

ELLIOTT EDITION

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World Partners

Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada
Following Jesus Together

Merry Christmas

**Keith and Ruth Ann Elliott
Global Partner Developers
Latin America & the Caribbean**



Dear friends and family,

A Christmas Meditation

It is amazing to think about the circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus, God's Son.

As you know, Jesus was born in a stable and laid in a manger. Due to the census that required people to return to their hometowns, Bethlehem was overcrowded which forced Mary and Joseph to find shelter in a stable where Jesus was born and they laid him in a manger as a newborn baby. Not even people living in abject poverty would want their newborn baby to be born in a manger. Wouldn't it have been better to plan Jesus' birth at another time when conditions were better? Yet God chose this time for Jesus' birth and entrusted him to the care of a poor couple.

As you know, the announcement about Jesus' birth was made to shepherds in the fields near Bethlehem and the angel choir sang to the shepherds. Shepherds were not only the lowest social class of their time, they were also considered to be chronic liars and they were not trusted to give testimony in a court of law. Doesn't it seem that the announcement could have been given to a better audience rather than to those disenfranchised people? Yet God chose to entrust the announcement to the shepherds in spite of their bad reputation, and they fulfilled their role as faithful witnesses.

As you know, Jesus was born when Herod the Great was King, and he tried to kill Jesus. He was a cruel man who had many people killed to satisfy his quest for power. Jesus' parents had to flee to another country to save his life and they lived as refugees in Egypt until Herod died. Wouldn't it have been better to plan to have Jesus' birth happen under a more benevolent ruler? Yet God chose to have his son exposed to the danger of a cruel and despotic ruler that made his family flee to another country and live as refugees for a time.

The Bible says that Jesus' birth happened at the exact time set by God. It was just the right time for his birth.

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.
(Galatians 4:4 ESV)

What is so amazing is that God knew perfectly well beforehand the circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth. At Jesus' birth God identified with the poorest of the poor, with disenfranchised people and with refugees fleeing violence. Think about what this means for us today as we live out the reality of God with us.

We were invited by our sister denomination, the Evangelical Missionary Church of Ecuador (La Iglesia Evangélica Misionera Ecuatoriana) to help with retreats for those serving in pastoral ministry. The retreats were planned by the Pastoral Care Ministry. This ministry foments the well-being of people working in pastoral ministry focussing on their relationship with God, their relationship with their spouse and family and with their work and the congregation they serve.

In April Pastor John Cedeño, coordinator of the Pastoral Care Ministry, sent us a list of themes that some of the pastors suggested and were of interest to them. These are the themes: spiritual health; financial administration; the rights and responsibilities of the pastoral family; the value of the family altar; forgiveness; getting along with colleagues—interpersonal relationships between fellow servants; the pastor and rest; the pastors integral health; the sexual life of church leaders and their spouse. In May he sent us three more themes: respect for the pastor; divorce; and the work of the pastoral couple. John also mentioned that we were able to choose from the list of themes.

The first steps were praying and gathering resources. The summer months were spent reading, writing, translating, proof reading and organizing the themes for the retreats. By late August we were close to having a draft version of a note book. We continued to work on corrections and adjustments into September even after arriving in Ecuador.

The Retreats

We travelled to Ecuador on September 7, then to Mexico on November 26, and back to Canada on December 2.

The retreats in Ecuador were as follows:

September 15-16 in the town of Same, located south of the city of Esmeraldas—9 pastors and 7 spouses participated in the retreat for the Esmeraldas Zone;



October 21-22 in Los Cerros camp near the city of Manta—11 pastors and 8 spouses participated in the retreat for the Manabí Zone;



November 10-12 in the Quinta Shalom in La Concordia—11 pastors and 10 spouses participated in the retreat for the Centra Zone.

The time between the retreats was for personal visits and follow-up. We had about 60 personal contacts and visits. Approximately half of them were significant conversations about personal matters.

The Material- We made a note book of the material we prepared with the title, *Maturing in Christ While Serving in the Pastoral Ministry*. A generous financial gift covered the cost of making photo copies and ring-binding the notebook in Ecuador.



The introduction had the theme verse we chose for the retreats from Isaiah 43:18-19,

Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.
See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.
(Isaiah 43:18-19 NIV)

The introductory Bible study was on the ministry of the prophet Elijah (I Kings 18 & 19); Victory, Defeat and Recovery. The time of victory focussed on the confrontation with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. The time of defeat was his flight from Queen Jezebel who threatened to kill him and his request that God take his life because he thought he was a failure. His recovery was after a 40 day trek to Mount Horeb when God met him and gave him instructions about preparing the next generation of leaders who were to keep fighting against the false practices of Baal worship.

The next section of the material was a biblical overview of the church as a foundation for understanding the work of pastoral ministry.

The third section of the material focussed on the challenges of pastoral ministry and the path toward failure. The intent was to understand the issues and prevent failure.

The fourth section focussed on the integral health and maturity of pastors and their families.

The final section dealt with the theme of finishing strong in the ministry.

Visit to Mexico

We had the privilege of visiting Mexico along with Dr. John Cressman, President of the Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada, Nicole Jones-Qandah, Director of World Partners and Daniel Chapple, global worker. We met with two groups of pastors.

We met in the city of Puebla on November 26 with several pastors and spouses serving with the Evangelical Missionary Church; and

We met with a group of pastors and spouses serving with the Missionary Church of Mexico in the town of Zacapoaxtla on November 29.

We had time to get acquainted and talk about their work with a view to encouraging them and continuing our fraternal relationship.

Thank you for being part of God's blessing in our lives and ministry. We cherish your prayers as we continue our work in Ecuador and Mexico.

God bless you. In Christ,

Keith and Ruth Ann



World Partners
Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada
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EMCC World Partners 160 Lancaster St. E.

Kitchener, ON N2H 1N2

Phone: (519) 894-9800 Fax: (519) 894-0941

Toll Free: 1-877-375-7600

worldpartners.emcc.ca/workers

609-18 Holborn Court, Kitchener, ON N2A 4A1

keithruthannelliott@gmail.com

226-751-2333