



Greetings, friends of the DR mission,

It has been awhile since we sent out an update on our work here in Santiago. What follows is a summary of recent news.

Our church in Palmar is strong with roots reaching deeply and branches extending in all directions. We have about forty-five members who attend church on a regular basis. Forty-five more are baptized, but need to be encouraged to return, and we are looking for many more through ongoing evangelism efforts. Right now we are focusing on visiting every member in our community. Something to keep in mind when making visits in Palmar is that whenever you visit a person, that person is seldom alone, but is surrounded by several people at almost all times. This, together with their instinctive Dominican hospitality, often leads to conversations with groups of people. In no way does this suggest that everyone you meet is open to the gospel—formalities can be deceiving—however, it ensures that you have a forum for preaching and a potentially rich conversation. Our every-member visits have had promising results inasmuch as they have led to several new contacts that we are currently pursuing. Our visits reveal the spiritual needs among the people of our community and generate requests on the part of friends and family to have their children baptized. Requests to have children baptized lead to Bible classes. Bible classes tend to invite more people, at least initially, and many of these visitors are unchurched. The main challenge is keeping up with visits on a consistent basis. I will elaborate on this and other challenges below.





I'd like to highlight a few individuals who have either been our main focus over the past couple months or will be in the near future:

Carmen is the oldest member in our congregation. She is a diabetic and lacks the ability to walk to church. The pastors (Pastors Idjon Fritz and I) visit her, usually together, every Wednesday at 5:00. We have a brief service of the Word, including the Lord's Supper once per month, and have anywhere between five and fifteen people in attendance. These regular services have led to contacts with Odaly, Carmen's granddaughter, and her friend, María Magdalena. Both have requested to take catechism classes and have their five-month-old boys baptized. Odaly has recently lost her young husband to sudden death and now has to work ten hours per day to put food on the table. We are looking for opportunities to meet with her and serve her spiritual needs.

Van y Maria are former members of the church. Van, an American who came down ten years ago with a short-term team from Fort Meyers, Florida, to build the school, has recently fallen ill. We visited him regularly in the hospital and received funding from St. Michael and Zion Lutheran Churches in Fort Meyers to pay for his medical expenses before we sent him to the U.S. for more medical care and an operation. Meanwhile, we have built a strong relationship with his family (his wife, María, her six kids, and a daughter-in-law). We have Bible classes in her home every Thursday at 5:00. We are working to "rekindle their first love" and bring them back to communion with Jesus.



Hector, the farmer, has lived across the street from church watching the mission grow from his own perspective ever since its inception. Over the past year he has also worked under the direction of the deaconesses and with the help of the seminary students to plant and cultivate a field that yields fruits for the group home and the congregation at large. He has always had a cordial relationship with the missionaries, members, and school children in Palmar and visited our church occasionally over the years. Recently, he has taken confirmation classes with the pastors and has taken his wife to church. He was just recently confirmed and become a communicant member of the congregation.

Reyes is the mother of six children living in Palmar. Her oldest, Sheyla, has been a member for years and serves as secretary of our school. After her mother died, Reyes began to take confirmation classes together with her son, Odji. The pastors had visited her mother several times



when she was on her deathbed, there in Reyes's house, and after a series of brief services of the Word in her home, she began to attend church regularly. She rarely misses a service. It is with great thankfulness to God that we have received her as a member of our congregation. Her son, Odji, has a few classes left before he, too, God willing, will be confirmed.

We have been working with several other individuals, members and non-members, young and old, in matters of conflict, seeking to bring about reconciliation to estranged loved ones. We pray that these meetings yield good fruit and lead to ongoing pastoral relationships, church attendance, and communicant church membership. Pictured on the left, you see an aerial view of Palmar. There is much opportunity for evangelism among this village's people.

Francis lives with the kids in the group home, Casa Hogar. He is deaf and in need of special care. Now that he is sixteen years old, he is becoming more inquisitive, independent, and self-aware. While Marisol, the director, and several of the workers, called "tíos" and "tías," have come a long way in their ability to communicate with him, we consider it a high priority to be able to preach the gospel of Christ and the forgiveness of sins to him as clearly as possible. We also hope that by improving our sign language we may be able to provide him with more effective discipline. God grant it!



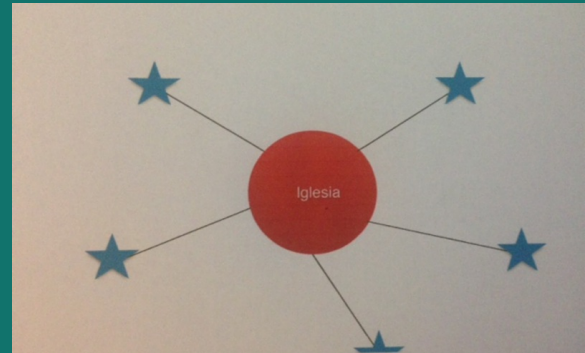
In addition to individuals, we are also working with various groups including the deaconesses, the kids at the Casa Hogar, and the school. All of these areas need improvement. The pastors and deaconesses have not been meeting regularly because of schedule conflicts. We have not been having regular Bible studies with the group kids, although they are regularly in church, or sitting outside listening in some capacity. We will resume special classes with these people as soon as we work through some scheduling difficulties. The school shares a chapel service (Divine Service) with the seminary each Friday morning in the Palmar Church sanctuary. While it has put many kids in contact with the means of grace and led to good conversation, there is still much work to do in terms of discipline and evangelism. Due to a shortage of help, Pastor Idjon, the school chaplain, has been teaching all the theology classes himself. We hope that, with the arrival of new seminary students from Bolivia, we may be able to take some of this burden off of the pastor. In turn, he can focus on outreach to students' parents.

Additionally, the pastors have been concentrating on the youth of our congregation. We have many

young folks attending church regularly. Most of them are girls, but they are growing up fast. Girls who were just two years old when Deaconess Danelle Putnam arrived in Palmar twelve years ago are now young ladies. And they have boyfriends. At the pastors' insistence, they have recently been bringing their boyfriends to church, one of them every Lord's Day for the last five weeks. This creates a whole new and exciting dimension of pastoral care. We hope to see more attendance, and through visitations and youth activities—we have youth activities one Saturday per month on the Mercy Center upstairs—we will see Christian weddings and marriages and the next generation of Christian children. How exciting!



In our evangelism efforts, we have been following the "cathedral concept." Imagining the church sanctuary as the "cathedral," we are treating the homes of members in different parts of town as small "churches" or outposts. There, in members' (and former members') homes, we follow a brief service of the Word with familiar songs and simple studies on the catechism. Having settled on a regular time, usually 5pm, they invite their family and friends from the neighborhood to attend. The brief service leads to more conversation and an opportunity to invite others to church. Reyes and Odji, mentioned above, became members through this model. We pray that God leads many more to follow suit. Meanwhile, we have a list of all of our members, including the baptized who do not attend church, and also names of people we would like to visit from various neighborhoods in Palmar Arriba. Finally, we have contacts in the nearby town of La Ciénega, which may lead to a future church plant. We pray that it yields fruit very soon.



Jenny and the kids are doing very well. My return home to them every day is very restorative, as things carry on there with the usual "joyful chaos" and I am met with stories about their day and questions and hugs. They are busy finishing up the school year and are preparing to spend a some time in the US this spring visiting family, where they will do some supplemental educational field trips as well as attend a homeschool convention and do medical checkups. Their Spanish is coming along very well, and Jenny is feeling more like this is "home" now that she is driving and able to communicate better. I am thankful.

By way of conclusion, there are a few challenges and opportunities we face with our work here. First, we are two pastors each with two full time jobs. I am a full time seminary professor, and Pastor Idjon is still a student at the university. Often, we are having trouble with schedules and appointment changes and broken routines. A lack of consistency has been an impediment to effective evangelism. We are working to overcome this obstacle, and we ask for your prayers. We are looking at tremendous opportunities all the while. We have hard working pastors who love the gospel they are privileged to bring to the nations. We have several other pastors who share the burden of preaching with us and are every bit as dedicated to the truth of God's love in Christ for all people. We have a hymnal coming out soon that is full of good Lutheran hymns that teach the gospel to our people. We have seminary students (pictured) who are dedicated to their education and tasks. And, what is more, we have the promise of God that his Word does not return to him void. May God keep us steadfast, humble, and useful in his Dominican vineyard!



Thank you for your continued thoughts, prayers, encouragement, and support.

In Christ,

Pastor David Preus
Missionary in the DR



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