

# The Bright and Morning Star

"All the Good News  
That's Fit to Print"

Volume XXVIII

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, TARRYTOWN, NY

Winter 2020

## The Team of Ten ~ God at Work

by Pastor Torrey Robinson

My greatest joy on this trip was seeing a bond formed between the ten of us that, I pray, will grow even stronger now that we are back home.

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The planning and preparation was complete. In a matter of weeks, we had seen God provide the funds we needed for our trip to Guatemala through the support of our church family, the generosity of our individual families and the gifts of friends. In the pre-dawn darkness, as we gathered at the church that Saturday for the drive to the airport, we asked for God's blessing on our seven-day, life altering, adventure.

Travel was an all-day affair. The flight took a little over 5 hours. Once we cleared customs in Guatemala City, we all boarded a van, to drive an additional three hours northeast to Hope of Life. We had anticipated this trip for months, traveled long hours, prayed and trusted God. He did not disappoint us.

From the beginning, this had been a venture of faith. We had each seen God make it possible for all ten of us to go to Guatemala. In the

seven days we were in Guatemala, we would see God continue His work in and through our lives. As the week progressed, we all became aware that even the timing of this trip had been orchestrated by God.

In this edition of the *Bright and Morning Star*, different members of our team will tell you our stories. God met each of us in different ways, but we each saw God work. We witnessed His work through the ministry of Hope of Life. We saw God use our individual efforts.

For me, as pastor, I made the trip for two reasons. First, I wanted to be part of this team of ten. Not surprisingly, I knew the four other adults on the trip better than the five children who accompanied them. My greatest joy on this trip was seeing a bond formed between the ten of us that, I pray, will grow even stronger now that we are back home.

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My second personal aspiration for this trip was to somehow be used by God in service to people in Guatemala. The surprise, for me, was how God used the people of Guatemala to serve us. Every day, the staff at Hope of Life took care of us in a myriad of ways. Some of them translated for us. Others cooked our meals. Staff helped us plan our next day's activities. Caring Guatemalan caregivers made it possible for us to play and visit with the orphans and the elderly who live

at Hope of Life. Staff traveled with us as we brought food and the good news of Jesus to different Guatemalan villages. Yes, God used our team of ten, but I am very much aware that we could not have served, if the people at Hope of Life hadn't served us.

I invite you to peruse these pages to hear more of our stories. It is my hope that what we share will encourage you. And as you read the articles in this newsletter, I invite you to pray for the team member who wrote each story. Although our team is now back from Guatemala, I am trusting that God will continue to write His story in and through our lives.★

### A Bittersweet Beginning

by Jen Kang



This was our second trip to HOL in 2019. Back in June, when I announced that we were going back to Guatemala for Thanksgiving this year I had many people ask, "Why so soon?" I couldn't really explain why.... Even the O'Connors, were excited that we were coming back but were surprised to hear that it would be so soon after our first trip in January.

Little did we know that the very day our team would arrive in Guatemala was to be the day that God would make it clear to the O'Connor Family that they would be leaving Guatemala and Hope of Life ministries to return to the states for good. When the O'Connor Family moved to Guatemala to serve at Hope of Life 2 and ½ years ago it was with the intention to start a helicopter

ministry to assist in rescuing sick and malnourished babies from difficult to reach mountain villages and bring them back to the nutritional hospital at HOL for care and treatment. And, that has not happened as they had hoped.

In the 2½ years that Jon and Allie have been serving at HOL the Lord has used their specific gifts and abilities in many capacities. To name just a few.... nursing, teaching ESL classes in the elementary School, leading Bible studies for the teenage girls in the Village of Transformation, working in the maintenance department, driving buses for groups and

working on construction projects. As a family, the O'Connors have been very instrumental in bringing the missionary families on campus together once a week for a "small group" Bible study in their home. Their older children have helped out various teams as translators and joined in with teams to serve in villages and on all kinds of projects. All in between doing their own homeschooling and other daily chores around the

house, of course!

Even so, Jon and Allie have been asking for God's wisdom and direction for the past year to show them if they were to stay and continue with Hope of Life or to leave and pursue other ministry opportunities that aligned with the vision God had given them and the day our team arrived at Hope of Life, Jon and Allie received confirmation that they felt God was telling them it was time to leave.

So, as we were excited to arrive and see the O'Connors, their hearts were breaking with the realization that they would need to convey the news, that they would be leaving HOL in three weeks, to not only our team, but to all the other missionary families, HOL staff, and friends that they had all grown to know and love. At first Allie apologized to me that this was all happening just as we arrived but later that week Jon said, "This was no accident that this happened the week your team was here. God sent

God is good  
and His  
timing is  
perfect

you here  
this week  
because  
he knew  
we would  
need your  
love and support  
to get through this."

God is good  
and his timing is  
perfect.

To be sure, this is a stretching experience for them. The O'Connor family has returned to the U.S. without a home or jobs. They pretty much came with what they could fit in their suitcases (plus a few of our suitcases...) but they are basically starting over from scratch. They will be staying in Buffalo NY with Allie's parents for the time being. Please keep them in your prayers as they faithfully look to God for the next step in where he has for them to serve.

As our time with them drew to a close, Allie shared that they had spoken to Carlos Vargas, the Founder of HOL, about ways they could still be involved and they are hoping to be able to return to Hope of Life for a week here and there to lead teams, like our church, on trips where they would be able to serve alongside of us. I'm really excited about this possibility, so let's see where God will take this!★







## More Than Just Soccer

by Jonathan Kang

I really enjoyed the second trip to hope of life in Guatemala because we got to do a lot of service projects. One of the things I liked best was going to the Village of Transformation and soccer field to interact and play with some of the missionary kids and Guatemalan orphan children there.

I was able to play with a lot of the kids that I had made friends with last time, as well as meet some new kids. Sometimes it was hard not being able to speak Spanish, but when we were playing soccer, body language worked well to communicate. I could gesture to someone, and they would understand what I was trying to say.

Playing soccer seemed like one of the minor things that we did in Guatemala compared to going to a mountain village and giving food or some of the other things that we did, but playing soccer with some of the orphans can actually be a bigger thing than it seems. Lots of the kids there have experienced heartbreak, abandonment, and loss, so a way of helping them feel better is to do a thing that will bring them enjoyment, such as playing a game of soccer.★



## Making a Difference

by Robert Kang



Compared to us, the children in Guatemala have very little. They have small houses with lots of family members and they share almost everything they have. Even with all that the Guatemalan children have to deal with, such as the heat, doing their chores, and facing many difficulties, they are still happy and content with what they have. When we went to the village the kids all came out and wanted to play soccer with us or do crafts with us.

I think God wanted me to see how other people live and show me how much I really have. All the

smiled at her or did something funny.

I think my biggest accomplishment was spending time on the construction site and learning to tie rebar

*I think God wanted me to see how other people live and show me how much I really have.*

kids were all very creative and used everything that we had brought to create stuff. At first, they seemed different but after I got to know them a little bit, I realized they are really just like us. On the inside

together to make long rectangular beams that they would later fill with cement to make the foundation of a building called "the Dream Center" where people would go to learn a trade after high school. It was super hard to get the rebar tight, and it was about 85-90 degrees outside! But when it was all over it felt good that we were able to help and someday people will use that building to learn a trade so they can get a job.

Sometimes it does not seem fair that we have so much, and they have so little, but we can use what we have, to help them. We shouldn't just give to them so that we will feel good, but because we want to help them, and make a difference in their lives.★



they are funny. They have good friends. They go to school, and they like playing sports. They are people just like us. The one thing that I will remember the most was one little girl in the nutritional hospital that would laugh a lot whenever I



## Serving Here and Beyond

by Lynn Lange

One of my favorite parts of the week was the opportunity I had to read a Bible story to the children in the mountain village of Volcancito. I got to share a story from one of my favorite books, *The Jesus Storybook Bible*.

I then gave the Bible to the village leader, asking that he pass it along to the school teacher so she can read it to her students.

I really enjoyed doing all of that, but I found myself wondering, “What good could it have done?” The needs of the children are so vast. What good would it do to hear one Bible story from an outsider whom they might never see again?

It was then that God reminded me of the story of Jesus feeding 5,000. One little boy, 5 small loaves and 2 fish. Not much at all. But with Jesus, it became enough

to feed the masses. That was one boy with a little bit of food. I was one woman with a short Bible story. I realized that my part is to serve God the best I can with the gifts I’ve been given and trust Him to use it for His glory.

On the trip, I was also reminded that God doesn’t look for superstars. We see it time and again in the Bible... God using unlikely people to further his kingdom.

This lesson hit home when I met Edwin, the leader of one of the villages we visited. Edwin grew up working at a garbage dump and didn’t attend school. He taught himself to read and write when he was 15. To many, he may not seem

like a likely candidate to be a HOL translator and a village leader. But that’s exactly what he is. I don’t know Edwin’s whole story, but when we met him, he clearly gave God all of the glory and looks to continue to serve God in his village and beyond. One man who grew up in a garbage dump. One American woman with a Bible story.

One little boy with 5 loaves and 2 fish. God reminded me that He is in charge. Our job is to show up and bring him our loaves and fish and He’ll take it from there. ★



## Memories of Hope

by Dan Lange

Our mission trip to Guatemala was especially meaningful to our family because Guatemala is where our son David was born. It was our first trip back since he was an infant. It was amazing to be able to be there with him, serving the people of his birth country, with him alongside us.

There were so many great parts of this trip. One of the outreaches that meant the most to me was the Hope of Life nursing home. Our whole group did a brief visit there, and then I was able to join another church group to go back and have a pizza/bingo party with the residents. A few things really stuck with me:

First of all, Domino’s delivers...even in rural Guatemala.

**Domino’s delivers...  
even in  
rural Guatemala.**

That is Gladys on the right. She was very happy to tell me that “When the Americans come to visit, they have pizza parties.” When I asked her whose idea it was to have the pizza parties, she gave me a smile and had a twinkle in her eye.



Another nursing home resident who I will remember for a long time is Miriam. She has an incredible story of how God worked in her life. She is an artist and a writer. About 8 years ago, she needed eye surgery to keep her from losing her vision. She couldn’t afford the \$300 for the surgery. One day, as she

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was standing on a street sharing her poems with people passing by, she met a man who was inspired to pay for her surgery. He stated that he had never helped anyone before, but felt inspired to help her, so gave her the \$300. Shortly after that, she had the surgery and her sight was restored.

This trip was an excellent reminder of God's faithfulness and love for his children.★



## A Special Place For Me

by David Lange



One of the things that I really liked about this trip was that I got to visit the country where I was born. I haven't been there since I was a baby. It was cool to see how pretty it was.

Second, I really liked helping people. In some places like the Nutrition Hospital and the Village of Transformation, we played with the children to make them happy. That was fun and rewarding.

However, what was most rewarding was the help we gave to the people in three places: the mountain village of

Volcancito, a garbage dump near the city of Zacapa where people work to collect metal they can sell, and the village of Pueblo del Rio. In those places, we helped by providing them with food and other items as well as spending time with the people there.

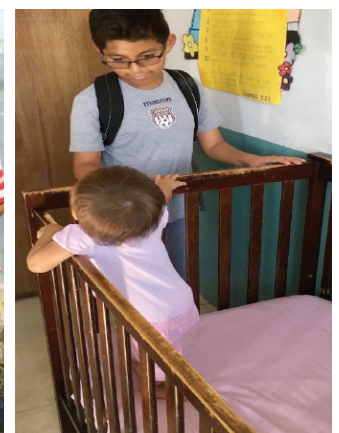
For Volcancito, we packed food bags and then delivered them.

At the garbage dump, we served food and played with children.



In Pueblo del Rio, the living conditions were really bad. When we visited there we brought the children toys, stickers, water bottles and sunglasses. That made them very happy.

Thank you to all the people who helped to send our team on this trip. It was amazing.★





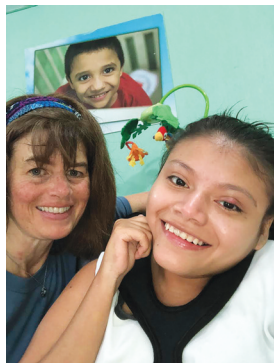
## A Visit to Kelly's House

by Jen Polimeno



*Colossians 3:12 says, "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."*

**A**s we discussed what our options for ministry were for Monday morning, our first day of ministry at Hope of Life, Kelly's House was on the list. We had walked through and heard about Kelly's House on our tour on Sunday. We had not participated in ministry here during our trip in January. I felt God tugging at my heart-strings, asking me to participate in an activity that I was typically less comfortable doing. Lynn, Jen and I went to Kelly's House, while the others went to the Nutrition Hospital.



Kelly's House is a home for orphans with severe developmental and physical disabilities. Some came to Hope of Life malnourished, some from abusive situations; some were rescued from a tragic orphanage fire in Guatemala City in 2017, and are now wards of the government. Kelly's House full-time nurses, nannies and therapists provide love, nutrition, therapy, support, and daily care to about 40 residents. The age range at Kelly's house is somewhere between 4 and 20, many of whom are non-verbal and in wheelchairs – in other words, they cannot walk or talk. Each room houses 4-6 orphans and are assigned a caregiver around the clock. I was assigned to a room with 4 girls and 1 boy. All but one were in wheelchairs or a crib, all were non-verbal.

When I arrived, the nanny was starting the process of

bathing each child in a separate area. Not able to speak Spanish, I gestured to her that I would watch, and then assist her. Over the next hour or so, each child was bathed, hair washed, and teeth brushed, then diapered and dressed in fresh clothes. It has been years since I bathed and dressed my own children, and let me tell you, it is hard work!

At some point, the nanny left the room and I was on my own with my new friends. I brushed and braided hair, adding pretty bows, which had been recently gifted to the girls. I sat with each child, massaging their hands, singing songs and praying for them. As if stretching, one of the girls repeatedly raised her arms overhead, clapping her hands. I mimicked her, which made her laugh. That laughter was contagious among the others. I quickly came up with a routine of clapping my hands overhead then snapping my fingers and patting my knees (similar to "Head, Shoulders, Knees & Toes"), which caused squeals of delight every time. After several rounds of this routine, more singing and one-on-one time, the nanny returned with bottles and sippy cups for the children. It was feeding time. The children were so excited to see her again. Her love for them and theirs for her was apparent. I began to wonder if my presence there was welcome or disruptive. Was I actually helping or hindering one nanny's daily routine? Before I could reflect on this much longer, our interpreter came into the room telling me it was time to go. I had been there for two hours, and it felt like 15 minutes.

God has chosen Hope of Life and the nannies at Kelly's House to foster these very special children. God loves each of them unconditionally.

Would you join me in committing the children of Kelly's House and their caregivers to prayer? ★

## The Trip to Volcancito

by Ashley Polimeno



**B**efore the team left for Guatemala, many of you were able to help us raise money to purchase food bags to feed an entire village of 74 families.

We packed the bags in a warehouse on the Hope of Life campus on Monday afternoon. Each giant bag consisted of

corn, black beans, a milk and corn meal powder, sugar, oats, and MannaPac. MannaPac is a food bag that also contains rice, protein and dehydrated vegetables. It is packaged by the Feed My Starving Children organization. The organization holds local pack events, something that I, along with others from our church participated in several years ago. Placing the MannaPac in the larger food bags was fascinating and a full circle moment having packaged them in the U.S., then actually distributing them to families in need in Guatemala. It took us about an hour and a half to pack 74 bags.

Tuesday morning, we loaded the food bags on to the back of



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a pick-up truck to be transported to the mountain village called Volcancito. We rode on a bus, then switched onto cattle trucks to make the rest of the trip up the mountain. We stood up in the back of the trucks as we drove along very windy, ascending dirt roads. Along the ride was a breathtaking view of Guatemala, all its nature and beauty in an entirely new perspective. When we arrived at Volcancito, the village leader and his wife were there to greet us. Volcancito is a village that has been transformed by Hope of Life. It has a leader, a pastor, a school, and a clean water source. We met in a concrete



courtyard outside the school building. As we began to unload the food bags, women and children started appearing and some of the children helped us unload the bags.

Caleb and Chloe, our interpreters, explained that Lynn would read a children's Bible story. We also gave out lollipops to the children. It is so much fun to see their smiles when given such a simple treat. After the Bible story,



Pastor Torrey had everyone's attention as he gave a sermon in Spanish. Then, each village family received a ticket and lined up to receive the food bags. We handed out the bags to one family member in sort of an assembly line. Since most of the men were out working, it was the women, many of whom already had their kids to hold on to, and children that received the bags. We also gave many warm hugs as we gave out the bags.



Afterwards, we had some time to play with the village children. The boys, Dan and myself kicked around a soccer ball, while Lynn and Torrey did some coloring and arts & crafts with others. Both Jens, Allison O'Connor and I also distributed hand-made dresses to the girls, which Allison's mom and aunt had made.

Our journey and time in the village was a very memorable and heart-warming experience. I will always cherish what Allison told us on the ride up the mountain. She said, *"This is what God meant when he commanded us to bring salvation to the ends of the earth."* (Acts 13:47). It definitely felt like we were at one end of the earth that day. To me, the village seemed like the most remote place, but to the people, it is their home. I hope that the people of Volcancito continue to know God's love, and that they are not forgotten. ★

## The Nutrition Hospital

by Dominic Polimeno

On Monday morning of our trip to Guatemala, Ashley, Jonathan, Robert, David, Pastor Torrey, Dan, and I went to the Nutrition Hospital on the Hope of Life campus. It is called a Nutrition Hospital because its main purpose is to nourish the babies and kids who are there, and to educate the moms about proper nutrition and care of their children.

When a baby or child is rescued through Hope of Life, they bring the baby and the mom and any siblings to the hospital, which is where they stay until they are well enough to go home. Sometimes a parent isn't able to come or stay with their kids, which is why they are in the toddler room at the hospital. The toddlers and children we saw at the hospital may have been malnourished and diseased when they arrived, but are gaining weight with proper nutrition, and overcoming some of their sickness because they are so well cared for.

To put some of their nutritional needs into perspective, Pastor Torrey shared an interesting fact with us that one of the toddlers named Evan, who we spent time with, is only a couple pounds heavier as a 3-year-old, than his grandson Hudson,

who is only a few months old.

The toddler room at the hospital is set up with a bunch of cribs, a rocking chair, some dressers, and a changing table. We played with the kids on the floor, using toys and balls. Jonathan made origami for some of them. I made a connection with Evan, the 3 year old I mentioned. We played with



Legos together. I learned through playing with him how smart he is. When I pointed to where to put the next Lego, he did it. The kids are full of smiles and laughed a lot. They like to be held and loved. It's possible that they don't receive the same amount of affection that they would if they had one or two parents. Afterall, they are orphans. Eventually, once they are well enough, they might attend the pre-school at Hope of Life and move into the Toddler House at the Village of Transformation, which is the orphanage on campus. After that, they might live with a full-time family in one of the orphanage houses.

I really enjoyed my time with the toddlers at the Nutrition Hospital. They might not remember me, but it is a day I will never forget. ★



## A Visit with the Lavermans in Tokyo

by Tim Raymund

Judi and I recently traveled to Tokyo, a place we had never visited together before. We spent Saturday doing some sightseeing within walking distance of our hotel. But on Sunday, we boarded the Hanzomon/Denentoshi line and rode 45 minutes south west to the Denen area near the Tama river. After a short walk from the Takatsu station through a neighborhood of tightly packed two and three story residences interspersed with small stores, we arrived at Denen Grace Chapel, marked by a folding sign on the sidewalk outside a door to a stairway going down to the meeting room.

This church is part of the work that Kevin and Kaori Laverman do in Japan. Our church helps to support them as missionaries in Japan. The work started when Kevin came to Japan on a short term missions trip some 30 years ago. He then went back as a career missionary in 1999. As Kevin has often told us, Christianity in Japan represents a tiny fraction of the population. Though Christmas decorations are prevalent in Japan this time of year, and one often hears carols while buying food in the market, most people seem only vaguely aware of the true meaning of Christmas. They know almost nothing about Jesus. To say that the work God has called Kevin and Kaori to is challenging hardly does it justice. I think of what they're doing as something like working a garden, in the middle of a vast desert, at night, in the winter.

After snapping a quick selfie with the sign, Judi and I walked down the stairs from the street to the meeting room, finding a man at the bottom getting ready to decorate the stair rail with Christmas lights. Being a little early and new to the place, Judi and I weren't sure what to do (or ask given the very few words of Japanese we have between us). The man smiled at us, gestured welcomingly to the double doors leading into the meeting room and said, "Dozo", which I'll very roughly translate as "Welcome. Please go ahead." His warm and gentle greeting was a kind of foreshadowing of our time with the church. On entering, we found people preparing for the service, with some getting ready to lead singing, others trying to capture the several small children zipping around and a few people sitting here and there in the chairs set up for worship. We found Kevin and said hello. We met Justin and Lindsey Mitchell who came to Japan about two years ago, working with the Lavermans in full time missions. Several of the church members stopped to talk with us, introducing themselves and asking a few questions. Though we didn't understand all of the service, being in worship with the church there felt like unexpectedly finding family. Towards the end, a lady stood up to give the announcements, delivering them with warmth and humor, in an informal style you might expect around the dinner table or at breakfast at a fam-

ily reunion. One can clearly see that this church is close knit family, a good example of how God calls us to Himself, changing our hearts and building us into a body of believers in ways we might not completely understand.

After church, Kevin pulled back the covers and showed us the bigger picture. He showed us the storage space the church has now at Grace Chapel which makes it much easier to set up and tear down on Sunday. We walked over to Grace House, a building of the church's own which includes room to meet on the first floor and a parsonage on the second and third. We drove over to Musashi-Kosugi (Mu-Ko), an area just to the southeast of Denen Grace Chapel where highrise apartments are springing up seemingly overnight. We saw the small building there which, much like Grace House, will provide meeting space on the first floor and a parsonage above.



As we toured, Kevin explained more about what God has called them to. Though the Mu-Ko building is the one we've heard about most in recent letters, it's only a part of the picture. Grace House, the other permanent space in Denen, offers the church there a chance to grow a bit and perhaps support their own pastor. The Mu-Ko building represents a "from scratch" church plant, casting a net in a growing part of the city to start a church with a whole new group of believers, again with the idea that

there will eventually be a church there with a local pastor. To the west of Denen, the Mitchells will start a third church. I think of this as going from one garden to three gardens, in the middle of a vast desert, at night, in the winter. As Kevin explained all this to us, I asked him, "How is your sleep?", wondering about the stress level. Kevin replied, "I sleep like a baby!", and then turned and grinned at me. "I often wake up crying in the middle of the night," he continued with a laugh. He was joking, but at the same time, a little serious. Though things might appear smaller than what we're familiar with, this is definitely big work, a massive exercise of faith.

Meeting the church in Denen and seeing the places firsthand definitely gave Judi and me a better sense of what Kevin and Kaori are up to, but it was Kevin's explanation of all that God has in mind for them which really tugged at my heart. Please pray for the church there. When you do, pray for more people to come to know Jesus and become part of the body. Pray for local pastors who can come alongside the Mitchells and the Lavermans. Pray for God to continue to provide living and meeting spaces for the churches. Pray as well for the Mitchells and the Lavermans, that they would have His strength and His peace as they work. And if you're ever in Tokyo, by all means, go see them!★

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Worship Service: Sunday 10:30 am • Sunday School 9:30 am • Spanish Church 3:00 pm

Weekly Prayer Wednesdays @ 4:00 pm Mezzanine

*The Bright and Morning Star* is seeking contributions for the next issue on any topics of interest which glorify the Lord Jesus Christ.

Please send articles to: *The Bright and Morning Star* newsletter at the address above.

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