

Report for Recent Months

Germantown, MD | February 1, 2024 | 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.

The last few months have brought numerous blessings our way as our God continues to supply us with His mercies and love in every area of life. Please allow me to share some of these wonderful things with you as you continue to share in our fellowship and pray for us in so many ways.

State of the congregation

The Northwest church continues to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord. We are all faring well physically and spiritually with one exception. You may remember brother Wilmore Gregorio who started worshipping with us back in early 2022. His wife and kids were able to join him from the Philippines, by the grace of God, last year. Wilmore is a Christian but his wife and kids are not. In the last couple months, they have not been active in the church and to some extent have grown distant from the church.

We know that there has been a few deaths in Wilmore's family that could be potentially impacting their faith and state of mind. Additionally, Wilmore's job seems to be quite demanding at times. He has responded to messages indicating that he desires to come back to services but he has not yet done so. We fear he may be going through a difficult time spiritually and we are not sure to what extent other factors may be playing in that. We continue to reach out to him intermittently in various ways offering encouragement. Please pray for Wilmore and his family and that our efforts to encourage them would prove successful.

Bible Class

We recently finished up our class on the problem of suffering. It was probably the most active class I have taught in recent memory. A lot of questions were asked, numerous comments made and many of us learned a lot of things we did not before when it came to suffering. Suffering is everywhere around us. It is hard to avoid. This can sometimes greatly impact not only potential prospects to the Gospel but also Christians who do not know how to deal with suffering appropriately and who do not know the Bible's perspective about suffering.

Indeed, even over the last year, our family has learned so much more about God and all the mysterious ways He works in our suffering and through our suffering to accomplish His purposes. This, of course, does not mean we enjoy our difficulties when we go through them. It is a struggle on certain days when everything seems to be going wrong. Nevertheless, there is a joy and peace that Christians have

and can have which give us a sense of security and stability even during dark days. How thankful we are for the resurrected Christ and our own hope of the resurrection that is to come.

These lessons were not exhaustive by any means but if you or someone who know is struggling with suffering, perhaps not knowing how to deal with it or how to respond, perhaps some of these lessons might prove beneficial. There are many of them which cover different aspects of suffering. The audio and material are posted on our website under the bible classes tab: nwchurchofchrist.net. I hope it can be of some benefit if you so choose to utilize it or share it with someone else in the hope of leading them to the Gospel in its glorious beauty.

Since we finished that, we are now turning our attention to a class on: "How to study the Bible." After a couple years of thinking about potentially teaching this and after prayer and much thought, I decided to go ahead and conduct this class here. The goal is, of course, to help us learn how to effectively read and study the Bible better. This is an area that I believe every avid Bible reader and disciple can always improve on. So often we don't know what to do with certain texts or how to apply them to our own day and time.

We will be looking at subject such as translations, context, hermeneutics, genre, helpful resources and some others that will seek to give us a better idea of how we can approach Bible study with the intent of getting the most out of God's divine word so we can learn deeper truths about Him, how we can use this principles to bring glory to Him and work on our relationships with each other in the broadest sense of that term. If you are interested in these lessons or sharing them with others, they will be posted to our website. We covet your prayers for the success of the class.

New additions/Visitors/Recent Interests

Linda Dovelle has continued to worship us since we've met her last year. She was initially introduced by one of our members. She lost her husband in late 2022 and has had a rough go at things since. Some things Linda has said in both Bible classes and private situations have been an immense encouragement because, in her grief, she is trying to draw closer to God and His word. I am thankful that she is a part of our group and we continue to solicit your prayers for her spiritual growth and comfort.

We met Luis Padilla at our Panera bread meetup last year. Since then, we have been able to have him over to our home and we have been able to build a really close relationship with him and conducted several Bible studies. He has visited our services on a couple different occasions. He has a mixed religious background with a somewhat dominant past of Catholicism. To some extent, I do believe this is holding him back from becoming fully ingratiated in the Gospel of Jesus. He is fearful that his mother will not like it since she is an ardent Catholic.

The important thing is he knows that there are a lot of inconsistencies within the Catholic tradition and he knows that he needs to study the Bible deeper and more reliably. His job keeps him working long hours which often interferes with our ability to have studies and/or get together more often. Please pray

that the fear of God will transcend the fear of men in his life and that as opportunities arise, his heart may be so softened to receive the blessed transforming Gospel of our Lord.

Beatrice Acquah is now a staple in our group. She is originally from Ghana and hasn't been in the country terribly long but she has longed for a group of like-minded Christians and we have enjoyed the blessing of having her become a part of our group. She lives with her son in one of the suburbs near us. He is not a Christian but she talks to him regularly about Him. Please pray for her and her family that her efforts would be fruitful.

Angela Cuzzolino is a recent addition to our Panera meetup group. She has been to every one of these studies since the start of the new year. She was searching for a group who was interested in God and learning more about Him. Like Luis, she has a Catholic background which plays a fairly significant role in some of her views and her hesitancy to perhaps come and visit us in one of our weekly services.

Despite this, she has a heart for spiritual things and being a single woman in her early 30's, she does not find a lot of "like-minded" friends around this part of the country who share in such things. We are thankful to have her be a part of this medium and she has told me many times that setting aside 1 hour for Bible study is not something that should be difficult since we are trying to learn more about God and seeking to do what pleases Him. We are excited to see what good can come from our interactions with Angela.

Raven Shaw walked through our doors 3 weeks ago on a Sunday. She is a 26 year old scientist who lives and works in our area and is looking to get connected with a church family. She was brought up in a Baptist tradition so there are certainly some similarities. She is a very active participant in studies and weekly activities when she is able to join.

We are still in an initial phase of getting to know her and having more interactions but we are certainly hopeful that she will be a long term participant in our efforts here in MD. The start of the year has seen a wonderful boost of new opportunities for us in the community. Pray that the Lord would work in and through these opportunities to bear much fruit.

Hispanic Brethren

We are now splitting the use of our current meeting place with a Hispanic congregation who has been meeting in this area for several years now. Initially they used the basement of another church in Rockville and then went to a sister's home during COVID. Now we have been able to get to know each other and offered the use of our space for them which we pray will yield tremendous blessings in the kingdom and bring much glory to God.

For now, there is not a lot of interactions between both groups but we pray that if it is God's will, this could open up some doors for increased relationships between us and them and maybe even a potential merger in the future should that become a possibility. We know you will be praying for both churches and the subsequent efforts accordingly.

Update on Paige and Medical Status

In recent months, Paige has continued to steady balance of severe episodes a few weeks apart from each other. There are days where she does really well and some others are weaker and more limited but not dominated with the more severe symptoms that usually take place approximately once a month. These really bad days usually require around the clock care and benzodiazepine intervention in conjunction with ventilation support. Eventually, after a few days, she starts to come around to her normal self. For the most part, this pattern has not changed and we are very thankful for that.

Recently, however, it is possible that in one of her severe episodes, Paige had her first generalized (tonic/clonic) seizure. Ever since her diagnosis, we knew she had sub-clinical seizures which cannot be denoted by the naked eye. These types of seizures are not as dangerous as some others but she has been on seizure meds most of her life in order to prevent the more dangerous ones. Since it is difficult to know if her last episode included a generalized seizure, the doctors have upped one of her meds and we are watching closely to notice any change in patterns.

We are able to enjoy so many good days with her and she is able to go with us to Sunday services almost every week. She does so well. We are blessed to have a wonderful team of therapists, doctors, nurses and technicians who strive to help her and help make our lives more maneuverable and for this we are always thankful to God and thankful for your prayers and all the ways you continue to help our family through these circumstances.

Update on Possible Move to Texas

We are thrilled to report that we have been invited to an extended visit with the Alston Road Church of Christ in Sugarland, Texas. We have been speaking with them over the last few months and we have agreed to this very important step before a final decision is made across both sides of aisle. Lord willing, I will travel at the end of February to spend a weekend with the brethren there and speak for them as well. If all goes well, Sylvia will be making a trip of her own to visit with them thereafter and from there we will know more concerning what the Lord has in store for us.

We covet your prayers for this whole process and we ask that you pray if it is God's will, that He would open the way for us to become a part of this group and relocate to Texas. This is a very exciting development for us and we do not think lightly of His grace that has already allowed for this opportunity to come our way. So many providential steps have occurred along the way and we cannot help but praise Him for His wonders. Thank you for praying and supporting us along this journey. We will keep you updated with how things turn out.

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.

