

## PROFILE OF TRANSFORMATION



**Name:** Kevin Orner

**Hometown:** Born in Eden Prairie, MN; currently living in Tampa, FL

**Profession:** PhD Candidate in Environmental Engineering at the University of South Florida

**ASA Affiliation:** Student Member, Annual Meeting Attender

**Hobbies:** Playing Ultimate Frisbe; Traveling with my wife, Sarah

### **When did you first discover the American Scientific Affiliation (ASA)?**

My first introduction to the American Scientific Affiliation came through the living testimony of ASA members who were also members of the church I attended as an undergraduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Through Geneva Campus Church, I met and learned from Peter Bosscher, Terry Morrison, and Cal DeWitt. I attended my first annual meeting this past July.

### **How has your personal and spiritual life been changed because of your involvement with ASA?**

As a young undergraduate engineering student, I thought of engineering as a way to use my skills to get a job and make a living, and church was something I did on Sundays. However, I joined Engineers Without Borders after hearing a talk by Peter Bosscher, who challenged us students to act on behalf of the over 1 billion people that lack clean water and over 2 billion that lack adequate sanitation. He communicated that engineers should be educated so that they (1) have the skills and tools appropriate to address the issues that our planet is facing today and is likely to face within the next 20 years; (2) are aware of the needs of the developing world; and (3) can contribute to the relief of the endemic problems of poverty afflicting developing communities worldwide. Peter often quoted Bernard Amadei, the founding president of Engineers Without Borders: "Improving the lives of the 5 billion people whose chief concern is to stay alive another day on our planet is no longer an option; it is an obligation." Peter said that as Christians we should further the kingdom, striving to seek justice and peace on earth as it is in heaven. This challenging message resonated with me and gave me a vision of how to unite my engineering skills, Christian faith, and global needs.

About that time, I started attending Geneva Campus Church. During the academic year, our pastor organized lunchtime sessions with professors who attended the church, including Cal DeWitt. Through these conversations I learned about topics such as vocation, creation care, and environmental stewardship.

However, soon after I met Peter, I received news that he had cancer and would not have long to live. Despite his fading health, Peter and his wife Marcia hosted my colleague Jonathan Thayil-Blanchard and me on Thursday evenings during the summer to discuss theology and service. His testimony was a strong motivating factor for me to go abroad as an engineer to El Salvador and Ecuador, and later to Panama as a Water and Sanitation Engineer in the Peace Corps.

Upon returning from the Peace Corps, my wife and I returned to Madison, Wisconsin, and to Geneva Campus Church. I had the blessing of learning from another ASA member as we joined the Bible study of Terry Morrison and his wife, Shirley. I also met up with Terry weekly at 6 am at a local coffee shop to discuss matters of faith, science, and life.

My learning of how my faith integrates with my work as an engineer, and how that work could be used to address real world needs, profoundly changed my approach to life. Meeting with Peter and Terry gave me the confidence and guidance to live out my Christian values in the Peace Corps, as a consulting engineer, and now as a PhD student.

### **What is the tangible evidence of the growth you've experienced?**

Micah 6:8 says that the Lord requires us to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with the Lord our God. Through my Christian journey I've been guided by ASA members to live out my faith, even before I knew

that ASA existed. Having led Bible studies and learned about how faith and science overlap from Peter and Terry, I was equipped and encouraged to start a prayer group at the University of South Florida with other graduate students. I've found several opportunities to mentor others, whether a research assistant or a newly married couple. My long-term goal is to continue investing in university students as a professor. I would like to research sustainable development technologies, teach students in environmental stewardship, and serve local and global communities through sustained mutually beneficial partnerships.

**How long have you been a member/donor and what has ASA meant to you?**

I have been a member since October 2015. ASA provides a great community where I can learn how other scientists who are Christians are living out their faith and be encouraged to do so in my own life. While attending my first annual meeting this past August, I was pleasantly surprised by both the number of people attending and also the humility of those I talked to. The clear message from the conference was that you can be a scientist and a Christian—they are not mutually exclusive. In fact, they are both necessary to address life's challenges. I've found a spiritual home in my discipline, which gives me confidence to live out my faith and have a community in which to discuss challenges.

**What do our friends and financial partners need to know about how ASA is making a difference?**

ASA testifies that science and faith are not mutually exclusive but, in fact, inform each other. I am an example of how ASA members have influence beyond just meeting attendance. By attending my first annual conference, I continued to gain confidence that my life as a Christian who is also a scientist is not abnormal, and that a community and resources exist. One thing that was immediately apparent at the conference was the openness and humility of the more experienced members. They welcomed me into the community.