



A note from LCMS Missionaries, James & Christel Neuendorf

Run and Not Be Weary

When we first started our missionary service over a decade ago in the country of Panama, my dad gave me some advice which I often think of; “remember that you are in a marathon, not a sprint.” At the beginning of this month, Christel, as well as my co-missionaries Anthony and James, ran in a half marathon in San Juan, and I spent some time reflecting on that advice.

The race started very early in the morning, before the unfiltered Puerto Rico sunshine really was able to take its toll on the runners. After watching the start, I wandered off into the dark and empty streets of old San Juan to try to catch them coming through at a variety of crossings and to enjoy a bit of my own hobby of street photography. At that early hour, the old colonial cobblestone streets and alleyways were covered with broken bottles, and there is still lots of unsavory graffiti on everything from the political crisis a few months back. In the ghostly flickering streetlights, the old city looked as worn out as I felt.

As I walked around the enormous racetrack in the dark, I reflected on the advice of my father and the words of Isaiah, a selection of which happens to be my confirmation verse;

Isaiah 40:28-31 “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”

The last few months have been exhausting. Certainly, my wife and teammates who were running for hours were tired, but in a deeper sense, now as we complete our first year in Puerto Rico, I realized how long the road has been already and how

Prayers:

- Confirmation Classes
- Ongoing visitation
- Anxiety of Coronavirus
- Church building repairs

long the road ahead will be. The overwhelming content of advice and counsel from others during our earthquake response has been for us to set a careful and deliberate pace, to slow down, and to take our breaks. After 50 days of intense ministry, we were generously given a weekend of rest on the other side of the island by our regional leadership, which was very helpful. Setting the right pace is important, but the course is still exhausting.

The sun was just starting to come up as I made my way to the remains of one of the old city fortifications to watch part of the home stretch, a particularly hard part of the course which goes straight up a difficult hill. I sat and waited for my wife and teammates to arrive. A woman opened her window from an apartment above to yell at the runners for making so much noise so early in the morning; we were disturbing her rest. I understand how she felt.

Before long I saw my fellow pastor and missionary, Anthony DiLiberto charge up the hill. The others made it too, step by step, mile by mile, but even then, the finish line was miles away.

It’s a marathon, not a sprint. Isaiah’s words of admonition were especially apt for me at 12 years old, that even young men fall exhausted, that no one can really keep up with the pace that is required over such a long distance, yet I still haven’t entirely taken them to heart. Isaiah doesn’t encourage us to be strong or fast runners, but to “wait” for the Lord, the one who from the very dawn of time has

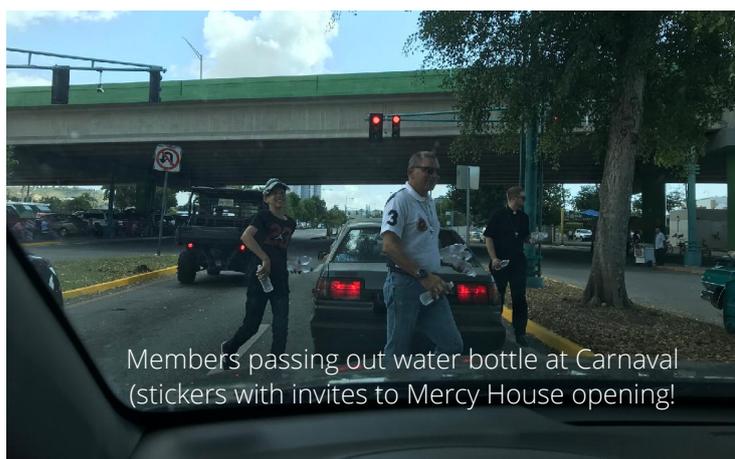
been working tirelessly. He calls us to a perseverance of prayer, of dependence, and of patience. For our long race, He calls us to the sabbath rest. The last place we are to look is at our lung capacity, instead we should look at the one who breathed life into them in the first place.

Jesus, in Matthew 11:28, offers us rest in our weariness. And it is that same rest which we are preaching to the weary of Puerto Rico that we ourselves need. We still do not have a verdict on the damages at our new building. Evangelistic follow up continues day after day with families who we met in the last two months, sometimes making great progress and other times sliding backwards. The devil resists us often and we are sometimes too tired to pray about it. Plans are made, then fall through, then are made again. Sometimes we think that Sisyphus ought to be our team mascot.

We are working to get back in a weekly pace again, although with the extra activities involved in Lent. Now everyone is talking about the COVID-19 pandemic, and many are sick with the seasonal flu. Next week is our large strategic meeting with supporting districts and institutions. In just two months we start the next hurricane season, which early predictions are saying could be worse than average. The course runs through hills and valleys, and there are miles to go still. We certainly cannot do this on our own.

What comfort it is then, to know that our rest in Christ will carry us through, from beginning to end, from everlasting to everlasting, it doesn't depend on our strength, but His. His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

"There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God." (Hebrews 4:9)



Members passing out water bottle at Carnival (stickers with invites to Mercy House opening!

Members of F de V and NewLife, Swartz Creek, MI helped make our temporary church location more inviting and functional for our time here!



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