

Christmas 2011

Dear friends,

As I write there is a gentle rain falling here in Charlotte. It doesn't exactly portend a white Christmas, but it is a soothing sound that reflects the peace in our hearts as we celebrate the advent of our Savior. Kathy is in the kitchen making Christmas cookies, while I am attempting to finish up some grading of student papers before we leave to spend Christmas at my mom's house in Tennessee. We have already received cards and updates from some of you and once again count ourselves blessed with our many friends and family who have stuck with us through the years.

The past year has been filled with changes, new challenges and opportunities. I (Alan) have seen a change in my job situation that has resulted in an opportunity we would never have imagined. I continue to teach at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Charlotte, but on a part-time basis as of the Fall. Economic realities at the seminary brought this on, but in the process we discovered the possibility of renewing our ministry in Brazil, through itinerant teaching opportunities in seminaries there. The result of this was that in October we were appointed as missionaries with United World Mission (www.uwm.org). I will be working with UWM's Theological Education Initiative, targeting Brazil and, hopefully in the future, other Portuguese-speaking peoples. We will be based in Charlotte, where both Kathy and I will continue to work, and will be traveling to Brazil for short-term trips throughout the year to teach modules in seminary degree programs as well as networking with Brazilian partners for other opportunities for leadership training.

One of the most exciting things is UWM's vision for the missionary scholar. I finally feel like I am working with an organization that "gets it" concerning the importance of theological education on the mission field. While many agencies have treated TE as an afterthought, UWM sees it as a critical piece of its overall mission strategy. Missionary scholars with UWM will be unleashed to be professors, mentors, and theologians who research and write. This will serve to promote the growth of indigenous Evangelical scholarship through the raising up of future generations of native scholars, pastors and missionaries. A highlight of this year for me was getting to meet some of the other, mostly younger scholars, who have joined UWM, during a breakfast at this year's ETS – SBL meetings in San Francisco. We have a great team that is forming and I am excited to work with them. So far, I have already begun preparations for teaching in a new master's degree program at the Baptist seminary in Curitiba, in South Brazil. My friend and writing partner, Franklin Ferreira, has invited both Kathy and me to consider teaching at a new seminary that will begin in the city of São José dos Campos. Please pray as these two schools jump through the hoops for government approval to begin offering courses, and also for us as we are raising support to fund a part-time salary and ministry expenses with UWM.

Kathy continues to work part-time as a psychiatric nurse practitioner at a practice in Gastonia. She has a patient load mostly consisting of poor and/or indigent persons so it is quite challenging. Her clients typically have social, financial, housing and occupational problems in addition to, or as components of, their mood and thought disorders. Issues of addiction, abuse, DSS involvement, etc. are the norm, things that most of us never have to deal with. She sees many patients each day and usually comes home worn out. We are trying to be more proactive to plan regular getaways as an antidote to the mental and emotional exhaustion that can arise.

Another exciting new development is the launching of Sparrowhaven ministries. Sparrowhaven comes out of a vision that Kathy has long had for healing of the brokenhearted. There are lots of dreams about things to come, but for now it consists of Kathy's private practice providing Christian based medication management and care. Again, we ask your prayers as this ministry develops. I hope to have a website up and running, www.sparrowhaven.com, soon - so stay tuned and drop by.

Carrie continues her studies at Gordon-Conwell, pursuing two Masters' degrees simultaneously; one in biblical studies and the other in Christian thought. She is still working in the seminary library, where she supervises the other student workers. A highlight this year was the donation of a large collection of books by Ben Witherington, III, an internationally recognized New Testament scholar who will be retiring to the Charlotte area. Carrie played an important role in preparing for the arrival of the collection and is busy making sure that it all gets properly cataloged. In addition, she was asked to assume the presidency of the Student Council at Gordon-Conwell Charlotte. Our dean told me that she is doing an excellent job at everything and is emerging as a natural leader among her peers. Needless to say, her mother and I continue to be very proud of her. Her next big challenge is to get her thesis proposal approved so that she can graduate a year from now. Her topic has to do with the philosophy of mind and early Christian views of the relation between the body and soul.

Kathy and I have been involved with a Brazilian congregation at our church. We love worshiping in Portuguese and making many friends there. Kathy led the women's retreat in January and has continued to teach at their monthly fellowship "teas" which she's found very rewarding. On a sad note, our pastor Joel and his wife Renate and kids had to leave the country while their visa status is updated. It is hard for us since they are very close friends. Meanwhile we are helping out with the church.

Our two cats, Melia and Samwise ("Sammy"), are still thriving with as much mischief as ever. They run around the house chasing each other when they are not glued to one of us. Since I work at home now I have to keep my study door closed to keep Melia off of my lap so I can type. They wait for Kathy each morning to join her while she has her quiet time. Sammy has been knocking ornaments off the tree and batting them around so he can chase them across the floor. Of course, he knows better, so when he gets caught he runs away, being careful to stay just out of reach.

Finally, a real highlight of our year was a visit to Brazil for a week last March. Our excuse for the trip was to keep our permanent visas active, but the real fun was visiting old friends in Itaúna, Minas Gerais (from Kathy's exchange student days), as well as heading to the beach near Ubatuba on the São Paulo state coast, where the photo was taken. We also stopped in to see my publisher and talk about ideas for future projects. Of course we got to visit friends from our time as missionaries and even met some new folks along the way. It just made us that much more anxious to get back to work in Brazil.

So that is a taste of what has been going on here. We enjoy keeping up with all of you with your cards, and now on Facebook. Visit us on-line (www.myatts.net), or drop us a note.

God's richest blessings to you all,
Alan, Kathy and Carrie Myatt

