

Report for 2023 To Date

Germantown, MD | July 1, 2023 | John Pollard

Brothers and Sisters,

I hope this report finds you all doing well physically and spiritually. My wife and I express our gratitude to you for your prayers, love and support of our work in MD. We appreciate it greatly. If you have questions about the information in this report, please feel free to get in touch with me.

It has been some time since my last report to you. Please know how appreciative we are for your patience and understanding. Since that time, as you all know, our lives have been filled with a lot and in many ways it has changed a lot. Earlier this year in January, Sylvia, Paige and I traveled to Houston to visit and assist my mother who suffers from heart failure. We were thankful and delighted that we were able to be there to spend some time with her and some of my immediate family as well. While there, however, our sweet little Paige developed significant health issues that kept us in the hospital in Houston for 2.5 months and an additional month in Maryland once we were transferred.

By the grace of our great God, we have now been home for two months and we have been able to steadily settle into our new normal though this is always subjective in regard to Paige's dynamic disorder. We have been able to jump back into the work here and our brethren have been incredibly compassionate and understanding in light of all that transpired. We are so grateful for their love and patience and support and we are grateful for the opportunity to be with them and spend time with them once more. Most of our days are filled with matters related to the church, doctor's appointments, therapy sessions, and phone calls/visits from miscellaneous medical personnel.

If we thought we knew how to manage our time before our current events, these days have certainly humbled us and helped us to truly appreciate each minute we have while seeing to the things that are of utmost importance. We are grateful that we have the strength, means and time to continue to be active in the church here and we have enjoyed getting back to our regular weekly events with our brothers and sisters in Christ. As of now, Sylvia, Paige and I aim to always attend Sunday services together. It doesn't always work out that way and sometimes Sylvia stays home with Paige but she has been able to come out quite a few times already which is encouraging to us and to the brethren. On Tuesdays and Thursdays when we have Bible study opportunities, Sylvia stays home with Paige allowing me to go and teach and equip the brethren.

I know how much Sylvia misses being at these meetings but I appreciate her dedication and sacrifice in staying home with Paige during these times. This is a small part of what is our new "normal." For now, Paige simply isn't able to venture out much and especially so at night time so we are content and grateful for when she is able to spend 6 hours out of the house on Sunday with us when we worship. Since we don't meet on Wednesdays, she is sometimes able to visit other churches in the area while I stay behind with Paige but this isn't always feasible although we are thankful for such opportunities afforded.

While there are many things we lament about Paige's condition, we are thankful that God has seen fit to bless us with her disorder. By that I mean several things. We have learned to rely on God and depend on Him for in our weaknesses, we do see His strength. Our faith matures. We have often discovered that Paige's diagnosis opens up doors for discussion with various folks about God and His word. People who see Paige and learn about her situation often ask how we are coping or how we are dealing with it. This almost always allows for a conversation about God and how He leads us through these difficulties.

In some sense, I have had more conversations and more deep discussions because of what Paige has been through and what we have all gone through. Suffering does indeed make us better in so many ways and I am convinced it advances opportunities for the Gospel to be spread in more ways also. So we ask, while it is not always easy for us on some days, please pray for our strength and wisdom to take advantage of any opportunity we might have to spread the Gospel and offer encouragement in light of our newfound situation.

State of the congregation

Sylvia and I were essentially away from our local congregation for four months. During this time, we kept in close contact with the brethren. While we are away, a number of brothers from the Virginia/Maryland area helped to preach and teach in my stead in addition to a couple of the men from the church. This was very uplifting to hear and encouraging to the church as a whole. The church is doing very well spiritually. The brethren continue to grow in their walk with God as well as their desire to learn more from the scriptures.

We have a number of our older members who are suffering from various illnesses currently but I am always encouraged by their resilience and spiritual fervor in wanting to be of service in the church in different ways and means. Over the last couple years, many of the members have gone through significant suffering. Whether it was losing a spouse, learning of an autoimmune disease diagnosis or losing a job, these events have really translated into an increased dependency on God and closeness among the brethren. I am grateful for the maturity and perspective of my brothers and sisters who do not use these circumstances to turn away from God but draw closer to Him.

Our current membership is about 20-25. We have a mixed bunch ranging from very young to old which, for a small group, is quite good. We are blessed to have visitors on a weekly basis most of whom are generally Christians travelling in the area but from time to time we have non-Christians who come after having been invited by our members or those that we met via our meetup at Panera bread. The church is doing well.

Bible Class

Before we left in January for Texas, we had begun studying the book of Judges. While I was away, one of our men took it over and finished it up in April. Our current class is on the problem of suffering. Evangelism is a tricky business because it's not cut and dry across the board in terms of where to start and how to start with different individuals. Now a days, most people I talk to about God, the Bible or

religion in general don't want to listen because of the issue of suffering. People ask, "Why does God allow all this suffering to go on?" This is again another reason why we consider ourselves blessed with our situation because we can offer a personal example of suffering that is making us better and suffering that is not without a lot of good.

Often, though, when these objections arise and when we meet such opposition in our evangelism efforts, it can be difficult to answer and reason with such skepticism. This class we are going through is designed to help answer some of these questions while giving us all a better grasp of suffering as a whole throughout the Bible. We are examining specific texts from Genesis all the way through to Revelation learning about this topic through the lens of God and how it unfolded among some of the most well-known biblical characters. It has already been a really encouraging series and especially so to some of our most recent visitors.

Visitors/Recent Interests

Speaking of recent visitors, one of our members, Julia Davis, recently brought a friend of hers with her to one of our midweek Bible studies. Her name is Linda Dovel. Linda is in her 60s but recently lost her husband in December of last year. Her grief and sorrow is still very palpable. Julia is a close friend and they met through a widow group since Julia lost her husband a couple years ago. Julia invited her to come to our services since we were starting the class on suffering. Linda was intrigued by this as she is learning to navigate and understand the suffering she is going through right now.

She has kept coming back but she has also been very active in the classes answering questions and asking her own as well. She has been a real encouragement as she is trusting in God and relying on His wisdom as she grieves her husband. I am grateful that she sees this as an opportunity to learn more about God and get to know the brethren a little better. She comes from a Baptist background so she does know quite a bit about the Bible and is yearning for more. Please keep Linda in your prayers and Julia as she continues to be a great influence on Linda.

Possible opening to Institutional brethren

Just this last week, I got a call from Gerardo Mendoza. Gerardo introduced himself as a brother and we talked for a little bit on the phone. He is originally from Honduras where he was converted many years ago by missionaries from the United States. Gerardo and his family now live on the northeastern side of Baltimore. After speaking with him for a little bit, I realized that he is associated with the "institutional" churches but he did not know there was a difference. I seized the opportunity to invite him over the house this last Saturday.

He and his wife came over and we spent about an hour visiting and getting to know each other a little better. I told Gerardo some about the work here I am involved with and he shared his experiences. We discussed a little about institutionalism which he said was the first he heard there was a difference so I offered him and his wife a couple lessons I preached on the topic a couple years ago so they could study and we could follow up on.

That said, it was a very encouraging visit. Gerardo is very active in the churches he is involved with in Spanish ministry in both teaching and evangelism. He initially called me because he found our website and was curious if he could help with Spanish ministry. He told me that there is a group of brethren meeting in a home in Germantown and another brother who lives in Virginia drives over to preach for them. They mostly speak Spanish. I have reached out to this brother, Hector Castillo, and we are planning to meet sometime soon.

He has also invited me to come and speak for the group some time in the near future which I would love to do and am planning to do. Prior to Gerardo's phone call, I nor the brethren here knew about these groups. Gerardo has already come to visit at one of our services and we are planning many more visits and Bible studies together in the near future. I don't know what this will all turn into or lead to, but I am excited about these opportunities and the good that can come from them.

Please pray that God will be glorified, God's truth will be heard and hearts will draw closer to Him.

Decision to move

Sylvia and I are grateful to be home and to be back with our brethren in Maryland. However, we have recently made the very difficult decision to move to Houston, Texas. Ultimately this decision was based on the long term considerations of Paige's health and weighing that with our continued dwelling in Maryland. Having no immediate family here and the church being on the smaller end makes it difficult to have extra helping hands when we need them. We do not qualify for nursing and it appears that this may be a long term issue for us so moving to Texas would help to alleviate this since my sister and brother-in-law live there and my brother-in-law is a trained respiratory therapist who would be able to be a tremendous help to us. They are not Christians and we cannot help but ponder the possibility our influence could have on them being closer to them.

Additionally, we would have the support of a great number of brethren in the area some of whom we have already met and established connections with who have kids in similar chronic situations like Paige. We would be closer to a hospital that we believe would provide extremely good care for Paige moving forward (my brother-in-law works at Texas Children's) and it's possible that in the state of Texas we would get access to financial aid programs that we are not able to in Maryland. My mother who continues to deal with heart failure may be making frequent trips to Houston, Lord willing, in the coming months and beyond and being there would give us the opportunity to see her since we really are unable to travel extended periods of time with Paige given her current situation.

It is a difficult decision because we did not anticipate having to leave Maryland so soon. We love the work here; we love our brethren here very much and it's been a tremendous privilege to serve in God's kingdom in this area. It's been a tremendous blessing having you all share with us in the work here by supporting us and continuing to do so in the ways you have. There is much good to be done yet. The brethren have agreed that we will continue to labor with them and labor here until we have found a new opportunity to spread the Gospel in the Houston area. We don't know how soon this may take place and I have already began my search so to speak so it is in God's hands.

Even so as I have already mentioned above, there are wonderful things happening, many blessings and opportunities for God's word to be shared here and we will continue to do that as long as He desires and we thank you for your continued graciousness in helping to support us to do this. Please keep us in your prayers as this transition period commences and as we begin our search for a new "home" in Houston. Please pray for the church here that their search for a new evangelist would go well and that God would direct one who would be a blessing to them and the work here.

God is good and we thank you once more for your willingness to support us in these endeavors. The brethren here greet all of you and we pray for the work and the brethren in your respective locations.

Thank you for reading this report and may God bless you.

Please enjoy some recent photos of Paige below. Her good days continue to be more than her bad ones. God is great.



