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## *The Ortegas 2019 Thanksgiving Newsletter*

*"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" I Thess. 5:18*

Dearest Ones,

On this Thanksgiving Holiday, we are eternally and extremely thankful for God's mercies and blessings in our lives.

The Lord has graciously allowed me to visit 3 different countries in the last 5 months and to be a blessing to many individuals, families and churches.

Ecuador – Like last year, Iglesia Semilla de Mostaza (Mustard Seed Church) in Loja, Ecuador invited me to be their speaker at their annual leaders retreat. This was a very exciting time for me to reconnect with several local pastors, as well as national and international missionaries. I spoke at their couples meeting on Friday night, and then I addressed their local church leaders on Saturday morning, preached twice on their two Sunday morning services. Later on that afternoon, we headed to a retreat camp to be with their

leaders and missionaries. For several days I spoke

to them on Elijah, the Prophet of Fire. Based on the attendees' responses, it was a very encouraging time for them all. We returned on Wednesday afternoon and on that same day, I spoke to a group of university youngsters in a Bible study. God is also doing amazing things there. Then, on the following day, I left for Quito, to visit my Ecuadorian friend of over 30 years – Marco Solano. What a great time that was, as we visited the city, along with a close friend of his and his wife.



Panama – Mary's mother has not been doing so well, especially after she developed cancer on her right cheek. Her advanced age as made her quite fragile and unable to be as mobile. For all those days, Mary tenderly cared for her, from cooking to bathing to changing her diaper. It was especially hard for Mary because she had never seen her mother in that physical condition. Broken-hearted and all, we had to leave after our almost 2 week time there. Only God knows how difficult it is to leave behind an aged parent, not knowing when or if we shall see them again on this side of heaven.





Cuba – Now that we are empty-nesters, Mary was able to go to Cuba with me. What an experience that was. We primarily concentrated our efforts on two different cities – Santa Lucia and San Juan y Martinez, in Pinar del Rio, the western-most part of the island.



All together, we shared Christ with several people, leading four to Christ. I baptized 16 new believers, married 5 couples, inaugurated a church and conducted several discipleship workshops in two different locations, benefiting around 20 different churches. Christ is definitely doing amazing things in Communist Cuba. Some of these beautiful believers started their journey out of their villages at 3 am in order to make it by 8 or 9 for their discipleship classes. They traveled on a one horse drawn cart.



Transportation there is such a major and daily challenge for everybody. Yet, their love for the Lord and their commitment is so incredible and exemplary that so often I am left in shame over the petty things I often complain about. How could we not be grateful to the Lord! We are especially grateful to Tentmakers Bible Mission for allowing us to be a blessing to these precious souls and even encouraging us to do so. Only in heaven will we truly find out just what our efforts on earth really accomplished – only in heaven!

Maranatha News – Our Life Groups keep plugging along. We are especially grateful when our friends from Tulsa, Ok. come down for our training. This is some fantastic time to get reacquainted, refresh and recharge for the future “ground” ministry. In fact, this is the very same material I’ve taken to Cuba. I meet with our facilitators every Monday night for training and then they hold their Life Group meetings in different locations. Our 3 primary objectives are: 1. To **Edify** the believers. 2. To **Evangelize** the unbelievers. 3. To **Encourage** everybody. Daniel and Rafael are the ones getting the most out of this material. Their own wives and children attest to that fact.



Family – We are so happy that our grandbaby Oliver Mateo Wright (Ollie), now 7 months old, continues to grow at an incredible rate. He is such a beautiful baby, alert and joyful. Brad and Priscilla are doing a great job at raising him up. Sylvia is staying with them and helping as much as she possibly can with Ollie, along with a part-time job that she is holding. Now, as to our beloved first-born Sarai – unfortunately her lupus condition along with fibromyalgia continue to seriously plague her. Additionally, she is dealing with a severe discomfort under her jaw that her doctor has concluded comes from a mass. At this stage of biopsy exam, the doctor has pretty much determined that she's dealing with cancer and he has already prescribed and applied chemo. This, of course, has brought even more physical pain, as well as psychological trauma to her, and so much sorrow to all who love her. She is currently on pretty potent medications, as well as steroids. One of her kidneys is also giving out. Moreover, because she could not renew her teacher's contract last year, she has no employment and no medical insurance. As you can only imagine, our very hearts are hanging outside of us. The only one good thing is that our hearts continue to be held in God's loving hands, and for that we are very grateful. Please continue to uphold Sarai in your prayers. Speaking of prayer, please continue to pray for us, as well. We find ourselves physically and emotionally spent. Although right now is not the time to stop, we do need to find the right time to simply slow down enough to recover a bit, so we can rejuvenate and be more effective for the King and His Kingdom. We also need to find options for Sarai, as she continues to live by herself in San Antonio and increasingly becomes less able to do so. If we do bring her home, we will have to make some modifications and additions to our house.



As you can read, our lives are a real “mix bag”. We can not deny or hide our pains, but we can not keep from sharing our gains. God was good, is good and forever will be... regardless. I'm mindful of Job's powerful exclamation: *“Though He slay me, yet will I hope in HIM...”* (13:15).

May you have a very Happy Thanksgiving Day and enjoy God's richest blessings.

Eternally grateful,

Franc & Mary Ortega  
Psalms 48:14

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