

# Rio Grande

ISSUE 61 SPRING 2026

## MAGAZINE



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**STUDENTS  
EXPERIENCE  
FOREIGN  
MISSIONS  
FIRSTHAND**  
ON THE DOORSTEP OF  
THE MISSION FIELD

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SPRING 2026



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**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

**on the cover** What a thrill for the team! Hoping to give a Gospel of John to the owners of a restaurant, they learned instead that the couple already knew the Lord! "We worship the same God!" they announced. After coming to Christ on a trip to the US, they had returned to Thailand and opened the restaurant to reach their countrymen for the Lord.

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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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**PRESIDENT'S CORNER**

## RECIPE FOR REWARD

The World War II bombardier approached their B-17 Flying Fortress with his canvas kit bag in one hand.

The crew gathered around to help put the ingredients from the bag into an empty ammo can. They put in six eggs, four cans of evaporated milk, one can of sweetened condensed milk, one and a half cups of sugar, and a teaspoon of vanilla. They mixed it well and put the lid on tightly and handed it to the gunner to take with him into

God uses the complications and turbulence of raw missionary experience.

his tiny gunner's ball turret, suspended under the fuselage. The "flyboys" knew that there would be inevitable turbulence, and the worst spot for bitter cold and extreme

vibration was the glass turret. He strapped the metal container of ingredients into the ammo rack so that it wouldn't come loose. At altitude it was freezing cold so the mix would solidify. And then all that shaking from engine vibration and turbulence, even the shock waves from enemy fire, basically

turned the sludgy mix smooth. So by the time they landed they had fresh ice cream made in the middle of a warzone. It helped serve as a taste of home and comfort, thousands of feet over enemy territory and thousands of miles away from home.

In similar ways, God uses the complications and turbulence of raw missionary experience. In the midst of hardship He combines the ingredients of the truth of the Word, the drawing of the Spirit, and the faithful proclamation of his servants to bring souls to Himself and to make of them faithful followers of His. Come with me through the pages of this issue to see how God is deploying Rio Grande students and alumni into His harvest fields to make "sweet and wonderful" samples of His grace, and disciples of every tribe, tongue, people and nation.



*Larry B. Windle*



# Practical Preparation for Missions

*Cesar Garduno, Missions Department Coordinator*

**E**ach person serving in the Missions Department keeps God's Mission at the forefront—He is the reason that we do what we do. Our Lord Jesus Christ told His disciples that they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth (Acts 1:8). We too want to be part of that mission; we want all of our students who are involved in God's Mission to be witnesses.

The Missions Department seeks to mobilize our Bible College students to become involved in God's Mission. It coordinates, promotes, organizes, and follows up on the mission trips that students take each summer. We maintain connections with missionaries and organizations on the field where our students serve in the summer.

At the same time, in keeping with the mission of Rio Grande Bible College—to train Christ-centered leaders with a biblical worldview for the global church—students are encouraged to make that mission a reality on the field by obeying the Great Commission. They seek to put into practice what they have learned in the classroom.

Before going to the field, students receive various training sessions led by Rio Grande staff with experience in areas such as the following: raising financial support, building prayer teams, teamwork, submission to authority, leadership, conflict resolution, field safety, financial management, and more.

We want every student to receive holistic preparation for their future ministry. They understand the biblical foundation of God's mission, having studied it in class, and they are encouraged to depend completely on God, praying for His care and provision.

Culturally, they develop empathy and sensitivity in intercultural relationships through their daily lives with other students from various Hispanic backgrounds. This interaction helps to prepare them to serve in other countries and cultures.

We have seen how, through mission trips, God impacts students by transforming their lives and teaches them new perspectives on spiritual and social realities in other parts of the world. They develop their character by learning to act with humility, service, and teamwork. Many

times, through these experiences, God confirms that He is calling them to become full-time missionaries.

Thanks to God, we can see the fruit of these mission trips. It brings us great joy when students who have gone on summer trips, after graduating return to the mission field as full-time missionaries. Their churches become involved in God's work by sending them, supporting them financially, and praying for them. Some also maintain connections with missionaries and organizations they were encouraged to contact during their time as students.

We pray that our good God will continue using the Missions Department as an essential part of Rio Grande Bible College—to fulfill Christ's mandate by encouraging students, local churches, and winter volunteers to invest resources, time, and prayer in the missionary formation of our students.

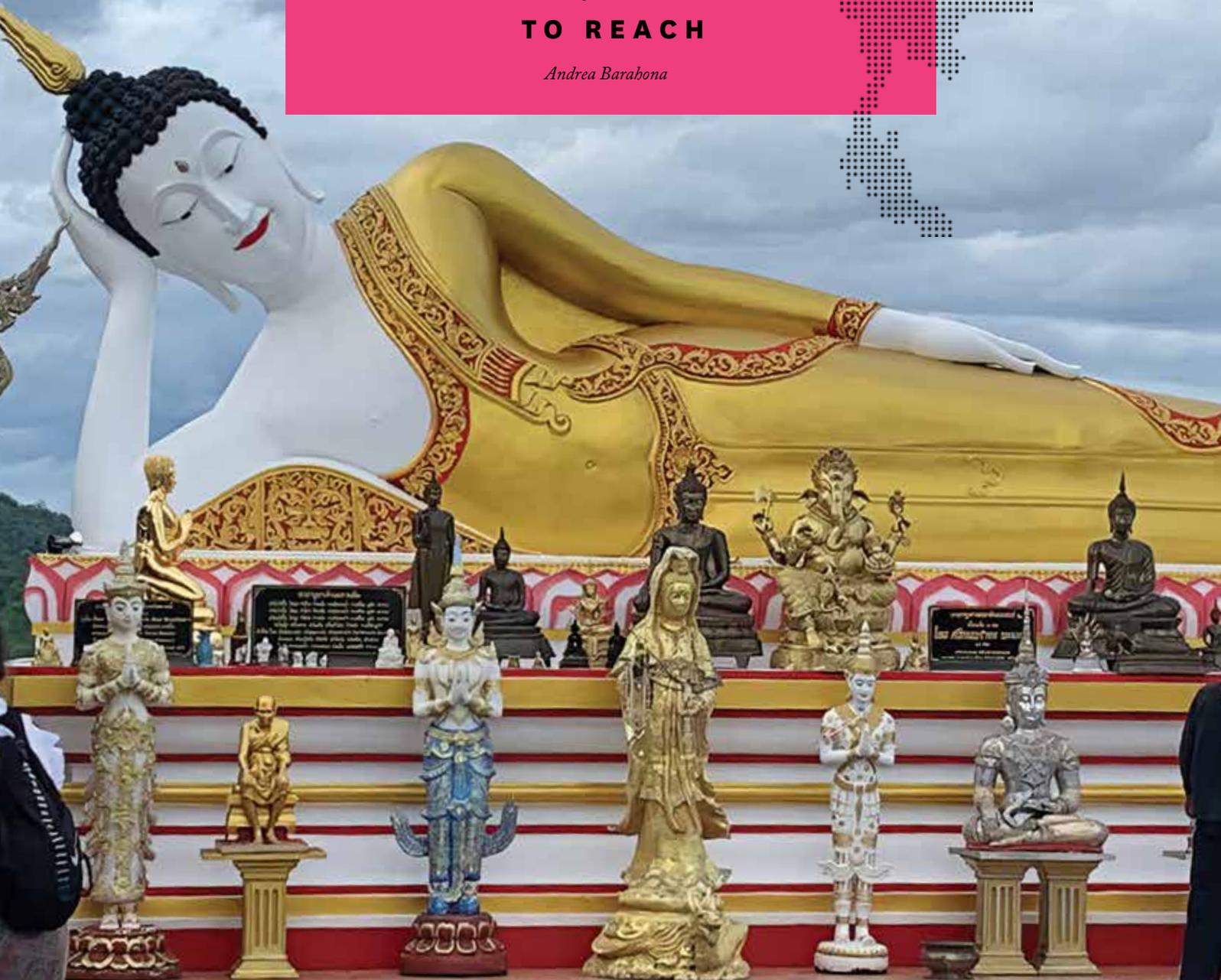
We want every student and every mission trip to be used to glorify God and to share the good news of salvation with others. We desire for Rio Grande Bible College to continue developing our graduates with a passion for missions—becoming Christ's witnesses in all nations—and that the Gospel would go deeper into their lives as they see firsthand the great spiritual need in other parts of the world.

Let's continue this ministry until Christ is proclaimed in all nations!

# THAILAND

**A COUNTRY TO  
DISCOVER, A COUNTRY  
TO REACH**

*Andrea Barabona*



▲  
The Reclining  
Buddha

→ OUR TRIP TO THAILAND WAS MUCH MORE THAN A GEOGRAPHICAL JOURNEY — IT WAS AN EXPERIENCE THAT DEEPLY TRANSFORMED OUR VIEW OF MISSIONS.



◀  
Andrea (front),  
presenting New  
Testaments in a  
public school

## EXPLORATION IN BANGKOK

The first stage began in Bangkok, a vibrant city where spiritual and daily life are naturally intertwined. As we walked through temples and museums, we understood the magnitude of idolatry and religious syncretism that shape the Thai worldview. We saw how altars dedicated to gods, spirits, and ancestors are found on every corner, reminding us of the words in 1 Kings 14:23 about altars raised “on every high hill and under every green tree.”

Thai spirituality combines Buddhism, Brahmanism, animism, and devotion to the royal family, creating a complex, polytheistic, and ritualistic religious context. In this environment, the gospel faces a unique challenge: many are not seeking eternal life, but earthly well-being. However, that pursuit of “immediate redemption” can serve as a bridge to speak about true rest and hope in Christ. Amid cultural admiration and spiritual contrast, we faced physical and emotional hardships — from digestive issues to spiritual attacks — but God sustained us.

## TRAINING & MINISTRY IN CHIANG MAI

The second stage took us to Chiang Mai, a quieter but strategic city for missionary work. There, we visited more than twelve ministries dedicated to spreading the gospel throughout northern Thailand.

We also attended the international Safari Church, where missionaries from various nations gather to worship. This time strengthened our sense of community and reminded us of the importance of the global church. Among our activities, we participated in training workshops, a practical Muay Thai class, and cultural immersion experiences that helped us better understand local life.

## CULTURAL & SPIRITUAL LESSONS

Throughout the journey, we discovered that learning the local language is an act of love. Language is the doorway to the heart of a culture, and every missionary who wishes to serve effectively must commit to learning it. We also realized that Thailand is diverse: the northern region has Lanna cultural roots distinct from the rest of the country, and it is home to multiple ethnic groups such as the Karen and the Hmong.

The testimony of the Hmong people was especially inspiring: after encountering the gospel abroad, many returned to evangelize their own people, demonstrating the power of reverse missions. Likewise, learning about the work of many other ministries helped us see the manifold grace of God in reaching the lost.

We returned to Bangkok for our trip home, and during those final hours, God blessed us with the opportunity to meet Brother Pablo Morales, a former student of Rio Grande and pastor of one of the largest Christian churches in Thailand: ECB, where around two thousand people from seventy nations gather. I would say this meeting was the crowning moment that closed our challenging journey. It reminded us that God loves all the nations of the earth and desires their salvation.

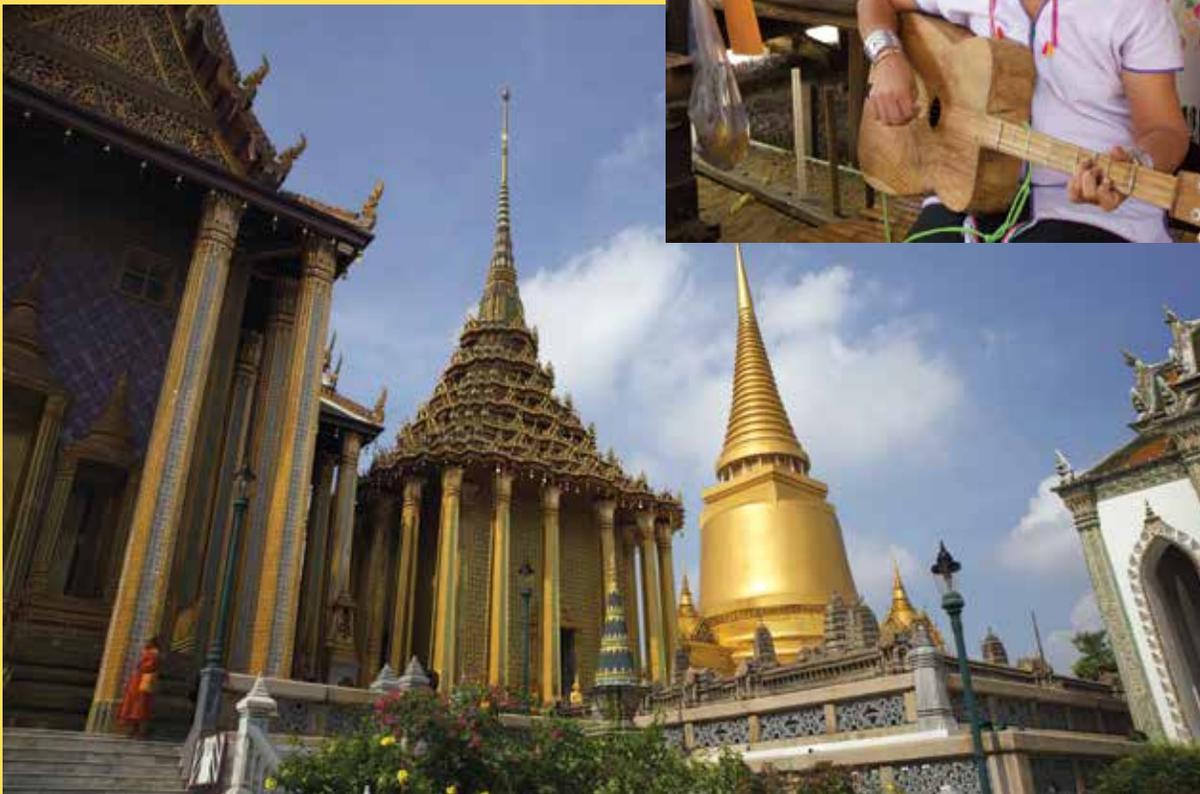


## FINAL REFLECTIONS

We came to understand that missions in Thailand are not based on large events but on personal relationships and authentic, long-term testimonies — where friendship and constant presence are key. Professions, talents, and everyday skills become the means through which the love of Christ is shared.

This trip deeply marked us. It reminded us that we are called to live on mission, to love and serve wherever God sends us, and that although the spiritual realm is difficult, the gospel continues to be the power of God for salvation.

We returned grateful and with a renewed vision of cross-cultural missions. Without a doubt, Thailand is not only a country to discover — it is a country to reach.

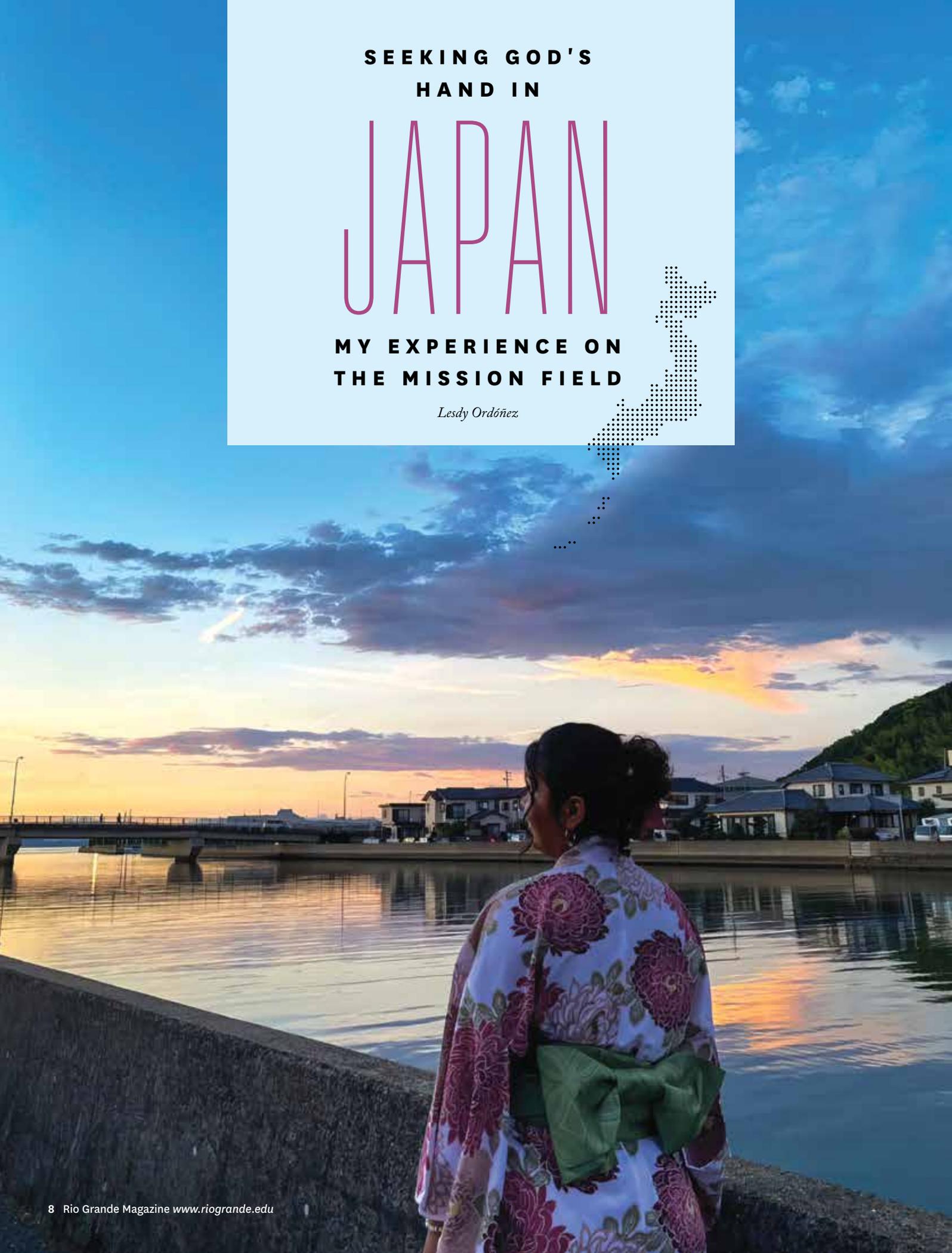


SEEKING GOD'S  
HAND IN

# JAPAN

MY EXPERIENCE ON  
THE MISSION FIELD

*Lesdy Ordóñez*



**→ I HAVE BEEN IN JAPAN AS A MISSIONARY FOR TEN MONTHS, AND I BELIEVE ONE OF THE clearest ways I have seen God's hand at work was in the process that brought me here.**

God placed in my heart the desire to be a missionary in Japan back in 2016, and that promise became a reality nine years later.

During the waiting period, there were moments when I truly felt it would not be possible to serve in Japan. Especially two years ago, I remember persistently asking God when He would take me to the mission field. Now I can see that His timing was perfect because the church where I currently serve did not even exist two years ago—He was preparing everything. God moved very specific pieces to bring me to Nagasaki: from the first Japanese person I met, to serving in a place where I learned how to raise funds, to having no open doors with missionary agencies, facing many rejections to serve in other parts of Japan, and now being part of a multicultural team (including Latinos) and a church with the vision of being a family that loves God and people. When I look at every detail, I am overwhelmed by God's faithfulness and His good plans for my life.

The process leading up to arriving on the field was truly very, very hard. Now I can see that through all that time, God was preparing me for what was to come. Lifeshare, the church where I serve, has been one of the most beautiful blessings I have ever received. During my first week here, four Japanese girls were baptized, and during my time in Nagasaki (not by my own work), three more baptisms have taken place. For me, it is amazing to see the power of God transforming lives.

Only 1% of Japan's population is Christian, which leaves us with 99% of opportunities to share the gospel. The concept of grace is difficult to grasp in a society so centered on effort and work. In many cases, there is little room for meaningful relationships; even Japanese families spend an average of only 16 seconds of quality family time per day.

Personal effort is the measure of worth, and people are often defined more by their usefulness than by their being.

However, the reality in the hearts of the Japanese cannot escape God's design and the truth that the second greatest commandment is directed toward loving others. The loneliness that many experience is a silent cry for companionship and affection. One of the young men who was baptized three weeks ago shared that before giving his life to Christ, the love he felt in the church caused him pain because he longed to receive that kind of love from his parents. He came from a broken family—with an abusive father and a mother who had children as a way to receive government money. But today he knows God as the One who took him in his abandonment and brought him into a great family that cares for him, embraces him, and loves him. (It's worth noting that hugs are not common in Japan; sometimes you can tell that many people don't even know how to react.) After several failed suicide attempts, he now testifies that God changed his heart,

filling him with a new desire to live. The gospel transformed him, and seeing God work in that way deeply amazes me.

At Rio Grande, it was common to hear that the language of heaven is Spanish, but now I think in heaven they speak Japanese—because it takes an eternity to learn it! Even with the challenges of the language, and the reminder that it's okay not to fully fit in, I must be constantly aware not to fall into the cultural mindset of self-effort, but rather to surrender again and again to what God is doing. Salvation belongs to the Lord, and my role in this beautiful nation is to rest each day in the power of the gospel, be filled with God's love, and allow that love to impact everything I do.

It is a privilege to be part of and a witness to what God is doing in the land of the rising sun.

Giving thanks  
in a local  
church  
that Lesdy  
attends

ONLY 1% OF JAPAN'S  
POPULATION IS  
CHRISTIAN, WHICH  
LEAVES US WITH 99%  
OF OPPORTUNITIES TO  
SHARE THE GOSPEL.



PRAYING • GOING • SENDING • PRAYING • GOING • SENDING • PRAYING • GOING • SENDING



**GAINING A  
MISSIONARY  
VISION FROM THE  
CONFERENCE  
TO THE NATIONS**

*Jon White, Chief Financial Officer*

**E**very year, our students take a break from classes to focus on what God is doing in the nations. Representatives arrive from around the world to encourage our students to join in God's global work. God's global desire is for people from every tribe, tongue, and nation to come and worship Him, and that requires the participation of the whole church. As John Piper said, "Go, send, or disobey," we are all called to take part in His great mission.

## GOING

The famous words of Isaiah, "Here am I, Lord, send me," have become a theme verse for many missionaries. In the past decade, more than 200 Rio Grande students have gone to more than 36 countries, each one responding to God's call to go.

To one graduate who arrived in 2011, the 2013 Missions Conference—that focused on 'Finishing the Task'—was life-defining.

"It was the first year that the conference was organized by students," he recalls. "We presented a musical drama based on the missionaries martyred in Ecuador. That year the Lord used the messages, workshops, and that drama to ignite our hearts for missions."

That same year, the Perspectives course was offered on campus for the first time, and mission teams were sent around the world.

"As a result, I joined a team that went to India in 2014," the student added. "There, the Lord confirmed His call for me to serve long-term. Today, my wife, our daughter, and I are living in India and making disciples."

The missions conference is calling our students to respond to God's call to go, and many who answer are carrying the Gospel to the ends of the Earth.

## SENDING

No missionary goes alone. Behind everyone who goes are those who pray and give. Sending isn't optional; it's essential for the Gospel to reach the nations. Paul asks in Romans 10:15, "How can they preach unless they are sent?" God designed His mission to be a partnership between those who go and those who send. Every prayer, every gift, and every act of support makes it possible for the good news to be proclaimed where Christ has not yet been named. Those who send share in the beauty and reward of the feet that carry the Gospel to the nations.

Another alumnus looks back on his first Missions Conference more than fifteen years ago as a moment that changed everything. "Those days were a turning point," he said. "The drama about the five missionaries who gave their lives in Ecuador wasn't just moving—it was a call to surrender everything for Christ."

Now serving in missionary mobilization across Latin America, working to send many more Latinos to the nations, he says, "The conferences at Rio Grande didn't just inform my mind; they formed my heart to live with a missionary vision."

## PRAYING

Not every student will cross borders to carry the message to unreached people, but everyone can pray. Missions Conferences produce intercessors who carry the nations before the Lord in prayer.

Daiby Daniel Ajalla reflected that, "learning about missionaries from unknown countries and hearing firsthand what God is doing there, led me to become more intentional in prayer for my brothers who serve in those places."

2 Thessalonians 3:1, "Finally, brothers and sisters, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you."

Just as Paul asked for prayer, missionaries today depend on it. When we pray, the Gospel moves forward. We may not all go, but we are all called to pray.

## FROM EDINBURG TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

What began as a week of teaching and worship has become a global movement. Former students now serve in dozens of countries, planting churches, discipling new believers, training leaders, and sharing the Gospel with the unreached.

From a small campus in Edinburg, Texas, God continues to send His message to the nations. Our Missions Conference is more than an event; it's a movement that is calling everyone to join and become a part of fulfilling God's global plan to raise up worshipers from every tribe, tongue, and nation.

*Give thanks to the Lord for He is good;  
His mercy endures forever. Psalm 107:1*

AUGUST 2025 - NOVEMBER 2025

# HONOR & MEMORIAL GIFTS

## IN HONOR OF

### KEITH & OLIVIA HEPNER

Gail Higgs

### DOUG & AMY ROEGLIN

Mr. & Mrs. Dewayne Erickson

### MICKEY & SARA TAYLOR

Ron & Susan Bak

## IN MEMORY OF

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Robert C. Divine

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Philip Beckenhauer

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Stan & Peri Dick

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Janet Mertens

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Delores Jeske

### JERRY JESKE

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Kay Jeske

### KEITH JESKE

Delores Jeske

Kay Jeske

Mark & Judy (Kracht) Keck  
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### GORDON & GRACE JOHNSON

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Calvary Church

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Mr. & Mrs. Stephen Pelphrey

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Gary & Verla Williams

Larry & Ruth Windle

# RIO GRANDE BIBLE MINISTRIES CAMPUS NEWS

Several Rio Grande students served with Baptist Student Ministries on the Edinburg campus of the University of Texas during Thanksgiving week.



Mission representatives shared mission opportunities and prayed with students during the missions conference.

## FALL MISSIONS CONFERENCE

Rio Grande Bible College presented a missions conference from October 22-24 titled "To All Nations." Each morning began with prayer for the unreached. Plenary sessions featured a keynote speaker whose identity was not revealed publicly for security reasons. Representatives from Rio Grande Global and missionary agencies such as Avant, ABWE, TEAM, the Summer Institute of Linguistics, Frontiers, and others, presented workshops on topics including the mobilization of churches for missions, cross-cultural church planting, the 10/40 window, church planting in unreached areas, and support-raising for missionaries. In the afternoons, webinars focused on South Asia and the Middle East. The attendees were fortified with snack breaks provided by the missionary agencies. These agencies also sent representatives in hopes of offering summer mission opportunities to our students.



**FALL MISSION TRIPS** Each fall, Bible College students spend Thanksgiving week serving with a mission team on varied projects, which can include community outreach with a local church, student outreach at the local university, or serving with churches or organizations in other cities in Texas or around the United States. Some even go to other countries, such as across the border into Mexico. Each team raises funds to cover airfare, meals, etc. This fall, besides going to places like El Paso, Los Angeles, and North Carolina, other students stayed on campus to lead a conference for local youth. The goal of the conference was to challenge the youth to deepen their walk with Christ and perhaps prepare for further studies by investing a year in our new two-semester "Life-Prep" course. Please be in prayer as we establish the curriculum for this new program.

▲  
Around 80 local high school students attended the "Called 2025" conference on our campus.

# ESSENTIAL SPIRITUAL EQUIPMENT

*Larry Windle, President*



PHOTO FREEPIK.COM

## “YOUR ENEMY THE DEVIL PROWLs AROUND LIKE A ROARING LION LOOKING FOR SOMEONE TO DEVOUR” (1 PETER 5:8).

Don't doubt for a moment that the world, the flesh, and the adversary of our souls are actively working to make us stumble into sin, to distract us with less than important time wasters, and to make every godly and spiritual activity seem worthless and fruitless. The Bible says He is strong, clever and scheming, bent on deceiving and outmaneuvering us at every turn.

But we are not defenseless! God has provided us with all the armor we need—armor so strong that Satan and his servants, the world and all of its convincing pressure, and the flesh with its unrelenting passions cannot penetrate it.

**BELT OF TRUTH** Ephesians 6 tells us that the *Belt of Truth* is our first weapon and defense. Truth that defends must stem from the heart. A lie, the opposite of truth, is the intent of the heart to lead someone to believe what is not true. Our speaking truth must be from a heart convinced of the truth, and a desire to lead others to have hearts that are also convinced of what is true. The Bible is our source of deepest truth about all things eternal, and is the basis for our relationship with God. In reflection of that deep truth in the heart, every other aspect of our life and speech will be characterized by truth. When truth doesn't characterize our hearts and speech, we will be forever vulnerable of being ashamed when the truth comes out.

### BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The *Breastplate of Righteousness*, or right-living, protects the vitals in our life. Choosing to do the right things in life provides great defense from the adversary. Bad actions make us vulnerable to the adversary's arrows of gossip, infidelity, lust, and virtually every other pitfall that we face in life. "Good living" doesn't save us, but it protects our heart from loving the wrong things. Accusations of bad conduct and offensive practices are best silenced by constant care to live uprightly.

**SHOES** Most tasks of physical labor *require shoes* that are appropriate for the task. To dig a ditch, you need shoes that can push on a shovel. To run a race, you need running shoes. To fight fire, you need boots that protect from hot cinders. Paul says that our feet must be shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace. Jesus gave us final instructions before ascending to heaven: "as you go, make disciples." This means pointed information and specific training on how to win souls and make disciples. And, of course, it includes definitive and ongoing action to accomplish the goal. Any Christian who is not trained, lively sharing his faith, and making disciples, will remain childish and petty in his spiritual growth and values. He will be vulnerable to fighting about petty and irrelevant issues, and thus be correspondingly irrelevant in the battle for eternity.

**SHIELD OF FAITH** The *shield of faith* protects when you are doubting the reality of your calling, the importance of daily time with God, the importance of your spiritual disciplines. Faith is living in such a way that if God's promises are not true, your life will be useless. Faith includes two core aspects: first is hearing, studying, learning, knowing what God says; second is embracing and acting according to the truth that He has given. Being absolutely committed to live in the light that what God has said is true, will help extinguish the adversary's fiery darts.

**HELMET OF SALVATION** The *helmet of salvation* is given to the one who comes to God confessing his sin, acknowledging that he cannot save himself by any means, believing that Jesus' sacrifice is enough to cover his sin, and asking Him to save him. "If you confess with your mouth... and believe in your heart... you will be saved" (Romans 10:9-10). At that moment a miracle occurs, and the Holy Spirit breathes into the spiritual nostrils the breath of life, and that person passes from death to life. This is regeneration, new birth. There is no hope for spiritual victory without spiritual life through the salvation event.

Believers have a distinct advantage in life. God has revealed the truth to us about who God is, who man is, and how man can be reconciled to God. He has shown us what values we should embrace, what will provide fulfillment in our families, what heaven will be like, and how to live eternally. This is all revealed through His Word. To know and live by this truth, we will need to study the Word to renew our minds so that the Truth will guide our values and actions. Then with that truth incorporated into our lives, we will be equipped to share the fullness of a life of liberty and communion with God to the world. We will have the answers to all of the accusations of the adversary and the foolish reasoning of the world. The Spirit will use the sword of the Word to address every circumstance of life that we face.

People with a full understanding of God's revealed truth will be able to live in complete liberty. There will be no condemnation, guilt, or confusion, but a deep understanding. Living by truth is wonderful, but there is another dimension when God adds supernatural effect to our efforts. This comes through the avenue of prayer. Jesus said, "Ask, and you shall receive. (Matthew 7:7) "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known." (Philippians 4:6) Truth plus divine intervention!

"The weapons of our battle are mighty through God unto the pulling down of enemy strongholds." (2 Corinthians 10:4)



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## GOOD NEWS FOR THE WORLD

**BUT HOW ARE THEY TO PREACH UNLESS THEY ARE SENT? JUST AS IT IS WRITTEN: "HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!" ROMANS 10:15 (NASB)**

Pray with us for wisdom to continue to prepare our students to go around the world with the gospel. God is working in the hearts and lives of our students. We are blessed to be a part of a team of volunteers, financial donors, staff and prayer warriors that make it all possible. If you would like to get more information about how you may get involved, feel free to contact us below. We would love to talk and pray with you.

Rio Grande student Andrea Barahona (center) with two friends she met while on a mission trip to Thailand last summer.



TO RECEIVE MORE INFORMATION CALL ROBERT ALLEN, 956-380-8125