for "caring" for each of the other units by connecting with them purposefully and faithfully – about every 2 months.

As leaders of the FMI Europe Care Team, we also have a Care Cluster, made up of the leaders of each FMI Europe Care Cluster. So, we began to model to our cluster leaders, the purposeful and faithful rhythm of connecting with them via Zoom every 2 months. With six clusters, we had three of these Care Cluster calls each month.

At BIF we had been working to put together a "Worship & Word" event in November and December, but never could get it off the ground – not for an in-person gathering, anyway. There were so many restriction changes and additions with the Slovak government trying to get their arms around an out-of-control case increase. But we also believe there was an enemy assignment against this planned gathering, so rather than being discouraged, we became more emboldened and determined to make it happen. It took a very organized recording schedule (remember the 6-person limit in PS4?) of appearances and recordings, but we were able to make it happen in February. Bratislava International Fellowship was truly blessed by all of the contributions of worship, the Word, and devotionals – done by many within the BIF family!



## MARCH

In March we celebrated 2 full years on the field! Hard to believe – seems like just yesterday that we were lugging six full-size suitcases up three flights of stairs to our flat in the Kramáre neighborhood of Bratislava. It was our first taste of what would become our daily (and sometimes multiple daily) workouts by “doing stairs”!

We also completed and submitted our paperwork to renew our Slovak visas. The whole process went much smoother this year than the first round in 2019. No standing in line at 4:00 a.m. as we had experienced back then. An online reservation system made the whole process more straight forward now, and our paperwork was accepted with no problems. Three weeks later we were notified that our residence permits had been approved – and this time for 3 years! Thank you, Lord, for the privilege of staying and serving here in Slovakia, and for making the application process much easier this time!

Still under lockdown, BIF continued online and initiated a 6-week series titled Doing What Jesus Did. Modeled after John & Sonya Decker’s teachings, we also added in 3 weeks on Hearing God’s voice. Just as Jesus only did what He saw and heard the Father say, we want to make sure we are hearing God’s voice in order to do what Jesus did. This teaching was very well received within the BIF family.

March was also a season of final preparations for furlough – not so much for ourselves (yet), but for our teams. The FMI Europe Care Lead Team and FMI Europe Care Cluster leaders were well equipped to care and lead without us – something we attribute to the high caliber of workers here in Europe! Though we would remain connected while we were away, the worker care culture and worker care rhythm were in a good place to function with us being on a different continent for a while.

We also did final prepping for our team at BIF to lead in our absence. We solidified a 3-person weekend teaching team at BIF prior to our departure. Gary formally added Roman Lacho, a Slovak who, with his wife Barča and kids, were missionaries to the Lakota tribe in South Dakota, and Mazvi Ngoshi, a native of Zimbabwe, and a young professional woman and employee of British airways. This team not only allows us to maintain our ½ time commitment boundary for BIF, but also gives us the time we needed to travel and care for FMI workers across Europe. In this case, it was key in allowing us to spend 12 weeks on furlough in the United States.

The BIF teaching team (along with some help from a few outside guests) took the BIF family through a 10-week series in 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy during our furlough. The series, titled “Awareness in Leading”, stemmed from our strong conviction that all Jesus followers can and should be leaders within the Christian Faith Community. It encouraged the BIF family to view the community as their own with a focus on wise leadership within it.

## APRIL

This was one of our most challenging months. First, we said goodbye to two dear families and friends from Brazil. Both came and made Bratislava International Fellowship their community of faith at different times during the prior year. And though they were all from Brazil, they didn't know each other before meeting and becoming close friends at BIF. Both families relocated back to the Sao Paulo area to be close to parents and (for their kids) grandparents, and will certainly remain friends in Brazil!



We were told when we became pastors of an international church that there would be many people “coming and going” as expatriates tend to have lives and work that take them many places. But these (other than some students who were at university here) were our first departures. We considered it a privilege to have a season with these precious families and know that they blessed the BIF community as much as BIF blessed them. We know they are stronger in their faith for having been here,

so we joyfully and boldly prayed and sent them out – back to their home country – to be a greater measure of salt and light to the people of Brazil! Please keep Lucas, Sâmella and Vitoria, and Alessandro, Marúsia and Maju in your prayers as they minister there!

We initiated a personal ministry of “Covid Care” packages – groceries & goodies sent to FMI Europe worker families in the midst of their own Covid lockdowns. When we could (and we were able to do this most of the time), it would be a surprise that would simply show up on the front door with very little advanced warning. This process took some interesting navigating – imagine ordering groceries at an online delivery service in Russia, with an American credit card held by someone living in Slovakia. Uh huh ... there were a few glitches. But for the most part, this was a huge success and encouragement thanks to the love and support you send us – and that we joyfully passed on to others workers that we help care for!



There was much to pray about and many details to cover for our plans to be away from Bratislava (and in the United States) for 12 weeks. With the virus and travel situations uncertain, we continued praying, watching, discussing, and finalizing these plans right up to the day of our departure. There was also a point, early in this month (April), where we felt a caution and took 2 days to pray and consider whether to cancel. In the end, we felt the Lord was still giving us a green light to go but was also helping us to make adjustments to our plans to better protect ourselves and the people we would be seeing.



Our departure and trip to the United States went very well. It was shocking how few people there were in the Amsterdam airport, and we cleared EU immigration in 5 minutes! We arrived and isolated in the Echo Park neighborhood of Los Angeles. Foursquare Missions International provides a week of housing for FMI workers each year at the furlough housing just down the street from Angeles Temple. It is always humbling to be where Amy Semple McPherson had such a powerful ministry and vision for reaching the world!

We didn't know what to expect as far as restrictions, etc., but Echo Park seemed to have the same level of cautions and restrictions we left in Bratislava. And as was the case across much of the United States, we saw a very different picture traveling only a short distance to Orange Country just a week later. That would be the case for our entire 12-weeks in the states. Adjusting to Covid restrictions wherever we would travel.

## MAY

We spent most of May in California – with family, with friends, and with churches – all of whom partner with us in the work the Lord has called us to in Europe. It was a privilege and a blessing to spend time at The Bridge Church in Rancho Santa Margarita, Thrive Church in Glendora, and with so many dear friends and communities of believers who stand for us and with us here in Southern California! We even had a special time with friends from our old Bridge Life Group who still faithfully meet to build up and encourage one another, and to pray for their friends Gary & Joy. We were both blessed and humbled.



We were thankful to spend quite a bit of time with our oldest son Elliott! He made the commute from the “Inland Empire” to Orange County as often as he could, and we found fun ways to simply hang together and enjoy each other's company. Great food ... time at the beach ... shopping ... all great things to do together while laughing and sharing what the Lord has been doing on both sides of the “pond”! The distance from family is one of the biggest struggles while being on the field. But getting to be with them and “catch up” when you return is one of the sweetest parts of a furlough after an extended absence!



Having been away from corporate worship for nearly 5 months, it was (at first) awkward and then wonderful to stand with other believers as we worshipped our God and King! The awkwardness soon wore off, and the wonderfulness just continued to grow. It's hard to describe the feeling of being present with other believers as you worship!! A renewed appreciation we can thank Covid for, but we can be grateful, nonetheless. So many things that we took for granted have been exposed and rationed over the last 2 years. And yes, it is both during and in the removal of the rationing we can be thankful!

BIF never skipped a beat in our absence. It was fun to “tune in” to Sunday services from halfway around the world. We were so grateful for and so proud of the team that carried the responsibility of leading and pastoring this wonderful community of believers! We were not entirely absent, of course. Communication between us and our team continued throughout our entire furlough, but most of it was small clarifications on things that came up, and planning for events and teaching after our return from the USA.



One event we had hoped wouldn't happen at BIF during our absence, did. Receipt of our letter to vacate our meeting space at Istropolis so that the performing arts center could begin to be torn down. We had been searching for our own space before we left on furlough and had prayed we would find what we needed before our departure. But even the few options that looked like good possibilities fell through, so we prayed our time at Istropolis might be extended beyond our return to Bratislava. It wasn't.

Fortunately, we had a space to move to (the City Church ministry center), and both the City Church and Bratislava International Fellowship teams planned and took care of the move while we were gone. Not great timing, but we're thankful for all those who made the transition happen!



We continued to initiate our “Covid Care” packages from the United States. Groceries and goodies were delivered to FMI workers across much of Europe – all facilitated from the comfort of friends' homes or the local espresso shop! Online grocery ordering and delivery to your doorstep – another great thing that we probably have Covid to thank for!

## JUNE

We had planned to join the greater Foursquare Family for connection in San Antonio in late May. When Connection 2021 got cancelled, we kept our itinerary and simply extended our time with family in Texas. We were blessed to be with our son Benjamin and daughter-in-law Tanja, and with Gary's sister, brother-in-law, and niece (and her family), all in Texas. Early June brought some crazy thunderstorms but managed to cut the Texas heat just a bit – something we were extremely thankful for!



Texas was really a sweet few weeks of downtime for us. We loved and cherished every moment spent with our support team in California – catching up, sharing testimonies, helping them to see their hands and feet at work through their financial support, prayers, and encouragement. But it is also incredibly refreshing to simply “do nothing” for a few weeks – something we hadn't experienced in over 2 years. Gary learned how to make Cornish pasties (a family favorite) from his sister Diane and brother-in-law Keith!



From Texas we flew to Seattle where we spent just 2 short days before hopping in the car (loaned to visiting global workers by the Northwest District and Seattle Foursquare Church – thank you!) and driving to Billings, Montana. After an overnight stop and breakfast in Missoula with Gary's nephew, we continued on to the Summer Foursquare Gathering at Faith Chapel in Billings. It was (again, strange, but) a huge

encouragement to be in corporate worship with so many from the Foursquare Family!

Our next stop was the Foursquare Missions International retreat at Camp on the Boulder south of Big Timber, Montana. An annual gathering hosted by Faith Chapel (well done FC team!). It is 3 days of great delicious food, heart-warming fellowship, and soul-filling encouragement among other global workers and many within the Foursquare family who champion work in the nations.



This is a very special event that we are both committed NOT to miss any time we happen to be in the United States at this time of year! We are so thankful for all of those who made this time and this event such a blessing to so many global workers!

We headed back to Tacoma by way of Helena (to visit Gary's childhood best friend). Oh, did we mention that Gary was born and raised in Montana, so this week in his home state may have been his favorite part of the furlough. Tacoma to Billings and back is about 1,700 miles, but almost all of it is beautiful and worth every spying-out-the-window-at-the-landscape-going-by moment! It is a road trip we won't soon forget!



With arrival back into Tacoma, the second phase of connecting with all our friends, family, and churches who support our work, began. Again, many cherished memories of coffee conversations, great food, sharing at churches, and catching up on both sides of the pond. There was no shortage of topics with all the Lord had been doing, and all that the world had been going through in the two short years since we had left.

We estimate that over the course of the 12 weeks we were in the United States, we slept in 12 different beds, drove over 3,000 miles, and spent quality connection time with over 80 individuals and churches. It was an extrovert's (Gary) dream and an introvert's (Joy) ultra marathon. Both of us came out spent but incredibly blessed by all of you who wanted to connect and encourage us in so many ways. Thank you!

We are truly grateful for all those who make up our support team. Your faithful investment in the work the Lord continues to invite us to join Him in is a testament to your love for us – a love we joyfully share with those we are called to love and serve in Slovakia and across Europe. There isn't room to include every picture of every cherished friendship but know that you are each continually and dearly loved and appreciated – the fuel that allows us to continually say “yes” to Jesus.



We were able to spend quality time with our daughter Emily, son-in-law Chris, and our grandkids Callum and Lua in July. This kind of connection really filled up the love tank for us – whether wandering around Point Ruston or Point Defiance Park in Tacoma or reading about dinosaurs on the couch at home. Lua was 1 and Callum was almost 3 when we were there. Such fun ages and so much love and fun just being “Nana” and “Grampa” to these sweet littles. It's so hard to be apart from our kids, doubly hard to be apart from our grandkids!

We were also able to spend about 5 days with Joy's brothers and their families in the Vancouver, Washington area. Again, this was largely downtime and fun. Gary crewed in a sailboat race (mostly by strategically staying out of the way), and then Joy and Gary both joined Joy's brother Jim and his wife Patty for a more relaxing evening sail later in the week – both adventures were on the Columbia River. Simple yet welcome and relaxing distractions from an incredibly busy 12-week furlough.



## JULY

We were invited to share at a number of churches, including one on Sunday, July 4<sup>th</sup>. Seemed fitting for our return to the United States of America! It is always a blessing to give testimony to what God is doing through hands and feet extended to the nations!



The first two weeks of July were in fact the last two weeks of our furlough. It was a roller coaster of final shopping (things we can't get in Slovakia), meeting with people we hadn't seen yet, and one or two family events including the wedding of Joy's nephew in Dayton, Oregon. Such a fun celebration, but a very long day with 3+ hours of driving each way from Tacoma.

We were ready to return to Bratislava. 12 weeks away (as we found out) was really too much – an adjustment we are looking to make with returns to the US in the future. Much had transpired both with our time in the US, and at home in Slovakia. Yes ... Slovakia is home now. It is where the Lord has called us for now ... so it is the home we are making to serve Him, the people of Slovakia, and FMI and national workers across Europe. It's OK ... as believers we are not of this world ... just as Jesus was not of this world. So, we truly consider it an honor and a privilege to be called (like Abraham was) to a place and a season where we can bless others as He blesses us!

The return trip was similar to our trip out – without complications. And it was a familiar sunrise over Greenland that announced the beginning of our return to the continent of Europe! There were definitely more people flying in the middle of the summer, but our connection in Amsterdam and our final arrival into Vienna (and bus ride to Bratislava) went off without a hitch! So thankful for the traveling mercies provided by God on every trip!





We did take a few days to isolate and rest after our trip back from the USA, but we jumped right back into ministry by helping our Young Life Czech friends put on their Prague Summer 2021 English Camp. It was a great week of re-connecting with YL leaders and the Czech youth – many of whom were at camps we helped with last year (and remembered us)! Young Life Czech is strong and making a huge difference by introducing the youth of this post-Christian (post-religion, really) central European nation to Jesus! We continue to get asked to help with these summer camps, and really enjoy this time of ministry. Young Life would love to start and begin developing their outreach to the youth of Slovakia as well. We will see where the Lord takes that vision and how He might ask us to be a part of His plans.

This is a door that Ken & Linda Stapleton, FMI workers in Czech, originally opened to us. We could not be more grateful. It allows us to love and serve the youth of Czech, and it allows us to serve, in a very practical way, with Ken & Linda – who by the way celebrated 30 years of ministry in the Czech Republic in 2021! Amazing faithfulness!

We also traveled to Nowy Targ (pronounced “nowy targ”) Poland to spend a couple of days helping long-time FMI worker Denise Johnson prepare to depart for a 1-year study sabbatical in the US. Denise was moving out of a ministry center she had been using, so the usual curtain-rod and curtain removal, box filling, car packing, and storage organization were all on the agenda. We were also there to help Denise (and many of her local colleagues and friends) celebrate her 25 years of serving in Poland.



We were joined at the celebration by some Polish Foursquare pastors, as well as Travis and Alexis Mielonen, fellow FMI Europe workers serving in nearby Krakow. This is a road trip we really enjoy as the drive takes you over the Tatra Mountains that separate Poland in the north from Slovakia in the south. Like being in Montana all over again!

## AUGUST

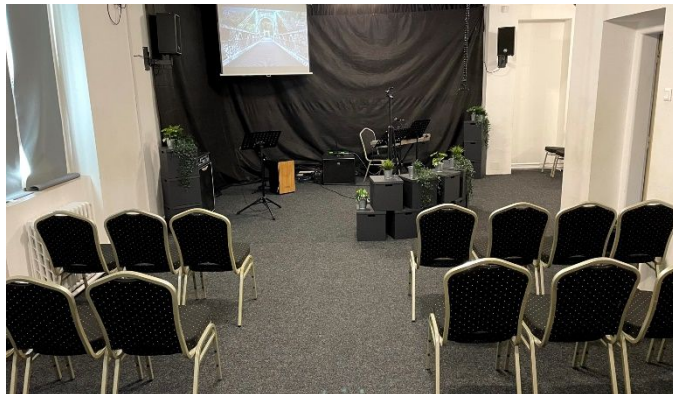
The end of July and the entire month of August were about returning to a faithful presence at Bratislava International Fellowship. After being away for 12 weeks, we felt strongly that we needed to be with the BIF family every Sunday for a while – even if we weren't preaching or serving in some way.

And this is the season when we do “Summer Event Sundays” at BIF – abbreviated services with devotions given by different members of the congregation, followed by an after-service gathering at a home, park, lake, or other fun location in the area.



This year’s summer teaching series was titled “Obedience to Blessing”. As we always do in the summer, we gave several in the BIF community an opportunity to preach. This time about how their obedience to God’s leading and direction produced blessing in their life. Powerful testimonies of real-life obedience that spoke powerfully to so many in the BIF community! Our after-service fun included grill parties and intense games of spike ball and Can Jam – an American favorite now introduced to Slovakia!

We also began to take inventory of “life at Sreznevskeho” – the City Church Bratislava ministry center that BIF had been moved to while we were in the USA. All of the basics were in place – sound system, projector, chairs, etc. But it needed some “finishing” work to make it more fresh and welcoming. A few enhancements to the existing furnishings, along with some additions from IKEA to make the space more functional –



and we were off and running with a “new look”. We gained a separate room for use during Sunday services and are planning to use it for the beginnings of a children’s ministry. BIF families had had two babies in 2021, and three more (that we know of) are expected in 2022! We really need a person with a heart to sow the seeds of this ministry this coming year.

## SEPTEMBER

This was an important month for forward planning. We gathered in Köln for 4 days with the core FMI Europe Ministry Team, led by Global Area Directors Jeff & Debbie Roper, to finalize plans for the fall FMI Europe training to be held in October, as well as to continue charting the course for effective care and support of all FMI Europe workers.

It was an important time of unifying our strategy for delivering the best training and support for FMI workers after they deploy. This is a fairly new initiative with a greater amount of emphasis being put on the continuing health, the continuing training, and the continuing effectiveness of FMI Europe workers AFTER they arrive on the field.

On our way to the Foursquare Europe Ministry team meeting, we were able to stop in Berlin and see our kids and grandkids in Germany for the first time since the previous Christmas. We are so thankful to have some of our family here on the same continent!

Unfortunately, our granddaughters, who were starting their first year of Kita (preschool) brought home some sort of “bug” (not Corona) that they happily shared with their Grampa and Nana. Whatever it was reared its ugly head just as we were concluding our FMI Europe planning meetings, so we hobbled back to Bratislava (an 11-hour drive) and spent a week in bed sick and recovering. It was only the 2<sup>nd</sup> time either of us had been sick since moving to Slovakia. And this time, we both got hit at the same time!

We also celebrated 35 years of marriage on September 20<sup>th</sup>! Sadly, we were both practicing the “in sickness” part of our marriage vows as it occurred while recovering from the bug we picked up in Berlin! We had planned to do something special, but decided it was best to postpone it and do something fun in October when feeling better!



We began a teaching series on Healing at Bratislava International Fellowship. It included topics of What Is Healing, Why Does God Heal, How Does God Heal, and How Do We Make Ourselves Conduits of Healing. This was a deeper look at the topic of healing that we shared in our series “Doing What Jesus Did”, earlier in the year. This was such a great learning journey for our teachers and congregation!

## OCTOBER

We followed up our teaching series on Healing with a series on When Jesus Returns. Meant to be a primer for a journey through the book of Revelation planned for the fall of 2022, we answered three simple questions about Jesus’ return – What Do We Know, What Don’t We Know and Can Be OK Not Knowing, and How Should We Live Our Lives Knowing What We Know and Don’t Know. We feel that it’s important for the BIF family to be comfortable with the topic of end times. Not fearful ... not obsessed ... but informed and confident in the things we do know, and at peace with what we don’t know because Jesus Himself said there are things even He is not meant to know. We can trust God to reveal these things in their time, and to lead and care for us always!



We gathered with those from the FMI Europe Family who could make it, at the annual FMI Europe Fall Training – this year in Köln, Germany. Last year’s meeting was cancelled (for obvious reasons), and this year’s gathering was much smaller, but it was so good to be together. The training focused on helping FMI workers develop coaching

skills geared toward listening well, asking better questions, and helping those we serve (and serve with) plan action steps that they themselves come up with through the coaching process. We also took a morning to prayer walk in the neighborhood in Köln where the FMI Brazee family is planting a church. Being with those who share the Lord’s call to Europe was a huge blessing to us and encouraged all who could attend!

This fall event is a very affordable way for FMI Europe workers to get ongoing valuable training and needed fellowship with other workers serving on the same continent. Lodging and breakfast are typically provided by the Global Area Directors Jeff & Debbie Roper through the generous donations of several facilitating and support churches – ours included. We are so thankful for this investment for us personally. Thank you!

## NOVEMBER

We were so thankful that despite the rise in Coronavirus cases, borders were still staying open – albeit with some restrictions (testing, vaccinations, etc.) on travel and various activities in other countries! Always careful to pray and discern the Lord’s leading in this way, we sensed a green light to travel to Albania and spend time with two different FMI worker families in November. Wow ... what a beautiful country this is!



After flying into the capital, Tirana, we rented a car and drove southeast to Korçë to spend some time with Sean & Vita Mason and their four kids (Eva, Oliver, Eleonora, and Zigmus). Sean is an American, Vita is Lithuanian, and together they pastor the Mission Emmanuel Foursquare church. This

wonderful family has faithfully been God’s salt and light to this incredible country and people since 2001 (Sean) and together since 2008. It was such a joy and privilege to do life with these guys and share at their church. It will not be our last trip to Albania!



We then headed back to Tirana to spend some time with Laura Dakas. She and her husband Chris (who was in the states during our visit) are long time (30 years!) and faithful FMI BAM (Business As Mission) workers who own a wonderful restaurant and bed & breakfast in the center of the city. The Stephen Center is known by so many who live in and travel to



Albania to serve in different types of cross-cultural ministry. And Chris and Laura are connected to all of them! The timing of our visit was on purpose – during American Thanksgiving – when they always serve a full-course Thanksgiving dinner with all the trimmings. We worked hard all day – preparing food, bussing and serving tables, and making guests feel cared for and welcome. Then we got the reward of an amazing Thanksgiving dinner – complete with pumpkin pie made with pumpkin from Korçë!

This is the month that we also began getting our BIF family used to a new name – City Church International (CCI). BIF is already part of the City Church family as the English-speaking community of City Church Bratislava. But the process of unifying the City Church congregations under a common name, already started with City Church Bratislava and City Church Pezinok, had not yet come to our community. Pasho Zsolnai, senior leader of the City Church family, left the decision up to us, but we wholeheartedly agreed that the change was good and made plans to make it official on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022!



## DECEMBER



While a lot of people start to “wind down” before Christmas, the Lord was still giving us opportunities to serve and be with global workers in both England and Wales. Our first stop was to re-connect with and love on Andrew & Connie Taylor, fellow Bridge (The Bridge Church, Rancho Santa Margarita) Global Mission Partners. We first met the Taylors while serving as Mission Pastors at the Bridge. They are a dynamic couple who lead the YWAM base in Cambridge. We are already talking about how we might collaborate with them to host a DTS outreach team or a week-long intensive from the School of Chronological Biblical Studies in Slovakia!

From Cambridge we headed west. Funny thing – we got strange looks when we told people we were doing this. We were told “we Brits don’t drive east and west – we drive north and south”. LOL. But we did drive west (from being nearly on the east coast of England in Cambridge) all the way to where we ran out of land in Pembrokeshire, Wales.

There we spent some time with Mike & Mary Bave, FMI workers who pastor a Baptist church in Pembroke Dock. Yes ... Foursquare pastors leading a Baptist congregation in Wales. In fact, there are several Baptist churches in Pembrokeshire that have congregations, but no pastors, and Mike and Mary are the first to answer the call to shepherd them here. God continues to remove boundaries to care for His faith-filled and faithful!



We also spent some time with FMI workers Jonathan and Nela Marsden, recently deployed FMI workers who are assisting Mike & Mary and praying about the possibility of taking over the leadership of another Baptist church in Pembrokeshire themselves.

While the tradition in Slovakia is to celebrate Christmas on the 24<sup>th</sup>, we also feel that it’s important for our Bratislava International Fellowship family to have a place to gather and worship on the 25<sup>th</sup>. Unsure of how many would attend, and coming off a recent lockdown that prevented us from gathering, we elected to stream our service live. We know that many in our congregation were blessed to connect in the spirit and “online” as we sang Christmas carols and shared the message of “a King that few were expecting”.



We were especially blessed to host a small group of expats at our home for Christmas dinner. The world, as it always is at Bratislava International Fellowship, was also represented in our home. Friends from Zimbabwe, Ghana, Mexico, and Slovakia helped us celebrate the birth

of our savior and enjoy great food and fellowship on this most special day of the year.

We closed out the year with a quick trip to Berlin to deliver Christmas presents and loved on our kids and grandkids. Back in Bratislava before New Year, we were thankful for a December 31 that was quiet and restful. With an incredible year behind us, and a very full year ahead of us, we rested and recharged with truly thankful hearts and spirits!

## 2021 / 2022 ... LOOKING BACK & LOOKING FORWARD

How is it that 12 months ... 365 days ... 8,760 hours, or 525,600 minutes can go by so quickly? It seems like just yesterday we were planning a year of transitions, including the move from Istropolis for BIF, and a 12-week journey to the United States for us. Now all of this is behind us.

As we look back and reflect, we see how the Lord used every trip, every meeting, every ministry opportunity, every location and space, every moment to further His plans and purposes. Plans and purposes that we have always privileged to be a part of! It's really quite remarkable how, when we trust and follow Him, the Lord takes us on a journey to be His hands and feet with all we need supplied by Him!

2021 was not a repeat of 2020. It gave us more opportunity, more promise, and more testimonies of God's faithfulness in every situation – despite worldly circumstances. We are so thankful that each have an EU resident card and a US passport, allowing us to travel freely both ways. And while we were very careful in our discernment of whether we “should” travel even if we “could”, we gave thanks to God for the ability to “go”.

It was definitely a year of both hellos and goodbyes. We lost a dear, dear friend in Washington state – gone to be with the Lord at a very young age – in August. And wow ... how thankful we are that we got to be with her to share and laugh one last time in June. During our time in different parts of the United States, we said both hello and goodbye to many of you. It is a rhythm that is both joyful and difficult all at the same time. Something that as long as we live on the field, we will probably never get used to.

We said goodbye for the first time (other than visiting students) to two families from Bratislava International Fellowship. Families who returned home to South America. We also said hello and welcomed new members of the BIF family from Mexico and Latvia. We love our multicultural family!

We were told this would happen – expats coming and going. Fortunately, the going has been minimal at BIF. We have an incredibly faithful community of believers – still about ½ Slovak and ½ from (now 12) other nations. And we are thankful that we serve as a Christian faith community in Bratislava for many from all over the world!

We navigated 2021 at BIF without a formal servant leader team. Yes, we had trusted servant leaders and help throughout the year, but we didn't have a peace about establishing a formal team until the Lord revealed His plans and purposes in doing so. We are moving that direction in early 2022, and hope to have a new servant leader team, with clear goals and purposes, established in the Spring or Summer.

We will begin the process of praying into, seeking, finding, and mentoring the next lead pastors of BIF (now City Church international). Not to step away from CCI, but to open up the opportunity for a younger couple (pastors) to start and develop a long-term vision for CCI. We envision stepping back and sideways to embrace ministries within the church that we'd like to invest more time in, including worship and discipleship.

We thoroughly enjoyed and were blessed by every segment of our US furlough. But we will make adjustments to our future furlough plans. Our goal of connecting with our entire support team, along with all our family members, was nearly realized. But 12 weeks away from our work in Europe, and 12 weeks of connecting in the United States, was too much. Because our US support team is nearly equally spread between the Northwest and Southern California, we are thinking of creating separate travel rhythms for each. It may mean a few more trips to & from, but probably less frequent face-to-face connections with each church or family. Something we are praying about.

We love the family of FMI workers here in Europe. Each worker family or individual is both faithful and unique in their calling and purpose. The more we spend time with FMI Europe workers, the more we recognize the incredible privilege we have been given to work with and support them. And though our travel in the first half of the year was restricted, our relationship with many continued to grow with rich, funny, and sometimes serious times of conversation and prayer via Zoom. When we do connect face-to-face it is now almost always familiar and comfortable for all of us. This is the dynamic of the God-birthed and God-matured relationships between and among our FMI Europe family. He knew exactly how He would develop care within FMI Europe! We expect, as the pandemic wanes, that our travel opportunities will increase in 2022.

We began to add some structure and focused purpose to the paths of care, and the Lord used these to continue growing and maturing the care culture of FMI Europe. As a result, FMI Europe global workers have a great network of present and purposeful care.

The "Care Cluster" structure has matured and even navigated the departure (and baton pass) from a departing FMI Europe family (and care cluster leader) to another family here in Europe. We believe these cluster relationships will continue to be key connections for health and support between and for FMI global workers in Europe.

Care will continue to be a unique focus in 2022 as we build our FMI Europe Fall Training Conference around the theme of care rhythms. Self-care will be the focus as we team with Angie Ritchie who will be our key speaker. We will team with Angie to bring health-positive self-care topics that both help and challenge our FMI Europe family to build and mature our self-care rhythms and up our overall self-care game.

We will also continue to find ways to take advantage of the wisdom and passion within our FMI Europe Care Lead Team. This is a team of 5 individuals from the FMI Europe Ministry Team (a small group of FMI workers that Jeff & Debbie Roper work with to ensure the health and effectiveness of all FMI Europe workers). With this Care Lead Team, we work to see care needs and to develop care initiatives to meet those needs.

2021 saw the departure of Carina Greer from the FMI USA Care Team – something that was sad and difficult for us. But we are excited about the development of the FMI Worker Supervisor role and have begun working with Kiha Pimental and Joyce Butron to ensure the unity and focus of care objectives across all FMI care structures. We are anxious to see care continue to be developed within this new framework at FMI.

As it was in 2019, and 2020, there was much we planned and expected that came to fruition, and some that did not. We are learning to be patient and give things more time to develop – a cultural norm that is present in most European countries. But we are staying true to our American culture as well – always looking ahead and expecting the Lord to create new opportunities to join His work. Work that will bring us all into greater kingdom maturity, and work that will produce lasting fruit.

We are incredibly grateful for all the Lord has done during our nearly 3 years on the field. And we are both humbled and strengthened by the faithful trust, confidence, encouragement, and support of all those who are partnering with us to make it possible!

## 2021 CALENDER & KEY EVENTS

January 1	Welcome in the New Year under quarantine (a Slovak government requirement after returning from 2020 Christmas in Berlin)
January 3	Bratislava International Fellowship begins 2021 by gathering online – a product of strict Slovak government restrictions that will last until June 20
January 30	Beginning of BIF Series “Mission 21” – Equipping the church and Engaging the community
January 19	Completion of leading 8-week Emotionally Healthy Spirituality online discipleship with leaders from Young Life Czech Republic
February 2 - 10	Recording & Video Editing for Bratislava International Fellowship Worship, Word & Prayer Service
February 8	Start of FMI Europe Birkman Stress Lab 4-segment bi-weekly series
February 14	Bratislava International Fellowship Word, Worship, & Prayer Service
February 16	Recording of City Church / BIF Vision Sunday
February 21	Vision Sunday for all City Church congregations, including Bratislava International Fellowship (online)
February 28	Begin 8-week series “Doing What Jesus Did” series at BIF
March 10-11	Furlough planning meetings with BIF Ministry Team leaders
March 14	BIF Prayer Ministry established with new Prayer Ministry Director and monthly online prayer gathering.
April 21	Depart Bratislava (via Vienna) for 12-week USA furlough
April 21	1-Week isolation and rest at FMI Furlough Home in Echo Park
April 25	BIF Teaching Team (minus Gary on furlough) begins 10-week “Awareness in Leading” teaching series through I & II Timothy
April 28	Time set aside (3 weeks) to meet with supporters in California
May 2	Share at The Bridge Church – Rancho Santa Margarita, CA
May 12	Day-long road trip from Rancho Santa Margarita, CA, to Wickenburg, AZ (and back), to visit Joy’s aunt.
May 18	Share at Thrive Church (online recording) in Glendora, CA
May 20	Flight from California to Austin, TX, and road trip to Longview, TX

## 2021 CALENDER & KEY EVENTS (continued)

May 21-24	Time with Gary's family in Longview
May 25	Road trip back to Austin, TX
May 25 – June 2	Time with son Ben & daughter-in-law Tanja in Austin
June 2	Flight from Austin, TX, to Seattle, WA
June 6	Abby Edwards, FMI worker in Linz, Austria, is guest preacher (online) at Bratislava International Fellowship (thanks, Abby!)
June 6	Share at Eastpointe Church in Bonney Lake, WA
June 6 – 7	Road Trip from Tacoma, WA, to Billings, MT
June 7 – 10	Foursquare gathering at Faith Chapel in Billings
June 10 – 12	Foursquare Missions gathering at Camp on the Boulder
June 13	Time with friends in Montana
June 14	Road trip from Helena, MT, to Tacoma, WA
June 15	Time set aside (3+ weeks) to meet with supporters in the Northwest
June 19	Share at Parkland Foursquare Church
June 20	Bratislava International Fellowship returns to in-person Sunday gatherings (now at Sreznevskeho Ministry Center) after 26 weeks online
June 22	Share at Seattle Foursquare Church
June 27	Share at River of Life Church in Aberdeen, WA
June 27 – July 2	Time with Joy's family in Vancouver, WA
July 3 – 12	Stay with daughter Emily, son-in-law Chris, and grandkids Callum and Lua
July 4	Share at Heritage Foursquare Church in Port Orchard, WA
July 4	BIF begins Summer Event Series "Obedience to Blessing"
July 6	Share at Northwest Church Missions Council Meeting
July 10	Family wedding in Dayton, OR
July 11	Share at Abundant Life Foursquare Church in Orting, WA
July 13 - 14	Fly from Seattle, WA, to Bratislava, Slovakia, via Vienna
July 12 - 17	Young Life Prague City English Camp with FMI Workers Ken & Linda Stapleton (Liberec, Czech Republic)

## 2020 CALENDER & KEY EVENTS (continued)

- August 5 – 8      Nowy Targ, Poland, to help FMI worker Denise Johnson move out of ministry space, and celebrate her 25 years of ministry in Poland
- September 1      Re-launch of BIF Men’s & Women’s Life Groups with new ministry leaders
- September 5 – 14      Time with daughter Elizabeth, son-in-law Shane, and granddaughters Amelia, Harvest, and Josephine, in Berlin
- September 15-18      FMI Europe Ministry Team planning meeting in Köln, Germany
- September 12      BIF begins 4-week teaching series “Healing”
- October 10      BIF begins 3-week teaching series “When Jesus Returns”
- October 20 – 24      FMI Europe Fall Training in Köln, Germany
- October 31      BIF begins 4-week teaching series “Kingdom Culture”
- November 1      BIF formally announces it will become City Church International (CCI) on January 1, 2022
- November 13      Day in Vienna with FMI workers Matt & Abby Edwards
- November 16 – 22      Korce, Albania with FMI Europe workers family Masons
- November 21      Share at Mission Emmanuel Church in Korce, Albania
- November 22 – 26      Tirana, Albania with FMI Europe worker Laura Dakas
- November 25      Help serve American Thanksgiving at Stephen Center in Tirana, Albania
- December 2 – 4      Cambridge, UK, with Cambridge YWAM base leaders Andrew & Connie Taylor
- December 5 – 6      Pembrokeshire, Wales, with FMI Europe workers Mike & Mary Bave
- December 6      Pembrokeshire, Wales, with FMI Europe workers Jonathan & Nela Marsden
- December 7 – 9      Cheltenham, UK, with FMI Europe workers family Griffiths
- December 25      BIF online service “Christmas at Bratislava International Fellowship”



## FINANCIAL UPDATE

Both elements of our support budget – our Living Expenses and our Ministry Expenses are paid out of our support funds. They are identified differently because our living expenses are issued as 1099 income and are therefore subject to USA and Slovakia taxes. Our budget includes provisions for both types of expenses and all our taxes.

Our support remained very strong in 2021, increasing over 2020 by 3%, and exceeding our budgeted income by nearly 9%. This was a result of both one-time gifts and increased monthly giving from some individuals and some churches.

We projected our Living Expenses would remain stable, so our 2021 monthly Living Expenses budget remained the same as it was in 2020. We ended 2021 at 0.5% under our budget. We have kept our living expenses budget for 2022 at \$6,246.

The tithes, offerings, and taxes portion of our Living Expenses budget represent just over 50% (Tithes & Offerings – 10%+, US Self Employment Taxes / Social Security & Medicare – 15.3%, Slovakia Income Taxes – 25%). Therefore, we require \$2 in support for every \$1 required to live on the field. So \$6,246 per month in support dollars is required to yield \$3,213 per month out of pocket to live here year round in Slovakia.

We did budget for higher ministry expenses in 2021 because of our planned furlough, and because we were expecting to be able to do more work with and for FMI workers throughout Europe. Indeed, we were able to travel more, so our 2021 actual ministry expenses were 90% higher than they were in 2020. But they were still nearly 17% under budget. We are expecting our Ministry Expenses to continue to grow as travel becomes even easier and opportunities to serve others increase. But we have kept our ministry expense budget at \$2,917 per month for the coming year, the same as it was in 2021.

God continues to be so faithful in His provision for us! He has built and blessed us with a support team that has always provided 100% of our budgeted Living Expenses and is now also providing 100% of our budgeted Ministry Expenses. 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 our partners, and we are so blessed by your faithful investment. Thank you! And we are incredibly humbled that some would even increase that investment – talk about a huge boost of encouragement to our spirits! An incredible testimony of God's provision!

Your faithful support is practical, spiritual, and emotional encouragement in the ministry work we are engaged in every week! Our daily, weekly, and monthly expenses are lovingly being taken care of by God, through the faithful investment of each of the individuals, families, and churches who have said “yes”!

Thank you! We could not and would not want to do this without you!

## **OUR SUPPORT TEAM**

We truly feel that each of you on our support team are family. Precious friends and confidants – gifts given to us by God – who are all part of the Waymaker’s plan to allow us to join His work here in Europe. You’re continually on our hearts and in our prayers. Our heart and commitment is to pray for and encourage you as you do the same for us!

Communications is a critical and deeply held value 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 Zoom/FaceTime calls. We understand the importance of sharing the testimony of what the Lord is doing here in Europe, and we will continue to faithfully tell the story!

We were so blessed to spend time with almost every member of our support “family” this past year. Wow ... we cannot put into words how special that was for us. We truly need that face-to-face connection with all of you who faithfully send, pray for, and encourage us! Thank you for making time to do that during our time in the USA!

We are still evaluating our USA travel rhythm. Time with our kids and grandkids was so dear to our hearts, but also highlighted how difficult it is to be apart. One thing we are certain of is that straight 12 weeks is too long for us to be in the United States and away from our work in Europe and Slovakia. So we are praying about increasing our trips to the US, relieving the demand of seeing our entire support team, and all our kids and grandkids, all in one trip. It’s a work in progress and we will keep you posted for sure!

We also hope and pray that our team members will take the time minister to & with us in Europe! And we are excited that a handful are committed to make the investment and the trip this coming year to do just that! We are really looking forward to having you!

## **VISION (Looking Forward)**

Nearing almost 3 years since deploying in late March of 2019, we have actually spent more time on the field inside the context of covid than we have outside of it. Somewhat surreal, actually. But we’ve never let any of our circumstances (Covid or otherwise) cloud, confuse, or otherwise deter the call and vision the Lord continues to give us. Yes, we have made adjustments as the Lord has given us wisdom and discernment to do so. But our focus remains the same – dual-purposed in leading care initiatives for FMI workers in Europe, and in leading, pastoring, and discipling the English-speaking community of believers at City Church International (formerly BIF).

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

## MINISTRY GOALS

We feel very good about the progress we've made in connecting, on some level, with every Europe-based FMI worker. We continue to deepen these relationships so we are better equipped to meet needs when they are expressed. We love to care in ways that are not just unique to a given situation, but unique to the persons we are caring for.

We know that we cannot effectively care for, individually, all those who are serving with FMI in Europe. It takes a team – people and resources located both here within FMI Europe, and with supporting churches and organizations in the USA. So, we will continue to work with Kiha Pimena (FMI Worker Supervisor) and Joyce Butron (FMI Associate Worker Supervisor) to insure we all have a cooperative and unified focus.

We have expanded the FMI Europe Lead Care Team to 5 members. This team, made up of us and three other FMI Europe workers, including Debbie Roper, plans, initiates, and oversees care for all of FMI Europe. We have also expanded our FMI Europe Care Cluster network to 7 clusters. Clusters have no more than 4 FMI units (individual, couple or family), including the cluster leader unit themselves. The one exception to that, currently, is the cluster which includes FMI Emissaries who are workers that only spend part of the year on the field. We will continue to use these teams and organizational structures here in Europe to continuously develop faithful and effective care for all FMI workers in this region. Relationships are key, so relationship building and strengthening will continue to be at the core of this maturing process.

We want our FMI Europe Lead Care Team of 5 to continue growing in vision for greater care, and our FMI Europe Care Clusters to continue growing in relationship building.

We are very excited that the focus of the 2022 FMI Europe fall training meeting in October will be worker Care. Specifically, self-care and care rhythms. Joy and I have been asked to help shape the content of teaching and to help lead efforts to plan, organize, and put on this meeting which we hope will inform, challenge, and bless all FMI Europe workers and families who attend. Our team is working with Angie Ritchie, President of Life Pacific University, who will be our partner and primary speaker.

At City Church International (formerly Bratislava International Fellowship), a couple of needs still remain from last year. First, a team of servant leaders who will joyfully share the responsibility of guiding and caring for the City Church family. Servant leaders who will not simply want a “voice” but invest their time and hearts by helping us in practical ways. The need is great, but we are not bowing to pressure to form this team hastily.

And we still need to plant the early seeds of a children's ministry. Young singles, couples, and families make up the majority of our congregation, and the number of children is growing. Families at CCI have had 4 new babies in the last 2 years, and 3 more (so far) are expected in 2022. We are praying for someone with a heart for children and a vision to lead to take on this mantle!

We do feel that City Church International really needs its own ministry space. We are still working to find a space that works (size and monthly rental cost). And while the space at the City Church ministry center is great, and is also adequate for our needs, the challenges of sharing the space with several other City Church ministries makes our weekend service setup and takedown more difficult, and really eliminates the opportunity for mid-week gathering and discipleship activities there.

## PERSONAL GOALS

### Sabbath & Exercise

We are still struggling with establishing a regular sabbath, and regular patterns of exercise. There are frequent “interrupters” and “distractors” – something on the calendar, it seems, virtually every day. So, we too need discipling on establishing healthy rhythms and boundaries. Practically, Monday would be ideal. But City Church Bratislava has staff meetings (which we are a part of) that day, and FMI Europe has all of its team and Europe-wide Zoom meetings that day. By the time Tuesday rolls around, there is already activity building which is focused on the weekend ahead. Not making excuses, just need a way to re-create our boundaries and stick to them.

Exercise was really hit and miss this past year – especially while we were on furlough in the United States. So, we are hoping to establish these rhythms as well. Joy, now pretty much free from shoulder pain, feels that she is ready to get back on her bike, so we are looking at doing this together. Joy will probably supplement this with walking, and Gary will join her and occasionally play tennis.

### Language

We are still making slow progress in this one. The pandemic restrictions have prevented in-person tutoring for Joy, but we are both working, as we can, with Slovak language workbooks and apps. We will pursue a tutor for Joy, and we will work on creating space (and boundaries) for regular language learning.

While the Slovak language is not required for any of our ministry work, life in Slovakia will become increasingly easier as we are able to communicate with people in every area of society. We would like to achieve A1 or A2 proficiency within this calendar year.

## **MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES WITH OUR PARTNERS**

Covid again prevented travel for those who sought to come to Slovakia in 2021. But it's a new year and we believe travel will continue to open up and give opportunity for partners to come visit and help if that is their heart.

There is a broad landscape of opportunities for our ministry partners to serve with us in Europe. And we take seriously the responsibility of praying with our partners and discerning and seeking the heart of the Lord for us serving together! In our time with the Taylors in Cambridge in December, we began to talk about what hosting a YWAM team in Slovakia would look like. It all starts with a discussion, and then letting the Lord unify hearts and purpose.

## **WHAT WE ARE HEARING**

Stay the course, and plan for the future. We believe the Lord continues to give affirmation to the type and direction of the work we are doing. We believe we still have so much to learn but are thankful for the ways in which the Lord has invited us to join Him in His work – both with caring for global workers across Europe, and with pastoring and reaching the multicultural English-speaking community here in Bratislava.

We have never felt that He called us to fill the roles of lead pastors indefinitely. And we believe He would also have us begin the process of seeking a younger couple to take over that role at City Church International. So, we have begun the process (which we believe will take 2-3 years) of praying into, seeking, finding, and mentoring the next lead pastors. We are doing this, of course, with the approval, help, and unified discernment of the leadership of the Slovak City Church team here in Bratislava.

We would not step away from CCI unless the Lord specifically asked us to do that. Instead, we envision a season of mentoring a new couple, helping them to transition into leadership, and then stepping back and sideways a bit to embrace ministries within the church that we'd like to invest more time in.

## PRAYER REQUESTS FOR THE COMING YEAR

Thank you for your continued prayer support. We feel the many and faithful prayers of those who converse with God on our behalf!

Health	Spiritual, emotional, physical. Especially sabbath and exercise rhythms and faithfulness.
Help	Leadership and ministry help at City Church International, especially a trusted servant lead team and a children's ministry director.
New Pastors	Ready to initiate the process of identifying and passing the lead pastor baton at City Church International.
Grace	In and with all relationships
Learning	Culture & language

## CONCLUSION

2021 – the year that was about adjustments for effectiveness! Continuing to do what God has called us to do, despite the exceptional circumstances that made this year so challenging. We are thankful for every moment, place, and purpose that He entrusted us with this year. And we can't wait to see what He has in store next!

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*

