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# COUNTRY Matters



"Contending earnestly  
for the faith..."  
Jude 3 (NKJV)



Keeping Country Churches Alive



# A View From the Country

with Brian Wechsler, Executive Director

## A Rich Legacy

Our theme at Village Missions this year has been “Legacy.” Through 70 years of ministry, Village Missionaries have left a rich legacy in rural North America. So many lives have been changed because missionaries were willing to go to unremembered places to preach the Word and love the people.

For many years, we had trouble recruiting new Village Missionaries to continue this legacy.

First, most Christian colleges and seminaries do not encourage their students to consider rural ministry.

Second, tuition has become so expensive that many students are convinced they must find a high-paying job immediately to pay off student debt.

Finally, many college and seminary classes are stressing church



communications, small group development, or how to increase attendance. This type of education does not prepare students for shepherding people in rural churches and communities.

That is why I am so excited about the Contenders Discipleship Initiative.

The CDI is free, immersing students in the Word of God and teaching them to study it for themselves.

We have seen dozens of Village Missionaries trained through the CDI, including the couple you will read about in this issue.

I know that the CDI will leave a rich legacy in Village Missions and across rural places everywhere.

Standing with the Country Church,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian".

Brian Wechsler  
Executive Director







Rick's heartstrings pulled as images of rural communities and country churches flashed across the computer screen. The more he heard and read about Village Missions, the more he thought this was exactly what God had been preparing him for.

Not only that, but Village Missions provided their own training program through the Contenders Discipleship Initiative. It was perfect!

But he couldn't tell Stephanie that. She'd never leave the family farm. Not after growing up there and now watching their own kids put down roots.

So, he couldn't believe it when Stephanie approached him that fall.

*"I feel like I need to let you know that if you feel like you're called to leave the farm, I'm okay with that."*

And so, Rick and Stephanie's journey with Village Missions and the CDI began—a story that would have seemed impossible not that many years ago.

## YOUNG LOVE & A LIFE-CHANGING WEDDING

Rick Sherman met Stephanie in fifth grade. They began dating in high school and were married shortly after. That part of Rick's life



went as planned.

What didn't go according to plan for either of them was everything else.

Neither were believers when they married, and as Rick graduated, he even grew hostile toward the idea of church.

Stephanie's story, however, went a different direction. She came to Christ in college through the Bible study of a friend. The group began praying for Rick, with one of the girls asking her entire church to pray for him.

Still, Rick refused to try out a church.

**RICK REFUSED  
TO TRY OUT A  
CHURCH.**

When Stephanie was asked to be the matron of honor at her best friend's wedding, everything changed. The engaged couple prayed fervently that one person would come to know Christ because of their wedding.

The day of the wedding, the groom became extremely sick and was rushed to the emergency room immediately after the ceremony.

Sitting in the hospital waiting area, Rick found himself next to the officiating pastor.

The next week Rick and Stephanie were at church, and Rick gave his



life to Christ shortly after.

## CHANGES OF HEART



Rick and Stephanie continued to grow in their faith, with Rick serving as an elder after 3 years in the church. He worked at his father-in-law's farm near Monitor, Oregon. It was a place Stephanie had lived her entire life and never intended to leave.

After ten years at their church, both Rick and Stephanie felt called to attend a local church closer to their home. Their pastor recommended that they plant a sister church, and he began training Rick toward this ministry.

During this time, Village Missionary Barb Douglass invited the Shermans' children to attend their church's Vacation Bible School. Rick decided to investigate the church to make sure it was a safe place to send his kids, and that was when he discovered Village Missions and the Contenders Discipleship Initiative.

After Stephanie agreed to pursue ministry outside the family farm,



Rick told his pastor all about the CDI and Village Missions, and he was quick to respond.

*“You shouldn’t be church planting. You should be serving with Village Missions!”*

Scheduling a meeting with Tim and Barb Douglass, Rick and Stephanie went to see if this was God’s plan for them. Before the meeting, Rick prayed that if Village Missions and the CDI was for them, Tim would mentor him.

He didn’t know Tim had told Barb the year before that he had no intentions to mentor someone through the CDI.



VILLAGE MISSIONARIES  
TIM & BARB DOUGLASS

Yet, as the meeting ended, Tim declared, “By the way, I’m going to mentor you.”

## EQUIPPED FOR SERVICE

So, Rick and Stephanie began a 2 ½-year journey at Monitor Bible Church toward becoming Village Missionaries.

It was a strange transition because as they stepped foot in Monitor

Bible Church for the very first time, everyone knew that this couple was not there to stay.

*“We showed up to the church with the plan to leave. We were there to be trained and equipped to serve with Village Missions.”*

Yet the congregation at Monitor welcomed the Shermans with open arms.

*“They loved us and encouraged us. Tim had me teaching adult Sunday school and they were patient with me—preaching on Sundays, and they were encouraging. They rallied behind us. Half the church came down to candidate school just to cheer us on. It was great.”*

Still working at the family farm, Rick began his intense studies through the six courses of the CDI—learning proper Bible study methods in Bibliology, growing through Christian doctrine and finding Jesus in the Old Testament were just a few highlights.

CDI PUT  
IT ALL  
TOGETHER.

*“All these little bits and pieces that guys had shared with me all the years—CDI put it all together.”*





Not only did the CDI provide biblical training and opportunities to serve in the church, it removed the financial burden of attending a seminary. Once paralyzed by fear from stories of friends plunging into student debt, Rick could fully train for ministry for free.

Finally, the CDI provided an opportunity for Rick and Stephanie to be mentored toward ministry.

For two years, Tim and Barb walked through life with the Shermans, meeting for hours at a time most weeks. They answered questions, spoke from personal experience and guided Rick and Stephanie through the time of training.

*“Tim and Barb were amazing,” said Stephanie. “It was hard leaving them and the church. Monitor loved on us for the 2 ½ years we were there.”*

Today, the Sherman family serves in Lookingglass, Oregon, a church that has been served by Village Missions since 1958. Though still in their first year, Rick and Stephanie feel prepared through the training of the CDI and mentorship and are excited to see how God will use



them at Lookingglass Community Church.

## EQUIPPING SPIRITUAL LEADERS

### WHAT IF THE CDI DIDN'T EXIST?

What if the CDI didn't exist? Where would the Shermans be today, and who would be preaching the Word and loving the people at Lookingglass Community Church?

Without the education or finances to go to seminary, Rick and Stephanie may have never been able to become a part of the mission they were called to join. The CDI and mentorship made that possible.

With the rise in online learning and the yearly spike in Christian tuition, the CDI is training the next generation of leaders



in North America. Nearly 25 Village Missionaries are serving today because of the Contenders program, with more in the works. The CDI is being used to strengthen entire Village Missions churches, as well as other individuals and churches around the world.

Will you help us train up spiritual leaders through the CDI? Your one-time gift will help train and equip the next generation of spiritual leaders in North America. Through your generosity, you are helping provide quality, free education for those who feel the call to serve the Lord, but may not have the financial means to pursue expensive education.

Your gift gives people the tools they need to properly read and interpret Scripture and share the good news of Jesus Christ to those who have never heard.



**RICK & STEPHANIE ATTENDED CANDIDATE SCHOOL IN THE FALL OF 2017.**





When Rick and Stephanie received the call to full-time ministry, they had no idea how they would train. Rick had a full-time job on the family farm, and they had three kids. Traditional college or seminary didn't seem ideal or even financially possible. The Contenders Discipleship Initiative and mentorship program made it possible

to follow their calling. In fact, more than 20 Village Missionaries have been trained through the CDI program. When you give to the CDI, you are helping train future missionaries, like Rick and Stephanie, who will bring the gospel to rural places in need. Visit [give.villagemissions.org](http://give.villagemissions.org) to help train future missionaries today!



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