



Paraguay

“Where there is no vision the people perish”

-Proverbs 29:18.



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Project Paraguay in transition.

In the summer 2014 the Lord gave me another chance to visit Paraguay and participate in the development of the churches down there. This year two teams traveled down to Luque to help with construction, church planting and various outreach opportunities including vacation Bible school, street evangelism and passing out tracts.

Paraguay is at a strategic crossroads of South America. It is one of the poorest countries in South America, and there is a great need for economic development. However, the greatest need is for a grace-centered Gospel message that brings eternal life, transforms lives and attitudes and leads to changed societies.

Project Paraguay seeks to build self-supporting indigenous churches that stress sound teaching and preaching, evangelism, counseling, and mercy ministries. El Renuevo Church was constructed as a joint effort of the local church and mission teams from the US. A school for children providing a Christ-centered world view meets in the El Renuevo building. This school has taught many children who otherwise wouldn't have had any education. Barrio Parque, the sister church, meets in a partially completed building. Mariano Roque is on the drawing board.



Pastor Roberto Maureira is the senior pastor of El Renuevo and was formally installed this summer by Pastor Larry Yeager from Heritage Presbyterian Church, Pastor Joel Acevedo representing Iglesia Gracia y Paz and Britt McNeill a ruling elder from Spriggs Road Presbyterian Church to represent the Potomac Presbytery of the PCA in Paraguay.

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Pastor Miguel Diaz is pastor of the sister church Barrio Parque which just had its roof installed in the spring of 2014. The North Carolina team participated in his ordination this summer. There currently is an effort initiated by the North Carolina team to raise \$2,500.00 for a door, windows and electricity to this church. \$ 500.00 has already been raised for this purpose which is a blessing.



Saul—a future pastor— is involved in the Mariano neighborhood with the goal of establishing a church there. We are currently praying for a plot of land suitable for a church. A purchase could be done for \$5,000.00. Saul and two other future leaders Sergio and Paolo are currently receiving scholarships from Project Paraguay due to the generosity of several donors.

The Lord has blessed the effort at Project Paraguay to evangelize in Paraguay over the past 18 years. I am praying for this work to continue and that the Lord will extend our donor support.



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I spent all day Wednesday packing and getting ready for my upcoming flight to Paraguay. With only three hours sleep I left for Gainesville Presbyterian Church early Thursday morning July 10th. Some of the team members met at the church where Albert my brother in-law and my sister Anette picked us up and brought us to Dulles Airport where we all checked in and soon found ourselves on board a COPA airliner heading for Panama City before continuing to Asuncion the capital of Paraguay. During the flight to Panama City I experienced unusual strong vibrations in the floor under my feet. I thought it could be due to some cables located under my floor board. These vibrations continued for about an hour and increased in severity. I finally shared this with my fellow travel companions David Core and Steve Josephson who also felt them. I finally decided to point this out to one of the flight attendants. She conducted her own investigation and solved the mystery—a young boy who was seated in front of me had been stomping the floor.

Without any further problems we arrived late Thursday evening where we received a warm welcome from our brothers and sisters from El Renuevo. I was very touched by the warmth and love they displayed especially because I know so many of them. We were each taken to our host families and final destination. David Core and I shared a room at the home of Lisa a sister of Ignacio who is an elder at the church.



Friday morning we arrived early at El Renuevo. We had breakfast together with some of our Paraguayan brothers and sisters. It was nice and relaxing after our long flight. Our team met together with Pastor Maureira and Pastor Miguel Diaz who explained to us the program for the next ten days while Pastor Joel Acevedo translated. In the afternoon our team listened to lectures regarding aspects of leadership for the benefit of the Paraguayan Church. Our team dignitaries discussed with Pastor Miguel Diaz issues concerning his upcoming ordination and a

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possible trip to the United States in the fall. The rest of the day was spent together with our Paraguayan church family catching up with friends and meeting new people.

On Saturday July 12th the rest of our team went sight-seeing while some were preparing for Pastor Maureira's ordination. We got a firsthand look at the devastation from a recent flood. Houses still buried in many feet of water. Temporary wooden structures had been built to house hundreds of homeless families. In several places big bulldozers pushed fill dirt on top of the flooded and abandoned homes. It was so sad to watch and we all wondered why people had been allowed to build there in the first place. The bus took us to the place where we saw the first Presidential Palace and the Naval headquarters of Paraguay. After a lunch at Do Gaucho Restaurant we met with Saul and his outreach team at a plaza where we also met Morgan a second year Liberty University student who was involved with another church reaching out to the community with the Gospel. Steve, Louis, a Paraguayan brother and I went around the neighborhood for an hour distributing gospel tracts. It was a great blessing and we had the opportunity to speak with a number of people.



Sunday morning July 13th we met at the church early. After a hearty breakfast we prepared ourselves for the morning service. I had the occasion to watch the children's Sunday school under the leadership of sister Vivianna.

During the church service Pastor Maureira was installed as a pastor representing the Potomac Presbytery of the PCA in Paraguay. Pastor Yeager gave the charge to Pastor Maureira. Ruling Elder Britt McNeill gave the charge to the congregation while Pastor Joel Acevedo served as a translator. This service culminated by Pastor Larry Yeager singing Rock of Ages while playing guitar.

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During this morning service I met 3 special people who had made an effort to be there. Theo, her daughter Vanessa and her son Elias— they were my first host family in Paraguay back in 2010— attended the service and greeted me warmly. I learned they currently attend another church. Theo's husband Ramon is not saved and it has had an impact on the family.

After a brief lunch at Comida de Mama a restaurant owned by Familia de Pineda our team went to Barrio Parque for vacation bible school. We saw firsthand the new roof on the church building. Pastor Miguel had done all of the brickwork surrounding the roof himself – clearly, he is a skillful bricklayer. If more people learned about all the work he put into this church I think perhaps added funds would be donated towards this effort.



Late afternoon I joined the Paraguayans and fellow team members for volleyball and after a dinner at Mama's place, our team members were challenged to play soccer with the Paraguayans.

Monday morning after a hearty breakfast a Renuevo our team started the first work day with a prayer and a short orientation by Pastor Miguel. Our task this week was to mix concrete and plaster the façade of El Renuevo the original church. A number of our team members mixed the cement and applied the plaster to the surface of the wall under the supervision of Miguel.



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Miguel had hired a man whose job it was to plaster the second floor of the building from a scaffold. It became a daily event to erect and take down this scaffold—things like that have value in Paraguay. Other team members were asked to apply water resistant paint to the inner walls in the church. Heavy rains had caused mold to enter through the walls and caused damage to the interior painted walls.



Pastor Larry Yeager, Juliana my niece, Heather, Britt McNeal's daughter and I were asked to paint the men's and ladies bathrooms and the front hallway into the church—a task that took us all day.

Our team would start work early each morning, but during fifteen minutes daily break around eleven o'clock we would fellowship together with the Paraguayans. They would share Terere and Matte with us. Terere is an herbal tea which can be taken cold (Terere) and hot (Mate).



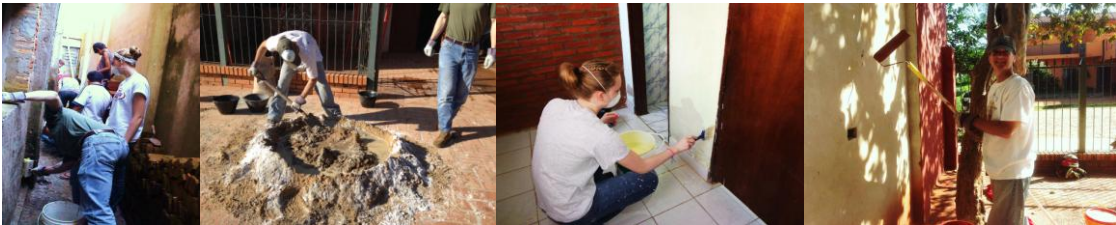
Pastor Yeager had to leave our team Monday evening he had to get back to his family in United States. He really seemed to enjoy his first trip to Paraguay. After dinner at La Comida de Mama, some of the team members like my roommate Dave Core enjoyed playing ping pong. I was blessed to have him as my roommate. He was a real brother and great companion in Christ. He was funny, encouraging and a fine godly man. We spent time sharing and praying together. It

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was his first mission trip and I learned soon that he spoke better Spanish than I. He just needed to branch out a little and it was not long before I frequently found him in conversations with our Paraguayan brothers and sisters.

Tuesday July 15th was a repeat of Monday, with continued work on the outside of the church. The paint crew applied a second coat of paint in the bathrooms and started to paint the hallway between the men's and women's bathrooms. Incidentally, it was last painted by me back in 2010 during my first trip. Albert my brother in-law had started painting the main foyer. We all had our usual morning and lunch breaks combining good food and great fellowship with the Paraguayans.



In the evening our Paraguayan brothers planned a special men's fellowship at Rosanna's house. Several of the elders from the church together with Rosanna's husband cooked meat on two very large barrel grills. The Paraguayan beef is well known for its great taste a lot of it is exported to Argentina where they put their own label on it. There were a lot of different meats including bloodwurst—a tradition inherited from German settlers—and a fine spread of vegetables and salads.



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The meeting started out with prayers and music by Pastor Miguel Diaz and then followed by greetings and introductions by the Paraguayans and the team members. The administrator of the school at El Renuevo Narcisso spoke about the attributes of God during a short devotional. Albert my brother in-law and I gave our testimonies in Spanish followed by the meal and great fellowship. I met a young man Angel who I later spent time sharing Gods word with.

We worked all day Wednesday July 16th. The work on the façade of the church progressed nicely. Some of the men under direction of Miguel Diaz mixed the concrete in the street then hand carried it in buckets to the scaffold where it finally was passed on to the man on the second floor by Bennett— Britt McNeil's son. The work in the foyer and hallway between the bathrooms progressed nicely, but it would still require another coat. The paint acts more like a staining of the walls. It is very watery and looks more colorfull when it has dried. I later went in to assist Mr. Nagy on a project involving the door to Pastor Maureira's office.



Mr. Nagy did a great job repairing doors, installing and repairing electric components like light fixtures. The team was very proud of his accomplishments. He had great knowledge and worked skillfully on a variety of jobs. He was a great asset to the team.

From the beginning it was decided that each team member on a given day should lead a short devotional he or she had prepared. This particular day it was my turn. I led a discussion about Gods concept of wisdom verses the worlds. We all got our chance which led to many fruitful and thought provoking discussions. On one occasion team members started honoring and praising the Lord with singing.

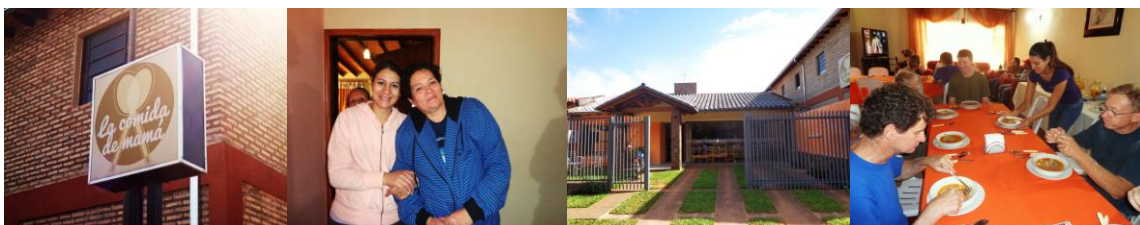
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Thursday July 17th my brother in-law and I had a short meeting with the church administrator sister Liliana Ayala Ocampos concerning some financial issues. Liliana and her husband are a great couple with four beautiful children. They are very involved in the church and strong supporters of Pastor Mureira and have been there from the beginning.

The work continued on the building both outside and inside. Mr. Nagy installed much needed light fixtures in the dining hall. I noticed that all the available ladders were in very poor condition and have asked Project Paraguay to invest in some new ones made out of aluminum.

Our day ended at Comida de Mama's restaurant. It turned out that the owners of the restaurant familia de Pineda are believers too. Our Paraguayan sister Liliana asked our group to pray for them before the Sunday meal which we naturally were happy to do. They cooked great food for our team every day.



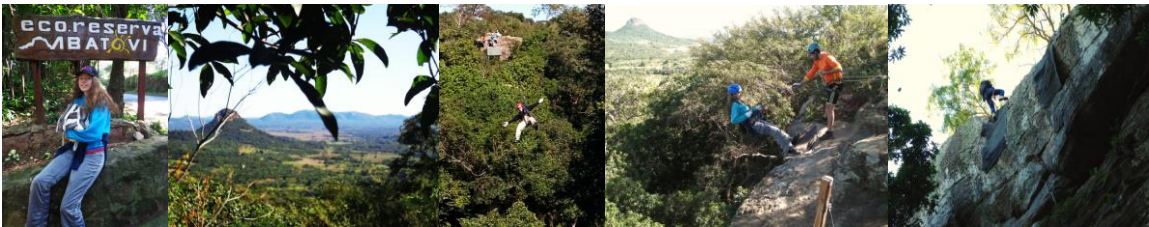
Friday July 18th our team met at the church at 6:30 am. A bus had been rented and our team was going hiking at the Mbatovi reserve in the North Eastern Paraguayan mountain range. The bus would take us through small rural towns on a narrow highway where several cars often were seen sharing the same lane. It was a very nice and cool day; as a matter of fact our team so far had been blessed with above average temperatures since our arrival.

I never realized that Paraguay had mountains and discovered that they actually have mountain ranges the size of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Mbatovi is a private owned park and reserve. Guides take tourists on beautiful nature trails with obstacles like hanging bridges of different kinds, some with just a cable and some with wooden boards to walk on. There is also a zip line crossing a deep drop and the trail finally finish with the participants rappelling themselves down an impressive 100 foot drop. Each member of the team received— after signing their life away

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on a release form—detailed safety instructions on how to use the supplied safety harness. Our guide led us on a path which took us through the dense forest. This adventure took place without any injuries. Even our senior member Mr. Nagy impressed us by completing the hike.



On our way back to Luque our team stopped and enjoyed a late and needed lunch at the Fruteria Paraguari restaurant. At the church Miguel and his hired help had completed most of the leftover work on the façade of the building. Team members helped clean up the church before having a late dinner and fellowship at Mamas's restaurant.

Later that evening Pastor Miguel challenged Dave my roommate and Albert my brother in-law to a game of checkers. He beat Dave but tied Albert. Later the church administrator Narciso challenged me to a chess game—he beat me **three** times. A small number of our team members learned that evening the hard way not to play board games with the Paraguayans.



On the morning on Saturday July 19th we finished painting the hallway and the foyer of the church. Mr. Nagy had finished his jobs and offered a helping hand with spot painting in areas that still needed it. The team cleaned the church and prepared it for the Sunday morning worship service.

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In the afternoon the church was involved with an outreach program at a local plaza. I estimate the event was attended by at least 75 children and parents. I noticed how much fun these children had and really got involved in what was taking place as they were given the gospel through clowns and other fun characters acting out on stage—most of these kids owning perhaps only the cloth they were wearing while walking around bare footed on a grassy field full of wild dog poo. This reminds me of an event that took place when Pastor Mureira, Steve and I went to pick up money at Western Union in the capital of Asuncion. Steve and I needed to go to the bathroom. We found a public bathroom; and we each paid equivalent of 25 cents to an employee who would give us the amount of toilet paper he thought we would need—piece by piece he would tear the sheet off the role he had in his hand. We then went in and stood patiently in line with 8 other men waiting for our turn. Finally our seats would be available, comfortably warmed by the 50 previous occupants—this is public toilet the Paraguayan way.



Later that evening I got to speak with Angel the young man whom I met earlier at the men's event at Rosanna's house. I found out he only lived a few blocks away from the church, but was an active participant. He was the only one in his family who attended church. I tried to encourage him in his Christian walk—I thought it cannot be easy for a young man with all the temptations out there to take God at His word. I told him that I would pray for his family. Incidentally his mother showed up the next day for the Sunday morning service.

Sunday July 20th suddenly came our final day together with our sisters and brothers in Paraguay. We all had to pack and bring our suitcases to the church and say farewell to our host families. During worship we all were very blessed by a young Paraguayan lady who performed with such grace and purity a beautiful worship dance honoring the Lord.

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Pastor Miguel Diaz preached from 1 Corinthians 1: 25-28, describing how God had chosen Samuel, and how a little boy helped Paul to escape from jail. Pastor Joel—who had come back from a brief visit to his homeland Chile—interpreted for the team. After the service we all made our way to Mamas for lunch and had a chance to pray for the Pineda family who had accommodated our group in their restaurant the past ten days.

The early afternoon was spent together with Albert on the church's computer copying pictures from other team members. Around 5 pm we all gathered in the sanctuary for a farewell ceremony. A number of the Paraguayans spoke and thanked us for helping them on the many construction projects and to our surprise we were all treated to Paraguayan folk dancing performed by Pamela a daughter of Alfredo and Pabla Troche — the host family I stayed with last year— and sister to Leidy, and Junior. She danced with grace and elegance while balancing first one and later two bottles on her head.



Our team members responded emotionally with expressions of gratitude towards our Paraguayan church family. This was followed by the host families handing out gifts to each of us with lots of kisses and hugs. Later the Paraguayans treated us to dinner in the fellowship hall. Some of the elders grilled steaks while the women were busy upstairs in the kitchen preparing salad and vegetables. We all eat and fellowshiped together and even had an occasion to speak with Jennifer Albert's daughter who skyped in from Texas where she was undergoing basic military training in the US Army.

The afternoon and evening went fast. All the team's suitcases were gathered and we were taken to the Asuncion airport. We checked our luggage in and got yet another chance for a last goodbye with a few members left of our church family. We filled out an immigration form and went

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through security as we left the country. For some reason I was singled out by an immigration officer who asked me several pointed questions before he let me proceed and I had barely left his office before another officer met me asking me more questions in regard to the reason for my stay in Paraguay he also wanted to see my US passport. I explained to him that I was doing mission work in the Capital. He then took me to another part of the airport where I was shown a sign and told not to wear hat, sunglasses and use electronic devices in the airport. That seemed a little odd to me since other of my team members were wearing their hats. He finally let me go and I caught up to the rest of the group.

After flying for nearly seven hours, we finally landed in Panama Airport where we stayed another three hours before catching our final flight to Dulles International Airport. There, Steve Josephson, Bob Sowers, Albert, Juliana and I were picked up by my sister Anette then it was back to the grindstone and the bills.

This was a very good trip and we all left with many fond memories, newfound friendships and a deepened relationship with our Paraguayan church family. A person once explained that the different people and cultures of the world are like a beautiful bouquet of flower created by God each with its own color, fragrance and elegance — all made to honor and worship Him in unity.

In His Joy

Kean Hyltoft



