Building Community

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When it came to finding and following God’s call on their lives, Kelly and April (Te Grootenhuis) Crull wasted no time.

Just three months after their graduation from Dordt in 2002, the Crulls began their ministry with Communitas International (formerly known as Christian Associates), a group that seeks to establish churches that follow Jesus in transforming their world. In January of 2003, the Crulls moved to Spain, where they’ve been ever since.

At Dordt, Kelly majored in English and Secondary Education with a minor in Bible, and April earned her degree in Psychology. April credits the couple’s semester in SPICE (Studies Program in Contemporary Europe) with giving them an awareness of the need for “relevant, modern people who believe in Christ” in post-Christian Europe.

“We wanted to go before we started what we called our ‘real lives,’” says April, but the Crulls are now in their 14th year of service in Spain. “Every time a decision point came up, we felt God was calling us to continue in this work.” Kelly and April now have three children serving with them in their family mission in Spain. Alleke, Teo, and Ruben were all born in Spain.

During their time in Spain, they’ve worked with three church plants, each with a distinctive mission and character. Mountainview International Church serves the international community of
Madrid as well as native Spanish people, offering a blended Spanish-English worship service. Oasis was focused on nurturing a community of believers concerned with social justice and serving their neighbors. Their most recent church plant in Madrid, Decoupage, was established as a community of believers bringing their creative and artistic talents together to glorify God and serve their neighbors.

Rather than coming into a community with an agenda, Communitas's style is more organic. When the Crulls first came to Madrid, their primary task, April says, was to listen and pay attention to the needs of the community, to find ways to serve that were meaningful, and to introduce people to God as they gathered others to join in the work God was already doing in Madrid.

The Crulls handed over leadership of Decoupage in the summer of 2015. The nature of church planting is transition, and part of the job of being church planters is discerning when it’s time to step back and let the church begin to lead itself from within. Eventually, as Decoupage approached this point in its growth, the Crulls began to feel led to find a new place to serve.

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— April Crull

Currently, the Crulls are serving in a support role. Kelly has taken on a greater balance of the home responsibilities and, in addition to writing support and training materials for Communitas, recently wrote and published a book of his experiences of fatherhood in Spain, *Becoming Dad* (Concha Books, 2011). April has taken on an administrative role with Communitas to help the churches being organized in Spain become a legal entity. This would enable the Spanish members to take authority as church planters themselves in their home country. Over the years that the Crulls have lived and worked in Spain, they say, more Spanish nationals have stepped up and voiced the need for more churches in their own country. April’s work helps Communitas provide a “platform of encouragement and support for Spanish people to launch themselves.”

Many of the details concerning this latest move, however, were shrouded in uncertainty. The family had gathered a small contingent of mentors and prayer partners to help them discern their way through the decision on what would come next.

“We’re kind of unconventional decision-makers,” said April. “We put together everything on spreadsheets, and then in the end, we just decide based on our intuition.” Even when the place became clear—northern Spain—two factors remained to be resolved: what their new role would be in the community, and, more urgently, where they would find housing. In Madrid, rentals were easier to find than in northern Spain, where most residents are homeowners. Because of the complications of being an American citizen living in a foreign country, homeownership was not an option, and rentals that met the family’s needs were extremely difficult to find. Time passed with few housing prospects, and with the beginning of a new school year only weeks away, the Crulls still hadn’t...
found a place to live. The place where they would make their new home would determine where their children would start school.

Kelly recalls sitting down with the kids one afternoon, giving them the idea to draw what they envisioned in their new home. “Draw me a picture of the house you’re hoping for,” he asked the kids. Teo, the youngest Crull sibling, drew a picture of a house with circular windows, insisting that their new home would have this feature. Kelly laughs at the memory now, thinking at the time, “I don’t think this is really a priority.”

Meanwhile, housing prospects dwindled, the start of school was nearly a week away, and they began considering possibilities that they’d previously crossed off their list. One house’s location was less than ideal, but April suggested to Kelly that they reconsider and make a call to the realtor.

The house appealed to Kelly right away. It appeared to meet their family’s needs, and it didn’t hurt that it was a charming old stone country house. “With us, the aesthetic always wins over the practicality,” he says. During a tour of the backyard, Kelly turned toward the house and spotted the circular windows that his son had been so insistent would be in their new home. “I wanted to research my way into knowing this was a good choice,” says Kelly, and yet, he explains, the details of the way God provided this house—in an unlikely place, with windows matching his son’s drawing—had all the signs of God’s provision.

In the midst of so many unknowns, with so little time to spare, God had not only provided their family with a home that met their needs, but he did so in a way that grew their faith.

“One of the hardest things about raising missionary kids, and I think about raising kids in general,” April says, are the ever-present questions: “Are we messing up our kids? Can we really trust God with our children?” Yet, in the midst of uncertainty, it was one of their children that pointed out that God had been guiding them all along. “That story with the window was one of those things where you just know—God was working. I hope that’s an encouragement to Teo someday—that he heard God in that. It was this sweet little way of God saying, ‘These are my kids. They’re in my hands. Trust me.’”

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The Crulls approach church-planting as an organic process that happens through careful listening and that focuses on the transformative power of Christ working through a community of believers.