

March 2, 2011

*Let us not be weary in doing good, for we will reap in due season, if we don't give up. Galatians 6:9*

Dear Friends,

This verse has been an important one for Theresa and me of late. There have been many times over the past months where we have had occasion to question, and sometimes even to doubt what we are doing here in Mexico. It certainly is not that we are not busy, or that we are sitting idly by. Certainly there is enough to do. But the issue is – what are we doing, and is it impacting the Kingdom, and is it fulfilling the mandate for which we were sent to Cd. Valles in the first place?

We have been extremely busy with over the past months with Project L.A.M.B.S. teachers coming down. At the end of January we had a whirlwind couple of weeks with Fred Erb here with us. At that time he wore two hats – one being Project L.A.M.B.S. teacher and trainer, and the second being that of representing Listowel Community Church and VitW Ministries in heading up the meetings of the Board of Directors of *Obreros Unidos para Cosechar* (OUUpC), the Mexican non-profit covering the Bible School / Training Center. If you are following our blogs, you will have read Theresa's March 6<sup>th</sup> entry entitled "Meetings, meetings and more meetings". This gives you a good idea of her feelings towards the seemingly endless amount of legal issues, planning, and roadblocks which we have been facing in the land purchase.

This year Theresa and I have also been blessed to be able to be involved with "Evangelism Explosion", an outreach of the church which is targeting new colonias, or areas of the city of Valles for cell group plants. Working with a team, we are using the projection equipment and movies to enter into new areas of the city, returning weekly into an area for a month. The objective is to find a willing family during that month which will open its home to begin a cell group in that particular colonia.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of March Cleo Yoder arrived to head up another cycle of Project L.A.M.B.S. teaching and training. Today I will drive him over to Tampico, about a three hour trip east, so that he can catch his plane home to North Dakota early tomorrow morning. As I mentioned in a couple of the blogs, we are delighted to see that the nationals are being trained to completely take over the teaching and implementation of the Project L.A.M.B.S. program. This makes for intense times for the instructors now as they train the national teachers to take over, but the fruit is well worth the difficulties involved.

But the issue always bubbling on the back burner is the purchase of the land for the Bible School / Training Center. I am sure that many of you must be rolling your eyes, clucking your tongues, and saying "enough already, just get it over with". We have been working with land purchase for two years, and intensely now since the end of 2010. So what is the big deal, and what is the hold up?

Well, actually there are several. First of all, we are dealing with the very different governments of two very different countries – actually three, because we also need to factor the United States into the Mexican and Canadian equation. This makes for very specific and unbendable laws which need to be

negotiated. Each party seems to feel that their specific spin on a particular issue is sacrosanct, and cannot be placed into question, and certainly that the issue cannot be viewed in any other way than their own.

Then, secondly, we are also dealing with language and translation issues. Each piece of documentation, each set of minutes, each legal transaction needs to be placed into the second language.

Then, you are dealing with people who lead very busy lives and are burning every available candle on each end. It is not easy to coordinate everyone for each needed task.

Then, maybe the biggest niggler is something that no one except a Mexican will possibly understand, and many Mexicans are also left baffled – we are in the process of purchasing “ejido” land. Ejidos were land grants which were set up mainly during the 1930 – 1940s. Below is a cut and paste from Wikipedia explaining Mexican land reforms, and what an ejido is:

*“The typical procedure for the establishment of an ejido involved the following steps: (1) landless farmers who leased lands from wealthy landlords would petition the federal government for the creation of an ejido in their general area; (2) the federal government would consult with the landlord; (3) the land would be expropriated from the landlords if the government approved the ejido; and (4) an ejido would be established and the original petitioners would be designated as ejidatarios with certain cultivation/use rights. Ejidatarios did not actually own the land, but were allowed to use their allotted parcels indefinitely as long as they did not fail to use the land for more than two years. They could even pass their rights on to their children.”*

Laws which govern the purchase and sale of ejido land are complicated, cumbersome, and somewhat baffling to both Mexican and foreigners alike.

As of Tuesday, March 29<sup>th</sup> it looked like we had hit a brick wall impasse between the demands of Mexican land laws and those of the Canadian VitW Board and Canadian Government. At issue was the ability to transfer title for the land. According to Mexican law it could not be titled (at this point yet) into the name of the non-profit, but only into the name of a physical person. Canadian law demanded on the other hand, realistically, that Canadian tax receipted money could not be used for any purchase which appeared as if it was benefiting an individual, but must rather go into the name of OUpC – the non-profit covering the work of the School. We were between a rock and a hard place, and we had two days to pay the landowner or lose the \$10,000 dollar down payment which we had already made on the land. Incidentally, up to this point we had always been guaranteed that there would be no problem transferring title directly into the name of the non-profit. It wasn't until the actual signing over of title that this bomb was dropped on us, two days before final payment needed to be made.

We quickly scrambled for a solution to the impasse. Canada suggested that a Trust Document set up in Ezequiel's name for OUpC would satisfy Canadian demands. Such Trust agreements do not exist in Mexico, and hence cannot be done. We begged for a payment extension of one more day from the landlord. He reluctantly granted us until 2:00 on Friday (yesterday) - a one-day extension. God, what were we to do? Were we going to lose the land which we felt so sure that God had given to us, as well as the \$10,000 dollars already invested?

The lawyer had an idea – there was a Mexican version of documentation which was similar to the Trust Documentation demanded by Canada. Maybe this would satisfy Canadian law. A phone meeting between Fred Erb, the lawyer, a good translator, and the Mexican team brought a conclusion to the issue about three hours before the deadline – it could be done!

Yesterday, after the phone meeting and final approval to spend the Canadian money as directed was concluded, the final payment was made. This was end of a saga maybe, but the beginning of a new journey. Thank you Lord for bringing us through what seemed to be an impossible conflict between two unmovable forces!

Now the real work begins. We now quickly need to begin turning the soil and preparing for planting sugarcane before the rainy season begins later this summer. There is a whole lot of work which must take place on the land to prepare it for planting and we need to begin this very quickly.

We still are praying and believing for the donation of a used tractor and implements for the farm. It does not need to be big since we are only farming a little over twelve acres, but without a tractor we are forever forced to hire field work from neighboring farmers. With a tractor we can be freed to use it as necessary on our own sugarcane, and it can also be a source of income as we hire it out as well. If God places this need on your heart, or if you know of a farmer who would wish to donate a used tractor and implements for this work, please contact me. The donation will be able to be tax receipted.

Of course, speaking about the generation of income – this is exactly the point of the farm in the first place, and why we have felt so strongly that God is giving us this land. Not only is it an excellent place to build the Bible School / Training Center, but it is also a way for the school to become self-financing. We believe that the only way that a school can work is if it is very quickly able to be turned over to nationals and be run by national money, becoming freed from the need for continual funding, and hence control, from foreign soil. We believe that the farm will be the first step in this process. Of course the twelve plus acres will not be enough income to run the school in and of itself, but it certainly will be a start. With good land management, and by thinking outside of the box and multiuse of the land, it will go a long way. Also, the training shops, when they are developed, will provide other sources of income for the school as well.

So, that is the vision. Praise the Lord, we are finally able to begin – at long last. It has been a lengthy struggle uphill, but we now have the title for the land. Thank you for your patience with us through this issue. I know that some of the issues seem very foreign, and the ways that things move don't compute. But that is simply what is involved every time a person works across national and cultural lines in missions.

Theresa and I are well. We thank you for your love, prayers, and support. Without these we could not continue here. Please continue to pray for us. There are still very real safety issues which we deal with on a daily basis. Also, as my letter has made very clear, there are plenty of times when one can second guess what God is up to, and discouragement can set in. We desire to live knowing that we are in God's will for our lives.

Thank you, and may God bless you richly,

Steven and Theresa