



2023 Year in Review



Andrew and Amy Fields - Colombia

A glimpse at what your support made possible:

Much more so than the U.S. or Canada, Colombia is a country that is divided along regional lines. Regional differences show up in language, cuisine, social relationships, political affinities, and even dress. While there is much beauty in this diversity, it can also tend to foster antagonism and stereotyping along regional lines. People from the Santander region are labeled as hot-tempered. Folks from Bogotá are “cold” and brash. One of the great benefits of our residential program is that students from all different regions of Colombia (and other countries) learn to live in a community and grow together as followers of Christ.

In our September monthly update, we shared the story of one of our students, Mario. Mario is from San Andres, a small island in the Caribbean that is officially Colombian territory and is home to a large Afro-Colombian population and some of the oldest churches in Colombia. He felt called to the ministry from his youth and began studies with our online program at the Biblical Seminary of Colombia in 2017. He began in our online program, but poor internet and the passing of his grandmother and aunt—his primary family members—led him to seek a change and come to Medellín. In Mario’s own words, “I came here for knowledge, but I got much more. I learned how to serve people.” Throughout his time here, Mario has been a leader among the students, walking alongside many of his classmates through difficult times as an apartment leader in the single guy’s dorm (like an RA in U.S. colleges). He has also been a servant in his local church here in Medellín. It is often hard for people from other regions to earn the confidence of church leaders here in Medellín, but Mario’s servant heart and maturity as a disciple were evident to the congregation where he has served as an intern. He has steadily grown in his leadership and in 2023 was a pillar of support for the congregation amidst pastoral upheaval. We thank God that Mario was able to graduate in November, and we pray that the Holy Spirit would guide his steps as he seeks graduate training to serve as a counselor.

Through students like Mario, we can see how God guides and unites the church across borders, and cultural and racial differences to serve a world in need of the transforming love of Christ. Mario is also a testimony to our residential program, which serves as a sort of seedbed to help develop leaders who can serve in diverse ministry situations with the grace and truth of the gospel. We thank God for Mario and his future in ministry, and we rejoice in the generosity of those who give through RCA Global Mission so that students like Mario can have scholarship funds to finance their studies.



Our challenges of 2023

For our mission partner, the Biblical Seminary of Colombia, the main challenge this past year has been financial. Alongside rising costs in Colombia, we are seeing lower enrollment numbers in our residential program. While steady enrollment in our virtual program and generous support from donors are cause for rejoicing, fewer students on campus have had serious effects on our financial stability. This means that many of our staff are stretched thin, and we have had to be very resourceful in maintaining the campus. Giving through our scholarship and well-being funds helps, but we are also praying for wisdom on how to grow our enrollment, particularly in the residential program. There are still many churches in Colombia that don't know about the Seminary or are not aware of the distinctive quality of our program.

On a more personal level, Andrew is one of those staff members who felt stretched thin in 2023. He serves as the academic dean overseeing our residential, virtual, and master's programs as well as the professors that teach in those programs. He is the field education coordinator, organizing the internship process for our students. In addition, he has continued in his role as a professor, teaching multiple classes each semester. He finished the year "*fundido*"—literally "melted"—and has made little progress towards further education. After a process of discernment, it has become clear that Andrew needs to reduce his load to have longevity in ministry. So he will not be continuing in another term as dean when his term finishes in March, and he is working on training a Colombian colleague to serve as the new coordinator of the field education program. We hope that by focusing on his role as a professor, he can engage in the holistic formation of students and his professional development in a way that will promote longevity in our ministry.

Please Pray

Please pray for the economic situation of the Biblical Seminary of Colombia. As we mentioned above, there are severe financial strains at the Seminary. We pray that God would provide generously for our needs and help us towards sustainability through growing our student body, especially in the residential program.

Join us in praying for some of the “new things” God is doing at the Seminary. Andrew has been involved in a curriculum revision that we hope will form students as disciples rooted in Scripture who can make other disciples in the contemporary world. We are also awaiting the approval of our request to open a new master’s program focused on Christian ministry. Andrew is part of the team that designed the program, and we are excited to see how it can serve the needs of the Latin American church for more leaders. Finally, we are making some changes to our virtual program in the hopes that it will have more audiovisual content and a more realistic pace of study for our students.

As a family, we ask for prayer that the Holy Spirit will bring renewal this year as we celebrate eight years of ministry in Colombia. We hope that some of the changes to his workload will help Andrew progress in further studies. Amy is discerning what this next stage of ministry looks like for her as the kids get older (Irene is 10, and Amos is 4). We are also aware that years of intense focus on the Seminary here has meant a lack of attention to our network of supporters in the United States. We pray that the Spirit will guide our process of discernment as we seek to change up some rhythms to continue to serve faithfully in 2024.

