

# EMU

## 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 . . .

Before I fill up this short column, I want to wish each of you a blessed Easter this month. It is not just a religious holiday to those of us who are members of the Church of our Lord Jesus. The events of Easter are the foundation of all we do as a missionary organization. Pray for our missionaries as they will all be involved with special Easter programs and outreaches during this time when people are especially open to listening to the Gospel message!

**Ted Allston** flew to the Island of Dominica to minister with the Tony Cornelius family, missionaries sent out by Hampton Park Baptist Church. Ted was there March 9-16. On April 2-28, Ted will be in Kenya again to continue training national church leaders.

**Jeremy Farmer** is in Greenville, SC, as I write. The missions committee at Hampton Park Baptist Church asked Jeremy to be the keynote speaker at our mission conference the week of March 30. When the Farmers were on furlough in 2024, the HPBC missions committee and then the pastoral board met with Jeremy and Bonnie Ruth to discuss their ministry and consider taking them on as HP missionaries. FYI, HP is the sending church for EMU missionaries - the **Crowleys**, the **Kanes**, and the **Josh Jensens**. So, this seems to be a good fit. Jeremy traveled alone from Cambodia, but he has three daughters studying at Bob Jones University. He won't be too lonely for family while here! Jeremy returns to Cambodia on April 8.

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## HOMEGROWN HEROES

by Jeff Davis, director of EMU International

A palpable energy filled the church auditorium as I approached the pulpit for my last message at the mission conference at Calvary Baptist Church in Midland, MI, on Wednesday, March 19. Over the past four days, I had spoken nine times, six at the church, twice at their Christian school, plus a television interview. I was passionately hammering out the theme, "Your Missionary Family," in which I challenged the church to be everything we can be here, so we can be what we need to be over there, the vast and varied mission fields of the world. The days had been a tapestry of joy and purpose. Reconnecting with dear friends, sharing stories of faith, and spending time with EMU missionaries Tim and Cheryl Chapman and their family brought a sense of warmth and camaraderie that only deepened my resolve for the final message. I began with a question as old as the Great Commission itself: "Where will we find the next generation of pastors, missionaries, and Christian workers?" The answer is closer than we think. To mobilize the next generation of church leaders, we must seriously pursue an inside-out approach locally if we are going to make a difference globally. I titled the message, "Homegrown Heroes." It's a phrase that conjures images of quiet yet profound determination—ordinary men and women who rise from the very soil beneath our feet to become catalysts for extraordinary change. The heart of global missions beats strongest where local faith flourishes.

When EMU International was founded in 1946, its focus on Uruguay reflected the seeds of transformation planted in a single nation. I'm told it was like a New Testament movement as Bible Institute students were launched into evangelism, new church plants, and camp ministries. Decades later, as EMU expanded its reach to eleven countries, the mission remains steadfast: to strengthen and support the Church both locally and globally through works of evangelism, establishing churches, and equipping nationals to do the same.

Before my trip to Michigan, I had spent a busy seventeen days rubbing shoulders with a group of those *homegrown heroes* in Uruguay.

Dr. Bill Hill, executive director of Equipping Nationals Worldwide, and I flew from Asheville, NC, to Uruguay on February 21. This was Bill's fifteenth time traveling to Uruguay and my tenth. We had never traveled at the same time, so last year I set in motion a plan for the two of us to travel together to our Annual Workers' Conference. We spoke ten times on the theme, "Let Us Encourage One Another." We desired to come alongside these precious workers, not as experts, but as fellow servants who understand some of the challenges they face in their ministries. We wanted to support and uplift each one of them and provide material that would be helpful and worth sharing with their congregations.

We each had five opportunities to speak on themes such as perseverance, ecclesiology, prayer, stress, evangelism, and theology proper. I also had the privilege of having one-on-one conversations with each of our workers. It is always a joy to hear updates on their families and their ministries. Each pastor is doing his part to equip their congregations to be *homegrown heroes*.

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(l-r) Jeff, Pedro Donz , & Bill at the airport

## Homegrown Heroes

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Pedro Donzé picked us up at the Carrasco International Airport in Montevideo on Saturday morning. Customs was a breeze for both of us. I was a little concerned as I had a suitcase full of homeschool material for the Espinel family and batteries for cordless drills that Rick Jensen had sent for our camp maintenance staff. We stopped for a delicious lunch at a restaurant that Gaby Gomez, one of our pastors, had recommended. We sampled several different *milenesas* (pounded, breaded, and fried cutlets of meat) which, when coupled with a long flight through the night, made for a sleepy afternoon when we arrived at camp. I would have loved to have taken a nap, but I had to prepare for the messages I would preach in a couple of churches the next day. Bill remained at the camp and connected with Pastor Carlos Olivera, his wife Mabel, and Carlos and Beatriz Alberti. Saturday evening, Pedro drove me to Montevideo to meet Chicha Rodriguez as we had bus tickets for a 6 ½ hour trip to Rivera, a town on the Uruguay-Brazil border. This was my first time on a bus in Uruguay. It was surprisingly comfortable. We arrived at 1:30 AM and were greeted by Pastor Pablo Billaflan and his wife Cristina.



*Cristina & Pablo Billaflan of Rivera*

Sunday was a great day of ministry and fellowship as Chicha and I ministered at the Rivera Chico church in the morning and then at Calvary Temple with Pastor Pablo on Sunday night. It was exciting to see the growth in this ministry that is celebrating 55 years in its current building in March 2025. Pablo's son Anderson does a tremendous job leading the music. Before Chicha and I caught our bus back to Montevideo at midnight, we enjoyed a delicious meal and time of fellowship with the Billaflans.

The ride through the night was on an even nicer bus than the one the day before. I don't sleep well on planes and buses, but this one



*55th Anniversary of Calvary Temple of Rivera*

had Wi-Fi, and I was able to work some and catch a few winks before we arrived at 6:30 am. We were met at the Tres Cruces bus terminal by Matias Espinel and Marcos Gomez, Pedro's assistant at Campamento Emanuel. We dropped Chicha off at her house and then headed to camp. Marcos made a quick stop at one of the biggest and nicest Starbucks I have ever seen. Monday was a day of preparation for the upcoming Workers Conference.

The camp was in excellent condition as this summer they had celebrated its 50th Anniversary. We all enjoyed the fruit of Rick's work team back in August and the excellent maintenance staff. Henry Castro has served as our camp caretaker for the past several years. He and Pedro are already putting together a project plan for another work trip next August. If you are interested in more information on how you can join this work trip or be a blessing to our camp financially, please shoot me an email at [jeff@emuinternational.org](mailto:jeff@emuinternational.org).

One of the exciting additions at camp is a new maintenance helper, Fabricio Josué Méndez, the nephew of our mission evangelist Juan Gonzalez. (Read Josué's testimony in this Newsletter. - kj) He and his wife Katha are now living in the *casita*. They have added a fence around the property and other personal touches. They moved from Treinta y Tres about six months ago. Josue's background is in automobile restoration, but he is a quick learner and each of our staff members talked about how grateful they are to have his help. Katha works in a nearby town as a teacher.

Tuesday morning our workers started arriving and joyful hugs and Uruguayan kisses were exchanged by all. I welcomed the group and then began the first session with an encouragement to "Persevere Despite the Obstacles." John Mark Steel was a huge blessing as he translated for the entire week. The first day we had a session in the morning and a session in the evening.



*John Mark Steel translating for Jeff*

That gave me plenty of time for interviews with the different workers. I was encouraged to hear how most of the churches are doing a good job of caring for their pastors. All of our pastors are now supported by their churches, except one. Most of our churches are also turning their attention outward with

a focus on global and local missions. We are praying that God will raise a generation of *homegrown heroes* in each of our ministries.

For these camps, the pastors always take advantage of the opportunity to spend time



*2025 Workers' Conference at Camp Emmanuel*

together in prayer and discussion. I had a profitable meeting with all of our pastors during the afternoon as we talked about future ministry leaders and how we as an association of churches and pastors can work together. I was excited to learn that each of our churches has students in our Bible Institute, which is led by John Mark Steel. The Bible Institute has 34 students enrolled this semester, and FEBU, the Bible college that is a cooperative effort with several other fundamental mission boards, has 21 students. Matias Espinel is the director of that ministry. I was encouraged to hear how Pastor Ovidio in El Cerro, who recently retired, is shepherding his church through a pastoral transition. They still don't have a new pastor, but the focus is on younger men in the congregation who are empowered to preach and lead. Though Pastor Carlos Olivera in Pando hasn't officially retired yet, he is doing the same with some of his young men. The other pastors are also working with young men and giving them more opportunities to speak.

On Wednesday and Thursday, Bill and I split the time speaking in two sessions in the mornings and one at night. Before arriving, we sent lesson notes to Pedro that he had translated into Spanish. I used much of my free time to use the notes to convert my PowerPoint slides into Spanish. We also enjoyed spending some of our time in small group studies.

We concluded the workers' conference on Friday morning so those traveling would have plenty of time to return to their respective ministries. Friday afternoon was catch-up time for Bill and me as our email inboxes were overflowing. I then turned my attention to preparations for my presentations the next week.

Heroes come in all shapes and sizes. Pedro could not do what he does without the help of his wife Patricia, who spent much of her time in the kitchen preparing delicious meals. Maxi, their 6'6" son, who wears a size 14 shoe, is studying at the university, but he also was around much of the time to help.

Sunday was a full day. Matias Rios and his wife Sara, daughter of Carlos and Beatriz, took Bill and me into Montevideo for the Sunday morning service at Calvary Temple. We were greeted by Pastor Gustavo, his

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## Homegrown Heroes

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Sara Rios translating for Bill Hill at Calvary Temple of Montevideo

wife Alejandra, and a familiar group of ministry friends. Matias leads the sound and technology ministry, and his brother and sister-in-law, Luis and Ruth, help lead the music ministry. The song service was energetic and worshipful with a healthy blend of new and old hymns. Bill preached and Sara did an outstanding job translating. At the end of the service, we were privileged to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Following a delicious lunch at the church, Pedro picked up Chicha and me and drove us three hours to Calvary Temple in Durazno.



Jose Kowalczyk with Jeff in Durazno

We were greeted by Pastor Jose Kowalczyk. He will be 82 years old in April. He officially retired last year but is still carrying the burden of much of the ministry. He has two wonderful families that the church has empowered to take leadership. We enjoyed a delightful time of worship as I spoke, and Chicha translated again for me. Following the service, I met with the entire church family to discuss future plans for the ministry. After a light dinner, we returned to camp and arrived around 1 AM.

Family Camp began on Monday morning with a group of over 60 participants. This was Bill's last day in Uruguay, so he preached two practical messages on the family. At tea time at 6 PM, the kitchen workers prepared *tortas fritas*, those chewy and delicious snacks made from fried dough which are like a hug from the heart of Uruguay. Pair them up with a scoop of dulce de leche and you will want to move to Uruguay as a missionary. The crew filled a sack for Bill to take with him on the airplane. After he finished his last message, he was given a Camp Emanuel T-shirt with his name on the back and the number 50 for the 50th anniversary of the camp.



2025 Family Camp at Camp Emmanuel

I preached the remaining eight sessions over the next four days. My subject was "Your Missionary Family," the same subject I preached in Michigan. I added a challenging biographical sermon on "The Family Legacy of Faith of Adoniram Judson." Matias Acevedo, nephew of Pastor Ovidio Acevedo, translated for us all week. He pastors Iglesia Biblica La Tuna, about twenty minutes from our camp.



Matias Acevedo translating for Bill Hill

The temperatures for the week were very hot with daily heat indexes over 100 degrees. For the last couple of days, we moved our sessions into the dining room because it has air conditioning. I was also honored with a 50th-anniversary T-shirt with my name.

For my last weekend, Chicha and I were with Pastor Alberto Diaz and his wife Carolina at Emanuel Church in San Fernando. Leading the music was Pastor Pablo Billafan's son Jefferson, who is married to Alberto's daughter Analía. Along with their son, Ivan, we enjoyed a delicious lunch at the Pastor's house. They have added a few classic pieces of furniture that they rescued from the EMU Mission House before it was sold last year. Later that afternoon we drove a couple of miles away where we spoke at Iglesia Cristiana Emanuel of Mont Grande. Pastor Jose Kowalczyk's sister Zulma is married to the pastor, Carlos Lopez, and his brother



Alberto Diaz at Monte Grande Church

Alejandro goes to that church. We then drove with Pastor Alberto to another church that is without a pastor that he is helping. Iglesia Bautista Ebenezer is in Las Piedras, north of Montevideo. We then drove back to Chicha's house and Pedro picked me up to stay with him for my last night in Uruguay. My return flight left on Monday night.

As I reflect on my seventeen days in Uruguay, I echo Paul's sentiment when he expressed his love for the Philippian believers in *chapter 1 verse 7*, "I have you in my heart." I celebrate these *Homegrown Heroes*, many of whom are now with the Lord, such as Fred and Seva Dabold, and George and Marilyn Jensen. We had a lady at our family camp named Mercedes who is over 100 years old. She was led to Christ many years ago under the ministry of Ursula Thiesen, who went to Heaven this past year. Our ministry in Uruguay has a heritage of faithfulness, but there is also tremendous hope for the future as we focus on raising that next generation of *Homegrown Heroes*.

A week earlier, just before he left Uruguay, I asked Bill Hill what encouraged him the most from this trip. He mentioned the number of pastors who are intentionally working to train the next generation. He mentioned Gaby Gomez, Gustavo de Oliveira, and Rubito Rodriguez who shared with him how they are working with young men and how they are using Bill's materials. He was especially encouraged by our youngest pastor, Nico Gomez, who serves in Tacuarembó. Nico is 38 years old, and he already is trying to train his people to think this way. He has requested more materials from Bill that he can use in his ministry.



Nico & Valeria working in the kitchen at camp with their son, Matias

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To view photos from Jeff's trip and to listen to the message "Homegrown Heroes," follow this link: <https://emuinternational.org/uruguay2025/> †

## Answer to a Mother's Prayer - and a Ministry Need

by Josué Fabricio Méndez, newest employee at Camp Emmanuel, Guazuvirá, Uruguay

My name is Fabricio Méndez, the youngest of five siblings. I was born in Tacuarembó, Uruguay, into a humble and hard-working family. Due to my father's work, we moved to Cerro del Arbolito in the countryside, where I spent much of my childhood. Arbolito (*Little Tree*) is a small village surrounded by stunning landscapes and majestic hills. My adolescence brought a return to the city so I could complete my secondary studies.

My early years were profoundly shaped by my mother's unwavering faith. Before my birth, she encountered the Gospel while living on a ranch in the interior. A missionary named Graciela (*Pereira*), along with other devoted individuals, shared the Word of God in remote areas, a ministry that reached my mother. Though my father was strongly opposed to her seeking God, my mother remained steadfast in her prayers, facing significant challenges in order to attend church and be with other Christians. These gatherings often took place beneath a tree in the open field. She was supported by loving sisters in Christ who helped her overcome obstacles. Her devotion bore fruit as a result of one of her answered prayers: my birth.

During my childhood and adolescence, I delighted in attending church, learning from devoted Bible teachers and participating in camps where the Word of God resonated deeply. The verse "*Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it,*" (*Proverbs 22:6*) mirrors my journey.

Despite rebelling during my teenage years, the teachings from my mother and childhood persisted as a guiding voice, even when I strayed into sin. At fourteen, I began to drift further away from God,



*'Josué' Fabricio & Katha Méndez*

creating a growing chasm between myself and the Lord. Friends led me down paths filled with temptation, which fueled my passion for vehicles and speed, resulting in my participation in dangerous motorcycle races without proper safety equipment. Yet, even as I distanced myself from God, His protective hand remained.

Far from the Lord, I sought stability and love but only found disappointment, betrayal, and fleeting relationships. Though people spoke to me of my need for God, I angrily rejected them, hardened by my pride.

A pivotal moment came with the birth of my son, Renato, from a relationship that eventually ended. Renato was born with a cleft lip and palate, requiring him to undergo numerous surgeries. Witnessing his struggles brought me to times of prayer, but not full surrender. When Renato faced domestic violence from his stepfather, I realized only God could protect him. This storm brought me back to church, where I was welcomed with love, despite my years of rejection and sinful actions.

One Sunday, alone in my home, the Word of God confronted me. I realized my hardened heart needed genuine repentance.

Through the counsel of a faithful couple, I unburdened my soul's need, and I embraced the Gospel, finding abundant grace.

From that moment, everything changed. Church became a joy and hymns filled me with purpose. The Lord transformed my life and vision, instilling a desire to serve Him fully. My prayer for a godly wife was answered, and today I rejoice in a Christian home, serving alongside her in ministry. I treasure each day as a gift from God, and I long to share the Gospel with those in pain, knowing He rescued me from sin and despair.

*"Even when we were dead in trespasses, [He] made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)." (Ephesians 2:5) †*

### ALONG THE WAY . . .

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On April 16-19 another **Pastors' School** will be held in BanLung, Cambodia. **JD Crowley** has prepared literature in Khmer on a biblical view and use of money and personal finances.

Finally, **Tim Chapman** is returning to Lima, Peru, for a dual purpose: another theology conference and to continue packing his family's belongings to be shipped back to the USA later this summer. The guest speaker at the theology conference April 17-19 will be A.J Gibson, a former missionary to Mexico. Tim's travels will cover April 14-26.

We thank the Lord for all of you who continue to have an interest in the ministries of EMU International. Thank you for your prayers, and when possible, your financial support. †

*Email: [office@emuinternational.org](mailto:office@emuinternational.org)*

*Website: [www.emuinternational.org](http://www.emuinternational.org)*

*Phone: (864) 268-9267*