



August 1, 2024

Dear Ministry Partner,

Time races on—it's already the final month of summer—the glory of the Lord is at hand!

*I have just witnessed first-hand the amazing power of God at work
through your faithful prayers and generous giving . . .
in VENEZUELA!*

I wish you had been there with me, to experience the beauty of the Andes Mountains. But the stunning natural landscape *paled* in comparison to the wonderful work of God in that troubled nation.

One family working with us has planted a mountain church at an altitude of more than 12,000 feet!

They're ministering to Indian children attending what is one of the highest schools in the world, at around 12,500 feet. **It's a challenge every week to get up to the school, through winding mountain roads, sometimes in the rain or snow—the dad, the mom, and their little girl—all on one motorcycle!**

Yet they're quick to assure you: It's totally worth it! The people in this mountain community are deeply grateful that someone cares enough to brave the elements and make the trek to bring their children joyful programs and teach them of God's love and care for them. Dad ministers to the parents; Mom shares Bible stories with the children and teaches cooking to the mothers; they teach sports as well.

And this is only one of the family's three church plants! The other two are close to the city of Merida, a city dwarfed by majestic mountains. Merida is also in the Venezuelan Andes, but at "only" 5,000 feet.

When I first arrived in Merida, I was led immediately to a street meeting, on a busy street, in a busy neighborhood, in front of a so-called "house of peace." The arrangement isn't unusual in this region. Some family opens their doors, invites neighbors and passersby, and makes their home the starting point for a church—a "house of peace."

I suppose the closest thing in our own culture would be a backyard party—but in Venezuela (and elsewhere), the meeting is out in the street, with everyone watching! Cars and motorcycles roar by, people have to get off the street to make way, crowding onto the sidewalk, straining to hear what the preacher is saying.

It was my first time in Merida, but even in towns I've visited before, the people expect a visitor to preach. No warning, no prep time! All I knew was that this was a town where our planters are planting churches.

So what could I do? (In seminary, Howard Hendricks always told us, “Be ready to pray, preach, or die at a moment’s notice!”) You can only do “whatever the Lord lays on your heart.” Stand up before a mob of total strangers and greet them and start a sermon based on a felt need that we all have, no matter where we live.

In this way, the Gospel goes out—and people come forward to receive the Lord! They were ready! (As the professors also taught me in seminary: no matter how old the people you’re preaching to, the Holy Spirit has been working on them for as long as they’ve been alive!)

It was a sweet experience, ministering among people who were so glad to hear the Word, so grateful to discover that God loves and cares for them and wants to give them eternal and abundant life!

*Absolutely opposite from the next place I visited: **El Diablo . . . the Devil.***

Another of our church planters works here—in a region that even the locals refer to as *the place civilization has not reached*.

The people here are known for their savage ways and their sinful lives. Vice is just normal day-to-day life. And the major vice? I was astonished to learn of it: *incest*.

Fathers with daughters. Uncles with nephews or nieces. Cousins, of course! I feel filthy inside just for knowing it exists.

And the physical consequences of inbreeding are horrific: congenital deformities, blindness, hearing loss, neonatal diabetes, limb malformations, disorders of sex development, schizophrenia—to name just a few.

Yet our worker, observing the ghastly outcome of this region’s incestuous trademark, has responded not by frowning and withdrawing or by lecturing . . . but by ***becoming a young Mother Theresa, by caring for them!***

She teaches the Word and uses her nursing and mothering skills every day. This extraordinary church planter is absolutely committed to being there for “my kids,” as she calls them.

I am amazed and humbled by the gift of mercy that some have received in generous measure. “All the ministry is the ministry of the Lord.” He gives gifts for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry. You and I are highly honored to serve in their company.

But please understand: This is not a matter of “outsourcing” the difficult work, so that we can excuse ourselves from it. You and I are called as the watchmen of our generation (Ezekiel 3; 33; Acts 20:26; Ephesians 4:11). We are all involved in the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

Yes, when confronted with such hair-raising bondage to sin, when witnessing the horrors of a multiplication of the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah, we gasp at a single Christian nurse who goes alone to respond to the spiritual crisis. But we must not merely watch it, as if this were simply another thriller movie.

This is a reality that calls Christianity to action! We need to be salt that has not lost its saltiness! As the late E.V. Hill said, preaching to a group of evangelicals, “If you don’t react to this, your wood is wet!”

We must not simply observe. We must be involved—according to the gifts that God has bestowed upon each of us individually. Your prayers and giving are a beautiful representation of the gifts God has bestowed on you!

As I write these words, after working just two years in Venezuela, we are close to reaching 1,000 church-plants. Yet a great many places still need to be reached:

- Many more sites in Merida, in the Andes mountains.
- Many more towns and villages in Anzoategui waiting to be mobilized.
- The Lord has called our attention to a state east of Valencia where scores of churches are needed to meet the demand for the Gospel.
- The states of Sucre and Monagas in the northeast of the country are not touched, yet.
- There are many mountain towns that need to be reached. Within these towns are people groups who fled the invading Europeans centuries ago, choosing life in the high Andes in order to keep away from the invaders.

We must be about the ministry of reconciliation! God enlisted you and me in this ministry. He is serious about it. Jesus says He died for us so we will live for Him. Are we? Will we? *How completely?*

Ministry isn’t easy. Sometimes it’s maddeningly difficult. But we “press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:14)

A 100-mile traffic backup qualifies as “maddeningly difficult” ! After returning to Caracas from Merida at 7 p.m., we were scheduled for a two-hour drive to Valencia. But a major car accident paralyzed traffic. Poverty makes for poorly maintained cars, so we saw multiple cars shutting down due to overheating.

Three times, the fuel line in our own car burst. We boiled over once, and we nearly ran out of fuel. Fortunately, the region’s tow truck drivers know the drill. They station themselves along the highway with fuel, water, and mechanical supplies.

Our two-hour journey turned into a twelve-hour adventure! After stalling four times, we made it finally to the hotel in Valencia at 7 a.m. We had spent all night on the highway, mostly repairing, or seeking parts to patch our ride. We slept for four hours, then returned to our program for the day.

In Cojedes, a town east of Valencia, a pastor rallied his church and bought property. This church is filled with young people. The event was high energy! The believers in Cojedes are enthusiastic about reaching their region with the Gospel. When they heard our vision for accelerated church planting, they cheered! Their big question was simply: “When do we start?”

In response, the local pastors quickly turned to the needs and opportunities in Guyana. Like so many Afro-Caribbean nations, it is poor and isolated, and needs someone to hear their Macedonian call!

What a model for us! What an inspiration! As needy as the Venezuelans are, they are opening their hearts to even needier brothers and sisters next door.

In Revelation 10, God commissions the apostle John. Even though John was present for the commissioning on the mountain in Galilee . . . even though he was there for the commissioning on the Mount of Olives at the Ascension . . . God tells John that *he must prophesy again*. And again, and again, and again, until the very end!

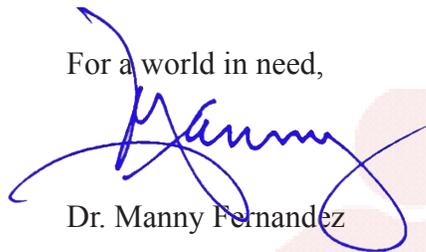
We are, likewise, ambassadors for Christ! As if God were pleading through us, He wants us to plead with people that they be reconciled to God!

Summer will soon come to an end; another year of ministry is about to begin. Will you please join in the ministry of reconciliation—to call others to be reconciled, just as you and I have been reconciled? Will you serve Him who came to serve and to present His life as a ransom for many?

This is God's idea, says 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, *that One died for all so that all who now live because of His death, will live no longer for themselves, but for Him who for their sakes died and rose again!*

I look forward to hearing from you soon!

For a world in need,



Dr. Manny Fernandez

P.S. Every time you give, God does great things through you! Please give as generously as possible, according to the bountiful blessings He has bestowed on you. Thank you in advance!

