

THE THOMAS FAMILY

Serving Together Since 2016 • Panama

"And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful."

Colossians 3:15 NLT

Words of Encouragement

March is here, meaning the beginning of the Spring season and of Lent, with Easter approaching soon. As the weather slowly starts to warm up more and flowers begin to bloom, a distinct change begins. We live in a day and age of constant change, some of which is encouraging, some worrisome, and some that doesn't affect us directly. Whatever changes you are experiencing, good, bad, or a mix, I pray for the "peace that comes from Christ" to "rule in your hearts" and over your life right now, as Colossians 3:15 says.

I also want to encourage and remind you, whatever season you're in, or perhaps a season you're transitioning into or out of, that you can breathe in His peace, steadfastness, and faithfulness, and breathe out or expel the worries, negative thoughts, or words we've heard or said. There is something truly valuable and desirable about living a life of peace, both externally and internally. With Christ, we can achieve this through prayer, surrender, and thankfulness (Philippians 4:6-7).

Ministry Updates

Things have been moving along with our blueprints. There have been several changes architecturally and on the engineering side. We have been in discussion and evaluating changing the position of our buildings to fit within the actual limits of our property. If you remember, our neighbor to the north had placed his fence on our side of the property. After months of trying to get him to move it. Even attempting to serve him papers that would obligate him to appear before the justice of the peace, we have been unable to do so. This is a lengthy process that our architect, lawyer, and topographer have indicated could take anywhere from two to three years. In the interest of keeping things moving for our blueprints, we have decided to rearrange the buildings to fit within the available space. We will continue to fight to reclaim our land; however, the layout will differ slightly from our original design. Additionally, this alters the position of our well, septic tanks, and much of the existing infrastructure. To put it another way, currently, things are being modified.

We also had a planned trip to an Indian reservation in February with our whole family to minister and continue our training on parenting. Stephen and Santi were going to host a father's talk on parenting from a father's perspective, while Yuli and I were going to speak directly to the mothers. To get there, we would have to drive six hours, then ride a small boat in the open ocean for another hour or so. However, we decided to postpone the trip due to high swells. Thankfully, we postponed after a small boat capsized because of the high wind and swells. We hope that sometime in April, we will all be able to go. This indigenous community is very impoverished, as most of them are in Panama. **We raised enough money through donations from locals and churches to buy 60 backpacks and all the basic school supplies the indigenous children will need for school. Praise the Lord!**

We were excited to announce in our last newsletter that we hired a social worker to help us create necessary documents for our ministry, which is outside of our expertise, when working with families and the child welfare agency of Panama, SENNIAF. Elisa confirmed twice (in writing and verbally) that she had agreed to work for us. All we needed was for her to sign the contract, which she delayed doing for some time. We did not expect her to later tell us that she decided not to take the job after all. We understand the Lord's timing is perfect, and she seemed like a good fit, being a Christian, having similar values, and experience working in ministry (as the wife of a small local church pastor). Regardless, it was a bit disappointing and discouraging to hear her decline the job in the end. **Will you join us in praying for the Lord to bring the right social worker to us who has similar values, a hard work ethic, and passion to help families be reunited through Christ?**

Family Updates

Our children are doing well and are the apples of our eyes! We are so enjoying this season, with our children a little older now: Noah, 6, Ezra, 4, and Esther, 2. We are officially out of the infant stage. It is bittersweet, of course, but we are grateful to enter this time of seeing more independence in our children. If you don't know this about me, I am a hobbyist at heart. I enjoy making my own things, from jewelry to home decor to baking and more. It has been a sweet time getting back into it slowly and also inviting my children to join with me (age-appropriately). **Noah** is doing well in school after some challenges earlier this year. Through many recommendations from trusted friends and Noah's school, we have been working with an Occupational Therapist (OT). It has been incredibly eye-opening and helpful to better understand how we can help Noah. He is incredibly smart and does very well academically, but struggles with how much time his school requires him to sit. Schools in Panama are a bit different from those in the US, and for our naturally active boy, limited outdoor playtime and having P. E. (Physical Education) only once a week, the school and we as parents have been trying to find a solution.

As for **Ezra**, I love how that boy just loves school! He is not as active as Noah and will sit for longer periods of time to color, paint, read, and do activities with me. It has been a sweet time, and I've been trying to enjoy every bit of it since our kids are just growing up way too fast! **Esther** has her bubbly personality, which is adorable! She's usually shy and serious at first, but soon after, she's bursting with joy, laughter, and cute energy! She is quite active and loves to play outside and explore, but she also loves to sit and look at her books or color at the table. We are so grateful for these beautiful gifts the Lord has given us!

Also, this month, March 18 to be exact, marks our 10th wedding anniversary!!! What a milestone; we give God all the glory. Marriage is both rewarding and challenging, and we are grateful to go through this journey of love and partnership with the Lord's help and guidance! We cannot believe ten years have come and gone so fast! As we reflect, we see God's faithfulness through the trials, such as moving first to Costa Rica as newlyweds and leaving my home country, and then years later experiencing COVID-19 in a new foreign country (Panama) with a newborn. God has been so, so good to us, even when it's hard to be away from the comforts of the US and especially from friends and family. Thank you, God, for ten years of marriage, and we look forward to the next exciting milestones in our marriage!

Partnering through Prayer

How can we pray for you? Did you know every Monday, Stephen, I, and our staff (Santiago and Yulianna) get together to corporately pray and lift up both personal and ministry petitions? We are intentional and diligent to pray because it's not only a direct form of contact with our Father, but also because we trust in Him and His faithfulness. Let us pray for you now.

"Dear Lord, thank You for today and for meeting so many of our daily needs consistently. Thank You for being our "good shepherd" who "lays down His life for the sheep" for us (John 10:11). You take good care of us regardless of whether we give You praise or glory for Your goodness. Lord, we lay our worries, our fears, at Your feet, and we surrender them to You. The creator of the heavens and the earth, we trust and know You are bigger than anything we are facing, and with Your help, we can overcome any challenges. We pray You bless and keep our brother or sister in Christ and let Your face, Your goodness, and Your joy shine on them today and every day! Blessed be Your name, Jesus! We give You all the glory and praise, in Jesus name, Amen!"

- Stephen, Kendra, Noah, Ezra, & Esther Lily

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