

May 31, 2020

Dear friends in Christ,

Over the last four years, I have repeated to myself the following refrain, “The church is the Lord’s. He will indeed care for it.” Through sad, frustrating and joyful moments, my prayer has been that I faithfully serve in our Lord’s church as He sees fit. Recently, the Lord has decided that it is time for my service in His church to shift as I was called to and accepted a faculty position at Concordia University (Seward, Nebraska) to teach theology.

For the last three and a half years, Panamá has been our home. We have made friends, developed habits and discovered our favorite places to eat or grab a coffee. We have been incorporated into a church family that loves us. I have baptized, preached and confirmed in those churches. In this beautiful country, we have lost two children to miscarriage, but the Lord has also given us a beautiful daughter, Aviva Eliana. As we prepare to leave Panamá, we do so with a mixture of great sadness and inexplicable joy. Ezra and Aviva know Panamá as home more than anywhere else, but we know that the Lord will care for His church in Panamá because “the church is the Lord’s.”

During our time with the LCMS Office of International Mission, your partnership in the Gospel has blessed Panamá as well as many countries throughout Latin America, the Caribbean and South America. In addition to serving, in various capacities, four congregations and a church plant in Panamá, I also served on the faculty of Concordia El Reformador Seminary in the Dominican Republic, teaching Old Testament exegesis. My work with the seminary also brought me to Mexico City and Zacapa, Guatemala, to provide continuing theological education for pastors. Your partnership has supported the pastoral formation of men from 10 different countries as well as the formation of deaconesses in Panamá, Mexico, Guatemala, Venezuela and the Dominican Republic. God willing, 135 deaconesses will be consecrated in the next two years and 50 men (a 20% increase!) will be ordained to serve our Lord’s church as pastors.

While leaving Panamá is certainly not easy for us, we take joy in knowing that our Lord Jesus is Lord of His church. Panamá has long had a missionary presence. We were not the first missionary family to serve here, nor will we be the last. The Lord’s work will continue in the hands of the Panamanian Lutheran church, which is in a good place to continue faithfully serving and proclaiming the Good News of Jesus.

I would like to thank you for your ongoing support of our Lord’s work through our missionary service. Amanda and I marvel at how many individuals and congregations, without having ever met us, have willingly given of their financial resources to support the work of the Gospel in Panamá. If you have been supporting us as your missionaries and would like to continue supporting the spread of the Gospel around the world, please contact Julie Loehring, Together in Mission (TIM) coordinator, or Michelle Beckmann, Mission Senders coordinator, at 888-930-4438 to discuss options for transferring your support. The Rev. Dr. Brent Smith or Gary Thies at Mission Central can be reached at 712-882-1029.

Transitioning from one country to another is difficult enough as it is, let alone trying to do it during a pandemic. In the midst of quarantines, curfews and travel restrictions, we are making our plans to return to the United States as well as provide pastoral care to El Redentor Lutheran Church in Balboa, Panamá. We continue to ask for your prayers as we prepare to depart Panamá and transition to Nebraska and into the Concordia University family. Thank you for being a part of our lives and for supporting our work of proclaiming the Gospel in Panamá and throughout Latin America.

The church is the Lord's, and He will indeed care for it and see to it that its mission of preaching Jesus crucified and resurrected for the forgiveness of sins continues.

In Christ,

Pastor Brian, Amanda, Ezra and Aviva Gauthier
LCMS Missionaries to Panamá