

JIM AND PHYLLIS CHILDRESS

Corona update 33

February 2022

Dear faithful Rope Holders,

We have been busy with end of year activities and vacation time activities as school is ready to start with in-person classes. December had mother's day, Christmas eve, Christmas day and New year's eve activities.

When we returned to Panama in November, omicron was raging and causing up to 30 deaths per day. Deaths have since decreased to less than 10 per day as we have almost 8100 covid deaths recorded during the pandemic. Today they announced only two deaths, but we are still under the nationwide mask mandate

Because of the threat from omicron, Carnival (Mardi-gras) was canceled again this year, this time at the last minute. Fines were announced for any group type party celebrations. We did not see any big celebrations that normally happen during the several days of Carnival, although some people took to the beaches as a family activity.

We used Fat-Tuesday (a national holiday) to get a special project done at church. It was the only day as a holiday instead of the traditional 3.5 days for promoting the desires of the flesh. Six guys came to work and we didn't finish until almost six pm. Felix was one of the six. I found out later that as we were ready to leave, Johniel reactivating an on-going conversation, asking Felix for clarification about his salvation - which resulted in Felix making a profession of faith after the rest of us left. Some of the men are unemployed, so I took a food box to the six on Sunday. This effort laid the groundwork to lay a concrete floor in the future for an additional class space or fellowship area.

Churches in the area have had different camps in January and February.... some virtual (interesting challenge) or limited in-person camps. One camp was a combination of both. Some of our young people attended more than one camp.

In February, we had our VBS for five days - that was the first time we could do that in years. My assistant pastor and his wife were in charge and did a great job. They had 19 of the young people helping in different areas. It was a rotation style system with all ages moving to 4 different stages during the daily activities. We had 55 pre-registered kids the first day (ages 5-12) but VBS grew to 88 kids on Friday. I was Samuel one day and John the Apostle another day, sharing four times each day segments of Bible History. We were glad to see several children receive Christ during the week.

Months ago, we had to tear down a wall and rebuild it. We transferred the rubble to the other side of the property, laid a foundation for a concrete floor, leveled the rubble, and recently poured the floor. For now, we have a portable tent awning for a Sunday School class. We are saving for a metal roof for the area that will remain an open-air classroom. The roof will need four posts, a number of metal roofing 2 by 4's (6 - 20 ft and 6 - 24ft) and seven metal sheets of tin roofing about 20 feet long.

Another church has the opportunity to buy the property they have rented for 5 years. They need to pay

\$10,000 down and then pay \$300 per month to pay the other \$25,000. The owner is financing interest free.

Our church, as well as several other churches, are doing a "30 pieces of silver" offering Easter week. We will give that offering to the church buying their property. The last church I pastored still does the same offering (we started it years ago) and they are dedicating their offering to this project as well.

The church that needs the down payment is doing the same. I presented the plan to the church and to motivate the congregation, I promised to match their offering. There are several conditions, like I only match the special offering, not tithe or missions. I will only match the congregational offering.

The pastor of this church is a missionary from Mexico, so I will not match donations unrelated to the sacrificial donations from the congregation. My philosophy of ministry is to do enough to encourage, but not enough to make them dependent. If the church pays the \$10,000 down payment during 2022, someone is donating another \$5,000, and that will lower the debt to \$20,000, with monthly installments.

We are presently helping a coastal church replace their roof. The mother church is located another hour and a half away as far as river mouths go. Then it is a three hour walk to the mountainous region, where their daughter church is located. The present roof is six years old and made of palm branches. Those branches are hard to find now and must be bought if any are available, so the church is opting for a metal roof. The faithfulness of the leadership is worthy of some financial encouragement. These people have very limited income, (basically live off the land) so some assistance now is appropriate.

The purchase can take place when ocean conditions permit travel. Men will travel up the coast several rivers to the edge of the province before taking land transportation over the mountain range to the next major city in central Panamá. The added costs include 65 gallons of gas/oil, transportation by bus to the purchase site, shipping charges from the store to the boat (several hours away). The challenge is going to be carrying those materials 3 hours from the riverbank to the village where the church is located. Volunteers are already lined up to carry the metal when it arrives. I am still trying to figure out how the church found this small village mission field so far away from their "stomping ground," considering their transportation limitations.

We are preparing mentally for the economic challenges that world events are creating and I can embrace the financial challenges coming as a result. They just announced gas is going up 30 cents a gallon on Friday. For me, that is nothing to get angry about. What I am having a hard time with is that the U.S. is supporting the Russian aggression by buying Russian crude. I wrote the White House days ago to ask: Why we are paying our enemies to kill our friends? I am rejecting embracing that situation. That situation does frustrate me.

Thank you for the prayers and financial support that allows us to continue our ministry.

Fishing and feeding,

Jim