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Dear friends and co-laborers,

In the face of the COVID-19 outbreak, 2020 has been one of the most interesting years from the very beginning up until now (not that the rest of the year does not seem much better). And yet, isn't true that so often it is in the darkest of moments that humanity is forced to bend the knee and acknowledge God? For it is usually in the darkest of nights that God's light shines the brightest. How many areas of our lives have been severely affected? Our physical, our family, our finances and yes, our faith.

Mary's mother passed away in Panama on May 1 and because of Coronavirus, we could not be there for her funeral. Our hope is that soon we can go there and hold a memorial service for her. We were just starting our Sabbatical time with many plans to travel to Panama, to Colorado and other places but, yes, we had to cancel most of such travels. We do count it a joy to have spent quality time with Sarai in San Antonio and with Brad, Priscilla, Ollie and Sylvia in Dallas. It was very, very good. We spent most our time with Sarai, at times crying with her, listening and encouraging her. In fact, on these very days she is experiencing a major lupus flare up where boils suddenly develop on her scalp and become very



Our beloved Ollie!

infected. That is the reason she had to shave off her beautiful hair a couple of months ago, and here she is once more. When she gets quite discouraged, I jokingly say that God has a great sense of humor in giving her a very "interesting" blood type and that she should take courage in that - her blood type being "B +". At times we both laugh, but honestly speaking, at times laughing becomes a very challenging exercise. This is such a time. Around these days is when she simply turns off her phone for days at a time. Of course, we ache for her as well. My health



Rest in Peace, Mom!

itself could be better. I am currently facing major weakness and I'm on a very lethargic mode. This is definitely NOT me! I am currently undergoing some medical exams and hope to soon find out just what I am going through and take the necessary meds. Another sick one (and now dead) in the family was our old A/C. It ran for 21 years but in the end, it just completely gave up, leaving us with some pretty hot and humid days and nights. Amidst all our "hot" news, the Lord has refreshed us. Speaking of God's faithfulness, we are thankful that He has blessed us with Brad and Priscilla's wedding anniversary (June 11), our own on June 14, Priscilla's B'day (June 17) and Sarai and my own birthday (June 26). Yes, June is a pretty busy month for the Ortegas!

As to our beloved Maranatha Church, we are very happy that our facilitators were able to hold down the fort in our absence, and they all did a very good job, too. However, with nowhere to go and a severe personnel shortage and a great pastoral need, we decided to cut our Sabbatical short by 3 weeks. Other brothers and sisters have really stepped up to the challenge in taking on new ministry responsibilities, especially as we had to go into a virtual mode of ministry. We then had some in-church

services but we could only do this for about 3 Sundays, as things suddenly exploded in COVID-19 positive cases all around us, though thankfully NOT within our church services but only in our members' work-related areas and relatives. As things now stand, several of our church members are currently infected with the virus and we find ourselves very busy contacting them to provide encouragement and help, even as we try to protect ourselves as much as we possibly can. Our area has suddenly become a hot spot for this nasty virus.



Staying in touch with God's people amidst COVID-19

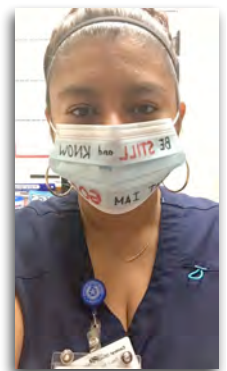


Our beloved Cuban brothers in action

As to our ministries in Ecuador and Cuba, that also had to be put on hold. For the past 11 years I have been going to Cuba up to twice a year, but not this year. In fact, our plan was to take two of our Maranatha youngsters there to explore and to develop a passion for missions, but our plans had to be canceled. I've also been going to Ecuador to hold pastors' conferences for two years in a row and they were really excited and expecting me this very month, but it

was not possible either. Please do keep all those faithful men and women of God in your prayers.

As I started out our newsletter stating that we have been tested in our physical, in our family, in our finances and in our faith, and this is so. Considering all these areas, where it all stops is in our FAITH. HOW will we respond is the critical question before us. God has called us to take precaution, but NOT to take in panic. Some people see problems, but others see possibilities. Some people see obstacles and others see opportunities. HOW will YOU respond? More than ever before, God's powerful invitation comes to our heads and hearts: ***"Be still and KNOW that I am GOD"*** (Psalms 46:10). This is such a fantastic time to get to know WHO GOD really is. Will we tremble or will we triumph? God has been consistently faithful throughout our trials and His very nature does not allow Him to change. Let us keep looking up and let us keep moving forward.



Marissa openly shares her faith at work

Eternally grateful,

*Franc & Mary Ortega*

Psalm 48:14