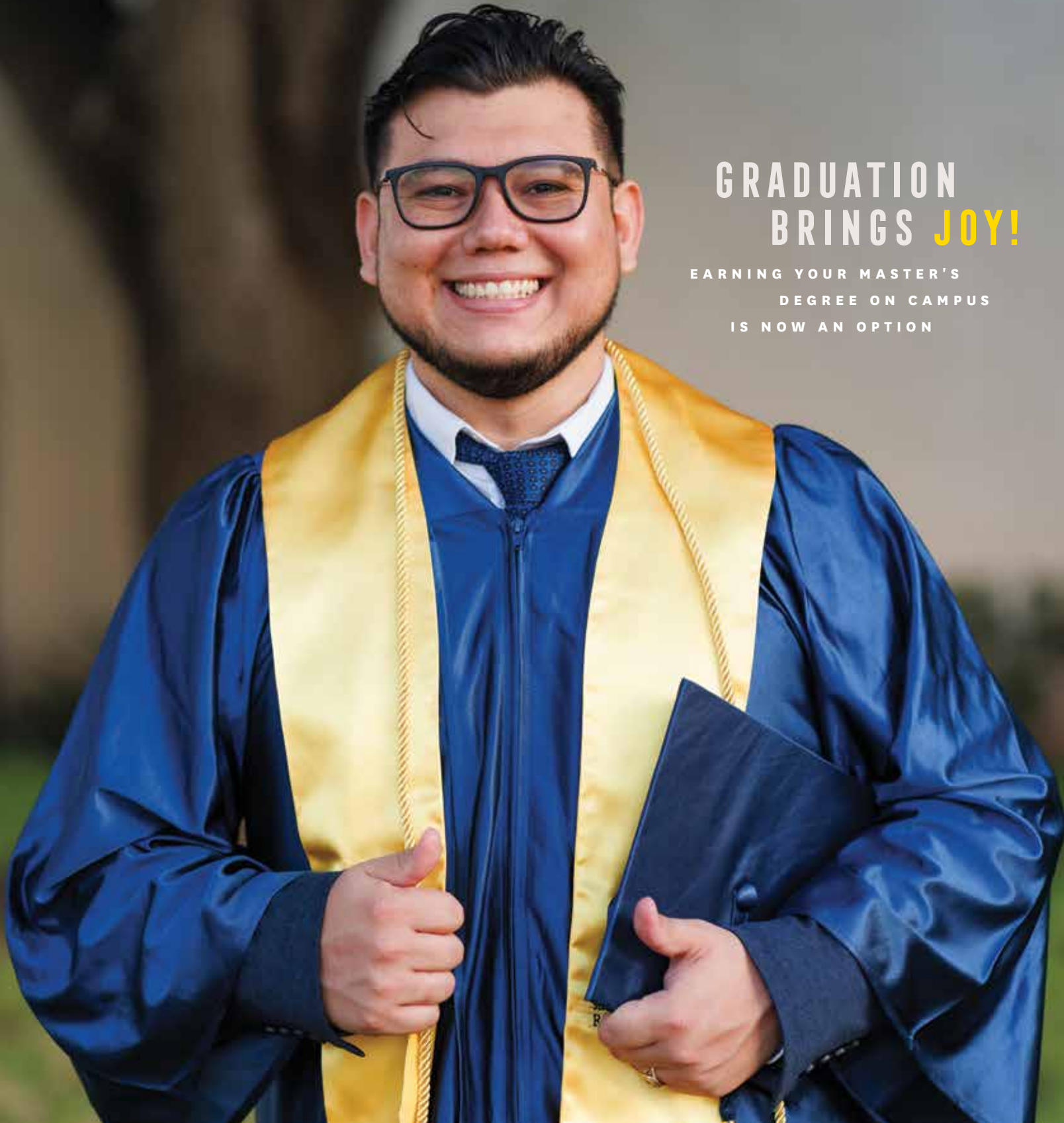


# Rio Grande

ISSUE 56 SUMMER 2024

## MAGAZINE



GRADUATION  
BRINGS **JOY!**

EARNING YOUR MASTER'S  
DEGREE ON CAMPUS  
IS NOW AN OPTION



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**TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS PUBLICATION:**  
**Rio Grande Bible Ministries** or **Rio Grande** = organizational name  
**Seminario Bíblico Río Grande** or **SBRG** = Bible College  
**MLS** = Missionary Language School (1955-2017)  
**ICS** = InterCultural Studies (2017-)  
**Year** = Graduated or last attended

**on the cover** New curriculum, new staff members, new students...yes, there are many new things at Rio Grande Bible College. But one thing that hasn't changed is our purpose, which is "... to train Christ-centered leaders with a biblical worldview for the global church." Among the informative articles in this new issue, we include "I Am Ivan," the story of one of our recent graduates who is now living out that purpose.

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Check out [www.riogrande.edu](http://www.riogrande.edu) to see our other publications.

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**PURPOSE** To make God's people aware of the needs of the Hispanic World and the role that Rio Grande Bible Institute serves to provide godly Christian leadership.

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*Publish His glorious deeds among the nations. Tell everyone about the amazing things He does.*

**1 CHRONICLES 16:24, NLT**



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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

# The Transformation of Lives

The kernels sat on top of the hot wood stove, seemingly unaffected. Then began to move...tiny jiggles, and suddenly...pop! The kernel turned into a snowy white kernel of popcorn.

The Great Lakes Iroquois, as reported by French explorers in the early 1600s, believed a spirit lived inside each kernel. When heated, the spirit grew angry, burst out of its home, and fled into the air as a disgruntled puff of steam.<sup>i</sup>

The Spaniard Bernabé Cobo, who worked with the Quechuas in Bolivia in the late 1500's and early 1600's, writes, "They toast a certain kind of corn until it bursts. They call it *pisancalla*, and they use it as a confection."<sup>ii</sup> They used specially shaped clay pots in which they placed heated sand<sup>iii</sup>, then placed popcorn on the sand. When the conquistadors came to Americas, the natives already had over 700 types of popcorn!

Each kernel contains a small drop of water stored inside a circle of soft starch. As the kernel heats up, the water begins to expand. The water turns into steam and changes the starch inside each kernel into a superheated gelatinous substance. As it explodes, steam inside the kernel is released.<sup>iv</sup>

A simple seed. Moisture. Heat. Starch. And a fascinating transformation!

Yet another miraculous transformation takes place when God's people begin to bring the warmth of His truth to bear on the hearts of people. Salvation that transforms lost people into children of God! Sanctification that brings Holy Spirit wrought holiness into the life that was controlled by sin. Hands and feet and hearts that once lived for selfish ambitions are trained for ministry to others!

Come with me through the Rio Grande Magazine and behold the effect of God's hand on the lives of tomorrow's leaders! Evidences of His transforming power are popping up all over!



*Lawrence R. Winkle*

**A SIMPLE SEED.  
MOISTURE.  
HEAT. STARCH. AND  
A FASCINATING  
TRANSFORMATION!**



# BUILDING A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR

*Elijah Windle, Practical Ministries  
Master of Arts in Biblical Studies*





Since our founding in 1946, Rio Grande has had the privilege of training many young men and women for ministry. God has been faithful to guide in creating and adopting new academic programs that meet the changing needs of the church. In recent years, the face of the Latin American church has changed. Congregations are growing, people are more well educated, and government expectations have changed. We need godly, biblical, and practical higher education for the Spanish-speaking church. Yet, to date, very few Bible-based master's degrees in Spanish exist for pastors, missionaries, and theologians. Churches are seeking to equip their leaders and need a program from a trusted institution that can provide training where they currently serve and at a cost they can afford.

To meet this growing need, Rio Grande has explored offering master's degrees in the past, finding each time that we lacked critical components--namely scholarly resources from our



► **Koinonia, the campus coffee shop, is a good place to study.**

library available to online students, more professors with doctoral degrees, and the infrastructure for meeting the ministerial and academic needs of online students.

God has now answered each of those needs. He has provided an on-campus library that meets and exceeds the essentials for a master's program. We are working on offering more resources for our online students. Among those resources is a Spanish scholarly library designed, together with Logos Bible Software, to provide the tools students will need for advanced studies and future ministry. The necessary faculty for the new program has come together with the addition of new professors and through the continuing education of those already here. God has also been preparing our online team for the academic needs of our online students.

Last year we finalized the development of a master's degree. This is the first step in a program that will faithfully train tomorrow's pastors, missionaries, and Christian educators for effective ministry and theology at a higher academic level. We were excited to announce that after extensive prayer and preparation, Rio Grande received approval in November to offer a Master of Arts in Biblical Studies. Our first classes began for online students in January, 2024.

Our first master's degree consists of a 36-credit program dedicated to the expository and in-depth study of each book of the Bible and each major division of theology. This degree is designed for Latin Americans with a bachelor's degree and at least a year's experience in ministry. They will

receive a deeper knowledge of Scripture and theology for part- or full-time ministry in a local church or in missions. This program builds the biblical and theological foundation that many master's degrees lack--at a deeper level of study, academic rigor, and practical ministry than our bachelor's program. Online and in Spanish, it is available to people serving across the globe.

As God provides each needed resource in this new program, He opens more windows of opportunity. The Master of Arts in Biblical Studies is the first step toward a comprehensive Master of Divinity track. This first degree establishes the biblical foundation for ministry. Building on this step, we anticipate two more steps toward comprehensive ministry training at a higher level.

The first of the higher degrees will include a Master's in Applied Ministry. It will train pastors, missionaries, and Christian educators in practical ministry tools that will enable them to serve competently in the ministries to which God calls them. The final step in the Master of Divinity track is to prepare the next generation of theologians and scholars. Building on the content of the first steps, this degree will add a deeper study of biblical languages and theological education. It will help meet the growing needs of the Spanish-speaking church with thoroughly trained and competent students of the Bible and articulate theologians who will be able to faithfully train others for ministry.

We ask you to pray with us as we obediently follow God into developing this new program. He has uniquely gifted and placed Rio Grande in the position to help meet the growing academic needs of the Spanish-speaking church. We are excited to see where He will take us next. Praise the Lord for what He is doing!

**Our new course offerings will help both women and men to be better prepared for ministry.**



# FORGET T N O A ONLINE

*Luis Gimenez, Director of Online Studies*

## ▶ WHEN RIO GRANDE LAUNCHED OUR ONLINE PROGRAM

**13**  
average number of students during our first year of online studies.

in the fall of 2018, the goal was simple: to provide high quality Bible training for people who were not able to study on our campus. During our first year of online studies, we had an average of thirteen students and only one staff member to oversee the whole process. Since then, in just a few years, we have grown more than 400% in the number of active students per year.<sup>1</sup> Also, we now have an official online department with a team of seven people actively working with the students. The number of online courses has expanded and we have incorporated the support of adjunct professors. These professors help us interact with the students, providing more personalized instruction and guidance as they study.

Today our online courses are more relevant than ever. In the past few years there has been a significant decrease in the number of student visas being approved for applicants from certain countries. This affects not only Rio Grande, but institutions throughout the United States.<sup>2</sup> In the past, this meant that such applicants could not experience biblical training with us. Now, in our online program, they can receive a high-quality education without needing a visa or having to leave their home countries. We praise the Lord that we are now able to reach more people with our classes because modern technology allows us to go to those who are not able to come to us. The training we offer through this program enables men and women around the world to acquire the tools they need to grow in the Lord and to minister more effectively.

We thank God for the opportunity He gives us to serve our online student population, and we continue to depend on Him for the challenges ahead. We are acutely aware of the need for solid biblical teaching in Latin America. Because of poverty, corruption, and violence in many of these countries, people are desperately seeking an answer and a way to cope with their dire socio-

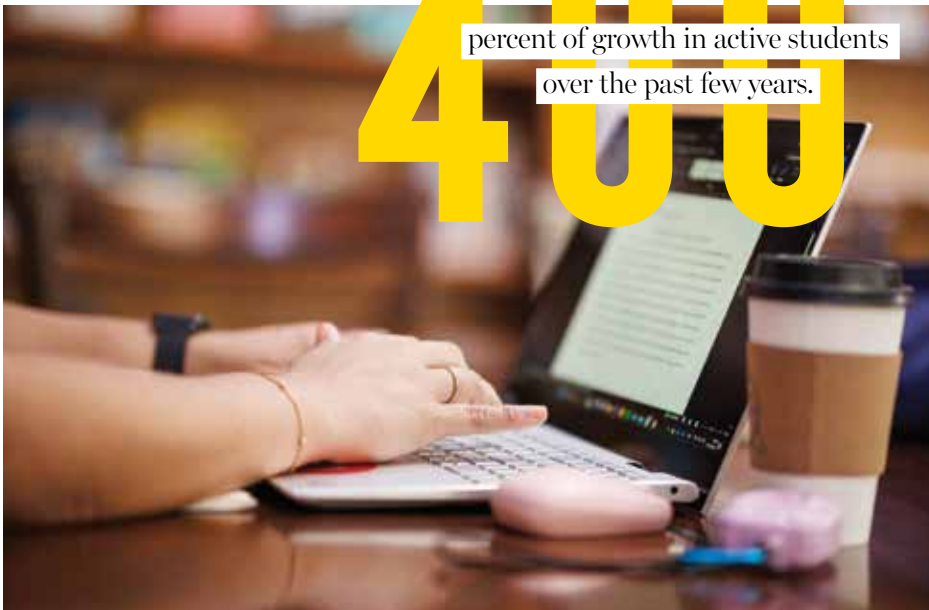
**400**  
percent of growth in active students over the past few years.

**7**  
people actively working with the students in our online department.

economic situation. God is using these difficult circumstances to draw people closer to Him.

As a result, the evangelical population in that area is steadily growing. Unfortunately, however, many pastors and leaders of the churches do not have the necessary tools to lead effectively and minister to their flocks. A growing movement in Latin American churches falsely promises their adherents health, wealth, and prosperity in the name of Christ, enticing them to come to Him only for what they can get from Him and not for who He is.<sup>3</sup> Thus, people are receiving a heavily diluted version of the good news that puts them and their needs at the center, not the glory of God as the true Gospel proclaims.

At RGBI, through our on-campus and online programs, we strive to train Spanish-speaking men and women from a Latin American context to treasure Christ, to preach the Gospel, and to recognize and counteract false doctrine by rightly dividing the Word of God. We provide them with a sound doctrinal foundation through theology courses and Bible classes covering Genesis to Revelation. We equip them with exegetical and hermeneutical tools and train them to teach from a text of Scriptures verse by verse, submitting themselves to the text and making the glory of God and His exaltation their chief aim. We are excited to see how God is expanding our online program and using it to train our students to rightly handle the Word and meet the ever-growing needs of the Latin American population.







“

# I AM IVAN

”

*By Deborah Stricklin*

## The way the Kingdom works is opposite the world's system.

Where the world wants to obtain abundance today by any means possible, God instructs us to plant seeds of generosity and kindness today that will reap a great harvest generationally and eternally. The amazing thing about God's methods is that if we succumb to the temptation to gather as much as we can today, that's all we get, but if we'll faithfully plant seeds today, the harvest He produces will multiply exponentially. Henri Nouwen said, "God's kingdom is the place of abundance where every generous act overflows its original bounds and becomes part of the unbounded grace of God at work in the world." Jeff and I are in the middle of such an experience!

The story begins with an act of obedience—a seed planted—nearly twenty-five years ago. I'm sure the story actually has its roots long before that, but we'll pick up our part of the story from twenty-five years ago. Our children were very young, and we had begun the journey of educating our kids. Being an educator by profession, I took my own children's education very seriously. And my personal conviction was to raise them in an environment where God was welcome. At times that meant private Christian education, and at other times, that meant periods of homeschooling. Either

way, their education was never free; it was costly to us.

At a church event 25 years ago, the Good Samaritan Baptist Mission was offering us the opportunity to sponsor a child to go to school. For about \$30 each month, a child who would otherwise not have the opportunity could go to school. The Holy Spirit spoke to my heart, "If you'll make sure one of these children has a Christian education, I'll make sure your children do, too." At that point in our lives, with three young children, \$30 a month felt like a sacrifice. But God had made me a promise, and I was all in!

Our child from Nicaragua was named Ivan, and his picture hung on our refrigerator for 14 years as we sponsored him all the way through his education. We lovingly called him the brother that our son Jonathon never had, as they were one year apart in age. We rejoiced the day Ivan graduated from high school, and eventually his picture came down from our refrigerator. Our kids have many memories of prayers prayed for Ivan and his family over those years. And our kids knew the story of God's promise—that their Christ-centered education would be taken care of because we obediently provided for Ivan's Christ-centered education. And God did exactly what He said He would do. That part of the story ended about nine years ago when Ivan and the last of our three children graduated from high school, but God has a funny way of working behind the scenes when we're not aware of it.

Over the last nine years, God has blessed me with twelve books to publish and a beautiful ministry in Pakistan. But God most certainly isn't finished.

A couple of months ago, I received a message through social media that asked, "Did you sponsor a child in Nicaragua? I am Ivan." Absolutely overjoyed to hear from him, we began conversing about what he's doing today. He is preparing to graduate tomorrow from a Bible college in south Texas. God has called him to be a church planter, and he said he will go wherever God sends him to plant churches and make disciples.

Tears flowed down my cheeks as I realized what God had started from that one act of obedience twenty-five years ago. What God gave me as a promise to educate our own children has turned into the beginning of exponential Kingdom multiplication. God has given us over 350 children in Pakistan (so far!) to educate and take the gospel out further and to generations yet to come. And who knows how many lives will be changed through Ivan's church planting. Only God...



Deborah and her husband traveled hundreds of miles across country to be present at "Ivan's" graduation at Rio Grande last December. (His real name is Juan Gaitan.)



“Did you sponsor a child in Nicaragua? I am Ivan.”



Tears flowed down my cheeks as I realized what God had started from that one act of obedience twenty-five years ago.

# A JOYFUL CHALLENGE

*Diego Manosalva, Practical Ministries Department*

THE JOURNEY OF THE



## BECOMING DISCIPLES

Teaching a group of children about Jesus.

**AS A BIBLE COLLEGE, WE ARE FIRMLY COMMITTED TO PREPARING OUR STUDENTS FOR FUTURE MINISTRY.**

We are well aware that theoretical instruction without practical application cannot produce well prepared graduates. That is why, as part of

the academic program, and with the goal of adequately training our students, we team up with local churches. We believe that together we can contribute to the ministerial development of future pastors, missionaries, and Christian educators.

The Practical Ministries Department has existed for decades, working hand in hand with local churches in the Rio Grande Valley. However, the recent challenge that we have embarked upon is that of educating students online, which has also meant developing the Practical Ministries program with churches that are located in other countries far from our campus.

Although this has made things more complicated, we have the most important resources to reach our goal: the Lord's support, willing pastors and churches, and technology! Advances in communications today have made it possible to shorten distances and to have real-time conversations with high quality audio and video. These advances facilitate contacts between Rio Grande and the students and their pastors.

As part of their practical ministry assignments, our online students (whether on a modular





THE PRACTICAL MINISTRIES DEPARTMENT HAS EXISTED FOR DECADES, WORKING HAND IN HAND WITH LOCAL CHURCHES IN THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY.



## SHARING THE LORD'S LOVE

Witnessing in a nearby town during the Easter break.

The students are also asked to evaluate themselves. This self-evaluation allows us to have a better perspective of the students' ministerial reality. In all of these steps, we are evaluating their training and development.

As staff members at Rio Grande, we are convinced of the importance of fulfilling what God has called us to do, that is to develop Christ-centered leaders for the global church: men and women called by God, well trained and equipped to impact the ends of the earth with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Many times we are blessed by God as we take part in these online meetings and are encouraged and edified by one another. We have wept and prayed for one another before the Lord, ending the meeting with hearts full of joy in spite of the struggles that pastors, students, and Rio Grande staff face daily. Therefore, we can say that although carrying out our responsibilities in the Practical Ministries area is undoubtedly a challenge, it is a joyful challenge!

or semester schedule) must make arrangements for a virtual meeting. This meeting must be attended by the student, his pastor or leader, and myself as the staff member in charge of supervising the online student's ministry in his local church.

In these meetings there is an opportunity to pray for the Lord's direction, before the conversation turns to helping the student develop a ministry plan in line with the vision and needs of his local church. The pastor or leader acts as a mentor on the field to help the student achieve the goals and objectives of the plan. He also evaluates the student's development and compliance throughout the semester or module, and then shares with our department the student's strengths and areas for improvement.

# PRACTICAL MINISTRIES DEPARTMENT

ANY TIME, ANYWHERE.

Using every opportunity to share the Good News.



THE RECENT CHALLENGE THAT WE HAVE EMBARKED UPON IS THAT OF EDUCATING STUDENTS ONLINE

DECEMBER 1, 2023 - MARCH 31, 2024

# HONOR & MEMORIAL GIFTS

## IN HONOR OF

**KEITH & OLIVIA HEPPNER**  
Gail Higgs

**CHARLES A. LEWIS & PENNY SEBRING**  
Don & Barb Lewis

## IN MEMORY OF

**DUANE ARNOLD**  
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**HILDA WEBB**  
Paul Webb

**DELORES WHITE**  
Richard & Carolyn Maatta



RIO GRANDE BIBLE MINISTRIES  
**CAMPUS NEWS**

*New staff! We welcomed the following people to our staff within the past several months:*



*From left to right: Miguel Bastias (BC '22) serves as Chaplain to the online students. His wife, Aylin, is a student in the Bible College and a stay-at-home mom. Cristian Campos (BC '22) and his wife, Stefanie, have joined the staff of Rio Grande Global in Colombia. Stefanie is completing her studies in the Bible College. Juan Fernández (BC '03) works in Reynosa as a recruiter, assisted by his wife, Lupita (Martín, BC '21).*



*From left to right: César Garduño (BC '22) serves as the Missions Department Chair, with assistance from his wife, Marycarmen (BC '23). Irian and Sarah Hernández are working with the students learning Spanish in our Intercultural Studies program. Irian is a Spanish Professor. Luis Herrera (BC '22) is the new Janitorial Supervisor, and his wife, Amisadai, works in our campus daycare.*



*From left to right: Brian Nancy joined our faculty last fall as a Bible Professor. His wife is Maryanne. Hugo (BC '13) and Tere (Gómez, BC '87) Villegas join us from Forest, MS, where he was pastoring a church. Hugo is the Assistant to the Academic Dean, and Tere is the Director of Koinonia Koffe. Yanela Zamora (BC '23) is on the staff of Rio Grande Global in Ecuador.*

FINISHING WELL SERIES

# MINISTRY IN SENIOR YEARS

*Dr. Lawrence Windle, President*





When I was a boy we homesteaded in the jungle. When it got dark in the house mom would say, “boys, it is time to light the lamps.” We would fill them if need be, then pump them up and light them. We had an open structured house, and we mounted two pulleys on the ridgepole. We would hang a lantern from each pulley and hoist them up to the ceiling to light the whole house. The purpose in lighting the lamp was to provide light, and the purpose of hoisting them up like that was to light the whole house.

As long as the light had good fuel and good pressure, it would produce good light. Whatever you brought into the circle of its light was revealed. The closer to the lamp you brought it, the brighter the light and the more was revealed.

Our occupation and work assignments give us our identity and our place in the world, in the church, in the community, and even in our family. When retirement hits and life’s old age events take their toll, it can be challenging to figure out what comes now. After serving in teaching, leadership, and a multitude of important tasks over the years, what is our role after age and mortality strike, after we leave our known identity?

You are  
light...your  
life emanates  
the light  
of the Gospel.

In Matthew 5, Jesus orients us on how to respond to every era of life, including the challenge of aging-out. When life happens and we ask the question, “What now?” His explanation still applies with great clarity: “Ye are the light of the world.” Notice it doesn’t say, “you shine light to the world,” but “you are the light.”

The point is simple. Light is a tool with a function--it is for seeing! Notice the intriguing

ago—He allowed her to be persecuted into publicity! What a lamp stand was found for Christianity in the martyrdoms of the Coliseum, in the public burnings by pagans and papists, and in all the other modes by which Believers in Christ were forced into fame!

Paul explains in 2 Corinthians 6 that we are, <sup>3</sup>“Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed: <sup>4</sup> But in all things approving ourselves

## When retirement hits and life’s old age events take their toll, it can be challenging to figure out what comes now.

point He makes! “No man lights a candle and puts it under a bushel, but puts it on a lampstand.” When it was dark enough to light a lamp, you’d set it high enough to illuminate everything around—on a shelf in the stone wall of your home or on a wooden lampstand in the center of the room, allowing 360-degree illumination.

Placement is strategic for the light to reach the dark places. Wherever there are dark places, a candlestick is an appropriate exhibitor of the light.

The loneliness of old age is a candlestick, an opportunity for you to shine to those in darkness. Cancer is a candlestick of opportunity... those who are walking through the valley of that dark shadow need a light to see Jesus, and He may choose that candlestick for you to shine in that dark place. See what the Lord did for His Church years

as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, <sup>5</sup> In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; <sup>6</sup> By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, <sup>7</sup> By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, <sup>8</sup> By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; <sup>9</sup> As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; <sup>10</sup> As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

What now? You are light... your life emanates the light of the Gospel. He will likely put it in one of the dark places where it is most needed!



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## BILINGUAL EMPHASIS

Statistics show that the majority of second- and third-generation Spanish immigrants in the US now speak English. To prepare our graduates to reach the next generation of these bilingual young people, Rio Grande has recently developed a new program in both Spanish and English, called the Bilingual Ministries Emphasis. *Pray that the Lord will use this new program as we seek to reach the unreached in both languages.*

