

Bolivia Volunteers in Mission Team

June 19-July 4, 2009

Trip Report #1

Sunday, June 21, 2009

WE HAVE: ARRIVED; CELEBRATED; RESTED; CHURCHED, LEARNED AND PREPARED.

Our trip to Cochabamba, Bolivia, was long, but unlike the 2008 team we did not encounter airline equipment airport problems so we arrived approximately on time—24 hours after gathering at LaGuardia Airport in NY to check in with American Airlines. As in 2008, our VIM team consisted of 14 members. This year, we have nine members from within the boundaries of the New York Conference and five from the Central Pennsylvania Conference, demonstrating our new path of combining people and efforts from these two conferences to better love and serve the Lord in working with our brothers and sister in Bolivia. Just as we are challenged to Rethink Church in this new quadrennium, we are Rethinking Mission to Bolivia in this manner—a fitting combination since both Conferences have sent VIM Teams to Bolivia in recent years, both Bishop Park and Bishop Middleton have been part such VIM teams to Bolivia and Bishop Middleton started the Bolivia Mission while she was a District Superintendent in the New York Conference.

On our arrival at the Cochabamba Airport we were greeted with the traditional greeting of the people of the Central District of the Bolivia Methodist Church—cheering and waving from the balcony of the terminal, lots of smiles and hugs after we exited the baggage-claim area, dancing on the sidewalk outside the terminal, accompanied by Bolivian music played by a group of church musicians, and welcoming gifts. Despite having little sleep on the flights and airport layovers, our hearts were warmed and our fatigue lifted for the next few hours, until the travel caught up with us and we sank gratefully into our beds at the guesthouse of the Instituto Americano (a Methodist school) for much-needed sleep.

Sunday morning began with an early worship service at Piedra Viva (Living Stones) Methodist Church, the most-recent addition to the roster of churches in the Central District and a facility and congregation well known to previous NY Conference VIM's who took part in it's first worship service in 2003—an open-air service when only a few columns for the walls were in place—and who helped construct much of the building. This service was attended by nine VIM's, while the other team members remained at the guest house to unpack the 14 "Team" suitcases containing medical supplies, school supplies, gifts for the churches, and the tools and supplies needed for our upcoming projects—construction of a daycare classroom, a 1-week daycare at two churches and assistance at two training workshops (life-skills and empowerment training for women and training for couples on improving their marriages). All fourteen team members then attended services at nearby Emmanuel Methodist Church—a glorious combination of worship and communion combined with a family reunion and celebration of the strong connections forged over the years since 2001 and still being formed. (Eight of this-year's team members had been part of one or more prior teams, and the new VIM's have quickly found themselves to be part of the family.) Adding to the connections was the arrival Saturday night of Sue Edris, from the Central PA Conference, who recently became a full-time mission volunteer living in La Paz, Bolivia, and working principally on medical and health programs. With her here are two students from Penn State Medical School who are working on research projects, and she will be joined next week by a dentist who will work in the clinic at Cotani, a part of the Central District just outside of Cochabamba.

We also learned of some exciting developments within the Central District that are a direct result of the connections of the New York and Central PA Conferences mission with the District. Those familiar with the Bolivia Mission will recall that each year we collect "Mustard Seed" funds that are brought to Cochabamba by that-year's VIM team and used to start or expand "self-help" programs benefiting people and congregations in the District. In 2008, a special collection of these funds was made in honor of Bishop Middleton to celebrate her founding of the mission in 2001, and a portion of those funds were used to create a new evangelism position in the District. The first assignment for this position was to help grow the congregation of Luz de Vida

(Light of Life) a “house church” planted by Emmanuel Methodist that was meeting in a chapel created by conversion of the garage at the home of an Emmanuel member (see picture below). This congregation, which was visited by Bishop Park in 2007, had grown slowly over its first two years and it was hoped that the evangelism person would speed that process. Speed the process she did, and the day we arrived some of us were privileged to accompany District and Luz de Vida leaders as they visited possible sites for the construction of a new church facility. One spot in particular looks promising, and although it is now a walled vacant lot (picture below) all of us were able to picture it in the future, occupied by a strong and growing congregation. The District already has a pledge from a donor of \$10,000 toward this project, with a lead on a matching contribution from a congregation in Texas. We hope to also raise funds in the NY and Central PA Conferences to make the land purchase possible, and can envision sending VIM’s next year to begin construction. Truly the Spirit is moving in Bolivia, and it is an exciting time for all.

Many of us made a tour of Cochabamba this afternoon, as well as preparing for the start of our programs tomorrow. Another report will be coming your way soon—thanks for your prayers and other support.

YOUR BOLIVIA VIM TEAM



Luz de Vida—currently housed
In a members garage (right side).



Prospective site of Luz de Vida
Church facility.

Note: If you’d like to support the planting of this new church, contact Carl Franson in NY Conference (cfranson417@comcast.net) or Bob Stevenson in Central PA Conference (manofnotes@comcast.net).