

# GUATEMALA NEWSLETTER



Byron, Snezana, Hawatthia, Jose, and Alex on January 3, 2024

Our prayer is that all of you are doing well and enjoying the blessings that come from Jesus. Allow us to share with you our most recent newsletter to bring you up to date with our lives and ministry. Soon, God willing, we will send out a separate newsletter regarding the work of ITL.

To start, we will update you on some events from the end of last year. Then, we will report on the latest with us since we have returned.

## Political Situation in Guatemala

In October of 2023, the political situation here in Guatemala became very volatile. There were certain players in the government who were making efforts to keep the incoming government from taking office. President Bernardo Arevalo had won the elections back in August of 2023 and it was a complete upset for the establishment. We are not affirming that he will be any better for the country, but the overall feeling was that will of the people needed to be respected. As a result of the efforts to hinder the new administration from taking office, the Guatemalan people began to protest. They began with road blocks at four locations. After about 10 days, there were 144 road blocks and the capital city was basically under siege. Nothing was able to enter in or go out of the city. Businesses were closed, as well as schools, banks, gas stations, and even grocery stores. Things were looking more and more as if we were headed toward a civil war. We were already scheduled to leave Guatemala during this time, but because of the blocked roads, it did not appear we were going to be able to leave the country.

In our hearts, we wanted to stay in case the church needed us, but we really could not do anything to help. Also, the local brethren encouraged us to get out if we could. Thanks to the Lord, on the day we needed to leave, the roads we needed to take were opened and we were able to get to the airport and to depart on our scheduled flight. After we left, it took another 10-14 days for things to settle down. Upon returning, we were not sure how the inauguration was going to go. Thankfully, on January 14, the new president took office. However, it was not without some difficulty. Please pray for this new administration so that it will bring a change for the better!



The points of protests



## End-of-Year Travels

We were blessed to begin our travels by attending the lectureship hosted by the **Linder Road church of Christ** in Meridian, Idaho. The church there was kind enough to help with our expenses. Hawatthia is a regular speaker there. The Benitez family was able to go simply to enjoy a very blessed time of edification. The church there treated



Hi teaching at Linder Road

us graciously and we are so thankful to the brethren for their kind hospitality.

From Idaho, we went to various places, reporting on our work to our supporting churches before going to Europe to visit Snezana's family and to participate in the annual **Euro-American Family Retreat** held in Rothenburg ob der Tauber, Germany. We were in charge of the teen program and had 13 teens from various countries. **Ebony Wooden**, who has come to Guatemala on mission trips, joined us this year in Europe and helped Snezana with the teen girls' classes.



*The teens and their teachers.*

After the retreat, we returned to the U.S. to continue our visits and reports. We are so grateful to all the churches who received us so kindly and to all the Christians who hosted us in their homes, shared meals with us, and made us feel very special. We returned to Guatemala at the beginning of January, in time for our preaching school, ITL (Instituto Teologico Latinoamericano), to resume classes and for **Jose** and **Alex** to begin their school year.

All of us were able to stay relatively healthy throughout most of our travels. However, in December, while in Denver, Hawatthia had a health scare when he began to develop a pain on the left side of his ribs that became intolerable. Byron took him to an urgent care. While there, the doctor determined he had bilateral pulmonary emboli. Hi was admitted to St. Anthony Hospital for more testing. Thankfully he got to go home that evening. We are so grateful to a brother from Mississippi who provided a three-month supply of the medication that Hi will need to take. We are also thankful to others who offered their

financial assistance and prayers. Currently, he is following up with a pulmonologist here in Guatemala, who will determine what will follow next, if anything. Please continue to pray for Hawatthia's full recovery. Shortly before coming home, Byron and Snezana got sick. Byron was well after a couple days, but Snezana's illness developed into sinusitis. She was prescribed some antibiotics and recovered soon after arriving home.

As we mentioned earlier, the boys started school already. Classes for them began on January 19. The school year will end in October. Jose is now in 5th grade and Alex is in 4th. They are both healthy and growing. We were able to celebrate Alex's 10th birthday last November with family in California. Jose will turn 12 next month. His voice has already begun to change! We are so grateful to God for them and ask that you pray for their physical and spiritual development.



*Jose and Alex starting their school year.*

## Linda Vista

When we left Guatemala last October on our way to the U.S., our preacher and his family, **Walter and Nohelis Dardon**, still had not returned to Linda Vista. For those of you who may not have heard, he and his family had to flee the village in July after his step-father and two of his half-brothers got into an altercation with some gang members in the neighboring village. Because of this, these brothers and all their family members were threatened with death. This, unfortunately, included Walter and his family, though they were not involved with the incident at all. That is sadly how the gang members operate in this country. Walter and his family were able to take shelter in an empty house of one of our members. After six months, it was determined that Walter was not going to be able to come back to Linda Vista. Because of this, he presented his two-month resignation and will end his time with the church with the last day of February.

We are thankful that God provided some Christians in the U.S. who were willing to financially support Walter and his family with a five-year commitment. As a result, the Dardons were able to find a new place to live, they were able to get their children into new schools to start the school year in January, and will be starting a new church plant in the city of Escuintla. Currently, there is only a non-institutional, one-cup, church there, so we believe that this will be a good opportunity for the Dardon family in a city of about 187,000 people. Also, two other graduates, **Jonathan and Oneida Godinez**, live in this



area, so we believe that these two families will be able to work together to build up the body of Christ in this city. Please pray for the Dardon and Godinez families and for the new work there.



The Dardon and Godinez families, with Fernando Martinez

Since Walter was not been able to work within the city limits of Linda Vista for six months, he was visiting members who lived outside of Linda Vista and held Bible studies in their homes. The men of the church have been sharing the teaching and preaching responsibilities and now that Walter has officially resigned, Hawatthia and Byron are helping with the preaching and teaching schedule and other responsibilities until we are able to find another brother to come work with the church. Please pray for both of us as we fill this void so that we can help the church not only to remain stable, but also to grow and mature during this transition period. We are also so thankful that we have several brothers and sisters who are willing to be involved to make sure the church grows during this time.

As we have mentioned Jonathan above, we would like to ask you to please pray for him. He hurt his back at work last year and has been suffering with lots of pain for the past several months. In January, his condition deteriorated so much that the doctor gave him a leave of absence from work and ordered various tests. He ordered physical therapy and if Jonathan does not improve, he will have to have back surgery. This will be determined at the end of February. Considering how inadequate public hospital services are here and the high risk of back surgery, we ask you to please join us in prayer for Jonathan and his full recovery, as well as for his involvement in the ministry in his area along with Walter and his family. Also, pray for his mom **Teresa** and sister **Reina** who have started studying with Walter.

Finally, in regards to Linda Vista, the church is currently working on the paperwork to get the church building and the property transferred into the church's name. Previously, these things had been in the name of another legal entity established by the brother who donated the

property. Now, after much effort, Linda Vista has its legal status and can receive its property.

### Alta Verapaz

Last year, the five ITL staff members traveled to Alta Verapaz to visit the preachers in San Cristobal, Las Pacayas, and Santa Cruz. After meeting with them, the preacher in Santa Cruz, **Francisco Ramos**, decided to accept our recommendation of working with the church in Las Pacayas, where his son, **Abner Ramos**, is laboring. We recommended this because Francisco had spent over a year seeking to restore the members the church lost during the pandemic (all of them except his family), and he did not have any success. So, we encouraged him to join efforts with his son to build up the church in Las Pacayas. We are hopeful that the work there will grow and prosper. Please pray for all the works in this area.

### Miscellaneous

On January 24, Hawatthia and Byron traveled to **Chuchipaca Segundo**, a small village in the department of Chichicastenango. Byron was invited to speak at a special day dedicated to the transition in Bible school committee members for the local church. They wanted Byron to



define ministry, to address our motivations for serving in ministry, and to discuss some obstacles to ministry. The event was well attended and the church treated us with great hospitality. The church there changes



committee members every two years and they make quite an event over the matter.

Our **Tuesday night Bible study**, which we initiated last year (originally on Wednesday nights) is going very well. We average between 15 - 20 people in attendance each week and we are beginning to see more visitors attend. We started the study because it was becoming increasingly difficult to make it to Linda Vista for the mid-week study. When we started the study, we chose the Gospel of John as our text. Currently, we are in chapter 12. Please pray for this group to continue to grow. Our hope and plans are to initiate a new church plant once we can get Linda Vista on a good and stable path.



*Tuesday night Bible study*

At the beginning of February, Byron and Hi traveled to the U.S. for the **Freed-Hardeman University** lectures. Byron was invited again to speak for the **Hispanic Seminar**, which is held the weekend before the English-speaking lectures. They both also took advantage of being in the U.S. and visited some supporting churches. During the week of the lectures, they manned our ITL booth.



*The Hispanic Seminar at FHU*

Thank you for reading our newsletter. We are hoping to send out another newsletter soon that will give you an update on our preaching school, ITL. Please continue to pray for us and for the work in this country.

We love you and thank God for you!

En Cristo,

*Hawatthia  
Byron and Snezana*