

December 2016

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

We want to thank each of you for making it possible for us to complete our 22<sup>nd</sup> year of ministry with the Methodist Church in Costa Rica. We have had a rich year of ministry, one filled with many blessings, and one which we could not have done without your support. Thank you for praying for us and for supporting us financially.

We are grateful for the many mission teams who came and ministered with us throughout this year. Thank you for taking the time to come to Costa Rica and lay block, mix concrete, and tie rebar in the hot sun and pouring rain. Thank you for spending time playing with the children, seeing patients at the medical clinic, and worshipping with the local Methodist congregations.

At annual conference this December, eleven students graduated from the seminary, eight students graduated from the Methodist University and nine men and women were ordained. Ray had some of his largest classes of students this year. It is a tremendous blessing to see the church grow and men and women prepared to follow Christ into ministry!

The spiritual life of the Methodist School continues to expand. This year the seniors attended their first international camp in Texas. The new youth ministers, Spencer and Kendra Thomas, began weekly Bible study groups and student leader's groups. And, we had a tremendous response to Spiritual Emphasis Week with the Mark Swayze band in August.

The ministry in Puerto Viejo continues to make a tremendous impact on the community. The Wesley medical clinic held several health fairs this year. The skateboard park was completed and is now ministering to many teens. Construction on the parsonage was completed and the pastor and her family have moved in. The church once again became a refuge for more than 180 people for three days during hurricane Otto in November. Additionally, the sanctuary in Pocora was completed this year and we look forward to the "official" dedication in the Spring.



Today, we have 23 children living at the Methodist Children's Home, 12 girls and 11 boys, ranging in age from 3 months to 11 years. We completed 4 adoptions and our first international adoption in 2016. Construction continues on the multi-purpose building. The exterior wall on the lower portion of the property is going well and will be completed soon. Thank you all for your continued financial support of the children and the ministry of the Home.



This has been an exciting year for our family. Emma graduated from 9<sup>th</sup> grade; her science fair group won first place; she continues to play soccer and piano. Sarah graduated from high school in December. Ray's parents, both of his sisters and their husbands, and some of Sarah's cousins were all able to attend her graduation ceremony. She is currently praying about where she will attend college in the Fall of 2017. Lidia was ordained in December at annual conference and continues to minister full time at the Children's Home. Ray continues to wear many hats; he serves as president of the board at the Methodist school, professor at the seminary, mission teams and construction organizer for the churches, medical clinic, and children's home. He is also continuing to work on his PhD related to the history of the Methodist Church in Costa Rica.



We will be in the United States visiting churches during most of January. Your continued prayers for us are greatly appreciated as we see many current ministry partners and prepare for another year of service in Costa Rica. In particular, we would ask you to remember two critical areas. First, we know many of you have been affected by rising health insurance costs, and for us that area continues to be one of our greatest financial needs as those expenses have risen by 100% in the last two years. Additionally, we ask you to be in prayer regarding Sarah's choice of university. We are so grateful for the positive news we have received from each school to which she applied and pray for God's wisdom and hand to be upon her in making this decision. Finally, we pray each of you have a very blessed Christmas and a happy new year and that you know how grateful we are for each of you. May God richly bless you and your families.

All our love, Ray, Lidia, Sarah and Emma Zirkel

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