



# From Aghanistan to Cameroon: Ministering to those in need



“There’s so much need; there’s so much to do.” Dr. George Vasil, a family physician since 1987, travels across continents to offer medical services to those in need. Working with the **Christian Medical and Dental Association’s Global Health Outreach (CMDA GHO)**, Medical Teams International, and other organization, he has visited locations ranging across Africa, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Haiti over the past 14 years, and has no plans to stop any time soon. “It’s such a pleasure to serve, and people are so appreciative and thankful. I just want to do what I can,” he says of the missions that are his calling.

Gambia, 2019: This poor boy was burned many years earlier when a gasoline container he was carrying exploded.

Inspiration came early in the 2000s when he met a group of four doctors at his local church who were dedicated to mission work. Partners at a clinic, each of them committed to taking one year out of every six to travel with their families to serve overseas for that entire year; during that time, the other partners would make sure that their patients were cared for and their obligations at home taken care of. Inspired by their remarkable devotion, Dr. Vasil sought to begin his own mission service. Since then, he has traveled around the globe to bring medicine and ministry to those in need. The CMDA GHO-organized trips generally take him on location for a few weeks at a time, and he volunteers for a journey about once every year.

CMDA GHO organizes groups for each trip, sending physicians, physicians’ assistants, dentists, nurses, and

Global Health Outreach is a short-term international missions program dedicated to providing healthcare while spreading the gospel by sending medical, dental, and surgical teams around the world.

other healthcare providers. (Dr. Vasil says the dentists and hygienists are always in extremely high demand, and work grueling hours to make sure they are able to see all the patients who need dental attention!) All of the healthcare providers are volunteers who serve out of a love for humanity: “they give their lives to this work,” he says.

Each group meets with local contacts — often a local pastor or church — who can help arrange travel and translators. Depending on the location, travel may be quick, or it sometimes involves many hours with multiple modes of transportation across varying terrain. One trip to Bansa Baptist Hospital in Cameroon required flying to the capital, riding an hour to stay overnight at a mission, then flying on a small plane the next day to reach Bansa. Another trip to Liberia, one of the more remote locations he’s worked in, required an hour drive daily over terrible roads to reach the village they were there to help.

In the beginning, Dr. Vasil said, it was like going back to medical



Cameroon, 2008





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“One of the more difficult pieces of equipment to acquire is dental chairs. We were all very excited when they developed a folding dental chair made of cardboard!”

school. One of his first trips was to Cameroon, where he worked closely with a doctor who was training African students to do surgery and another physician who was a specialist in tropical medicine. Together, they shared lectures and discussions each morning, and he became

deeply educated on the problems that plague populations in developing countries, such as AIDs, malaria, and tuberculosis.

Equipment and medicine are not always easy to come by; CMDA provides some equipment and medications, but the teams have to make use of what’s available on the ground. Sometimes there are hospitals, and sometimes they work out of peoples’ homes, schools, churches, or clinics. In Liberia, his team spent a day in a prison in Monrovia, ministering to the inmates. At Galmi Hospital, in Galmi, Niger, the 110-bed mud-brick, tin-roofed hospital, built in the 1950s, overflows during malaria season, and they have to add extra mattresses as people come from all over when they get sick. And when they ran out of mattresses, they used blankets.

The teams usually include professionals with an assortment of specialties. Dr. Vasil recalls one trip to Cameroon where they were lucky enough to have an OB-GYN nurse on the team, who delivered a baby during their stay.

One of the hardest parts about his mission work is knowing that they can’t save everyone. “There’s a hierarchy,” Dr. Vasil explains, “when people get sick, they’ll start with their local healer. We’re often the last on the list, so when people come to us, they can be very sick by then.” Death is a part of medicine too.

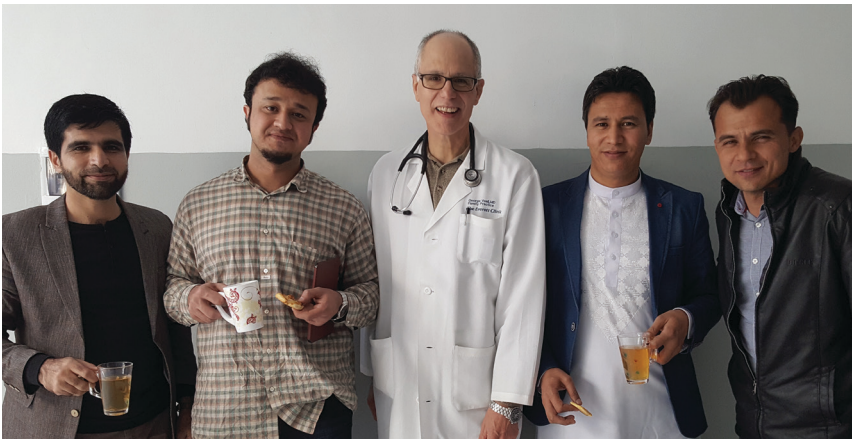
There is also the knowledge that availability of help is limited. Patients who need long-term or expensive medication may not have the means to afford it, especially if it takes away from their ability to support their family. It is heartbreaking to see firsthand some of the very difficult choices people are faced with.

On the other hand, he has seen the inspiration that has arisen out of the work he and his fellow healthcare providers offer. One local child in Galmi, Niger, liked to follow the doctors around as they worked — that child ultimately became a surgeon and returned to work in the hospital in Galmi. An American who first came to West Africa as a Peace Corps volunteer returned to the United States to become a physician. Upon completing his training, he arrived in Galmi and has been there for decades, raising a family, losing his first wife to cancer, and later marrying the hospital pharmacist. These amazing people were deeply inspiring.

And there have been some truly remarkable experiences. Dr. Vasil recalls the time he was able to meet Alassane, a boy whom he had been sponsoring for more than ten years through **World Vision**. Alassane lived in Mauritania, which was close enough to Dr. Vasil’s mission in Gambia in 2019 for him to make a side trip for a few days. With a driver and a translator, he traveled about 250 miles, getting as close as possible, and then three villagers arrived on horseback, dressed in traditional garb, to escort him into Alassane’s village, where the entire family and village had prepared a welcome feast. “I was glad to remember enough French!” he recalls. He was overwhelmed by their deep appreciation and affection; Alassane’s mother presented him with a gift of traditional dress, and the village chief told him in French, “You are an African now!” an honorarium he cherishes.



Ethiopia, 2017: This young boy has a cleft lip and cleft palate.



Afghanistan 2017: Working with medical residents in Kabul, Afghanistan





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Dr. Vasil also recalls an incredible experience working with Mahmoud, a Syrian Kurd. Mahmoud and his family escaped as refugees from Syria and landed in Istanbul in Turkey, but were concerned due to the hostility many Turks held toward the Kurdish. Mahmoud had contacted a smuggler to help them get to Greece, but the night before they were scheduled to leave, he had a strange dream. In it, he and his family boarded the boat, but the boat sank. A mysterious figure in the dream identified himself as Jesus Christ and seemed to warn him. Though not one to pay close attention to dreams, this one struck him and he kept his family from boarding the next day. The boat they would have

been on did indeed sink, leading Mahmoud to become a convert to Christianity and to join the mission work.

For healthcare providers who have thought about traveling overseas, Dr. Vasil says, "You just need to do it." He had some hesitation at first but once he took the leap, it became a profound part of him and his life.



Niger, 2011: This boy has tetanus.

He now says, "It's in my blood. There would be an empty spot in my heart if I didn't do it." The work is deeply rewarding, and the perspective he brings back reminds him to pay attention to what's really important in his own life. "It's also a wonderful way to travel, where you are not a tourist, but are able to really experience the people and places." And, he says, "there is always so much to do."

Dr. Vasil doesn't just serve in faraway places: "Sometimes the person in need isn't half a world away," he says, noting that there is plenty of local need for medical care. He works with a church in the Seattle area that operates a mobile medical clinic in a van, which travels around to see patients. Local hospitals and clinics donate equipment, and volunteers provide the service.

"We are greeted with such appreciation and openness without any hostility. Doing this, you learn that people everywhere are really the same and want the same things. They just want to live their lives and care for their families."

The doctor is dedicated to providing help to whomever is in need, regardless of the circumstances that brought them there. "We lose sight of the reality sometimes that these are fellow beings, and of our appreciation and compassion for people. You just try to extend love," he says. His next trip will be to head back to Turkey this spring, where he expects to join up with a few individuals he's worked with previously on CMDA teams.

If you are interested in learning more about **Christian Medical and Dental Association's Global Health Outreach (CMDA GHO)** or getting involved with their programs, visit:

<https://cmda.org/global-health-outreach/#>

Thank you to Dr. Vasil for sharing this amazing story!



Boghe, Mauritania, 2019: Riding into the village to meet Alassane, a boy Dr. Vasil has sponsored since 2009 through World Vision

