

10

Countries

38

US Missionaries

51

National Missionaries

1

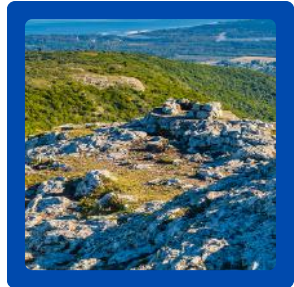
Great Commission

- Works of Evangelism
- Establishing Churches
- Equipping Nationals



JEFF DAVIS

Director, EMU International



Missions in the *Interior* of Uruguay

Today is another blank page, an opportunity to put pen to paper in the grand narrative of ministry. As I mentioned in last month's newsletter article, it is our responsibility to "Write the next chapter." The book of Acts indeed ends in chapter 28:31, but the command given in Acts 1:8 to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, requires that the story continues beyond that last verse. We are not writing by inspiration but by application and obedience to the Great Commission. Turning the page to the next chapter is another opportunity to partner with the sovereign One who is penning the ultimate story.

Friday, February 23, was a beautiful morning in Guazavirá, Uruguay, at Campamento Emanuel. One day earlier we had concluded two weeks of ministry with missionaries David and Maribel Bell for our Family Camp and Annual Workers' Conference. Following our last breakfast together, John Mark Steel arrived at the camp to take them on a journey with his family to visit picturesque Colonia in the Southwest corner of Uruguay. This was my last time to see the Bells, as they would return to Spain the next day, and I would spend the next three days in the interior. Chicha Rodriguez, my chauffeur and translator for the weekend, arrived to pick me up for our planned excursion.



be sure to read our separate **URUGUAY 2024 Update** pastorjeffdavis.com

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A Not So Rugged Journey

In 2016, our former director Ken Jensen led me on my first trip into the interior of Uruguay. When he mentioned we were visiting the interior, my mind immediately pictured a rugged and arduous journey akin to David Livingstone, machete in hand, carving his way into the interior of Africa. I wondered what kind of shots were going to be required for my visit. It is not like that. Instead, picture a nice scenic drive across the rolling hills of Nebraska or Kansas. We left behind the urban sprawl of the capital city of Montevideo traveling eastward across the verdant canvas of the Uruguayan Pampas. The sweeping plains stretch as far as the eye can see with open countryside, marked by expansive fields, and dotted with cattle ranches and grazing livestock. Along the way, we passed through quaint rural towns and villages, each with its own distinct charm.



On drives like this in the past, Chicha and I have listened to the missionary biographies of David Livingstone and Amy Carmichael, but on this trip, I decided that I wanted to just focus on Chicha and her ministry. The four-hour drive gave us plenty of time to catch up. We celebrated her 80th birthday last year, but don't let her age fool you. She is as busy as ever, continuing to work in ladies' and children's ministries. She also regularly ministers in the prisons and continues to serve on our Uruguayan Board of Directors. As mentioned earlier, she is my main translator and chauffeur. She is an invaluable link in the ministerial chain that is EMU's ministry in Uruguay.

As we made our way farther east, the terrain began to subtly change, with meandering hills, offering breathtaking views of the surrounding countryside. We stopped for lunch in Minas, a town of about 40,000 people named for the mines in the area. It is a beautiful setting, surrounded by the Minas and Carapé Mountain Ranges and by the beautiful Santa Lucía River. Chicha wanted to drive me through the resort area of Villa Seranna, with its curvy roads and significantly higher elevations. We drove through the small town of José Pedro Varela where former EMU missionaries Gilberto Torres and Carlos Piedad served. We stopped in another small town to visit a lady that Chicha has been trying to reach. Our target destination was the town of Treinta y Tres (Thirty-Three in English), named after the 33 Orientales, national heroes, who established the independence of Uruguay.

Treinta y Tres - No Place Like Home



We arrived at the new home of Pastor Rubito Rodriguez and his wife Marita. He built the house himself over the span of about five years. They have a nice guestroom downstairs with air-conditioning where I slept for a couple of nights. Their bedroom and his office are upstairs, along with a beautiful deck that we enjoyed under the full moon later that night. He expanded the outside carport to allow for groups to gather. They are using their home for ministry. Several of his neighbors know the Lord and are members of his church. In the backyard, they have another building where they keep their tools and landscaping equipment. Marita has quite a green thumb and a gorgeous garden. We sat outside and learned how the Lord is blessing their ministry and about some of the challenges they have faced. After a while, the weather turned cooler and windy. It started raining so we went into the shed. The neighbor called out to us, and we saw a full rainbow. We enjoyed a delicious meal together and more conversation before setting down for the night.

Saturday, February 24, was a full day. Rubito is an amateur archeologist. His hobby is hunting for historic relics which are in abundance in that region. He has shelves downstairs and upstairs at his house, which contain arrowheads, bells, bullets, cannon balls, and even pieces of swords. Several times that I have been with Rubito, I have mentioned wanting to see how he collects these objects. Following breakfast, he took me through town to the Olimar Grande River where we searched for treasures using a couple of metal detectors. With gauchos on horses walking across the river, we explored much of that area but only found bottle caps and the rings for the tops of cans. I was hoping to find a gold nugget like one of his friends did. It was fun just to spend time with my friend. We went back to the house and enjoyed a delicious lunch and then rested for a little bit.



La Charqueada - Honoring the Life of a Dedicated Missionary

Later that afternoon, Rubito and Marita, joined Chicha and me for another beautiful drive across the Uruguayan countryside. We stopped for a quick visit to view the many improvements made at Camp Bethel. There was a family that was staying at the camp for the weekend and a man was working on the new bathhouse. The camp is more rustic than Camp Emanuel, but still a nice place to hold camps and it is used often by our interior friends.

We then left for a short drive to La Charqueada, a small town where Pastor Rubito's church holds satellite services. We stopped at the church which was the home to former EMU missionary Julia Alvarez. In February's newsletter, there is a sweet tribute to Julia who unexpectedly passed away in January. She had served faithfully as one of our missionaries for fifty-one years. As we stopped by the church, it was sad to think about Julia not being there. I got emotional seeing the motorcycle she used for ministry in the middle room. I took a few photos, and then several other families started to arrive. We prayed together and then proceeded to the cemetery for a celebration of life service. It was a unique experience for me as I had never been inside a cemetery in this country. They do things differently than us. They do not embalm, so they bury the bodies quickly. They put them in a coffin, and then place them in a little mausoleum for two years. They then reduce the bones to a smaller box. We had about 40 people show up for the service, including local friends and family, and several folks from Rubito's church in Treinta y Tres, and Pastor Ricardo Windmoller's church in Vergara. Julia's sister brought a beautiful plaque that read in Spanish, "With love from her family and her EMU missionary family." It was a touching moment. We then triumphantly sang, "Because He Lives," followed by a clear gospel presentation by Pastor Rubito. Many of the folks in the crowd are not saved but heard a powerful gospel message.



Vergara: A New Name Written Down in Glory

Chicha and I then followed Pastor Ricardo on a cross-country drive to Vergara. It took about an hour on a gravel and dirt road. It was very bumpy, but it was a gorgeous drive as we passed soybean and rice fields as the sun set in the West. As we drove into town, we passed an old, abandoned train station. It felt like we were going back in time 100 years. We went to Ricardo's house which is also home to the Liberator Radio Station. We were greeted by his wife Mayka. Gabriel, their seven-year-old son was taking a nap. They showed us around and then we sat down for coffee and tea. It was good to have time to catch up with them and hear about their ministry. We then enjoyed a delicious supper and were entertained by the outgoing personality of their son Gabriel. The town of Vergara is much smaller. When I was last there five years ago, I learned that their church had knocked on every door in town at least three times. I challenged them to add a relational approach to their strategy. Since then, they have implemented several new initiatives to build intentional redemptive relationships. One new effort has been quarterly cookouts for the men. We would learn the next day how God is using this approach.

On Sunday morning, February 25, Chicha and I were up early because we were going on the air at 7:10 AM. Ricardo suggested that I preach on Psalm 46, a message I call, "No Fear." As always, Chicha's translation and pacing were perfect and the thirty-five-minute message seemed to be used by God. We had listeners tuning in from Germany, Russia, the United States, and Uruguay. Following a light breakfast with coffee and some pastries that they had gotten at a nearby bakery, we went to church for an early morning prayer meeting. Ricardo and I then drove to Rincon to pick up one of his church members. I preached that morning on the theme that I introduced earlier, "Write the Next Chapter." I had everybody turn to Acts 29, of course, which does not exist. We talked about the outline of the Book of Acts and how it ends so abruptly. I challenged the folks that we are to continue the story, obeying the commands that Jesus had given before his ascension. We went back to Matthew chapter 28 and I explained the text in detail and also gave a strong evangelistic appeal. For my conclusion, I told the story of my daughter Abby getting stuck in a treehouse when she was four years old. She cried out to me, "Daddy, help me!" I told her to jump into my arms. She put her toes on the edge of the treehouse and leaned out but wouldn't jump. I asked her if she trusted me. She replied, "Yes." I asked her if she thought that I would let her get hurt. She replied, "No." But, she wouldn't jump. I told the congregation that there are many people like that about Jesus. They say that they trust Him and that they know that He will save them, but that they are like Abby in the treehouse. They have never jumped into his arms. Following the service, I had the privilege of talking to several people about their spiritual needs.

Treinta y Tres – Many Happy Returns



One man who had come to a few of the men's cookouts wanted to talk to me. He had climbed up on a ladder outside to help get one of the children's toys off the roof. He was visibly nervous, as he was way up high. I clapped my hands and jokingly said, "Jump, Abby." He responded, "That's what I need to do, jump into Jesus's arms." I pulled him aside, and asked him, "Have you never done that?" He replied, "No." Chicha helped as I talked to him about the Gospel. He said, "What do I have to do to be converted?" I asked him if he knew that he was a sinner. "Oh, yes," he replied. I asked him if he understood that Jesus died for his sins and rose again so that he could have life. He replied, "Yes." Chicha and I paused for about thirty seconds as we watched the wheels turn. He emotionally stated that he had been in a play when he was younger and that he had butterflies in his stomach. He said that he was experiencing that again but this time it was better. I told him that if he believed in his heart, God promises eternal life. We then prayed together and he trusted Christ as His Savior. It was like picking ripe fruit. He was so ready. He hugged me four times before we left, and he kept thanking me for telling the story about Abby. We gave him a Bible. He asked where to start reading. I turned to the book of John (Juan in Spanish) and dog-eared the corner. He was pleased to hear that there was a book in the Bible that bears his name.



Following lunch with the Windmollers, Chicha and I decided to go ahead and head back to Treinta y Tres to rest some before the evening service. I took a much-needed 45-minute nap. We stopped by Chicha's brother's house. He is also Pastor Rubito's father. We picked up Rubito's sister Susanita and arrived at the church around 6:30 PM. Every time that I have attended this church there is excitement as the congregation gathers. The church filled up quickly. It was a very sweet service. I felt especially safe as there were seven policemen present who regularly attend. They also have ten teachers who attend. The church has a lot of musical people, and the song service was a blessing. Rubito wanted me to preach the same message that I preached in Vergara. Again, God blessed us as there was a good response from the people and they were engaged the entire message. Rubito commented on how clear the gospel was and how helpful the message was. We returned home for another delicious supper and a wonderful conversation.



The next day, Monday, February 26, we drove back to Montevideo for my return trip to the USA that evening. It was very rainy throughout the morning. As Chicha and I made our way out of town the streets looked like rivers flowing with eddies and currents swirling around the cars parked on the side of the road. We drove through the giant arch that spans the street on the exit of the city. The words on the side read, "Buen Viaje," "Have a good trip." I prayed for us, "Lord, thank you for blessing our trip to the interior. Thank you for the opportunity to spend time with these wonderful missionaries. Thank you for allowing us to be blessed and to be a blessing to these people. Thank you for the new soul that is on his way to heaven now. Thank you for the opportunity to celebrate the life of one of your choice servants. As the rain falls on us this morning, I ask you Lord to send showers of blessings upon your ministry here in the interior of Uruguay. Help these churches, these pastors, these individuals to write the next chapter."

View Facebook photo album:

<https://emuinternational.org/uruguay2024/>



Attention Pastors

I am currently planning my calendar for 2024. In addition to traveling and visiting the EMU International missionaries on their various fields of service, I have had the privilege of preaching in Christian School chapels, Pastors' Fellowships, at Christian Camps, Missions Conferences, Revival Meetings, and Family Conferences. I am also available for single meetings to promote the work of EMU International. Contact me if you are interested in me visiting your church.

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PRAYER CORNER

- Many people don't realize that Joanna and I are supported like other missionaries and need churches and friends who will partner with us monthly. Please pray with us that God would raise an army of ministry partners who will help hold the rope for us by supporting us financially and through prayer.
- We are also praying about a new travel vehicle. God blessed us last year with a used van for us to drive around town. We need something more reliable though for my travels. Our 2011 Toyota Camry has been an excellent vehicle but it is approaching 250,000 miles.
- Continue to pray for healing for Joanna's hip. She injured it a few years ago. She was recently told by a doctor that she has arthritis and that she is a candidate for having it replaced. That is tough for someone as athletic as she is to hear. She does not want to have surgery, so we are praying for healing.
- Pray for God to grant wisdom as EMU International moves forward in the days ahead. We are praying that the Lord of the Harvest will send laborers into His harvest and we desire to be a part of His plan.
- By God's grace, each of our four children's families is serving the Lord in full-time ministry. Pray that God will bless their ministries and sustain them through the many joys and trials that accompany their calling.