

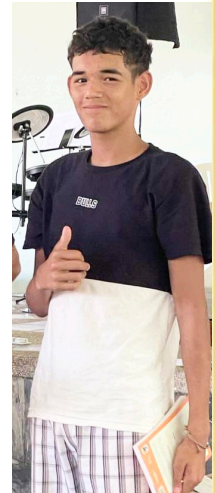
Dear Family and Friends,

Joneses to Colombia

Youth camp went very well! We are so thankful for all those who gave to help send the youth to camp. It was four days and three nights of fun, food, preaching, devotions, and small group workshops. We tried very hard to get permission for nine teens, but only got permission for six to go. Then at the last minute, a brother and sister were unable to go because of a family



emergency. We ended up only taking four, but we know God has a plan and reason for only taking those four. One of them got the camper of the day award for memorizing Bible verses and having a good attitude of service and friendship. We were so proud of him. He was there last year too and the leaders recognized his change since last year. Also, there was a group coming from an orphanage in Bogota, and Eri was able to assist with their workshops. She had a great time with them.



We were so exhausted trying to keep up with all the youth games, sports, and activities (our age is slowly starting to show LOL)

The weekend after camp, some volunteers from Bogotá met us in Ambalema to have a Christmas service and in the evening we met with those of Chorrillo. We sang a few songs, Eder preached, and then we shared some typical Colombian Christmas snacks while we fellowshiped.

As we wrote in our last newsletter, Pastor Eder shared with us in November that the Lord is calling him to give up his plan to serve as church planting pastor in Ambalema and focus on the church members in Bogotá that the Lord has given him to shepherd with the other pastors from the church. Since then we have had more time to pray, talk with others in ministry, talk to our pastors in Alabama, and talk to the Drive-In Board of Directors. **The overwhelming consensus is: if the Lord is calling us back to the U.S. then that is where we should go, and there is plenty of work to be done there.** The ministry has offered me to **fill the positions of Hispanic Ministry Director and Facilities/Maintenance Director when we return to the U.S.**

We feel the Lord is closing the door for us here in Colombia, and I want to give a few of the reasons why we are making this decision. The first reason is that since we first started working here full-time in the ministry we have been working outside of our spiritual gifts, and while we understand God sometimes calls us to work outside of our comfort zones to help shape us and form us, there are other factors as well. Looking back on our roles with the Park ministry in the U.S, we were utilizing our spiritual gifts very often and effectively. My spiritual gifts are in the area of helping or assisting, logistics, problem-solving, maintenance and languages. Our objective here in Colombia was in fact to assist Pastor Eder in planting the church in Ambalema. From early on, I volunteered to teach the small groups in an effort to try to help the people learn more quickly and also meet weekly with the people. A few months before Eder informed us he would no longer be church planting pastor in Ambalema, we had been praying more intentionally and directly for God to send Eder full-time to live near Ambalema to formally "found" the church. We believe the decision of Eder is our answer to that prayer. That He wants us to return to the U.S. Obviously, we are very concerned about leaving behind the people we have been working with so we have been in communication with a group of volunteers who have helped us on many occasions in Ambalema and they are willing to continue making trips to Ambalema so that the people continue to have evangelism and discipleship. Many of you may be thinking, well just find another pastor and another church to assist, but it's not that simple. Ambalema and the village of Chorrillo are very rough and difficult areas plus they are very far away from the cities and big towns. Also good doctrine Protestant churches here in Colombia are very new to missions and we haven't met any church so far that sends missionaries out. We will continue to oversee what's happening with the volunteers going to Ambalema and even assist them financially, with prayers and any resources that we can. Also the volunteers are exploring their calling to become missionaries, so we love to be part of their process. This group is going to be around eight people, that are very capable and knowledgeable of the Scripture and presenting the gospel and have an evident passion for missions. We'd like to talk more about each of them in future.

We're now sure and at peace that the Lord is calling us to return to the U.S. and His plans are always perfect. He doesn't make mistakes. Please be praying intentionally for us, this transition is very hard. We hope to continue to count on you both in prayers and financially if that's in your hearts. We know God is working and doing things the way He has planned to. This time here has definitely been shaping us, preparing us, teaching us, and challenging us. We know that we're now better servants and better people for His Glory!

In Christ,
Stephen and Erika Jones

Happy new year!



For Christmas, we were planning to host Eri's family and extended family at our house to celebrate. However, there were a few inconveniences with a couple family members and we had to postpone their coming until New Year's. We made the trip to Bogotá for Christmas so that the family could all be together to celebrate and we had a great time! For New Year's, we brought many of them back with us in the van and they had a great time here for New Year's and a couple days more. There were twenty-one people total staying in our house. We had air mattresses

scattered in all the bedrooms and living room, but everyone had a place to sleep! And we had a great time eating, playing sports, swimming, dancing and even in New Year's Eve Eri's cousins directed a miss universe pageant for the aunts, it was very funny; we all laughed so much. Also they had a karaoke competition for the men. I barely won first place by singing English romantic songs to Eri.

Happy New Year 2024 to all of you! May God bless you and fulfill His will in y'all's life.