

Jason and Abby Torgeson

Regional Consultants for Latin America



Who is our neighbor?

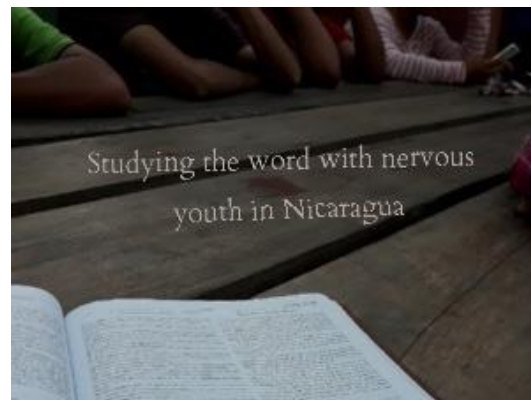
Nicaragua. Venezuela. El Salvador. Honduras. Colombia.

For most North Americans, the names of these countries sound vaguely familiar from news reports of problems happening "over there." The details get lost in an incessant barrage of media reports, and even the most gripping stories quickly get lost in the hustle and bustle of daily life.

But for those of us who work in Latin America, the challenges facing these and other countries in the region are very real. Even here in Costa Rica, which is a stable and relatively comfortable country, gang violence has left its mark. One congregation has had to give up land rights to the local narco mafia in order to prevent a massacre. Another young leader tells the story of being caught in the cross-fire of a shoot-out while walking home from church. The bullet hit her Bible, which literally saved her life.

Still, the countries mentioned above have experienced even greater hardship. Millions have fled their homes, often with little more than the clothes on their back, just trying to survive another day. They pour into neighboring countries, seeking help and an opportunity to raise their families in peace.

At first, they were welcomed with open arms. Latin Americans are nothing if hospitable. But over time the stress and strain and growing pains of unending series of crises is beginning to take its toll. Ecuador has declare state of emergency. Costa Rica is struggling to contain angry anti-immigrat protests. Brazil has deployed troops to its border.



It's easy to depersonalize millions, but what happens when "those poor people over there" become our neighbors?

How do we respond to the young Venezuelan woman in the grocery store who doesn't have the right currency to purchase groceries for her husband and toddler? How do we treat the Nicaraguan construction worker who has left his agricultural engineering studies to do grunt labor in a foreign land? How do we help the pastor who fled with his family after learning that his name was on a hit list?

We have seen their faces. We know their names. We have even prayed and cried with the trembling voice on the other end of the phone that tells us in hushed tones, "No one knows we are here."

Immigration is a challenging topic, and we realize that governments have to make hard decisions in the interest of the citizens they were elected to protect. Still, may we as citizens of the Kingdom never forget our biblical mandate to love our neighbors and to care for the foreigners in our midst.

They are real people with very real stories, and our brothers and sisters in the Church of God are not exempt from the struggle. At this moment at least four Latin American pastors from our movement are outside of their home countries, watching, waiting, and praying to discern what God would have them do next. Pray for these faithful servants who want nothing more than to love and serve their people in the place they call home.

Pray also for countless others who remain in harm's way, working in the trenches day in and day out to love their neighbors well. In a world of intense darkness, they offer a beacon of hope that transforms one life, one family, one community at a time. They too are our neighbors, our brothers and sisters, and fellow citizens of the Kingdom of God.

In the days to come, whether we are watching the news of a crisis far away or interacting with an immigrant on the street, may we pause for a moment and whisper a prayer. Then may we open our hearts to respond in obedience to how God may be calling us to love our neighbor.

(As a practical suggestion, if God is leading you to help us respond to emerging ministry needs, including crisis situations, in Latin America, click [here](#) to support our regional project line, which includes funds that can be dispatched quickly when unexpected situations arise.)

Vancouver Visit

During the month of August we had the opportunity to host Peter Henrichs and Bryan Schmidt from the Vancouver First Church. Our original plan had been to take them to Nicaragua to work with our churches there, but the current situation made it impossible.

Instead, we took them to visit some Nicaraguan leaders who are staying in Costa Rica while they await the right opportunity to return to their community. For safety reasons we can't publish more details about the family, but it was a

blessing to spend some time getting to know them and to help provide an opportunity for them to relax and enjoy some time with one another. We shared in a powerful time of prayer and worship, remembering that together serve a God who transcends borders and language barriers.

Bryan and Peter also had the opportunity to connect with leaders in San Jo Los Guido, Nicoya, Tucurrique, and Las Vueltas. The pastors of the latter churches accompanied us on a really fun tour of the mountainous region east of San José. They helped us hire a tractor/wagon that took us around the countryside for about four hours. None of them had ever taken the tour but really enjoyed the chance to show us the beauty of the area where they live.



Although our teams do not always do the same kind of "work" that has been done on traditional mission trips, we feel that taking the opportunity to focus on building relationships is critical to successful ministry. We firmly believe that getting to know people allows us to find out the best way to respond to their needs, and even just the process of spending time together can have more impact on all of us than we often realize. Most pastors know that an important part of ministry is just showing up, and we believe the same is true here.

Please pray for Vancouver Church and for other congregations that have sent teams or plan to send groups to Costa Rica or other parts of the world. Pray that God would continue to give them and us a vision for how to build

strategic relationships that allow all parties involved to bless and encourage one another in our walk with the Lord.

Teaching in the Middle of the World

In the month of August Abby had the opportunity to travel to Ecuador to teach in the seminary's annual intensive week. The classes are normally held in Quito, but this year the decision was made to try it in another location to see if the change would allow more students to come. Instead of the usual 25-30 participants, 78 students made the trip to the coastal town of Same!

Despite the change in location and increased enrollment, everything went very smoothly, and Abby was very impressed to see the way that the Downings successfully navigated the details and delegated many responsibilities to the Ecuadorian leaders, who are learning to run the program themselves.

Abby's assigned topic was biblical sexuality, a challenging but important subject that had never before been taught at the seminary and had rarely been discussed in any church setting. Some signed up for the class out of sheer curiosity, but many later expressed appreciation for the opportunity to examine God's perfect design for sexuality and to learn some ways to respond when human beings choose not to use the gift the way He intended.



Abby also enjoyed getting to spend some time with Eric and Bonnie Newell a with Jorge Palacios, guest lecturers that came from the U.S. to teach ab Christian education and leadership development. After the seminary we had chance to attend a new church's first baptismal service and celebrate with new brothers and sisters in the faith.

One newsletter does not have enough space to share all the stories of the week, but we know that the Spirit of God is alive and active in Ecuador! We are excited about the churches being planted and about the ever-expanding group of young leaders that are preparing to serve the Lord in those congregations and others not yet imagined. Please pray for the leaders there, as well as the Downing family, who are working hard to prepare and train the Ecuadorian church to take their ministry to the next level. We are seeing the fruit!

Click [here](#) to support the growing work of the seminary and [here](#) to support our colleagues the Downings.

Other Prayer Requests and Praises

- Pray for Pastor **Arturo** in Costa Rica, as his family is walking through some dark and difficult challenges.
- Praise God for a wonderful women's convention in Costa Rica and for **Alanis**, a young woman who accepted the invitation to preach and did an amazing job. The future of the Church of God is in good hands with the next generation!
- Praise God that Timothy's School in **Paraguay** recently obtained the funding they need to purchase land for their own building. Pray for Jason as he travels to Paraguay this month with two pastors from First Church of God in St. Joseph, Michigan.
- Our responsibilities as regional coordinators come with **increased travel expenses**, so we need additional ministry supporters. If God is leading you to partner with what He is doing in Latin America, click [here](#).



Your Passion
Connected

PO Box 2420, Anderson, IN 46018
chogglobal.org • 800-848-2464
www.facebook.com/chogglobal



GLOBAL STRATEGY
CHURCH OF GOD MINISTRIES