



Atlanta Church of Christ <sup>in</sup> Gwinnett  
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*The birds of the air come and perch in its branches.  
- Matthew 13:32*

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## Starting the day with a spiritual feast!

On Saturday, March 9<sup>th</sup>, both the men and the women of the Latino ministry gathered at different disciples' houses to share physical food and spiritual encouragement. Daniel Ruiz hosted the men's breakfast, where Daniel Medrano taught a lesson on 2 Peter 1. Linda Medrano hosted the women's event, drawing on several scriptures in a lesson about sacrifice. Everyone left strengthened and well fed, ready to meet the challenges of the day with a more godly frame of mind. The Latino women have been meeting for breakfast once a month for the last several years; the men, heartened by the addition of two new members last year, only began meeting for breakfast this year, but generally meet twice a month. What a great way to make any weekend better!



With thanks to Peter Berry and Rosa Linda Perez for pictures and information!

# Catching up with...



Daniel and Alicia Ruiz  
with their sons  
William, Daniel and David

## **Where are you from originally? What would you like people to know about where you're from?**

Alicia: We're both from Paraguay, from the town of Alfonso Loma near the city of Caraguatay – it's a beautiful city! Everything there is very natural; you don't have to worry about what you eat – cows, chickens, everything. You can go fishing, and you don't need a license. I never saw my mom worried about what our family would eat. Oranges on the trees, mangoes, watermelon, pineapples, grapes and honeydew melons, different fruits in different seasons, growing on your land. It was a lot of work for sure; my father planted so many things when he was alive – I realized when I moved here how rich we were.

Daniel: I've been back to visit, and it's really changing now. The forest is changing; you can see more cars, etc. But it's a nice town—people there play soccer, volleyball, drink yerba mate. On your first visit people bring you some and treat you. Alfonso Loma is about a hundred kilometers or 60 miles from Paraguay's capital, Asuncion.

Alicia: We know everybody in the town – all the people and their children. All the children went to one school.

Daniel: That's changing now; there are many schools because the city is growing. People used to be able to walk to the school, but now there are many different schools around town.

Alicia: Daniel was my neighbor there! I knew his family but I didn't meet him there. I met him in New York.

## **How did you come to live in the Atlanta area?**

Daniel: I flew from Paraguay to New York, and lived there for 13 years. I had family there, but I drank too much, so I decided I had to move. In 1993, I moved to West Palm Beach, Florida. My sister Avelina was moving to Lawrenceville, where the housing was less expensive, so I came to visit – it was nice and we had other friends here, so we liked it and in 2001 we moved here. I said, "No more moving! I'm staying here." We've been here 18 years.

Alicia: I came to New York in '94, and I met Daniel eight days later – "Where are you from? Oh, I know your family, your brothers and sisters!" We lived there for eight years, and that's where we had Daniel and William. We lived in a small apartment but we wanted a house, and in New York it's very hard to find a place to live as a family with a backyard and everything. Daniel wanted changes in his life, and we wanted a better life for our children, so we moved.

Daniel came here first, then one month later we moved the family down. When we came, it was a little hard at first. I didn't have a driver's license— when we lived in New York I didn't need one, but it's hard without a license here, and I hadn't thought about that part. Daniel had his license, but it wasn't really necessary to have one in New York because of the buses and trains. I practiced driving every Sunday morning, when there's not much traffic; we put the kids in the car and I learned to drive. We spent one year in an apartment, then got a house in 2002 – big hallelujahs from me!

### **What do you do for a living? How did you choose/come to be in that field?**

Daniel: I own DWD Transmissions. I had a transmission shop in New York, but we sold it and moved and opened Delta Transmissions, but that burned down, then I opened DWD. I began at 14 or so working on transmissions – my brother-in-law had a shop and I started learning there. In my country I went to school to become a mechanic, but when I moved here I worked in construction at first. My cousin needed a mechanic to help in his business, so I started working on transmissions again.

Alicia: I help Daniel with the shop. I used to clean houses, but Daniel asked me to help in his office. When I got cancer, I really saw his shop going fine without needing my income from cleaning, and I thought, "Wow, I need to have more faith!" That was when I left my job to help in the shop. I help control the paperwork, financial things.

Daniel: She's my personal executive assistant!

### **Tell us how you first got involved with disciples – what was your first impression of them?**

Alicia: I met the church when I met Daniel's sisters in 1995 in New York City. Daniel was my boyfriend then. He told me, "They're very strict; they go to church, and I hope you will, too." I loved how the people at church welcomed me, how they paid attention to me—it was not like the Catholic Church I was used to. I liked it, but I didn't want to make my mom sad by changing religions. My mom didn't want me to be a Christian – when I was eight she sent me to live with rich people in the city. They were Christians, and they taught me to pray, but every time I went home to visit, my parents saw and it made them angry. My mom said, "Don't be an evangelical!" She wanted me to stay a Catholic. When I was 11 years old my dad was upset about what they were teaching me, and he brought me back home. I finished sixth grade, but didn't get to finish seventh. I cried a lot – I liked it with the family in the city, playing with their daughter and not having as many chores. Back home, I went to my old school again, but I needed things that we couldn't afford to finish my education, so at 13 I went to work in the city cleaning houses.

I visited the church in New York many times, but I was scared of my mom's reaction so I didn't want to make a decision—that was wrong thinking. After we moved here, my mom passed away, and David was born with partial hearing loss. I felt the need for God. We visited five churches, then we found Cornerstone. We visited there for five years every Sunday, but they never invited me to study – I felt ready, but that was not my time. We were married there in 2009. Then I met the Gwinnett church, and I felt welcome, felt the love—I thought, "This is my home!" Linda Trejo, Cynthia Doble, they were so warm, and they invited me to study right away, so I started studying.

Daniel: My sisters invited me to church in New York, and I went for two years, and then quit; I thought, "This is no good for me."

Alicia: When we met, he seemed like Christian, very respectful –

Daniel: But I'd already quit studying by then. I started to read the Bible in '93 and '94, but then I stopped. When I first went, it was fine—I liked the respect, I saw how everyone was praying and everything, very different from the Catholic Church I was used to, but I was young and not ready to be a disciple. Then last year, after 28 years, I started studying again.

### **What has surprised you most about life as a disciple?**

Alicia: It's easy to talk with kids and friends, talk about things using what the Bible says. My family was angry when I was baptized—my sister said bad things, and it really hurt. But now when she has problems with her kids, I'm the one she calls to have me talk with them – I can speak calmly, and she says I convict them while we're talking. I prayed and prayed, and now I'm so much closer to my family! Life is easier, especially with my kids, as a disciple.

Daniel: It's easier to find people to call when I have a problem—like Jose Netzahuatl or Daniel Medrano. It's easy to talk about problems I have; before, I had nobody.

Alicia: It's like a big family in the church – the support and love is amazing! Leonor, Carmen, so many more!

### **What do you wish other people outside the church knew about following Jesus?**

Alicia: With Jesus, it's a better life – you lose so much if you don't know him! Without Jesus you have a lot of sin and trouble—with Jesus you have eternal life!

Daniel: I agree with what she said! It's very hard for me with my work to talk with people about Jesus – they say they believe in God, but you never know what they really believe. I meet lots of customers with different religions, and I try to share with them! A girl who came to my work saw the Bible in the office, so I gave her my wife's number; they're still trying to work out a time to study.

Alicia: The warm love and friendship we have in the church—you can't find that outside!

### **What has your biggest challenge been in following Jesus, and how do you deal with it?**

Daniel: Reading the Bible – but I pray, and open it up, and keep trying.

Alicia: Humbling myself, and anger! Repenting is easier now, but I'm still working on that. I pray and I call Leonor for help.

### **What is your favorite scripture?**

Alicia: I have so many favorites! Hebrews 12:2 says to keep your eyes on Jesus, who is perfect, because I'm not. He died on the cross for me and took the pain and didn't refuse—He chose to die in pain for me – all I'm going through is nothing in comparison. Jesus was innocent, and took the cross for me. That lifts me up! Also, Psalms 37:4 about how God gives us the desires of our hearts – I love that one! God responds, not always right away, but He won't let me go down. When you pray and are faithful, life is easier!

Daniel: James 3:1, really verses 1 through 6, because I try to control my mouth, but it's hard!

### **What do you enjoy doing in your spare time—interests, hobbies, etc.?**

Alicia: Walking with the dog, going to the gym; when I hear good music, I dance a little, especially the Christian music that's really good – that brings me so much peace!

Daniel: Working on learning the guitar – I'm supposed to be practicing two hours a day, but actually I only get to spend about 20 minutes a day practicing.

### **What might someone be surprised to know about you?**

Alicia: I love listening to music from my country – Guarani music.

Daniel: We both speak three languages: Guarani, Spanish and English. In Paraguay Guarani and Spanish are our national languages, and everybody speaks them. Guarani is the native language of the people who were there before the Spanish came. Sometimes we have parties and different people from my country come, and they switch languages back and forth so fast it's hard to keep up!

### **If you could speak to yourself as you were ten years ago, what advice would you give yourself?**

Alicia: "Don't lose time – repent and become a Christian; follow God!"

Daniel: Like she said—"Don't lose time!"

# The Strength of the Body

I recently had a conversation with Muhammad and his brother Koran that really drove home why we need to attend church each Wednesday and Sunday, and to stay connected to the Body. We were sharing how our weeks had gone when they each started sharing testimonies of God's work in their lives. We became so engrossed in our conversation that we completely missed the Philippians class; as it turned out, God had other plans for our morning.

Muhammad shared how God had been working through him to touch the lives of his family and friends. He spoke with such love and affection for God, and such reverence and pureness of faith that I felt as though the room were shrinking. I am not sure if you have ever had one of those moments when it felt like the boundaries of your physical body were expanding to encompass all that is, but that is the best description I can give for how I felt as our conversation carried on.

The brothers shared how God had been revealing His will in their lives, how they had started to tune into His direction and guidance and how they'd even been sharing their experiences with others.

Muhammad also recounted having conversations with people, suddenly getting an intuition and sharing it with them. He described several interactions during which he had encouraged people with insights he had regarding direction or guidance for their lives and that these had a profound impact for most of them. It turned out that the same was true for me in that moment—the brothers provided exactly the encouragement I needed.

After we hugged and I asked if I could include their testimony in my next newsletter article, we went into the worship service, and I was left feeling that I had work to do. Was I as sincere in my relationship with God as these two young men were? Did I have the love and faith for our Father that they had just shown? It was evident not only in their words, but also in how the Spirit moved through them, that they were feeling connected with God. Was I?

This reflection was by no means a pity party. I was not feeling sorry for myself, but quite the opposite. I was on fire. It was like they had stirred something up in me. Something that would not have been stirred had neither they nor I been there at that moment to have that conversation.

It reminded me that I have not been great about getting to church on Wednesday nights, and led me back to this verse from one of my discipleship studies: [Hebrews 10:23-25](#), "Let us hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us be concerned about one another in order to promote love and good works, not staying away from our worship meetings, as some habitually do, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day drawing near."

This seems to me to be something we all have to consider. Not just coming, but the reason why we come. We need to be part of the Body so we can take care of each other. You never know how God will use you.

– Alex Neumann

# Beauty in bloom

*"The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come..." (Song of Songs 2:12a)*

In closing, here's just a sample of the amazing beauty God brings us every spring! Enjoy!



We welcome news and pictures on interesting personal stories, family group activities, and more. Please send them to Nancy Berry, [nberry2@gmail.com](mailto:nberry2@gmail.com). Thank you!

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