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The Ortegas' June 2023 Celebration News

*Your love, LORD, reaches to the heavens,
Your faithfulness to the skies. Psalm 36:5*

Dear friends and co-laborers – what a joy and privilege to be able to share with you of the wonders that the Lord has done in and through us during these past few months!

Forever Family: As we've mentioned in the past, June is such a family-packed month for us, full of B'days, anniversaries and more. On June 11th Brad y Priscilla celebrated their 6th wedding anniversary. Now they are a family with two precious boys, Ollie (4) and Levi, (almost 1). They are a true joy to have. On the 14th, Mary and I celebrated our 37th anniversary. WHAT? Ah, yup! And we had our special event while on our last day in Cuba, for the first half of the day and then we also spent the other part of our day in Tampa, Fl. This is the first time we spend the same anniversary on two different countries. On 17th, Priscilla celebrated her 33rd B'day. She was born right on a Sunday, Father's Day. What a precious present! On the 26th, Sarai will turn 35 and I will turn 62. She has been my best B'day gift for all these years. We praise God for His faithfulness, because in all the ups and downs of life, He has been so consistently faithful to us. A special word of appreciation to all of you who have been with us for all these years in so many different ways.

Maranatha Matters: It is a complete joy for Mary and me to appreciate God's Work for 34 years. He has raised up great leadership in so many different ministries and has brought up young people with a passion to honor and serve Him. One such leader is Samul Peña and his dear wife Yulissa. They are doing such a great job with our young ones, ages 13-17. For this, we praise God. But, as in all cases, we have others who have come amongst us with severe needs, such as Daniel and Katherine, Antonio and Wendy, Marco and Julie. So, please continue to pray for them. Please help us in prayer for God's gift of grace and wisdom, that we may know how to best help with these couples. We also need wisdom to know how to minister to about 13 college age youngsters. We desperately need a mature young couple to help us in this critical ministry.



Children listened, learned and laughed a lot while our Terrific Trio spent quality time with them.

Missions Mindset: I shared on our last newsletter about our **Cuba** missions trip (June 5-15). Well,



This was how we got around while in Santa Lucía.

this was a complete success in so many aspects. As we have done in the past few years, we returned to the western part of that island nation, and we found things in a much more complicated state, almost in every area of life. Our first stop was Santa Lucía, where we met with a group of rural pastors and leaders of several churches. For the next 5 days, I taught on the importance of proper leadership characteristics from the life of Nehemiah. Our three youngsters became warriors, enduring the extreme heat and humidity, they worked with children and did a phenomenal job. These Cuban children had such fun learning from Bible stories, singing, playing, simply being children. After our 5-day ministry

there, many of these great kids were weeping, as we spent our last night with them. It was a very emotional time, both for them as well as for us all.



Verdera and Emilio go many years back, when Emilio was in jail and Verdera was his prison guard. What a joy to see them now as brothers in Christ and co-laborers.

Our terrific trio is ready to go and do it all over again. Such a great and godly response by them. Alberto was heavily involved with the ministry he started years ago of buying a few pigs for some families to them themselves and contribute to the church plant efforts. He also met with a couple that he purchased a chainsaw to produce charcoal with a similar idea in mind. Two families are directly benefitting from this and several churches. What a wise way to help them to help themselves, and their ministries. Mary was working right beside me all the time, encouraging me, guiding me with her “sixth sense” and ministering to the local women and our trio. Other than teaching, I was also involved in baptizing two elderly believers. What a joy this was! I also officiated in two weddings of people who had come to faith in Christ, but who had not gotten married. Every day we would commute from our rental house to church on what they call a “riquinbili”, a motorcycle equipped with a carriage to accommodate all 5 of us behind the driver, while our 6th team member rode shotgun. You’d love to ride on one of these; it really improves your prayer life, especially on sharp curves and bumpy roads. As a side note, the cars are some kind of “different” creations, literally. It is very typical to see, for example, an old '52 Ford engine in a Chevy carriage with a Honda transmission and a tractor’s radiator – rolling as a single unit. It would simply blow your mind away how the Cuban mechanics make all this work. We were able to help about 20 local leaders with \$20 donation, and 7 others with about \$30. To put things in perspective, \$20 dollars is the average salary of a professional employee ... a month. You heard right – **a typical employee makes around \$20 a month!** Here’s another shocker – the price for a gallon of gasoline is around \$17, and drivers who are fortunate to have vehicles, need to wait for hours, and at times for a couple of days, before they are sold just a few gallons. Power outages occur daily! Our minds were shocked, and our hearts broken! Never in the 19 years that I’ve been going to Cuba have I ever found such crushed spirits and a badly broken system. It both angers me and breaks me from within.



Pastor Norberto gets a laptop for Pastor Borjes. In fact, we passed out a total of 4 of these useful tools for pastors, donated by a great missions-minded man.

From Santa Lucía, we pushed on to San Juan y Martínez for the remaining ministry days. While there, we met with Ministerio Punta de Lanza (Tip of the Spear Ministry). This is a group of 45 men and women who are devoted to church planting in all the surrounding rural areas of their city. Upon arriving, we had arranged for a meal to be prepared for our meeting. While there, we loved on them, celebrating them for their hard labor of love.

I also had a chance to express my broken heart over the ones they had lost to COVID, including their own ministry founder. For the last 3 years, I had longed to honor this courageous group of warriors ...



It was our complete joy to love on and honor Tip of the Spear Ministry with new caps with their own logo on.



Our hearts were broken when we found out that a lady by the name of Yusnerkis and her girls live here.

... who faithfully venture out into those remote areas, far from their town to take Jesus to the poor of the poor.



We took the last day to visit Havana.

So, before our meal, we presented them each with a cap with their own ministry logo on it. They were so very happy, and we were overjoyed. On the following day, we joined them for service, including our own terrific trio who participated in worship and in sharing their testimonies, while I preached the Word. Once again, I shared on a 3 pm service for church leaders. On the following day, we joined a group of church planters from Tip of the Spear on visiting and encouraging 3 new house churches. We must have walked a few miles under the hot blistering sun. This really makes us appreciate their own personal sacrifice to honor the Lord, day after day. We are simply blown away by their commitment. Because we could not find any government licensed hotels in that city, we had to travel about 30 minutes each day from where we stayed overnight to San Juan y Martinez. After completing our ministries there, we left for Havana, where we spent our last day, which happened to be our 37th wedding anniversary, flying back to Florida on that very day. On the following day, we flew from Florida back home, very tired, but very happy that the Lord had so graciously provided for all our expenses, especially for the terrific trio of youngsters. That is a whole other story, because just a few weeks before we had to leave for Cuba, we did NOT have the funds to make the trip. TBM contacted me about a lady (whose name I shall keep private), who came to McAllen on a missions trip over 24 years ago sent us a generous donation and we covered so many of the expenses. What an experience this was for our young kids, and for us, as well!

Ecuador: I will be traveling to the southern part of the hemisphere on July 6-14. My first speaking engagement will be on Friday night to a group of high school and college age youngsters. On Saturday morning I will attend a breakfast where I will meet with a group of church leaders. On Sunday morning I will get to preach twice in a church. That same day, I leave to the retreat with a group of pastors and church planters. Please pray for me, that God would grant me good health, wisdom and grace to do His work.

Spain: On August 16-29 Mary and I will be attending TBM's Europe conference in Barcelona. Before that, however, we will be starting our trip near Seville, where our beloved missionary friends, Frank and Salud Benoit have been serving for over 30 years. We go back with Frank over 35 years. What a joy it will be to join them in their field. From there, they will drive us to Barcelona for the conference. After the conference, Mary and I will visit TBM's Italian missionaries Mirco and Paola Franzini in Bologna and will join them for church. What a joy to participate with our beloved missionary agency in this experience. By the way, we have served with TBM for 32 years, and feel privileged and blessed to be counted amongst their number. They have been so very instrumental in our lives and at Maranatha.

I trust you can both praise for what the Lord is doing in Cuba and pray for all the upcoming ministry adventures in Ecuador and Spain.

Eternally grateful for your vital partnership in the Gospel,

Franc & Mary Ortega