

**March 2021**

*“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*

*He makes me lie down in green pastures.*

*He leads me beside still waters.*

*He restores my soul.” (Psalm 23)*

Dear Friends

We’re excited to say that we’ve booked flights for Home Assignment and look forward, God-willing, to being back in Sydney from mid-September until late January 2022. Despite all the uncertainty with international travel we trust and pray that it will be possible for us to get back to Australia by then. Please let us know if you would like us to visit and share at your church.

Christian Covenant School in Belrose has very generously offered places for Toby and Gabriel, which is where some of their cousins go, for all of term 4. We’re really glad that they’ll get a taste of Aussie school life, as well as being in a very God-focussed environment - something they really miss out on in Spain.

Apart from the pandemic, we’ve had quite a tough season recently and we feel the need to rest, and have our minds, bodies and souls refreshed.

Since our last prayer letter, we’ve had more difficult situations to deal with. In brief, 2 families (out of 6 in our small church) have decided to leave. One family from a Spanish gypsy background left on not such good terms. As much as we tried to resolve the conflict which arose it became clear we had to draw a line and part ways. Although this was hard and left us feeling pretty battered emotionally, it’s clear that this was the right thing to do for all involved and for the protection of the church in Zalla.

A couple in their late 50s also recently decided to leave, as they chose to attend the church in Bilbao, with which we previously partnered. Although we remain good friends, this came as very sad and disappointing news for us and our teammates, the Aldanas. Over the last year we have invested quite a bit of time and energy in both families, discipling them and trying to show them Christ’s love, so it has been hard to accept this loss.

As we reflect on Christ and his ultimate experience of rejection, we can take comfort that he understands our situation completely. Jesus was abandoned by his closest friends, even Peter rejected him 3 times in his hour of greatest need. And then on the cross, he experienced the rejection of the Father, as he turned his face away, leaving him to suffer the full judgement that we deserve for our sins. But God did not abandon him to the grave, raising him up to the highest place.

Although we are now currently just a church of 4 families with the occasional participation online of a lady in Bilbao, we trust that the Lord is Sovereign and that he will build his church. We might be less in number but we see clearly God’s pruning at work and that always bears fruit.

Those who remain in our small group are hungry to learn from God's Word and are growing in maturity. Apart from our Sunday zoom church meetings when we look at Acts, we also catch-up during the week in different groups to read the Bible.

Carolynn and Karina meet up with Maria on Tuesday mornings to go through a course for new believers. On Thursday mornings they meet up with Ani and Anabel to read through Galatians.

An answer to prayer since we last wrote has been the start of a men’s Bible study. On Wednesday evenings James and Mauricio meet up with Jorge and Juan on zoom to read through the book of James. Juan is in the military and not yet a believer but is keen to know more about Jesus.

Our vision remains the same - to plant a church in Zalla - and we’re thankful to God for our teammates, Mauricio and Karina and their boys, as well as the European Christian Mission both in Spain and Australia. In rocky times, the support of friends and teammates is invaluable.

In recent months Carolynn has started selling cakes and baked goods on Instagram (@sweetzalla). It has turned out to be a great way to connect with all sorts of new people in Zalla. There are always birthdays so people always need cakes! Baking started as a coping mechanism back in 2016 and continued as a creative outlet in the pandemic, and she’s thankful to God he has allowed this mini-ministry to grow.

Please pray for some practicalities. One is that we’re in the process of setting ourselves up as a new local association called “The Old Way, Enkarterri” (which is “El Camino Antiguo Enkarterri” in Spanish and “Enkarterri bide zaharra Elkartea” in Basque). As a team we liked the reference to the Camino/Way because it refers to the ancient pilgrimage that runs through our town, the Camino de Santiago, and it also describes our identity as a followers of “the Way” (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). Enkarterri is the Basque word for our region. We’ve decided to have the name registered in the Basque language, as for many people here it's very important to have a Basque, as opposed to Spanish, identity.

Once officially registered, this association will enable us to function as a church - in terms of being able to use Council buildings, participate in local town events, as well as open a bank account. Please pray this goes ahead smoothly and that our new association will be an effective and useful platform for outreach and ministry.

Pray too for a good location for us to meet. At the moment we’re limited to meeting online but we’re keen to find a suitable place for church as and when the restrictions ease up.

Finally, many thanks to those of you have given us extra one-off gifts or started supporting us regularly. As the pandemic started we anticipated our financial support to drop but praise God it has actually increased. Nevertheless, we still have a little way to go to reach 100%. If you´re able to start partnering with us please contact either ECM Britain or ECM Australia.

Many thanks for your prayers and partnership in the gospel!

With love in Christ,

**James & Caro, Toby & Gabriel**

**Summary of prayer points**

**Praise God for:**

* Our upcoming Home Assignment. Pray for smooth travel and for many opportunities to talk about what God is doing in Spain. Pray too for us personally that, after a tough season, the Lord would allow us to have our minds, bodies and “souls refreshed”.
* Maria, Ani, Jorge and Juan who are all keen to read the Bible during the week.
* Places at Covenant Christian School for Toby and Gabriel. May they enjoy Aussie school, make friends and soak up being in a God-focussed environment.

**Pray for:**

* All to go well with setting up our new association “The Old Way, Enkarterri”, that this would provide a useful platform for ministry and outreach.
* A suitable location for us to meet as church on Sundays.
* 2 friends of Carolynn, both called Amaia, and 2 friends of James, Luis and Hernan, to come to faith in Jesus.
* God to provide all our financial support so that we can reach 100%.