

Dear family and friends,

This letter is more of an update on the Burch family in Belize than a mission moment, but for those of you who are following our mission life here, I hope it will be interesting. Blessings as you celebrate Resurrection Sunday. We will be having the Meissner family and the Snyders here for church and brunch. We look forward to celebrating in Belize this year, and with the people God is preparing to gather for His service in the years to come.

Herb and I are still pinching ourselves to make sure we are not dreaming. Belize? It's the kind of place where people vacation. However, here in the interior of the country we learn that life is no vacation. Most people who live in the villages and countryside work very hard to eke out even a poor existence. The cost of living is very high and all the speculation from outside the country just drives prices up. An average daily salary for a Belizean laborer is about 40 BZE dollars, which is equivalent to \$20.00 USD. Farming is one of the main industries, but few farm workers own more than just a small plot of land.

Speaking of owning land—another real challenge in Belize is figuring out who owns it. We have recently visited a village called “More Tomorrow” that is located on the Belize River about 35 miles from here. I read about an investor who had “bought up” much of the land there, but the citizens were “up in arms” about the sale. Many of the people thought that their presence and improvement of the land gave them ownership. At the time of the writing the problem had not been resolved, but I do know that getting a deed of ownership can take months (or maybe years) to sort out and ownership is not always clear.

Herb and I and Duane and his family have been taking turns traveling the two+ hours to Seine Bight for Sunday services, but this Sunday evening Herb and I plan to join a small group of believers in “More Tomorrow” for Easter church. “More Tomorrow” is a tiny village of Spanish speakers that our missionary friend Randy Gaither introduced us to. He has had to leave the mission field, but is hoping that Herb and Duane will be reaching out into the communities to help with theological education and outreach. The people of “More Tomorrow” speak Spanish in their community and with their friends, and the little church body only uses English when there are visitors present. We were at first surprised and now delighted that God is using our Spanish language skills to reach out to people here in Belize. Even though English is the official language, Belize shares borders with Mexico and Guatemala, so many Belizeans speak Spanish at home

Herb and Duane drove down to the coast to hold a “Good Friday” service. I was surprised to learn that Belmopan's businesses close early on Maundy Thursday, and don't reopen until the following Tuesday. Duane shared that last year, the people of Seine Bight came to the “Good Friday” service, but after that most people binge until they go back to work on Tuesday. Duane plans to hold an Easter service for all those party-goers on the Wednesday following Easter.

Herb has been getting out and meeting people. He really is happiest when he is out-and-about meeting new folks and talking about Jesus. We received a shipment of “Portals of Prayer,” and it is lovely to see how eager people are to get a copy of this special devotional. We have them in both Spanish and English—many thanks to the people who brought them down from The Lutheran Church of Webster Gardens.

Herb, Duane, Sue Dorn, the Warrens, and I have been meeting once a week for training to be “Grief Share” facilitators. We hope that we will be able to offer this helpful program to people who are suffering after the loss of a loved one. We have all gained so much insight into how difficult and solitary the journey of grief is for most people, but we look forward to pointing people to the solace and power that is theirs through reading God’s Word and learning how to look at their sorrow as a journey instead of a destination. Please pray that this outreach will help hurting people heal and grow in their love of Christ.

“ I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.” Philippians 3:10-11 (NIV)

Easter blessings! Yours in Christ,
Markie (and Herb too)