

March 2010 Prayer Letter

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Grace and peace to you on this day as February draws to a close. I am writing this letter from the Latin American Biblical University (UBL) in San Jose, Costa Rica. When I wrote at the end of January, I did not yet know if I was going to be invited to participate in the annual professors' conference here. The confirmation of my participation came during the first week of February and here I am. The professors' conference this year focused on Latin American theologies. The presence of colleagues from different branches of the UBL in Peru, Chile, Colombia, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, and Guatemala allowed us to celebrate and affirm the way this unique educational project functions across many contexts and touches many lives. Students have the opportunity to do most of their theological study in their own countries and then come to Costa Rica to interact with students and professors from throughout Latin America.

I'll be staying in San Jose another week to continue work on new materials for the teaching of the history of Christianity courses. I love being where I have access to a library and colleagues with whom I can converse. I'll be returning to Guatemala City on March 8.

According to the liturgical calendar, we are now in Lent, a time of reflection on how far we are, as individuals and as societies, from living toward God's hope for God's creation. For me this year, Lent is a time of discernment at many different levels. At the beginning of Lent, I was accompanying a group from the First Presbyterian Church of Winchester, Virginia, in their visit to Guatemala. This church is actively discerning how and with whom they are called to deeper mission involvement in Guatemala. I am grateful for the care they are taking in the process, for the way they listened to the Guatemalans with whom they interacted, and for the opportunity to walk and pray with them. Now that I am halfway through my current term of mission service, I am beginning to discern the next steps in my calling to serve in theological education in Central America. Conversations with colleagues here in Costa Rica are an important part of that process. At the end of March, Tamara and I will be traveling to the US to allow her to visit colleges, a new stage in our family's life. I invite your prayers for these processes of discernment as we all reflect in these days on the suffering in the world and God's call to us to respond.

Since I'm here in Costa Rica, I'm going to miss the services in Guatemala for the World Day of Prayer on March 5. CEDEPCA will once again be hosting a workshop and worship service for women from different churches. The women from the different presbyteries around Quetzaltenango will be holding a service in Olinstepeque. March 8, the day I return to Guatemala, is International Women's Day, a time to remember how women still struggle in many parts of the world for recognition of their basic rights.

When I return to Guatemala, I'll stay in the capital to teach my weekly classes before I return to Quetzaltenango. On Wednesday mornings, six or seven students gather to study

the history of Christianity from the fifteenth century to the twentieth. We are focusing on how Christianity, once primarily a European religion, over the course of six centuries became a world religion, present in many cultures. On Wednesday afternoon, I'm teaching a small group of students how to write basic research papers. Most Thursday mornings I'm meeting with a couple of students who are working through a course on Christian ethics.

I'll go back to Quetzaltenango on March 11. By then, the latest litter of kittens will be a month old. We didn't intend to keep adding to the number of cats in the neighborhood, but Tamara's cat had other ideas. The kittens are very cute and mama cat is much more relaxed this time around.

My husband, Javier, is continuing to work on his thesis. He is finding the process of writing to be slower than he expected, but he is making progress. Tamara continues to find her junior year of high school less than challenging, but an online course in British literature from Pikes Peak Community College is keeping her somewhat busy and academically engaged.

Tamara and I will be flying into Louisville on March 26 to drive to Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana. Then we will fly to Portland, Oregon to visit Reed College and Lewis and Clark College. Both Tamara and I have Holy Week off, so this was the time we could get away. We'll fly back to Guatemala on Saturday, April 3 in time to celebrate Christ's resurrection. I admit that I feel a bit of anxiety as I contemplate sending Tamara off to college. She has told me on several occasions recently that she is glad she did not grow up in the United States. I wonder how ready she is to live there on her own.

Reading corner

Every Holy Week I find myself turning to a book to which I was first introduced when I was a student here at what was then the Latin American Biblical Seminary in 1984, Jon Sobrino's *Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Approach* (You can find inexpensive copies at abebooks.com). Jon Sobrino is a Jesuit who has spent most of his life in El Salvador. Sobrino's work was and continues to be an important part of efforts in Latin America to recover the historical Jesus and locate Jesus' words and actions within the social context of his time. In 2007, the Vatican notified Sobrino that some of his teachings are erroneous, especially his lack of emphasis on Jesus' divinity. A too-human Jesus is seen a threatening to the power structures of the church. Sobrino helps me remember each year that Jesus' death came as the result of how he lived, announcing the coming of God's reign as good news for the poor. This is the way I also want to live, though I'm often not willing to pay the price. I invite you to let Sobrino help you learn about Jesus.

UBL profile

As I am sure you are aware, an earthquake measuring 8.8 on the Richter scale struck just off the coast of Chile yesterday morning. One of my colleagues currently at the UBL is

from the Center for Pentecostal Studies (CEP) in Concepcion, Chile. CEP is one of the branches of the UBL. Luis Orellana founded CEP with others in 1993 and has worked at CEP ever since. I spent most of the day yesterday with him as news trickled out from the affected zones and the death toll mounted. The epicenter of the quake was only 70 miles from Concepcion. The strict building codes and well-organized civil defense in Chile have kept the death toll low, though the destruction of buildings and infrastructure is extensive. At least half-a-million people have been left homeless. In the early evening, Luis was finally able to contact one of his daughters who told him his wife, son, and other daughter are all fine. Last year, Pentecostals celebrated their hundredth anniversary in Chile. Luis, a lifelong member of the Methodist Pentecostal Church of Chile, has become a historian of this movement. He completed his licenciatura here at the UBL in 2003 and is planning to continue his research in doctoral studies at the University of Santiago. The center currently has about 45 students and thus far has sent eighteen students to study here in San Jose. Luis asks for your prayers for CEP and their efforts to provide theological education in Chile. And of course, he asks that you pray for people and churches in Chile as they organize to recover from this disaster.

As always, I am grateful for your prayers and accompaniment. I welcome messages, even if I don't always have time to respond immediately.

Blessings,

Karla

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