



July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019

From: the Foster family- Alan, Colleen, Kalea, and Joshua

You are receiving this letter because you have supported our family on mission in Panama.

This past year has been the most difficult time our family has ever experienced. While we have sent out prayer requests, I wonder if we have fallen short in mobilizing you as prayer partners by not being more intentional, more specific, and more frequent in our communication. Forgive us where we have fallen short of Jesus' perfect example and where we could have done better in relationship and in partnership with you.

Almost exactly one year ago, our peaceful existence began to unravel following an episode in which two indigenous men asked me, independently and without each other's knowledge, for help in confronting our fellow missionaries for injustices committed against them. In honoring that request, our lives went from a journey of plains and rolling hills to hellish abysses and beautiful peaks. God has met us and sustained us in ways we could never have imagined, and this past year was an amazing chapter in our faith journey.

At present, we have very good and fruitful relationships in **all the villages** where we've worked as well as an **open invitation** to continue. We have more invitations to new villages than we could possibly accept, and we have excellent relationships with every organization and institution with which we've worked, be them faith-based, secular, or governmental, except for one, the IEU.

At present, we have an ultimatum from MB Mission to leave the country or cease to be under their umbrella. This is due to an ambiguous letter emitted by the Panama City-based indigenous board of directors, 5 people working behind closed doors, which are currently the institutional authorities of the local church here in Panama (Iglesia Evangélica Unida, IEU), which is part of the Mennonite Brethren international (ICOMB) family of churches. While MB Mission has acknowledged that what is being done is wrong, and they have offered to transition us to another unspecified country in Latin America or elsewhere to continue mission work, their current policy structure precludes them from allowing us to continue in Panama with the numerous churches and organizations desiring to be in relationship with us, including the villages where MB churches are located, without the express invitation of the local church institution (IEU).

This is extremely painful and difficult for us because we cherish the MB family and give thanks to God for inviting us to serve among this amazing international community. We desire to continue as part of the MB family, and we have requested to MB Mission leadership that we remain in Panama as MB missionaries to continue with the many organizations that desire for us to be here in Panama. But our request has been denied. We cherish our relationships here that we have worked the better part of a

decade to cultivate, and through which we are seeing fruit after so many years of toil. We, as a family, would like to invite you into the discernment process with us because we lack clarity at this juncture.

We've always been operating on a long-term vision and have many projects underway that cannot be brought to a healthy closure in 6 weeks, or realistically, even in 6 months. The investment in time and resources has been tremendous. These commitments also ride on our promises given under the banner of Christ Jesus to unreached people. In fact, the very idea of ceasing relationship goes against everything we stand for as Christians, and yet we are willing to walk softly and mold our existence to submit, to the extent possible, to the demands of those few in power here in Panama that recoil at any notion of accountability for leadership.

As we have thought and prayed through what lies ahead and pondered what is behind us, we think it is correct to invite you into this discernment process as a vested and valued partner in God's command to go to the least reached. Whose leadership do we submit to? Whose invitation do we accept? It seems to us like the highest expression of love in this ugly situation would be to quietly leave the home we worked so hard to build here in Yaviza and move back to Catrigandí (we have one load of belongings remaining to complete that task), to refrain from seeking justice, and to do our best to love everyone here, including those that hate us... to keep serving the people, including those that do us harm, and to pray and remain available for reconciliation and restoration through the hope that the Holy Spirit will convict His people of sin. We have no anticipation that staying would be easy, or even safe, but we know that the light yoke and safety is found in Jesus and not our lot in life.

We have sought council from many mature mentors, within and outside of the MB family, including MB Mission/Multiply leadership. Several international Christian organizations with which we have relationships here in Panama have offered for us to join their teams. Should we stay or should we go? Will you continue to partner in ministry with our family? Would you like to ask any questions to guide you in this discernment process with us? Please pray with us and share counsel as you are led.

*Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ. Galatians 1:10 [They] intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. Genesis 50:20*

Your servants in Christ Jesus,



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