

Repositioned to influence leaders in Ukraine

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Our stories are very different. We grew up in different parts of the United States, lived in divergent locations and served in various ministries around the world.

Until 2019, Bob and Carol served in Germany for eight years. Matt and Onalee were serving as pastors in a local church in Phoenix. At the same time, I served in Ukraine for 11 years until 2020.



As we met with pastors in Ukraine on our first journey together, each of us began to tell our story, and a pattern emerged. Approximately three years ago, God began to reposition us. God has called us all to something different, and that something brought us to Rivne, Ukraine, to help men learn how to be influential disciple-makers.

In January 2018, when I returned from a three-month home assignment, I sensed God telling me that I had two more years in Ukraine. But I didn't know what was next. Two years passed, and I accepted the Converge director of Mobilization position, but now I also serve as a bridge to continued ministry in Ukraine. I am using the equity from years of relationship to help the church in Ukraine positioned itself for a revival.

Converge global workers transition to a new role

In that same year (2018), Bob and Carol were facing a decision. A treaty between Germany and the United States required them to return after five years for one full year, after which they could return to Germany. An extension had been granted to allow them to stay three more years, but in the fall of 2019, they were going to have to leave.

The church they had planted in Darmstadt was willing to allow them to go and return a year later. But the Marshes were in their early 60s, and they felt it was best to hand off the church to its next pastor while things were good and strong leadership was in place. So, in July 2018, they informed church leadership that they felt called to return to the United States and see where God would lead.

But who wants to hire a pastor or church planter in their 60s? What would they do? There were no clear answers.

Bob called Dennis McMains, Converge's international leader for Europe and the Mediterranean region, to let him know of their decision to leave Germany.

"You're kidding!" Dennis replied. "I was in a meeting in Orlando, and Converge is creating a new position in International Ministries. I told the group I wanted you in the job. I just didn't know how I would ever convince you to leave Darmstadt."

Thus began Bob and Carol's transition to Impact Team leader. In that role, they work with movement leaders in areas where Converge does not have workers. When Tanya left Ukraine, Bob was asked to serve as the primary link between the ministry in Rivne and Converge.

In the first Zoom call between Tania, Pastor Valodya and Bob, the heartfelt desire for discipleship training was expressed. So, Bob called Matt Swartz to see if Matt could help.

A pastor and his wife take a leap of faith

Matt and Onalee had been serving for 26 years in Converge churches in three different districts, the last 19 at Sun Valley Community Church in Arizona. Matt's role as the international pastor put him in constant conversations with global leaders in many countries who asked for training and resources to help disciple-making movements emerge through their churches.

Those conversations led to the launch of Foundations, a Sun Valley ministry. Foundations focused on training leaders in disciple-making. It provided free discipleship material in the leaders' language to help them enter into purposeful discipleship relationships up close, personal and over time.

By 2017, this ministry trained more than 1000 leaders per year. But God began to place a restlessness into Matt and Onalee's hearts. What if God was asking them to take a leap of faith to take this ministry out of Sun Valley and commit their energy to it full time?

Through conversations with Sun Valley lead pastor Chad Moore, it became clear that Sun Valley would not only bless this decision to move Foundations out from the church's umbrella but also for Sun Valley to send Matt and Onalee out as global workers.

So, in May 2018, the couple stepped out in faith and joined Developing Workers as full-time global workers. This transition allowed Foundations to expand into more nations and languages than it would have been able to from Sun Valley.

The vision of Developing Workers is to develop workers to mobilize ministry. This provided a platform to begin asking where God would expand Foundations to. Two guiding principles help direct where the ministry expands:

- They go where they are invited.
- They go where the desire for partnership is a driving value.

Amid the pandemic in the summer of 2020, Matt Swartz had a conversation with Dennis McMains about the vision of Developing Workers to end discipleship poverty. McMains asked if Developing Workers would ever be willing to invest in partnership with Converge in Europe and the Mediterranean region. Swartz's response was a resounding "yes!"

The next step was to discover national leaders in that region looking for a partnership to see a disciple-making movement advance in their nation. One month later — in August 2020 — McMains connected Matt and Onalee with Bob Marsh. Bob had recently been on a Zoom call with Pastor Volodya in Rivne, Ukraine, who was looking to see discipleship movements increase through his church.

God had been working for years in the lives of each of these leaders to step into a season of partnership and ministry together. While they may not have been aware, God was working through the Holy Spirit to align their stories for this season in Ukraine.

Tania Martin, *Director of Mobilization*

Tania loves Jesus, missions and discipleship. These loves led her to serve full-time in Ukraine for the past 11 years. She relocated to Orlando, Florida, in June 2020 as Director of Mobilization to continue pursuing these three great loves by helping others find their passions for missions and go to the nations.