

# EMU<sup>†</sup>

## INTERNATIONAL

Evangelical Mission to the Unreached

Evangelical Mission to Uruguay

PROCLAIMING THE TRIUMPHS OF THE GOSPEL

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Ken & Joan Jensen  
Assistant Director

### ALONG THE WAY . . .

On Saturday, April 25, shortly after sundown, the last of 3 super-cells pounced on upper Greenville County (north of I-85) with a vengeance. At its southern edge, the storm reached down with a vortex of devouring winds - an EF-2 tornado - cutting a swath up to 200 yards wide along a 5½-mile east-by-southeast path, mainly through residential neighborhoods. No injuries were reported, though ancient trees were laid waste on power lines, vehicles, and houses. This super-cell affected all of us in upstate Greenville, but only a small minority were ravaged by the tornado. The blessings from the storm were manifold: no deaths, most property was spared, most of the damaged property was insured, most of the power was restored within 24 hours, and hundreds, if not thousands, of Greenvillians converged on the tornado's path that night and on Sunday to assist their fellow citizens. Our own church had at least 3 crews helping 3 of our church families who were hard hit. They also cut fallen trees from non-church members' houses.

The COVID-19 crisis has been extensive, and though we have all been affected by it, most of us have not been ravaged by it - so far. In this time of upheaval, there are blessings that have been revealed that we would not otherwise have seen. I trust the testimonies in this May issue of the Newsletter will be a blessing and encouragement to you. In the June Newsletter we will present reports from other of our fields. †

## BLESSINGS IN THE STORM

by various EMU missionaries around the world

*In April I asked our missionaries if there were any special blessings during this disruption of their regular ministries that they probably would not have experienced under their normal routines. To present their responses will require more than just this May EMU Newsletter. The main difficulty in sharing these testimonies is determining which to include in this issue and which in next month's. Obviously, those presented next month will be a bit more dated; however, we want to let you know how our EMU missionaries have been riding out this global shut-down.*

**Gabriel & Rosanna Gomez, pastor of Gethsemani Church in Montevideo, Uruguay**

Although this new virus has changed our lives and ministry, we are thankful that our family is fine. In Uruguay we are inside most of the time, but we can go out for food or to work, if it is necessary. Rosanna is working from home, and Lucas (high schooler) is studying by Zoom. We don't know what will happen with his Math exam. He is supposed to take it in April, but school is closed, and no one answers the phone. He is still "attending" classes, so we are praying that he will not lose the school year.

We have made many ministry adjustments. I'm very grateful that the Lord gave me two sons who are fond of computer technology. I am sure I wouldn't be able to adapt without them. We are using Zoom to hold live meetings on Sunday nights. It's difficult to explain all the things that we have to do to have a good meeting! Also, I'm grateful for the men at church who are helping those in the church who are not as skilled in understanding the new technology. Not everyone from our church is able to connect because their cell phones are too old or they don't have a computer (mainly the elderly), but we have new people visiting with us in our online meetings. Yesterday we had a man from Colombia (the father of a lady who is living in Uruguay with her family). His family has been attending our church since September 2019. Another lady invited a friend from Colombia, and she is meeting with us with her husband and little girl. The girl has also joined the "Saturday school Zoom class." A Cuban couple, who live in Uruguay and visited our church last year until they moved, were able to connect with us! Rosanna has an aunt that always attends

Sunday school, but her husband only visits the church for special programs. It's encouraging for us to see him sitting next to his wife for the whole service on Sundays!

I am recording and sharing the Sunday school class by WhatsApp on Tuesdays. Our Thursday Bible study is also recorded and sent out by WhatsApp. WhatsApp seems to be quite easy to use for our elderly, so they are hearing more than usual. Some can even get the rest of their families to listen to the audio, too!

On Saturdays we are having our normal meetings with the young people and teenagers. The children have their special class on Saturday mornings. But the children we bring to church in the van don't have help from their families to connect with us, so we really miss them. We don't know what the Lord is doing through this pandemic, but we pray that all the world (unbelievers and believers) will raise their eyes to our Lord in heaven and let Him change our hard hearts.

We are so happy and thankful that our family could celebrate the wedding of our son Marcos and Tali before the Coronavirus

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Gabriel Gomez preaching from his living room to his "online church"

## Blessings in the Storm

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crisis stopped everything. It was a sweet time for our family, and we enjoyed the love shown to us from those who came. They encouraged the bride and groom (and us, too) a lot! Marcos and Tali are living in the house in front of us until their apartment is ready. We are enjoying having them so near. Tali likes the house, and she is adjusting to marriage.

### Rubito & Marita Rodriguez, pastor of Calvary Temple of "33," Uruguay

As you know, we have suspended almost all church activities. We continue to contact our brothers and sisters, calling some for discipleship and visiting the elderly who live alone. We are also helping the older folks by doing their errands so they don't have to go out. The church is collecting groceries for the neediest church families who are not working due to the business closures. The church people have been very generous in supplying for those most in need.



Rubito & Marita

Although we cannot hold services, we have been teaching over the internet. While most of the church can see and hear the teaching, what has surprised us most is how God has used this time of trial to make many people more receptive. Relatives of our brethren and people from the city have followed our services. They are more willing to listen to the Word now than at any other time past.

Thank God our department of "33" has not had any cases of the virus. We know that this is part of His plan. On the other hand, it has helped our members appreciate how important it is to gather and be in communion. So, God has used it for good. Thank God the faith of the brothers is maintained despite not being able to gather.

### John Mark & Deborah Steel, teachers at the EMU Bible Institute and FEBU in Montevideo, Uruguay

At the time of writing (April 20), we are starting our sixth week of "quarantine," which means - etymologically - that the "forty days" are almost over! God has dealt with us gently, protecting us from disease and mitigating the personal effects of the interrupted schedule. Beyond controlling the negative effects, he has added these undeserved blessings:

These weeks have forced Bible Institute and FEBU classes to take a step forward in their online course offerings. Not only in Montevideo but also in other cities, students are accessing courses online. Though this

might not be essential for their training, it tends to be a hurdle for some; and, the hurdle now having been crossed, the way might open to more options in the future.

The EMU Bible Institute has added an online Hermeneutics class not originally on the schedule. Men in our church have begun a weekly online meeting studying principles of Bible study. Other discipleship opportunities with men outside Montevideo and Pando have arisen due to the specific challenges of the pandemic. Our church's online services have provided a much-increased potential of influence and have (ironically) actually facilitated a degree of connectedness not experienced before. On the personal level, we have had more opportunity to be involved with our children's education and have been much more connected to our sending church in South Carolina via their live-streamed services. We have been able to continue settling into our new house in ways we might not have been able to under the "normal" schedule.



John Mark & Deborah with children Elizabeth & Daniel James



John Mark teaching a class via the internet

We do not know how many more "forty days" of interruption the future may hold in Uruguay, or anywhere else, but we know that God is managing well the affairs of nations and the affairs of our little family.

### Matias & Kristine Espinel, teacher at FEBU in Montevideo, Uruguay

On March 13th, Kristine's birthday, our government announced the first four known cases of coronavirus in Uruguay. The authorities in Uruguay immediately cancelled classes from pre-k to university level. All concerts, sporting events, and public gatherings, including church services, were cancelled as well. Pretty much the entire economy of the country stopped

in a week. We are quarantined at home practicing social distancing. We are not prohibited from going out in the streets, but the authorities are asking people to stay at home and only be outside to take care of necessities. The police have the authority to go around the city and tell a group of people who are gathered to disperse. Our children had started attending a local school at the beginning of our school year in March, but after 2 weeks they are back to doing homeschool with Kristine because of the quarantine. This past week, the authorities announced that some work could re-start again soon.

While many see this as a necessary decision in order to give people the chance to work again, others are concerned for the potential growth of virus cases in the country, especially as winter is right around the corner.



Matias & Kristine with children (l-r) Megan, Emma, Sophia, & Misael

We are having online services on Sunday mornings using Zoom, and we also use WhatsApp for our three weekly-prayer meetings. Our young adults are still having weekly services online, and some unbelievers join them on occasions. We encouraged some of the men in our church to record a short daily video where they share a few verses from God's Word and then challenge the believers to live according to that truth. It has been a blessing to hear from men who do not typically preach in our services. This time of social distancing, though challenging, has helped the church understand how important it is to be together and to be united in prayer during this time. On Good Friday, a group of us from our church had the opportunity to be outside of our church building to give out some special traditional Easter pastries to our neighbors and the families we have contact with. We gave them a letter explaining why we celebrate Easter and a gospel tract with it. Just a few days ago, a man named Nicolás texted me saying he wants to attend our church with his family. Pray with us that we might see spiritual results of this work for His glory.

At FEBU we started classes at the beginning of March with 17 students. We have students from Uruguay and Argentina this year. Every year we take two days for a retreat where students and faculty with their families spend some quality time together. Our classes now have been moved to an online platform. At this point, we are not sure when classes will go back to "normal."

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## ***Blessings in the Storm*** (continued from page 2)

We are thankful that our FEBU ministry has continued in a remarkably successful way without too many complications. During this time, we have discovered that it is possible to train our students in these ways, and we have seen the potential of working in association with other Spanish speaking Bible colleges in the future. This will be a blessing for our students for sure.



*FEBU students in early March 2020*

At home we are enjoying some extra time together. Kristine's allergy treatment is going well. We have not seen many changes yet, but the doctor said her body (based on her reaction to the treatments) is responding well. This treatment is a year-long process, and we thank those who have helped to cover this expensive treatment. We were planning to go to the States for a short furlough during our school-winter break in June-July, but we decided to postpone that trip to the end of the year, even before the virus situation existed. At this point, we have plans to go to the States in December of 2020 and be there until the middle of February.

### ***Josh & Amy Jensen, Bible translation in Oyadao, Cambodia***



*Josh & Amy with children (l-r) Becca, Ezra, Anna, Clara, & Isaiah*

So far there have been 122 confirmed cases of COVID-19 infection in Cambodia, and no deaths. So, for whatever reason, we've been spared any major spreading so far. We pray that continues. (Some have speculated that the very thing that makes Cambodia such a difficult place to live from March-May, the constant heat and humidity, may be ideal environmental conditions for quickly killing the virus.)

The main differences for us over the last five weeks have been (1) home church as a family because religious gatherings over 10 people are not allowed, (2) no trips into town for meetings or fellowship with other missionaries or missionary kids, and (3) no

trips into villages, as many of them have closed off their roads.

Additionally, the Khmer Pastors' Bible School session in May has been cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions on educational and religious gatherings.

Although we had to stop our every-other-week neighborhood Bible Club, we've been able to continue our Sunday night Khmer Bible study, but without our kids present (to keep the number to 10 or below). Since we meet on our front porch, we just have our kids stay in their room.

Josh continues to go in to work every day, and he's actually getting more done because he never goes anywhere else! By the end of next week (the first week of May), the team expects to be done with the first three major verse-by-verse checks on Matthew 17-28. They finished exegetical checking and community checking last week, and team review is progressing well (today they checked 44 verses, reaching Matt. 27:14). That will leave two more checks—the church leaders Committee Check and the outside Consultant Check. We don't yet know whether these checks can proceed while meeting size is limited to ten. The first sixteen chapters of Matthew have already gone through all the checks; for those chapters, all that's left is writing footnotes and checking cross-references.



*Josh's Jarai translation group*

### ***Matt & Becky Hancock, church planters in Ou Reang Ov, Cambodia***

We are doing well. God has largely spared Cambodia from the pandemic, at least for now. Most business is as usual in our small town, but for the past three weeks schools have been suspended as well as all religious gatherings. Because of this, Matt's regular ministry outlets of English classes, soccer coaching, and church ministries are now on hold. It was hard to have all these doors shut at once, but we are grateful for continued ministry opportunities in our neighborhood and through a Facebook ministry page.

*(Matt just finished a 12-minute evangelistic video in Khmer.)*

### ***Billy & Saritha Judson, planting & maintaining Bible colleges in India***

On March 24, 2020, the Indian government initiated a nationwide lockdown – requiring all Indians to shelter-in-homes unless acquiring food or medicine. This is now extended to May 3. In compliance with this order, our Bible college ministry pushed the pause button on all of our ministry activities.



*Billy, Beatrice, Saritha, & Keren*

For the last two Sundays, we started breaking bread in our own homes. We do not know how much longer this will go on, but we felt for now we must shelter-in-place (as the state requests), respecting the ordinance of the authorities as Peter exhorts us to do in 1 Peter 2:13-17. Praise God that I can keep ministering to my family and also talk about the importance of the Lord's table to Bernice, in addition to individual Bible study.

Starting last Tuesday, I got an opportunity to teach a class on 'Church Planting and Growth' via Zoom to an online class at the Tirupathi teaching site. Seven students joined online. The leadership at that church school insisted we keep up the fellowship and study the Word through the available technology. A couple of these families live in the declared Red Zone infected areas. We had a good discussion on the first chapter, the church foundation. Lord willing, I will be teaching a two-hour class tomorrow evening on the indigenous methods of church planting. We did not do online studies in the city of Hyderabad. Technology is good, but it cannot replace the one-on-one fellowship.

### ***Michael & Liz Cole, church planting in Bordeaux, France***

God has been lovingly using the strict lockdown conditions in France during Covid-19 for our good and His glory. The main word that comes to mind when we think about what He is doing is "growth." He has grown our church family closer through the use of WhatsApp, texting, and phone calls as a means of staying connected and giving spiritual encouragement to one another. We have personally experienced the love of our church family through meals provided, phone calls, and prayer.

Our relationships with our neighbors have also grown during this time. Our house is part of a grouping of 3, and we've been able to have read-aloud times with the neighbors from the other two houses (classic novels read by a neighbor who suggested the idea). We've also exchanged baked goods from time to time and were able to deliver brownies and a "He is Risen!" Easter coloring sheet that the girls made for our

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## ***Blessings in the Storm***

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4 closest neighbors. We trust the Lord will use this deepening of relationships for our neighbors' good and His glory.

A third area of growth we've seen is in our family relationships. We've experienced multiple layers of difficulty during this time with Liz being sick for 4 weeks, the kids doing school at home, and Michael having to handle everything from cooking to cleaning to educating to pastoring! God has grown us individually in ways that we probably would not have grown had we not been placed under these circumstances. He has strengthened our marriage relationship as we've sought Him together for help during this time of trial. Our family has enjoyed more time together for reading, Scripture memory, art, and play, resulting in fortified relationships between siblings, and between children and parents. Finally, God has grown us in our understanding of our utter dependence on Him for all things and the belief that He lovingly works all things for our good and His glory. As you may know, Liz went through 4 weeks of an unidentified sickness followed by days of deep anxiety and stress-related symptoms. While possibly the most difficult time we've ever experienced as a family, we saw how the Holy Spirit used spiritual songs, the Psalms, and spiritual (virtual) fellowship to lift Liz up again. All praise to our loving heavenly Father for these blessings of growth in the midst of the storm. Thank you for your love, prayers, and support.

### **Tim & Ruth Bixby, church planting in Sarcelles, France**

As to our children, the confinement has been a blessing of God in restructuring our lives around the family nucleus. We have four children in four different grades in public school. In a normal school week, our two elementary-aged boys get out at 4:30 p.m.,

our daughter often at 5 p.m., and our oldest son on a couple of days per week doesn't get out until 6 p.m. We are presently in our sixth week of what the French are calling "confinement" (or lockdown, or shelter-in-place, or whatever you call it where you are) with pretty tight restrictions. We are only allowed to leave the house if we carry a pre-written form stating our purpose (that has to be one of the few reasons they have given as allowable). We are allowed a one-hour walk (with proper papers, of course) per day with the children, for which we are very grateful! Other than our family walks, however, our children have not left the house since the beginning of the confinement. This new schedule has given us much more time together as a family, and we have all felt that our daily family walks will be missed once this time is over!



*(l-r) Macaiah, Ruth, Siméon, Tim, Miriam, Gabriel, & Zacharie*

As to ministry, we must acknowledge that there is no substitute to replace personal contact. However, God has opened up other opportunities. To help our church people, we have been doing a nightly devotional (on Facebook Live) every evening at 8 p.m., in addition to our longer Sunday morning worship services (also on Facebook Live). There are about 60 people who watch these devotionals live every evening with many more who watch it later. This nightly broadcast has proved to be a real lifeline for our people. It has been more work for

us, but we are grateful to do something helpful while stuck at home! The special blessing, however, of this format is that we have begun hearing of more and more unregenerate people who are listening in. We know of several unsaved people with whom I did a Bible study four years ago who have followed at least some of these devotionals. We have two music teachers that have "joined" us as well. Our neighbors, whose house is joined to ours (Muslim) have also joined online. We also have a doctor (also Muslim) who has told us he would listen in. Our people have sent out digital invitations to many of their friends, and we believe that many are being reached. Two nights ago, while I was speaking, we got a person who gave us a lot of negative (even mean) feedback about our faith. We take this as evidence that God's Word is reaching into peoples' lives. Please pray that God's Word would not be stopped and that He would continue to give us creative means of spreading the glad tidings. We are trying to use technology for meetings of other formats as well, such as using Zoom for various smaller-group meetings. We have met with the different families of our church several times by Zoom, and Ruth has met several times with different ladies to continue an ongoing Bible study.

This week the president said they were considering letting churches open in mid-June. Please pray that God would work His perfect will. Pray also that God would lead us as to our planned visit to the States this summer. †

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*Email:* [office@emuinternational.org](mailto:office@emuinternational.org)  
*Website:* [www.emuinternational.org](http://www.emuinternational.org)  
*Phone:* (864) 268-9267

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