



Tena, Ecuador – January 22, 2020

Happy New Year!

It's a new year, a new decade, and a time for new beginnings. We can't think of a better way to celebrate and mark a new beginning than with a baptism. Carlos and his wife Isolino as well as Betty, a student at the Ninawachi Mission Institute, will be baptized this Sunday, January 26, in the village of Zábalo. They have been introduced to Jesus and have freely chosen to be adopted into God's family. Pastor Leoncio and thirty members from the Cofán Church in Dureno – as well as seven indigenous students from *Ninawachi* Mission Institute, members of the Shuar, Waoraoni and Kichwa communities – will travel downriver with us to welcome them in. Nothing can prevent these three from being baptized, for the mountains of obstruction have been plowed down. It doesn't matter what tribe they're from or what family they belong to, the rocky hills have been made smooth, choices they made in the past have been forgiven, and every man-made impediment between God and each of them has been demolished, for God has cleared a path. They have accepted Jesus as their healer/savior and have chosen to reorient their lives around the reality of God's relentless love.

Just as the Christian's descent into the water represents a surrender – a death to the old way of living, and an emergence, a resurrection, a starting over again – before every beginning there inevitably comes an ending, a turning away from what *was* to help make room for what *is to come*. It has been a joy and a privilege to reunite with Rubén, a Cofán youth who was orphaned



a year ago. The death of his father meant the demolition of the only house he knew. He left his home, his village, his people and began a journey in pursuit of education, a new life up river. He was stripped of the supports on which he had earlier relied, a loss that was grievous but also one that leaves him able to explore, in a new sense, who he really is. With Christ at the center of his new living situation, Rubén is having opportunities to heal and reorient his life around God's relentless love.

The order of things in nature is first an ending, then a beginning, with an important fallow time in between, the chaotic time under the water before the resurrection. Endings are fearful, they break our connection with the setting in which we have come to know ourselves. Having made this transition from one setting to another and back again half a dozen times now, our family is becoming very familiar with this cycle. Unconsciously, we have sensed the importance of ending well in each place before we go back to the other. We are beginning to realize that we cannot ignore or neglect the fallow time.

Each transition can activate a minor identity crisis. Who we are, the roles we play, the people we interact with and the activities we do change drastically from place to place. There is an important period of disorientation and chaos, amidst the unpacking and re-engaging in the new location, and it is hard to honor the fallow time given the joyful intensity of our work here. After three days of traveling – by air, land and water – we were asked to speak at the Christmas morning worship service in Zábalo, celebrated Jesus’ birth with a hundred members of the community that afternoon, attended an all-day assembly the following day, then entertained dozens of people who came to visit us in our home during the rest of our first



week in the village. We were grateful for several days on the Pacific Coast as a family before we relocated to Tena, our communication base in the Andean foothills. Our first weekend here we were invited to a pastoral training in nearby Shell hosted by Clever and Sophia Mashiant and featuring presenters from Mennonite Mission Network and the newly-formed, Kichwa-speaking denomination known as ICME (Mennonite Christian Church of Ecuador).



We are realizing that each year we need a little time to loosen the bonds of who we thought we were so we can go through a transition toward our new identities in the new place. Every six months, a chapter of life comes to an end and it takes some time to reorient our lives in order to discover God’s relentless love in the people and places we will call family and home for the next six-month chapter.

We thank you for your prayers as we begin our sixth year of ministry in the Ecuadorian rain forest,

Jane, Jerrell, Naomi, Teresa and Jordan Ross Richer

