

Rising from the “-ashes”

Dear family, friends and supporters,

The title of this letter is the best way I can think of to sum up the two months since our last prayer letter. We have experienced three negative “-ashes”, but in the midst of it all have seen God’s grace in many wonderful ways.

The first “-ash” was a slash. Around the time we sent our last prayer letter, Blanca discovered that she had aggressive breast cancer and needed surgery right away. Doctors successfully operated on both breasts on December 3, and Blanca began the painful recovery process, not even being able to bathe or dress herself at first.

The second “-ash” was a clash. I have mentioned church leadership struggles vaguely in previous letters. A situation that started a year ago keeps mutating itself and extending its life and affecting everything it touches. I am grateful that I am able to stay on the periphery of the conflict, and that my teaching and ministry is not adversely affected by the situation. But it affects our friends, including the two pastors featured in our last prayer letter, so we ask for your prayers for this struggling Mexican denomination.

The last “-ashes” were a splash followed by a crash. A glass of water was accidentally spilled on my laptop recently (no, not by me), rendering it useless. What’s worse, I discovered that the external hard drive I use to back up my files has some corrupted files. After a full week I was finally able to regain access to my laptop hard drive and am starting to become productive in that area again...

(I tried to find a way to include my severe annual December/January allergies as another “-ash”, but was unable: Maybe *Ash-oo?*).

Despite all this, we are overwhelmed by the way we have seen God’s grace in numerous ways. Even in the thick of things we feel we have already risen from the “-ashes”.

Let me count a few of the many blessings of the last few months:

- Blanca’s recovery has gone smoothly, and by the time you read this, she will be getting radiation treatments.

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Dave and Blanca Gifford

dgifford@crcna.org

Blog address:

<http://www.giffmex.org/newsblog>



**Christian Reformed
World Missions**

2850 Kalamazoo SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49560
(616) 224-0700

Ministry objectives:

- Teach at / develop the Reformed Theological Seminary of Mexico, and develop free Spanish resources on the web
- Give conferences on various topics across Mexico to Reformed Presbyterian (RPC) churches
- Network the RPC by developing and maintaining its website, pastor’s directory and statistics
- Assist local churches in Mexico City and host Service and Learning teams from Christian Reformed churches

Current support level:

- December helped put us back up to 100% of our year-to-date “minimum” fund-raising goal.
- Our amount to date is only 31% our “total” fund-raising goal for this year (the full cost of our serving here in Mexico)

Special prayer needs:

- Blanca’s radiation treatments
- Dave’s seminary classes and conference preparation
- Pray for resolution to leadership struggles that are crippling the RPC’s effectiveness
- Studies, good friends and spiritual growth for Daniel and Alexandra
- Pray that we will find new individual supporters
- Pray for our Mexican friends who are experiencing hard financial times

- Dave's parents came to visit us for ten days soon after the surgery and were a tremendous help and encouragement to the four of us.
- The four of us were able to attend an enjoyable church retreat in sunny Acapulco over Christmas.
- I took my vacation time in December, and in between bathing, dressing and bandaging Blanca, I found time for some rewarding reading. In particular I starting digging deeper into the book of Revelation. See my new blog, <http://revelation.giffmex.org>, for the results.
- Since vacation ended I have been preaching again, getting ready for seminary classes, continuing my preparation for a conference on conflict and forgiveness, and helped the seminary buy a new computer with donations from a generous supporting church.
- We got a flood of Christmas cards, a few in December, many more throughout January. People have also encouraged us by e-mail and Facebook. Thank you all!
- Missionary Winnabelle Gritter came to give a two week intensive course to the seminarians. She said she was quite pleased with our students.
- Blanca's mother has come for two weeks in January. This is the first time anyone from Blanca's family has visited us in Mexico, so we are thrilled to have her here.
- Daniel and Alexandra are back in classes and are doing well. Daniel is taking catechism classes, too, and is involved in the youth group. Alexandra sings in the church praise team.
- After two months, my allergies finally seem to be subsiding.

We are filled with hope for 2010. I am looking forward to the new semester that starts this week. I am also looking forward to leading the new conference I am preparing. I am praying the Lord will use it this year to bring healing and reconciliation to people who need it. Blanca is looking forward to training two churches for Vacation Bible School this year, and helping the ladies of Jesús el Salvador Church form a small library of helpful Spanish Christian materials to share among themselves. And we are encouraged when we think of all of our friends, family members and supporters praying for us and making our service here possible. December helped us get our financial support in better shape, too. Thank you all!

May the Lord accompany and carry you, as he has us, through the slashing, clashing, splashing, and crashing of life. And may you rise from the –ashes, emerging victorious by his grace. In Christ,

*Dave & Blanca
Daniel & Alexandra*

Dave, Blanca, Daniel and Alexandra Gifford