

# Couple keeps faith through pregnancy term, coronavirus ordeal

FRANKLIN, Tenn. (BP) – Rocio Martinez was 20 weeks pregnant when she had to drive herself to the emergency room at 3 a.m., because she was barely able to breathe.

She had been diagnosed with COVID-19 coronavirus a few days prior – as had her husband, two sons, and members of their extended family.

“When my sons woke up the next day I had to tell them mommy had gone to the hospital, and immediately my oldest broke down crying,” said Miguel Vera, Martinez’s husband.

In the midst of fear and uncertainty, Vera did what he had seen Martinez do many times before. He knelt and prayed.

The Vera-Martinez family are members at Esperanza Church in Franklin, Tenn., where Vera serves as an usher and parking attendant and Martinez sings with the worship team and serves in the youth ministry.

Fourteen members of their family attend the church. Last month, not long after attending a birthday party together, they all tested positive for the coronavirus.

On a Sunday in early June, Martinez’s husband and brother who both work in construction began to feel ill. A few days later she started to feel sick as well.

“I called my sister-in-law immediately and asked her how my nephew was feeling because I had been holding him at a birthday party we had the day before,” Martinez said. “She told me he was running a fever and hadn’t been able to sleep all night.”

The 14 members of the family who were present at the birthday celebration went into quarantine for 14 days. A week after her symptoms began, Martinez's health worsened.

She went to the emergency room and was admitted to the hospital. X-rays revealed pneumonia. Because of the pregnancy, she was transferred to another hospital in the area.

"They feared the baby would have to come out early," Martinez said. "The doctor told me I had 48 hours to get worse or better and if I didn't get better, they would have to get the baby out sooner because she wouldn't be getting as much oxygen and her health would be in danger."

According to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, pregnant women might be at an increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19 as compared to non-pregnant women. The disease also may bring an increased risk of adverse pregnancy outcomes, such as preterm birth.

Additionally, Hispanic women are at a higher risk of complications from the virus, according to the CDC.

Alone in an emergency room and barely able to breathe, Martinez called her pastor, William Burton. During that 48-hour period, Burton and his wife Maria began a prayer chain among church members.

"It made me emotional to see the list of names of people who had committed to pray for me," Martinez said.

At home, Vera was desperate. "I couldn't leave the children and go with her to the hospital, and even if I could find someone to care for the children, I wouldn't be able to be with her. My hands were tied and all I did was pray." Husband and wife were apart for five days.

"Miguel and Rocio are a young couple," Burton said. "They had recently purchased their home and now they couldn't work or

even go out to buy food.

“The church family, all on their own, started a system to bring meals to the Veras and the other family homes. While Miguel was quarantined with his sons, someone from Esperanza church came to deliver food for the day and they even help(ed) pay for their mortgage.

When 48 hours had passed, Martinez was doing much better. “The doctor was surprised when she came in and saw me so much better,” Martinez said. “She wasn’t expecting it.”

Even though she was alone and in a difficult circumstance, Martinez says she felt peace. “I wasn’t scared that I was going to die. I asked God to do His work. He’s the potter and I’m the clay, and I put my life in His hands.

“Through this circumstance we can say that we have grown in our faith and we also realize that we are not exempt from unfortunate circumstances, but when they do come, we just have to be faithful.”

For his part, Vera says the virus has been the best thing to happen to his relationship with Christ. “Each day I saw God’s hands through the people who brought us food and helped us financially. If it wasn’t for them, I would not have been able to feed my children.

“Today I see my church family [not just] as people I see on Sunday but as my actual family. Pastor Burton told me on that first night, ‘You’re not alone,’ and I wasn’t.”

Martinez is doing well and expects to deliver a healthy baby girl in a few weeks. All family members are healthy today and have begun attending drive-in church again.

“When they [arrived at] drive-in church that first Sunday back everyone started honking their horns and flashing their lights,” Burton said. “It was an amazing homecoming.”