

May 2021

# Mission News & Helping Hands

Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
Board for World Outreach  
Sharing the Gospel in South America and Asia

## Chile

### A Vicar in Linares, Chile — A Blessing and Necessity for the Congregation Unidos por La Fe

"How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'" (Rom 10:14–15).

**My feet are not beautiful.** In fact, my wife sometimes lovingly compares them to those of a hobbit from Lord of the Rings. However, God led my feet to Linares, Chile over 5 years ago to the church Unidos por La Fe (United by Faith) and now has ultimately led me to take on the role of vicar in

that congregation. I take great comfort in knowing the power of the Good News, that God's precious Word never returns empty. God redeems, transforms, and makes new. He can make the ugly beautiful and He is at work, even through people with ugly feet like me. I am humbled and blessed to share His goodness and faithfulness with the community of Linares alongside others.

continued on next page

Jon Gross

• Santiago  
• Linares

### From the Editor

Rev. Thomas Heyn  
Board for World Outreach  
Administrator

Updates from Chile are the focus of this month's issue. After many years without on-site pastoral leadership, a vicar has been installed in the Linares congregation. Jon Gross writes of the interesting turn of events that resulted in his being the first on-site trained worker and what it means for that congregation.

While we hear this encouraging news, we also have been advised that a new wave of COVID, more devastating than previous waves, is spreading through the country. The BWO together with the Board for Christian Service will be able to offer assistance to those hard-hit in Chile. Your generous offerings from recent months will help your brothers and sisters in Santiago and Linares, Chile.

We appreciate your prayers for the work in our world fields and your financial support that makes this work possible.

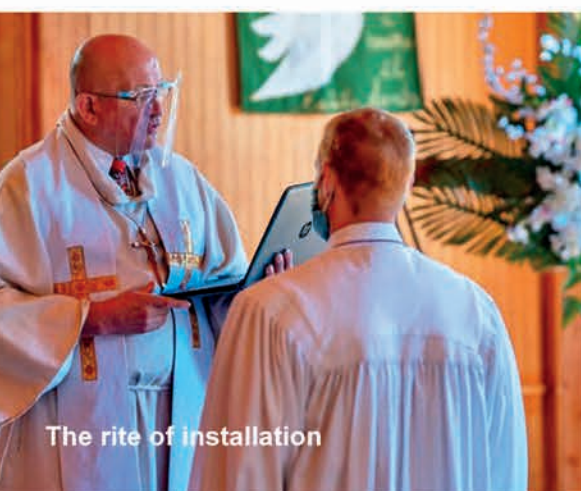
"Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge, Until these calamities have passed by" (Ps 57:1).







L to R, Patricio, Vicar Jon Gross, Pastor Mario Gálvez, Sergio



The rite of installation



Congregation and guests at Unidos por La Fe

The congregation Unidos por La Fe has been around for many years starting in homes and slowly growing into a beautiful white church building now found on Presidente Ibáñez Avenue. When my wife and I first arrived, we witnessed how church members themselves organized services and activities, guided by Missionary Tim Erickson who visited monthly. On Sundays when Missionary Erickson was serving in the city of Santiago, Linares church leaders took turns leading worship, reading sermons that were shared with them and organizing activities for the youth. I was often reminded of the Acts churches, small groups formed by traveling apostles and then taught how to gather and worship together. When Missionary Erickson retired and returned to the United States in 2018, the Linares congregation continued to meet and to be led by local leaders guided by vicars and a newly ordained Pastor Mario Gálvez located in Santiago.

While the leadership and guidance of Missionary Erickson and now Pastor Mario in Santiago are an absolute blessing, there are many challenges to being a church without a pastor or vicar based in one's own city. After seven years without a permanent local church leader, the members of Unidos por La Fe encouraged and voted for some of

their willing male leaders to pursue pastoral studies. It was at this time that I also was encouraged to lead more directly in this manner. Thanks to the support of the ELS, I enrolled at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary and have been taking courses online. On January 10th of this year, I was installed by Pastor Mario as vicar of Unidos por La Fe. In addition, another church member, Sergio Gutiérrez, is also currently engaged in Biblical studies. It is a joy to serve together with him!

Why is it important to members of Unidos por La Fe to have a local vicar and hopefully soon a pastor? I asked several members this question as I was preparing this article. Here are some of their responses:

"In church I look for an opportunity to learn. Not just by reading the Bible, which is incredibly important, but also to correct my errors, to learn humility, and to learn how to forgive. The church is like a family and we need a leader. When I have a question, it is a pastor who guides, who shares challenging things but like a father, correcting in love. I give thanks to God for having a vicar who I can consult when I do not understand the Scripture or what is happening in the world around me."

"The Christian life is a blessing. Having a church is another blessing. And of course, having a leader who shares the Word and Sacraments regularly with us is a blessing."

"The role of the vicar is to watch over the church, to provide order and to lead others in the Word. Without a pastor or vicar there could be disorder and the church cannot prepare services or bible studies or give the sacraments."

"Having a vicar based in Linares means that visitors and newcomers have someone to go to personally with their questions. They can be led by the same leader whose face they also see every Sunday. They do not have to wait until a visiting leader comes to town to take confirmation classes nor do they have to ask personal questions to a visitor that they do not know well."

Linares is a city of around 100,000 souls and it continues to grow! How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?

The fields are ripe and there are always opportunities to share the Good News of God's saving Grace with our neighbors. Many members of Unidos por La Fe are excited to serve and to share the Hope that they have. They also desire spiritual leaders to guide them. I am humbled to currently serve as vicar and to lead alongside others like Sergio. God's Word is powerful and life giving. It is an absolute honor to share it with others and to watch the Holy Spirit at work.

*Jon Gross, vicar at Unidos por La Fe Lutheran Church in Linares, Chile*



With wife, Elise, and son, Moses



## Covid Update from Chile

■ **Chile**—Chile is experiencing an unprecedented second wave of COVID, with infections that reach 50% more than at the peak of the first wave in June 2020. Last week alone, we mourned the deaths of three people related to members of our congregations. Yesterday, we heard the news of 25 seriously intubated patients awaiting an intensive treatment bed in one of the hospitals in Santiago. The entire hospital network has collapsed, and doctors face the dilemma deciding between who will receive care and live and who will die for lack of care.

The restrictions allow us only one permit per week for leaving our houses to purchase essentials such as food, cleaning supplies, medicine, etc. At the beginning of the pandemic, our congregations, due to robust sanitary protocols, were able to hold a single face-to-face service on the first Sunday of Advent. In Santiago and Linares, we have been unable to continue with such in-person services where we baptize and confirm new members. It has been vital for us to hold services, conduct classes, and have meetings via recorded sessions shared on the net through WhatsApp, web pages, and Zoom meetings. This has provided encouragement and hope during the confinement and fear that this whole situation has produced for our members. More than a month ago, we began to meet by Zoom to pray every evening at 9:00 p.m. We pray for those in our congregations seriously ill with COVID 19, placing our hope in the promises of Jesus Christ. We pray for the surviving families of those who have died, for all the needs that this confinement is generating. You, also, our brothers, continue encouraging us with your prayers.

*Pastor Mario Gálvez*

## News From Other Mission Fields

■ **Peru**—Worship continues via online video presentations. The Peru synod leadership is encouraging pastors and congregations to work together as the church body works to resolve certain problems during these trying times.

■ **India**—The seminary students in the two district seminary programs, through a generous gift from an ELS congregation, received cell phones that will allow them to participate in online seminary classes while COVID or other problems prevent in-person classes.

■ **South Korea**—There are still travel restrictions and quarantine requirements. A Bethany seminary graduate will be assigned to serve at Seoul Lutheran Church as well as conducting ministry in other locations. Pray that his visa process goes smoothly.

■ **Latvia**—The churches continue under quarantine due to the coronavirus. Work has begun with a new evangelism center in a historic part of the capital, Old Town Riga.

■ **Czech Republic**—A surge in the coronavirus has once again severely limited in-person gatherings in the church as well as in Martin Luther School.

■ **Ukraine**—Administrators Nick and Kerry Laper have returned to the United States for several months. The counseling centers and medical clinics continue looking for ways of offering their services. Plans are underway for upgrades and purchase of new equipment for the clinics.

## How Can You Help?

■ **Pray**—for each of the mission fields, for the national pastors of these churches as well as for the members of their congregations to remain faithful in their homelands that often do not welcome the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Pray for these Christian brothers and sisters who often do not have the kind of medical care and government help that is available to most of us in the United States. May the Lord continue to care for them and strengthen their faith. May God work all these challenges for the good of his people, as he has promised.

■ **Please**—prayerfully consider a gift or regular donation for the work in the various fields. Every field, and some more than others, have many needs where God's people can provide much needed assistance. You may designate a gift to a particular field or project on the memo line of a check. You may also go to [els.org](https://els.org) and click on "Donate" in the top banner on the right-hand side.

■ **For more information**—please contact us in the following ways:

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