

MARCH 2020

A note from LCMS Missionaries, James & Christel Neuendorf

## Closed Doors

I suppose I don't need to tell you what it is like to be in quarantine. I doubt I need to talk about the anxiety that people are feeling, the fear or the panic that has overtaken the city. I don't need to tell you what it is like being separated from your family or having to interact with them through the blue glow of a screen. It would be pointless for me to tell you about the long lines, the empty shelves, the driving restrictions, the police presence. I know that you understand what it is like, because you also are living it. You know all about these things, better than you would like, I imagine.

More than ever before, we are closer to our partners in ministry even as we are farthest away. This is a gift, as Paul says to the Philippians we share the cost as we share the joy of the reward. So what can I share with you that hasn't been shared? What hope can I offer that you haven't heard a hundred times from your own pastors, and hopefully your fellow believers? Perhaps this will shine some light into the dark places;

Have you ever noticed that despite the joy of Easter, the disciples mostly remain shut up in the upper-room until Pentecost comes? The Risen Lord remains with them for 40 days, but even though they are bliss filled days, they remain concealed away from the world. Even as the seed begins to spring forth from the ground, filled with potential and new life, it remains hidden and small. Before Pentecost, you could contain the entire church of Christ in the entire world in a single large room (Acts 1:15 tells us there were about 120 of them).

Yet these were not idle days, the Lord was working hard among His disciples to prepare the church for the explosion of Pentecost. He was laying the groundwork for their testimony to the nations. I find it interesting that there are 120 disciples present, because this means that for every Apostle (if we prorate Matthias of course), there are 9 other disciples, already the multiplication is primed for the day of Pentecost, like a legion ready to march.

## Prayers:

- Those who are alone and sheltering in place
- COVID 19 - anxiety, frustration, safety
- Continued response on the Fuente de Vida facebook page

The miraculous expansion of the church on the day of Pentecost doesn't come out of nowhere, it grows from the Holy Spirit breathed germination of this group of believers who were hidden away with the risen Christ.

As I'm sure it has been for you, the quarantine has been discouraging. As a church-planter, it feels as though all my tools have been taken away from me. We cannot make visits, we cannot host events, we can't be out in the streets. Our fragile little congregation is scattered and most don't have access to the internet or even phones. Increased poverty and depression are grave concerns, the vast majority of employed Puerto Ricans were hourly workers and the economy was already in shambles. I am especially concerned about the domestic violence epidemic in which Puerto Rico was already entangled. To top it all, here in the south, many are living in temporary housing with few possessions because their homes were destroyed in the earthquakes.

We are doing whatever we can to attend to them, dropping off groceries and supplies for those most in need (to the extent we are permitted), making phone calls and sending letters, and for those who are able, providing worship services and bible studies online. The pastors produce twice daily devotions which are broadcast on the radio and the internet via facebook, and Christel and Stephanie have been working hard to provide Sunday School packets for families, as well as other activities for women via the internet.

Your generosity following the earthquakes has put us in a unique position to help those in need. Our new neighbors at our temporary facility, a family pharmacy, are partnering with us to distribute relief bags with medicine and needed supplies to people in need in the community with the funds that many of you have sent. We've been using the art and craft supplies many of you mailed to us to help families with young children, and other support that has been sent to help make the difference in families whose financial situation is on the brink because of a lost job.

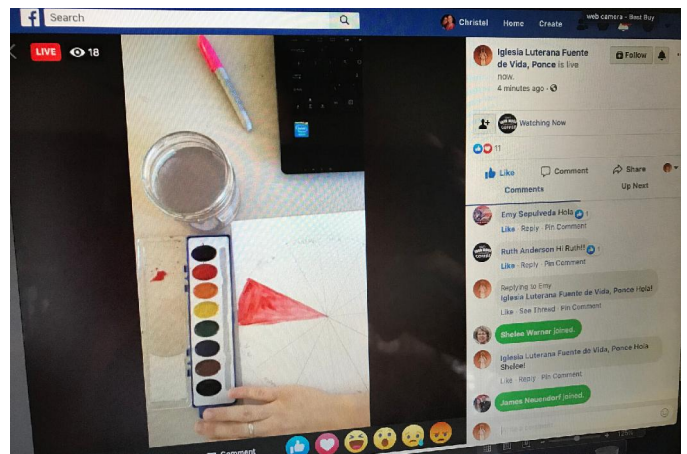
We have been working on our internet outreach, and over 500 new people from the city of Ponce have begun following our facebook page and receiving our devotions and activities. 40 local families have signed up to participate in our Sunday School by mail. For the most part we are sending out the Word into the void, as we do not hear back from the majority, and if there is any interest, we cannot make a follow-up visit yet, not in person anyway. Like the disciples in the Upper Room with Jesus, we are not idle, but yet our work remains hidden, at least from us.

But friends, take heart. Easter is about receiving the concealed and secret joy in a world of bad news, that sin, death, and the devil are over. Pentecost is about proclaiming that good news to the entire world. The harvest is ready, the workers are few, but the Lord of the Harvest is risen and working even now, even in secret. Easter is here, and Pentecost is coming!

**Christ is Risen! Aleluya!**



Packing bags at Fuente de Vida of hand sanitizer, soap, and a Bible. These are now being distributed by our neighbors (local pharmacy).



Online watercolor class taught by Missionary Ruth Maita. The event was co-hosted with F de V and Principe de Paz



March 2020 Puerto Rico Foro



Sunday School Packet with extra crafts and food.

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