



# Matt and April Sykes

July 2019

## ...serving the Lord in Puerto Rico

Dear Friends and Family,

Last time we wrote, we had just begun traveling around the United States and sharing about what God had been doing in Puerto Rico. We spent time at many churches in the Pacific Northwest before getting a little bit of family time. We returned to Puerto Rico in November and were able to get back into the swing of life here on the island, where we facilitate short-term mission trips and run an after-school center at our home to provide a safe place for kids in our neighborhood. All of this is to impact people for the gospel and make disciples of Jesus Christ.

In January, we traveled to Orlando, Florida, for the Sonlife D•Conference, a conference centered around discipleship and evangelism training. From there, we traveled to Nagarote, Nicaragua, to visit fellow Grace Ministries International (GMI) missionaries, Milo and Raquel Seravalli. We participated in the ministries there and we even got to accompany them on a survey trip to Honduras. This was a new experience for us! We were grateful to meet fellow believers from different walks of life.

After our trip to Orlando, we made some positive changes to the after-school program, such as spending more time in prayer with the kids, focusing our Bible lessons on Jesus' life and ministry, and reintroducing memory verses each week. The leaders and students were all excited about the new direction and benefited from better structure. Then, in late January, the local elementary school began free after-school tutoring for students. While the students were getting a better education, we saw a decline in at-

tendance. Prior to this, our numbers used to be anywhere from 20 to 40 kids a day. After tutoring began, attendance dropped significantly. Even though the new numbers were discouraging, we chose to focus on the positive aspects of the lower attendance. In addition to there being less chaos because the numbers were much more manageable, we were also able to give more individualized attention to the kids than before.

Unfortunately, in late April, we found out that Club Maravilla did not have the proper government permits to be open as a neighborhood after-school center. We were completely taken by surprise, as we had been under the impression that everything was in order regarding its legal status. To protect our testimony as a ministry, and to avoid legal issues with the government, we made the difficult decision in early May to close Club. Even though Club is not running in an official capacity, we have had a continuing impact on the community by having our home open to the kids. Just this past Thursday, we had 20 kids participate in community service to earn their scholarships for summer camp. Thanks to the generosity of donors around the country, all of our Club kids who expressed interest in going (as well as some other children from the barrio) will be attending Camp Caribe in July free of charge.

In the months after returning to Puerto Rico, we hosted mission teams from Union University (Tennessee), Celebration Bible Church (Michigan), Grace Christian University (Michigan), and J.O.Y. Ministries (Kentucky). Most of these teams spent time



*Union University students sealing the multipurpose roof at camp*



*Grace Christian University students at Club Maravilla*



*Matt and April sharing at Grace Bible Church in Port Orchard, WA*

investing in kids at the after-school center, as well as working on projects at Camp Caribe such as sealing a leaky roof, renovating our main dining hall, rebuilding metal roofs that blew away in the hurricane, and much more! We are thankful for all of the teams that have come down to help Camp Caribe continue to get back up on its feet. Recently, Camp Caribe experienced a huge answer to prayer when the concrete roof on the chapel was finished! While we still have plastering, electrical work and painting to finish the building, we are hoping to get much of this work accomplished this summer with the mission teams coming to serve at camp.

After spending a lot of time in prayer, and asking God to show us His will for our lives, we notified the Camp Caribe board, as well as the GMI home office, that this will be Matt's last summer working at camp. This is not a decision that we made lightly. We both firmly believe that God is leading us away from camp and opening doors elsewhere. Although we will no longer be directly involved, we still love camp and want to see it succeed! Matt's last day will be August 16. Back in May, Matt began training his replacement, Jean Carlos Márquez. Jean Carlos will be working alongside Matt all summer, so he will be ready to take over as the Mission Adventure Team Director in August. Please pray for a smooth transition.

We prayerfully considered our future in Puerto Rico and whether we should continue doing ministry here on the island or change fields. As we noticed many doors closing, we felt that God was moving us in another direction, and that led to our decision to change fields. After our visit to Nagarote, Nicaragua, we realized we would like to be a part of the ministry team there working alongside Milo and Raquel Seravalli. We presented our ministry proposal for Nicaragua to the GMI Board, and it was approved at the June Grace Ministries International board meeting.

We are looking forward to ministry opportunities in Nicaragua. April is hoping to start an after-school ministry with the existing church kids in Nagarote. She hopes to train the youth to run the ministry as well. Matt will be able to use his experience hosting mission teams to increase the number of teams that will be able to come down and serve in Nagarote. Two other areas of ministry we hope to be involved in are discipleship and teaching, and we have many other ideas about getting involved and helping out!

While we are sad to leave our island home and the friends we have made here, we are also very excited to see how God will use us on our new field. Please pray for us as we are packing and moving back to the States temporarily for home assignment, and then we will begin traveling again to speak at churches about our new direction.



*Matt and April in Nagarote, Nicaragua*

We want to thank each one of you who is praying for us and other missionaries around the world. We press on knowing so many faithful people are encouraging us with their thoughts and prayers, striving to always “do so even more” (our life verse found in 1 Thessalonians 4:1). We want to leave you all with a word of encouragement as well. Reading through the Psalms in our season of changes, traveling, and fellowship has reminded us of what David and the nation of Israel went through. As Christ followers, we will have to endure a lot in this life, but we must always “look up” so that our focus is correctly placed on Him. Psalm 100:5 says, “For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.” His faithfulness encourages us to press on.

Please pray for:

- 1) Continued opportunities to share the gospel with kids in the community and their families.
- 2) The remaining time we have with Camp Caribe—that we would finish well and be able to train Matt's replacement. Please pray for a smooth transition.
- 3) Strength and endurance for the upcoming busy summer season.
- 4) Our transition back to the States.
- 5) Our transition from the States to our new field, Nicaragua.

*Matt and April  
Sykes*