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FREE METHODIST WORLD MISSIONS  
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Grim. That's how one could describe the news these days. Stomach-churning headlines recount how the pandemic is taking a harsh toll on both our lives and ways of life all around the globe. Just today, I saw reports on the unrest in Kenya's Kibera slum, the un-buried in Guayaquil and the unrelenting onslaught in New York. Grim.

And then there are the things each of us face everyday. We joke about the trials of homeschooling, working over Zoom or the constant and epic quest to find TP, but there are also very serious ways we are all being affected by the virus and the measures taken to slow its spread. Lost jobs, postponed retirement, not being able to celebrate high school graduations, not being able to see a new grandchild - and even the loss of loved ones to the disease. It's real. It's hard. It's a lot to process.

**And yet, not all is lost. Not all is grim. There is light in the midst of darkness. Good news in the midst of the bad. In fact, isn't that what we just celebrated on Sunday? The triumph of life over death, hope over despair, God over the grim grave?**

We've been in quarantine here in Colombia for the last 4 weeks and during that time, just like anybody else, I've had bouts of struggle with fear, worry and pain. It's hard to have so many purposes put on hold, so many plans cancelled. Hard to not have parents and in-laws and VISA teams come as scheduled. Hard to know that if a loved one got sick in the States it would be complicated to be with them. But in the midst of all that "grim", there's been this growing joy, this sprouting recognition that our God is alive and at work powerfully all around us as much now as on that first Easter morning.

So today, fueled by Easter joy, **we're dedicating this newsletter to the Good News** of the Lord who is risen indeed! And who is even now up to some amazing and redemptive things in and around Colombia and beyond. Our prayer; that these stories of generosity, courage, and relentless faith, would encourage you, wherever you read this from today.



### **An Easter Gathering to Celebrate!**

Last weekend over 20,000 families from around Latin America tuned in to four combined virtual services to celebrate Jesus' death and resurrection! These first-of-their-kind gatherings brought Free Methodist brothers and sisters together all the way from Mexico to Patagonia and highlighted worship, scripture, and the Word with participation from 5 bishops, and leaders from at least 15 countries! You can get a taste of the Easter Sunday service in the video above (even if you don't speak Spanish, the worship is amazing and needs no translation).

Many families shared that these online gatherings served as powerful encouragement and wonderful reminders of our connections in Christ even during isolation. We thank the Lord for using the Covid crisis as a catalyst to bring us together as never before, and look forward to ways we can build on and repeat this kind of connection in the future.



### Food for the Vulnerable

If you've been following our newsletters for a while you may be familiar with the Usme church plant. Less than a year old, it began by serving some of the most vulnerable communities in Bogota - folks who were at great risk even before Coronavirus hit. Now, 80% of their neighbors have lost the day jobs that put food on their tables, their plight is more dire, and the ministry of the church more crucial than ever.

At great self-sacrifice, the team of leaders planting our Usme church have organized an ongoing food distribution system to help provide critical nutrition to families who have in many cases lost any and all opportunities to earn their own livelihoods and provide for their families. Over the last week alone, the Usme church has gathered and distributed emergency food bags to over fifty families including the one in this picture (above).

These food bags cost an average of about \$15 USD each, but equal priceless hope in the midst of despair.

What is even more moving is realizing that this is not an isolated effort. As I speak to our leaders around the city and country, I'm hearing the same story repeated. Even though offerings have fallen between 60-75%, churches are doing whatever it takes to care for the less fortunate around them. And the efforts aren't limited to Colombia. The FMC throughout Latin America has leaped into action radically living out the Gospel we proclaim. The Good News preached within the walls is overflowing to the streets in some amazing ways.

One FM pastor I spoke to last week in Argentina shared how their humble congregation has taken on the ministry of preparing lunch every day for a growing number of hungry folks around them. What started with a few dozen has turned into over 200 people lining up every day to receive what may be their only meal of the day. I was deeply moved when the pastor, chuckling, shared how recently they had distributed all their food only to discover there wasn't anything left over for the volunteers. They whipped up a few more servings, only to have another group of hungry neighbors knock on the door just as they were to sit down to that meal. In the end the volunteers went hungry so that their neighbors wouldn't have to.

It's definitely a sacrifice, but one they consider worthwhile, especially when they remember Jesus words: "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matt 25:40).



## Walking Home

First the bad news.

As soon as we arrived in Colombia we noticed them. Sometimes alone, more often in family units, "Caminantes" (walkers) dot the highways of Colombia and testify to tragedy unfolding next door. **Caminantes are Venezuelan nationals given little choice but to flee the atrocities of their homeland the only way they can - by foot.** They load their strollers, carts, and makeshift conveyances with children and belongings and set out - courageously intent on finding a better life - even if that means literally walking across the country to get there.

It's always heart-breaking to see Caminantes, but recently the unthinkable has happened. They've turned around. They're still walking, but now in the opposite direction - back "home" to Venezuela. And they're leaving by the hundreds and thousands.

That says a lot. It says that their conditions in Colombia under Coronavirus quarantine

have become untenable. They figure they'd be better off in Venezuela despite the massive shortages there of everything from food to medicine to the most basic of goods. Even gas - up until recently plentiful and crucial there, is now virtually impossible to find. News outlets even report that once Caminantes cross the border (there is a humanitarian corridor set up to allow them to return to Venezuela) they will be subject to 14 days quarantine in what is being described as "Concentration Camp-like settings" - and yet they walk!

But, as promised, there is Good News! **Even in the plight of the Caminantes we can see the Risen Lord at work through the church!**

We see the Risen Lord working through ministries like that of the Usme church where some of their neighbors are Venezuelans who might have been forced to take to the highways were it not for the food and support they're receiving.

We see the Risen Lord working along the way where leaders from the Tocancipa church often minister to and provide for folks during their journey.

We see the Risen Lord at work at the border where the FMC partners with a ministry called the "Tent of Hope" a safe oasis of God's Word as well as physical assistance for tired pilgrims.

And we see the Risen Lord at work back home in Venezuela where a strong network of godly men and women tirelessly minister with God's love in Jesus' name.

The story of the Caminantes *is* a story of despair - but it's also a story of the Risen Lord relentlessly pursuing everyone everywhere with His love, ministering to them through His body the church, wherever they are - even on the side of the interstate.

**Oh, and by the way, if you'd like to contribute to these initiatives there will be an opportunity to do so below.**





# generosity

## Blown Away

We've watched the soaring unemployment figures and devolving financial news in the States with concern on multiple levels. On one level our hearts hurt for those who have had the economic rug pulled out from under them, and we deeply feel for those who today face financial uncertainty that would have seemed unthinkable just a few weeks ago. And on a second level, we've also been aware that the financial state of the US has massive implications for missions efforts across the globe. I confess that I've worried that there might be serious implications not only for our own ministry, but for the incredible initiatives happening all across the region and globe.

And yet so far, we haven't seen churches or individuals decrease their giving. In fact the opposite seems to be happening- my faith has been bolstered and I've personally been challenged as we've witnessed the following:

- One small church pastor in PA gave up an entire month's salary dedicating it to meet the most urgent local and global needs. He's encouraged anyone from his congregation who is able to follow suit.

- A partner house church sent in the largest monthly gift they've ever sent. "We're going out less and spending less money during quarantine" they explained "so we have more to give".
- A church in Michigan decided that instead of taking on another staff member they would cover the stipend for a key local leader here in Colombia!
- A church randomly sent an offering with an explanation that simply stated "The Father told us to send this"!

As I witness these incredible expressions of generosity **I am truly blown away by folks who, remind me of the Macedonians that Paul commends who " In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy ... welled up in rich generosity" (2 Cor 8:3).**

To all those who are giving generously not only to us as a family, but to your local church, and/or other expressions of the Kingdom - we wholeheartedly thank you!

You've inspired us! This month, we want to join you in generosity. We as a family realize that the stimulus checks give us a unique opportunity to help out where the need is greatest. We're going to be donating most of what the government gives us to a the Latin American Humanitarian aid fund - an account that FMWM has specifically set up to help meet the most pressing needs of those most affected by the pandemic in Latin America. It'll help with ministries including those like Usme, the Tent of Hope, and the ministries that can serve and help Caminantes once they get home.

In fact, maybe you would like to consider giving to this fund too? Whether you have a tax refund, leftover cash in your "eating out" budget, the ability to re-purpose some of your stimulus check, or simply a desire to give sacrificially, **we would encourage those extra gifts to go not to our personal support account, but rather to the strategic needs initiative that we'll also be supporting. Donations can be made by clicking the button below:**

[\*\*Support Humanitarian Fund\*\*](#)

Thanks again for your prayer, encouragement, and support. See below for contact info, and keep an eye peeled for our next newsletter. Until then, **Bendiciones!**

- Thad, Nikki, Lily & Evie Roller