

April 2018

“Is this not the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter? Isaiah 58:6-7

Latin America 2018

We have been working with CBM since 2006, spending 7 years in Rwanda as GFS where we had the privilege of working with our church partner to grow our activities and develop strong leadership. Since November of 2014, we have been the CBM Team Leaders for Latin America. Our role is to support all CBM partner relationships, staff and programming. We have also been tasked to identify and develop partnerships in other areas of Latin America, to work with churches that share a vision for being a witness of God’s love to their community through word and deed. We are privileged to help expand our CBM work in Latin America and the Caribbean. In addition to Bolivia, we currently work with partners in Cuba and El Salvador.

In early February 2018 we travelled to the Dominican Republic and will be in El Salvador in April. We also had a few days in Guatemala where our son Ben and his wife are volunteering for a year. We are excited about possibilities for new partnerships in Central America and the Caribbean, because of how we can serve churches and communities there and also how Canadian churches can be engaged with our partners in that part of the world.

Dominican Republic

In the **Dominican Republic (DR)** Bruno attended the annual gathering of the **Baptist Churches of DR (IBAREDO)** and visited several member churches. All the churches except one have bi-vocational pastors and typically are located in small rural or poorer urban communities. Nearly all the IBAREDO churches are actively engaged with their community – teaching kids music, engaging youth in learning a trade so they don’t gravitate to drugs or prostitution, counselling families,

hosting small group bible studies, helping poor cane workers to understand God’s care for them, etc. In **Sosúa**, a community very near to Puerto Plata, a popular tourist destination for many Canadians, we met with a group of dynamic young people, meeting in a small church building of perhaps 4m x 8m. This church is 3 blocks from the beach but seems many miles away from 5-star resort hotels. The church members teach music lessons to dozens of kids – they have to set up on the sidewalk because the church building is too small. They teach teenage girls and boys, hairstyling and entrepreneurship – an attractive alternative to drugs and prostitution.

Several Canadian Baptist churches are already engaged with local DR churches. We are hopeful that in the next year CBM can help develop healthy relationships between DR and Canadian churches, and facilitate visits by Canadians, encouraging local church members and promoting ministry efforts that benefit the local church in DR, and help grow Canadians’ understanding of mission and possibilities for engaging people in Kingdom work – locally and far away.

Guatemala

While in **Guatemala** we had a few days with **ENLACE Guatemala**, one of our El Salvador partners expanding into Guatemala. Guatemala is a unique country of nearly 17 million people. 40% of the population is indigenous, nearly all Mayan, represented in 23 ethnic/language groups. Nearly 60% of the population is considered poor (national poverty line) and more than 10% extremely poor (<\$1.90/day). As with many people living in poverty, child malnutrition is very high, maternal and infant mortality is high, as are illiteracy, many health problems, violence, corruption and other development challenges.

The country is 96% Christian, and nearly 40% claim to be evangelical. The 45,000 evangelical churches are growing at more than 3% per year (twice the population growth rate). And yet it appears that the evangelical church is having little impact on poverty, violence,

corruption, literacy rates, health problems, etc. There is a local saying that the “*church is divorced from poverty*” i.e., there is little expectation that a high number of evangelical believers should have any impact on society! We are pleased to be connected to **ENLACE**, working with a network of evangelical churches of different denominations, believing that the church **can have impact** on society, and lasting community transformation happens through the local church.

We are hosting several Canadian groups with our **ENLACE El Salvador** partner in 2018 and hope to someday be hosting teams in Guatemala.

So what might be the impact of developing new partners in Central America and the Caribbean? Our objectives are two-fold; clearly there are great needs in the region, including high levels of poverty and all that entails, lack of education and decent health care, violence, corruption, injustice, etc. We are even more excited about the possibilities of working with churches in this region as they work out the mission of God – proclaiming Good News (Matt 28:19-20 go and make disciples...) and practicing the Great Commandment (Matt 22:37,38 love God & your neighbour...) as being outside of the church building and in their community.

Secondly we take seriously our mandate to help the Canadian church to grow in their understanding of mission and how to engage with people in our Canadian context as well as far away (Acts 1:8 you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth...) Often the learning that comes from being with other believers helps us see how big God is, and to be encouragers and encouraged by the examples of brothers and sisters in the majority world.

Prayer Requests, Thankfulness and Gratitude

Kathleen spent 3 weeks in February and March with her 94-year old Mom in Halifax, the first extended time with her since we have been away in 2006.

Ben & Elissa are adapting well to the work in Guatemala.

Bruno was with his Dad (Gilles) in his final days before he passed away on Dec. 23. Christmas was a special time with family and friends as we celebrated Gilles’ life.

April 2-25 we will be traveling:

El Salvador to accompany a team from RiverCross Church (a church already deeply involved in community transformation in Saint John NB) visiting churches in El Salvador that are a testimony of God’s love in their communities. Pray that this would be a time of encouragement and growth for all, as churches share how God has been working.

Cuba with CBM staff supporting our partner projects and women’s initiatives.

Bolivia for our partner, the Union of Bolivian Baptist Churches and CBM staff in Bolivia as we support the local church to share God’s love in word and deed.

Central America that we will find the right partners to join Canadian Baptists in God’s mission.

We thank you for your faithful prayer and financial support that sustains and encourages us.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. Luke 4:18, 19

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