

*And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.*

*Galatians 6:9*

**ITMI**  
Monthly

1 JULY 2025

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## “In Weakness, Strength: The Story of Vio and Daria Pop”

Echoes II Corinthians 12:9 and captures the heart of their faith-driven perseverance.

*Some stories shine  
brightest when told*

*quietly*—through worn hands that never stopped giving, and through feet that kept walking long past when the body said “no more.” This is one of those stories.

Viorel and Daria Pop—two humble, disabled Romanians—gave 28 of their best years to serve the forgotten. Today, as their health has finally slowed them, their legacy continues to speak: of perseverance, obedience, and God’s faithfulness.

### Planted in Suffering, Grown in Mercy

Both Vio and Daria learned suffering early. At four years old, Vio contracted polio. Dozens of surgeries followed, and with few resources in communist Romania, care was limited. He never walked unaided again. But his upper body—and his resolve—grew strong.

Daria fell ill with scarlet fever at age five. It damaged her kidneys, depleted her bones of calcium, and

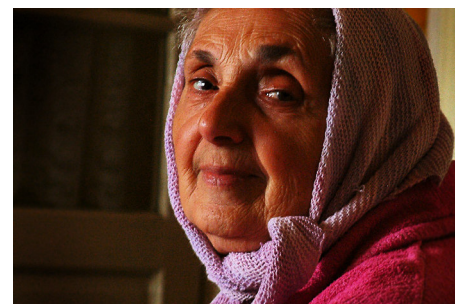


Smiles, strength, and the beginning of decades of impact. Daria, Vio, Steve captured when energy was high and hearts were already all in.



Simple kindness in a quiet room—seen by God, remembered in eternity.

her with scoliosis. She dreamed of becoming a teacher, or maybe a musician. Rejected from both paths, she trained in medical



Warm, safe, and cared for - modeling Jesus for the widows.

caregiving—unaware that God was shaping her for something even greater.

*(continued on p.2)*

Growing up under Nicolae Ceaușescu's brutal communist regime (1947–1989), life for Romania's poor and disabled was often hopeless. Christians were watched. Disabled people were seen as burdens. But Daria remembers two things that shone through: the warmth of Christian unity, and the desire growing in her heart to serve the forgotten.

After the 1989 Revolution, Romania opened to the world—and so did new opportunities. That's when she met Viorel. He was not yet a believer, but soon came to faith, and was baptized in 1991. What bonded them instantly was a shared passion for serving the outcast: orphans, the disabled, and the elderly.

### **Bethesda: A Home for the Forgotten**

In 1992, with the help of believers in England and later **In Touch Mission International**, Vio and Daria founded the **Bethesda Foundation** and opened a Christian nursing home. It was a safe place for elderly Romanian women with no family, no money, and nowhere else to go.

The women who came to Bethesda weren't just aging—they were abandoned. Some had been left by their families, others by the system. In Bethesda, they found warmth, prayer, dignity—and a place to belong.

There was Susana, an 80-year-old neighbor grieving the suicide of her son and the death of her husband, who later attempted to end her own life. After returning from the hospital, paralyzed from the waist down, Vio and Daria brought her in. She lived five more years surrounded by care and companionship.

There was Sister Ileana, a gentle believer who lived at Bethesda for nine years, witnessing to others and even leading one resident, Beji, to Christ.

And there was Erji, a frail woman evicted by her landlords and found sleeping in a cemetery. She was brought to Bethesda and lived there safely for three years.

As Daria recalls, "We had many 'grannies' who welcomed us with joy and gratitude. That gave us the strength to carry out this work with complete

dedication."

Their daughter, Moni, grew up in the home. "What I saw in my parents was sacrifice, dedication, and deep compassion," she says. "That's why today I teach disabled children. I want to carry on their legacy of mercy."

### **A Faithful Provider**



#### **Daria's gentle act reflects the Gospel: love bending low for the broken.**

Running the home wasn't easy. Costs grew, staff needed salaries, residents had daily needs. There were moments when the money wasn't there—until God made it appear, often through ITMI's support, just in time. "The Lord always provided," Daria remembers. "Even at the last minute."

COVID-19 brought new challenges—more regulations, staff shortages, rising costs. By late 2020, it became clear their season at Bethesda had come to a close. But even then, the Pops continued serving elderly in their homes—bringing food, medicine, prayer, and presence.

Only recently did their own health needs force them to retire. Daria fell in early 2025 and broke her arm. She now cannot walk or use a walker. Vio lives with chronic pain, yet still drives their two grandsons to school. Still, their faith endures.

"We saw the Lord was in control from beginning to end," Daria says. "Everything happened at the right moment."

### **A Legacy Worth Continuing**

Many of you reading this have walked alongside Vio and Daria over the years—supporting them through prayer,

encouragement, and gifts. You helped them rescue the elderly, comfort the lonely, and offer dignity in the final chapters of life.

Now, we ask for one more act of compassion.

Pray for Vio and Daria. They gave their best years to serve those most in need. Let's support them now in their time of need.

And let us not forget—there are still elderly, disabled, and abandoned people across Romania waiting for someone to show them the love of Christ. What better way to honor the Pops than by continuing their ministry?

Let's carry the torch they held so faithfully. Let's make mercy happen—again.

To honor the Pops and continue serving Romania's elderly, give here:

👉 [[intouchmission.org/donate-to/bethesda-care-for-the-elderly](https://intouchmission.org/donate-to/bethesda-care-for-the-elderly)](<https://intouchmission.org/donate-to/bethesda-care-for-the-elderly>) - Steve Evers



**Vio and Daria, wrapping another life into their own with joy and dignity. Because no one should grow old without being loved like this.**



## A Dollar and a Dream:

### *How God is Changing Lives in Zulu Land*

**4:00 AM. The line starts forming in the pre-dawn darkness. Mothers clutch their babies.** Fathers shift on tired legs.

Hope hangs in the cool South African air like mist. What are they waiting for? A grocery bag of used clothes—for \$1.75.

In a remote stretch outside Durban, South Africa, where the Zulu tribe calls home, life is not easy. There is a *problem*—and it's not just poverty.

*It's isolation. Spiritual hunger. Broken families.*

A deep weariness that can only be felt in the marrow of people who've known too much suffering for too long.

But in this very soil, **Kelly and Cherise Smith** have planted more than crops—they've planted **hope**. And that hope is taking root.

### **The Problem: A Community Struggling to Survive**

Life in rural Zulu land is a daily battle. Families struggle to afford basic necessities. Many children grow up in homes fractured by abuse or neglect. Alcoholism and fatherlessness plague the area. The spiritual climate is heavy—witchcraft, ancestral worship, and false teachings linger in the background. And for many, the Gospel is either unknown, untasted, or deeply misunderstood.

Education is limited. Access to biblical teaching is even more rare. Young people like *Simiso*—bright, gifted, eager to serve—have dreams that seem out of reach without mentors and resources.

Women long for dignity and independence, but opportunities are scarce.

Without intervention, the cycle of poverty—both material and spiritual—threatens to swallow yet another generation of Savior-devoid souls.

### **The Solution: A Gospel-Fueled, Community-Driven Movement** **Enter 7 Rivers Farm. Enter the Thola Centre. Enter the Gospel.**

Kelly and Cherise Smith are doing something radical: **they're giving the Zulu people the tools to transform their own community through the power of Christ.**

- **Kelly**, a full-time South African pastor, Elder, and teacher at

Fellowship Baptist Church in Umhlanga, is not only preaching and discipling weekly—he's also raising up future leaders.

His training with young leaders like *Adrian* equips them with theological depth and practical skills. Every sermon they preach, every counseling session they lead, is sharpened by Kelly's mentorship.

- **Cherise** serves women and children through the Thola Centre—

offering love, dignity, and purpose. Her bead shop helps local women earn income and feed their families. Her discipleship work, through WhatsApp devotionals and face-to-face encouragement, is sowing seeds of faith in women like **Nokubonga and Zama**, meeting them exactly where they are.

- Through **biblical counseling**, Cherise brings healing into dark places. One woman, shackled by years of resentment towards her husband, finally tasted freedom as she began her journey of forgiveness through a devotional on mercy. Another day, another soul directed away from bitterness by truth and grace. Cherise's goal is to lead, with the Holy Spirit's involvement to a complete casting off of the local traditions and a

complete acceptance of God's truth as given to us through His Word.

- The **Thola Centre outreach**, supported by generous donations from local churches and American believers like you, is nothing short of astonishing. On April 5, hundreds from the community lined up before sunrise for a chance to "shop" for clothing and receive food—each bag filled with a Gospel tract and accompanied by a clear, bold presentation of the good news.

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Kelly, Cherise, Sli (their oldest daughter), and the two precious grandchildren.

“People had been lining up from 4am... Each group heard the gospel before shopping. It was a day of dignity, joy, and eternal seeds planted,” shares the Smiths.

- And then there’s *Simiso*—a young Zulu man with a calling. Thanks to this ministry and support from VBS kids back in the U.S., he’s studying **Hermeneutics** at the International College of Bible and Missions. His life is on a new path—a ripple effect of what can happen when our love, the Smith’s love, God’s love meets vision.

### The Benefit: Lasting Change Rooted in Christ

What’s the outcome of all this?

**Hearts are being changed. Leaders are being raised. Families are being healed.**

The funds raised from the clothing outreach don’t yet cover the cost to operate the Bible based **Thola Centre Preschool**. The children learning their ABC’s today are the same ones who

will one day teach the Gospel to their grandchildren. With God’s help and your help, this is our deepest desire.

**Kelly and Cherise’s work is not charity—it’s Kingdom building.** The men in Kelly’s Bible study groups are learning to lead God’s way, in their homes. The women working with Cherise are discipling others. The Gospel is spreading—not through events only, but through relationships. Through consistency. Through faithfulness.

And yes, through that \$1.75 bag of clothes.

### From the Soil of Struggle to a Garden of Hope

In this part of Zulu land it is no longer just a place of pain. It’s becoming a place of promise. Through the tireless work of **Kelly and Cherise Smith**, through every sermon, every prayer, every beaded bracelet and shared devotional—**God is glorified and truth is planted.**

The Gospel isn’t just spoken here. It’s lived. Every day.

**Will you join what God is doing in Zulu land?** Will you pray? Will you partner? Will you give? Will you send? Because when local hope costs only \$1.75, no investment is too small—and no soul is beyond reach.

Next month stay tuned for Q&A with Kelly Smith about why the Zulu culture is so very difficult to the truth of the Gospel. - Steve Evers



Simiso loves to exercise his calling to share the Gospel to his Zulu people. He is ready to share with the homeless Zulus.

## FOR PRAISE

1. India - David and Taru Kumar - New class of pre-school children and their parents started at the Deepam School.
2. Romania - Vioral and Daria Pop - Twenty-eight years of faithful sacrifice and service to the forgotten of Romania.
3. Zimbabwe - Charl van Wyk - Zimbabwe tractor is already making an impact on the farmland that will feed many widows and children.
4. Poland - Piotr Zaremba - Piotr has a full summer of family and youth ministries.
5. ITMI - God’s continued blessings and provision allowing us to accomplish more Kingdom work as the needs grow in today’s world.

## FOR PRAYER

1. Romania - Adi and Ema and Ionel-Casa Dorca - As they seek God’s direction and plan in serving needy widows and orphans.
2. South Sudan - Lazarus Yezinai - Continued provision and protection in a degrading and lawless society.
3. Zambia - John Leach - Continued rural leadership training and extending the reach of the evangelism and discipling network.
4. All ITMI - wisdom, guidance, integrity and clarity for our partners making weighty decisions around the world.
5. ITMI USA - Staff health and staff help. As God grows ITMI we need additional co-laborers in His Kingdom work.
6. ITMI USA - Pray for God’s help and strength as ITMI moves to a new office location after 40+ years at the original office.



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