



# Paraguay

*“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”*

-Jeremiah 29:11



***A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity.....***

Paraguay has had its share of adversity in its history. It was governed by three dictators in the first 60 years of its independence from Spanish rule. Francisco Lopez the third ruler waged war against Uruguay, Brazil and Argentina from 1865-1870. It was a costly war Paraguay lost--by some estimates 70% of its population died, mostly to disease. Half the male population was killed. After the Second World War, Paraguay experienced a period of unstable conditions. In 1954 Alfredo Stroessner a dictator took power and ruled until overthrown by army Gen. Andres Rodriguez in 1989. Rodriguez managed to win Paraguay's first general election in decades. Since then, Paraguay has experienced a period of financial growth and stability.

# 1



Preparing for my missions trip this year, I experienced a number of personal health problems leaving me a bit discouraged--in fact, I saw a doctor the day before I was to fly out of Dulles Airport. Similarly our team underwent numerous changes in participants due to sickness and various reasons. At one point, we only had one person to interpret for us. We also learned that our church van in Paraguay was in need of repair and that the Pope was scheduled to visit Luque for three days, at the same time we were supposed to be there, creating a vast security problem, but through prayers and hard work we managed to bring a diverse team of 13 people together.



After traveling fourteen hours with a two hour stop in Panama City we arrived in the Airport of Asuncion, the capital, where we were warmly greeted by Pastor Maureira and members of the El Renuevo church. Michael Parks, one of our team members was able to apply for his visa in the airport. We arrived early at 5 am, and Pastor Maureira prearranged the lodging of the team members. Due to the broken van the church had arranged sleeping quarters for a number of people at the church in two classrooms. Five of us—Gordon Caylor, Michael Blake, David Tanks, Bob Sowers and I— went to Papla de Troche's house. The team members staying at the church were Pastor Phil Howard, Michael Parks, A.G. Harding, Joseph Veldhuyzen and Jonathan Veldhuyzen. The ladies on our team— Anette Veldhuyzen, Nancy Stanley and Pastor Joel Acevedo's wife Gladys, who arrived a few days later, would stay at Rosana Jara's house while our interpreter Tana Robbins would stay with Lily, a member of the church.

## 2



After catching up on our sleep we all met again at El Renuevo at 11 o'clock bringing all the stuff each individual member had brought along: refurbished computers for the lab, theology books for the seminary students, a projector for the school, clothes, candy and treats to be used during outreach together with medicine etc.

The Paraguayans had prepared sandwiches to carry us over before lunch so we had time to catch up with old friends and meet new ones. Two seminary students I met that day were a young married couple, Abraham Martinez Miless and Mirta Montania. They were kind enough to allow us to use their van while the church van was undergoing repairs--unfortunately we never got the church van back. Other members of the Paraguayan church offered their vehicles for us to use during our stay. Fredi Sosa is a seminar student, who on several occasions drove Gordon Caylor and I. I wanted to pay for his gas, but he told me that it was a blessing for him to serve. He and his wife Esther have a two year old son Benjamin. I gained a lot of respect for this young man who without fear a week later was willing to preach the gospel in a public setting—a park in the center of Luque.



We enjoyed a fantastic lunch at Comida de Mama—a restaurant frequently used by the missions teams during their stays—a time of great fellowship and for some of us veterans, it meant catching up on the latest news. Later in the afternoon Pastor Maureira held an orientation meeting in the sanctuary laying out the program for the week. Due to the Pope's visit, work on the churches first started on Monday.

His visit had a profound effect on the area for three days. Everywhere the roads were crowded with adults and children carrying personal possessions and chairs on their way to see the Pope.

### 3



Luque had come alive like an anthill. The weather was warm and sunny, but much cooler than the hot and humid Virginia that we left.

The next day (Saturday, July 11<sup>th</sup>) after a good night's sleep, we had a hearty breakfast at the church at 7:30 am followed by a meeting in the Sanctuary where each team member was given an opportunity to introduce themselves. A number of the participants had never been on a mission trip outside US, so it was all new for them. Pastor Phil Howard from Berea Baptist Church in Fredericksburg was one of them, and I got to know him very well and enjoyed his enthusiasm. He was scheduled to preach the next day. After the initial greetings and introduction, Pastor Maureira introduced to us a group of seven scholarship and seminary students—some of whom we already knew—each described for us their reason for seminary and the call that the Lord had on their lives. Subsequently, our team members and the seminary students broke out into smaller groups for a time of sharing and prayers.



Later that Saturday, Pastor Maureira laid out the vision for El Renuevo and what he believes our Lord wants for the church:

- Church growth through outreach to the surrounding communities by both El Renuevo and Barrio Parque churches—an ongoing task to which both churches have committed themselves as evidenced by their growth. Three new families had recently joined El Renuevo and Pastor Miguel recently was officially recognized as the leader of Barrio Parque which achieved the status as its own congregation.
- El Renuevo is committed to the continuing growth of the school and is now looking to expand and build a school separate from the church if a piece of land can be purchased.



## 4



His vision is to teach beyond 9<sup>th</sup> grade so the students can finish high school. Eventually, the goal is to found a Christian University.

- For the outreach areas Marin and Mariano, it is their desire to purchase land and build two more churches. Currently, the congregations are meeting in the open under the trees and subject to the weather.
- It is the desire of the church to launch a Pastoral Study for couples.
- Most importantly, the Lord calls his people to pray that they may become equipped to use their God given gifts on Earth; that they may be encouraged to become pastors, teachers, missionaries, bus drivers, architects, doctors, and whatever the Lord has called them to do.

Pastor Maureira also emphasized the importance of continuing evangelizing the world around us because our Savior commands us to that important task.

Late afternoon, some of our team members went to Barrio Parque Church. A select group of our members including my sister Anette who never had seen the church went together with our electric experts Gordon Caylor, David Tanks, and Michael Blake. The rest of us were challenged by our Paraguayan brothers and sisters to show off our volleyball skills in a local park.



After supper at Comida de Mama, those of us staying at Pabla's house went back there for the evening. We had fellowship with Pabla, her mother-in-law Isidora, and her daughters Pamela and Leidi before turning in.

# 5



On Sunday morning after an early breakfast at the church, Dave Tanks led the Sunday school for the children with help from Tana Robbins who served as interpreter. Dave conducted a Sunday school for children both Sundays with the use of a felt canvas describing mankind's creation and fall from grace through the first Adam all the way from Genesis to the New Testament where Jesus Christ, the second Adam redeemed us through His death on the Cross and subsequent resurrection. He compared Mount Moriah in the Old Testament where Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac who was carrying his own wood to Calvary where Jesus carried His cross. Dave explained to the children how God intervened and provided Abraham with a sacrificial lamb pointing toward His own son Jesus Christ who thousands of years later would give up His own life in obedience to His Heavenly Father.



Worship in music preceded Pastor Phil Howard from Berea Baptist Church preaching a great salvation message on the identity of Christ as the man without sin—the lamb unblemished born by a virgin conceived through the Holy Spirit.

***—We struggle with the Spanish language visiting with you, but we can see Christ in your eyes and in what you do for us. The world must see a difference in each of us as we serve Christ—***

Pastor Phil finished with an invitation for unsaved man to repent and turn to God. He encouraged all of us in Christ to press ahead with a desire to learn more of His will for each one of us. Phil Howard spoke through an interpreter, Rachel. She and her husband used to serve in the Anglican Church, but had joined El Renuevo only a few months ago.

## 6



It is customary at El Renuevo after lunch to send teams out to Marin and Mariano to evangelize these areas, but due to the Pope's visit and accompanying security, the NOVA team had some free time until 4 o'clock in the afternoon. Pastor Maureira held a meeting outside the church due to a power outage. It was a prayer meeting where we prayed for some of the obstacles' we currently were facing: security due to the Pope's visit and the breakdown of the Church van. We also prayed for a seminary student who currently was dealing with sickness and a host of other needs.

On Monday, team members took a bus to Barrio Parque and started digging the trenches from the outside fence to the church where electric cables were then buried. Other members stayed at El Renuevo moving stones used by masonry workers to improve the look of the façade and pillars of the church. This project was funded by Project Paraguay Foundation, but skilled local laborers were needed to do the job.



The ladies on the team prepared for the Women's Conference and those of us guys who stayed at El Renuevo helped them give out tracts to the surrounding community and set up chairs for the Women's Conference that took place July 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>. Incidentally I met a young woman Jessica on one of the roads as we were walking. She is the daughter of Teonila Ortigoza and her husband Ramon, a family I stayed with back in 2010. I had not seen her for nearly five years--what a blessing to meet her again.

Back at the church some of the young girls rehearsed for Hebrew Dancing. El Renuevo is blessed with so many talented people who want to use their talents for their Lord and Savior.

# 7



Two girls that come to my mind who study and teach Hebrew Dancing is a seminary student, Elena Camps, and the oldest daughter of my host family, Pamela—both girls possess excellent dancing skills.

The team members at Barrio Parque did an excellent job and by Monday evening most of the trenches were dug. Rumor has it that our interpreter, Tana Robbins, did most of the digging while the guys did most of the supervising, but the truth is that by evening the job was nearly complete and the trenches were ready for the cables.



It was now clear that the main purpose for our team was to install most of the required wiring in a safe manner to enable the power company to connect the church to the grid. Our team had a few obstacles to overcome installing the wiring. Every evening during the week, Gordon Caylor conducted meetings at Pabla's house around 9 pm together with David, Michael, Bob and I to discuss the progress of the electrical work. Gordon had made detailed drawings of the electrical network at the church. Every day the team members who were going to Barrio Parque to work on the electrical grid would leave right after breakfast while Gordon and I would go to the local *ferretería* (hardware store) where we would buy essential electrical hardware like wires, fasteners, conduits etc. The van would then come by the *ferreteria* and pick us up. In Paraguay, there are no Home Depots or Lowes. Everything used in construction is bought at the *ferreteria*. Sometimes a visit to another *ferreteria* is needed to find the right material. It was very important that installation of the electrical grid at the church was done in a safe manner.



# 8



Every day our team met at Comida de Mama for lunch and supper. This is a family restaurant and during the course of our stay we got more acquainted with the family. I noticed that the father of the family really liked A.G. Harding. I noticed that he always greeted him before anybody else. I guess he recognized the fact that A.G. was a man who really appreciated his food and good food it was— always something different.



On Tuesday the 14<sup>th</sup> of July it rained heavily most of the day and into the night. We sent Michael Blake and David Tanks over to Barrio Parque to observe how the water was leaking into the apartment where Narciso, his wife, and child lived. The team discovered how moldy the conditions were inside the apartment. Gordon said; “You can even smell it when you enter the room”. Gordon and I used this rainy day to buy the necessary materials for the next day. We also purchased a tank sprayer that Jonathan and I used to spray the exterior walls of El Renuevo. We used muriatic acid to try to eliminate the mold on the walls. This was done wearing mask, gloves and plastic cover for protection. We also discovered that a 4 inch PVC pipe used as a down spout to carry the runoff water from the roof was broken allowing rainwater to flood the passage way outside the exterior wall of the church.

Work on the electrical grid at Barrio Parque continued both Wednesday and Thursday and the work progressed nicely. Every evening we had our meetings at Pabla’s, planning what to do the next day. Pabla or her husband Alberto served us coffee at these meetings and I provided them with Australian Liquorice. By Friday, David Tanks explained to me he and his grandson Michael Parks still needed to work Saturday to finish the electrical work on the grid.

# 9



Friday was a day designed for our team to sightsee and explore the Mbatovi reserve in the eastern Mountains of Paraguay. Pastor Maureira's son Carlos worked at a bus company and was able to secure a very favorable rate so not only our team, but also Pastor Maureira's wife Angela and a number of Paraguayan church members came along--it was great! The bus ride from El Renuevo to Mbatovi (between 1 and 2 hours) takes the passengers through a number of small towns. The views are great and you get a real good view of the Paraguayan country side with its small stores, car repair shops, and restaurants. You never see any supermarkets or department stores—except in Ascuncion the capital— just lots of small mom and pop stores. Mbatovi is a nature reserve located in the mountains. It boasts of having the latest in safe “extreme sports” equipment. After signing your life away, the guide and safety instructor give you a thorough instruction in safety and then take you on a beautiful nature trail over 2.5 kilometer with obstacles like hanging bridges, some with just a cable and some with wooden boards to cross over. There is also a zip line crossing a deep drop and the trail finally finishes with the participants rappelling themselves down an impressive 70 foot drop. The views are sensational and captivating and everybody enjoyed themselves, except for a few tense moments. On the way back, the bus stopped at the Fruteria Paraguari restaurant for lunch before finally reaching the church late afternoon. This was a nice break for the team and also gave everybody a change to fellowship more with some of our Paraguayan brothers and sisters.



Saturday was the last day working at Barrio Parque and finishing the electrical installation. A group of the team members went out to conduct VBS at Marin together with church members from El Renuevo. I did not go on that trip because I was occupied trying to purchase more electric wiring and a metallic fuse box. Saturday evening, I had the great pleasure of inviting

# 10



Sister Deidi Guerrero from El Renuevo, her daughter Lali and her son Alex out to a restaurant called Acuarela together with Abraham Martinez Miless and Mirta Montania the young couple I mentioned earlier who both are seminary students. I did not have any interpreter with me, but when you eat good food, there is not a whole lot of room for talking at the same time. I had a great time and used my Samsung tablet with translation capabilities a lot. I had thought of doing this in a discreet manner, but eventually everybody at the church learned about my date with sister Deidi and my Paraguayan brothers and sisters picked on me relentlessly from then on. An impulsive sweet young lady, Annelise Jessen burst out to me: “Wow Kean are you dating Deidi?”.

On Sunday morning, we packed our suitcases and brought them to the church where we would stay until leaving for the Airport around 11 pm. At 7:30 am, we had an early breakfast. Afterwards David Tanks and Tana Robbins finished the Sunday school lesson from the previous week. The church service started and after the music worship, Pastor Maureira preached the Sunday message.



We enjoyed our last lunch at Comida de Mama and said goodbye to the owner and his family before traveling to Mariano a very poor neighborhood where Project Paraguay would like to purchase a piece of land so we can build a church there. A church there would be a place of gathering for people where they could hear God’s Word and where not only their spiritual needs would be met, but also their physical needs. One lady at Mariano had opened her home to the church to meet for church service and VBS, but when we came by; we learned that her home had been destroyed by heavy rain. Her home had been no more than a shelter, but now she was staying with a neighbor. She still had chairs set up for us to use and a blue tarp for the children that came. As we were walking around in the neighborhood, we saw people trying to



# 11



repair the road that had been washed away. A couple of ladies used buckets to dispose of the water left on the road while men and children used rakes to straighten out the road. After inviting children from the neighborhood, our team conducted a VBS led by Nancy Stanly, Anette Veldhuyzen, and Tana Robbins together with Paraguayan brothers and sisters. Afterwards, treats were given out together with some hot chocolate.

Later in the afternoon we returned to the church where a customary send-off party was prepared. It included a dance performance by Pamela Troche and some of the teens in the church, followed by the opportunity from each of the team members to share something with the congregation. For me this is always a bittersweet moment and for some reason Gordon Caylor and I found ourselves in a meeting with the church administrator Liliana Ayala at that point so we missed all the fun, but we did get back in time to see the teens perform a dance.



Finally the Paraguayans prepared dinner for us. We were served great Paraguayan beef and chicken that the elders grilled outside--even blood sausage--while the women were busy in the kitchen preparing salad, rice and all kinds of vegetables. This was a nice time for our team to again get a chance to fellowship with our hosts and a last time to eat Manioca, a Paraguayan potato-like starch and drink Guarana made by Fanta, a drink made from a plant that grows in Brazil. It is used for tea and soft drinks. It is not sold in the US, but it taste so gooooooood.

Our team was eventually brought to the airport and after checking our luggage in we got one more chance to say goodbye before going through security. Here I met Gustavo the husband of Viviana who is the sister of the administrator Liliana. Gustavo heads up security at the airport and he and I had a long talk. Our friendship goes back to a volleyball game where we beat nearly everybody. Keep in mind this man is over 6 feet tall and has a very deep voice and a



# 12



serve that matches his stature. You never lose with him on your team. He is an exceptionally friendly and kind man.

The flight home was a long one about 25 hours with a 12 hour layover in Panama. Our team members decided to rent a van and sightsee at the Panama Canal. It was a great experience and I was glad that I did it. It is very impressive to see the large containerships go through the canal. It is estimated that on the average 30 ships pass through every day. The Panamanian authority charge between \$300,000 and \$400,000 dollars for each ship. That might be the reason that the Chinese want to build a canal in Nicaragua according to Tana Robbins. Our visit to Panama finished with a great lunch at a restaurant, before going back to the Airport. After arriving at Dulles Airport, my brother-in-law picked us up and drove us to Gainesville Presbyterian Church where a few of us had parked while the rest continued to Berea Baptist Church in Fredericksburg to their final destination.



Our team this year encountered a number of unexpected difficulties: some participants opted out for various reasons, the church van broke down during the time we were there, the Pope's visit and all the security measures—as a result, there was uncertainty and a need to remain flexible. Furthermore some people got sick, but in the end everybody pitched in when needed and we all had a really great time. I am currently reading about William Carey who is called The Father of Modern Missions. It is mind-boggling what he faced back in India dealing with disease, a wife that got crazy and tried to kill him on several occasions, and a host of other tragedies. Nevertheless, he was able to master Bengali and Sanskrit and establish schools, translate The New Testament into Bengali while holding down a full time secular job. We are only part-timers and country club members compared to that.

# 13



I know many of our team members fell in love with Paraguay and our brothers and sisters there. I fell in love back in 2010 and I am still maintaining a certain level of insane love for the country and its people. The North Carolina team left their marks on Barrio Parque and between our effort and theirs, that church now looks a whole lot more like a real community church. It is such an immense blessing to be just a diminutive part of God's work and seeing the transformation taking place.

Our team this year was Presbyterians and Baptists united in Christ working together and building God's church and enjoying great time and fellowship while doing so. I want to encourage other church members to join our team next year and expect great things as we serve our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In His Joy

Kean Hyltoft

