

THE THOMAS FAMILY

Serving together since 2016 • Panama

"If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

2 Chronicles 7:14

A Reflection of God's Goodness

Feliz Año Nuevo!

As we begin the new year, we reflect on all that has happened in 2024 and past years. In October, we celebrated five years of living in Panama! In 2019, we moved while I was 7 months pregnant. We had to start from scratch buying all that we needed for our home and our baby as well as our ministry. These five years have passed by so fast. Even though we would like to be further along in building the children's homes, the Lord has never stopped being faithful! He reminds me that His timing is

perfect and that as much as we try to rush or push things along, sometimes culturally, it doesn't always work that way. In the past, when I have felt frustrated or impatient, the Lord has reminded me of the story of Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 17). Abraham waited on the Lord to deliver His promise of a baby until he was 100 years old. Also, the Lord has encouraged me by revealing the amount of time and work it took Noah to build the ark. So much preparation had to be done before the ark was ready for the flood (it took roughly 55 to 75 years to build the ark). In this season of "waiting," much preparation has been done and is still

being done. We give glory to God for all He has provided, not just financially but so much more, such as staff with a similar heart for our vision, the property, the architect, etc. The Lord has been so good. We give thanks to Him often, and we say thank you to you as well! You are a part of this journey with us. The Lord has used you in ways we may never know. Our main desire throughout this journey is that God, our Lord, be glorified!

This quote struck a chord with me because I can relate to it and maybe you will too:

"Patience is more than endurance. A saint's life is in the hands of God like a bow and arrow in the hands of an archer. God is aiming at something the saint cannot see, and He stretches and strains, and every now and again the saint says--'I cannot stand anymore.' God does not heed, He goes on stretching till His purpose is in sight, then He lets fly. Trust yourself in God's hands. Maintain your relationship to Jesus Christ by the patience of faith. 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.'"

Oswald Chambers



Ministry Updates

Our new year has started with a whirlwind of activity. Things have been moving faster than expected. At the end of December, our general plans were approved by the local municipality. This is the first of three steps. We are negotiating the final details of a contract with an engineering firm that will take us through the whole process of drafting all the technical drawings that will need to be approved to receive our permits to build. Please pray for this process, as it is the most technical. When the plans are complete, there will be numerous government entities that the technical plans need to go through since we are building new infrastructure (water lines, water holding tanks, electric posts, etc). That includes approval from the firefighters, the water and electric company, and the local municipality.

Additionally, we've been ordered to complete an environmental study. We have submitted several letters asking for an exemption, because they are very costly and usually for much bigger projects that have more of an impact on the environment. One of our Panamanian board members thinks we are being unfairly targeted because of the size of our project. She explained that because of rampant corruption in Panama, any project that seems like it has money will be scrutinized more than usual. Even though we have explained that we are a non-profit, our requests for exemption have been denied. Our last resort was submitting a letter to the mayor's office this week. In addition to asking for her help in exempting us from environmental studies, we also asked that she consider a reduction in the amount of taxes we will have to pay in the future (it is standard that all projects whether for-profit or non-profit have to pay.) Please pray that God will grant us favor with the authorities and that He will continue to provide the funds in case we have to do the extra studies.

The Thomas Clan Updates

On the home front, the kids are great! We spent time with family in Arizona over Christmas, and the kids did not want to come back home! Noah turned five years old on January 2nd, and on the 6th school started. He has had a rough transition returning to school. I think the transition from having fun over Christmas break, putting away our tree, and getting back into school has been a hard one for him. He is doing better, but he is already counting down the months and days until we put our Christmas tree back up!

Ezra has been well. In late November, he had a small procedure to correct an issue on his urethra. The doctor told us he could not swim, jump, or play hard for 3 weeks. We had to constantly remind him not to do those things but thankfully he has recovered well and is getting back into the groove of homeschooling with me. As for Esther, she had her first birthday on December 22nd. She loved the cake Mommy made for her! She is now crawling and zipping around our house. So much so, that she has tried to escape the house when the doors are open a few times now! Her favorite thing to do, though, is dance. We will have worship music on, and while playing with a toy she begins swaying and moving her hands to the music. It is so much fun watching her grow into her personality, which is so different from her brothers!

Encouragement and Prayer

In this new year, look for the opportunities God has placed in your path and pursue them wholeheartedly, knowing that God will make a way! It's much easier said than done, but doing the hard things is always worth it. Noah has had to learn that recently going back to school. Hard things are necessary, and we need to make sure our attitude is one of gratefulness that we can do hard things and that it will shape our character more into Christ's.

Lastly, please remember if you have any prayer requests, let us know. We were so blessed last year, as many of you reached out with different requests. We would spend time as a family praying for those specific prayer requests at night. It has been such an encouragement to hear that God has answered some of those prayer requests.

Enjoy this new year, new beginning, and a chance for God to write a new story in your life this year. Happy New Year! We hope it's the best one yet!

Support

- Stephen, Kendra, Noah, Ezra, & Esther Lily

Thank you for partnering with **Stephen Jr & Kendra Thomas** in seeing His Kingdom come and His will be done on earth as it is in Heaven! Thank you for your gifts and prayers.

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