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Advent Prayer Letter

Dear companions in mission,

Greetings from Costa Rica as the days whirl toward the start of Advent. In the midst of final papers and year-end reports, Advent insists that we make space in our lives for expecting something new. Advent always catches me off guard, not prepared to make preparations.

Commercial outlets here, of course, have been into Christmas sales for several weeks now. Snowmen, Christmas trees, Santa figures and reindeer seem to be everywhere, very out of place in this land of palm trees. Traditional nativity scenes can still be found in homes. This time of year tamales abound, wrapped in banana leaves and steamed.

As I write, I have been packing to leave on Tuesday, November 28, for the next meeting of the international Reformed-Pentecostal Dialogue on mission. This year our meeting is being hosted by the Pentecostal team at Alphacrucis College, an institutional of the Australian Christian Churches (Assemblies of God), in Sydney. Our discussion at this meeting will focus on the church and mission. Our teams will also have the opportunity to meet with representatives of the Uniting Church of Australia, the World Communion of Reformed Churches member church in Australia. Our meetings begin on Friday, December 1st and conclude on Tuesday, December 5th. I hope you will accompany our deliberations with your prayers. Before I return to Costa Rica on December 10th, I am going to visit my friend from Union Seminary, Elizabeth Nolan, a pastor in the Uniting Church in Brisbane. I am looking forward to learning about life and ministry in another part of the world. Of course, I also hope to see kangaroos and koalas.

I will return to Costa Rica for our last week of the term at the Latin American Biblical University. The students who have been reflecting with me on eschatology in times of climate change will present their final papers on December 11th. Almost all of our students in residence will be returning to their home countries. It has been such a privilege to watch them grow while they have been here and to send them back with new skills and perspectives.

On December 19th, Javier and I will be traveling to Portland, Oregon, where we will spend Christmas with our daughter, Tamara. My brother, Gary, is planning to drive up from San Francisco as well. We are looking forward to a quiet family time, though we also hope to see friends in the area. Javier and I will return to Costa Rica on December 28th. Though the offices of the UBL don't open until January 8th, I will have a lot of work to get ready to teach three classes next term.

Reading corner

As my students and I have been thinking about eschatology in times of climate change, a book that has been stirring my thoughts is Catherine Keller's *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World*. Keller wrote the book

as the last century was ending, before the effects of climate change became so evident. In this richly woven and wide-ranging text, she explores the ambiguities of apocalyptic thinking, which in her analysis provides the subtext for much of Western culture. She asks if we can construct a counterapocalypse that will open up historical possibilities instead of cutting them off through cataclysmic destruction. There is lots of food for thought here.

UBL profile

This month I want to ask your prayers for Grettel Fernandez, who has been part of the maintenance staff at the UBL for just over seven years. On October 9th, Grettel severely injured her left hand when she ran into a glass door in our multipurpose room. Though the cut was very deep, the doctors believe that the tendon was not damaged. The wound has healed well. Grettel started physical therapy on November 17th, a very painful process, to regain motion in her fingers. She is hoping and praying she will be able to return to work in January.

Grettel has lived her entire life here in the neighbor where the UBL is located. Her 16-year-old son, Andres, has just finished his penultimate year at the local public high school. He dreams of studying medicine, with a special interest in pathology, though he knows the competition to get into the public University of Costa Rica is very stiff. Grettel and Andres live with Grettel's mother, Zelmira, and Grettel's brother in an apartment owned by the UBL in the neighborhood. Though Costa Rica has disability insurance for work-related injuries, it doesn't replace all of Grettel's lost salary. She is very anxious to get back to work and we miss her gregarious presence at the UBL. I hope you will join me in praying for Grettel and her family.

Closing thoughts

As this academic year comes to a close, we are very grateful for the way the work of the UBL has deepened and grown during the first year of Elizabeth Cook's tenure as our president. Our student body has almost doubled to 180 students from 20 countries in our university-level programs. As we look to the coming year, we hope to continue to impact the lives of students and churches throughout the continent. Thank you for your prayers and support that make it possible for me to be part of the work on the UBL.

In Advent hope,

Karla Koll