

Report No. 14 from Alto Cayma – 7 Sep 08

Serving Alto Cayma

Last week I foreshadowed that we were about to undergo some fundamental changes in the way we operate here in Alto Cayma. The first of these is that we have just filed to formally register Serving Alto Cayma as a not-for-profit Association. To help us do this, we have added Roxana, a CPA, to our staff. Under her guidance, we now have a task force of 5 people working in the first floor of our house, putting the books in shape for the formal reports required by the government once our formal establishment as an Association goes through. We are fortunate to also have Lidia working on our team, with her degree in computer science. She is working with one of her former professors to create a data base management system which will greatly facilitate keeping up with the ongoing accounting workload.

Creaciones Angel Cardmaking Group

The girls are still cranking away, trying to make enough cards to prevent our airplane from being able to take off in early October. Meanwhile, we're starting to lay track for how to deal with the challenge of selling 6,000-7,000 cards back in the States as we approach the Christmas season. I have written to 31 Rotary Clubs plus a number of church groups seeking bookings to give presentations, and we already have 5 Rotary Clubs and 1 church Christmas Bazaar booked. Even after 5 years, marketing the cards still depends mainly on personal appearances such as this. It's a grueling road to travel, but we enjoy it because we get to experience firsthand the willingness of people in our country, who are materially blessed, to support those in the Third World who they know are making an honest effort to get ahead.

Acercádonos (“Coming Together”) Sponsorship Program

Yesterday was our monthly meeting with all of our “ahijados” (sponsees), and it was an energy-filled, inspiring event. First of all, with 200 ahijados plus family members, we completely filled the church. Then the crowd was supercharged with energy by our opening and closing act, Hermano Coco (Brother George). Hermano Coco has a seemingly endless repertoire of songs combining devotional themes and zany humor which he leads with his voice and guitar. He had the young folks grinning from ear to ear, and the elderly dancing in the aisles. Then Miguel Angel, the boy with the cochlear implant, made a surprise appearance, back for a visit after his first few weeks of rehab training in Lima. What a difference, seeing him react directly to the sounds around him, rather than tracking the music remotely by observing the motions of other people's clapping hands.

On a somber, but inspirational, note, we issued an appeal for the people to help find a girl in the community who has been missing since Aug 18. Her story was told and pictures and information were handed out. Then Victor pointed out that the girl's mother can't work because she's searching for her daughter every day, and asked the people for a freewill donation to help tide her over. He suggested it be taken up at the back as the people were leaving, but they weren't about to wait. As Victor was starting into the next topic on the agenda, he was interrupted by 4-year old Ismael, a precocious little boy with thick glasses, who ran up with a fistful of coins he had collected from those seated around him. Then other kids and elderly began coming forth, and Victor simply had to suspend the business of the meeting until the collection was complete. When it was done, the poorest people in Alto Cayma had contributed over 200 soles, which is as much as many of the people here make in a whole month. And while we hope this story will have a happy ending, I couldn't help but notice that the last two people left in the church after the meeting were the mother of this girl and the mother of another boy who went missing last spring and was later found dead at the bottom of a ravine. One can only imagine the depth and the intensity of the conversation these two women were having.

Salir Adelante (“Getting Ahead”) Educational Sponsorships

I'm very excited to report that we've added two new sponsored students in just the last week, bringing our total up to 34. Marina, a girl who is just finishing high school but who has aspirations to study Business Administration in college, is being sponsored by a Rotarian in Mooresville, NC. Mayra, a girl in her third year of nursing school at the Catholic University, is being sponsored by a nurse from Anchorage, AK, who visited here a couple of years ago.

I'm also happy to be able to report that one of our students who was a “lost sheep” is returning to the fold. Georgina's family was abandoned by their father years ago, leaving their mother as the sole breadwinner. Georgina had been studying under a Salir Adelante sponsorship, but she had to drop out and go to work full time to feed the family when her mother's health took a nosedive and she could no longer do the manual labor which is all she knows. The mother's health has now been stabilized, thanks in part to a medical fund generously contributed by a young couple in our church back home, and Georgina is now slated to resume her studies the beginning of next month. As with most good outcomes in this austere environment, success requires a team effort.

Get Thee to a Nunnery

Last Sunday we gave Victor and his family a “scholarship” to visit the beautiful Santa Catalina Monastery. This is Arequipa’s number one tourist attraction, yet many of the locals have never seen it because they don’t have the price of admission. Now we’re working on how we could give the kids in our New Horizons youth group this same opportunity.

A Run for the Border

Despite the fact that we have a house here and spend over half of every year in Peru, we still enter the country every time on a 90-day tourist visa. That means that on our longer stays, we need to leave the country, even if only for 10 minutes, and re-enter, in order to renew our “legal” status, sort of like having to tag up at third base before stealing home. So this morning we loaded the 5 Musketeers (Victor, Lidia, Giuliana, Jim & Gloria) into the car and, chanting “Road trip! Road trip!”, we headed for Chile. It’s about a 4-5 hour drive, and once we reached the border, we had to do extra paperwork to get Victor’s car across. Being unfamiliar with the process, it took us an inordinate amount of time, but we entertained ourselves by making a big to-do over the fact that this was the first time in their lives that either Giuliana or Lidia had ever left their own country. In any case, by late afternoon we were in Arica, Chile (a place that has special meaning for Peruvians because it used to be Arica, Peru, until the Chileans captured it in the War of the Pacific). There we took a walk on the beach and acted like Japanese tourists, taking pictures of each other in every possible combination. Then we did the whole process in reverse, but this time with night driving through fog zones. We didn’t get home until 2:30 in the morning. Oh, and by the way, we found out that now they give visas for up to 183 days. If they would have made that change 4 months ago, all this would have been unnecessary.

A State of Mourning

We are in mourning. The Capriccio coffeeshop on Mercaderes Street has been closed while the street undergoes repairs so massive that even pedestrian access would be impossible. Faithful readers of these Reports know that man does not live by social mission projects alone. He must have capuccino as well, so the closing of Capriccio is a heavy blow indeed. It’s supposed to reopen the first of October, but as these types of projects tend to go, I’ll be surprised if we see it open again before we leave. Nevertheless, we will somehow manage to press on to

“Love God, Serve Neighbor/Serving Alto Cayma”,

Jim

