

Celebrating 10 Years

Martin Luther College

Thalassa Prize

2007-2016



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The gospel ministry is a global ministry—instituted by our Lord when he commissioned his followers to “make disciples of all nations.” The mission statement of Martin Luther College recognizes this as well, stating that, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we encourage students in “developing and demonstrating a heart for service in the church, community, *and world.*”

The Thalassa competition, established in 2007, is a tribute to our students’ hearts for global service.

In this competition MLC students and graduates who have served abroad submit photographs and written reflections that share the beauties, the joys, the challenges of their ministries. A panel of judges chooses the winner and awards \$1000, half of which the student designates to a mission of their choice.

We’ve seen entries from North and South America, Asia, Europe, and Africa. Tiny villages in the Peruvian Andes. Teeming cities in Southeast Asia. A Siberian college town. A Brazilian *fazenda*. A Malawian orphanage.

Each reflection and photo is rich in particulars, yet each tells the same story—a story of human needs and the Savior who meets those needs.

We are humbled and honored to have had a hand in the shaping and training of these gospel heralds. And we are grateful to the Lord of the Church and to his Spirit for allowing Martin Luther College to be the threshold from which these students carry the gospel into the world.

This \$1000 award is given to recognize Martin Luther College students or graduates who express clearly and beautifully, in image and word, personal reflections on their ministries overseas.

Purposes of the MLC *Thalassa Prize*

- To express gratitude to God for the opportunity to serve him in international venues.
- To provide an opportunity for MLC students and graduates in international ministry to share their stories.
- To motivate and inspire current MLC students to consider serving overseas.
- To bring glory to God through excellence in the arts of photography and creative writing.
- To reaffirm through image and word the dignity of the entire human race and the desire of God to save all people.

Entrance Requirements

- Open to all MLC undergraduates and graduates who have done ministry or are doing ministry outside the United States.
- Each entry must include
 - A completed entry form (found at mlc-wels.edu/go/thalassa)
 - A color digital photograph taken in a foreign mission field
 - A personal reflection on ministry in that foreign mission field
- Entrants may submit as many entries as they wish.
- Deadline for all submissions: April 30.
- Photo and essay specifications, judging criteria, and tips for entrants may be found at www.mlc-wels.edu/go/thalassa.

Prize

- The *Thalassa Prize* recipient will be announced in May or June.
- The prize will be divided equally between the winner and an international mission of the winner’s choice.

The Thalassa Prize has been funded by the MLC International Services Office and by two anonymous donors, for whom we are very grateful. In celebration of the 10-year anniversary of Thalassa, the prize money for 2016 was doubled to \$2000.

Ten Years of *Thalassa* Winners 2007-2016

- 2016 **Johannah Crass '14**
White Robes: Antigua
- 2015 **Sara Schmeling '11**
God's Light in a World of Darkness: Russia
- 2014 **Chris Pluger '97**
Jesus Speaks My Language: Zambia
- 2013 **Maria Reese '99**
Like a Mother: Malawi
- 2012 **Paul H. Kelm DMLC '86**
Searching for a Better Life: Czech Republic
- 2011 **Amber (Schlomer) Poth '05**
Don't Be Afraid: Southeast Asia
- 2010 **Gretchen (Kock) Schmiede '07**
A Look Through the Door: Southeast Asia
- 2009 **Rachel (Meyer) Sommer '07**
Constant Companion: Southeast Asia
- 2008 **Rachel (Kionka) Schroeder '07**
One in Christ: Malawi
- 2007 **Kristina (Wessel) Troge '06**
Considering Clay: Dominican Republic



Johanna Crass MLC '14 taught 31 fifth-grade students in Antigua in 2015-2016. The previous year, 2014-2015, she served in another international mission, teaching English Bible studies in Novosibirsk, Russia.

Since then . . .

I am hoping to be assigned to serve a school in May 2016. God willing, I will start out on an all-new adventure in my very own country. **I want to encourage** the children I teach to consider mission work. Travel not just to see things, but to *do* things and to experience something that will change you and others forever. I am confident that the Lord used these challenging experiences to shape me to serve his will. What a blessing it is to be one of the harvesters!



2016 WINNER

White Robes

Johanna Crass – Antigua

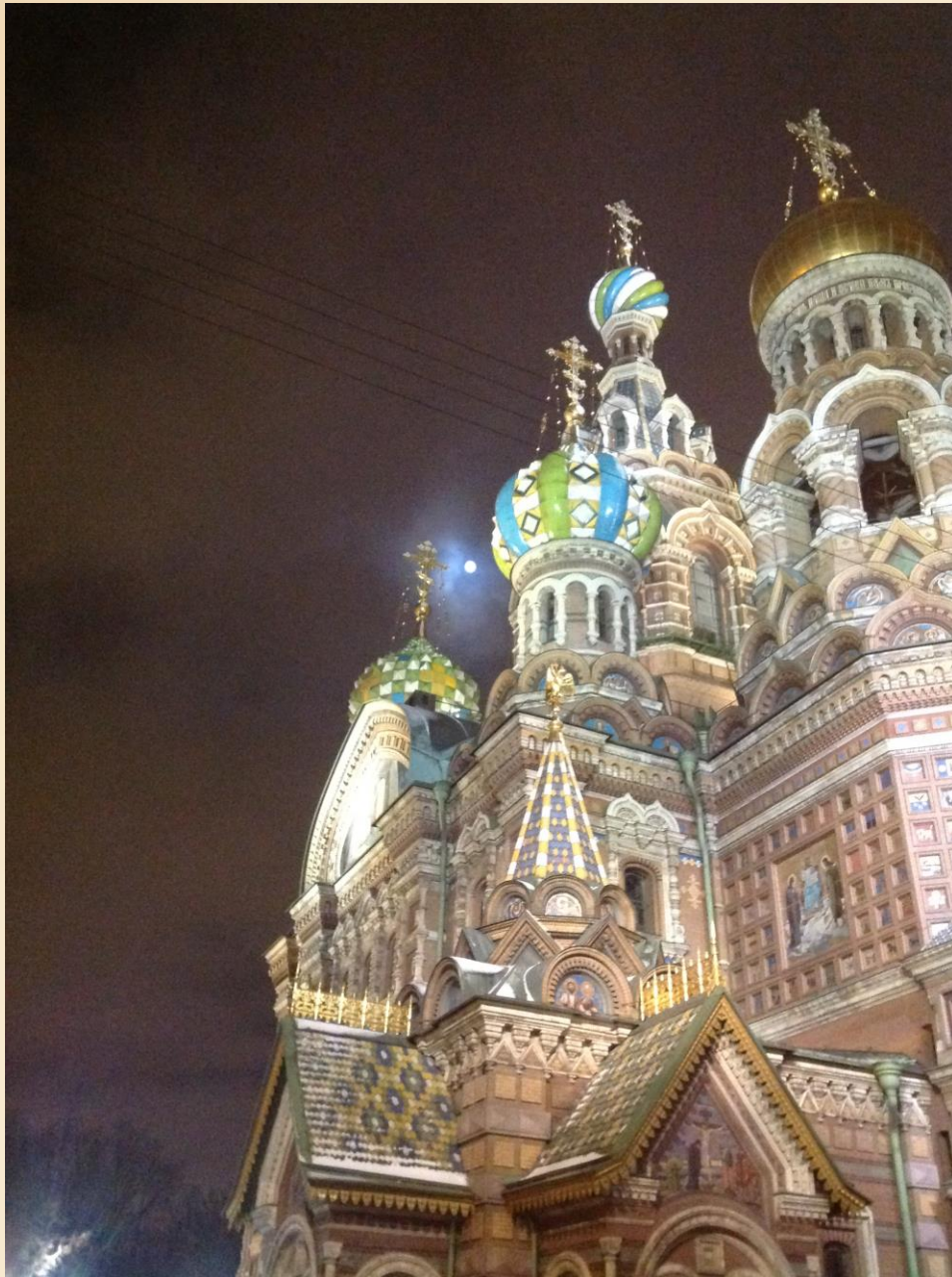
Growing up, I wanted to step into the wide world and spread the good news. I wanted to see creation's finest treasures and share God's treasure of grace too. My dream—to be in paradise with the faces of everyone I know wearing white robes. Don't we all want that? Beautiful, stainless white robes! Revelation 7:9 tells us that in the writer John's vision, there "was an enormous crowd that no one could count, made up of persons from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb dressed in long white robes, and with palm branches in their hands." I have had the privilege of sharing this good news to the far corners of the earth—from snow-laden Russia to sun-soaked California, from impressively structured Milwaukee schools to the calm white shores of Antigua.

As stunning as these sights may be, my real joy in travel has come from those who will one day wear the stainless robes with me. So often, I see people flocking to this perceived paradise that is Antigua, hoping to find a real paradise—if only for a few days. However, the palm tree and blue sky in the photo do not embody paradise, as so many think they do. Rather, I look to my students' smiles. It is within these *children*, who daily persevere in a world of sin, that God has established his true kingdom, and his paradise really *is* perfect. One day, their carefully pressed white uniforms paid for by parents will be exchanged for white robes, free of the stain of sin and paid for by the blood of their King. The grace they receive, which we too share, is what we can eternally sing praises for one day in paradise—wearing white robes.

A big lesson I learned in Russia was that God's love doesn't have a boundary. Be patient. Be fearless. I don't want to limit whom I evangelize based on language, culture, clothing, music preferences, or lifestyle choices. Everyone needs to hear the Word, even if they repeatedly avoid or reject it. In Antigua, I learned the power of being open about your faith. Speaking of your faith does not need to be limited to Bible studies but can take place with co-workers, friends, and even strangers.

While in Russia, I became close to a 13-year-old girl named Masha, who was clearly from a difficult home. The church was her safe

haven. Halfway through winter, she stopped showing up. I don't know if it was the bad weather or a home situation, but I was worried. As my year came closer to an end, we had a special Easter service. Masha came! She showed up late, but she was there! With a huge smile, I invited her to sit by me. I will never forget her voice, which was terribly tone-deaf, and she knew it. I had my own troubles though, stumbling over the long Russian words. We were so happy to be struggling through the beautiful service together. Hearts full and smiles abounding, we worshiped our risen Savior in imperfect yet overflowing joy.



Sara Schmeling '11 served in Novosibirsk, Russia, the 2014-2015 school year, teaching English and leading Bible study and other church programs. She gave half of her Thalassa Prize to the WELS mission, Daylight in Russia.

Since then . . .

After leaving the adventure that was **Russia** at the end of the 2014-2015 school year, I spent six months in Europe, traveling and tutoring children in English. I am now looking forward to receiving a call and continuing my teaching career.

2015 WINNER

God's Light in a World of Darkness

Sara Schmeling – Russia

Dark. Cold. Dreary. Those are words commonly associated with Russia. Having adventured through frigid Siberian winter and traveled through several days of Arctic night, I can attest to this.

Walking in sub-zero temperatures on a January night in St. Petersburg was a moment that brought those words to my mind. Ahead was my destination, the Church of the Savior on Spilled Blood, a giant Orthodox church engineered to inspire awe. However, the information plaques surrounding it focused more on its historical significance than the Savior of its name. Floodlights illuminated the church with a blinding intensity when compared to the night.

That wasn't what caught my attention however. The moon was holding its own, shining down and spreading its glow, even as the church and the rest of the city lights tried to drown it out.

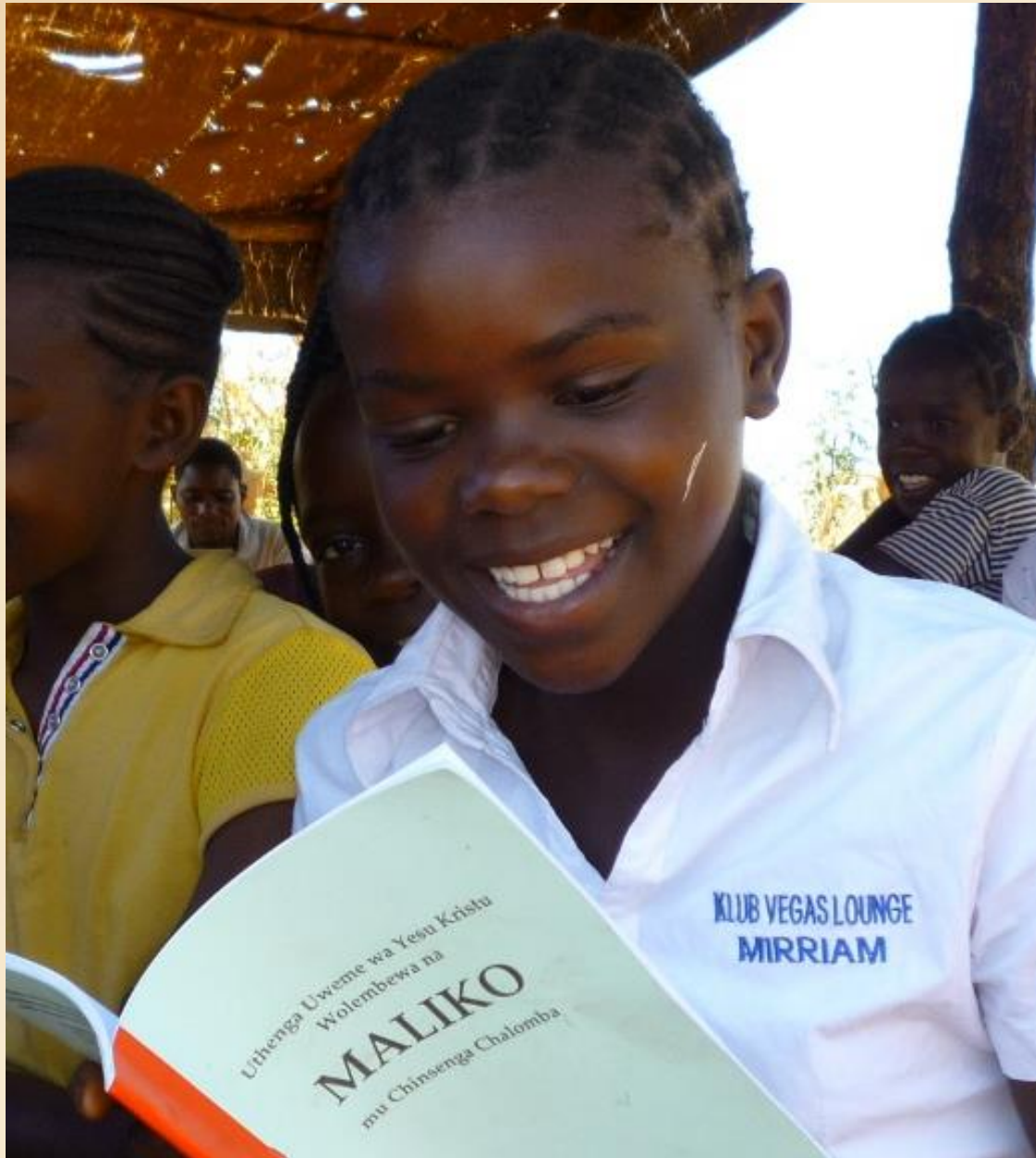
God's love works just the same here. The darkness of the world, the inaccuracies of the Orthodoxy, and shadows of logic over faith try to obscure God's grace. But there is always the glow, the glimmer—no matter how faint—of the gospel being faithfully proclaimed.

John 8 declares, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness." From the missionaries welcoming us with open arms and the church members that are always ready with a smile and helping hands, to the joyful children who are learning to appreciate an oasis of love, God's light and love is evident everywhere. For those we came to serve, we pray that they see God's light in us.

Light. Warm. Loving. When I hear the word Russia, those will be the words that I think of, and I pray that HIS Light will keep shining in this country and all others.

One of the many special memories that I cherish would be the Easter Service that I attended while in Novosibirsk. It was a warm spring day, and there was such a feeling of fellowship and joy at seeing all the people that the Holy Spirit had brought to faith. Sharing that Easter joy with people I know I will see in heaven, if not again on earth, was very special for me, and I am very thankful that I was able to be a part of it.

Patience and thankfulness! The small inconveniences that make up daily life are very much kept in perspective after such an eye-opening experience. Other people around the world are dealing with much bigger problems and have much harder difficulties. While life abroad is not always easy, even then my troubles as a foreigner were nothing compared to some of the problems of life around me.



Chris Pluger '97 served as the translation advisor/exegete for the Nsenga Bible Translation Project in Zambia from 2011 to 2016. Chris gave half of his Thalassa Prize to Lutheran Bible Translators.

Since then . . .

Since Thalassa, I'm still serving in Zambia with the Nsenga Bible Translation Project. We have finished work on the New Testament, which is now off for typesetting and printing, and will be dedicated on July 14, 2016. At that point, over one million speakers of the Nsenga language will have access to God's Word for the first time in the language of their hearts. We have since begun work on the Old Testament as well. However, shortly after the NT dedication, I will be leaving Zambia to begin teaching at Great Plains LHS in Watertown, South Dakota.



2014 WINNER

Jesus Speaks My Language

Chris Pluger – Zambia

Do you remember the very first time you read the Bible in your mother tongue? This young lady does. She is holding a copy of the Gospel of Mark, the first book of the Bible published in the modern Nsenga language.

Many Nsenga people have heard about Jesus before. Many of them attend Christian churches every Sunday. But until now, they have had to listen to the Bible being read in a foreign language, from a Bible written in another country for people of a different tribe. It would be like someone telling you secondhand what someone else has said: “God told me to tell you that he loves you and takes care of you.” Not necessarily very comforting.

But now imagine Jesus himself coming to you in the words of a Bible in your own language and saying, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30). What a comfort for sin-burdened souls! What a joy to hear your Savior speaking directly to *you*!

The Nsenga Bible Translation Project is working to bring God’s Word to the heart language of the Nsenga people of south-central Africa. Pray for the Lord’s blessing on this work. Praise God that his Word is being translated into many new languages. Give thanks that this young lady can hear her Savior calling to her in her own mother tongue. And don’t forget to read your own Bible, too!

So many memories are dear to me from my time of service, but they all have to do with individual people, living their lives with passion for God’s mission in whatever capacity they have.

The biggest thing for me is a new appreciation and realization of the power of the Word of God. We so take it for granted in the USA, with our multitude of English translations. When you work among a people who are forced to interact with the Bible via a second or third language they may not understand very well, you see the blessing we have. And then you remember that we were all that way once, before Jesus, the Word of God, “translated” himself into a human being for our sakes and showed us the Father.



***Maria Reese '99** worked in Lilongwe, Malawi, from October 2012 to August 2013 as the administrator for the Lutheran Mobile Clinic (LMC) of the Central Africa Medical Mission. LMC travels to four villages around Lilongwe, providing basic health care to as many as 5000 patients each month. Maria gave half of her Thalassa Prize to the Central Africa Medical Mission.*

Since then . . .

Since I won the Thalassa Prize, I moved back to Minnesota from Malawi. For the last two years, I have been working as a tour coordinator for a tour operator that specializes in international group travel. I am hoping, though, to get back into the public teaching ministry.



2013 WINNER

Like a Mother

Maria Reese – Malawi

They carry their children on their backs, leaving home before the sun has fully risen. Baskets, containing what they need for the day, rest on their heads. Some of these women travel on foot for hours to reach the clinic where they can receive much-needed care for their sick children. They seek medications, vaccinations, or the added nourishment their children require. Afterwards, they return home—the children on their backs, baskets on their heads. These mothers do not consider the care of their children a burden too great to bear.

Sometimes, the everyday routines or the unexpected challenges of working in a foreign mission field make me question whether the work we are doing is worth the effort. Are we accomplishing anything? Will we see any of these people in heaven? Then I am reminded by these women and by the words of the apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, “But we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.”

At Lutheran Mobile Clinic, not only do these mothers receive the care they need for their physical ailments or for those of their children, but they also hear the gospel message of the Great Physician, who cures their spiritual ills. Is the work and effort worth it? Yes, it is! Every minute!

Part of what made serving abroad special was getting to know the nationals that I worked with. It was always so interesting to hear them tell of their background or something unique to Malawi.

Serving in a foreign mission field has definitely, permanently impacted my life. I know I can survive with many fewer things than I own. Serving in a field where access to healthcare is limited and where people often die from treatable illnesses also makes me very thankful for the access to healthcare that we have been blessed with in this country.



Paul H. Kelm DMLC '86 served in the Czech Republic for 12 years, 1994-2006, teaching at Skola Martina Lutherana, a K-9 school, leading English Conversation club, and teaching English Bible classes. Previously, he spent 1987-1989 in Japan, teaching the children of two missionary families and teaching English Bible classes to Japanese adults. Paul gave half of his Thalassa Prize to the Lutheran mission society Thoughts of Faith.

Since then . . .

Since returning to the United States with my wife and three children in 2006, I've served as a teacher at Risen Savior Lutheran School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The work at Risen Savior is very mission oriented. We serve students and families from many nations around the world.



2012 WINNER

Searching for a Better Life

Paul H. Kelm – Czech Republic

Pausing briefly, the laborer looked out longingly from the construction site where he worked. Below, his tired eyes could see shops cascading with fresh produce, colorful clothing, and sparkling crystal. Up wafted the smells of pork, sauerkraut, and dumplings from a nearby restaurant. Shoppers' footsteps clicked across the cobblestones.

He had come here from the East to work for higher pay. The money would make him wealthy back in his homeland. Perhaps he would use it to buy a place for himself when he went back—if he ever went back.

Days later, I returned to share this photo with him, but he had moved. New workers had already filled his place. As the new workers and I spoke in a mix of broken languages, I invited them to come and visit our mission.

All around us are people desperately searching for a better life.

Teaching in a foreign mission field immersed me in an ocean of lost souls in search of a better life. Ordinary daily encounters like meeting the workers, greeting my neighbors, or even asking for help at a store, often started a conversation. Quizzically I was asked, “Why did you come to the Czech Republic?” My reply always included an invitation to visit our church, Bible class, or conversation club.

Many times the Lord led those invited guests to visit our mission, unaware that hearing God's Word brought them closer to their goal of finding a better life.

What joy it brings when someone comes to faith in Jesus! I thank God for the opportunities he gives me and all his people to have conversations which lead to sharing his Word. Through God's Word, the Spirit gives the gift of a “better life” to searching souls. To them he gives it eternally.

On my last visit to the Czech Republic, I had the privilege of witnessing the installation of our first two national pastors, both of whom were student vicars when I was serving there. What a blessing to see Czech men assuming the role of pastors! While there, I walked downtown near the old square where my oldest son used to ride his bike and where we'd sometimes stop for a “parek v rohlíku,” or sausage stuffed into a Czech roll. While downtown, my wife and I were stopped several times by people that we used to see somewhat regularly at our English

Conversation Club or Bible classes or at school. Former students, parents, and even shop owners remembered us and had fond memories of their time at the mission church/school.

Sharing God's Word in Milwaukee, though a world apart from the work we did in the Czech Republic, is still exciting and humbling. I am thrilled that the Lord continues to use me and my family to do his work of sharing his love and forgiveness with the world around us.



Amber (Schlomer) Poth '05
taught college-level science and English Bible studies in Southeast Asia from August 2009 to June 2013. She gave half of her Thalassa Prize to a mission in Southeast Asia.

Since then . . .

After winning Thalassa, I served two more years in Southeast Asia. I returned to the United States and have been working for a company that does aerial photography. I recently got married to my best friend, Steven Poth, and we live in the St. Louis area.



2011 WINNER

Don't Be Afraid

Amber (Schlomer) Poth – Southeast Asia

I was traveling. I was visiting a small village, and I stumbled across a small child. I didn't know his background. I didn't know what he was thinking, but I could tell that he was afraid of something, or possibly someone. His face told me that. I could only imagine what had happened at home. Maybe he did something wrong and was afraid of his father's anger.

We are not so different from this little boy.

This little boy's fear reminded me that I was exactly the same. That used to be me and every believer before the Holy Spirit called us out of darkness. We used to hide from our Heavenly Father, thinking that we could bear the grief and shame on our own.

He doesn't know. He doesn't know that someone else was punished for his wrongdoing. He doesn't know that his Father loves him and he is welcomed home by arms that have held children before, by arms that have hung on a cross.

But I get to share it with children like him and countless others who come searching for meaning and peace in their lives. I get to tell them, "Don't be afraid. Let's go home. Your Father loves you and is ready to run to you with open arms." I get to see that fear transform into relief and joy when a friend is pulled from the pit by hands still bearing the marks of pain and forgiveness.

This boy is only one person. How many others are there? How many do not know about this gift from their Father? I cannot answer that question exactly, but I know the number is high. If we don't tell them, who will? Tell them. Don't be afraid.

Almost every memory that I hold dear involves a Bible study with friends. It was amazing to see our Asian friends grow in their faith. I found one of my best friends in Asia. I miss the work and the people there dearly.

Steve and I are members at a church that has a large Chinese mission, and St. Louis has a large Chinese population. I'm able to use some of my language skills and culture knowledge in regular life. Being in Asia changed the way I go about personal Bible study. When you work in world missions, you spend a lot of time in the Word. I'm thankful that this has carried over into my life in the States.



Gretchen (Kock) Schmiege
*'08 taught English as a foreign
language to middle school students in
Southeast Asia from February 2008
to June 2009. Gretchen gave half of
her Thalassa Prize to a mission in
Southeast Asia.*

Since then . . .

I've been living in Lawrenceville, Georgia,
where my husband, Jeremiah, serves as principal
and upper grade teacher at Sola Fide Lutheran
School. I've been staying at home with our two
(soon to be three) children and serving in
various music and teaching ministries at church
and school.



2010 WINNER

A Look Through the Door

Gretchen (Kock) Schmiede – Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia. A time-lapse video of skyscrapers stacking higher and higher like steel Legos. Rushing crowds of black hair and beeping cell phones. Tea shops and fans. A red flag with five golden stars. One foot edging tentatively forward and one foot facing directly backward.

This is a place of wild contradictions, a place of opportunity for some and a dizzying maze for others. This is a proud nation; people here speak about having one heart. Presently that heart is open. Alongside Buddhism, atheism, materialism, humanism, or any combination of those, the gospel is here. It's in packed state-run churches, in small house-church gatherings, on a necklace, within families who have protected it like a treasure.

This generation is searching for peace in a very literal sense. What better peace than the overwhelming love of a Father and the certainty of heaven through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection? The professionals, the curious, the workers, and the students are being led to that peace and are leading their friends, associates, and children to it.

I met a young graduate student, a philosophical expert and lifelong Christian. His vocabulary was astounding, yet he spoke slowly, haltingly, to make sure he was expressing himself as accurately as possible. He put it this way: "To be honest, I am . . . (long pause) . . . *grabbed* by the Bible." Which is exactly what God does—grabs us out of our abhorrent human condition, and through his Holy Word and Holy Spirit puts faith where we can only put futile human thinking.

No one knows what will happen in this country's future. No one, that is, except the Director of human history. While we blundering humans look through the open door with bright eyes and cautiously glance over our shoulder, the Director holds that door open, for now.

Special memories that I have are ones that continue into the present as I hear about or communicate with Christians I met while serving abroad. I also still pray for and think about those with whom I've lost touch. I think about how God makes those seeds of faith grow through the power of his Word.

One thing I have learned and held on to since leaving an international mission field is the eagerness and thankfulness that I saw in those who were hearing the Word for the first time. Talking about faith in a real-life and personal way has always been a struggle of mine, and

I believe God was developing that skill for me through watching young Christians ask tough questions and witness to each other, though their stakes are much higher in a country that is not friendly toward the gospel. Living in a diverse area now, I've been able to use my experience abroad in meeting other moms at the playground who have come from that part of the world. There are opportunities everywhere to share Christ's love.



Rachel (Meyer) Sommer '07 taught English as a foreign language to grades 7-9 in Southeast Asia from August 2007 to June 2009. Rachel gave half of her Thalassa Prize to a mission in Southeast Asia.

Since then . . .

From 2009 to 2012, I was a tutor at Luther Preparatory School. In 2012 I received and accepted a call to Winnebago Lutheran Academy, where I served for one and half years. I live in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, with my husband, Ryan. I count it a special blessing to be able to stay at home with our daughters, Anita and Mabel.



2009 WINNER

Constant Companion

Rachel (Meyer) Sommer – Southeast Asia

A young girl shuffled along a rustic path. Ignoring the beauty in the surrounding mountaintops, she focused on the small distractions. She whimpered when the steps became too high or when a strong wind blew in her face. Her father accompanied her on this short journey. He never left her side. Clutching a large load over his shoulder, he placed his free hand behind her, carefully leading her along the uneven stones. Amazingly, his guidance went unnoticed by his young child.

To many, life seems unbearable. They are tired and saddened, concentrating on the trials of this hopeless world. Blind with unbelief, they fail to notice a companion who lowered himself to give them peace. To share the good news is a command and the responsibility of all believers. Opportunities to fulfill this command are as plentiful as there are people in the world.

In my work here, I am blessed to share the news about our ever-present Friend. While some analyze, others cling to his promises and the new clarity which permeate their lives. Only the Good Shepherd knows when true faith is planted in a person's heart, and I rejoice when he gives me evidence. A friend reflected upon his saving work as she left study. While tying her Converse shoes, she confessed, "Some days I feel like I can't do it, but then I am very confident when I remember that it is he who makes me brave to face everything in life. I hear him say to me tonight, 'Go in peace.'"

Until we reach our final destination, our constant Companion guides our earthly walk with an abiding peace that never departs from those whom he loves.

Praise him for never leaving us alone.

Remembering Southeast Asia: The conversations that I was able to have with the friends I made abroad will always remain dear to me. The questions they asked, the teaching that went both ways, and the laughs over cultural differences seasoned my days with joy.

Living abroad provided many opportunities to practice patience and flexibility. Many times, the ability to "go with the flow" was of utmost importance. Those experiences have continued to help me, as they have caused me to better adapt to life's ever-changing flow of events. Through prayer and the help of God, I view them as part of his grand plan for my life.



Rachel (Kionka) Schroeder
'07 taught at Sir Harry Johnston International School and volunteered at Grace Orphan School in Zomba, Malawi, from July 2007 to July 2008. She gave half of her Thalassa Prize to WELS World Missions-Malawi Special Fund.

Since then . . .

Since my time in Malawi, God has allowed me to serve in a variety of ways. I served as a dorm supervisor, teacher, and coach at Luther Preparatory School and chaperoned mission trips to Florida and Ukraine. I then taught and coached at West LHS, where I met my husband, Howard Schroeder. We spent a year serving in Mexico. Now my husband is staff minister at St. Peter, Modesto, California, and I am director of the church's Mornings with Mommy program. We have three children ages 3 and under.



2008 WINNER

One in Christ

Rachel (Kionka) Schroeder – Malawi

The joy hits before you even get out of the truck. The choir sways out of the small brick church, clapping and dancing. Then they begin to sing. It is a sound you've never heard before; the harmonies are more brilliant, more penetrating. Stepping down onto the dirt, you realize you will never be the same again.

The choir, children, and elders greet you and follow you into the church. It takes a moment for your eyes to adjust to the darkness of the humble room. Sitting on a small dirt bench at the front of the church, you are surrounded by young children with piercing eyes. They smile shyly and love holding your hand, staring at the beautiful differences.

What have you found? Here are your brothers and sisters in Christ. Here they give their all to praise our gracious Lord. Here they show their love through song, and often that is all they can give. By earthly standards they have so very little. Looking into their eyes, you see a glimpse of the greatest strife and sorrows in this world. But you will also see peace and joy. Joy in their Risen Lord.

While the service often lasts over two hours, I can only pick out a handful of Chichewa words, and though the dirt benches are hard, I never tire of going to visit our bush congregations here in Malawi. These services cause tears to run down my face every time. Our backgrounds, cultures, languages, and skin colors might be different, but as we stand together and speak the Lord's Prayer, sing "Create in Me," and celebrate Holy Communion, we are unified with something stronger than words can explain. Christ is our Leader and we are his Church.

Of all the opportunities I had in Malawi, one of the most memorable was worshiping with our brothers and sisters in Christ in the bush congregations. The humble surroundings did not hinder the enthusiasm with which they worshiped and praised their Lord.

While in Malawi I was privileged to teach kids from kindergarten through high school. However, I am positive that I learned much more than they did. Scripture summarizes many of these lessons:

- "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Never have I met such happy people, even in the toughest of circumstances. It is a great reminder to focus on Christ.
- "Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58). What a privilege it is to serve the Lord!



***Kristina (Wessel) Troge '06** taught high school science, math, and English as a second language in Santiago, Dominican Republic, at a nonreligious private school called St. David's from July 2006 to June 2007. Kristina gave half of her Thalassa Prize to WELS World Missions-Dominican Republic Special Fund.*

Since then . . .

After my time in the Dominican Republic, I was assigned to teach at Manitowoc LHS, where I served for three years teaching chemistry and physics, ESL, and coaching. While there, I met my husband, Caleb Troge, and shortly afterward took a call to Divine Savior Academy in Doral, Florida. This is my fifth year serving at DSA as science department chair and teaching chemistry, elective sciences, and engineering courses. My husband and I have two children (with another on the way!) and spend our free time enjoying the weather and some of the many activities Miami has to offer.



2007 WINNER

Considering Clay

Kristina (Wessel) Troge – Dominican Republic

Teaching is a challenge no matter what kinds of students occupy the desks of your classroom, and at an international private school, countless opportunities assemble in those desks. Here in the Dominican Republic, I drive my students to work hard, and so our class trip to an art college was a welcomed break.

Beautiful scenery surrounded us and aspiring artists as we toured painting classes, clothing design studios, and finally the pottery barn. Instantly my students were drawn to a corner where a man was sculpting on the wheel. He threw the clay and as it spun the dirt came alive. Alana and Germán smiled and talked easily with the potter, asking questions about his life. I've never seen high school students so mesmerized! Maribel had a sparkle in her eye, and Federico actually went outside to lean through a window to get a better view.

As I took a step back from my kids and watched them consider this man, a bigger picture opened up to me. I reflected on what I wanted my students to grasp after spending this year in my classroom. Maybe it was those “off-topic” questions about life we discussed, those one-on-one conversations, perhaps even my struggling yet deeply satisfied life, that were all pictured here. I remembered that I simply wanted them to watch the Potter. To see how he gave his only Son as their Savior and how he's shaping them. The potter dipped his hands into the water to finish the vessel and I was taken aback at how God uses even first-year teachers, only clay jars, to share the joy of forgiveness with their students.

The tour ended, but I didn't push the group on as I usually would have. I paused, took a deep breath, and lingered.

Remembering the Dominican Republic:

I recall the sounds of the morning traffic coming through the window and the partial darkness of my naturally-lit classroom one morning. A student had arrived early to school so we had time to discuss some of the more important things happening around her and her sense of worry and stress. It still reminds me of the weight many of my students carry with them daily and how God has purposefully placed me in opportunities to share real hope in Christ.

God used my experiences teaching in the Dominican Republic to develop my comfort level of operating in a new culture, which made my transition to and living in the Miami area much easier. I also gained valuable experience learning about and teaching students who spoke Spanish as their primary language, which is also true of my current teaching experience. Living in the Dominican Republic opened my eyes in a direct way to the spiritual needs of people, regardless of culture, language, or age.

Thalassa Photo Gallery



2007 Zach Seeger '05 *The Lost Sheep: Southeast Asia*



2007 Julie Jabs '09 *Where Two or Three Come Together: Brazil*



2010 Mary Balza '05 *A Heavy Burden: Southeast Asia*



2015 Joe Schmudlach '15 *Unordinary Guides: Peru*



2007 Katie Lange '05 *Christians in a Buddhist World: Southeast Asia*



2012 Rachel Wendland '11 *Time for Washing: Zambia*



2014 Kate Hieb '10 *Courageous Love: Malawi*



2012 Ryan Kolander '10 *Confetti and Guns: Mexico*

One of the goals of Martin Luther College is “to encourage the student in developing and demonstrating a heart for service in the church, community, and world” (2016-2017 Undergraduate Catalog, p. 6).

The *Thalassa* entries are a testament to the hearts for service of MLC students and graduates.

If you would like more information about Daylight International, Study Abroad, or International Students, please contact Megan in the International Services Office at kassuemr@mlc-wels.edu or visit us on the MLC website by typing “International Services” into the search box.

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