

Bolivia Volunteers in Mission Team

June 19-July 4, 2009

Trip Report #2

Wednesday, June 24, 2009.

First, our apologies for the delay in getting the first report to you last Sunday, which was held up by transmission problems. We understand that report has now been distributed and hope this one will go more smoothly.

Our project work began in earnest Monday morning, with:

- Five VIM's and a bevy of Bolivian interpreters and teachers welcoming approximately 70 eager, bright-eyed, smiling children to the vacation bible schools (VBS's) being conducted in two locations (Nazareno and Piedra Viva Methodist Churches).
- Eight VIM's and another bevy of Bolivians began advancing the construction of a new classroom to be used by the rapidly expanding daycare program at Nazareno Methodist Church).
- One VIM began working with the life-skills and empowerment workshop being conducted with 32 women.

The VBS's have worked with a variety of crafts and other activities to help the children understand several Bible stories, such as the Tower of Babel and Daniel in the Lions' Den. Such activities as coloring wooden crosses with magic markers produced a lot of smiles and showing off of the finished projects, not to mention some very colorful fingers. A play parachute made a big hit, since most of the children here were unfamiliar with this play activity that many children in the U.S. take for granted. All of the VIM's working with the children have commented on how creative and artistic the children are, even at a young age. Although the teachers speak little Spanish (and no Quechua, the original language of many people here), communication flows smoothly with the aid of local interpreters, motions, smiles and hugs, and the bright eyes of the children are pure joy to all of us.

At the construction site, the structure for a new daycare classroom on which last-years VIM Team worked now has a roof and three walls, and we began the completion of the interior and the final, end wall. Working with men, women and older children of the congregation, we cleared the clay floor of the classroom and the front, covered patio, loosened and removed some of the soil, and transported many, many bricks and rocks. Using the traditional building methods of the area, our task was to create a bed of closely fitted rocks with tops at a specified level (like putting together a gigantic puzzle with pieces that had not previously fitted together) and then cover this with concrete to create a smooth and level floor. The local hired masons laid out the edges of the stone puzzle and then moved on to complete the brick wall while we installed the rest of the stones. These tasks were completed by Tuesday night and today was spent mixing concrete and pushing it in wheelbarrows to the classroom, where the masons smoothed and leveled it. Tomorrow we hope to be able to add an additional thin layer of concrete TO complete the task and, when that is dry, the plastering of interior walls can begin. We also have worked on some additional tasks, including the installation of a 1200-liter water tank on the roof and plumbing of a system to distribute water throughout the church and daycare facility. This will provide a reliable source of water from an unreliable city water system, since water from the source can be pumped into the tank when the city system is operating and then used at any time by drawing from the tank. We also began the process of converting a former storage room into a room that can provide privacy for counseling of children by a psychologist who provides such service through the church...

In the workshops, a GBGM missionary couple who work with the Methodist Churches of Latin America and the Caribbean on health issues have been brought in to provide training for local women, many of whom have suffered from physical and emotional abuse and may be single parents. This couple has provided this or similar training here under the sponsorship of our Bolivia Mission several times, and the changes in the women and their families has been very positive. At the end of the week, they also will provide a short

workshop for married couples—a program started when the 2008 VIM Team was here that proved so successful in improvement of relationships that many couples requested that an additional workshop be provided this year. These workshops have been financed in substantial part with a portion of the grant made in 2008 by Bishop Park’s Partners in Mission funds. Our VIM part of these workshops, in addition to funding, is to provide an evening session of lighter fare such as crafts and games so that the participants can relax after a day of intense work, helping them to prepare for the next-day’s working sessions.

Outside of project working hours, we spent some time Monday night hearing presentations on the many community outreach programs at Emmanuel Methodist Church (e.g., a daycare program, a medical/dental clinic, outreach to the elderly, a women’s credit union and the women’s sewing cooperative that provides the many sewn goods sold at our Bolivia Boutiques in the U.S. and enables co-op members to support their families, the church and the daycare program). Included in the presentations was a fashion show of sewn goods with children and youth from the congregation as models. Not originally in the fashion show but added at the last minute were two male models from the VIM Team (“older youth”) who had just purchased the warm woolen jackets included in the co-op product line.

In Tuesday night we had the extraordinary privilege of meeting some of the youth who have recently entered a new program to train and ordain young people from the Quechua and Eastern lowland areas of Bolivia. Although Quechua people (descendants of the Incas) are the largest ethnic group in Bolivia, Methodism first took root in the La Paz and Alto Plano regions of northwestern Bolivia, where the Amayra people (of pre-Incan origin) predominate and slowly spread to the Quechua and lowland areas. Pastor Gustavo Loza, pastor for two churches in Cochabamba and a youth program at the Thiu Rancho retreat center on the edge of town as well as head of a theological training program, saw the dearth of ordained pastors from the Quechua tradition and began a program to help youth in the Cochabamba and Santa Cruz areas to discover their calling to the become ordained and to provide a plan to achieve this dream. We met with five of the seven youth who have embarked on their studies—Alex and Karla (who are married with one child), Maria, Jose and Vladimir. These five live in the Cochabamba area, including Cotani outside the city (Karla having come originally from Santa Cruz) and have begun studies at the Roman Catholic seminary here. Next year, with God’s guidance and the gathering of financial support, they and another married couple from Santa Cruz will be entering the Methodist seminary in Brazil. Please pray for them (and provide our Bolivia Mission with whatever financial assistance you can—more on that after we return to the U.S.).

After this moving and memorable meeting, we took the rest of our evening to celebrate the Festival of San Juan. Following the Bolivian tradition, which is to burn bonfires to welcome back the sun (this being the time of the Winter Solstice here), we built a small fire on the grounds of the Instituto Americano where we are staying. Then we added our own tradition of roasting hot dogs and marshmallows and a good time was had by all.

The beat goes on—we’ll report again in a few days.

YOUR BOLIVIA VIM TEAM



