

Ezra International's Mel Hoelzle, Who Helped 90,000 Jews Make Aliyah, Dies at 81

Mel Hoelzle, founder and former president of Ezra International ministry, died last week at the age of 81, leaving a lasting legacy of almost 30 years of helping thousands of Jews make Aliyah to Israel.

Hoelzle is survived by his wife, Joanne, Ezra International's secretary/treasurer and co-founder.

Since he founded the Christian organization Ezra International in the early 1990s, Hoelzle never considered his work to be his own. It was God's vision, and he always said he was just following God's instructions to help His chosen people.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, God gave Hoelzle a vision to begin rescuing Jews from those countries and bringing them to Israel. Ezra International's mission is to rescue, return and restore poor Jewish people to Israel. Through the generous support of donors, Ezra International is able to provide one-on-one support for Jewish people in their home countries, completing in-depth ancestry research and procuring necessary immigration documents as well as financing the emigration journey.

"When the Soviet Union was collapsing, Mel went into action," said Ezra International Director of Development Gary Cristofaro. "Since then, we've expanded to 17 different countries and we've helped more than 90,000 Jews make Aliyah to Israel. He was among the pioneers in helping to make that happen, but he was always very humble about it and stayed behind the scenes. But he was the one always engineering it, and there are 90,000 people now living in Israel with new hope, thanks to his vision and his legacy."

Hoelzle helped Ezra International's reach expand into countries like Ukraine, Siberia and Argentina. In 2014, *Charisma* magazine recognized Ezra International as one of 12 ministries making a difference in Israel.

In a recent Ezra International board meeting, Hoelzle handed the reins of the organization over to Patricia Frame, who assumed duties as the ministry's president.

Hoelzle believed that God's name is glorified every time Christians extend a helping hand to the Jewish people.

"We will truly miss him," said Cristofaro, whom Hoelzle brought into the organization in 1998. "He was very large in stature and very large in his thinking. He stayed quiet because he was always listening to God for his next move. It is God's work—a holy work—and his memory will last however long Ezra International continues to bring Jews to Israel, and beyond that." {eoa}

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