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Coat of Arms from the flag of the Dominican Republic



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Pandemaphobia!

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, our beloved mission supporters! Yes, we're still here in the DR. The pandemic has had its way with us, but it hasn't taken us out. It may have seemed like it, given that we haven't written for awhile. I tried several times, but simply couldn't find the words. These past six months, as I am sure is the case for so many of you, have been incredibly challenging, personally and professionally. Last time I wrote, I laid out all of the immediate ministry changes we made here to continue, or even enhance ministry in the midst of the pandemic. At the time, I thought it was hard. Looking back, it's potentially even harder now than it was back when the pandemic began. But the Lord is good and merciful. He loves us in Christ! He has brought blessings in the midst of cross-bearing difficulties, and will continue to point us to Jesus as we continue forward in life and ministry here in the Dominican Republic.

So what do I mean that it's harder now? I wish I could say that it is harder now "POST-pandemic" but we are not quite post-pandemic yet. Here in the DR we are still under a state of emergency, complete with a daily curfew. Thanks be to God, after three months of completely virtual ministry (services, visits, seminary classes), we were able to return to in-person services on June 7 in all of our missions. At Iglesia Luterana de Pueblo Nuevo where I serve as Pastor, we began celebrating the Lord's Supper again on June 21 after that long fast. What a joy it was to commune again, receiving the Lord's body and blood together with members, sem students and fellow missionaries. We've ramped up safety precautions in our celebration of the sacrament, but it's worth it. But that's not the hard part.

The hard part is seeking out and bringing back the scattered sheep. Virtual ministry was novel at first and we had pretty solid participation online. But as the weeks went by, online participation dropped off until it was just a handful. We maintained communication with many of our sheep, sending daily devotions, making check-in calls and the like, but there is nothing like physical presencial ministry. Unfortunately, when we began to gather again in the church for weekly Divine Service, it was clear that some were out of the routine of weekly worship. The list of visits began to grow, even as we were preparing to gradually resume in-home visitation and somewhat normal ministry.

To make things even more challenging, COVID made its way closer and closer to our church. Two members tested positive in early July, although they had not been back in church. Ironically, Vicar Mario, Clarion and I had been with these folks in their home, but ten or twelve days before they tested positive. After a couple of days, we knew we were in the clear, but that was the first broach with COVID. There would be more to come in the weeks ahead as the virus made its way into the Pueblo Nuevo community.



Friendship Sunday in Pueblo Nuevo - August 2020

Pandemaphobia (continued)

Before I get to the closer brushes with COVID in the church, I've come to the most difficult part for me of pandemic 2020. In July the airport opened back up, so we took the opportunity to go to the states to pick up Andrei's growth hormone, visit family, and drop Sergei off at boarding school at St. Paul Lutheran High School in Concordia, MO. It all went well and we were ready to return to the DR in mid-August when very suddenly my mother passed away. It was not COVID-related. It was another minor health issue that turned bad at the last minute. Wow! We ended up spending a couple more weeks in Houston for funeral, grieving, and assisting my father with this huge adjustment in his life. I do not think I was ready to return, but life and ministry goes on. Despite the difficulty, I knew I was needed back on the field. And it turned out that being back gave me renewed strength!

So back to work. Back to the mission. Back to the seminary. Speaking of the seminary, it was a difficult summer for our students. Normally they return to their home countries for summer, but COVID made that impossible. My colleagues and I met with students and made a plan for summer, a plan that would balance time off with continued service in the missions and some other projects on the field. Thank you to a very generous donation from supporters in Plano, TX, we were able to fund this special summer that was not in our already stretched budget. The Lord is good. Students got time off, albeit with little opportunity to venture out to places like the beach or other

attractions around the country which were closed or very limited during the pandemic. But now students begin a new school year not having seen family for more than a year. Please pray for them as they continue prepare for service in our Lord's kingdom. Please pray also for Vicar Mario, who finished his vicarage and returned to Spain in mid-July. He is awaiting an opportunity to serve a year in the USA, but COVID has made his visa process difficult. Meanwhile he is active in ministry in Spain as he awaits this next exciting step in pastoral formation.

We have three new students this new academic year, but they are studying from their home countries until things fully open for obtaining a visa. Classes have started. Unfortunately for classes we are still completely virtual, not necessarily because of COVID. Our campus is completely solar powered. As we were on the brink of expanding this system, part of our original system went dead. As we await new circuit boards and other parts, the campus is running on limited power. So we made the decision to begin the year virtual. We will continue virtual at least through the end of October.



**Seminario Concordia el Reformador
opening service - Sept. 2020**

Nevertheless, our seminary community did gather for an in-person opening service. That was a true joy! Despite virtual classes, I love being back in the "classroom." I am teaching Greek this year and Hebrew readings alongside my admin duties. I love it!

As I said earlier, COVID wasn't done with us. Shortly after being back in the DR, the husband of one of our core members passed away. He had suffered

from various serious health issues the last couple of years. Although he never was confirmed, I was so thankful that he was in church numerous times with his wife and daughter in the months that his health was declining. Then, unfortunately he got COVID. It was too much for his already weakened body. When there is a death here, things go quickly. I spent the afternoon at the hospital after he died, sitting with his dear wife, then on to their home to inform their children. This is the second most difficult COVID thing for me this year. But the Lord is good. Even though I ended up being in contact with other infected folks at the committal and subsequently having to quarantine 14 days, the Lord gave us wonderful opportunities to preach Christ, His death, resurrection and victory over sin, death and the devil. I needed that more than ever this year.

There have been great blessings in this pandemic. For the seminary, students have learned another side of ministry and are all the more prepared for challenging ministry in their countries. We held a virtual theological symposia with 200 attendees. In Pueblo Nuevo, we have celebrated seven confirmations since July. Our virtual VBS was a huge success, ending with a friendship Sunday. Also, we have reached even more children through virtual Sunday school. The challenge remains, bringing all the sheep into the fold for regular participation in Word and Sacrament.

Pandemaphobia! I think many of us have contracted that this year. But the Lord is good. He is merciful. He loves you in Christ. Life and ministry moves forward. I pray that you, like me, have been drawn closer to our Lord in these months and rejoice in that which is sure and certain in the midst of this very uncertain world with its crazy pandemics and politics. Your Lord Jesus reigns victorious! Rejoice! Thank you all for your patience, love, prayers and amazing continued support! The Lord be with you!

Pastor Joel Fritsche



Vicar Mario Sánchez farewell

Updates from the Missionary Wife

PLEASE PRAY FOR:

- Our seven newest confirmands in Pueblo Nuevo.
- Three new seminary students, that they may come to the DR soon!
- My father and our family at the sudden loss of my mother in August.
- Family of Jose Luis from Pueblo Nuevo, who passed away in September.
- Veteran Missionary family, the Wildauers, who are transitioning to Latin America from Africa and are with us in the DR for field orientation.
- Vicar Mario Sánchez and his opportunity for a special extra vicarage year in the USA beginning very soon.
- The scattered sheep in the midst of this pandemic.

GIVE THANKS FOR:

- The marriage of missionary Jamielynn Tinkey and Seminarian Rafael Flores (August 2020).
- The marriage of Deaconess Danelle Putnam and Pastor Carlos Schumann (October 2020).
- The ordination of Guillermo Leyva, 2020 graduate of our seminary and his call to serve in Guadalajara, Mexico.

PRaise GOD FOR: K Y S

- New opportunities to bring the Gospel of Christ to people in the Dominican Republic and beyond.



Andrei's confirmation July 2020

We pray this newsletter finds you all well. Things with the Fritsche family continue to go well as we serve here in the Dominican Republic.

Clarion was very disappointed not to be able to travel for her deaconess intensives in Fort Wayne this summer, but thoroughly enjoyed participating via Zoom and learned a lot. She is occupied with classes and heads into her second and last year of deaconess studies. Dios mediante, she will graduate in May.

Viktor is doing well with his classes and receiving all A's so far. We are proud of him! He is a bit anxious as we consider options for his future and what he would like to do after graduation. Being in the Dominican Republic and trying to work out future plans is a bit difficult. He is preparing for the ACT and thinking about what he wants to do after next year. We ask for your prayers for God's guidance as Vik considers options ahead.

Happy Fall! Hope you all are enjoying colorful leaves and cooler weather. Cuanto tiempo! How long it's been since we've done a missionary update.

Sergei, now affectionately known as Max, is in Concordia, Missouri attending boarding school. St. Paul Lutheran High School has been around for a long time and has a great tradition of education. It is not always easy but Sergei is doing well and we could hardly be happier with his progress.

Andrei continues to zoom forward. He has shown maturity and responsibility with his classes and continues to grow. We were able to pick up some more growth hormone this summer so he started injections again after a 3 month hiatus.

It was really an adjustment coming back to the D.R. without Sergei and having to say good-bye to Joel's mom. However, the Lord's mercies are new every morning and we find our joy and peace in Him. May that be said for us all. Bendiciones!

Clarion

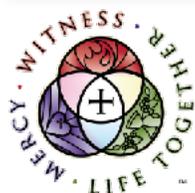


Sergei (aka Max) at SPLHS in Concordia, Missouri

We are blessed to be serving our Lord in the Dominican Republic. The Lord is blessing the preaching of His Word and the administration of His sacraments. We are grateful for your partnership in this work. God bless you all!

In Christ,

**Rev. Joel & Clarion Fritsche
Viktor, Max and Andrei**



There are many opportunities to serve as short-term or GEO missionaries. Check out the current list and download an application at lcms.org/service. Click on "Service Opportunities."

To support the LCMS through the work of Joel & Clarion Fritsche, you may send a tax-deductible gift to:

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P.O. Box 66861
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SPRING/SUMMER 2020 IN PICTURES

