

## Colorado Couple Travel the World to Teach Pastors

Peggy and Delron Shirley make their home on a mountainside overlooking Colorado Springs, but they say that they feel that they belong just as much on the bustling streets of Calcutta. The couple say that they have lost count of the number of times they have been in India and at least a dozen other countries around the world to hold training conferences for the national pastors. Both have had to have extra pages added to their passports to accommodate the visas and border-crossing stamps from such exotic places as the Maldiv Islands, Kenya, Guatemala, Finland, Philippines, Japan, Bangladesh, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Zimbabwe, Myanmar, and Korea. Delron chuckles about a time when he was re-entering the US and the passport control officer commented, "It looks like you are trying to visit every country in the world." His reply was, "Yes, that's the plan." In fact, their ministry's name bears out that very idea: Teach All Nations. The Shirleys explain that they came up with the name during a time of serious soul searching several years ago. At that time, they had already been tremendously active in trotting around the globe on short-term mission trips and were questioning the Lord about becoming career missionaries in a foreign land.

As they continued to seek the Lord's guidance about making the move, they felt directed to the Great Commission passage in the twenty-eighth chapter of Matthew where Jesus sent the disciples as missionaries to "teach all nations." Delron admits that it wasn't until he had read the passage several times that he was able to "stop looking at the trees and see the forest." Just as Jesus told His disciples to go to all the world rather than just one place, His commission for the Shirleys was also to have a global venue. Peggy emphasizes that their calling is to teach the pastors who can then impact their local communities. "It's always funny when we return home," she adds, "because people want to know how many people we won to the Lord on the trip. Our simple answer is that we were speaking in pastors' conferences, and all the pastors were already saved." Of course, there is always one-on-one evangelism with the locals they meet as they travel. Delron recounts one really interesting story about a pastors' conference in the mountains of Nepal when they rented an entire hotel to accommodate the pastors who had come in for the meetings.

With no other guests in the building, he told the staff to sit in on the meetings since they had nothing else to do while all the pastors were in the classes. At the end of the sessions, he called the hotel staff together for a special session and asked them what they thought of what they had heard. The entire staff responded that they would like to convert from Hinduism to Christianity! Peggy adds that almost the entire staff at the hotel they frequent in Kathmandu, Nepal, have also become believers through the distribution of Bibles and gospel tracts on their many visits. Nepal has been a focus of the Shirley's ministry since the nation was granted religious freedom in 1990. Prior to that time, the country was under the rule of a strict Hindu monarchy and it was illegal to even own a Bible. Delron says that in 1986 he started praying daily for things to change in the Himalayan kingdom. He says that he was probably as excited as a Nepali when the new constitution opened the doors for Christianity. When the Shirleys began their annual missions to the Hindu stronghold, they found an emerging church

desperate for solid Bible teaching. Delron recalls that on his first trip into the country, he was asked to explain what the word "hallelujah" means. Today Nepal is considered the fastest growing center of Christianity in the world. In one of the ministry's newsletters, Delron described the approach he uses to emphasize his points when he teaches the pastors, "I really surprised the pastors and cell group leaders who had gathered for the Christian Leadership Conference in Sri Lanka when I opened the session by throwing out packets of candy. You should have seen the frenzy of hands eagerly grabbing the sweets as they flew through the air over their heads. The room was a virtual landscape of commotion and delight as they tore open the plastic wrappers and began to indulge in the unexpected treats. Once they regained their composure and the room settled down, I went to work teaching them about the gifts of the Spirit. After the lesson, I asked for all those who were sick or in pain to form a line across the front of the auditorium. About half the group came forward expecting me and my team to minister to them. Then came another surprise--even bigger than the candy. I called the rest of the delegates to form another line facing those who wanted prayer. I told them that the Bible said nothing about having to be a white American who speaks English to be able to operate in the power of God; these promises are to all who will receive them. I then reminded them of the candy, telling them that it was more than just an unexpected blessing--it was an object lesson. Just as they didn't have to pay for the candy, they would not have to earn the gifts of God.

I encouraged them that they could receive the power of God in the same way they got their candy--by reaching out and grabbing it! I asked how many still had their candy--and, of course, no one did. Then I encouraged them to immediately put the gifts of God into operation just like they eagerly put their treats to use. As the nationals began to pray for their fellow delegates, every one in the room received a miracle: the sick were instantly healed and the ministers began to operate in a new dimension of anointing. When I asked them how many of them had ever prayed for the sick, everyone responded that they had not! But from that day forward, they were launched into a new dimension of ministry." Peggy has a real burden to raise up women into active roles in the ministry. She presents seminars entitled, "Women for the Harvest," in which she details what the Bible says about women and encourages women through showing them what history records about great women of faith through the ages. This is an especially novel teaching in the third world, and it has certainly "raised a lot of dust" in some places. When asked to deliver this message at a conference in Rwanda where pastors from at least six African nations had gathered, a number of the pastors strongly objected. She replied by telling the story of the Nigerian pastor who had vehemently refused her message but later came back to her to confess that God had made him change his mind. When he realized that his church was not growing, he questioned God about the problem, and the Lord responded, "I made women to give birth, but you are keeping them barren!" The Rwandan pastors listen and responded--and have now allowed women into their Bible training programs!

All three of the Shileys' sons have accompanied them to the mission field. Peggy relates one mission strategy they learned from Christopher when he was only about ten years old. As they were traveling from one city to another, he became

disturbed about the many villages they were passing through without sharing the gospel with the people. When the van slowed down in each village, he opened the window of the van and started handing out Scripture booklets.

The outreach of TAN (Teach All Nations) is not limited solely to teaching conferences. For example, the Shirleys partnered with Feeding the Nations to bring much-needed food and supplies as well as biblical teaching to the devastated coastal villages of India and Sri Lanka after they were struck by a massive tsunami in December of 2004. They have also helped raise funding for building a Bible college in Nepal and a Christian school in Zimbabwe and have established a scholarship fund to help promising students from developing nations get a Christian education. TAN also provides opportunity for those who want an introduction to missionary work to go with the Shirleys to assist in the ministry and experience living and working in a foreign setting. When questioned about funding for these extensive travel and various projects, Delron replied that the work is all by faith in God and the generosity of friends who support the vision. He jokingly added that in addition to Jehovah-Jirah, biblical name of God which means the God who supplies, he is also convinced that God has another name, Jehovah-Nick, "the God who comes through just in the nick of time."

When asked about the highlights of their missionary ventures, Peggy responded that meeting Mother Teresa in the convent in Calcutta was certainly a moment she will never forget. She then quickly adds that God has also given them the opportunity to join hands with scores of other ministers around the world whose names are unknown in this world but whose ministries are impacting their nations for the kingdom of God.

Someone once very accurately observed concerning the revival that is occurring in many parts of our world today that it is a mile wide but only an inch deep--the result of energetic evangelism by both missionaries and local Christians who are actively following the Great Commission. However, there is a marked shortage of teachers who are taking the next step in fulfilling our Lord's directive to teach them how to observe all that He has commanded. TAN's commitment is to deepen that revival by helping to establish a solid foundation in the pastors and leaders so that they can help enrich the people. Often TAN pays for the travel and lodging of hand-picked national leaders because Delron and Peggy want to invest into their lives but know that these third world saints could never afford to come at their own expense. TAN always provides the meals for all the guests during the conferences. In addition, the ministry tries to furnish solid Christian literature in their local language or in English for those who understand the language.

Delron began his international teaching ministry in the 1970s while still a college student through summer mission trips to India, Sri Lanka, and Japan. Peggy has brought a new emphasis to TAN's ministry--an outreach to the women. In third world nations, the women are second class citizens; this really forces them into a very oppressed status. But to Jesus, every person is in first place; therefore, one unique area of TAN's work has been to hold an annual women's conference in which the Christian women are taught how to advance in the love and benefits of Christ. This special emphasis on a forgotten and neglected element of society has produced tremendous fruit in the individual lives of the women and in the

strengthening of the church. The zealousness that burns in their hearts for their mission can be reflected in the record of their intensity when on the mission field. Delron reported on one of the trips by saying, "Counting the day we landed and the day we flew out, we were actually on the ground twenty days; yet I personally taught thirty-one sessions. My traveling companion ministered in one session each day to give me a couple hours' break before the evening rallies. Including his ministry, we had a total of forty-two preaching and teaching sessions. Yes, it was a tiring schedule; but the hunger for the Word of God which these eager people demonstrated as they sat for hours on end made fatigue and exhaustion pale in comparison. In addition to our itinerary, Peggy held an additional eighteen women's meetings--bringing the total number for our team to sixty meetings. This was an exhausting schedule when you remember that we traveled to nine different cities in three countries during these twenty days!"

The eagerness of the people to learn can be indicated by the sacrifice they will pay to attend the training conferences. Because there is no modern highway system in most of the counties where the Shirleys minister, many times the delegates have to travel for days to get to the meetings. In Nepal, for example, individuals have been known to travel as much as eight days--six days of walking to get to the highway where they could catch a bus for the thirty-or-more-hour bus ride to Kathmandu. Delron expressed that it was unbelievably humbling to minister to people who have made that much of a sacrifice to receive the Word of God! Once, a delegate who was not able to come to one of the national leadership conferences walked for three days to a village where he could get a phone to call and say that he was not able to attend; he spent almost a week of his life (three days coming and another three days going home) just to make a phone call and say that he wanted to come but would not be able to! This is real sign of the hunger that there is for the Word of God!

In addition to what they were able to do in person, the Shirleys have been able to leave a lasting impact on the nations by publishing literature in English and in the local languages. Delron also teaches God's Word in cyberspace through the simple and inexpensive--yet fast and efficient--approach of a monthly email meditation.