

Manila, Philippines



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Missionary Bill Snider ministers to a local family.

It's about people

ARTICLE AND PHOTOGRAPHY
BY TIM SCHIRMAN

Focusing my camera on the hills above Cagayan do Oro, Philippines, I realize I have lost track of my missionary ... again. Backtracking, I find that Bill Snider has stopped to talk to a family resting under some shade trees beside their simple wood home. Through the camera lens they appear framed against the valley below, with the ocean barely visible behind them. It looks like a scene from a classic missionary film of the 1960s.

I've known Bill and his wife, Kim, for more years than I can remember. In addition to being AGWM area director for Southeast Asia, Bill is founder and director of Asia Pacific Media Ministries. Since my work is missions storytelling, our paths have crossed many times, but this is my first time to be with him in the Philippines, his base of ministry. Watching him interact with the local family clarifies what I have known about him all along and what I have come to see as the basis of APMM's success: Bill does media because Bill loves people.

Behind the scenes

Bill and Kim have been involved with media ministry for as long as they have been missionaries. Over the past 20 years, the Sniders and the APMM team have produced an impressive list of materials. Among the latest are 26 episodes of *Family Talk*, a drama and discussion program, and several evangelistic and pre-evangelism feature films.

Two facts catch my attention as I walk into APMM. First, while the facility is carefully maintained, it is very compact as media centers go. It doesn't have large studios and control rooms, which is surprising given the amount of material produced here.

Second, while the ministry is founded and operated by U.S. missionaries, the staff is mostly Filipino. APMM has been successful and financially efficient over the years because the Sniders understand missions media are most effective when produced by nationals who understand local culture and can design programs for use by national pastors and laypeople. Missions media's goal is the same as any other missions endeavor — to bring people to Christ and integrate them into local churches.

"I've always felt that success in Christian media is when people become involved in local churches because of it," Bill says. "Putting the Word on the airwaves is fine. It creates an atmosphere and sows the seed. But if you don't link the message to local believers, you have missed the potential. Local churches are the end result. That's where the harvest is."

Traveling across the Philippines, Bill and I visit several rural church plants. Several years ago APMM designed a strategic follow-up mechanism as part of a broadcast to create direct contacts between listeners and programmers and enable evangelism and church planting opportunities. The intentional use of media resulted in planting more than 40 churches.

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Missionary Bill Snider



On the set of Family Talk



Missionary Kim Snider

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Family Talk

Harold and Melissa Cruz are a charming couple with open and honest smiles. Watching them together, you can see the love and respect they have for each other. Few people would guess their marriage was once on the verge of collapse. But God intervened in their lives and marriage, and today they are the hosts of APM's flagship program, *Family Talk*.

Sitting in the APM studio — which is not much larger than the typical American family room — they explain the program to me. Part drama and part talk show, the 26 episodes cover difficult subjects, such as marital infidelity, teen pregnancy and spousal abuse.

The Cruzes explain that Filipino culture is very nonconfrontational. People have a hard time openly talking about personal struggles and pain. *Family Talk* is designed to be a conversation starter to help people talk about needs in their lives and seek help.

The video series is most often used in family or group settings as a tool for evangelism or discipleship. “The shortest path between the truth and the message you want to convey is a story,” Melissa says. “*Family Talk* bridges the gap between what you want to tell people and how they can relate it to their lives and say, ‘I have that need as well.’”

“We are just so humbled with the results of this video ministry,” Harold tells me. “Because of what happened in our marriage, we are thankful that God has been so gracious to let us have a part in it.”

Tools for the local church

Thursday evening a group of about 30 people gathers around a television in a side room of a Manila church to watch a *Family Talk* program on teen pregnancy. Pastor Peter Benzon plays segments of the video and then leads a group discussion. The dialogue is animated, and everyone in the room is engaged. The video has clearly hit a responsive chord. During the prayer time at the end of the evening, it is clear that the cultural barriers that kept these people from openly sharing their needs have been broken, and true healing is taking place.

Tools for personal evangelism

Following the meeting, I ask Pastor Benzon about the effectiveness of media tools in ministry. One of the most powerful uses, he says, is personal evangelism. He tells me of a group from his church that knocks on doors and offers to show the videos to families.

“They knocked on one door and asked the woman who answered to watch a video with them,” he says. “The video was about forgiveness. After they watched it, they learned that the woman was packed and ready to leave her home because her husband had cheated on her. Instead, she opened her heart and shared with the team, and they counseled her. The woman gave her heart to the Lord and then asked, ‘Could you talk to my husband?’ The team counseled the husband, and now both of them are attending the church.”

It’s not about electrons, it’s about people ...

The sun is setting as I stand on the beach in Roxas City talking with District Superintendent Johnny Gallos, who also pastors a church. At the end of our interview about his church planting efforts, I ask, “Are there any ways that media tools have been useful in ministry in this district?”

For the next 10 minutes, Gallos talks almost too fast for me to follow as he lists ways he and his fellow ministers use APMM’s media tools. Among them are outreaches to businessmen, cell group meetings, personal evangelism, crusade evangelism, church planting, discipleship, teaching, family counseling, world missions, home missions and much more.

Over supper that evening Bill tells me he never anticipated all the ways people would use the various media tools. I notice again that the success of this ministry stems from its emphasis on people — both on those who are trained to create the tools, and the national believers who use them.

In my 30 years of doing media, I have learned that equipment breaks, software becomes obsolete and production styles change. The only lasting media investment is in people. Any student of missions already knows that truth ... it’s about people!

“People come to Christ through personal contact,” Bill says, “but how do you get to that first contact? Media can be a great tool to get the Word and the people into the marketplace.”

It’s about people ... **tpe**

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E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.



Above: APMM partnered with another production company to produce a movie called Rebound — a full-length motion picture designed for evangelism. It premiered and was broadcast nationwide on television.

Left: Taping an episode of Family Talk