

## **Dear Friend, Encourager, Partner-in-Mission,**

We had every good intention of sitting down and reviewing our 1<sup>st</sup> semester Spanish every day but instead the past 2 months has been filled with activity! So rather than feeling guilty for not having done what we planned, **we are thrilled that during semester break we have gained an incredible amount of knowledge about, and experience with, the people and their culture!** We praise God that for the past 2 months, we have been building relationships and conversing with several Ecuadorians daily - which means we are regularly using the language we've learned so far!

During the month of December, we organized and re-sized hundreds of photos. Also with the help of friends back in the U.S. we've sent out over 100 Year-End Newsletters along with a few of those photos. **We are happy to report that, so far, we have received \$1,720 in Year-End Gifts!** Others will still send in their gifts throughout the first part of 2015. **Whether we receive more year-end gifts and/or new monthly supporters, we are trusting the Lord to provide for us, through you, what we need to complete His work!**

**Friday, Dec 5, Sondra attended a Ladies Christmas Fiesta at our HCJB/RB supervisor (Denise's) home.** The 8 ladies who attended enjoyed a light meal, Christmas music (in English), good conversation, a cookie-exchange, and of course, laughter! These times spent with other missionaries is heart-warming and encouraging as we share our experiences and prayer requests with each other.

**Saturday, Dec 6, we and our family attended a huge "El Dia de Independencia" or "6 de Diciembre" Parade.** It was held at the landing strip at the former international airport and lasted 4 hours! The 6th of December is 1 of 2 of Ecuador's independence days (first from being under the rule of the Incas, then later the Spaniards.) Ecuadorians begin celebrating the 3rd weekend in November and the festivities last for 5 weekends, through mid-December. They celebrate with concerts, art shows, food displays, live music, dramas, comedies, mimes, parades, parties, fireworks, and time spent in the parks with family. **We thank the Lord for the amazing opportunity to experience the social closeness of families as we all enjoyed the fiestas!**

**Wednesday, Dec 10, as an early Christmas gift, we were able to bless 2 Ecuadorian families with the blessings that the Lord has given us.** Pastor Salomon and his wife Lucy (Directors of the Nazarene Church and Language Institute) just had their second child, caesarean, and had incurred significant expenses. Also, Jenn (assistant director of the Language Institute) and her husband are pregnant with their 1<sup>st</sup> baby and in need of purchasing all the necessities that comes with the birth of a first child. **Please pray for their financial needs and Lucy's recovery from her second difficult child-birth.**

**Friday, Dec 12, Darrell met with Pastor Salomon for lunch.** Darrell, who lives with almost all women, needs "guy time" and Pastor Salomon, who doesn't get away from the Seminary often, expressed the need to have another "guy" to talk to and pray with. **Sondra has also begun to establish relationships with several Ecuadorian and non-Ecuadorian women.** We thank God for our established relationships which have really helped us to feel "at-home".

**Saturday, Dec 13, we and our family attended the HCJB Radio/ReachBeyond event called "Mission Compartida" (Shared Mission).** This 4-day event is held to help raise money from the Ecuadorian people to financially support this Christian Radio Station that reaches over 100 countries around the world! **Because of the new Communications Law, the number of hours that could be used this year to solicit donations was greatly reduced but, Praise Be to God, despite this restriction, this year's event grossed over \$248,000!** Including this event, the annual goal of \$350,000 was reached! Approximately 3,500 people visited the event and over 2,000 people made financial donations. Some of those donations included hand-made items and animals (chickens, cuy, etc.) brought to the event to be sold to raise part of that money!

**Sunday, Dec 14, we visited the Condado Assembly of God Church.** Pastors Ramon and Wanda Talley invited us to attend their Christmas program and service. **It is a great experience to witness what God is doing in various churches.** Ramon and Wanda have served in Columbia for over 20 years and over 10 years in Ecuador. They've served as L. American Regional Directors and Pastors of the their church-plant in Condado. Wanda has also served as the head of Alma Libre (Free Soul) women's prison ministry for more than 10 years. They are leaving in February, after more than 33 years of service, to return to the States.

**Tuesday, Dec 16, Gustavo and his wife, from the Nazarene Church, invited us to their home for a mid-day meal.** Gustavo is retired from working in a clinic as a Dr. of Psychology for many years and knows a lot about "politics" and "government policies". His wife, who is originally from the Coast, is an amazing cook and prepared us an enormous meal! They warmly welcomed us into their home, fed us til we burst, and then invited us to return again sometime for another meal! **Gustavo kept trying to speak what little English he knows with us, but his wife kept the conversation going in Spanish. As a result, we learned more words, phrases and expressions in doing so.**

**As soon as we left the Dr and his wife's home, we headed for HCJB/Reach Beyond for their annual Christmas party!** We shared MORE good food, played games, and sang Christmas hymns in English, Spanish, and (with a lot of help) German! It was so good to see more of the missionaries who are now back in Ecuador after being on furlough. Jim and Elaine have served here for more than 30 years. Jim, is the head engineer of the radio towers and Elaine works in Interpol (a holding place for people arrested and waiting to be placed in the prisons). More than 3 years ago, Elaine met with **a pregnant woman in Interpol** and continues ministering to her while she serves her prison sentence. In the women's prisons, children under the age of 5 are kept with their mothers (one reason being because most all children here are breast-fed and often until the age of 5). **After this woman's child was born, Elaine and her husband Jim, have been able to obtain permission to take this woman prisoner's son, David, into their home periodically. David now has the opportunity to see what it's like to have other people to love him and care for him and to be taught about the hope that is available because of the love of Christ.** (Here is a photo that Sondra took of David while he joined us in singing "Silent Night" that evening!) →

\* \* \* \* \*

**At Casa de Confianza (House of Trust), in southern Quito, there are presently 50 women and more than 50 children. The women are serving their prison time in an environment where, Praise God, the authorities are open to having the women from Alma Libre minister to the women prisoners and their children!**

**Both the women and their children need to see the hope of Christ and to know that someone is willing to bring the LIGHT OF CHRIST into this dark place! This is why Sondra, and others in the Alma Libre ministry, have a deep heart passion for serving the women and children at Casa de Confianza!**

The Alma Libre ministry brings in personal hygiene products and Bibles, conducts Bible studies and worship, and teach crafts and life-skills, so that when the women return to the world outside of the prison walls, they have greater chance of succeeding! **And by ministering to their children, they too begin to see hope within the prison walls and the hope that awaits them outside of their present situation!**



**Also with the confines of prison walls are 800 other women (without small children). These women live in the Latacunga prison, 2 hours south of Quito. Sondra and other Free Soul women hope to soon begin ministering to some of the women in their cells.** When Sondra worked in the El Inca Prison in 2011, the situation was much different and the staff very corrupt. Since then, the government has closed it down and moved those women to Latacunga. Some of those women have since been "set free" - not only physically, to return to their homes and families, but spiritually, to return to the outside world knowing the love of Christ! But now, because of the past corruption, the authorities of the Latacunga prison are quite suspicious and reluctant to let anyone, including the women from Free Soul, to come in to minister to the prisoners.

**Our new leader of Alma Libre is Jennifer Daniels** (who Sondra met in 2011), a missionary from Canada who served here for 2 years. In 2014 she heard the call of God to return to Ecuador as a career missionary to continue working with the women in prison full-time. Wanda Talley has turned leadership of Alma Libre over to her. **Jennifer has been working hard to build trust with the new prison authorities. Jennifer and Sondra will meet at the end of the second semester of language school to discuss plans for ministering in Latacunga. There is much to learn under the new laws of the government and we need your prayers for wisdom and safety.**

**Thursday, Dec 17, Sondra and Verito (a member of our family) joined with almost 50 other volunteers to help prepare Christmas gift packages for the 800 women in the Latacunga prison.** The gifts were wrapped in clear plastic and contained several personal hygiene products. Former authorities had approved the contents of the packages; but more recent authorities would not approve the plastic bottles of shampoo because they could be broken and the plastic used as weapons. They told us that we needed to remove each bottle from the gift packages and pour the shampoo into zip-lock bags! **But the Lord blessed us - the man from whom Jennifer bought the shampoo, donated 800 aseptic bags of shampoo to replace the plastic bottles! Now, the amount of shampoo available to each woman was now double in size!** Our volunteer group removed 800 bottles of shampoo from the packages that evening and plan to bless other families-in-need with them.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Saturday, Dec 20, while shopping for Christmas paper and small gifts for our family, Sondra met a street vendor, named Gladys.** *This little Ecuadorian woman was interested in where we were from and why we were here. When Gladys discovered that we were attending the Nazarene Seminary/Language Institute, she assumed that I not only knew Spanish better than I do, but that I could advise her in concern with reading a recent Watch-Tower magazine that she had received from a Jehovah's witness. Gladys began showing me things she was reading in in the magazine and wanted me to compare them with what she was reading in her Bible. With the help of God and a quick prayer, I explained to her that there are similarities between what the Watchtower says and what the Bible says, but that there are differences that are not true and are often subtle or hidden. She asked if I could explain the differences. I told her that my ability to speak Spanish was limited right now. I told her that I have read the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation twice, that I have received Bible instruction for more than 25 years, and that I know one thing for sure, it is always better to read the Bible than any other book. I shared that if ever she was having trouble understanding something in the Bible that she should pray, asking the Holy Spirit to help her to understand and that I know He will do it. She immediately threw the Watch-Tower in the garbage and gave me a big hug! **Praise God with us, that He was able to use me, despite my not yet fully-developed ability to speak Spanish!***

**On Sunday, Dec 21, Darrell was a "dancing Santa" in the Nazarene Church Christmas Program Musical!** All throughout November and December, Darrell has been growing out his beard. In 2011, when he did this we began noticing children on the street staring intently at Darrell. We later learned that they thought he was "Papa Noel" (Santa Claus). They would ask to touch his beard and gave him big hugs. So this year, with a much whiter beard and hair, plus frame-less reading glasses which he did not have before, the reaction has been even more intense! Everywhere we went, children and adults alike, stopped what they are doing, and began pointing and whispering that it was "Papa Noel"! So, our Ecuadorian family decided to make Darrell an authentic "Santa suit" to wear so that he could help spread some joy during the Christmas season!

**In the evening, we celebrated in our home with our family by sharing in preparing a N. American Christmas dinner together!** After much effort we were able to buy turkey and improvise our meal with dressing (made from scratch with drying out our own bread) potatoes, gravy, cranberry sauce, and "squash" pie.

**On Tuesday, Dec 23, Darrell played "Papa Noel" at the Carcelen Fire Department employee Christmas party!** We shared a pizza meal with snacks, played games and "Papa Noel" passed out the "secret pal" gifts. We laughed all evening long as we got to know each other and enjoy each other's company!

Everyday, Darrell passes by the Fire Dept when he goes on a short walk to the Carcelen Park. One afternoon, Darrell saw the firefighters trying to throw Christmas ornaments made out of colored plastic soda bottles over the branches of a very high tree. Many times, the soda bottles would land on the park-side of the fence instead of on the tree. Darrell would laugh and throw the bottles back over the fence. And of course, they began talking. This has been the start of a great relationship with the Fire Dept! The night of the Christmas party, the district Captain drove us in his vehicle to another department so that they could also have their photos taken with "Papa Noel". **The department captain expressed wanting Darrell to be "Papa Noel" next year for all 19 Quito Fire Departments!**

**Wednesday, Dec 24, we and our family, again, shared in a Christmas meal.** But this time we bought chicken and rice from a little family-run place around the corner. Everyone was tired from making the big meal on Sunday. Tonight, instead, we concentrated on relaxing, enjoying each others company, great conversation, the presentation of small toys as gifts for the children, and candy/snack/fruit bags for the adults, and prayers of thanksgiving to Jesus for coming to our world to save us. **Without the Lord's blessings that he has given us, this family would have not seen any gifts under their tree. Yet despite their limited funds, our family bought us a picture frame and 2 little plants to have for our "new home" when we move.**

**Thursday, Dec 25, Christmas Day, we celebrated with 20 other missionaries and their children** enjoying a Mexican-style meal together and playing bingo for prizes which is one of their annual Christmas traditions. **Later, we traveled by bus to Conocoto to spend the rest of Christmas Day with our Ecuadorian friend Monica, and her parents.** This family has worked at the Henry Davis orphanage almost their entire lives. We shared a meal, watched a movie on television, and then stayed over night because there were almost no buses or taxis running at this time of night on a Holiday. **A special guest at their home, was 16 yr old Clinton, an orphan, who has no family to spend Christmas with.** All during school break, Clinton is living with Monica's family. We had brought small gifts just for Monica's family. Fortunately, we had an large tin of candies (in preparation for unexpected situations) and presented this to the family to share with Clinton. He was extremely pleased!

**Friday, Dec 26, Monica and Clinton took us to the Conocoto Park where we continued spending time getting to know Clinton.** **We thank the Lord for providing us with such a memorable visit on the day of our son Aric's birthday!**

**Tuesday, Dec 30, the Carcelen Fire Dept invited us again to their fire station, this time to celebrate New Year's with them!** We shared snacks, played games, and shared discussions about the differences between Ecuadorian and U.S. traditions for celebrating the New Year. **This evening, they also invited us to be a part of a ministry they are involved in (which we will explain in the next newsletter!) Join us as we thank the Lord for opening this door within the Quito Metropolitan Fire District! We are excited to see what He has planned in the future!**

**Wednesday, Dec 31<sup>st</sup>, we experienced our first New Year's Eve in Ecuador!** The people create life-size images of people, animals, etc from clothing, stuffing, and paper-mache. The time and artistry that goes into making them is amazing. Activities include not only the typical family time, food, and music, but the men dress up as women and roam the streets until midnight crying out "Where is my old man? Where is my old man?" (a representation of the old year). Most of them will also block the road so that cars and taxis can not pass unless they allow the men (dressed as women) to dance for them and then pay them for doing so. Also, children often block the roads by stretching a rope across it and refuse to lower the rope until you pay them money. The evening ends with people throwing the life-size figures into the streets and burning them (a representation of the old year ending). When the fire burns out, people set off private fireworks, and share testimonies of a good year, hope for the new year, and long warm embraces. **Another awesome celebration this day was being able to call our son, Colin, on Skype phone, to wish him a happy birthday!** Our conversations with him continue to improve and this particular one ended with him expressing some positive intimate emotion. **We are hopeful in what the Lord is doing in his heart. Please continue to pray for restoration of our relationship!**

**As the New Year begins we are hopeful and trusting**

**that the Lord will work not only in our lives but in yours!**

**We pray that you look at the year behind with thankfulness**

**and the year ahead with great hope and expectation !**

