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Prayers:

- Continued relief efforts in Puerto Rico.
- Safe travels for conventions and visits.
- Continued relief efforts in Guatemala.

First Steps In Church Planting

Last month we began our series on what is next for our ministry as missionaries with the LCMS Office of International Mission with a description of the types of pastoral ministry calls that James might receive in Latin America. This month we wanted to explore a bit more of what pastoral ministry looks like in an international mission setting, and particularly how it usually begins.

As in all ministry environments, pastors preach, teach, and administer the sacraments on the foreign mission-field; however, the biggest difference is that the work begins with a very small congregation or sometimes no congregation at all! This means that a large part of the early ministry of a church-planting missionary is spent in building relationships in the community. In order to reach a point where a missionary has an inroad to sharing the important news of the Gospel, a relationship of trust and mutual concern needs to be established with people.

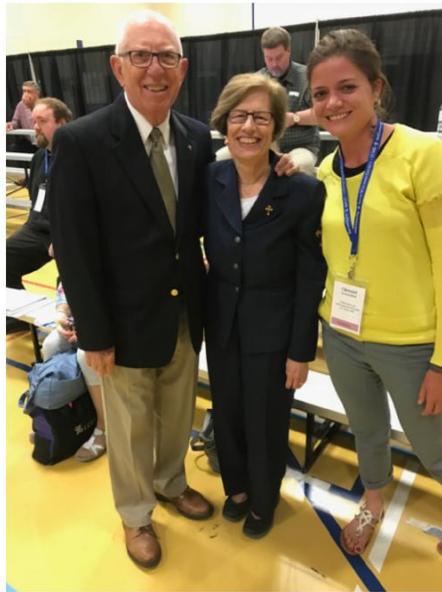
Whatever the language, culture, or situation, the simple fact remains that ministry is fundamentally and fervently about *people!* In most cases, the missionary needs to spend a year or two learning the language and culture before they can begin to really build meaningful relationships, a process which we hope will be greatly accelerated by our previous experience and knowledge of the language from the Dominican Republic.

Building those initial relationships can be done in a number of ways, whether it is joining in on hobbies of people in the community, working alongside them on community projects, or simply stopping in for a chat. A missionary pastor usually spends a lot of time meeting and visiting with people throughout the week and may not be able to introduce a full Bible class or worship service into the relationship right away. Usually a short devotion and prayer is welcomed earlier in the relationship and allows the missionary to share the Gospel during regular visits.

In our own experience, it has often seemed that the initial opening to the conversation which really brings an understanding of the Gospel to a person comes at their own initiative after some time has passed in the relationship. Being present on a regular basis allows the missionary to speak the right words of hope and comfort exactly when they are most needed, which is certainly something which the Spirit knows better than the missionary! One current active member whom we visited about twice a week for several years in the Dominican Republic, was not interested in hearing about the church or Jesus for 4 years! Nevertheless, we persisted in visiting her and sharing the love of Christ with her until the moment was

right for her to want to listen to the most important message of her life. Your continual support allowed us to be patient missionaries and continue to show her that love until the Word did its work in her! Thank you!

We expect that the first year or so of the next stage of our missionary service will be spent in exactly this kind of work, learning the names of people in the community, visiting them and building relationships with them, and committing them to regular prayer as we await the Spirit's leading for the right time to share the life-changing Gospel with them. For some people that might be very soon, and for others it may take years. When we first move in to our new field, we will be looking for opportunities to build those relationships in a number of ways, which will doubtless be the topic of a few of our newsletters! Next month we will continue our series with a discussion about how those initial relationships and Gospel conversations begin to move into the formation of a church!



We always joke about how the world is so small and how it gets even smaller in the LCMS. This month proved that to be true in many ways. The first photo is of one of our supporters, Ruth, from Wisconsin. She has been praying for us since we left in 2008 for Panama. I had the privilege of staying and visiting with her over my visit to her congregation, St. Paul in Janesville.

The second photo is of Dr. and Deaconess Eyer. Dr. Eyer among many other books wrote, [Pastoral Care Under The Cross](#) which is a staple for our deaconess course study. However, I found out that Deaconess Eyer served at St. Paul Lutheran in Flint, MI (where I grew up) when my aunt was in youth group.

The third photo is of Charlotte from [MOST ministries](#). We shared a table at the LWML IN District convention and quickly realized we knew each other. One of her first trips with MOST was in Peru when James and I had the opportunity to serve with our fellow missionary, [Anthony DiLiberto](#) in assisting with translation.

We are reminded in Hebrews 12:1 of being "surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses." This verse came up often at many of the conventions and gatherings this month. We are meant to be in community and the Lord has given us such great encouragement among our brothers and sisters in the faith. To God be praised!

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