

EMU⁺

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Evangelical Mission to Uruguay

PROCLAIMING THE TRIUMPHS OF THE GOSPEL

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Ken & Joan Jensen
Assistant Director

ALONG THE WAY . . .

It's a conundrum I have observed throughout my life: immediately after a verbal or written statement that I think I'm doing well physically, my health takes a nose-dive. In December, Joan and I decided to write a Christmas letter (something we used to do each year before my Trigeminal Neuralgia) to family and friends letting them know of my recovery from about 18 years of health difficulties. However, no sooner had Joan sent out the last letters than my latest plunge took place. On Saturday, January 15, **Joan and I** both woke up feeling "not quite right." By that evening, it was apparent that we both had a flu bug. As is always the pattern, her case was milder and shorter. After ten days of getting worse, Joan talked me into seeing our doctor. After a blood test, x-rays, and later, a CT scan, the doc said I had Covid pneumonia, which was no surprise to either of us considering my coughing fits. The two weeks that followed were not much better than that first week. Joan kept me on my medication regimen and mother-henned me for a full four weeks. Now, in the second week of February, unless there is a relapse in my future, I should be ascending towards full recovery. I will definitely *not* let you know when I'm feeling great again!

The above is the reason this February newsletter was very delayed in getting written and published. For the last two weeks, I have thought "tomorrow I should

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A HECTIC END TO 2021 & BEGINNING TO 2022

by Matias & Kristine Espinel, professors & church planters in Uruguay

We trust your new year is off to a great start! We praise the Lord for His faithfulness to us each new day and are excited for what God has planned for this new year.

Thank you also for your continual prayers for our unsaved contacts.

At the end of November we were able to reconnect with a couple we've known for several years at a small Thanksgiving celebration with them and 2 missionary family friends (the Acevedos and the Steels). Marcelo Chung grew up in NYC until he was a teenager, at which time his Chinese/Uruguayan family moved to Uruguay where he married Monica, a Uruguayan. We met them when our son was in kindergarten several years ago. Every year we have talked about getting together for Thanksgiving, but this was the first year we finally did. We had a wonderful time, and it was great to reconnect with them. Please pray with us for the Lord to work in their hearts to show them their need of Him.

Thank you also for your prayers for Mariana, the girls' violin/viola teacher. We had another wonderful opportunity to share the gospel with her on the day of the kids' last lesson when she asked about a particular advent ornament on our Christmas tree (one that represented substitutionary sacrifice). Mariana grew up completely non-religious, so all of the Bible stories and concepts are new to her. It has been an amazing experience for us to see God tenderly seeking out people who are not seeking Him. His grace and goodness are amazing! We don't know which of our contacts will be saved, but we praise Him and love Him all the more as



Kristine Espinel (right) next to Chicha Rodriguez, who was the guest speaker at the Ladies' Tea. The other two ladies are part of their ladies' leadership team.

we see firsthand His work of reaching out to those who are lost, as He did with us before we were saved.

Thank you for your prayers for the end of year outreach activities in Siloé Church. The Ladies' Tea came together beautifully, and a wonderful

time was had by all. There were around 40 ladies in attendance, including at least nine "unchurched" visitors.

Our Saturday children's Christmas program went well also, with many families visiting and hearing the gospel. We have been praying for quite some time for one mother in particular. She has advanced pancreatic cancer, and we are especially burdened for her salvation as we realize her time left on earth may be very short. She heard the message of the gospel through the Christmas story that Matias shared, and she said it was the first time she had ever heard that story. Please pray for her salvation, and the salvation of her little girl Constantina and her husband, and for wisdom as to how we can minister to them.

Our annual Christmas dinner the next day was also very well attended and a very nice time with a few visitors as well. At this point our church space is pretty much maxed out. We long to reach our community and are constantly praying for church growth, but we need to seriously consider expanding. We have met with an architect and have had plans drawn up for a building expansion, but lack of funds has held us back from being able to begin this project. In the meantime, the church

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The Steel Wrap-up for 2021

by John Mark & Deborah Steel, professors & church planters in Uruguay

Thank you for your prayers over the last several months. We are approaching the end of what, for us, is the second semester of the academic year and are looking forward to two students graduating from FEBU on November 27. Josías finished his studies last year but was unable to graduate due to pandemic complications. He is currently preaching and teaching in the northern city of Artigas. Sabrina is Argentine and, following graduation, will marry Pablo, another FEBU student, early next year. Please remember these names when you pray. In addition to teaching Apologetics (John Mark) and Introduction to Research Writing (Deborah) in FEBU and the Bible Institute this past semester, JM has continued to help coordinate Bible Institute classes in Montevideo and in several churches around Uruguay. He recently completed recording a short video series of lessons teaching basic Spanish grammar for Bible study. These are now being edited to be published online next year by a local radio/internet ministry. In August Matías and Bethany Acevedo completed their first two years back in Uruguay, a period during which they served faithfully with Iglesia Bíblica Maranatha, the church we help in Pando. Beyond their work with the teen/college-age group and informal discipleship with the men, our hope was that during these two years the Lord would direct the church and their family concerning their next steps. In conjunction with the

leadership of their sending church, they've decided to fill a pastoral need at a church in the coastal town of Neptunia. This will be a gradual transition during which Matías will continue to help with our youth group. We are also hoping that together we can give some supplemental guidance and practical experience to several young men who are already being mentored in their local churches and taking part-time classes in FEBU and the Bible Institute.

In December, Elizabeth will complete Ciclo Básico, the first three years of Uruguayan public high school (roughly equivalent to 7th through 9th grades in the U.S.). She regularly looks for ways to share truth inside and outside her classes. In December Daniel James will finish 4th grade at Colegio Cristiano Bautista Cristo Viene, where Deborah also teaches English two days a week. Please continue to pray for the many children and their families potentially influenced by this school.

In mid-October John Mark took two weeks to visit his parents in SC and his dad's twin brother's family in CO. On October 14, after a lifetime of serving as husband, father, pastor, mission representative, Bible-institute director, and teacher, Uncle Jim went to be with the Lord. This brief, full trip included opportunities to meet with several friends in UT, some of whom have close connections to Uruguay, and to visit and report to supporters and church

partners in CO and UT. Next year (2022) we are scheduled to visit the remainder of our churches, and we hope to share the work in Uruguay in several new places. If you or your church would like a personal visit, please let us know. We will be in touch directly with our partner churches about a possible in-person report during April through July. Earlier this month JM spent a weekend in the border city of Rivera where he preached for special services in Templo El Calvario, a church celebrating 51 years of gospel ministry this year. Other opportunities included serving in the church's efforts in the neighborhoods of Rivera Chico and the small rural community of Las Flores, about two hours south of Rivera. The church in Rivera is one of the sites in interior Uruguay participating in the Bible Institute's video program. There are currently eight students at this location.

Upcoming opportunities include an evangelistic Christmas program in the streets and plazas of Carmelo, an outreach of Iglesia Bíblica Comunitad in that city. We also request prayer that the Lord would direct young people to commit to seriously preparing themselves for future service, whether as active members of local churches or as pastors and evangelists. The names of students, churches, and communities mentioned in this letter are representative of many more needs and opportunities in this country. Thank you for your faithful prayers! †

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be able to work on it," but for too many reasons (excuses), it didn't happen.

This issue's articles by our American missionaries serving in Uruguay are more dated than I would like. But the letters are good overviews of the ministries of the Espinels and Steels.

The **Espinels** are back in Uruguay and well into their summer ministries. However, the **Steels** have had some major changes in their lives in recent days. At the beginning of February, John Mark's father's health began deteriorating rapidly. **John Mark** was advised that if he wanted to see his father alive again, he should fly to Greenville, SC, as soon as possible. John Mark arrived at his folks' house on Monday, February 7. Because of some document issues with the kids, **Deborah and the children** plan to fly to Greenville around the middle of the month. The Steels were already planning to return Stateside for a furlough in April and for John Mark's doctoral graduation in May. However, this current trip north is necessitating reworking their schedules for this first semester in Uruguay. (We

just received word that John Mark's dad passed away today, Thursday, February 10, 2022. The memorial service for Mr. Steel will be Monday, February 21, 11 am, at Cornerstone Baptist Church, Greenville, SC.) Pray for the family.



Above: Children's Camp in front of climbing wall
Below: Adolescent camp



January Camp Emmanuel Staff

In Uruguay, **Camp Emmanuel** has been having "regular" camps for the first time in two years. January began with a rental camp, followed by four days of staff training for the EMU camps starting January 18 with **children's camp**. Over the next two weeks, the **adolescents' and Jovenes' camps** were held. All these camps were greatly restricted in number for several reasons. First, the government requirements for holding camps are such that only a portion of the facilities can be used. Second, there was a marked lack of staff volunteers this year. Though not necessarily the primary reason for this, many of the camps over the past two years have been cancelled after people had volunteered to work, contributing to

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approved the purchase and is preparing a shipping container to use for classroom space for the children's classes. While this meets one need, it still leaves the need of a larger sanctuary unmet. Please pray for wisdom to be able to go forward with an expansion project as well as the funds needed to do it.

The children finished their school year the last week of December. They completed 2 years in a very small private school within walking distance from our house. We are so thankful for the life lessons learned, for the connections with Uruguayan culture that were formed, and for each new contact that was made. We are planning a several month furlough later on this year (2022), so the kids will not be attending a physical school (Kristine will be homeschooling this year), but we would ask prayer for the relationships built to continue and to bring forth eternal fruit. Kristine requests special prayer for the demands of homeschooling



Stan (sitting) & Miriam behind him; Kristine & Matias (in front of tree), Kristine's sister & her husband at right, & the 4 Espinel children

along with teaching a class in the Bible College (FEBU) this semester. She will also continue to head up the ladies' meetings and Bible studies at Siloé Church, as well as a few speaking engagements, all while keeping up with the home and frequent hospitality.

Our family made an emergency family trip to spend some time with Kristine's parents in Myrtle Beach, SC, over the holidays because of the serious illness of Kristine's father, who was hospitalized with pneumonia and sepsis. We are so thankful for the sweet time we had with them, and especially for the gifts from so many of you that made it possible. The timing was very providential, as both of Kristine's parents got quite sick while we there, and we were right there to help with various needs they had.

We were supposed to return to Uruguay on January 22, but our flight was cancelled the day before (apparently due to the weather forecast), and the airline could not get us all together on a flight to Uruguay until the following Wednesday, January 26. After negative Covid tests, we flew back that

Wednesday, and Matias was able to preach at a family camp in northern Uruguay the next week. Thank you for remembering us before the Lord! We know that He reigns sovereign, and we rest in His purpose and plan for us for each moment. †

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far fewer folks signing up for the training in December and January. And third, though the camp received very generous donations to the Camp Sponsorship Fund this year, parents of children and teens were more reluctant to send their children to camp due to the continued hype over Covid infections.

Because this may be the only extended mention of the January camps, I will give a brief overview of the children's and adolescents' camps. (I have no photos or reports on the Jovenes – 16 years old and older – Camp.) The emphasis of the camps was missions around the world. Besides the Bible teaching and preaching on this subject, a new dimension was added to the program. The director of the camp, **Pedro Donzè**, prearranged for several EMU missionary families in various parts of the world to connect with the campers via computer link. The missionaries told about their families, ministries, and life in their particular field of service, also allowing for campers to

ask questions. The **Joshua Jensen family** in Cambodia was featured at the children's camp, and **Marco and Gwendolyn Nuñez** were interviewed from Cancún, Mexico, for the adolescent camp.

During each week of camp, someone came down with **Covid**. Pedro and his team set up a very detailed protocol for isolating and containing such outbreaks. Unfortunately, when a staff member became ill, as happened each week, it left the workers very shorthanded. There was never a widespread outbreak during the camps. Also, when someone tested positive for Covid after already being at the camp, Pedro called the parents of all the campers to let them know the situation and what was being done to protect the campers. It seems from the correspondence that the stress level very much increased among the leadership during these times. However, none of the camps needed to be cancelled or dismissed before the last day of camp, and the campers seemed to have a blessed and edifying week.

Thus far, the **Workers' Conference** (Feb. 22-25) and the **Family Camp** (Feb. 28-Mar. 4) are still scheduled to be held. **Jeff Davis** and the family of **Tim and Cheryl Chapman** of Lima, Perú, will be speaking at these camps. Jeff is to arrive in Uruguay on Saturday, February 19, and returning Stateside on Tuesday, March 8. The Chapmans arrive in Uruguay early Monday morning, February 21, and will return home to Lima on Saturday, March 5. During their time in Uruguay, Jeff and Tim will be speaking in several EMU churches, with Jeff traveling as far north as Rivera on the Brazilian border. The last two years have taught us that a lot can "go wrong"

during such an undertaking, so please pray that the plans made for the camps and visiting churches will be realized. As a heads-up, Jeff Davis will be with **Marco and Gwendolyn** in Cancún (April 13-22) to preach for their Easter services and then spend a few days teaching Marco's ministry team in Cancún.

*(As this paper goes to press, we received an update on the Covid situation at Camp Emmanuel in Uruguay. A young lady counselor began having symptoms the 2nd week of February. It is believed that an asymptomatic female from the camp the week before was the source for some of these cases. The illness quickly spread to other female staff and campers. **Beatriz** (the camp secretary), **Valeria Gomez** (who has helped at all the camps and is in the early months of her first pregnancy), **Paty Donzè** (wife of the camp director, who has had many physical challenges since her kidney transplant years ago), and now **Maxi** (the Donzès' son) all have Covid, though none of these folks are critically ill. At this time, the Workers' Conference and Family Camp remain on the schedule for later this month. Thanks for your prayers!)*

Over the past month and a half, Covid took up residence with several of our missionary families: the **Bixbys** in Sarcelles, France; the **Crnkovics** in Koprivnica, Croatia; and the **Nuñezes** in Cancún, Mexico. For at least a couple of these families this was their second round of Covid during the last two years. They all seem to have recovered.

On January 29, **Ted Allston's mom** met Jesus face-to-face. She had been declining for several days and was under hospice

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Valeria Gomez teaching at the Children's Camp

Return Service Requested

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care. She was buried in her hometown on John's Island, Charleston, SC, on Saturday, February 5. A memorial service was held at Hampton Park Baptist Church in Greenville, SC, where she was a longtime member, on the 8th. Pray for Ted and Marla, his two sisters, and their families during this time of loss.

The news in this *Along the Way* seems pretty rough so far. Even the Camp Emmanuel report is a mixed bag of blessings and difficulties. But there is "happy" news, too. **Alexis Shoemaker** married **Juan Jesus Arenas** in Lima, Perú, on January 22 in a garden wedding. Several family members and friends of Alexis traveled to Lima for the joyous event. Following the ceremony, the couple flew to Cusco, Perú, (the old capital of the Inca empire) for their honeymoon. (On Alexis's Facebook page, it was fun to see many of the same sights that Joan and I visited during our 41st anniversary visit to Cusco and Machu Picchu several years ago.) Alexis will continue her full-time ministries with **Faith Baptist Church of Lima**, where **Tim Chapman** is the lead pastor. Juan Jesus is also very involved in the ministry of Faith



Alexis & Juan Jesus Arenas

Baptist, but he is finishing up his college degree as he works a secular job.



JD Crowley let us know that his latest book, *True Religion and Counterfeit Religion: A Commentary on I-III John*, is currently being printed in Cambodia. A special gift from another mission organization was given to pay for this printing, with copies to be given to all Khmer pastors throughout the country. This material was taught during the November 2021 Pastors School in Ratanakiri, Cambodia. May the Lord greatly use this material to strengthen the Cambodia church and safeguard it against false cults that have plagued Cambodia.

Also, in northeastern Cambodia, **Josh Jensen** and his team are working on translating Exodus. The main translation work for Genesis is finished, but there are still review checks that need to be completed. Sadly, the linguist who has been doing this review suffered a physical setback when he received his last Covid shot. Pray for a full recovery of this gentleman. This man is also doing the review for the Krung Bible translation that **Brian Kane** oversees.

A report from the **Bixbys** in France let us know that the final signing and property transfer took place in late December for the

purchase of the **Bible Baptist Church of Grand Roissy's** building! What an amazing journey this has been! And basically the church owns the property debt-free. The heavy government Covid restrictions seem to be lessening in France, and more church activities are being added to the schedule. During December and January, Tim's mom visited from Greenville, SC, and Tim's sister, who is a missionary in the Central African Republic, also arrived for several weeks. Unfortunately, Covid ran through the family during this time (before his sister's arrival), but everyone has recovered.

After two full years of living with the Covid pandemic, I doubt if there is anyone reading this who does not have a fairly strong opinion about this illness, its treatments, the information/misinformation debate, and a hundred-and-one other political and domestic issues we have witnessed during the past 24 months. Many of us have had our initial flippancy about Covid tempered by the death of close friends and family due to the disease. Thankfully, we are not called to preach "Covid" or political correctness, but the Gospel of Jesus Christ in its full orthodox, evangelical truth. Such a stand and activity will not divert persecution, ridicule, and disdain from unbelievers. For two thousand years, this message has been the target of Cancel Culture, and it always will be, until the Lord returns. What is overwhelmingly comforting is the knowledge that this message wins in the end. May the Lord grant us the grace to keep our focus on Him and the building of His Church. Thank you for your prayers for our EMU International missionaries and their ministries! †

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