



Paraguay

"Where there is no vision the people perish"

-Proverbs 29:18.



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Returning to Paraguay

It has been nearly three years since my first mission trip to Paraguay which I did together with a group from Heritage Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Virginia which included my brother in-law Colonel Albert Veldhuyzen, his daughter Jennifer and oldest son John Evert. This trip left me with fond memories of the people I met. I have since been on mission trips twice to Guatemala in Central America, but I have always had a burning desire to return and rekindle the friendships that I made on my first trip to Paraguay. I have the utmost respect for my niece Jennifer and her husband Brian both wanting to serve the Lord full time in Paraguay some day. Jennifer is currently in Puerto Rico for a year as part of her ongoing education in becoming a doctor. A skill she wants to apply as a missionary to Paraguay.

Paraguay is at a strategic crossroads of South America. It is one of the poorest and most corrupt 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 was founded in 1996 as a ministry of Heritage Presbyterian Church to introduce Paraguayans to Christ's message of hope and redemption. Chileans Joel and Gladys Acevedo began work in 1997 in Asuncion to plant a congregation. Thirteen years later, Roberto Maureira pastor the Iglesia Presbiteriana El Renuevo (The Renewal Presbyterian Church), a church which reaches out to the surrounding communities and has planted two other churches, Barrio Parque and Mariano Roque Alonso. Furthermore it is currently also involved with outreach at Itapuami, a jungle area and Marin Kaabe an area around Luque.

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 providing a Christ-centered world and life view meets in the El Renuevo building and has taught many children who would otherwise have had no education. Pargue, the sister church, meets in a partially completed building and Mariano Roque is on the drawing board.

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On Tuesday July 16 2013, after months of preparations applying for visa, filling out adult MTW release forms etc., we met my friend Tim Gauck in Vienna Virginia. He kindly drove Bob Sowers and me to Reagan National Airport where we flew directly to Miami joining the rest of our group from Stanley North Carolina for our final flight to Asuncion the capital of Paraguay. We each were provided with a great t-shirt in the airport with the following message; “Taking the heart of the gospel to the heart of the world”.

We arrived in Asuncion Wednesday morning July 17 at 7:40 am. Here we were greeted warmly by Pastor Roberto Maureira and people from the congregation and driven by vans to the church in Lugue where we met for breakfast and a short orientation before being taken to our host families.



I was placed at the home of Alfredo and Pabla Troche, the grandmother Isadora and their children Leidy, Pamela and Junior, together with Bob Sowers, Joel Jessen – who had Danish ancestry – and Eric Reel a Baptist minister. The home was also— una Tienda— a grocery store where the family sold a variety of products. Alfredo was working in a prominent restaurant in Asuncion most of the day including the weekend while his family was tending the store. After our— ubicacion en las casas— or placement in our new homes for the next ten days we then by van went to El Barrio Parque for an A to Z planning and information meeting concerning construction on the church during the coming weeks.

Our group worked on different projects we built a fence , cut down two coconut trees, which was done using axes, machetes and ropes to guide the fall. The trees were cut up in sections and placed in a pile to be burned later together with the leaves that had some long penetrating thorns. In an effort to clear some land by the church for improved visibility the team cleared some brush with machetes and a rather large tree was cut down. During this process a nest of rats was found, but one of the local dogs took care of that and ate the rats in a matter of

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seconds. During the clean-out process around the buildings two very large toads were discovered generating much attention among team members. One class room floor was cleaned out and leveled. This process was done by crushing stones, carrying out debris and using a rake.

Mortar was mixed by hand on the concrete slap in the church's sanctuary and then carried to the areas needed one bucket at a time by team members while other team members was slinging the mortar on the raw brick wall where it was smoothed out and later white washed using several coats. A group of men helped Miguel Diaz putting up a scaffold so he could finish brick work on a class room in preparation for a roof to be installed. During this process a different batch of mortar was mixed and then carried up to him on a latter. The team finished the surface work on a number of inside and outside walls, but the main church building still needs a roof.

All construction projects were supervised and lead by Miguel Diaz a talented teacher and construction worker who will be ordained as the pastor of El Barrio Parque sometime in November 2013. He has recently been married to Pinchi a great lady who has been teaching children in one of the finished class room.



Each day would be busy and strenuous. I would wake up at 5 am shave and take a shower. Keep in mind that Paraguay is located on the Southern Hemisphere. Their winter here is in June, July, and August. The first two days were relative warm, but then the temperatures changed and by night fall they could drop as low as the upper thirties and climb to the upper fifties to low sixties during the day time hours. The houses have no heat of any kind so plenty of blankets are necessary. I had brought a blanket with a sipper much like a sleeping bag which is easy to bring in a suitcase.

After getting dressed I would walk half a mile to the church where I would find Pabla my host lady and her daughter Leidy already preparing the breakfast together with Liliana—the

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Administrator of the church— and some of the other ladies. I would grab a cup of coffee and speak briefly with the teachers and students as they arrived for school before the rest of the team members would arrive from their respective host families. Breakfast was between 7:30 and 8:30 am. After a hearty breakfast we would often have devotional or evaluating meetings lead either by Jimmi Mitchell, Tommy Barton or Joel Jessen. The team devotional meeting could also take place at the worksite at El Barrio Parque after lunch. During this time a number of team members including two Paraguayans Sulma and Miguel gave their testimonies. At the worksite a chair was placed in front of the building and each team member would alternate and spending at least fifteen minutes praying for the church, the team and individual needs during the time of construction.



The church vans would bring us to the church at El Barrio Park where Miguel informed us what had to be done. Normally mortar had to be mixed first before work on the wall could begin. Around noon the team would break for lunch. Ladies from the main church at El Renuevo would arrive with a variety of great foods; sandwiches, hamburgers— Paraguayan style— and plenty of soft drinks. A kind neighbor lady made coffee for the team on several occasions. She is a friend of Maria Elena wife of Narciso who is the school administrator at El Renuevo. He and his wife actually live at the El Barrio Park construction site. After lunch and fellowship with the Paraguayans the team would continue work on the church facility. In a couple of instances we would do construction in the morning then at noon the church vans would pick us up and bring us out to one of the remote ministry areas where we would conduct Vacation Bible School (VBS) (escuela de verano) with the children. One such area was Marin Kaabe. Indecently it was a very cold and rainy day, but we were all determined to go ahead with our program as scheduled. The person responsible for this area is Saul. He is a young man who currently is taking seminar classes to become a pastor. Several church members from El Renuevo that I recognized came to

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help out. One of the ladies Deide— she has a son Paulo who is leading the worship music at El Renuevo on Sundays—did a great job inviting children to the VBS as we all were walking throughout the area giving out tracts and invitations. She obviously knew a lot of the children already. Despite the drizzle we still were able to gather a good sizeable crowd of children and mothers with infants who willingly took part in the program.

All our VBS programs were lead and conducted by Martha Mitchell and Anna Kathrine Friesenhahn. As the children and some of the adults showed up our team would engage and entertaining them with variety of ball and jump games precede by prayer and continuing with singing followed by a bible story explaining and demonstrating the armor of God —Annalise Jessen was dressed as a roman soldier. Finally a drawing project was handed out to the children by other team members. We all participated in the program. It was a lot of fun and forced us to speak and interact with the children in their language. I noticed how God’s Holy Spirit spoke through us and made the interaction with the children so much easier.

The program at Marin Kaabe still stands out in my memory because despite the cold weather there was such joy displayed both by the team members and by the children and their mothers’ —as the Lords work vent forth.



Usually late afternoons around 5 pm the church vans would pick us up and bring us to a great restaurant called Los Jardines (The Gardens) where we always had an excellent dinner. This arrangement worked also well for me, because there was an ATM machine handy in the foyer. One night I took out 1,500,000 Guaranies which sounds like a lot, but really isn’t (1 Guaranie=0.00022 Dollar). I needed to buy a new camera because the one I brought broke.

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In Paraguay there are great denominational differences among churches. Currently there is a move among churches in the Capitol area to try to put aside their differences and unite around the work of the Lord. Pastor Maureira is involved in this effort and the team was invited on Thursday 18 at 7:00 pm to an event in the capitol Asuncion called, **“Expo Ministerios Christianos 2013”**. Several prominent pastors spoke and Pastor Maureira had arranged for Brother Jimmi Mitchell to speak at the event as well. It was a time of fellowship, music and good food while sharing ideas and encouraging unity in a public forum.



Our two drivers Richie and Roxanna both did an excellent job. The logistics involving bringing all the team members back and forth to various destinations, sometimes on nearly impassible dirt roads, was a major undertaking. We all appreciated their great driving skills because getting around without road signs is a challenge. In Paraguay very few roads outside the capitol are marked with street names. Tourists like us can easily get lost on our own it could turn out to be a rather costly experience especially at night. There are gangs roaming the streets and caution needs to be taken. Besides being a fine young Christian man, Richie is also an excellent soccer player and known for his athletic abilities among his peers. Paraguay constant competes with its neighboring countries. Two teams, which constant were the cause of "discussions" among the Paraguayans in the Luque area were Olimpia with a number 2 rating among the national soccer teams and Cerro Porteño with a current 9th rating.

One night our host familie invited me and my three co-laborers to watch Olimpia playing a Brazilian soccer team they just recently beat 2-0. We all watched as the game progressed and Brazils team this time beat the Paraguayan team, but during the game even the grandmother Isadora got into the game dancing and shouting. We all had a lot of fun and the hospitality displayed from Alfredo our host was impeccable. He grilled steaks outside and the family cared for us far above what could be expected. I never forget that. A couple of days earlier our team of 12 had been invited to the restaurant where Alfredo works to eat as his guests. It was very

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touching. Alfredo was saved just 5 years ago and could not attend church because of his work, but he wanted to show his gratitude towards us because of our willingness to work on the church at El Barrio Parque.

During my stay I got a firsthand look at the outreach program at El Renuevo. The church is actively engaged in reaching out into the surrounding communities. At one visit to Mariano Roque Alonso—a slum area—I recognized a few children from my visit three years ago. I was able to re-connect with one little girl especially during our craft session. Joining us for this event a lady, her son and daughter from another church came to give out clothing. I had met her son and daughter at an Expo Ministerios Christianos 2013 youth concert event earlier. The daughter had asked me if her family could participate at the VBS outreach at Mariano Roque Alonso she told me that she had lost her father a few months ago. The church is center for stability in a lot of children's lives. El Renuevo is primary focused on children's ministry in its effort to build a bridge to the children and eventually attract the parents and bring them in contact with the church. This type of relationship building seems to work very well; naturally prayer is very important in this process. I noticed how all the teachers every morning before school prayed together in the school administrator Narciso's office.



The North Carolina team is well coordinated and extremely disciplined. I thoroughly enjoyed their effort and it was a privilege to participate in that. Everybody help each other out. I experienced great camaraderie. For two people this trip was a first. Annalise Jessen the daughter of Joel Jessen had a blast. She is 17, and really interacted with the young people at the church. She had a great time and possible will return again she also was our official photographer. Eric Reel a Baptist preacher was on his first trip. He and I became soon friends due to our humor which coincides. He became roommate with Bob Sowers, Joel Jessen and me at Paplas house. He is a great guy and I guess long time friend of Tommy Barton.

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When the time came for our team to head back to the US the church had a short service where the Paraguayan children performed for us and our team sang a song. Each team member was then given an opportunity to say a few words. It was a very touching moment for each of us. Our brief testimonies were followed by an outpouring of love and gift giving from our host families everybody embracing each other. It was a true blessing to experience the love these people showed to us. After this service the leadership from El Renuevo together with the ladies cooked for our team and we all finished the evening in great fellowship together. The following morning, after another emotional and heartfelt good bye in the airport, the team flew back to the US. My friend Tim (Mr. Dependable) picked Bob and me up in the airport. I hope someday to persuade Tim to join me on another mission trip to Paraguay.

After my first trip to Paraguay I decided to learn Spanish. I have currently studied the language for little more than a year through Rosetta Stone and what I have learned so far turned out to be very helpful during my stay. I am still seeking the Lords future will for my life in regard to missions, but I do what I can right now in continuing my language studies.

As the team was working on the church at El Barrio Parque I observed how the need to get a roof on the main church building now is at a point where it is imperative that this is done by next year. The church has been standing with just the walls for the last at least 5 years. Some of the school rooms are currently used, but the people in this area need to see progress on the main building and not just cosmetic improvements once in a while. I came up with an idea for a fund drive that I believe will work and have a real impact on the progress on the program. As I spoke with our team leaders, Pastor Maureira and elders from El Renuevo I discovered that it can be done for \$ 5,000.00. Bob Sowers is also mentioning this in his team report. Each team member's expenses on this trip were \$ 2,400.00. If each member next year gave \$ 500.00, but stayed home next year then we could actually accomplish this with money to spare (\$ 500.00 multiplied with 12 persons equal \$ 6,000). Simultaneously we could run a fund drive with a motto maybe like this; "By staying home this year we are building a roof on the church at El Barrio Parque. Who wants to help?". A lot of prayers and consideration would be needed, but I believe enough funds could be raised so even the main church El Renuevo also would be able buy extra land for their expansion as Pastor Maureira laid out for the team in his future vision for the church project. I announced to the team that I will be willing to give \$ 500.00 for this purpose so we can get the roof done next year. It is my understanding that Miguel Diaz will be ordained pastor in El Barrio Parque in November, 2013, would it not be fitting that he has a church building

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ready to use. He personally is working very hard on the building project at the same time he is working a regular job to feed his family. I will be praying that considerations will be made by the leadership of Project Paraguay to raise funds for the roof by next year.

Again I am very thankful that I have the opportunity to be a part of Project Paraguay. El Reneuvo currently needs prayers. There have been long standing disputes with a neighbor who throws stones on the roof which has damaged it. I had a firsthand experience one night while the team was relaxing on the second floor playing ping pong. A very loud bang was heard. The church have made several improvements by installing windows and by increasing the height of the wall next to that property owner to help keeping out any noise from the church, but at no travail. Prayers also are needed for the new group of elders and their families that currently is being assembled as the church leadership is being defined. Anyone who wants to get involved in with Project Paraguay actively and financially, do not hesitate, but please contact them at <http://www.projectparaguay.org>.

In His Joy

Kean Hyltoft



