

Report No. 3 from Alto Cayma – 22 Jun 08

On the Economic Front

The good news this week is that the dollar has begun to rebound a little. It was up to 2.93 on Friday, up from a low of 2.78 around the time we left here last time. The bad news is that 90 octane gasoline is going for \$5.22 a gallon, which drives the price of everything else, and this in a country where the vast majority of the people don't have a penny to spare.

Serving Alto Cayma

Routine events this week really highlighted how Serving Alto Cayma works as a fully integrated team. Each person has areas of primary responsibility, but everyone helps out wherever their talents are needed. Lidia is giving computer training to Giuliana to help her be more effective in helping out in Victor's Acercádonos office. Oscar Garcia, our volunteer youth motivator, has agreed to get involved with the children in the Aldea in addition to all the other things he's already doing for us. And finally, the girls from Creaciones Angel helped out as always with the handicraft project in the monthly Acercádonos birthday party. The absence of territorial boundaries is key to our being able to accomplish as much as we do with so few people.

We received some sensational news on the medical front this week. Miguel Angel Soto, our 14-year old deaf boy, will have his cochlear implant operation on the 4th of July, right here in Arequipa. This extraordinary event is being made possible by the generosity of the Connelly family, who are involved in Alto Cayma in many ways, but especially in helping the many handicapped children we have here.

Visitors

Victoria and Alex, our students from Davidson College, made some home visits with the Acercádonos staff this week. Even after having been here a couple of weeks and seeing the indigent patients in Father Alex' medical clinic, the reality of the conditions under which the people here have to live didn't really hit home until they had this opportunity to enter the people's houses. Victoria and Alex really want to serve, and are making themselves useful in many different ways. One of their current projects is to help us prepare standard documentation on every "ahijado" (sponsoree) in the Acercádonos program. Right now they're taking a little tourism break to Puno and Cuzco, but they'll be back with us on Thursday of this week.

Dr. Wayne Centrone of Portland, OR, is arriving today with a group to visit Father Alex. We will also have some peripheral contact with this team, and Father Alex will be offering Victoria and Alex an opportunity to participate in the projects he's planned for them.

This evening Dwight Hartsell and his daughter, Sherry Fowler, will also be arriving for their 3-week stay. Dwight, of course, will be teaching in Father Alex' woodshop. Sherry, who will be making her first visit, is coming on a mission to establish a supportive relationship between her church back in Charleston, SC, and Father Frank's Aldea "Sagrada Familia". I had a preliminary meeting with the staff in the Aldea this week, and they are eagerly awaiting Sherry's visit.

Creaciones Angel Cardmaking Group

The girls in the cardshop will be greeting Wayne Centrone with the 200 logo cards he ordered for his Health Bridges International organization. These proved to be quite difficult to make, but turned out to be strikingly beautiful.

We have 3 new candidate girls who have completed formation training with Maria, the social worker, and are now presenting themselves for admission to Creaciones Angel. This week we'll be receiving essays they've written about their lives and aspirations. They will also be subjected to medical, psychological and aptitude evaluations this week. After that, only the personal interviews will remain to be done before they can enter. As you can see, reading between the lines, we have learned over the years that Creaciones Angel isn't for everybody.

Acercádonos ("Coming Together") Sponsorship Program

We took 94 letters from sponsors to the Cultural Institute for translating this week. They'll be ready by the end of this month, in time for distribution at the July Acercádonos meeting. We wish that all 190+ ahijados could have gotten letters. If you happen to be a sponsor who hasn't written for a while, you can always e-mail us a letter or mail one to Project Acercádonos (name of sponsoree), c/o Victor Galdos, Casilla 158, Arequipa, Peru.

Saturday was a big meeting day for us – two Acercádonos meetings and one Salir Adelante. In the morning we had a meeting of the Acercádonos youth group (still un-named) under the leadership of Victor, Oscar and Carlos. This group meets 2 Saturdays a month, and their possible slate of activities is still growing. They are definitely a work in progress.

On Saturday afternoon we had the monthly birthday party for Acercándonos. This one was unusually large, with 17 people (both children and elderly) to be honored. Giuliana had helped Tulita and Luisa purchase the presents for all these people, and she came back impressed with how difficult it is to find really nice-looking presents while still staying within a budget of 30 soles, or approximately \$10, each. (Sponsors who send extra money for their ahijado's birthday should know that those presents are handled on the side. For the public gathering, everyone is on a level playing field so that no one feels disadvantaged.)

Salir Adelante (“Getting Ahead”) Educational Sponsorships

The third meeting on Saturday, in the morning, was the monthly meeting of all the Salir Adelante students. This is where they receive their monthly stipend, and also engage in group activities. This time Carlos Sirena gave his first talk to the group. He did a great job of establishing rapport with the group, and his talk was very well received. He made an open offer at the end to meet with any of the students who wished to, one-on-one, and one student took him up on it right there on the spot. This is all part of our strategy to provide reliable “big brother” figures from whom the youth can seek guidance with confidence. At the end of the meeting, the students approached us with a proposal for how they themselves could take a more active role in planning and carrying out the group activities at the meetings. The activities they are planning for the next meeting are very interesting ones, as will be reported next month.

Rotary Projects

On the Charlotte Rotary Club's Water Project, it is becoming abundantly clear that the Cerro Verde copper mine folks are not going to be able to crystalize their commitment in timely fashion, so we're going to have to go with the best option for a relocatable plant that we can afford within the amount of the approved Rotary grant. Carlos Cusirramos, the President of the Arequipa Rotary Club, and I are to meet this coming week to capture the details required for submittal to The Rotary Foundation.

Looking ahead to when we return to the States in Oct-Dec, Gloria and I have already booked our first program and card sale at one of the Rotary Clubs in our district. These appearances are the lifeblood of Creaciones Angel, and are instrumental in obtaining other forms of support as well, so we plan to book as many such appearances as the clubs will allow. It's not unusual for us to visit as many as 20 clubs on each of our two homestays, or a total of 30-40 such appearances every year.

The final item under the Rotary heading doesn't involve Alto Cayma, but I'll report it here because it does involve us and the Charlotte Rotary Club. There is a movement within the Charlotte club to send another 40-foot container full of donated goods down to South America, and we are brokering the deal for the container to go to the Rotary Club of Bogotá Chicó in Colombia. This is the club with which we did a World Community Service Showcase Project around 8 years ago, so we know they are a reliable partner. The Bogotá Rotarians have provided their initial "wish list" for the container contents, and the Charlotte club is now organizing their approach.

Our House

To our shock and amazement, Telefónica (the local phone company) showed up on Tuesday this week to install a landline in our house. The telephone service is nearly worthless, because the low-end plan which we bought is only good for calling other fixed phones, not the cellulars which everyone uses, but it is a necessary prerequisite to getting internet service in our house. On Friday, another group of Telefónica technicians showed up to install the internet connection. By the time they were done, they had gotten it to work on 1-1/2 out of our 2 computers, but by Saturday morning it didn't work at all on either one. We'll pick up the trail again on Monday.

The Winds of Winter

Every year we have a period in the winter (remember, we're in the Southern Hemisphere) where the wind blows very strong almost every morning. We're starting to see a bit of that already as we move towards the end of June. In our well-built house, we're as snug as the Practical Pig in his house of bricks, but the people in the "sillar" (volcanic stone) block huts with tin roofs really feel it, as do all the people who have to walk long distances in the early morning hours to reach work or access to public transportation. Think of them this week as you contemplate the need to

"Love God, Serve Neighbor/Serving Alto Cayma",

Jim