

# **Puerto Rico Work Report (December '23 – January 2024)**

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Greetings brethren in our Lord and King,

We hope and pray that you all had a wonderful new year and that the Lord's work where you are is abounding and that God is glorified in all your work. The change of year always brings time of reflection and change, and this year is no exception. We have been very busy with a lot of work and growth in the Kingdom. Thanks be to God we have gotten over some of our long-term illnesses and have had a time of relative peace on the health front. We have tried to make the most of this time by investing even more in the open doors that God has given us. My family sends their greetings to you all and we continually give thanks to God for the fellowship that we have together in His great work!



Axel's baptism

## ***God gives the increase!***

At the very beginning of December, we were blessed with the baptism of Luis Martinez. Luis has been amazing in his growth and dedication to the Lord. Over the past two months, I have had regular weekly bible studies with



Vivian's baptism (Axel's wife)

him, and he has been learning and growing so much. After Luis' baptism a week later, we were blessed with another baptism. Axel Rivera decided to be baptized. Axel is a close friend of Alvaro Jirau (one of the members at Arecibo), and both Alvaro and I had been studying with Axel for several months before he decided to be baptized. We were overjoyed at his decision to put on Christ in obedient faith! Axel has been learning and growing and doing very well in his growth as a new Christian. After the beginning of the new year many of the sisters of Arecibo, including Kaitlin, had been trying

to encourage and study with Luis' wife, Lorna, and Axel's wife, Vivian. After several weeks of study and encouragement on January 21<sup>st</sup>, both Vivian and Lorna decided to be baptized. We rejoice with the angels in heaven at the salvation of these new sisters and are thrilled that they have decided to join their husbands in their walk with Christ. All 4 of the new Christians have been doing very well and Luis and Lorna Martinez have been bringing their 4 children to studies and church services. I have been trying to continue to set up personal studies with both couples and Kaitlin and I have been able to have the Martinez family over to our house. We are working hard now at helping them to be grounded as they start the new stage of work for Christ. While this vital step of baptism is just the beginning of their Christian journey, we nevertheless



Lorna's baptism (Luis' wife)

give all praise and glory to God for the exciting news of their repentance and obedience to Christ.

In December we were blessed to have Jim and Bobbie Smelser visit us. I have known Jim for about many years, and he was a huge encouragement to me to begin preaching. Right after Kaitlin and I were married we were



Jim and Bobbie Smelser with the congregation at San Seb.

working in McKinney, TX, and the Smelsers were working in Sherman, TX about 30 minutes north of where we were located. During that time in Texas, the Smelsers were a great help and encouragement to Kaitlin and me as we not only started as newlyweds but also as new to the ministry. Jim and Bobbie are members of the College View church of Christ in Elizabethtown, KY and that congregation helps support Joel Holt in his work in San Juan. The church in Elizabethtown helped send Jim and Bobbie down here to Puerto Rico for two weeks.

The Smelser's stayed with us for one week and then went to San Juan where they stayed with the Holt's for the last week of their visit. We had an excellent time with the Smelser's and my whole family was very encouraged by their visit. Even in their older years, Jim and Bobbie exude a remarkable passion for the gospel. They accompanied us on our trips and studies and Jim presented sermons and classes in San Sebastian on his visit here. Later when he went to San Juan he taught a series of lessons on the book of Daniel which were excellent. We give thanks to God for the Smelser's visit and hope that they can come back and visit us again sometime in the future. If anyone is interested in hearing brother Jim's evangelistic report on their trip to PR you can listen to the audio at <https://www.collegeviewchurchofchrist.org/sermons/wednesday-bible-studies/2023/12/27/puerto-rico-report>.

The past two months have been very busy and productive with bible studies. I finished my weekly bible class series on the survey of the Old Testament. I think this series was a resounding success. This year I have started a bi-weekly class on the topic "Defending the Faith: A History of Apostasies." In this series we are taking a look at many historical apostasies from the first century up until the present day. This series takes a lot of work and preparation, but it is being very well received and we are getting a good amount of participation and feedback. Additionally, I have had continued bible studies with Alvaro Andres, Edwin, Yadimar, Wilfredo, Yadiel, and others. Further, I have been continuing to teach my bible class series on the Holy Spirit at Arecibo. The workbook that I wrote and translated is the first time the brethren at Arecibo are ever going through a workbook for a class. I have been



Bible study with Jim Smelser and Yan

thrilled to see their excitement, engagement, and work in the class. While the class is going a bit slower in pace than I expected, I am very happy to go a bit slower because there are so many questions and comments in each bible study.

While there have been so many positive points over the past two months there have also been several challenges. The issue of marriage and divorce is still a continued and looming problem at Arecibo. Kaitlin started a personal study with one of the sisters on the topic of divorce this past month. There have been some advancements on the matter, but it is still a monster that we have to wrangle with. Furthermore, we have been having significant issues with one of the members of San Sebastian who appears to have abandoned the congregation because we declined his insistence for the church to pay for a new remodel job for part of his house. After the church told him that the remodel was not fully necessary and that he should save and pay for it, he then got upset and tried to pressure me to pay for it personally. When I declined, he then said he was going to leave the church. Sadly, we have not been able to contact him, and he is refusing to talk with any of us and has even rejected his own family members. I am very hurt and saddened by this, but I hope and continually that God will give him time to repent and that he will change his heart.

Despite the challenges, we give thanks to God for all of the wonderful opportunities and open doors that He has given to us! We constantly pray that God will help us and send more workers to Puerto Rico. There are many opportunities here, but we are in desperate need of more workers. If you, or anyone that you know, are interested in Spanish work or the work here in Puerto Rico please let me know. We will do whatever we can to help bring more workers here to help in the growth of the Kingdom and to take advantage of all the numerous opportunities that God continues to give us.

Thank you, brethren, for your prayers, encouragement, and support in our work here. We would not be able to do what we do without your help and fellowship. Glory be to God for the work that we can do together to help His kingdom grow! If you have any questions or comments about our work here in Puerto Rico, please do not hesitate to let us know.

Grace be with you,

Caleb B. Westbrook