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Missionary family spreads hope

by Jennifer Waldrep, posted Monday, March 30, 2020 (yesterday)

BOGOTÁ, Colombia (BP) -- Sarah McNeill sensed a city-wide quarantine coming. Her preparatory grocery run included school supplies, since her kids would transition to learning at home. She put printer paper and poster board in her cart and, with an idea blooming, added yellow, blue and red tissue paper.

The McNeills live on the 11th floor of a 13-story residential building. Like many in Bogotá, Colombia, their neighbors are fearful of COVID-19.

As Sarah conversed with one concerned neighbor, she was able to show the difference knowing Christ Jesus personally makes in times of crisis.

"There were tears in her eyes. It was like she didn't think I understood," Sarah explains. "We do understand, and we are trying to take precautions, but we also just have hope, and we trust that God is in all those details."

With neighbors in fear, Sarah resolved to spread hope.



Bella McNeill prepares a surprise to encourage anxious neighbors
Submitted photo



David and Sarah McNeill are IMB missionaries in Colombia from Faith Baptist Church of Youngsville, N.C. They currently lead a one-month old church with two Venezuelan church planter families. The church is continuing to meet remotely during Colombia's mandatory quarantine. David and Sarah's children are Emma (14), JJ (8), Holly (5) and Bella (12).

Submitted photo

The three youngest McNeills made homemade cards for

each household in the building. They included Philippians 4:6-7 and signed their family's name with their apartment number. They also used the tissue paper Sarah purchased to make 13 flowers in Colombia's national colors. Using fishing wire, they hung them in each floor's stairwell with a message of hope.

Five-year-old Holly said, "We want to help others not be so afraid and not be so sad about the coronavirus."

The McNeills' joy grew when they heard neighbors' delighted exclamations at the surprise flowers or saw their cards displayed on doors. Some neighbors even wrote back.

"I was sad, and I felt strange all day," one wrote. "But I arrived home and I saw your card. Thank you, neighbors, for this. Thank you for hope and the happiness of my heart."

Two months ago, the McNeills started a small group in their home. It usually takes a long time to build rapport to the point that a neighbor will join in Bible study. Through Sarah's response to COVID-19, "we took a step forward with all of our neighbors."

Jennifer Waldrep is a contributing writer for IMB. She serves among South American peoples.