

December 2025

MISSIONS



An Assembly Grows among the Farmlands of Costa Rica

Teaching Lessons for Life in **Ireland**

Interview with a New Missionary in **Zambia**

Reaching Higher Weekend at **CMML**



THINKING IT THROUGH

BY DAVID DUNLAP

Glory to the Newborn King

Christmas is about the Son of God’s entrance into the world. Strip away the season’s hustle and bustle, the trees, the cookies, and the extra pounds, and what remains is a humble birth story of the eternal Son of God. The Incarnation, God Himself becoming human, is a glorious fact too often forgotten amid all the gifts, get-togethers, and glitter. Therefore, we would do well to meditate on the Incarnation, especially during this season of the year.

The Incarnation is a glorious fact too often forgotten amid all the gifts, get-togethers, and glitter.

Christ came into the world to die

Christ came into the world to die, yet His birth was no tragedy; it was a triumph and victory. The author of Hebrews tells us about this victory: “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.” (2:9)

The death Jesus tasted was the penalty of our sins. In His six hours upon that cross, the Lord Jesus Christ absorbed the full judgment of all the world’s sins. If we were to suffer for all eternity, we would never be able to pay even the smallest part of the price for our sins. Yet Christ, upon the cross, paid it all and then walked away as the risen, ascended, sin-conquering victor.

Christ humbled Himself

Jesus is no typical king. He didn’t come to be served; instead, He came to serve (Mark 10:45). His humility was on display from Bethlehem to Golgotha. In Philippians 2:6–8, Paul glories in the humility of Christ: “Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”

Christ’s birth fulfills prophecy

The Incarnation wasn’t random or accidental but predicted in the Old Testament, in accordance with God’s eternal plan. Isaiah 9:6 is perhaps the clearest text declaring that the Messiah would be both human and God: “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

In this verse, Isaiah sees a son who is to be born—but no ordinary son. Jesus’s extraordinary names, from Wonderful Counselor to Prince of Peace, point to His deity. Taken together, the virgin birth of this Son and His names reveal Him as the God-man, Jesus Christ.

Christ’s birth is necessary for the missionary mandate

Christ’s birth alone does not save us, but it is an essential link in God’s plan of redemption. The writer to the Hebrews states in verse 17 of chapter 2 that Jesus “had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”

Not only did Christ first make propitiation for the sins of the world, but He then called the redeemed to go to the ends of the world and preach this salvation message to every people and every nation. Let us follow the example of Christ, who said, “That I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth.” (Mark 1:38)

Our Redeemer is above us and with us

The Incarnation displays the glory of the newborn King. Christ is the Eternal One born in a stable, yet He was not distant or withdrawn. He was not self-seeking but sacrificial, humble, and giving. Our Redeemer, who is far above us and whose ways are not our ways, is not a god we can put into a box and control. Our God redeemed us by His blood and did not leave us in our sin. Our redeemer-king, who came into the world in a lowly manner, is glorious indeed! ■

David Dunlap is a commended worker based in Florida.

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COVER PHOTO: Baptism in Costa Rica—Courtesy of Johnny & Mabel Marin



An Assembly Grows in COSTA RICA

From One Small Seed to a Flourishing Fellowship

BY JOHNNY & MABEL MARIN



Quebrada Amarilla is a small town located on the central Pacific coast of Costa Rica, two hours from the nearest assembly. It is just 10 minutes south of Jaco Beach, where many tourists go to enjoy the sandy beaches and proximity to a great variety of Costa Rica's tourist attractions. At night, Jaco becomes a hub for prostitution, parties, drinking, drugs, gambling—you name it. The culture and practices, as well as the increasing crime rate, make the area a challenging place to live.

Despite being close by, Quebrada Amarilla is much more peaceful, consisting mostly of fields and farmland. Quebrada Amarilla's population comprises mostly lower-income families, many of whom are immigrants from Nicaragua. We have noticed throughout the years that, here, lower-income families are generally more receptive to gospel efforts, which presents us with various opportunities to share the Word with people in the community.

A lot of the Nicaraguan immigrants come to Costa Rica undocumented and looking for work. They come and go, affected by the opportunities in the area, so Quebrada Amarilla's population changes often. This reality discouraged us at first; we often felt that we would invest in many of these contacts only to see them disappear. But the words of Isaiah

55:10–11 remind us that God calls us to proclaim His Word and trust Him to give the growth and do with it what only He can: "For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not

return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it."

Watching God build His work

Mabel and I moved to Quebrada Amarilla in March 2019, with little more on our minds than starting our new life as a married couple. We began renting a home that belonged to my dad, who had been (and still is) an active part of the gospel work here since the beginning. One thing we were sure of: we wanted to be a light for Christ. So we began sharing the Gospel in the community gym in May of the same year. We were encouraged as we began seeing souls come to faith in Christ, but we had no clue what the Lord had in store for us and the work He had planned here.

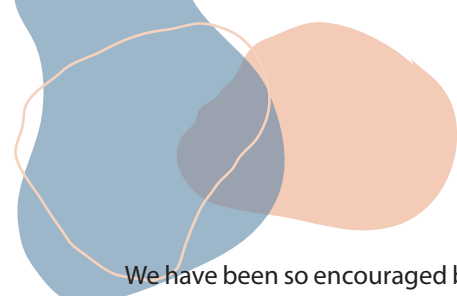
As time passed, we began holding Bible studies and gospel meetings on a weekly basis. We soon moved these ministries to my dad's cabin just down the street, which would become our gathering place for the next four to five years.

Under the mango tree

In January 2021, as we were handing out tracts and calendars, some neighborhood children approached us, curious if we had any activities for them. We felt this was a unique opportunity we needed to jump on, so we suggested meeting that coming Saturday at 3:00 p.m. under the mango tree in the middle of the neighborhood. Thus, our children's ministry was born. This mango tree remained the meeting point for over a year as we got to know the children and their families; however, we were eager to move the meetings to the cabin, since rain added difficulty for half of the year.

God calls us to proclaim His Word and trust Him to give the growth

Above (L-R): On Tuesday nights, men would gather for a Bible study in the cabin; For over a year, the children's meeting took place under a mango tree; On Saturday mornings, children, teens, and some parents participate in Bible classes.



We have been so encouraged by the growing number of children and youth. We now hold our classes on Saturday mornings, and each week, we typically see between 30 and 40 youth, ages 2–24 years old. With the help of Mabel and other believers, such as Pricilla, Eunice, and Alejandra, we have split the classes into three age groups: I teach ages 12 and up, Pricilla teaches kids 6–11, and Mabel and the others teach kids 5 and under. Many parents have begun attending meetings at their children's invitation. Some parents have even professed faith in Christ after a time.

We also take many of the youth to Bible camps run by the assemblies twice per year. The camps are a great chance for them to meet other young people who are in the same stage of life and have similar questions about God and His Word. It is also a great opportunity to show the love of Christ to some of the youth who grow up in environments affected by drugs, alcohol, and abuse and lacking in exposure to God's Word or people who truly care.

If the Lord builds the house

In 2021, we acquired a plot of land near the cabin and wanted to have it at the Lord's disposal. In 2023, we began to feel the cabin was running out of space for attendees. We had been praying that if the Lord wanted us to use the plot of land to build a hall, He would make His will clear and provide for the project. By the end of 2023, we had all the permits, the blueprints, and most of the finances to finish the building. By early 2024, we had everything we needed and began constructing the building. In September of that year, the building was finished, and in October, we held an inauguration ceremony, inviting believers from other Costa Rican assemblies and everyone from the community. We had a wonderful time of singing, gospel messages, and a meal afterward. We made connections in the community and enjoyed fellowship with the other believers. We also extended invitations to join us for a week of gospel meetings following the inauguration. We were encouraged to receive support from Kory Crawford (*Missionary Prayer Handbook* Day 14) and Mabel's father, Wilfredo, as the outreach's preachers.

Breaking bread together

Year after year, we prayed that the Lord would give us wisdom to disciple and prepare the believers for gathering as a local church. We began seeing a lot of personal growth in each one, as well as a desire to serve and be active in his or her faith. Near the end of 2024, we felt the brothers and sisters in Christ were ready to take the next step: breaking bread together as a local church. In November 2024, we and the believers visited the Ciudad Colón assembly to observe the Breaking of Bread meeting—to help the believers visualize what we had been studying and looking to practice.

On December 1, we invited Brethren believers across the country to join us in breaking bread for the first time in Quebrada Amarilla. We were encouraged to begin breaking bread and to see many believers come together in remembrance of our Lord and contribute to the worship meeting. Those now in regular fellowship are Delvin, Alejandra, Nelson, Mercedes, Pricilla, Jese, Eunice, Liliana, Arturo, Nikol, Carlos, Rosie, Sammy, Johnny Sr. (my dad), Mabel, and me.

We are tremendously encouraged by the believers who form this local body. They have shown a sincere interest in bringing souls to Christ and a desire to serve wherever they can, seeking out and using the gifts the Lord has given them to edify the church and further the kingdom.

We expect and pray that, by the end of 2025, a few more people will join our assembly fellowship. Herson, Pricilla's husband, has expressed an interest in being part of the assembly. He battled with addiction for many years. A few years ago, he professed faith in Christ, and since then, he has been baptized. He is now over a year-and-a-half sober. We are encouraged by his growth and desire to go on for the Lord. We appreciate prayer for him and Pricilla.

Sammy's wife, Erica, and daughter, Isabel, recently professed faith in Christ and expressed a desire to be baptized. We look forward to sitting with them and working through the next steps of obedience to Christ.

Brittany, the daughter of Liliana, recently told us of her desire to be saved, but she battles with the fear of failing the Lord after deciding to follow Him. We had a great conversation with her as we opened Scripture, reassuring her of Christ's finished work and His promise to walk by our side and guide us with His Spirit. She seemed encouraged, and we are praying we can rejoice soon over another soul trusting in our Savior.

Spiritual growth in Quebrada Amarilla

Please pray for the discipleship of the believers in Quebrada Amarilla. We really want to develop in them an urgency to be disciple makers—to grow deeply in their relationship with the Lord and knowledge of His Word in order to bring others into a relationship with Him. We want to be intentional about outreach work and having a presence in our community, for we have found that the most effective way to share the Gospel is through developing relationships with others.

Please pray, too, that the Lord will give us wisdom and guidance in identifying elders in the local church. We do not want to rush this process but also don't want to delay for too long. Our family also appreciates prayer as we await our second child, who will be born at the end of December. "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you." (2 Thessalonians 3:1) ■



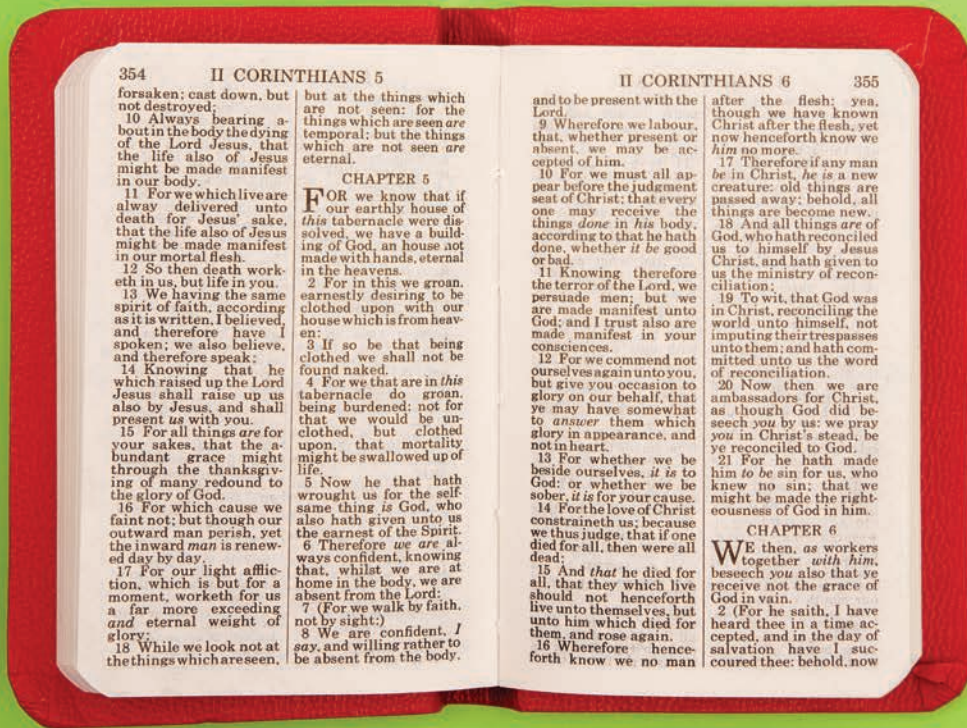
Top (L-R, from top): Pricilla teaches the preteen Bible class; Mabel, her sister, and their mom lead the youngest Bible class; Youth and adults gather for a photo during Bible camp.

Middle (L-R): The fellowship in Quebrada Amarilla calls this building home; Kory Crawford gospel preaches during the first gospel series in the new building.

Bottom (L-R): Believers and community members celebrate inauguration night at the new hall in Quebrada Amarilla; Johnny and Jese baptize Sammy in a local river.



Johnny and Mabel Marin are commended from Newton Christian Assembly in Newton, British Columbia.



LESSONS FOR LIFE

TEACHING THE BIBLE IN IRELAND'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

BY COLIN SHELDON

I love every Bible Explorer lesson I teach. For 27 years, I have taught boys and girls, ages 10–12, on a voluntary basis. So far, I have taught more than 6,765 lessons with each lasting for an hour. What a privilege to teach the Bible in the classroom!

For over 20 years, my wife, Rosemary, and I led a team involved in Sunday school, children's and teenagers' groups, holiday Bible clubs, and camps. We thank God for the blessings and encouragements we saw these bring to many children and teenagers. In the mid-1990s, Rosemary came home excited from a Walk Thru the Bible seminar and said the organizers were looking for people to teach this program in schools. She believed I should take up the challenge. My school days were already busy, and we were involved in other weekly clubs and groups, so I laughed the idea off.

Two years later, a pal of mine encouraged me to take up the challenge of this opening into primary schools. By this time, a number of our weekly activities had finished. I, before the Lord, took this as a second call. I went ahead for training and taught my first lesson in April 1999. In that very first lesson, after 20 seconds, I heard a girl say to her friend that she was going to enjoy this program. It is still a challenge, but again and again, I see children taking to the program, sometimes before I even start. I had to eat humble pie—Rosemary is my greatest supporter and encourager!

What's in a lesson?

Invariably, as I walk into a classroom, there will be different responses from the children. For some, the children are up on their feet cheering because I have come into the room, or they give high fives or fist pumps. In other classes, a hush seems to fall over the room as I get my things for the lesson out of my box. It's as if they are expecting something to happen. And, yes, I believe something is going to happen as God's Word is going to be taught over the next hour and they are going to learn things that will help them.

We look at the Old Testament over about five weeks and then the New Testament for a similar length of time. The lessons are interspersed with hand signs to help the children understand the message and to add a little drama and help press home what they are learning. Each time, we begin by reviewing the hand signs from the previous lesson. There could be some issues that come up, so we talk about these and how they relate to the children today. Then, I move into the next lesson.

I always like lesson five as, at the end, the principal will come to the class to watch the children put their hand signs together

I stand there encouraged and thankful because people like you have prayed in faith.

with enthusiasm for the Testament they have been taught. The principal may ask a variety of questions about the lessons, such as which story they liked best or what that last hand sign was all about. They encourage the children to express openly what

they learned through the lessons. This is very revealing as children share what they have taken in. I stand there encouraged and thankful because people like you have prayed in faith. As the old chorus says, "The blessings come down as the prayers go up."

If I asked to get into school to do a Bible study, I probably wouldn't get beyond the front door. However, many of the teachers tell their students I have come to do a Bible study with them. I will take whatever the teacher calls the program. At the end of the lesson, the children clap. Many of the Bible stories are not a million miles away from situations they face, and some of them come and have a private word with me as I leave. Occasionally, the teacher will thank me for the lesson, as the issues raised may have recently been real concerns in the classroom.

One of the schools where I have taught over the past five years is an all-Irish school, meaning Irish is the primary language used. The principal had attended the youth club in our assembly for about two years when she was a teenager, and she tracked me down about six years ago. All the words used are in Irish: in my PowerPoint, any drama, the hand signs, and the worksheets. I do not have an interpreter in the class, and about 30 times in the lesson, I will change between Irish and English. This is always a real challenge, but I like it.

There is more Irish coming out of my mouth these days. One principal, T., and others along the way have helped me with my Irish, as they see the value of this program in the all-Irish school. I get the same response from the children as in other schools, and they cannot wait for the next lesson.

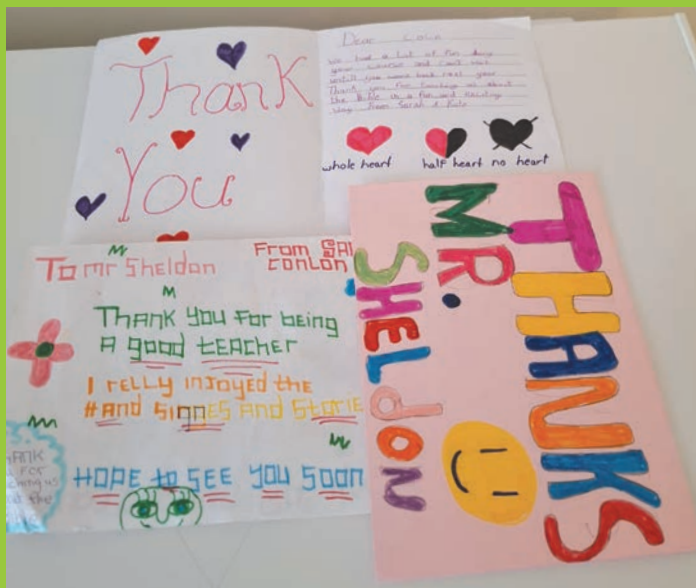


Above: Colin teaches Bible Explorer at local schools such as this one.

Generations remember

Over the years, I have taught 19,652 children, of which 14,711 have learned both the Old Testament and New Testament. I have continued to teach in the same schools. Last school year, I taught in 11 schools in 46 different programs, which meant 230 hours of teaching the Bible. The principals told the children I would be back in their schools next year.

In September, when I visited the schools to arrange programs for the new school year, the principals welcomed me with open arms and diaries. A similar program to last year was arranged and will run until June 2026. I will teach more than 225 hours total; some days, there are as many as three or four lessons.



In one school year in the past, I taught one husband's class; in another school, the wife's class; and in a third school, one of their children. Some of the children I taught years ago are now teachers in the schools, and I teach in some of their classes, which they and the children like. Recently, as I sat in one staff room, three of the teachers sitting around that table had been taught by me as children in three different schools. I taught some of the student teachers doing teaching practice in schools where I teach as well. Children, teenagers, and even young adults have stopped me in shopping centers, on the street, or wherever to remind me that I taught them. I have been invited to school functions, I receive boxes of chocolates, and some of the children have written thank-you notes for telling them about the Bible. It amazes me that those 5 or 10 hours I had with them to teach the Bible are not forgotten.

Above: Colin enjoys reading the students' thank-you notes.

Daily encouragement

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, I was teaching in more schools and perhaps taught over 300 hours of Bible lessons in the classroom. But the current level is good for me as, most of the time, I can incorporate any doctor or hospital appointments for Rosemary around my program. Over recent years, she has not enjoyed good health, with four underlying health issues. Five years ago, Rosemary's life was in danger, but thankfully, it was an answer to prayer when she recovered from COVID-19.

As she is able, Rosemary is involved in the women's ministry in the assembly, and she encourages and supports others. She used to have a one-to-one Bible study with one contact, A., but in more recent times, Rosemary has been of great help to A. over the telephone. As Rosemary is unable to travel outside of the country these days due to her health, we are thankful for churches that have asked us to come on Zoom and share more of our ministry for God in Dublin. I also thank the Lord for the support and encouragement Rosemary gives in the Bible Explorer ministry.

We attend a small assembly in southwest Dublin, and we are thankful to the Lord that He helps us encourage those who come through teaching the Word and supporting them in their daily walk with the Lord. Recently, we celebrated 50 years of marriage. The Lord gives help, and there is still more "diesel in the tank" to follow the Lord day by day in the openings that come our way. ■



Colin and Rosemary Sheldon are commended from Hilltop Chapel in Toronto, Ontario.

Prayer Requests:

Please pray for Colin as he teaches Bible Explorer lessons.

Pray for Colin as he speaks Irish in the all-Irish school.

Pray for Rosemary, her health, and the women's ministry.

Pray for staff and open doors to teach the Bible in schools.

Pray for the children as they learn God's Word.

Pray that, as a result of the Bible lessons, many will be saved.

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REACHING
HIGHER



Life as Missions, Not as Usual

BY JUANES PINEDA

Being a first timer at a conference is always an experience. You never quite know what to expect. That was how I felt going into Reaching Higher. I had helped organize the event, so I knew the schedule, the speaker, and even the team behind the scenes. Yet I still wasn't sure what the Lord would do. Looking back, I can say only one thing: He far exceeded my expectations.

Reaching Higher takes place at the CMML Missionary Guest Home in Wall Township, New Jersey. With its warm, family-like atmosphere, the Guest Home feels less like a conference center and more like a living room. That environment creates space for real connection—conversations, prayer, and fellowship that go beyond the surface. This “home vibe” captures the heart of why Reaching Higher exists: to encourage believers ages 20–39 to grow in the Word, to challenge them to live with a missions focus, and to send them back to their daily lives renewed in their devotion to Christ.

From Friday through Sunday, the schedule was filled with Scripture, prayer, and fellowship. Attendees prayed earnestly for the Lord's work in their hearts and for missionaries serving around the globe. They also listened to reports from the field. This year, J. and H. Mathews (*Missionary Prayer Handbook* Day 26) shared how God is working in their South Asian country and invited us to join them through prayer and support.

One of the highlights for me was the worship. The singing was powerful, with young voices united in declaring God's goodness. Even during free time, many kept singing together! Another special feature was a visit to the Atlantic Ocean, where attendees enjoyed God's creation together and built friendships in a refreshing setting.

Our speaker this year was Steven Harrell from Randleman, North Carolina, a businessman who uses his work as a platform to proclaim Christ and disciple others. Steven opened the Word and walked us through themes such as loyalty to Christ, intimacy with the Lord, and service in the local church. He also challenged us to boldly witness for Christ, before closing with a stirring message on walking by faith. His teaching reminded us that when we walk closely with Jesus, we naturally become His witnesses—“in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

At CMML, we pray that young believers across the country will come to Reaching Higher and find not only rest but also renewal. We long to see them return to their local churches shining the light of Christ in a spiritually dark world, living with a missions focus, and making disciples of all nations. Please pray for the 46 attendees this year—that the Lord will deepen their walk with Him and guide them in lives fully devoted to His service. ■

Juanes Pineda, CMML youth-engagement representative

