

God uses Mission Friends to prepare leader's heart

August 20, 2019

MONTPELIER, Vt.—As a Mission Friends leader in Alabama, Kathryn Nunnelley delighted in sharing stories about missions and missionaries with enthusiastic preschoolers. Perhaps more significantly, God was instilling a call to missions in her own heart.

“I started seeing these stories about just regular families who were on mission,” she recalled. “It just really started stirring my heart that my family could also be on mission and just living out our faith in our lives so that people saw that and it could be the thing that stirred their hearts to find Jesus.”

That gradual realization was among the factors that prompted Kathryn and her husband Matthew to invest their lives as missionaries in New England. They are helping provide leadership as Mission Service Corps missionaries at a church start in Montpelier, Vt.

He serves as associate pastor and worship leader of Capital Community Church, and they both are members of the church planter team. Focusing primarily on ministry to children, she teaches older children's Bible study, directs Bible Quest Camp—the church's version of Vacation Bible School—and volunteers with the church's community playgroup.

“We do basically whatever the church needs,” she explained. “Where gaps are, we fill them. We're here to serve.”

Responding to God's call



In addition to serving with her husband, Matthew, at Capital Community Church in Montpelier, Vermont, Kathryn Nunnelley works part-time as the administrator of Anew Place, a transitional housing program in Burlington. (WMU photo / Pam Henderson)

How did the Nunnelleys' transition from Alabama to New England unfold? The bottom line, she said, is that they "just felt God was calling us to go."

The couple married in 2000, two weeks after they both graduated from the University of Alabama. The newlyweds moved to Anniston, Ala., and became involved in his home congregation—Chulafinnee Baptist Church in nearby Heflin, Ala.

"I was a new Christian, so it was really my first time to serve a church, and they put me right to work," Kathryn Nunnelley said. "It was a great time of learning from mentors who had been there for years."

Chulafinnee Baptist “is where I got introduced to Mission Friends and WMU (Woman’s Missionary Union) and missions education,” she added. Their local church experience “really strengthened us and we both started feeling the call to more than what we were doing.”

Searching for mission options through the North American Mission Board website, she said, they kept feeling drawn to a ministry opportunity in Worcester, Mass.

“We had a 1-year-old when we started feeling the call,” she said. “We both had full-time jobs. I was a teacher at a high school. Matthew owned his own business. We had the American dream. We had our own house and lived close to our parents, but we just felt like God was calling us to go.”

Serving as church strengtheners



Kathryn Nunnelley helps cook Capital Community Church’s weekly church dinner. She and her husband, Matthew, “do basically whatever the church needs,” she explained. “Where gaps are, we fill

them.” (WMU Photo / Pam Henderson)

They ended up making the connection with Pleasant Street Baptist Church in Worcester and made the transition in 2007 to serve there as church strengtheners.

“That was a great experience—a lot of growth and just learning how to love anybody and everybody,” she recalled.

Ministering to the homeless community, former convicts, families with financial struggles and others, she said, “We got exposed to a lot of different kinds of people and learned to see them the way God sees all of us.”

Leading a Children in Action group in that setting, she said, the children’s missions education program “is a great way to expose them to the idea that God calls all of us as Christians to share the gospel with others.”

When the Nunnelleys had the opportunity to move back to Anniston, Ala., to serve Greenbrier Road Baptist Church, she acknowledged that leaving New England was “the hardest decision I’ve ever made.” They returned to Alabama “hoping to inspire others to join in missions,” she added.

As she again led a Children in Action group, she noted that season of life “was another time of learning and seeking God’s will.” It was “a time to rest and recharge and focus,” she said. However, she added: “We knew this is not where we’re meant to be forever. ... We just felt God was calling us back to New England.”

They connected with Austin and Ashlea Smith, who were working to plant a church in Montpelier.

“We knew that Vermont was one of the least religious, least churched

states,” she said. “We knew it would be a challenge, but we felt like God was calling us here to work with them and to help the church thrive and grow and to reach people in this community for Jesus.”

Once again following their missions calling, the Nunnelleys bid farewell to Alabama a second time and moved to Montpelier to serve at Capital Community Church.

Raising their own financial support as MSC missionaries, they balance their ministry roles with other jobs and a busy family life. Matthew works as a pool and spa service technician, and Kathryn serves part-time as the administrator of Anew Place, a 26-bed group home and transitional housing program in Burlington. The Nunnelleys have three children: Taylor, age 15; Jacob, 8; and Julia, 5.

Seeing Christ transform lives



Mission Service Corps missionary Kathryn Nunnelley joins in worship during Capital Community Church’s weekly Thursday night Bible study. “We felt like God was calling us

here,” she said, “to help the church thrive and grow and to reach people in this community for Jesus.” (WMU Photo / Pam Henderson)

The Nunnelleys joined Capital Community Church’s ministry team in 2015, about a year and a half after the Smiths launched the church start in their home. The congregation currently rents space from an Episcopal church in downtown Montpelier, just a few blocks from the state capitol.

Citing the challenges of seeking to make a spiritual impact in a largely unchurched setting, Kathryn Nunnelley said: “Sin is still what equalizes all of us. The only way to be free of that is through Jesus. To be a part of telling people that and seeing life transformation through what Jesus can do is a great opportunity and an honor.”

Their ongoing ministry efforts take “time and effort and intentionality,” she said. “Those are all things I’ve learned through missions education, through WMU curriculum, through events I’ve gone to. My favorite thing is always listening to the missionaries’ stories and learning from them.”

Affirming that “we’re all called to tell others about Jesus,” she said a primary prayer request for their ministry is that “people’s hearts and minds would be open to hear and that they would allow themselves to surrender to Jesus. ... We know how freeing that is and what an impact on the world that can be.”

That’s the same spiritual truth she taught over and over to Mission Friends and Children in Action. And it continues to motivate her to faithfully follow God’s call from Alabama to New England.