



“God is good, all the time. And all the time, God is good.”

Pastor Dave and Willie Robertson (from *God’s Not Dead*)

Dear Friends,

God’s goodness comes to mind as we take time to reflect on all that our family has encountered since the beginning of this year. We live in a broken world, and the events of our lives are not always good, certainly not all the time. Cancer happens. Fear drives us off course. But God’s love is steadfast and God’s presence is a power we can tap into – any time and any place.

It has been three months since a melanoma lesion was removed from Jerrell’s right ear by a skilled surgeon and – thanks be to God! – the skin graft is healing day by day. It has been two months since we returned to our home base near the town of Tena. The Kichwa children who live near us are a little older, the cacao plants on the farm a bit taller, and the trail next to our home is now a graded road. Changes are inevitable.

In mid-February, we traveled down the Aguarico River to the Cofán village of Zábalo. We were welcomed by Iter, Charles and Irene, leaders of the local church, and our children were reunited with their friends from the village.

Then in March we were joined by a group from our home congregation, Waterford Mennonite Church in Goshen, Indiana, for a two-week Learning and Fellowship Tour. We began near Tena with a welcome lunch of *maito* (leaf-wrapped fish) prepared by our Kichwa neighbors. Our travels took us to the historic Nate Saint Family home, an ethnobotanical garden, and a butterfly farm.



Pastor Clever Mashiant described the evolution of mission models among the Shuar people, from the past (Christianization) to the present (discipleship) to the future (accompaniment). Our neighbors, Lourdes and Ceci, demonstrated how to make *chicha de chonta*, a beverage made with the boiled fruit of a palm tree. We witnessed the acrobatic movements of troops of Woolley and Howler monkeys as they scampered freely through the trees above the Zabalo River. And we worshiped with believers in three distinct languages: Spanish, Kichwa and Cofán (plus some English).



Our family was blessed by the positive attitudes and adventurous spirits of the twelve who took part in the tour. We all had a chance to get outside our comfort zones and rely on God's protection as well as the wisdom and generosity of our indigenous brothers and sisters. Here are some of the moments we will remember:

- The blessing service we held with Iter's family, the Borman family and a group of Cofán women and children in our new home in Zábalo ("May our lights shine!")
- The muddy surfaces, loose rocks and slippery trails we encountered along the way ("Can you give me a hand?")
- The moment we were asked to sing a song during the special music time at Dos Rios Church ("Do we all know the words to 606 - *Praise God from Whom all Blessings Flow?*")
- The morning we had to wait until the rain stopped before traveling up the Zábalo River to release forty juvenile turtles into the wild ("Be free!")
- Our final day in Ecuador, meeting with members of the Ecuador Partnership at Quito Mennonite Church, and praying that God's Spirit will overcome the darkness while standing in a circle and holding hands atop Panecillo Hill ("Amen!")

We will treasure these and many other moments we shared together – you can view more photos at www.twowaymission.net And, God willing, we look forward to welcoming another group in the not-too-distant future!

Thank you for your prayers for our family, for our neighbors, and for the leaders and members (both present and future) of the indigenous churches of eastern Ecuador.

God is good, all the time!

Jerrell, Jane, Sierra, Naomi, Teresa and Jordan Ross Richer