

# Rio Grande

ISSUE 57 FALL 2024

## MAGAZINE

WINTER  
VOLUNTEERS  
HAVE A  
HUGE IMPACT  
ON CAMPUS



# IN THIS ISSUE

FALL 2024



## ◀ MEET OUR WINTER VOLUNTEERS

These ambitious retirees do everything from sewing to planting, building to singing! What would we do without them?

## ON THE COVER

Curt Hennings, from Nebraska, is an example of the hard-working folks who come to our campus each winter. Unlike many who flock to the Rio Grande Valley simply to escape the cold weather, our Winter Volunteers are here to serve the Lord. We are grateful for the blessings they bring to our campus family. Enjoy reading their stories!

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*Kevan Soderberg introduces us to these talented friends, explains what they do and some of the benefits of their labor.*

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### TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS PUBLICATION:

Rio Grande Bible Ministries or Rio Grande = organizational name  
Seminario Biblico Rio Grande or SBRG = Bible College  
MLS = Missionary Language School (1955-2017)  
ICS = InterCultural Studies (2017-)  
Year = Graduated or last attended

PHOTO: FREEPIK SOURCES 'MACLURA POMIFERA', HORSE APPLES, OR BODARK ARE THE FRUIT OF THE OSAGE-ORANGE TREE. THEY'RE ABOUT THE SIZE OF BASEBALLS. THE OSAGE PEOPLE USED THE VERY HARD WOOD FOR BOWS, AND SO THE FRENCH CALLED THE WOOD BOIS D'ARC, WHICH TURNED INTO "BODARK."



**PRESIDENT'S CORNER**

## A Walk with Wisdom

He chose his favorite cane out of the holder by the door. He had several, and I wondered why that plain one was his favorite. He had a fancy carved one, with leaves and vines carved the full length, and a lion's head on the top. But he liked a normal-looking one without any fancy adornment, with just a simple curved handle and a rubber ferrule on the bottom. He said to me, "Larry, would you like to walk with me?" I was thrilled. Why would a dignified, elderly man choose me, a nine-year-old, to walk with him?

Dr. David Schmidt greatly impacted my life when our missionary family visited him for a few days. As we walked together in his neighborhood in Santa Rosa, California, I would kick some of the horse-apples<sup>1</sup> that lay on the street, and occasionally Dr. Schmidt would whack one with his cane and watch it skitter down the road.

As we sauntered along, he would ask me about school, about my interests, and we carried on what I thought was a very adult conversation. He would teach me how important it was to read my Bible, discuss verses that I had recently read, and tell me about the grace of God and

the wonder of God saving sinners who confessed with their mouth and believed in their heart.

Twenty-five years later, my wife and I were headed to the mission field with our family, and Dr. Schmidt's widow wrote to us in her careful handwriting, pledging to pray for us each day. And she kept her word, writing to us regularly and praying for us faithfully.

I wonder if the Schmidts ever knew the impact they had on my life, and later, on the lives of my family.

The importance of seniors who are engaged in prayer, encouragement, and discipleship of young people can never be overappreciated! Come with me through the pages of this issue of the Rio Grande magazine and witness the amazing ministry of our Winter Volunteers!



*Lawrence B. Windle*

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publications.

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**PURPOSE** To make God's people aware of the needs of the Hispanic World and the role that Rio Grande Bible Institute serves to provide godly Christian leadership.

**SUBSCRIPTIONS**  
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# WHAT IS A WINTER VOLUNTEER?

*Welcome "Abuelitos"*

*Kevan Soderberg*

Let me begin by saying the Lord has blessed Rio Grande Bible Ministries with an army of volunteers. But not all volunteers are the same. The 2023–2024 season report (see the note at the end of this article) shows 138 volunteers reported 27,521 hours of donated labor. In the report you will see the amount and variety of work they accomplished last season. They come from diverse places and backgrounds and provide vital help to the ministry. Some are sent by a church as a “Mission Team” and serve for a short time, usually on a special project. They provide not only manpower, but often funding for their special project. Others

volunteer individually for a short time in whatever capacity is needed. All the volunteers are important, and we thank the Lord for each one, but there is a special group that we call “Winter Volunteers.” They are the backbone of our volunteer ministry. It is this group that I wish to focus on in this article.

So, what is a Winter Volunteer? The Oxford dictionary defines it as one who volunteers during the winter season. Of course, they add expanded definitions of “winter” and “volunteer.” Our definition is one who donates at least 28 hours labor per week for at least four consecutive weeks during the Winter Volunteer

season, which runs from October through March each year. That is the basic, barebones technical definition of a Winter Volunteer. But in my estimation, Winter Volunteers are so much more.

Winter Volunteers are typically, though not always, retired. This tells us that they are older individuals. What I find amazing is that our Winter Volunteer men average 75 years of age. Keep this in mind as you read this article or read through the annual report. Many bring their own tools and live in their own RVs on campus.

Our work week is Monday through Thursday, beginning each

day at 8:00 a.m. with a time of devotion and prayer. The day ends at 4 p.m. with one hour in the middle for lunch. I've often seen men working before 8:00 a.m. and after the workday ends, and on Fridays and Saturdays as well. They are clearly self-motivated individuals committed to getting the job done.

The 2023-2024 Winter Volunteer season was 26 weeks (about 6 months), from October first to April first. We had four volunteers on campus for the entire season. In truth, they were here before it began and stayed beyond its end. The minimum commitment is four weeks, but last season, of the 95 who qualified as "Winter Volunteers," only six worked the minimum of four weeks. The rest worked much longer. In fact, the average stay of our Winter Volunteers was over twelve weeks (about three months).

The depth of commitment of the Winter Volunteers is further demonstrated by their return year after year. The average number of years served by this dedicated group is 9.2 years. We have fifteen who have served fifteen years or more, and one couple who have served 36 years at Rio Grande.

I was recently told that the term "Volunteer" does not adequately capture the essence of this dedicated group of people. I pondered this for a while, and soon realized the students had already solved this issue. They affectionately call this

*work week*  
**MONDAY  
THROUGH  
THURSDAY**

group "abuelitos," a Spanish term of endearment meaning grandparents. How fitting, since grandmas and grandpas have a natural vested interest in the success of their grandchildren. They perform tasks and sacrifice time and resources, all from a heart of love. This defines what we officially call Winter Volunteers, but they truly are "abuelitos," many returning year after year, investing time and talent and resources in the lives and ministries of these dear students. And they witness firsthand how Christ is working through them and the ministry of RGBM. It is a small investment with eternal returns.

To read the 2023-2024 report, please go online at: <https://rgbm.org/winter-volunteer>

The winter  
volunteer  
season runs  
from

**OCTOBER  
THROUGH  
MARCH**

**28 HOURS  
PER WEEK**  
*for*  
**4 WEEKS**

**75 YEARS**  
*average*  
**AGE OF MALE  
VOLUNTEERS**

**27,551  
HOURS**

**of labor  
were donated  
last year**

*nine*  
**AVERAGE  
YEARS  
SERVED**



*Marlon and Norma Vogt*



# HOW DID OUR WINTER VOLUNTEER JOURNEY BEGIN?

Prior to retiring, we seriously began thinking of purposeful ministries to do in the future. We were seeking ministry opportunities in a warmer winter climate. If you are familiar with Upper Midwest winters, you will understand our desire for a warmer climate.....and of course, serving Jesus....

We initially heard about the Winter Volunteer opportunity because of connections at Norma's home church, where Dennis and Kay Kronberg and Curt and Kathy Hennings are members. Norma's sister and brother-in-law, Gary and Verlene Carlson, were also Winter Volunteers for several years. Their combined encouragement to consider joining the ranks at Rio Grande created the desire to check it out.

For two weeks in February, 2021, we visited the Carlsons at the campus. During week one, we were going to check out the Winter Volunteer ministry, and week two was going to be a relaxing time at South Padre Island. But God had other plans, as week one coincided with the infamous Texas ice storm/power outage. The normal cadence of a Winter Volunteer experience was severely compromised, but we all avoided freezing to death. Then God also changed the plan for week two in South Padre. It became apparent that the island's electrical power would not be fully restored, so we pivoted to spending another week at RGBM. This blessing allowed us to experience a 'real' week of service; and, to use a fishing analogy, "this set the hook."

We have now completed our third year of being a part of the Winter Volunteer family at Rio Grande. We have an RV on El Contento Street that we use for housing each year. Norma's focus is the sewing room, where she mainly sews items for the annual Craft Fair fundraiser. She also assists, as time allows, with many other sewing tasks. I help with whatever needs to be done, which, among other tasks, includes concrete work, electrical wiring, drywall, painting, roofing, insulating attics, and fiber-optic splicing. This year I will also begin serving as a member of the Board of Directors.

We praise God for the opportunity to serve Him in this way. In our experience, the community of Winter Volunteers is unmatched. We work hard, relax hard, and share a common understanding that God allows us to serve the leadership, faculty, staff and students of Rio Grande. The Winter Volunteer program is an amazing picture that demonstrates the fellowship of believers.

Each year our time is less consumed by how to live/fix/repair/improve our RV 'home'. We are also increasingly familiar with the cadence of events and work on campus. We no longer must look up the other Winter Volunteers'

names because they are now our dear friends. We are increasingly able to spend time with the amazing faculty and students on campus. Developing these relationships is an added blessing during our time of service at Rio Grande.

In retirement I (Marlon) volunteer as a civil engineering program evaluator for the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology. Accreditation provides significant value to institutional educational programs. An accredited program is recognition that it offers demonstrated high academic quality and effectiveness. Accreditation also provides the incentive for the institution to maintain and improve the quality of the programs.

We are excited to see God's providential expansion of the academic program. Rio Grande has achieved accreditation. It has added a Master's degree program, and faculty are acquiring advanced degrees to support this institutional growth.

While many small colleges are struggling to survive, God is expanding Rio Grande's influence and capabilities, for His glory. As Winter Volunteers, we are humbled and privileged to share in these exciting times.



◀ WINTER VOLUNTEERS AND SPANISH-SPEAKING STUDENTS OFTEN FORM LONG-LASTING FRIENDSHIPS.

# LEAVING A LEGACY

Cathie Grayson

What is service? According to dictionary.com, service is “an act of helpful activity.” Female Winter Volunteers at Rio Grande come from all over North America and beyond to stay active and useful during their retirement years. It’s a place where they can use their well-seasoned skills and wisdom for the greater good. Some may come just to help, but God has a way of taking simple service and transforming it into eternally significant action.

Walk into the Koinonia Koffee Shop and find Cathie, a Winter Volunteer from Shreveport, Louisiana. She serves up coffee with a smile, but what she’s really doing is building relationships. “It’s my happy place where I get a front row seat to what God is doing through the ministries of RGBM. I work next to several students and serve coffee to many others. I laugh with them, cry with them, and pray with them.” Cathie and her husband Steve find themselves serving as surrogate grandparents to many of the students who are far from

home and missing their families. She explains, “When I was a young, new believer, my family was not supportive. The family I gained from the Christian community provided me with the support I needed to grow and thrive as a young Christian. Today, I get to be that refuge—that home away from home—for many of the students who cross my path.”

Bernice, from Canada, has found her niche working with ESL students to practice and perfect their English skills. She also volunteers in the homeschool co-op where she tutors children while their parents are in class. Imagine the opportunities to be the heart of

Christ to children and their parents who are far from home and family. Bernice also uses her background in finance and bookkeeping to assist the finance department during the winter months when she’s on-site and remotely the rest of the year.

Many Winter Volunteers invest in the students while doing seemingly menial tasks. While cleaning apartments, they pray for the graduating students who will be entering the mission field equipped with language and Bible skills and for the new arrivals nervously taking their place inside those walls. Others use their sewing skills to create craft items and quilts that are sold to raise money for student

*“WHEN I SOMETIMES FEEL TIRED OR DISCOURAGED, SEEING THE LOVE MY WINTER GRANDMOTHERS HAVE FOR THE LORD ENCOURAGES ME TO KEEP GOING.”*



Cathie  
with some  
of her new  
friends.



*“MY WINTER GRANDMOTHERS HAVE A HUGE IMPACT ON MY LIFE AS THEY DEDICATE THEIR RETIREMENT YEARS TO SERVING THE LORD WITH GREAT STRENGTH AND ENERGY.”*

expenses. These women fill in the gaps with their existing skills and their willingness to learn new ones. They are ready to jump in wherever needed, with a greater goal of encouraging the students as they focus on their studies.

Rio Grande students consider the Winter Volunteers their mentors and “winter grandparents.” When Amy Martinez, a recent graduate, came to campus, she thought retirement meant resting from years of hard work. “My winter grandmothers have a huge impact

on my life as they dedicate their retirement years to serving the Lord with great strength and energy. Sometimes, it seems they have more energy and strength than the students! They inspire me to remain faithful to the Lord and to continue growing in Him until my last days. When I sometimes feel tired or discouraged, seeing the love my winter grandmothers have for the Lord encourages me to keep going. Having lived more years on this earth, they leave a legacy for the next generations, and, in their

wisdom, they advise us to continue living for the glory of God.”


These volunteers remind Amy of Caleb in the Old Testament, who said in Joshua 14:10-11 (CSB), “As you see, the Lord has kept me alive these forty-five years as he promised, since the Lord spoke this word to Moses while Israel was journeying in the wilderness. Here I am today, eighty-five years old. I am still as strong today as I was the day Moses sent me out. My strength for battle and for daily tasks is now as it was then.”

For the Winter Volunteers, the retirement years are not for resting. They are for making an eternal impact on young people who will soon be sent to the nations to spread the Good News. No act of service is simply “an act of helpful activity” in the Kingdom of God.

# HERE IAM SEND ME

*Dennis and Kay Kronberg*





## YOU NEVER FULLY KNOW WHAT YOU'RE GETTING INTO WHEN YOU SAY "YES" TO GOD. WE'RE LIVING PROOF.

I'm Dennis Kronberg and my wife is Kay. In 2014 we were nearing retirement age and were wondering "Okay...what's next?" After spending years listening to missionaries tell what they do on the mission field, we were wondering what we could do to serve the Lord in our retirement years. We were invited by some RGBI Winter Volunteers (people from all over the US and Canada who spend a portion of their winter helping in various areas at the school) to check out the opportunities to serve the Lord at RGBI as Winter Volunteers, doing whatever work we could in warm Texas during the cold Nebraska winters. I'd just retired from working as a HVAC professional (heating, ventilation, air conditioning) and I'd seen a "want ad" in a recent school magazine for a HVAC trained worker on campus, so I thought I could make myself useful. Kay had spent the last 15 years working as a customer service rep for the Nebraska Child Support Customer Service call center, so she felt sure she could find a niche for her secretarial abilities as well.

In January of 2015 we pulled our RV from Nebraska to Texas and

settled in on El Contento Street (translated as Happy Street), where Winter Volunteer RV's from all over the US and Canada are parked. We planned to stay about three months. Kay started working in the library on the computer, entering new book information into the library database, and I started working on AC units and wherever else a handyman was needed.

"Wherever else" can be anything you can imagine! I not only did air conditioning work, but also mowing, weed-eating, working on gas appliances like furnaces and the dining hall ovens, and trimming trees and shrubs. Trimming a palm tree? Hmm... never did that in Nebraska, but it's on my resume now!

The school's campus is made up of classroom buildings, men's and women's dorms, the dining hall/chapel building, printshop, coffeeshop, daycare, staff apartments and many private staff homes. Maintenance buildings include mechanic, welding and woodworking shops as well as a cabinet shop. Heating, electrical, plumbing...so many buildings, so many systems to keep fully functional...right? By the way, if you are a handyman with specific abilities like plumbing, construction, installing windows, roofing, installing flooring, painting...feel free to contact RGBI to see if you might be able to be of service to the Lord in this way. Look for contact information inside this magazine.

In late February, there was an activity at Bibleville for winter volunteers from the school and for the residents of Bibleville. President Larry Windle was speaking about

the school and various needs of the school. He mentioned the need for an HVAC technician and I said to Kay, "What do you think? Should we spend more than just a few weeks here? Like most of the school year?" Kay said that she was thinking the very same thing.

And, as they say, "the rest is history." We have spent most of the last ten school years here at RGBI, working as volunteers in various capacities and connecting with the student families and their children... and loving every minute of it. Five couples, friends of ours, from four different states have come as winter volunteers at our invitation and have also been a real blessing to the school.

We've found that saying "yes" to God can be an amazing experience. We've been truly blessed.

**WE'VE FOUND  
THAT SAYING  
"YES" TO GOD CAN  
BE AN AMAZING  
EXPERIENCE.**

APRIL 1, 2024 - JULY 31, 2024

# HONOR & MEMORIAL GIFTS

## IN HONOR OF

**BOB & BARB KRACHT FOR  
50 YEARS AT RGBM**  
Dr. & Mrs. Antonio Lim, Jr.

## IN MEMORY OF

**RUTH BIEBER**  
Mr. & Mrs. Richard Maatta

**T.N. "BUD" & LUCILLE  
BLACKWELL**  
Mr. & Mrs. Ken Tharp

**VERLENE CARLSON**  
Mr. & Mrs. Ronald Bryan  
David & Lonna Drewelow  
Mr. & Mrs. Kendal Pliner  
Mr. & Mrs. Sheldon Weinert  
Mr. & Mrs. Gary Williams

**MAX DEETHARDT**  
Mr. & Mrs. Richard Maatta

**DON GRABER**  
Judy Anderson  
Carol Graber  
Duane Graber  
Karen Lehman  
Dr. & Mrs. Antonio Lim, Jr.  
Lowell & Joyce Martens  
Mr. & Mrs. Jerry Owen  
Mr. & Mrs. Gary Williams

**JOYCE GRIZZARD**  
Mr. & Mrs. Jerry Owen

**GAYE NELL JOHNS**  
Mr. & Mrs. Bob Kracht

**MARVIN JOHNSON**  
Gordon Robinson

**RAY & MARY JOHNSON**  
Gordon Robinson

**JAMES LETOURNEAU**  
Mr. & Mrs. Gary Williams

**DR. FREDERICK  
MACDOWELL, JR.**  
Judith Anderson  
Ron & June Bryan  
Mr. & Mrs. Bob Kracht  
Dr. & Mrs. Antonio Lim, Jr.  
Ruth MacDowell  
Mr. & Mrs. Jerry Owen  
Lloyd & Delores Stone  
Mr. & Mrs. Albert Van Dorp  
Gary & Verla Williams

**DONALD MCMILLEN**  
Mr. & Mrs. Richard Maatta

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Mr. & Mrs. Richard Maatta  
Gordon Robinson  
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**MANFERD NICKEL**  
Jerry & Reita Owen

**FRAN NICOL**  
Rosa Palos

**ED QUICK**  
Gordon Robinson

**LUCILLE RANKE**  
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# CAMPUS NEWS

## PORTABLE LIBRARY IN ANY LANGUAGE

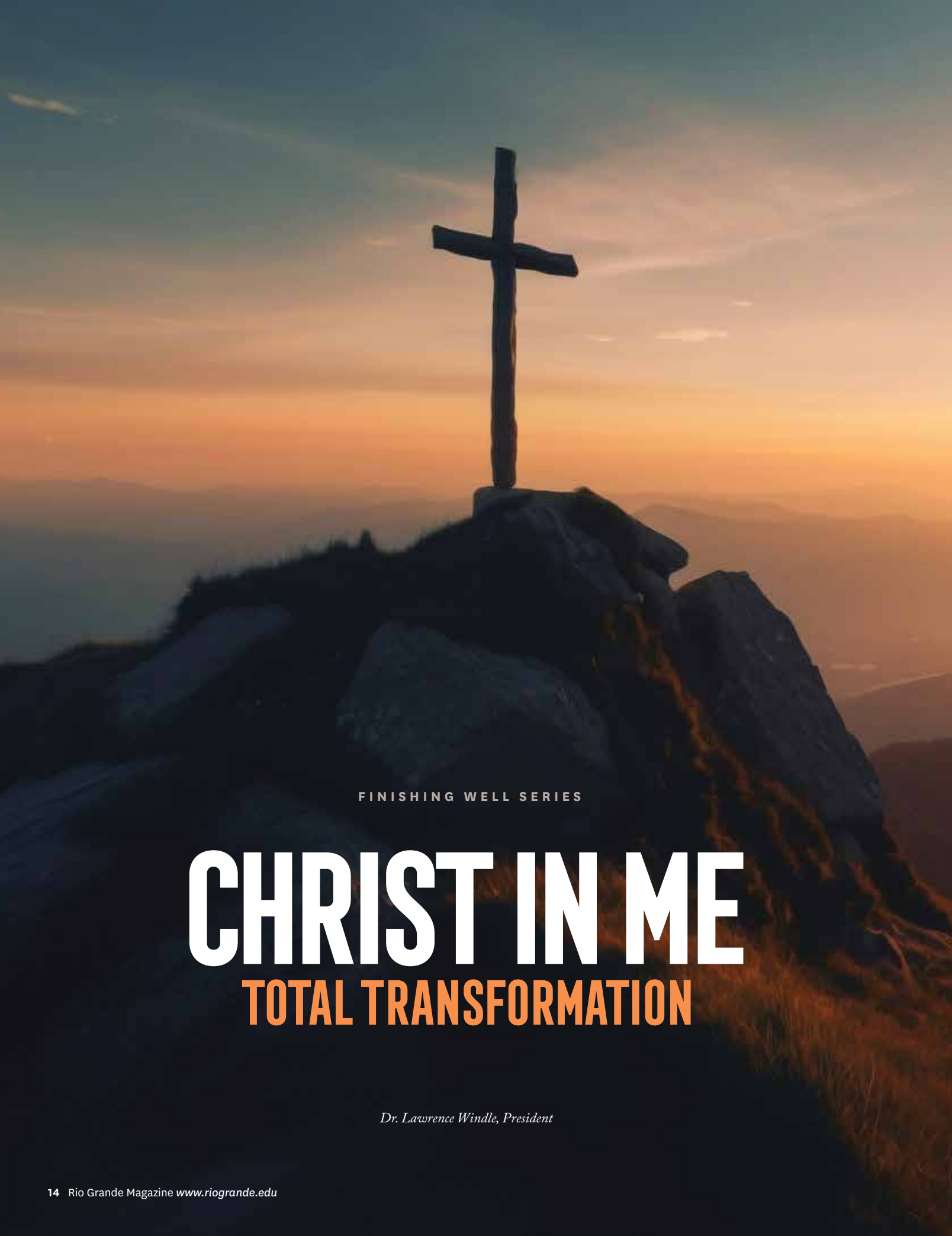
We began offering an online Master of Arts degree in Biblical Studies (36 credits) in January 2024. This new program and the exponential growth of our online bachelor's program meant we were facing a critical need to offer more resources for theological research for our off-campus students. To meet this need, we recently purchased licenses from Logos, a Bible and theology software provider, to provide a digital library of 500 books for our students and professors. This is especially important for our online students in other countries, many of whom have no Christian bookstore available. A key feature of the software is the ability to instantly translate any book into the heart language of the user. The total market value of this collection is about \$11,000, and all students who complete a degree will be able to take their digital library with them after graduation. Thank the Lord for His provision!



## RIO GRANDE TO THE WORLD ▶

Our students participated in ministry this past summer in Central and South America, Europe, and South Asia. Their activities included evangelizing in open-air meetings and door to door; participating in women's ministry and youth evangelism training; holding VBS, camp programs, and other children's events; working in drug rehabilitation centers; and hosting a clinic with one of our students who is a dentist. Please pray that the seeds planted in these areas will take root and grow.

**CORNERSTONE BIBLE INSTITUTE** President Larry Windle recently shared the following message with staff and ministry partners: "The boards of Cornerstone Bible Institute [located in Hot Springs, SD] and Rio Grande Bible Institute, after significant seasons of prayer, investigation, and frank communication, are thankful to God for His clear leading in bringing the two entities together at such a time as this. The legacy of Cornerstone ... [has] provided a landmark of ministry for many." Cornerstone has transferred its property and assets to Rio Grande Bible Institute for the purpose of continued ministry. Please pray for a smooth transition, and for wisdom as we continue to seek the Lord's direction in this venture.



FINISHING WELL SERIES

# CHRIST IN ME

## TOTAL TRANSFORMATION

*Dr. Lawrence Windle, President*

# I HAVE A CONFESSION.

I was born a sinner, by nature and conduct, fulfilling the awful actions of my depraved mind. I was separated and alienated from God...and even worse, I was an enemy of the Creator because my mind was warped and set against Him, and my actions proved it. This is called sin. Justice decreed that my rebellious mind and actions deserved separation from my enemy and retribution for my wickedness.

Wonder of wonders, while I was in this state God became a flesh-and-blood human. He wanted to pay the penalty that I deserved, and He understood that the only way to pay the penalty of death for a sinful human was to become a sinless and innocent human who took that penalty of death in my place. His death paid the price completely, but not only for my sin; He died for the sins of the whole world! He proclaimed that as many as received Him, to them He would give the right of sonship, applied for those who believed on His name. Now I am reconciled to God by the incarnation and subsequent death of Christ because I believed on His name.

God wanted me to escape the death I deserved, but He had a greater purpose in mind. He wanted to redeem me and to make me holy, blameless, and above reproach. Saved from condemnation, reconciled into fellowship with God, and transformed from a warped minded and vile acting person into a right-thinking and righteous-acting son of God! This victory over my natural self is only possible for me if I steadfastly continue to walk in well-grounded faith and fellowship with Him...and am not moved away from the simple Gospel of salvation by grace through the avenue of living faith.

This wonderful Good News was given to be proclaimed to me and to all humans! Salvation from hell, embraced as a son, and transformed into a true saint in mind and in actions, unto good works! How is this possible for me to actually do good works and to think clearly? This great mystery has been hidden to the hearts and minds of people for generations, but now has been openly proclaimed by the believers. Here is the secret: Christ lives in, indwells, those who confess with their mouths and believe in their hearts! The fellowship of having Christ living in us, transforming and changing us, gives us assurance of eternal life,

the hope of glory! This enables our actions and conduct to actually change into something that pleases God!

This is the message we preach. We warn and teach people so that they also may come to Christ for salvation and walk with Christ in sanctification. We labor and strive with all of our strength and focus to accomplish this, and He in turn fills us with supernatural enablement to give our efforts amazing success.

Colossians 1:21-29: "And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight -- if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven,... the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints... which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily."<sup>i</sup>

## DANIEL WEBSTER WHITTLE EXPRESSED IT THIS WAY:

*Once far from God  
and dead in sin,  
No light my heart could see;  
But in God's Word  
the light I found,  
Now Christ liveth in me.*

*Christ liveth in me,  
Christ liveth in me;  
Oh! what a salvation this,  
That Christ liveth in me.*

*As rays of light from  
yonder sun,  
The flowers of earth set free,  
So life and light and love  
come forth  
From Christ living in me.*

*As lives the flower  
within the seed,  
As in the cone the tree,  
So, praise the Christ of  
truth and grace,  
His Spirit dwelleth in me.*

*With longing all my  
heart is filled,  
That like Him I may be,  
As on the wondrous  
thought I dwell  
That Christ liveth in me."<sup>ii</sup>*



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#### AMBASSADORS OF RIO GRANDE

This summer we were blessed to visit many churches of supporters and Winter Volunteers who provided hospitality to the Ambassadors, our student music group. These friends also provide Rio Grande with prayer, volunteers, and generous donations that directly benefit our students. If you would like more information about how you might become involved in one of these ways, please contact us at the number below.

