

Report No. 9 from/about Alto Cayma - 24 Feb 08

Note: Strictly speaking, this report isn't "from" Alto Cayma, because at the moment we're in Bogotá, Colombia. However, we were in Alto Cayma until Friday morning, so this report is "about" what happened there up to that point.

Serving Alto Cayma

As part of the ongoing series of adjustments to separate the activities and projects of Serving Alto Cayma from those of Father Alex to the maximum extent possible, it was agreed this week that on-site management of the Adventure in Faith Woodshop will be assumed by Father Alex. The rationale for this decision is that the Woodshop is a church-supported project (Advent Lutheran, in Charlotte), and church initiatives fit best under the umbrella of Father Alex' mission. All decisions concerning the Woodshop will now be made by Father Alex and Dwight Hartsell, and my only involvement will be to help Dwight sell the shop's products back in the States.

On the other hand, management of the Home Improvement Initiative will be assumed by Serving Alto Cayma. The rationale for this decision is that this project was initiated by Rotary clubs in the Charlotte area (Dilworth, joined by Charlotte East and Gastonia East), and Rotary initiatives fit best under the umbrella of Serving Alto Cayma. Father Alex will continue to manage the one home improvement project which is still underway, and I will manage any new projects from their inception.

This week Gloria began unpacking the 27 cartons which will become our newest workshop, the one for decorative rubber stamping. With half the cartons unpacked, it looks like it will be a challenge to fit everything in the space available, but I know it can be done. It may be just a case of obtaining additional storage units of some kind to house the thousands of small items that comprise the tools and equipment for this workshop.

Finally, it looks as though Serving Alto Cayma has acquired a new personnel resource to work with. Carlos Sirena, a psychologist/educator who lives right here in Alto Cayma, approached us with an offer to help as a volunteer in our projects and activities. We gave him an "audition" by inviting him to give a talk to the girls in the card shop. He proved to be an animated speaker, and the girls seemed to enjoy his talk. We'll continue looking for places to try out his services in order to define how he can best contribute.

Visitors

Besides bringing lots of woodworking tools, Dwight Hartsell also brought with him on this trip a nice collection of early learning materials for use with the children of Alto Cayma. These materials were purchased and sent by his wife, Susan. Dwight decided to place the materials in the hands of Karen, a long-term volunteer who is staying in the Volunteer House, for her to use in the classes she is conducting with the children. Dwight has now reached the end of his 3-week stay and is returning to the States to prepare for his next trip in June.

Creaciones Angel Cardmaking Group

Most of the time we have nothing but positive news to report from the card shop, but once in a while, even after all the time we've spent forming these girls over the years, things still hit the old proverbial fan. In recent weeks, we discovered that the girls had created an elaborate practical joke against one of their number, and that they had let it get out of hand to an extent where it was beginning to damage relationships. This was so at cross purposes with everything we had tried to teach them that Gloria decided it was time to lower the boom, and levied suspensions of from 2 to 5 days (without pay) on 8 of the girls. We hope that in this way they will finally learn their lesson.

Acercádonos ("Coming Together") Sponsorship Program

Similar to the card shop, most of what we encounter in the Acercádonos program is positive, but from time to time we have to struggle against threats of negative outcomes. In the past week, for example, we've been dealing with the case of one teenage boy who had become rebellious and left home. (His mother had raised him on her own, and was not able to cope with his rebellion.) With the help of the local police and a lot of tough love from Victor, we are trying to pull him back from the brink. The jury is still out, but we are optimistic that he will get back on the right path. The point of the story is that there's a lot more to the Acercádonos program than just meeting the physical needs of the "ahijados" (sponsees).

Rotary Projects

The Water Project, co-sponsored by the Rotary clubs of Charlotte and Arequipa, is in the process of taking a radical turn. This project is to replace the small water plant that provides most of the water supply for Alto Cayma with a new, higher-capacity plant. The plan had been to build another fixed plant, but there is a more comprehensive government water project coming

over the horizon which would render this plant obsolete. We are therefore seeking to switch the approach to one of installing a relocateable plant which can later be disassembled and moved to another location when it is no longer needed for Alto Cayma. In this way the Rotary investment can continue to provide water to people in need for the full 30-year life of the plant. I spoke to the staff at The Rotary Foundation about the change, and they indicated it can be done, but we have to generate technical and budgetary data in the same detail as that which was presented earlier for the original project approach. In short, we have some big homework to do, but the end result will be well worth it.

On The Road

As I stated at the outset, we have fled Peru for a little respite in Colombia. We wondered for a while if we were going to ever get here. We were supposed to fly out of Arequipa on Thursday evening, but our flight was cancelled because of fog. We were able to get out on the first flight the next morning, and barely made our connection in Lima for the flight to Bogotá. We've spent the weekend just relaxing with friends and family, but on Monday we'll begin working with the Rotary Club of Bogotá Chicó on a project to organize a network of volunteer healthcare providers. We did a couple of significant projects with this club in the late 90's, before we started our work in Peru, one of which was selected as our District's World Community Service Showcase Project, so we know that this club knows how to successfully carry out a project. It will be good to work with them again. This project is loosely tied to Alto Cayma by the fact that we are being advised by Dr. Wayne Centrone, a familiar figure to all in Alto Cayma.

And that's all the news from (and about) Alto Cayma for this week. Until next Sunday, don't forget to

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

Jim