Travel with me back into Old Testament history to the period of Israel’s Babylonian exile. False prophets were telling them to expect to return to the land in two short years. God’s prophet sent them a letter, which we know as Jeremiah 29, saying their exile would last far longer – 70 years! How disheartening that news must have been, but God did not leave them in despair. He gave them specific instructions for life in exile:

• Build houses and live in them
• Plant gardens and eat the produce
• Get married, let your sons and daughters marry
• Bear children

In other words, go on with life even though you’re living in a hostile land. And don’t let Israel die out. Increase in number! This message was not too different from what He told Adam and Eve in Eden (Genesis 1:28).

Through Jeremiah, God also told His people to seek the welfare (peace) of the cities where they had settled and to pray for the other inhabitants. “In its welfare you will have welfare.”

As we know, exile was chastening for idolatry and not attending to God’s law (Deut. 28). They wanted to return to Israel but first they had to return to God. While still in exile, they could live for God – separated from the surrounding culture, living distinctly as God’s people.

This is very similar to our situation today. While Jeremiah’s words were for Israel of that time and place, we as Christ’s ambassadors in a culture grown increasingly hostile can find comfort and instruction in Jeremiah 29:4-7.

We too are foreigners in a land that’s not our real home. We await our Lord’s return and the blessing of living with Him in a new heaven and a new earth (2 Peter 3:11-13). One day Satan will be banished and Christ will reign on His throne – no more tears, death, sorrow, pain.

Years ago, Francis Schaeffer asked, “How should we then live?” Several New Testament passages add to our understanding:

• Romans 12:14-21 – “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.”
• 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 – “Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands… so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.”
• 1 Timothy 2:1-2 – pray for government leaders “so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.”

It doesn’t mean we should be passive. No, we are Christ’s ambassadors to people living in chaos, violence, and all kinds of evil. We must share the good news of salvation and lead lives that exemplify our Savior’s character (2 Corinthians 5:20).

The good news is He’s not left us alone! Through the power of His Spirit and with faith in His sovereign control over all things, we can live in peace and confidence during fearful times.

And, as we work and raise families, we can also care for women in crisis pregnancies and for those nearing the end of life. By these and other pro-life ministries we confront a godless culture and show God’s love.

BULGARIA

One culture in which Christians are seeking to make a difference is Bulgaria, a formerly communist country.

Bethany Morris directs Pregnancy Choices on the south side of Lansing, Michigan. She and her husband and two others from the center recently made a trip to Bulgaria, and asked Life Matters Worldwide for help establishing a pregnancy care center there.

It all began with her pastor’s search for a people-group that their church (Cedar Street Church in Holt, MI) could serve. On an exploratory visit to Bulgaria, he discovered the Pomac people who are converts to Islam, and a need for pro-life ministries that offer alternatives to abortion. He asked Bethany for help, and she came to us.

Abortion is often used as birth control in Bulgaria. Women will have as many as 13 abortions after reaching their desired family size of one or two children. The government pays for abortions, and “pregnancy termination” is viewed as the solution to unplanned pregnancy. Nearly 6 million abortions have been reported there since 1953.

There is nothing like a PCC in Bulgaria, but pastors are very interested in starting one. A church in Sofia has offered
a building, but has no one to lead the effort. An obstetrician/gynecologist in another city (Sandanski) has been steering women away from abortion but could use the support of a PCC.

As in Ukraine, the strategy for forming a center may involve first offering post-abortion Bible studies. Those materials are currently being translated. PCC leaders and volunteers could be recruited from among those who complete the study. Bethany and Life Matters will continue exploring ways to meet the need. Please pray as this effort moves forward.

ULTRASOUND FOR PNG

God has greatly used the ministry of missionaries Bill and Lori Smith in Papua New Guinea. Lori operates a medical clinic and sees many pregnant women. Over the years she has used ultrasound equipment that we helped provide to show them their unborn babies and turn their hearts toward giving life. But that equipment has worn out!

Thankfully, through her supporters and our connections, a new portable sonogram machine has been secured. This summer Lori is in the States to take delivery of the equipment and receive training from our good friends at Ultrasounds for Life and Innovative Imaging Technology.

SUMMIT 2016

Since at least 1994, we’ve hosted an annual two-day Summit for pregnancy care center staff, board members, and volunteers at a conference center. Before that, we’d simply gather around a table in our office with directors from the centers we’d helped open. This year’s Summit was our biggest ever, with about 175 in attendance.

As in the previous two years, we met at Maranatha Bible & Missionary Conference on Lake Michigan. Our main speaker was Scott Klusendorf, of Life Training Institute, who focused his four sessions on making the case with skeptics for human dignity at all stages. Other gifted speakers brought workshops on topics as diverse as avoiding financial risk, human trafficking, abortion pill reversal, and loving your client as yourself.

Thanks to our supporters, we were able to host four missionaries (from Ukraine, Chile, and Liberia) free of charge, and offer scholarships and discounts to other centers. We always aim to keep the costs low so that people from even the most rural centers are able to afford it.

Here’s what some of our grateful guests said about the 2016 Summit: “It’s part of our annual training,” “Highlight of the year,” “Invigorated my ministry heart. Gave me excellent tools for the battle.” “I’m excited to go back and reinforce what I learned.”

LIMA SUMMIT

The biennial Summit in Lima, Peru, is always a joyous time of fellowship with our South American partners. Missionary Evelyn Stone and her staff from Centro Prenatal Vida Nueva do a great job promoting and organizing the event for guests from Chile, Ecuador, Colombia, and Peru.

Julie and Brant Cuthbert made the trip (along with Tom Lothamer and John Macomber) to present LIFT and end-of-life ministry to an enthusiastic group of pregnancy care center and church leaders. Although death is a very taboo subject, their presentation opened up a dialog.

Brad Imler (from America Pregnancy Services in Dallas, Texas) joined Tom to conduct training in the areas of PCC operations and counseling. John led a well-received plenary session on encouragement.

As a result of the Lima Summit, we have invitations to go to Ecuador, Chile, and the other side of Peru next year, to help with the development of additional pregnancy care centers.

WHAT’S NEW WITH LIFT?

Julie Cuthbert would love to talk to you about bringing LIFT (Living in Faith Together) to your church. Together you can explore what ministries to the aging and infirm are already taking place, identify areas of continued need, and discuss whether implementing all or portions of LIFT might be a good fit for your church. Email julie@lifemattersww.org or call (616) 257-6800, ext. 103.

FISCAL REPORT

The following is an overview of Life Matters Worldwide’s income and expenses for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2015:

- Total support & revenue: $390,826
- Program expenses: $310,875
- Management & general expenses: $74,865
- Fundraising expenses: $47,125
- End of year net asset balance: $132,057

We’ve also posted our 990 form for 2015 online at lifemattersww.org > How Can You Help?