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The Ortega's July 2017 Newsletter

Dear friends and co-laborers – W A R M greetings from Southwest Texas. How warm? About 110 degrees! We trust that nobody is doing as warm as we are.

We are grateful that some special friends have contacted us to find out about our Panama trip, Priscilla's wedding and more. In response, we present you with our July newsletter.



One happy mother and children

Our **Panama trip** (March 20-30) was great and encouraging. Mary's mother's 80 B'day celebration was a delight. She really enjoyed having all her children, which she had not had together in many years. For those couple of individuals who financially contributed for this trip – thank you so very much. This was a very memorable family time. I took care of driving, taking pictures and sharing jokes (which she really loves). However, at the time of this letter, she is not doing so physically well, which brings for my beloved wife a bit of concern. Your prayers are very much appreciated on her behalf.

A joyful event we are so pleased to inform you about in our **Maranatha Matters** section is that of our park outreach. We had an absolute great time with a few families who came from Hope in the City (Austin, TX) who contacted us on their willingness to join us in a ministry adventure. In short, this was our best church spring break ever. What a way to start up a new Life Group. As a result of this outreach, we currently have about three new families who are now coming to church on a very regular basis. Praise the Lord with us!

As a matter of fact, our Life Group ministry (small groups) took a few weeks off (June) to refresh and refuel. We ended May with some very good statistics. In our traditional ministry mode from 2015 we averaged about 55 in attendance on Sunday and Wednesday nights. Our May 2017 monthly average was 100. Of course, these are simply numbers but these numbers are actually people who are favorably responding to the gospel in our new ministry mode. We also reviewed our primary objectives at the end of May. We started with two main pillars in 2016: 1. To edify the believers and 2. To evangelize the



Hope in the City (Austin, TX) brings hope.



Steady and strong FBC youngsters hard at work.

non-believers. At the end of our first year, we concluded that while we covered the former, we failed on the latter. So we started 2017 with the challenge of being more committed to evangelism and we are so glad to inform that we have had more conversions to the Lord in the last 5 months than in the last three years put together. We now have the Valladares family, the Hernandez, the Sandovals, Armando & Araceli, Dolores, Angélica, Cirenía and others. In fact, as in

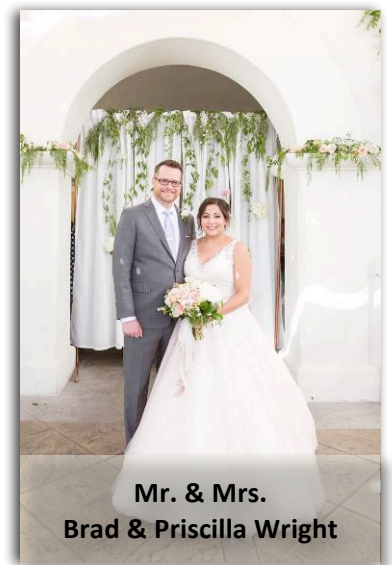
the book of Acts, the new believers are now asking us about baptism. Of course, we are absolutely pleased and overjoyed about this.

Now the fact that we took a break in June from our Life Group ministry until the second week of July does not mean that June has been completely idle and carefree. As in previous years, our dear friends from **FBC** came down (June 3-10) for their labor and ministry at Maranatha. While in previous years they had graciously worked on our church building and our parsonage, this year involved replacing our old house fence. But before they did that, I had to completely bring down the old one we had. I worked alongside them for a couple of days. I must say that for that group of Jr. High kids, they worked as hard as any adult I know. Even in temperatures around 100 degrees, these young men and women worked and did things as unto Jesus Himself. What a sight that was! The very presence of God was vividly sensed throughout their stay. Where they shined even greater was in their sharing the gospel with our neighborhood kids. In fact, when we did the invitation distribution, some of our community kids already knew what it was all about – their buddies from Oklahoma were coming to town. What an impact these young lives have continued to make in our community. They clearly shared the gospel through worship, Bible stories, skit presentations, crafts and even games, wrapping things up with a block party on Thursday night. They greatly encouraged our new kids and even parents who have been reached through our Life Groups ministry. We could never thank God enough for these precious ones.

The Sandovals now come to church



On June 8-15 Mary, Sylvia and I made a quick road trip from McAllen all the way to Santa Barbara, California for our daughter Priscilla's wedding. This was a sort of bittersweet experience, as she is the first of three daughters we give away in marriage. She and her husband Brad Wright now live in Dallas. Interestingly enough, Priscilla was born on the Lord's Day and she got married on the Lord's Day, as well, one week before her 27th birthday on the 17th. On the night before the wedding day, Mary and I presented her with an oak piece with Deuteronomy 6:5-9 inscribed on it. It was a very moving evening. Speaking of June events, Mary and I celebrated 31 years of marriage on June 14 and on June 26, Sarai and I celebrated another birthday together.



Mr. & Mrs.
Brad & Priscilla Wright

Cuba remains pretty much alive in our hearts. I am currently projecting another trip to that island nation around October. My last three trips to Cuba have revolved around the capital city of Havana as well as the western part of the island (yes, where the best Cuban cigars are produced, and no, I have not smoked one). These have been by far, the very best and most accomplished visits I've made in all 10 years that I've been going to Cuba, especially since I've connected with some very solid pastors who are very strong in personal evangelism and church planting. However, they really appreciate encouragement, resources and training, since many of them have no formal Bible training. Of course, these gregarious pastors have also taught me many valuable lessons on humility, devotion, service, faith, joy and love. On my last visit, Pastor Chris (Nebraska) and I were given the honor of baptizing a number of newly born-again believers, while I led others to Christ and challenged them to remain faithful. I'm looking forward to reconnecting with Marcos, Papo, Emilio, Juan Carlos and many more. I still vividly recall the joy and tears some pastors shed when we closed out the last conference. I'm sure those church leaders from FBC

(Tulsa, Ok) who joined me, as well as my dear friends from Wyoming and Nebraska really hold dear those dear believers.

The Family: At the time of writing, Mary and I find ourselves doing alright. Sylvia, on the other hand, was found with her aorta valve having further expanded. Please continue to pray for her. According to her specialist, we should anticipate a decrease in her growth spurt, thus easing up on her aortic enlargement. Sylvia remains pretty much conscious of her condition and we live enjoying and loving her one day at a time.

Do remember that Mary and I could not possibly do ministry in McAllen and in Cuba without you. Thanks so very much for being a vital part of our team.

Please keep the following prayer requests close to your hearts:

1. Brad and Priscilla's marriage, that they would seek God in their new home. They are currently attending Fellowship Dallas.
2. My Cuba trip in October.
3. Our Maranatha Life Groups and the new believers and the ones still to come to faith in Christ.
4. Mary's mother continues to be in poor health.
5. Sylvia's syndrome, especially her enlarged aorta.
6. For Mary's and my health, that we would carry on the ministries God has entrusted to us.