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Photo credit: tracyshaun



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Ministry to children

## Nazarene connects school in Middle East with organization for sports ministry

By Gina Grate Pottenger

*While serving at a Nazarene school in the Middle East, \*Genesis helped to connect the school with a local Christian nonprofit organization that is now offering football (soccer) clinics on Saturdays to the students, as well as local refugee children.*

Originally from Argentina, Genesis's parents served the Nazarene church in several countries, including Mozambique (in Africa). So Genesis grew up adapting to and enjoying a variety of cultures, sometimes living in areas with a high

percentage of people who follow other religious traditions.

Following graduation from a master's program in the United States, she expressed a desire to serve refugees in a cross-cultural setting. The Eurasia Region welcomed her to a major city in the Middle East. In her first year there, Genesis has found her multi-cultural background – as well as her Argentinian heritage – to be an advantage in understanding and adapting to the Arabic context.

Genesis serves in the local Nazarene church, and works at the Nazarene school during the week. She noticed a lack of Christian volunteers to support the school's work and meet the students' educational and spiritual needs.

"I was trying to get volunteers in," she said.

On Fridays, she attends a Spanish-speaking congregation where she met people from across South America, including Brazil and Argentina. That's how she befriended the families who run the nonprofit organization, which serves the community by teaching English, Spanish, graphic design, sewing and other skills or activities. They were considering adding football clinics for



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# FOOTBALL: Future clinics planned for girls

*Continued from page 2*

Sudanese refugees when Genesis told them about the need for extra support at the Nazarene school. They wanted to help. They had also been looking for a good space to host their football clinics, and the school has the space they need.

The school welcomed the organization to use its space on Saturdays to provide the clinics to interested students, as well as a number of Sudanese children living in the neighborhood, whose families fled to the country as refugees from war in their home country.

Each Saturday, the coaches talk to the boys about a value like “respect” or “cooperation” and how to implement it in their everyday lives. They also thread this theme through that day’s soccer training.

“We’re hoping to do more days next year,” Genesis said. “It was a trial for a month, but it’s been almost two months. They want to do an official agreement with us. So we’ll probably pursue that. They want to invest in the school and they know other people who would invest in the school. The nonprofit has also brought a volunteer from Italy who used to work in professional soccer. She will be here through February.”

The clinics are only offered for boys (for now), as boys and girls in this culture often do things separately. So, the organization is discussing offering a sports clinic for girls, or self-defense classes. ♦

*\*Full name and location omitted for security reasons*

*Read more to the right and on page 4 from Genesis about how God is touching refugees with His love.*

## Raya gains confidence, transformation through relationship with church

*\*Raya is a refugee from Syria. She is a single mother, and has three daughters. Her husband left her, so she raises their girls on her own.*

As a cross-cultural worker in the Middle East, \*Genesis has had many opportunities to witness how God is working in families and children, especially refugees like Raya and her daughters.

Through the local Nazarene church, Genesis and others visit Raya and many other families experiencing loss, trauma and physical hardship as a result of fleeing violent conflict in their home countries and regions.

Genesis (see first story page 2) recently shared about Raya\*:

*Stories like Raya’s are very common among the people we visit and build relationships with. Many women are left alone, divorced or find themselves in a forced, arranged marriage. However, the difference in Raya’s story is that something happened within her.*

*We believe the Holy Spirit is working in her. The first times that members of the church visited her, they said that she was not doing well. She was afraid to go outside or even to let her daughters leave the house. She saw no future, no purpose for their family.*

*Filled with compassion for Raya and her daughters, the church members started to take action, journeying with her. Some people stepped in and helped her find a place to stay. Church members*

*gave her furniture, a refrigerator, food, clothes and met other needs. Even though Raya didn’t see a future at first, God is a God of new beginnings. He gives us new life in Jesus. “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full” (John 10:10, NIV).*

*Raya started noticing that something changed in her. One day, talking to one of the leaders she started to laugh and said, “Something is different, I see it, too.”*

*She started to clean the house, to play with her daughters, to let them go outside, and many other things she wasn’t doing before. Raya sees a future now and has begun to dream: She wants to start her own business. She is starting slow to reach for this, but believes God will open great doors.*

*Raya works many hours to make crafts that she can sell in the market or bazaar. The church also helped her by subsidizing some of her business expenses. Having this job will also give her time with her daughters. She wants to give them a different life.*

*Raya is also enrolling in a discipleship course at the church! God is at work! Please pray for her and her three daughters. ♦*

*\*Names and location changed for security reasons*

# ‘Please keep visiting my family’

A family from Syria welcomes Nazarene woman into their home - and finds some unexpected things in common.

*While many times women in the Middle East seem more open to the voice of the Holy Spirit than men, sometimes the unexpected happens. \*Genesis (see first story on page 2) shared this story:*

A friend asked me to do a house visit with her. The family she wanted to visit is from Syria. We went to see them on a Friday afternoon about 3 p.m. The person we went to see was a young woman around our age, but her mom was there, too. Later one of the older sons came and joined us.

They asked if we wanted coffee or maté. My eyes lit up when they said “maté.” If you are not familiar with it, it’s a loose-tea herbal drink served in a specific cup and matching straw. It is a central part of our social culture in Argentina, but also in some other South American countries. Three years ago, however, I found out that it’s also popular in Syria and Lebanon.

So, they prepared maté for us. The way they served it is a bit different from our tradition in Argentina, in which we would all drink from the same cup and straw, passing it around the circle of gathered friends. However, since there was a man with us, he had his own cup.

They are a very welcoming family. Next time we visit I’m hoping to take my maté equipment and share with them other flavors of yerba (the tea).

After we shared the maté, the young woman’s mother



Photo credit: Felipe Menanteau

asked, “Would you stay for dinner?” We did. We helped cook and then had dinner together with the women of the house. We ended up leaving after 9 p.m.

As we were about to leave, since we were in a neighborhood not familiar to us, the daughter said that her dad could walk with us until we found a taxi. We hadn’t spoken to her dad all day; he only came in and greeted us once.

As we started walking down the street, he said, “I believe in the same [Jesus] you do. Please keep visiting my daughter and my family. They don’t understand.”

Normally stories are the other way around: Women are more open to hearing about our faith, and eventually accepting it for their own. But it’s exciting to see how God works! Please keep this family in your prayers. ♦

*\*Full name and location omitted for security reasons*



Regional Priorities

## Identifying with the ‘marginalized’

*Game-lovers in Tbilisi form caring community where they are welcome*

By Rebecca Moio

*When I first arrived in Tbilisi, Georgia, I was concerned with finding a group of friends that would breathe life into me during my year-long assignment here. I joined a worship team at the English-speaking church I attended, but there was still more I felt I needed to do.*

*I thought to myself, “I love playing games. I wonder if there is a group here that plays my favorite game?” After some thorough research, I found no such group (or, at least, none that spoke English). So I thought, “I wonder if I could start one?”*

I’ve never started a gaming group before, and I’ve certainly never done it in a culture outside of my own. But I went out and tracked down the nerdiest establishment I could find: A café and comic book store, the only one of its kind in the city. The managers agreed that hosting a gaming group in their store could bring in some great new customers. So they invited me to advertise the free gaming group if I agreed to manage it.

I advertised the gaming group on Facebook, but I didn’t expect anyone to show up. When I arrived at the café the night of our first game, there were nearly 15 people waiting to play. I was really surprised.

We started in May 2019 and have a group of 12 to 15 people who show up to play games every week. I have gotten to know so many new people from all around the world. And it all sprang out of what I assumed was my need for friends. I assumed it was for my own comfort. I thought this plan was about my own resilience in ministry.

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# CARE: ‘Our labor is never in vain’

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God has since proven me wrong.

It’s a highly social game that requires lots of speaking and relationship skills. It’s an amazing way for people to practice their English skills. I have seen amazing leaps in language proficiency from players who started in May and have been playing for just a few months.

But it’s also a place where those with social anxiety or depression can work out their fears and needs in a safe environment. I have many players who have deep wounds that are slowly healing among trusted friends.

Slowly, carefully, we’re untangling the messes that society and culture have created in these lives, and we’re doing it with Jesus involved every step of the way—even if they don’t know Him yet.

I don’t ever preach at them, and this will never be an “officially recognized” ministry. But that certainly doesn’t stop God from ministering!

*“Slowly, carefully, we’re untangling the messes that society and culture have created in these lives, and we’re doing it with Jesus involved every step of the way—even if they don’t know Him yet.”*

You need to understand: These aren’t people who would ever go to church. They’re not going to seek out a Bible on their own. In many cases, they’ve already been rejected by their own society. They are pushed to the fringes of their own culture because, in various ways, they just don’t easily fit in. One of the Eurasia Region’s five priorities is

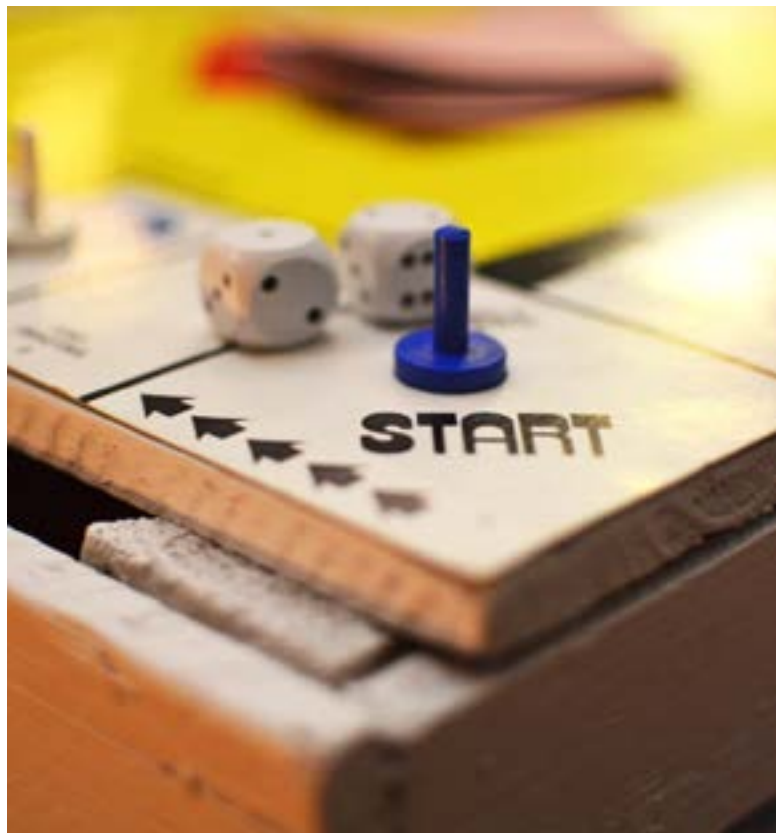
to identify with the poor and marginalized. Well, this is a marginalized group, maybe just not in the way we often imagine. Reaching them with Christ’s love requires doing it in the context of an authentic friendship that does not treat them as an evangelistic project. God has a heart for these beautiful, marginalized people, and He’s given that heart to me.

I buy them slices of cake. I listen to their problems when they’re ready to share them. I lead them on crazy gaming adventures where we explore morality, friendship and teamwork. Sometimes we hang out beyond the game meetings; we watch movies together or get fast food after a long day. They speak into my life and heart as well, as they extend acceptance and friendship back to me. I am filled with joy by their presence just as much as I try to be joyful.

My assignment here comes to an end in April. At first, I was worried about my friends. I said, “But God, what will happen to them?” It breaks my heart to think of leaving them. I love them all, you see.

But this is where it gets good.

Recently, God brought a young Christian couple to our group. They’re Americans who happen to love games. They also have a heart for serving those around them. God said to me, “These will be the



ones who will tend those seeds you are planting.” This couple cares as deeply for these gamers as I do, and they’ve been waiting for God to plant them in the right place for such a ministry as this. That fills my heart with peace.

I still have no idea what God’s plans are for me after this assignment ends. But I know I can trust His plans for my gamers in Tbilisi. ♦

*-- Rebecca Moisis has served as a cross-cultural worker in Georgia for the past year. Previously she served as a media missionary on the regional communication team, based in Manchester, England. She has also served the Nazarene church in the Philippines.*

# Who are Nazarenes?

## We are a Christian people

As members of the Church Universal, we join with all true believers in proclaiming the Lordship of Jesus Christ and in affirming the historic Trinitarian creeds and beliefs of the Christian faith. We value our Wesleyan-Holiness heritage and believe it to be a way of understanding the faith that is true to Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience.

## We are a holiness people

God, who is holy, calls us to a life of holiness. We believe that the Holy Spirit seeks to do in us a second work of grace, called by various terms including "entire sanctification" and "baptism with the Holy Spirit"-cleansing us from all sin, renewing us in the image of God, empowering us to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbors as ourselves, and producing in us the character of Christ. Holiness in the life of believers is most clearly understood as Christlikeness.

## We are a missional people

We are a sent people, responding to the call of Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit to go into all the world, witnessing to the Lordship of Christ and participating with God in the building of the Church and the extension of His kingdom (Matthew 28:19-20; 2 Corinthians 6:1). Our mission (a) begins in worship, (b) ministers to the world in evangelism and compassion, (c) encourages believers toward Christian maturity through discipleship, and (d) prepares women and men for Christian service through Christian higher education.

Learn more at: [www.nazarene.org/articles-faith](http://www.nazarene.org/articles-faith)

*"For this is what the master, the Lord, the Holy One of Israel says: 'If you repented and patiently waited for me, you would be delivered; if you calmly trusted in me you would find strength, but you are unwilling.'"*

*-- Isaiah 30:15*

## Prayer requests

Please pray for all those who attended the Eurasia Regional conferences in November and January. Ask the Holy Spirit to move in our church through the participants, and to grow and mature our church across the region.

Pray for \*Genesis, a Nazarene serving in the Middle East. Ask God to bless her and fellow workers who are ministering to children and refugees, and that God would bring these "least of these" to know His love and comfort.

Pray for the group that has formed in Tbilisi around a mutual love of games. Ask that the Holy Spirit would continue, in God's prevenient grace, to draw them close to Him for healing, peace and joy in relationship with Him.

## Where Worlds Meet

is the monthly newsletter for the Eurasia Region of the Church of the Nazarene.

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