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Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Greetings from Costa Rica and the Latin American Biblical University (UBL) as we continue our journey through Lent. On March 24<sup>th</sup>, a church in St. Louis asked me to share via Skype in their weekly Lenten breakfast about what Lent means to me. I told them that I experience Lent as a time to stop and look around and realize that things are not as they should be in the world. We are so very far from living God's desires for God's creation. Lent is a time to let our hearts be broken by the things that break God's heart.

During Lent this year, the thoughts and prayers of the UBL community have been drawn to two situations close to us. On March 8<sup>th</sup>, International Women's Day, a fire in a government-run youth shelter in Guatemala claimed the lives of 40 teenage girls. In this facility, teenagers who had been abandoned, adolescents removed from their homes because of abuse, and disabled children whose families could not care for them, as well as youth who had run into trouble with the law, were all warehoused together in overcrowded conditions. The shelter was already under judicial review for abuse committed by staff, including rape. Dozens of teenagers had escaped the day before. The girls who were captured by police and returned were locked in a classroom overnight where they continued to protest. Apparently, the girls themselves lit a mattress on fire in the hope that staff would let them out of the classroom. The staff didn't unlock the door and 40 young women lost their lives. Throughout Latin America, indeed in much of the world, groups of young people are considered disposable as violence and neglect cut short their lives. We ask you to join us in praying for the families who have lost children in Guatemala as well as for ministries working with children throughout Latin America.

The destruction and loss of life caused by flooding in Peru is also on our hearts. We have six students from Peru in residence as well as many graduates there who keep us informed about what is happening. A coastal El Niño, an unusual warming of the surface temperature of the Pacific Ocean, is bringing torrential rains to the Peruvian coast, an area that typically sees little to no rainfall. The official death toll stands at 75, with tens of thousands already left homeless. Over half the country has been declared in a state of emergency. While the cyclical El Niño phenomenon has been documented for decades, climate change caused by human activity is making these weather events much more intense and more destructive. Please pray for the affected communities in Peru and for all of those working in disaster response.

In our family, we have been dealing with health challenges. Tests at the end of February

confirmed the Javier, my husband, is now diabetic. Both of us have a lot of experience with diabetes in our immediate families, so we have a good understanding of how to manage the disease. Still, it's hard for Javier, as a typical Nicaraguan, to restrict the quantities of tortillas and rice he eats. It is a very good thing that he likes vegetables and has never really cared for sweets. His blood sugar levels are now under control. Though he is taking small amounts of insulin now, we hope that he won't be insulin dependent. He is going to spend the first week of April in Nicaragua. We'll see how he does when he doesn't have much control over his diet. We appreciate your prayers for us as we continue adjusting to this new reality in our lives.

After months of planning, our John A. Mackay Conference on Latin American Theology is happening this month. We are expecting about 60 people to participate. The conference opens on Tuesday, April 18. Over the following two days, thirty-five academic papers will be delivered. Elsa Tamez, the former president of the UBL, and Luis Rivera Pagan are coming to deliver public lectures. As we approach the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, here in Latin America we are asking what has been the relationship between religious reform and social change. I am the coordinator of the conference, so I have my hands quite full. I am looking forward to the discussions and to meeting many of the people with whom I have been corresponding.

Along with the work of coordinating the conference, my duties as chair of the theology department continue as we prepare to end the current semester and start a new semester in early May. Our distant students need a lot of encouragement to set aside time from their ministries to dedicate to their studies. The e-mail messages I receive warm my heart. Almost every day a student writes to tell me how much he or she appreciates the opportunity to study with the UBL.

### **UBL Profile**

To help with the logistical details of the conference on Latin American theology, we have hired one of our students, Daniel Mora. A couple of years ago, Dani was a student in my introduction to the history of Christianity course. Later for my mission class he wrote his final project on Young Life (Vida Joven in Spanish), the ministry that is his passion. He told me that he got involved in Vida Joven as a high school student starting in 2006. By 2009, he was a volunteer leader in the organization. Soon he began to notice that no one in leadership had any theological training. He wanted to be able to guide the young people into a deeper understanding of the Bible, so he started to study at the UBL in 2012. He has now finished his coursework for his bachelor's degree in Bible. His graduation paper focuses on humor in the Bible. His next step, he told me, is to do a licenciate degree in teaching at the State Distance University (UNED). With that degree, he hopes that he would be able to teach religious education in the public schools here in Costa Rica.

Dani lives with his parents and his two sisters. Together they attend the Roman Catholic parish in Zapote in southeast San Jose. His parents were not thrilled with his decision to study theology. They wondered how he would make a living. Yet, Dani tells me, his parents see how happy and fulfilled he is with his studies and his work with Vida Joven. Dani asks for your prayers for his studies and his plans for his future. He also asks you to pray for Vida Joven here in Costa Rica.

There are currently twenty groups, all located in the greater metropolitan area of the Central Valley. The ministry hopes to reach out to more communities, especially where youth are at risk. Dani also asks for prayers for his family.

### **Reading corner**

As activities to celebrate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformation are getting underway, have you been wondering what the Reformation was all about? For a highly readable introduction to the dynamics of religious and social change in sixteenth century Europe, I recommend Kenneth Appold's *The Reformation: A Brief History*. Ken teaches church history at Princeton Theological Seminary. In a small number of chapters, he describes how an internally divided church evolved into a plurality of church politics over the course of a few decades. He not only focuses on the principal figures of the Reformation and their reforming activities in the cities, but he also asks what was happening to the poor folks in the rural areas, where overall the Reformation did not bring positive changes. This is an excellent beginning point for reflecting on the Reformation's legacy today.

### **Closing thoughts**

On April 21<sup>st</sup>, the Latin American Biblical University (UBL) will be celebrating twenty years as a state-recognized university. Over two decades, the UBL has awarded over 250 bachelor, licentiate and master's degrees. Thousands more women and men have taken courses or participated in our non-university programs. In this anniversary celebration, we are giving thanks for those agencies and churches who have shared our vision and helped make our work possible. Presbyterian World Mission has walked with the UBL long before it became a university. I am grateful for the support from churches and individuals that makes my service here possible. Thank you for your prayers and your financial help.

Though I will be very busy during Holy Week this year preparing for the conference, I look forward to being part of the Emmaus community's remembrance of Jesus' death and the celebration of his resurrection. In a world where there is so much needless death, may we rejoice that death does not have the last word and commit ourselves once again to work for abundant life for all.

In resurrection hope,

Karla

