

Musical couple begins new phase of ministry in Australia

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PLAINVIEW—After three years in Australia performing Christian concerts, Clint and Jennifer Staj are spending the holidays state-side this year before starting work in January as youth ministers at an Australian Baptist church.

Three years ago, the Stajes—along with band members and fellow Wayland Baptist University alumni Greg and Sara Howle and Salem Posey—moved to Australia where they performed Christian concerts under the name Zuigia. About a year ago, the group members decided to go their separate ways.

Clint and Jennifer Staj, with 9-month-old Makarios, continue their mission work in Australia. After the first of the year, they will begin work as youth ministers at Cooma Baptist Church.

Staj continues to travel and bring the gospel message to Australia's young people through music. New doors of opportunity have opened since the band downsized.

"It has freed me up, and I get to travel more places because I can fly with the acoustic (guitar) now, and I don't have to travel with the sound system and trailer," he said.

With his newfound freedom, Staj has traveled farther inland, sung in maximum-security prisons and visited the island state of Tasmania. What he sees in these places is a lot of people hurting and searching for answers

that he believes can only be answered through a personal relationship with Christ.

"Unfortunately, teenagers in Australia really relate to my background, being an atheist, a self-harmer and suicidal, and being hopeless," Staj said.

"I get to see things that are pretty miraculous—people coming up to me and asking me if they can accept Christ because their life is where mine used to be, and they want their life to be where mine is now."

Staj and his wife have started out on a new adventure of their own with the birth of their first child, Makarios—a Greek name meaning "happy and blessed."

At 9 months old, she already has been an important part of her parents' ministry.

"I have a picture of her that I take around a lot and show it at schools and the prisons," he said.

"And the toughest, most hurting people who try to have this tough exterior—I guess a shell or a mask—just melt and even break when they see her picture. Then I play a song I have written about her and my own life, not having a dad, and it just breaks them in a good way."

While the last three years have seen Zuigia's ministry bless many lives around Australia, the unsure nature of what they do also has been a growing experience. While living in Australia on a religious worker's visa, the group was not allowed to raise funds or work at paying jobs.

Jennifer Staj, who played on Wayland's Flying Queens women's basketball team in college, has played basketball for the national team and Sydney's semi-professional basketball team, but for no pay. She and her husband both say living on faith has been a blessing.

"We have had to trust God," she said. "When we don't have the money or there is an issue that might arise, it is easy for us to say we'll pray about this and God will give us direction, as opposed to stressing and worrying because we can't do it on our own anyway."

As their ministry and lives continue to evolve, the Stajes will start a new job after the first of the year as youth ministers at Cooma Baptist Church. He will continue his concert travel, as well as serve as chaplain for the local school. It is an opportunity that is wide open for the couple to share the gospel with people who have never heard, they agreed.

The Stajes hope to change their visa status in the near future. They will switch from religious worker visas that have to be renewed regularly, to permanent resident visas that will allow them to stay and work in Australia without restriction for the long term.

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