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The Ortegas Newsletter
September 2024

Hello dearest friends and family ~

Our hearts are full of joy and gratitude, as we recollect the wonderful memories of our last few months. Since a picture is worth a thousand words, I will present you with several thousand words in picture form.

God is doing amazing things among us at Maranatha, even in spite of us! After working, worrying, whining (some), waiting and praying lots, I am very glad to inform you that we have finally completed and dedicated to the Lord our newly built, and much needed church parking lot. Do rejoice and celebrate with us! God's faithful provision is so very amazing that it takes us to humbly devote ourselves to a higher level of devotion and commitment. Our eternal gratitude to our beloved friends at the Rocky Mountain Bible Church for their generous donation to make this venture possible. We are also eternally grateful to a few other individuals who participated in this urgent need. To God be the glory!



A few months ago, observing our young adults' personal and spiritual needs, we approached a young married couple on such needs. Mario & Kerena Serrano had been feeling the same concern and burden over the same age group of youngsters and, after a few weeks of personal prayer for divine confirmation, they agreed to take on this ministry. We are all very glad this need is being covered.



Sam and Yuli Peña are also conducting a phenomenal ministry with Jr. High and High School kids. This young married couple have a great heart for these youngsters. Sam is also taking online Bible courses, and he is very excited to put in practice what he is learning in Bible school.



Anissa in stripes, Iddy in brown and Caro(lina) in grey – joyfully celebrating Iddy’s decision for Christ.

Out of nowhere, I get a text from an unknown number, asking me if I was Franc Ortega. When I responded in the affirmative, she went on to tell me her name (Carolina), a few things she had gone through and the fact that she desperately wanted to start a relationship with God. Of course, I was delighted beyond imagination. Long story made short, she is a 21-year-old young lady who used to come to our VBS programs year after year, when our friends from the Fellowship Bible Church (Tulsa, OK) would come for such yearly events. She even remembered the names of her two “buddies”. I shared Christ with her and in a very emotional state, she said YES to Jesus. Then she brought her sister Victoria, and she also made a decision for Christ. Now Carolina is sharing Christ left and right, bombarding me with multiple Bible-related questions and telling others

about Jesus. In fact, just a few days ago, she brought me two of her friends (Anissa and Iddy) and Iddy also said YES to Jesus, amidst a flood of tears. This is all product of those who have planted the gospel seed and now I’m taking care of some “late” harvesting. So, if you are currently planting the gospel seed and see no visible product, take heart. God is hard at work. The harvest is coming! So, don’t give up!

My beloved Mary meets with her Tuesday morning group of ladies to study the Scriptures, spend quality time praying and counseling. She always comes out fully energized and excited to see their spiritual progress. They share each other’s trials, burdens, and life lessons, encouraging one another and growing in their relationship to Christ.



After last year’s great missionary trip to Cuba, this time around we had one “add-on”. Moreover, even since last year, all 3 missionary rookies agreed that one whole week was not enough to conduct all the ministry they had envisioned for 2024 summer. So, they wanted this year to be a 2-week trip under very hot and humid conditions, and that is exactly what we did. Our hearts are so full of much gratitude in watching before our eyes knowledge turn into character and character developing a powerful passion for missions. Once again, Fellowship Bible Church (Tulsa, OK.) and Bethel Pres. Ind. Church (Houston, TX.) have so much to be credited for all these young missionaries. A great word of “THANK YOU” to both churches that invested several years of their precious lives and resources into our neighborhood children who are now our young missionaries. Rejoice and celebrate with us! Also, a big Thank You to a few of you who financially invested into this powerful quartet to make their trip to Cuba possible. A few descriptions as to what we did in such missionary adventure ...

After a four-hour plane delay out of Houston, our arrival time at our first ministry was at around 1 am. Our young team worked until 3 am in preparation for their first ministry time with the Cuban kids, who were anxiously waiting for them.

Even under challenging weather conditions, with severe heat and humidity and constant electrical blackouts throughout the day and night, we pressed on day after day. On our very first Sunday morning service, I was so extremely sick that I had to preach in a sitting position, to avoid a likely fall.



Also, in a different location, while Mary supervised and helped our youngsters in children's ministry, I taught the adult leaders in a house church. These Cuban brothers, because of severe government restrictions, are not permitted to build new church buildings. The only such structures allowed by the authorities are the ones that precede the revolution. These are the extreme limitations that our dear brothers must work under. And yet, they greatly honor their Lord by opening house church after house church.



Although there are many precious lives who have deeply touched our hearts, there is one that especially stands out among them all. Last year we met Yordany, a young 12-year-old boy (right). Our dear brother Emilio told us back then about his dire situation and great faith in the Lord. His mother (left) Yusimi, interestingly pronounced "*You-SEE-Me*", yes, just like that, is a LUPUS patient and suffering from a major

depression, attempted suicide by burning herself with boiling hot water. As if her condition was not bad enough, this mother/son couple do not have a place of their own to live in. To find a roof over their heads, she agreed to cook and wash for a man who owned a house. However, he is an alcoholic who frequently beats her when he comes home drunk. We have managed to temporarily rescue her by finding this mother and son duo a borrowed house, until we can manage a more long-term solution. Our Cuban contact, Pastor Emilio, has just informed us that he has found a house that is for sale for 3 thousand dollars. This small and modest two-bedroom dwelling is more than enough to cover this urgent need, and it is only a few houses down from the house church. The idea is to have this project be under his church as an ongoing ministry for this current need and others to come, after Yusimi is able to her feet on the ground. Should you, after praying, feel led to donate toward "*You-SEE-Me*", please do contact me or send donation to IBCM (short for our Maranatha Bible Church, in Spanish). Please attach note: "*Yusimi*". If so, please avoid using on your donation description the name of the country we are addressing, as it may raise some red flags.



I end with an emotionally charged-up story. A new mission project (left) that we had the joy to also participate in Pan de Azúcar (Sweet Bread). Located about 2 hours away from our center of operation, Santa Lucía. This is a



very remote village with several families who are hungry for the Word of God. Several years ago, right before the pandemic, I had the joy of sharing the gospel with Jacqueline, a nurse in Santa Lucía. In tears she emotionally called our online Maranatha ministry in McAllen a lifeline for her faith, especially when she was sent by her country to Barbados to help out with COVID patients for about two years, before she was allowed back for 6 weeks to visit her husband and child, before she was “recommissioned” by the Cuban government back to Barbados. On Sundays, when she could, she would go online to our church services and received much needed spiritual nourishment for her and her Cuban fellow nurses through our church program. Well, it turns out that she and her husband Juan are the missionaries who have opened this field in Pan de Azúcar. I had the joy of

baptizing 8 new believers of only 4 months old in the faith of Jesus Christ.

As to our family, Sarai continues to struggle with her lupus condition and her very stressful and low-paying online job. Brad, Priscilla, Ollie and Levi are doing well in Austin, working from home. Sylvia is doing well, attending school. May I kindly ask you to continue praying for our multi-faceted ministry. Please pray for a group of believers from our church who undertook a 3-year counseling program to be better equipped to help with the needs of current and incoming families in our congregation. Also, please pray for a new hermeneutics class I will start in January 2025. This will greatly help a group of serious students of the Word in better understanding the Scriptures. I also need prayer concerning preparations for a small group of men to hold spiritual leadership roles in our church. Coming up in January, as well, I will start a new annual theme called **“Discovering Your Divine Design”**, based on Genesis 1:26-28. Our young team of missionaries are also passionate about returning to the hardships of Cuba and continuing the ministry they’ve started for the last two years. Lastly, please also pray for our health, that God would continue to grant us of His grace and health to carry on the diverse ministries He has entrusted to us in McAllen and extending into Cuba.

By God’s Grace;
For God’s Glory!

Franc & Mary Ortega

