

**Medical Missions and the Local Church**

**Brenda Sheets, Speaker**

**The Columbia Metro Connection Podcast 024**

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Chris Reinolds: Welcome to the Columbia Metro Connection podcast, where you can go to get valuable, relevant, and quality resources for you and your congregation. The Columbia Metro Connection is sponsored and supported by the Columbia Metro Baptist Association and the almost 100 family churches that support the ministry of the CMBA. Hosts for this week's episode are George Bullard, the Director of Missions, strategic leadership coach, and lead Missiologist at Columbia Metro Baptist Association. And I'm Chris Reynolds, certified church consultant and lead pastor at Killian Baptist Church.

Chris Reinolds: Joining us this week is Brenda Sheets, a member of St. Andrews Baptist Church, who felt the call to begin participating in medical missions in Central America. Whether local or abroad, the work of a missionary is vital to the unreached people of the world. Without the beautiful feet of those willing to carry the gospel into the dark places of this world, there are millions that would go out into eternity without ever hearing the hope that they can have in Jesus Christ. We're thankful for the many people like Brenda who inspire and encourage us to think of new ways to engage people with the gospel.

George Bullard: Welcome Brenda, we're very glad to have you today to be a part of our podcast.

Brenda Sheets: Thank you.

George Bullard: We appreciate very much who you are as our leader of the Visionary Leadership Community, and the fact that you've been involved so many years at St. Andrews Baptist Church and in the community, doing various things. And of course, recently, your international trip. That's just a part of who you are. And so, Brenda Sheets is the leader of our Visionary Leadership Community, which is our former administrative team, and she provides excellent and steady leadership for us as we seek to make decisions that will empower our congregations to reach their full kingdom potential.

Brenda Sheets: Thank you.

George Bullard: So, very glad to be with you.

Brenda Sheets: Thank you. Would you mind telling my husband all that?

Chris Reinolds: We were just talking before. We were talking about you, you know, you came to St. Andrews the second time in 1980 and you've been serving there for a while. But, something in the past 14 years, you've been serving overseas, seeking to go and serve in Central American. Now, what was sort of the catalyst to begin this work? What drew you to it?

Brenda Sheets: Well, my husband's been going for 25 years.

Chris Reinolds: Oh, wow. Okay.

Brenda Sheets: He started because of what we call our in-town dad. Mr. David Rogers, a member of our church, came to my husband and to our friends one year and said, “Boys, I'm going to Honduras, and I need y'all to go with me.” And they said, “Yes, sir. What do you need us to do?” He said, “Well, we're going to be doing carpentry work,” which is a joke because my husband nor the other two gentlemen do that. So, we laugh and say they've been his apprentices for 25 years.

Chris Reinolds: That's funny.

Brenda Sheets: And so, at the time, I was teaching. And, the schools just don't like to let teachers take a week off in January, at the start of a new semester.

Chris Reinolds: I can't imagine why.

Brenda Sheets: And so, once I quit teaching, then, I said, it's time for me to go.

Chris Reinolds: Right.

Brenda Sheets: So, that's when I started.

Chris Reinolds: You were tired of hearing all the stories come from him, and you wanted to have some of your own stories!

Brenda Sheets: Well, I got tired of washing his laundry when he came back!

Chris Reinolds: So, when you get back now, does he wash his own laundry?

Brenda Sheets: No!

Chris Reinolds: Oh, you're still washing it?

Brenda Sheets: I'm still washing. I wash all of it now!

George Bullard: Well Brenda, tell us. Is this a subtle effort by your church, just somebody that your church connected with? Or, is this through some missionary organization of some kind?

Brenda Sheets: Well, like I said, David Rogers is the one that got us all involved. And his son, one of his sons, got him involved, but it's actually through an organization called BMDMI, it's Baptist Dental Medical International out of Mississippi. And so, our team consists of about 30 to 40 North Americans. Some are from Columbia. Some are from the Upstate. We have some from Georgia. We've had members in the past from churches in Florida and Tennessee. So, we all kind of join up at the Atlanta airport and head out.

Chris Reinolds: Okay. Well, that's great. And, seeing how various parts of the church, global church, come together to do the work of the church in a very concentrated fashion. Now, over the 14 years that you've been doing this, and maybe even the 25 years that your husband has been doing it, how have the methods sort of changed and evolved as y'all have been seeking to engage with people in Central America?

Brenda Sheets: Really, the methods haven't changed that much in terms of when we get into a village. We never know... well, typically, we don't go back to the same village two years in a row. For the last few years, we have, because that village has specifically invited us to come back. So, when I first started going, the village that we would go into, very few of them had electricity. And so, we had to, you know, take our own generators.

 But, they were always notified ahead of time that a group was coming, and what services we would be able to provide for them. And so, word-of-mouth, it spread. They don't need telephones down there for that sort of thing. And, the people would come. And of course, you know, they're always curious about the North Americans who come.

Chris Reinolds: Right.

Brenda Sheets: But, once we got there, it was just interacting. Creating those relationships with the people made it very easy to work with them. And for them to then, you know, accept our services that we provide.

Chris Reinolds: Now, you started off doing the food and clothing focused aspect of the ministry, and it's sort of changed over the years.

Brenda Sheets: Well, they've never let me in the kitchen, except to serve food! We have some ladies who are our cooks, and I let them take care of that. But, we do all help out when it comes time to serve the food and different things. But, yes. The first year I went was the first year that our team did a clothing ministry. And, one of the ladies that went with our team that year, her husband was a dentist who had been going for several years.

 And, their church, small church, decided that we needed to distribute clothing. So, the members of that church just, you know, started gathering clothing, and she bought some plastic bags. And, they would put a piece of clothing in a plastic bag, write on a slip of paper what it was and what size, and throw it in the bag, and then tie the bag up. And, they would throw all these bags in a box. There was no sorting process whatsoever.

 So, the team leader said, “Um, you're an organized person. You can organize and handle this!” Sure! Whatever! So, we got down there and, you know, they brought the boxes that had all the clothes in them. Opened them up, and we figured out real quick that there was no organization to them, and we had people lined up at the door ready to get clothes. So, we're digging through boxes, and throwing bags, and you know, you had to hunt for the piece of paper that had the information on it.

 So, it was not a quick process. But, we got all the clothes distributed that year. You know, some of the men went away with ladies' dresses. Who knows? And, we had some interesting items packed in those boxes. Ladies' swim suits, undergarments, shall we say. High heels.

Chris Reinolds: Those are convenient when you’re working in the field!

Brenda Sheets: Oh, very convenient when you're in a country that, there's nothing level anywhere. So, we thought, no. So, we just, you know, kind of put those items off to the side and said we'll deal with those later!

Chris Reinolds: Right.

Brenda Sheets: But, out of that process then, we said; You know, there's got to be a better way, not only ease in packing, but to make it easier and quicker to distribute these. So then, we came up with having them packed in Ziploc bags, which would allow them to kind of flatten them out when they... because, we're only allowed certain size boxes to pack and ship in.

Chris Reinolds: Right.

Brenda Sheets: So now, they pack them... pack an outfit in a bag. The bag is labeled on the outside with a, you know, a sticky label. And then, the clothes are sorted. So like, one box is Boys, size 4 to 7. Another box is Boys, 8 to 12.

Chris Reinolds: Right.

Brenda Sheets: So, it makes it a lot easier for distribution now.

Chris Reinolds: So, y'all got that process worked out as far as organization goes. But, you've kind of transitioned slightly in that, now, you're kind of working over the optical. There's and optical center. Is that the case, that y'all are setting up like an eye doctor there on location?

Brenda Sheets: Exactly, yeah. A few years after we started the clothing ministry, then, a friend of ours, as a matter of fact, Sharon King, who is our Minister of Adults and Administration at St. Andrews, started going.

Chris Reinolds: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brenda Sheets: And so, Sharon kind of took over the clothing ministry, and at that time, we started an optical ministry. And so, I've been trained on how to use the auto refractor, and all of the equipment that we have for that.

Chris Reinolds: Wow!

Brenda Sheets: So, we have Kendall Optical Ministry out of Kentucky, who set this ministry up for us. And so, there's like 3000 pair of reading glasses in inventory.

Chris Reinolds: That's great.

Brenda Sheets: And so, I mean, we go in, we set up shelves, set up our inventory. We have a laptop. We have the auto refractor. We have a printer. It's an optical shop right there in the village.

Chris Reinolds: Right. So, here's my question. At some point in time, do you get to say, “Is it better one, or better two?”

Brenda Sheets: No. That's the great thing about this auto refractor.

Chris Reinolds: Because it does all the work for you there?

Brenda Sheets: It does all the work.

Chris Reinolds: That's great.

Brenda Sheets: You sit the person down, and you have to get knee-to-knee with them. And you... it's like a... oh, I can't think of the name.

Chris Reinolds: I know what you're talking. Those little toys that the kids used to click.

Brenda Sheets: Yeah, the little toy that you click.

Chris Reinolds: Yeah.

Brenda Sheets: They go from slide to slide.

Chris Reinolds: The view finder. I think that's what it's called.

Brenda Sheets: View finder. That's it. It's kind of like that, only it's much fancier.

Chris Reinolds: Okay.

Brenda Sheets: It's like a $10,000.00 piece of equipment.

Chris Reinolds: Much more expensive. Yeah.

Brenda Sheets: Much more expensive. And so, I put that up to their eyes, and the trick is to get them to not blink.

Chris Reinolds: Right. Yeah.

Brenda Sheets: And, within seconds, it will give me a reading.

Chris Reinolds: Okay.

Brenda Sheets: And then, I switch and go to the other eye, and in seconds, it'll give me a reading.

Chris Reinolds: That's great.

Brenda Sheets: And then, this software program that an engineer designed, it feeds their prescription into this software program, where all the glasses that we have in inventory are in there in a database.

Chris Reinolds: Right.

Brenda Sheets: And, it pulls up the best fit pair of glasses in inventory that we have for that person.

Chris Reinolds: That's incredible.

Brenda Sheets: Now, it may be a pair of glasses that, you know, an 80 year old wore...

Chris Reinolds: Right. Yeah.

Brenda Sheets: ... and this is a 20 year old that I'm trying to put them on. So you know, we have options, and we can go through and find those. Because, all the glasses are glasses that have been donated. And, there's a team in Kentucky that has the equipment. And, they sit down, and they can put the glasses under this piece of equipment and read the prescription off of it.

Chris Reinolds: That's wonderful. That's great. I mean, that's great. And, that's what the evolution has taken place as far as, you know, from clothing and food, to the eyecare stuff, to other medical stuff, to, I assume, dental stuff as well that y'all have done.

Brenda Sheets: Right.

Chris Reinolds: And, I've also heard that even veterinary services y'all have gotten into.

Brenda Sheets: Yeah, we have a vet team that goes with us.

Chris Reinolds: That's awesome.

George Bullard: That's great.

Chris Reinolds: That's wonderful.

Brenda Sheets: Yeah. That vet team has really opened the doors to allow us to get to the men in the villages.

George Bullard: Oh, yes. I can see that.

Chris Reinolds: Any specific stories that, you know, really stand out to you as far as your time over the past 14 years that were especially impactful within your ministry?

Brenda Sheets: Oh my gosh. There are so many. I know, one year, we were in a little village, and I can't recall the name of the village. But, we had an older gentleman who came in. And, first thing we always do is ask them is do you need help seeing up close or at a distance? Because, we also take readers with us that we can hand out. And so, he needed help seeing at a distance. And so, we used the auto refractor and got his prescription for him, and found him a pair of glasses in stock, and, put them on him.

 And you know, of course, he had never worn glasses before. So, he immediately started looking around at his feet and everything. And we said, “No, no, no. Look outside. Look outside,” because we're typically in a room. And, he looked out, and all of a sudden, his eyes just got real wide and bright. And through the translator, he said, “I can see the birds singing on the trees in Una Catal, and it's like three villages away!”

George Bullard: How about that!

Chris Reinolds: That's funny!

Brenda Sheets: But, we also one year, had a young girl, she was like 10, I think, who was legal... here in the states, we would classify her as legally blind. And, we did not have any glasses, a pair of glasses in stock. But, we do carry the supplies, and we can make glasses. So, we call those our Harry Potter glasses, because they're the round frames, you know.

Chris Reinolds: Yes, right.

Brenda Sheets: And so, we did have the lens, and we were able to make her a pair of glasses. And, she walked out of there seeing that day.

Chris Reinolds: Aw, that's great.

Brenda Sheets: And, her mother was just crying.

Chris Reinolds: That's good. That's good.

Brenda Sheets: So, you know, you only need one of those every couple of years, and you're good to go.

Chris Reinolds: Right. I'm sure you are. I'm sure, yeah.

George Bullard: Well, what about those church members that cannot go? In every church, there's got to be people who physically, even financially, or for other reasons that can't leave their job. Want to go, want to participate, want to be a part of the gospel conversations, and those kinds of things. How can they be a part of what you're doing?

Brenda Sheets: Our church St. Andrews Baptist has just really grabbed hold of this. We have a group of ladies who, like you said, can't go. But, they get together two or three days a week, and they sew. And, they make pillowcase dresses for us to take and distribute. And, they have the best time doing that. We have another group that is in charge of collecting used clothing. They collect it, they sort it, they pack it for us. They give us an inventory sheet of, you know, what's in each box.

 That's a whole group of people. We have another group of people that put together hygiene kits for us to take, and distribute through the medical clinic. Then, there's a group of people who get together, and, I promise you, this one gentleman, George Meeks, he could squeeze a dollar and get a dollar fifty out of it! And, they go and buy hammers, screw drivers, tarps, things like that, that the guys on the vet team distribute to the gentlemen.

Chris Reinolds: Right.

Brenda Sheets: Then, we also, our church collects money and goods. And, we always take and leave with the village, several boxes of school supplies. Because, some of those village families, they can't afford to buy a box of crayons for their children. So, when we go in January, that's their summer time. So, school is out. So, we typically stay in the school buildings of the village. So, to thank them for allowing us to do that, we always leave them school supplies.

Chris Reinolds: That's good.

George Bullard: Great.

Brenda Sheets: And, you don't think of it, but, don't take battery-operated pencil sharpeners.

Chris Reinolds: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Right.

George Bullard: Right.

Brenda Sheets: They don't have batteries.

George Bullard: Certainly.

Brenda Sheets: So, trying to find the old, you know, mount on the wall pencil sharpeners is quite a trick.

Chris Reinolds: Right.

Brenda Sheets: And like, for the optical clinic, when I dilate some of the people's eyes, these days, trying to find a little pen-like flash light that's not LED, that's a trick. You don't want to shine a LED flashlight in somebody's eyes.

Chris Reinolds: Sure, yeah.

Brenda Sheets: But, we have lots of groups that do that. Our church also, kind of is the collection point for all the clothes. We have a team that, a group, that goes and purchases food that we take down with us. And then, they gather at St. Andrews, and they pack that food. And, the food is packed by the day of the week that it's going to be used.

Chris Reinolds: Okay.

Brenda Sheets: Excuse me. So, menus are made out ahead of time. And, the boxes are packed according to the days, so they know which box to open for which meal.

Chris Reinolds: That's good.

Brenda Sheets: Excuse me.

Chris Reinolds: You're all right.

Brenda Sheets: We also have people who donate money, because through the medical clinic, we distribute rice and beans to villagers. So, they donate money for us to use for the rice and beans.

Chris Reinolds: So, y'all come back after y'all have done this mission work. And, once y'all return, you have a special day set up to where you kind of go over with the church body, the ones that have really been, you know, preparing for y'all to go for a period of time, kind of share with them, you know, your experience and what took place?

Brenda Sheets: We do. We have a mission report...

Chris Reinolds: Okay.

Brenda Sheets: ... that is typically on a Wednesday night. And, we have slides that we show, because they really like to see pictures of what's going on. And, we have different team members who would give the report, and we, you know, set up our little goodies that we brought back. Because, most of the villages have a... each village has a specialty item that they, typically the ladies, make. One village, it was baskets that they made. One village, they pulled the... took the seeds off of trees, and made jewelry, necklaces and all.

Chris Reinolds: Oh, wow!

Brenda Sheets: And, the village that we were in last year, Unki Kaggwa, the ladies in that village had gone together and bought a loom. And so, they would weave fabric and then make scarves and items like that out of them. So, they usually come and set up their little market the last day that we're in the village.

Chris Reinolds: Oh, wow!

Brenda Sheets: And, you know, I feel like it's my duty to help support the economy of Honduras.

George Bullard: That's right.

Chris Reinolds: Absolutely.

George Bullard: Buy everything you can.

Brenda Sheets: Tell that to my husband!

Chris Reinolds: If there's a pastor or a church leader, or maybe even laymember who are out there listening to this, and they're prayerfully considering maybe participating in, you know, maybe with you guys. Maybe it's with some other ministry. Maybe it's starting something of their own, in their own context, and where it is that they're at. What would you say as a word of encouragement to them?

Brenda Sheets: You need to do it. There's nothing like it.

Chris Reinolds: Right.

Brenda Sheets: We've had lots of team members kind of go float through our team, I guess is the correct word to say it, over the years, that have then gone on and started their own teams to go. I know there's a team out of, some of the members were from Sumter that, they now have their own team. And, they go to Honduras every year. So, yeah, we're always having teams break off from our team, which is as it should be.

George Bullard: Right.

Chris Reinolds: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Multiply it.

Brenda Sheets: Exactly. And, we can reach more people down there that way. But, our team has, let's see if I can name all the ministries. We have a carpenter crew. We have medical. We have dental. We have optical. We have a pharmacy. We have children's ministry. We have a clothing ministry, and we have a veterinary ministry.

Chris Reinolds: Wow!

Brenda Sheets: All that, and 40 North Americans.

Chris Reinolds: Yeah.

Brenda Sheets: Now, we also, once we get down there, we have translators that go out with us.

Chris Reinolds: Right.

Brenda Sheets: But, yeah.

Chris Reinolds: That's great.

George Bullard: Excellent. Well, Brenda, it's wonderful that you're doing this, St. Andrews Baptist Church is doing this, and that you are encouraging other churches to get involved in doing this, because this really is a part of being involved in missional engagement. And so, we thank you very much. Would you feel comfortable in talking to someone to provide with additional information? Or, is there a way you would be willing for them to contact you?

Brenda Sheets: Oh, definitely. I'll talk to anybody about this! And, probably the best way to contact me is through my email. And that's, bksheets@me.com.

George Bullard: All right. Good. Thank you very much.

Chris Reinolds: Thank you so much for being here today.

Brenda Sheets: Thank you.

Chris Reinolds: And, to all of our listeners, thank you for joining with us. And, please be sure to check out the show notes for more detailed information about today's show. Also, if you found this podcast helpful for you and your ministry, share it with others so can get the word out about what God is doing. Until next time from all of us at the Columbia Metro Connection, we thank you for listening, and urge you to share this podcast with everyone you know. It's the good news about the Good News in the Columbia Metro Baptist Association.