

Earthquake in Chile Update - Ricardo and Beth Gomez

8 March 2010

If the truth be told, I'd rather be in bed right now than writing an update HOWEVER I promised the kids I would stay upstairs until Daddy gets home from teaching at the Seminary Extension. Even though they are both sound asleep now, they find security in knowing I'm here and I find security in keeping my promise to them. It is one of the ways you live a post-earthquake life.

Actually, we've learned/experienced a lot of positive things due to this earthquake. (When I say we, I'm referring to my fellow Chileans as well.)

We've learned about resourcefulness. Cecilia, one of our friends who attends Alpha in English, told us how her boyfriend hooked up lights and television sets to the car battery that he brought into the house. They were never "really" without electricity. Many of us learned or re-learned how to wash clothing with our very own two hands. Etc.

We've learned about neighborliness. We've been "stealing" internet from our next door neighbors (they did give us the password) ever since the earthquake hit because we can't get ours to work. Without the help of our neighbors, we couldn't send you these updates.

Our friend Magdalena told us Sunday about how in the pre-earthquake years, she would only say "hello" to her neighbors as she slipped in behind the locked gate but last week, she spent 5 nights sitting out in the street with them around a bonfire as they waited for electricity and protected one another's property from looters. After years of living beside them, she has just made new friends.

We've learned about Chileans.

They come through for one-another in tough times. Chilean flags are proudly displayed everywhere now, as a way of demonstrating the solidarity of the Chilean people. Cars having "Be Strong Chile" painted on their windows. A 24-hour national telethon in Chile just raised more than double its goal for a total of \$60 Million USD (of course that is only a drop in the bucket of what is needed).

We've been reminded that there is ONLY 1 FIRM FOUNDATION! Fellow missionary Kay Stotts related the story of her next door neighbor, Lupe. Kay said that Lupe was the kind of neighbor who barely even said "hello." Lupe was invited to a women's Bible study and heard the words of God for the first time in her life. She developed friendships within the church and even got a little involved but in more than year did not let any of that change her life. Kay wrote that in the middle of the earthquake,

"it [finally] became crystal clear to [Lupe] that all she had been taught from the Bible was true. It was true! And it was for Lupe! So right there middle of the earthquake, Lupe asked Jesus to be her Savior and Lord. Are good things going to come out of the tragedy and devastation in Chile? Absolutely! Just ask Lupe."

end quote

I suspect that we have a lot more yet to learn!

In His presence,
Ricardo and Beth Gomez
Free Methodist World Missions

6 March 2010

1 week and perhaps 1,000s of aftershocks later, life in Santiago begins to resemble some normalcy. Pastor Luis Alberto and family moved back into Casa Grande last night after it was deemed "safe" by an engineer. The Santiago FM pastors had their monthly prayer (and now relief planning) breakfast today. Church services will be held in their normal locations tomorrow. School starts on Monday as do the Seminary extension classes. Alpha for Couples will begin on Friday. This normalcy, in the midst of continuing relief efforts and frequent shaking.

Unfortunately normalcy is far from the reality down south! A 6.6 aftershock yesterday brought with it

more tragedy. Pastor Sergio reports that one of the children who attends Sunday School at the church in Talcahuano was killed when a wall fell on him. Please pray for comfort for his family and that of his church family.

We just received a message from Pastor Nelson Concha, of the Free Methodist Church in Lota. We are translating it here for you...

Here We Are.

Now things are calmer, but everything was terrible... from the earthquake to the looting...we protected our lives and then later our belongings. It was incredible to see the true brokenness of human nature after the earthquake.

My family and I are still without water and only have electricity occasionally... we are sleeping in a tent in the street because our home is in very bad shape. It has been torn now - we hope soon. We have still not seen the government help even though this will be another problem because it isn't clear how to distribute it and the people of Lota are very violent. Help us pray that all of this calms down. We trust in God and his provision. We don't want to fight for food.

Our brothers and friends in Chile have helped a lot with food...I know that people everywhere are praying for us and this gives us strength.

God has been our refuge and strength. Little-by-little we are recovering our sleep but the aftershocks continue. This will not be only for a few weeks but rather for many months or years.

We trust in God and in our church. The Lota FM Church is a big family and God knows that we can overcome and help others.

God bless you. "The Lord is our pastor. We shall not want."

Nelson Concha
Pastor, Free Methodist Church
Lota, Chile

2 March 2010

We wanted to give you an update and ask you to pray for tomorrow's work. Ricardo will leave tomorrow with our friend, Sumi, and a policeman at 5 a.m. They will go to Chillan to drop off some supplies that will be sent to Lota, pick up Superintendent Sergio Loyola and then continue on to Talcahuana where 90% of the city has been destroyed. Due to strict curfews that have been put in place, they cannot arrive before noon and must leave the city by 6 p.m. tomorrow.

We've spent the day shopping, making phone calls (the home phone works now as does our electricity since about 4 p.m. today), collecting donations, and filling water jugs to take with them. We've just learned that the government is sending its first help to the area tomorrow - so in some ways the Free Methodist church are among the first responders. Other teams will be going down Thursday, Friday, etc.

This is how the body of Christ is working together in Santiago: some are collecting clothes, some are making bread, others are shopping, all are working together. The bishop's relief fund has sent "first response" money. More is expected thanks to your generosity. We are planning to send a larger truck with more supplies no later than Monday. Based upon what was spent today, we think that it will cost

about \$20,000 to fill the larger truck. If you would like to give too you may do so through Free Methodist World Missions using this link: www.helpchileheal.org

As we told the bishops this morning...

We have pastors and lots of other people living in tents or worse because their homes have been destroyed. Some people are completely out of touch with family members. Others, as you know, have passed away. Lots of people are without water and any kind of food. Supt. Sergio said he saw many are without clothing. What little people do have, others are stealing.

Parts of Chile got hit with a 1-2 punch; earthquake and then tsunami. The few minutes that we had enough electricity to watch news last night, we heard that there is so much lawlessness now that some people say it is worse than the earthquake itself. We saw men guarding their homes with guns - in other videos neighbors were forming "armies" using rakes and hoes, brooms, whatever they had to try and protect their areas from the lawless. Today military has been sent to help protect the areas most affected. Also, the cities have imposed strict curfews. There is story after story to be told.

The threat of aftershocks continues. We're just watching a report that says if we have an aftershock of only 5, two of the high-rise apartment buildings here in Santiago (for those who know Santiago - in the Comuna of Nunoa, which is not far from where we live) could come down. Almost 900 families live in these 2 buildings. Fortunately the builders are paying for hotels for the residents.

It may be far away but it is very real. Please keep praying!

In His presence,
Ricardo and Beth Gomez
Free Methodist World Missions

Tuesday, March 2

More from Chile

Tomorrow (Wed., March 3) before dawn, Chilean pastors Karim and Sumi, along with Ricardo Gomez will leave Santiago for Chillan, the worst hit earthquake area. They will drive a truck loaded with food and supplies, as well as clothing and blankets donated by Santiago churches.

Superintendent Sergio Loyola has an emergency team in place there to help with distributions. In addition to distributing supplies, the trip will help determine road conditions and assess needs for future trips. A second, larger truck with many more supplies is scheduled to leave Santiago Fri., March 5. Funds from Help Chile Heal will help pay for these supplies.

From Brazilian Bishop Jose Ildo Swartele de Mello: Following Saturday's massive 8.8 magnitude earthquake, Pastors Sergio and Mari Loyola were able to reach Talcahuano, near the epicenter. With tears they report that 90% of the town is seriously affected. Many houses collapsed due to the earthquake, especially in the area where the Central FMC is located. And then the tsunami hit. Chaos. Pain. Says Loyola: "We will return to Talcahuano with food, kids' clothes, water ..."

From Kay Stotts Godoy and Ricardo and Beth Gomez Families: Profound thanks for all the prayers on our behalf and for the ongoing encouragement and support the Chilean FM family has received in these 72 hours since the catastrophic earthquake. Help has not yet arrived for our suffering brothers and sisters in highly affected areas, where they have been and are still without food, water, electricity and shelter. Tomorrow, Wednesday, teams from our Santiago and Chillan churches will take supplies to Talcahuano, hit by a tsunami 30 minutes after the earthquake, and other devastated areas. People are desperate and in need of not only food and water, but hope as well. Our church is stepping up to the task

at hand and your prayers and support are vital. Please continue! Thank you.

Bishop David Roller and Brazilian Bishop Jose Ildo Swartele de Mello will travel to Chile, Mon., March 8.

Earthquake in Chile 1 March 2010

Please accept our apologies for not keeping you better informed recently. We are doing fine but have been without electricity much of the last 24 hours. We are so thankful for what we do have though - most of all, one another!

Yesterday we held church under a tree. There were 16 people (including the 4 kids) there and it was a good time of sharing our experiences, thanking God, and praying for others who are hurting so much more. We think that everyone in our church is safe but have not yet been able to contact everyone due to the fact that we and others don't have telephones, and cellphones only work randomly. Our superintendent reports that the church families throughout Chile are safe - but not without major need. Some pastoral families are without homes and basic necessities.

Chile is an earthquake zone. It is somewhat prepared. Ricardo went downtown yesterday and was amazed at how "untouched" the city seemed to be- at least from outward appearance of the buildings. But that is not true in the older areas, poorer areas or in the epicenter. Damage down south has been significant! It seems that what the earthquake didn't get, the tsunami did. Last time we had television, we heard that the death toll was over 800.

Superintendent Sergio Loyola was in Talchauno today. He reports that 90% of the city was destroyed - first by the earthquake and then finished off by the tsunami. They've lost everything and the people are desperate and therefore there is chaos. They are without all basic necessities, including clothing - because the sea stole them. The churches in Santiago are working together to collect water, gas, food, clothing, blankets, etc. to send down. Ricardo, Pastor Karim and our friend Sumi are taking a moving truck of supplies down Wednesday morning and may be going down on Friday as well.

Since we don't have electricity, you probably know more than we do. Juliana just made me an necklace with a bell on it. As she put it around my neck, she said, "this bell is so that I will always know where you are." Life has changed. We appreciate your continued prayers!

In His presence,
Ricardo and Beth Gomez
Free Methodist World Missions

27 February 2010 - PM

Chile thanks you for your concern and prayers! Please keep praying! After shocks have continued all day - some of them quite strong but almost always there is a rocking sensation. We wanted to give you some updates.

Casa Grande has significant damage and so Pastor Luis Alberto and family and Dra. Teresa are staying in our home. Current plans are to go back and have a service in the yard tomorrow - or in the nearby plaza. To see pictures of Casa Grande, click here:

<http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=37806&id=1645819951&l=627ab1a5af>

According to the radio news, more than 1.5 million homes in Chile have been destroyed by this catastrophe. The death toll at this time is 214 people.

School was supposed to start next week but the President has postponed all schools until at least March 8. We are also going to postpone the Biblical Institute until we know that the building (Casa Grande) is structurally safe. Other churches and pastoral homes have structural problems. Please be praying for wisdom to know what houses/churches are safe for living/services and how to make proper repairs.

By the way, we learned that the earthquake actually lasted 3 minutes. They were LONG minutes. We praise God that our neighbors family has been located and is fine.

As the kids keep repeating from their Vacation Bible School a few week ago, "God is always with us; Fear NOT!" We rest in His presence tonight (and hope to get a good night of much needed sleep) -as the floor rocks beneath me. We are actually feeling sea sick!

In His presence,
Ricardo and Beth Gomez
Free Methodist World Missions

27 February 2010 - AM

We were shaken awake at 3:40 this morning by an earthquake. We rushed upstairs, grabbed the kids, and prayed together in a doorway for what seemed like 5 minutes (but later learned it was only about 45 seconds). After we rushed outside, Jonathan asked if this was like the earthquake in Haiti. When I said "yes," he replied, "then people in other countries are praying for us." That was a great comfort! While we have just now gotten communication back - we see that we have already received many messages from you, telling us that you are praying. Thank you.

We are thankful to report that we are fine. Fellow missionaries, Kay Stotts and family, Pastor Luis Alberto and family (Colombia) and Dra. Teresa (Bolivia) are safe. All of the FM pastors in the city are also safe and we have received reports that many of the other pastors in Chile are too. Please pray for our neighbor, Exequiel, whose parents and niece are on vacation near the epicenter. He still hasn't been able to reach them. The current death toll stands at 122 but that is expected to keep rising.

The only real damage to our home is a few broken dishes/vases and an office in complete disrepair. Santiago seems to be pretty well prepared for an earthquake although several bridges fell, some new buildings have collapsed and there are problems with fires and destruction, particularly in the industrial part of town. The airport is closed indefinitely due to damage to the building - not the runways. Recent reports (now that it is daytime) say that damages downtown are quite extensive. Casa Grande seems to have a lot of cracked walls - and neighbors thought it would fall based on the way it shook. Luis and Daisy and Teresa (who live there) are not sure that it is safe to live in.

The epicenter of the quake was about 200 miles south - and there is much more destruction there. It really seems to have affected all of this long country with its 8.3 force.

We are still experiencing quite a few, very strong, aftershocks - many in the time that it has taken me to write this report. The kids are prepared - with their play tent and life jackets.

The government is asking everyone to stay put today so that the safety of buildings, bridges, etc. can be assessed in addition to helping those in need. President Bachelet has declared a state of catastrophe but

fortunately all of tsunami warnings are expired for the Chilean coast. Please keep Chile in your prayers as we all work together to assess damage and help those in need.

We will report back to you as we know specific details.

Sincerely,
Ricardo and Beth Gomez
Free Methodist World Missions