



EL CAMINO SOLIDARIO

<THE PATH OF SOLIDARITY>

MISSION NEWSLETTER FROM KATE LAWLER AND DAVID WUNSCH

January 2006



Living in God's amazing grace

Hopes and Prayers for the New Year

One thought that has carried us into the New Year is that God's Kingdom is here among us, yet at the same time lies beyond our efforts and vision. While our new friends keep telling us that we have just arrived, we can't help sensing the urgency of all that there is to do for the Kingdom of the here and now. In our South American region, we see all around us the realities of growing economic inequalities; staggering and unjust external debt; hunger; unemployment; and lack of government funding for health, education and infrastructure. These are the challenges that our companion Lutheran churches in South America face every day.

In Isaiah 43 the God who says "I work and who can hinder it?" also promises "to do a new thing" and "give water in the wilderness". Our urgent prayer is that we find a way to be the water that God pours out, water that in some mysterious way will provide nourishment and energy to build a more just and dignified life for all God's creation here on earth. We ask you to join us in this prayer, that in the New Year we all may be "water in the wilderness".

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Mission and Community Development in Northern Argentina

Four hundred and fifty miles north of Buenos Aires lies the Chaco — a hot, humid lowland that extends across the Argentine border into Paraguay and Bolivia. During the last days of November 2005, Kate had a chance to visit the capital of the Argentine Chaco, Resistencia and its neighboring town across the Paraná River, Corrientes.

In these northern reaches of Argentina, is a rich example of how a mission of our companion church, the Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Unida (IELU), grew out of the church's involvement in crisis response. The IELU's work in this area dates back to the early 80's when massive flooding in the Resistencia area led to the displacement of hundreds of families. With support from the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the IELU responded to the crisis by building housing and a community center in a new community called Barrio Juan Bautista Alberdi. From this emergency response grew a small community of faith and the eventual construction of a small chapel within the community center.

More than two decades later, this IELU church mission, now known as "the Maria Magdalena Mission," continues to work amid the realities of a community



Members of the Mission Maria Magdalena team:

(from left) Ignaki Unzaga, IELU vicar in Resistencia/Corrientes; Ofelia Molina and Fabian Roja, social workers; and Pastor Raul Gleim, IELU pastor in Resistencia and Corrientes.

living in poverty. Residents of the Barrio Juan Bautista Alberdi face the ongoing problems of community and family violence, sexual abuse of children, poor nutrition, alcoholism, unemployment and a poorly funded health,

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Northern Argentina con't...

education, and social infrastructure.

With the support of the LWF, the ELCA, and El Redentor, a IELU congregation in Buenos Aires, the Maria Magdalena team is focusing its energies in three primary areas: development of community leaders and participation; development of community knowledge and activism on health and environmental issues; and development of church mission. In the area of health, the Maria Magdalena Mission is following a model of community health education and mobilization developed by EPES (Popular Education in Health), a community health organization in Chile which will be featured in our next newsletter.

Please keep Mission Maria Magdalena in your prayers as they continue in 2006 along the long road of transforming lives and social systems.



(Above) At an event closing Mission Maria Magdalena 2005 activities, community members engaged in a dreaming session about the future of Barrio Juan Bautista Alberdi.

How To Become a Sponsor

If you are interested in becoming a sponsor of our mission work, please contact The Reverend David Lerseth, Director for Global Mission Support, ELCA Global Mission, Phone: (773) 380-2641, E-mail: dlerseth@elca.org.

On a Personal Note

We send our warmest wishes for the New Year. We hope everyone enjoyed a joyful and spirit-filled Christmas season! Our highlight for December was participating in a Christmas Workshop and Pageant at Santo Sacramento, a IELU congregation in Villa Ballester. Our family's first Christmas in Argentina found us sorely missing not only friends and family back home, but also the close connections that come from being part of a church community like we had in New York. Fortunately, the members at Santo Sacramento welcomed us with open arms to the extent that Kate ended up teaching a class of five to nine year olds during the week leading up to Christmas. David was welcomed into the church's kitchen and baked cookies which the kids then decorated for distribution at a local children's hospital.

January started with a bang as Kate traveled to Chile and David to Bolivia. Look for write-ups of these trips in future newsletters. We have so very much to look forward to and be thankful for as we head into the New Year! Thanks to all for your prayers and support.



Matthew, Emily and friend Agustina dressed as unlikely angels for the Christmas Pageant. Matthew was wearing halo number four in this shot after destroying three others.

Interested in learning more about Global Mission and the work of our companion churches in the region? Check out these websites to learn more.

ELCA Global Mission: www.elca.org/globalmission See the "Country Packets" under "Resources" for information about the Lutheran churches in each of the countries in our region.

Argentina: Iglesia Evangelica Luterana Unida (IELU) www.ielu.org. See also the IELU's companion synods in the U.S. Nebraska Synod-- www.nebraskasynod.org/ministries/argentinauruguay.html Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod-- www.nepsynod.org

Bolivia: Iglesia Evangelica Luterana Boliviana (IELB) See also the IELB's companion synod in the U.S. Montana Synod-- www.montanasynd.org

Chile: Iglesia Evangelica Luterana en Chile. www.ielchi.org See also the IELCH's companion synod in the U.S. Indiana- Kentucky Synod www.iksynod.org

Peru: Iglesia Luterana Evangelica Peruana (ILEP) www.ilep.org See also the ILEP's companion synods in the U.S. Texas, Louisiana, Gulf Coast Synod--www.gulfcoastsynod.org; La Crosse Area Synod-- www.lacrosseareasynd.org