

# Rio Grande

ISSUE 59 SUMMER 2025

## MAGAZINE

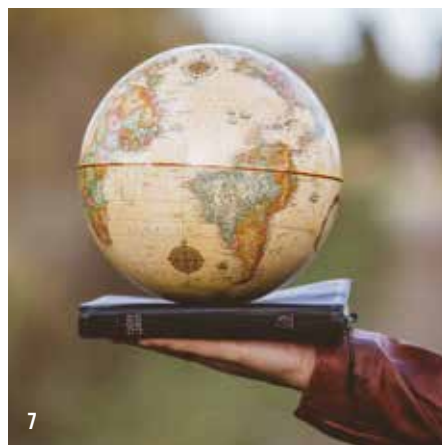
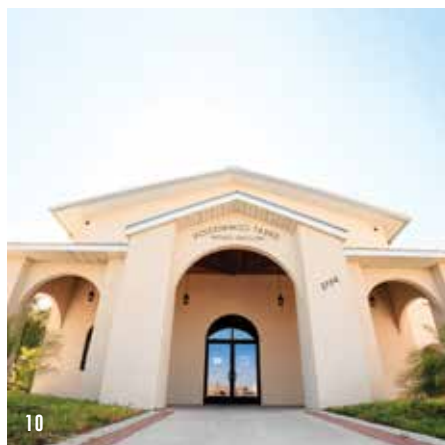
RIO GRANDE MINISTRY  
EXTENDS AROUND THE WORLD





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## on the cover

This is the flagpole circle on campus. Each Monday morning the flags from the 16-18 Latin American countries are flown representing the countries that our students are from. The alumni stories in this issue represent several of these countries.

**TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS PUBLICATION:**  
**Rio Grande Bible Ministries or Rio Grande** = organizational name  
**Seminario Bíblico Río Grande or SBRG** = Bible College  
**MLS** = Missionary Language School (1955-2017)  
**ICS** = InterCultural Studies (2017-)  
**Year** = Graduated or last attended

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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** This publication is sent without charge and is sustained by voluntary contributions. Send requests, cancellations, and address changes to Ministerial Advancement, Rio Grande Bible Institute, 4300 South US Hwy. 281, Edinburg, TX 78539, U.S.A., E-mail: [RioGrandemail@riogrande.edu](mailto:RioGrandemail@riogrande.edu), phone: 956-380-8100, fax: 956-380-8256.

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## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

# BECOMING LIGHT BEARERS

Benjamin Franklin. John Hancock. Rembrandt Peale. Famous people. Boston. Philadelphia. Baltimore.<sup>i</sup> Well known places. When we see these names, our minds immediately begin to categorize them together and associate them with a specific aspect of history. You are likely thinking along the lines of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the foundation of the United States of America.

Benjamin Franklin was the inventor who innovated oil lamp designs for bringing streetlights to Philadelphia.<sup>ii</sup> John Hancock led a citizen's committee in Boston to bring streetlights to Boston to prevent crimes at night.<sup>iii</sup> Rembrandt Peale introduced gas streetlights into Baltimore.<sup>iv</sup>

The early followers of Jesus undoubtedly had notable abilities and characteristics, but Jesus told them that they would forever be identified by the training that He gave them, the life-on-life discipleship that He poured into them, and the remarkable commission that He sent them to accomplish.

Fishermen. Tax collector. Accountant. Zealot. No, you shall be my witnesses. As you go into the world, make disciples. Baptize them

in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to observe all the things that I have taught you.

Come with me through the pages of this issue of the magazine and see how God directed, trained, and commissioned some servants through the ministry of Rio Grande. They are known as light bearers, ministers of the Gospel.



*Lawrence R. Windle*





# TAKING LIGHT *to the* DARKNESS

*Jim Berryhill, MLS '75*

In 1973, Jeanne and I went on a mission trip as part of the requirement to graduate from Bible College. We desired to serve God full time but did not know where He wanted to use us. An older missionary couple shared their testimony about working among a tribal group that had never heard of Jesus and paid our expenses to enter the jungle. During those seventy-two hours, God called us and later directed us to the Pemon Indians, a tribe with no Bible. The elderly missionaries gave us the godly advice to pray for a couple to work with us, for God to prepare the Tribe to receive God's Word, and to allow us to quickly finish school and deputation.

I finished my degree, was accepted into linguistics training in 1974, and met a family preparing for translation and church planting. While praying together, they felt led to go to the Pemon tribe with us. After linguistics school, we went immediately to Rio Grande to study Spanish, without raising support, but believing that God would supply. By the time we finished the language course, we had enough support to beg the mission to allow us to go straight to the field. And, we never missed a meal for lack of funds!

Before we arrived, God had prepared the people, who

were waiting for God's messenger to bring His word. When we asked permission to live in their village, they called a meeting where I shared our vision of translating the Bible into Pemon. The oldest man in the village, a witch doctor, stood and said, "All our lives we have searched for God who is in the light. We search but always fall away. I vote we allow James and Jeanne to live with us because I feel in my heart that God has sent them to take us from the darkness to the Light."

The men were always busy, so I had no one to teach me their language. One day I saw a group of kids playing with marbles in the village center. They loaned me a marble, so I played with them. It was great because the kids kept teaching me new words. Many of those children today are pastors and missionaries.

The religious authorities in the Pemon territory began slandering us in the local newspapers and among Venezuelan officials. We defended our case all the way to the Venezuelan Supreme Court. They claimed that we had violated an old statute and expelled us from the village and all work with tribes. When we left the village, two churches were started in their tribe, and today there are forty-five!



Later we were invited to a frontier town to buy supplies for eight missionary groups working in the jungle. While there, we helped plant two small works and to send nearly fifty young people to Bible Institutes. Nearly all of them are serving the Lord in different ministries today. We had yearly mission conferences, and many dedicated themselves to serve. There were also VBS programs, using the youth as teachers and helpers. One year there were morning and evening classes, reaching 2,000 different children in one week. In 2007, the man in charge of expelling missionaries told us that we should make plans to leave.

God then opened the door to serve in Bogotá, Colombia. There, we witnessed many decisions for the Lord and helped in a Bible Institute for those who had no formal studies. At one mission conference, many made decisions to prepare to serve full time. And at three Passover suppers, the Gospel was shared with the many visitors.

In 2023, fifty years after our first trip to the mission field, we returned to the US, due to my health problems. We heard about the mission conference at Rio Grande last November and came to visit. We spoke to an older couple who were preparing to help teach in the Bible College. We also met several faculty members and leaders who took time to talk to us about possible areas where we could be helpful at Rio Grande. We submitted an application, and in December 2024, we were accepted. We are now learning how to carry out our new ministries -- exactly fifty years after studying Spanish at Rio Grande!

"ALL OUR  
LIVES  
WE HAVE  
SEARCHED  
FOR  
GOD WHO  
IS IN THE  
LIGHT"



WHEN WE LEFT THE  
VILLAGE, TWO  
CHURCHES WERE  
STARTED IN THEIR TRIBE,  
AND TODAY THERE  
ARE FORTY-FIVE!

PHOTO FREEPIK.COM



# TRANSFORMED

## INTO A SERVANT

### LEARNING BY EXAMPLE

*Oscar Martinez (BC '11)*

My name is Oscar Martinez. I am from Mexico and I began my studies in Rio Grande on January 8, 2006. I grew up in a family that sought to guide their children in the ways of the Lord. When I was fourteen years old, our family was challenged to work full time, planting churches in the city of Guadalajara, Mexico.

When I was eighteen, four years after serving the Lord with my family in that arduous work, the Lord called me to prepare myself for the ministry as well. For me, it was a great testimony to see how my Lord opened the doors and traced the path for me to study at Rio Grande Bible College.

Studying the Word of God was exciting. I chose to take the pastoral emphasis, and I can joyfully say that I had very good teachers in my years as a student at Rio Grande. They were men and women of God whom I still remember fondly, because they transmitted to me their passion for teaching God's Word.

However, one of the greatest lessons I learned during my time at Rio Grande was that the Lord had not led me there to learn only in the classroom. He also wanted me to learn from people with the same calling, the same heart, and the same desire to prepare to serve Him faithfully. During my time there, I had a variety of experiences, and I believe that half

of what I learned was through the lives of my fellow students. I learned from their examples, from their passion to serve, from their humility, but also from how they forgave offenses and carried each other's burdens. And I also learned from their mistakes.

I learned that the people I was going to minister to when I would become a pastor were no different from those I rubbed shoulders with at the Bible College. They would also need to study God's Word, and to experience His grace and forgiveness. And they would need someone to help them carry their burdens and show them the love of the Lord. I learned that it is important to prepare to teach the truth—but the truth must also be taught in love, with patience, with the same wisdom and love as the Lord Jesus modeled for us (Matthew 6:34).

I graduated from Rio Grande Bible College on May 12, 2011. Since then, the Lord has allowed me to serve Him for fourteen years in the city of Queretaro, Mexico,

as Co-Pastor at Nuevo Amanecer Presbyterian Church. I thank God that when I arrived at Rio Grande, I was a boy with a great desire to learn, and He transformed me into a servant for His glory.

Before my time at Rio Grande, I did not consider myself a leader or a good teacher, much less a good preacher. I simply did not believe I was capable of many things; I just wanted to learn more of His Word. However, the Lord prepared me, transformed me, and taught me that apart from Him I can do nothing (John 15:5). Almost fifteen years later, I now can see how God prepares us and uses us to minister to others—to help them grow in their love, commitment, and personal relationship with Him.

In 2020, I had the opportunity to meet and minister to a young woman in my church, named Daniela Melchor. The Lord allowed me to witness how He worked in her life in a tremendous way—in the midst of the Covid pandemic—and completely changed her life. Daniela answered the Lord's call to serve Him in 2022, and in 2023 she began studying in the Christian Education emphasis at Rio Grande Bible College.

**THE LORD PREPARED ME,  
TRANSFORMED ME, AND TAUGHT  
ME THAT APART FROM HIM I CAN DO  
NOTHING (JOHN 15:5).**

I think I was one of the youngest students at Rio Grande when I enrolled there, and I didn't feel ready to fulfill the Lord's call on my life. But throughout the following years, He has taught me that He doesn't call trained people; but instead, He trains those whom He calls. One day He called me, and then He trained me. He showed me that it is not about our abilities, but about our willingness to serve Him to impact the lives of others. So, the work here continues, and my prayer is that God will allow me to continue to impact the lives of those who want to continue this work and to prepare to serve Him (Luke 10:2).

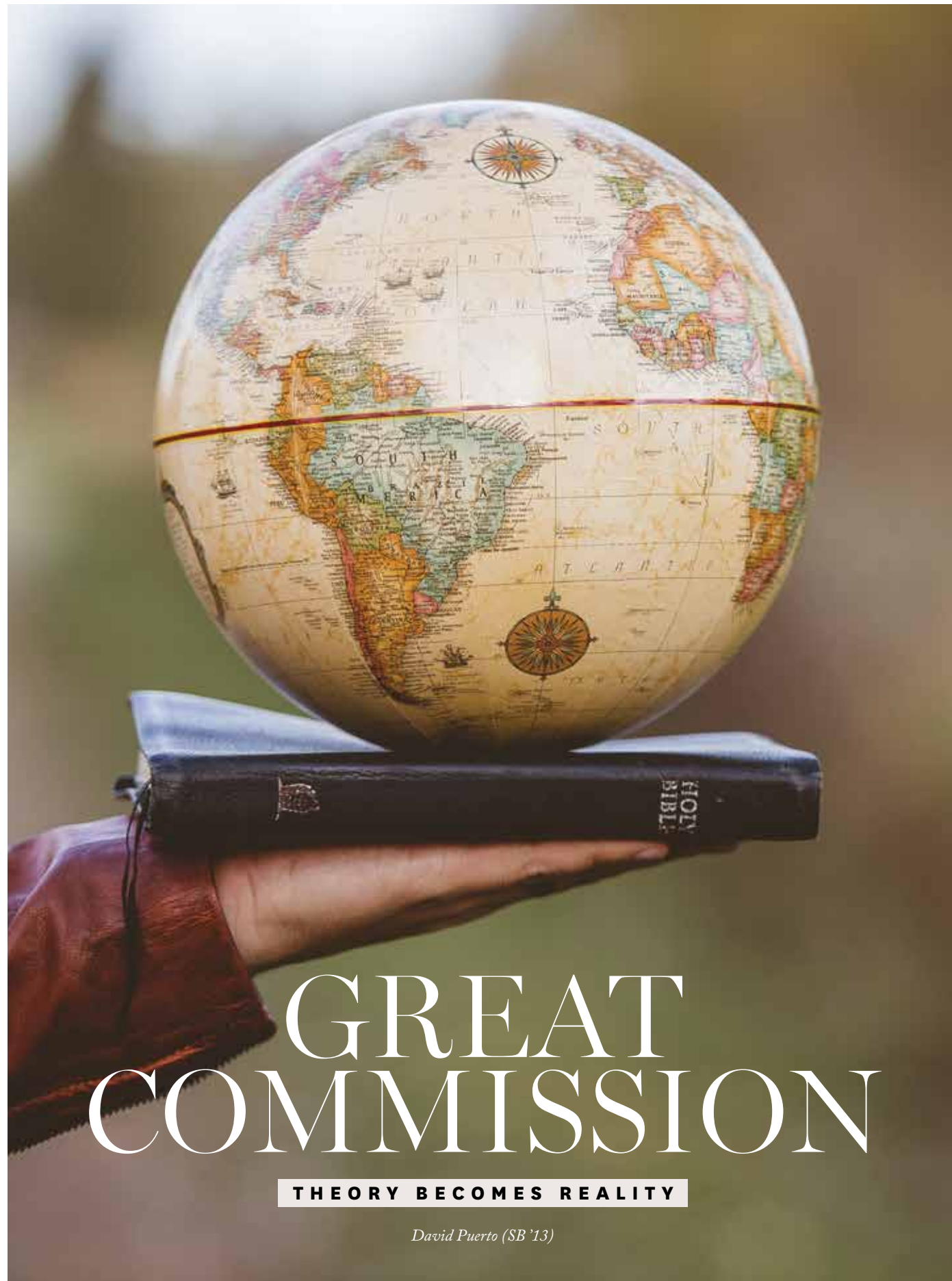
**PASTOR OSCAR  
MARTÍNEZ  
WITH CURRENT  
STUDENT,  
DANIELA  
MELCHOR.**

**I WAS A BOY WITH  
A GREAT DESIRE TO  
LEARN, AND**

**GOD TRANSFORMED  
ME INTO A SERVANT  
FOR HIS GLORY.**

**GOD HAS TAUGHT ME  
THAT HE DOESN'T CALL  
TRAINED PEOPLE;  
BUT INSTEAD, HE TRAINS  
THOSE WHOM HE CALLS.**





# GREAT COMMISSION

THEORY BECOMES REALITY

*David Puerto (SB '13)*

PHOTO: FREEPIK.COM

## FOR YEARS NOW, GOD HAS PLACED IN MY HEART A STRONG DESIRE

to see the local church in Latin America take an active role in global missions—not only as receivers of the Gospel, but as senders of workers to places where Christ has not yet been proclaimed.

Currently, I have the privilege of serving in two areas that reflect this passion. On one hand, I am part of the pastoral team of Iglesia Reforma in Guatemala, where we walk together as a community in the Gospel, seeking to grow in our faithfulness to the Word and our mission in the world. On the other hand, I am part of the global mobilization team of TEAM (The Evangelical Alliance Mission), where I serve as the Mobilization Ministry Area Leader for Latin America. My role is to accompany local churches in the region, helping them to discern their call to send cross-cultural missionaries to peoples without a Gospel witness.

Service in mission mobilization involves travel, challenges, and times of faith. But it has also allowed us to see God's faithfulness in unexpected ways. As a family, we have learned that the Great Commission is not just a theological concept, but a reality that transforms lives, beginning with our own.



As a family, we have learned that the Great Commission is not just a theological concept, but a reality that transforms lives, beginning with our own.

Throughout my ministry, I have seen how God is awakening many Latin American churches to actively participate in missionary work. However, this process does not happen automatically. Mobilization is key to helping churches develop a biblical view of missions and to structure sustainable processes to identify, prepare, and send workers to the nations.

In my service with TEAM, I work hand-in-hand with pastors and leaders, providing tools, mentoring and teaching strategies for churches to become responsible and effective. Seeing congregations that previously did not consider sending missionaries now praying, investing, and sending their own members to the cross-cultural field is one of the greatest joys of this ministry.

Along the way, Rio Grande played a pivotal role in my formation and preparation for ministry. It was a time in which God not only deepened my knowledge of His Word, but also expanded my vision of His work in the world. There, I learned the importance of a Gospel-centered theology and how it should shape every aspect of ministry, including missionary mobilization.

The relationships, teaching and discipleship I received at Rio Grande continue to be pillars in my life and service. Every conversation with professors

and peers, every class and every ministry opportunity were tools God used to prepare me for what I do today.

The task of the Great Commission continues, and although there are advances in missionary mobilization in Latin America, there is still much to be done. I pray that more churches in our region will assume this call with courage and faithfulness. I also pray that God will continue to raise up mobilizers, pastors, and leaders who will prepare and send workers to the ends of the earth.

If I have learned anything along the way, it is that the local church is God's instrument for global mission. And it is a privilege to serve in this effort, trusting that the Lord of the harvest continues to send workers into His harvest.



# FORGED AT RIO GRANDE

Erick Zaldaña (BC '99)

My name is Erick Zaldaña, and I have the privilege of being part of the 1996-1999 class of Rio Grande Bible College.

I currently serve as senior pastor at Shadow Mountain Spanish Church in San Diego, California, ministering to the Hispanic community of Shadow Mountain Community Church, whose pastor is Dr. David Jeremiah.

With my wife Yami, we began our pastoral ministry in 2008, when we founded the church with the support of twenty-four people. Today, by the grace of the Lord, we enjoy a testimony that identifies us as a biblical, Christ-

centered and relevant church; receiving more than 1,000 people each week at our two campuses. God has allowed us to share the Gospel over the years, making use of mass media such as radio, television and digital platforms. This has allowed a regional reach, taking the Gospel to cities in both northern Mexico and southern California.

All of the above has been possible, first of all, thanks to the Lord's support. But I also give thanks to the biblical-theological formation I received in my years as a student at Rio Grande. The teaching there has been engraved on my mind and heart forever.

Rio Grande not only gave me the biblical formation necessary for the ministry, but also forged my character, spiritual life, and my dependence on, and relationship with, God.

I believe that I was a student at a great time at Rio Grande, because we had a small computer room with about ten computers, which students had to reserve in advance. Since the Internet had just emerged, all our work had to be done exclusively in the library, filling a table with our various books. Now that I am in full-time ministry, I value very much these "limitations" that we had back then. They forged, both in me and in my classmates, the habit of studying the Scriptures biblically, exegetically, and linguistically. We believed that working in the library, in the kitchen, or as tutors, was like winning the jackpot, and only the "chosen ones" could enjoy those assignments. Those were the days!



Erick pastors the Spanish congregation at Shadow Mountain.

**RIO GRANDE NOT ONLY GAVE ME THE BIBLICAL FORMATION NECESSARY FOR THE MINISTRY, BUT ALSO FORGED MY CHARACTER, SPIRITUAL LIFE, AND MY DEPENDENCE ON, AND RELATIONSHIP WITH, GOD.**

I got to be part of the gardening department, which helped me to measure the thermometer in Fahrenheit degrees instead of Celsius, as I was used to. This was crucial for me, as there were days when the temperature would rise to 110°F, and we still had to make sure the lawns were properly mowed, the flowers watered and fertilized, and the seminary's green areas properly tended.

Working every day in high temperatures under the sun helped me to become more responsible—because after doing my work, I had to

eat quickly and take advantage of the hours of study in the library. I wanted to do well in the assignments that were given by our teachers such as Dr. Russell Hobbs, Dr. Gordon Johnson, Dr. Aaron Juett, Dr. George Parker, Dr. Oscar Sanchez, and Keith Swartzbaugh, among others.

Another experience that affected me immensely was going out every Saturday to knock on doors in the apartments near the campus. It was then that my good friend Jose Gutierrez (Pepito) taught me how to present the Gospel effectively.

Now, almost thirty years later, one of the most solid ministries in our church is evangelism—all thanks to what I learned at Rio Grande! And what could I say about the weekends with OP (Practical Ministry), which allowed me to minister in a local church in the nearby city of Mission, where I developed a passion for Christian education and discipleship.

The experiences that I had in practical ministry at Rio Grande, we have replicated in our children's ministry here in California, with more than 300 children every week, and in the more than 60 workers who helped develop our children's ministry, "Shadow Mountain Kids en Espanol."

I will always be grateful to God for having given me the opportunity to come to Edinburg to enjoy and learn from the extraordinary examples of dedication and devotion that we saw first hand in the lives of our teachers, the staff, and all the other workers at Rio Grande Bible College.





DECEMBER 1, 2024 - MARCH 31, 2025

# HONOR & MEMORIAL GIFTS

## IN HONOR OF

**KEITH & OLIVIA HEPPNER**  
Gail P. Higgs

**CHARLES LEWIS & PENNY SEBRING**  
Mr. & Mrs. Don Lewis

## IN MEMORY OF

**LAINE AMAVIZCA**  
Sherri Koch  
Mr. & Mrs. Don Lewis  
Mr. & Mrs. Armand Rouleau

**MILLIE BARGER**  
Shirley Harrison

**CONRAD BARNUM**  
Mr. & Mrs. Ronald Heath  
Rev. & Mrs. Hilmore Williams

**FRANK CAMPBELL**  
Mr. & Mrs. Bob Kracht

**VERLENE CARLSON**  
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Helen Robinson

**ISAAC FRIESEN**  
Mr. & Mrs. Ron Eigsti

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Catherine A. Garrett  
Gwen Goodrich  
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Thomas L. Hanson  
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Helen Robinson  
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Jerry Owen  
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Michael & Colleen Downey

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Dr. Jim & Alice Lytle

**JOYCE MARTENS**  
Mr. & Mrs. Ron Eigsti  
Sheri Koch  
Justin & Sunshine Loewen

**FRAN NICOL**  
Mr. & Mrs. Robert Mills

**REITA OWEN**  
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Anonymous  
Allen & Gina Bass  
Charlene Berger  
Linda Bolton  
Mike & Shelly Bruegge  
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Doug & Annette Chalupa  
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Mount Vernon Missionary Baptist Church  
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**NOLA PIERCE**  
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**MELVIN RAY POPE**  
Rev. & Mrs. Hilmore Williams

**LARRY POTTER**  
JoAnn Ries

**H. EARL RANKE**  
Mr. & Mrs. Bob Kracht  
Norma Ranke

**ALICE SCHLOTTE**  
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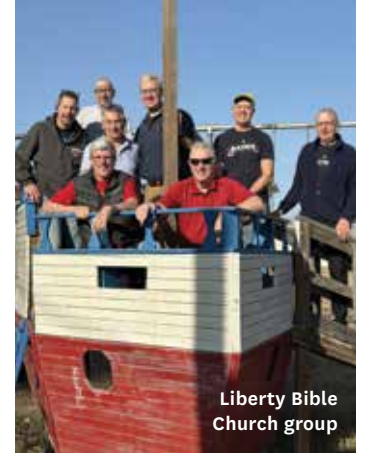
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**BARB TONEY**  
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**DELORES WHITE**  
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## RIO GRANDE BIBLE MINISTRIES CAMPUS NEWS

Calvary  
Evangelical Free  
Church group



Liberty Bible  
Church group

### SPRING WORK TEAMS

A work team of 13 from Liberty Bible Church of Chesterton, IN, served with us the week of February 1-8. Projects included repairing and building playground equipment, tree trimming and removal, assisting with database work and storytime in the library, and hosting a game night for the students.

Twenty-three young people and adults from Calvary Evangelical Free Church in Spring Grove, MN, were on our campus March 14-21, helping in various ways, such as painting, insulation work, tree trimming, and stuffing envelopes for a mailing. This team included third- and fourth-generation descendants of people who served at Rio Grande!

From March 24-29, 23 people from West Side Baptist Church and School in El Dorado, AR, did a roofing job, fixed exercise stations along our walking path, helped with several painting projects, took shelter during a tornado warning (!), and assisted with clean-up after the severe thunderstorms that hit our campus March 26-27. Also, a member of the team who is a hair stylist offered free haircuts during the week.



West Side Baptist  
Church group



▲ **CAMPING CLASS PRACTICUM** Bible College Students in the Camping Ministry class led by Bob Kracht and Billy Jackson planned and conducted a weekend camp titled “Doers of the Word” (based on James 1:22-25) for students and staff. The camp took place April 4-5 at Brand Christian Youth Camp in Mission, TX. The 31 attendees and 9 leaders enjoyed teaching, worship, and sessions of connecting with God and nature, including a guided bird walk by co-teacher and Media Director Billy Jackson.



# The Father's House

Larry Windle, President

“We read of a place that's called heaven,  
It's made for the pure and the free;  
These truths in God's word He has given,  
How beautiful heaven must be...”<sup>i</sup>

I heard George Jones crooning the familiar words today, and I remembered my mother singing along with George while she did her housework. Now and then she would turn and sing directly to our little dog Gypsy, “how beau-ti-ful hea-ven must beee...”

I miss my mother. She passed away a few months ago while I was on a return flight from Bolivia. Her new home is in heaven. Many of my good friends and family members have gone to live there this year.

What is heaven? My dear friend and mentor, Dr. Alban Douglas, said, “The first heaven is the area where birds fly. The second heaven is where sputniks go. The third heaven is the home or throne of the Lord God.”<sup>ii</sup> Genesis 1:1 asserts that God created the heavens, while other passages state and infer that the third heaven, God's throne, will abide forever.<sup>iii</sup>

Heaven is the dwelling place of the Lord God.<sup>iv</sup> It is referred to as a building<sup>v</sup> and a tabernacle,<sup>vi</sup> even as a grainery.<sup>vii</sup> Jesus called it His Father's House.<sup>viii</sup>

Heaven is also a general term for the eternal living arrangements that He is preparing for the redeemed people. At the culmination of the ages, which Scripture often refers to as the day of the Lord, the present earth and its accompanying universe (the

first and second heavens) shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.<sup>ix</sup> Then God will recreate the earth and the universe, “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.”<sup>x</sup> This is part of the preparation for our eternal, heavenly home.

The New Jerusalem, which Christ is preparing for His bride, the Church, is not heaven; but rather one of the components of our eternal dwelling place. After the creation of the new heavens and earth, the New Jerusalem descends down “from heaven, but is not heaven itself.”<sup>xi</sup>

Scripture describes heaven as a high and holy place,<sup>xii</sup> But oh, so much more! It is a place of happiness,<sup>xiii</sup> a place without death, tears, sorrow, crying or pain.<sup>xiv</sup> There will be no hunger, thirst, excessive heat or cold,<sup>xv</sup> and there will be no night there...”<sup>xvi</sup>

In heaven no drooping nor pining,  
No wishing for elsewhere to be;

God's light is forever, there  
shining,

How beautiful heaven must be.

Various wonderful descriptors are given about what heaven will be like. God lives there. The Devil will never enter there!<sup>xvii</sup> Many want to live in a peaceful neighborhood, and the Bible tells us about some of the people that will not be our neighbors in Heaven. The “fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars” won't live there!

What a wonderful group of cleansed people will be living in our eternal abode! And we know that Jesus went there, and the Old Testament saints will be there. Enoch and Elijah and all of the patriarchs will be there. Ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of angels will be there.<sup>xviii</sup>

The angels so sweetly are singing,

Up there by the beautiful sea;

Sweet chords from their gold  
harps are ringing,

How beautiful heaven must be.

The Bride of Christ, the Church will be there, with all those who have died in Christ, whom God will bring with Him.<sup>xix</sup> Those of us who are alive at the time of the rapture will be with Him there. And those who are saved after the rapture, while not forming part of the Church, will still be redeemed through the blood of the Lamb and live in that eternal place!

There will be no more curse, and all of its effects will be done away with.<sup>xx</sup> And we will know each other,<sup>xxi</sup> just like we were known on earth.<sup>xxii</sup> He will call us by our names, just as they are recorded in the Lamb's book of life!

How we look forward to meeting our loved ones again... what talks and fellowship we will have!

But above all, we will see Jesus our Savior.

How beautiful heaven must be

Sweet home of the happy and free;

Fair haven of rest for the weary,

How beautiful heaven must be.

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<sup>ii</sup> DOUGLAS, ALBAN. HEAVEN. 100 BIBLE LESSONS. EDITORIAL RIO GRANDE, 2025. <sup>iii</sup> II COR. 5:1, HEB. 11:10, PSA. 45:6 <sup>iv</sup> MATT. 6:9 <sup>v</sup> I COR. 5:1 <sup>vi</sup> HEB. 9:11 <sup>vii</sup> MATT. 3:12 <sup>viii</sup> JOHN 14:2 <sup>ix</sup> 2 PET. 3:10, NEW KING JAMES  
VERSION \* REV. 21:1, NEW KING JAMES VERSION \* REV. 21:2, 10 <sup>x</sup> ISA. 57:15, PSA. 20:6 <sup>xi</sup> REV. 21:4 <sup>xii</sup> REV. 21:3 <sup>xiii</sup> ISA. 65:17 <sup>xiv</sup> ISA. 65:17 <sup>xv</sup> ISA. 65:17 <sup>xvi</sup> ISA. 65:17 <sup>xvii</sup> ISA. 65:17 <sup>xviii</sup> ISA. 65:17 <sup>xix</sup> ISA. 65:17 <sup>xx</sup> ISA. 65:17 <sup>xxi</sup> ISA. 65:17 <sup>xxii</sup> ISA. 65:17





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