

Ecuador Mission 2007

Cookeville and St. Michael's were well-represented on the medical mission to our sister diocese of Litoral, Ecuador. In all, 27 people from or associated with our diocese participated in the week of clinics. From St. Michael's, Betty Catlin, Jim Gatton, Chuck Womack, the Ensors (Dale, Ginger, and Melissa) and the Reddings (Helen, Kate, and Phillip) helped, along with the Wells family from Cookeville (Tom; his daughter, Sara; and son-in-law, Josh).

People flew into Guayaquil, Ecuador, on Friday and Saturday, July 6 and 7, and spent Saturday and Sunday shopping, sight-seeing, and preparing for the week's clinics. On Sunday, the nine of us from St. Michael's loaded into a van and were taken to Duran, site of our sister church. We headed over there around 4:30 p.m. in order to have time and plenty of daylight to visit the site of the new church construction. St. Michael's provided the funds to purchase the land for this church and has provided some money towards the construction. (Thanks to all for your contributions, mostly in the form of purchases at our Ecuador markets over the years.) There's only the outline of a building right now, and they're out of funds to do more at this time. They have been able to raise around \$2,500 to pay for permits, clearing of the land, inspections, etc.; for them to raise that much money is quite a feat. After looking at the construction site, we sat at the current church and visited and had meatloaf and bread that had been prepared for us. People started arriving for the service shortly after 7:00, even though the service didn't start until 7:30. Kate did a lovely job of reading one of the lessons in Spanish. After the service, it was meet and greet time and people came by and shook our hands and/or gave us hugs and kisses. Phillip was quite the attraction with his height and fair skin and eyes, so the females wanted their photos taken with him. We had taken some dress-up jewelry for children and some Russell Stover's chocolate, so passed those out, visited a bit more, and went back to the hotel. It was a good evening.

Clinics started on Monday (July 9) at Virgen Maria in Guayaquil. Things went smoothly, especially for a first day. People were very good about pitching in and doing whatever needed to be done, so the work went quickly. Chuck and Helen saw patients, Kate translated, Phillip took medical histories, Melissa worked in triage taking blood pressures and blood sugars, Jim entertained the children who came, Betty handed out reading glasses, Tom and Sara were our pharmacists, Josh was the gatekeeper/crowd control person, Ginger helped in the pharmacy, and Dale tried to make sure everyone had what they need and that things moved smoothly and worked in the eye clinic when he could. We saw 312 people in the medical clinics, over 100 received reading glasses, and we're not sure how many teeth were pulled. In addition, lots of people were given antiparasite medication and vitamins. It was a great start to the week.

On Tuesday, we had the 2- 2.5 hour drive to one of our favorite locations in the foothills of the Andes - lovely, but really poor and sparsely populated. We set up in a school with one large building/room and about 4 or 5 individual classrooms. The people are always so appreciative of our being there, but there weren't that many people who came; guess word hadn't circulated very far. We had 161 in the medical clinic, so it was a "light" day for us. The principal of a school further up in the mountains had ridden by horseback for 3 hours to come to the clinic and we gave her some vitamins, antiparasite medication, a box of 64 crayons, and whatever else we could pull together to take back to her school. The drive through the areas where they grow lots of rice and bananas is always a good experience - much different than the areas of the city we normally see. Wednesday was clinic day at Jesus Obrero, our sister church. The current location is too small to accommodate the clinic, so we divided people/tasks. The eye clinic and medical histories, antiparasite med station, and triage were held in the church, then the people walked several blocks to the home of Zirle's family to be seen by the medical personnel or to have teeth

extracted; the pharmacy was also housed there. Bob Elam, from Nashville, set up his portable dentist's chair in the small courtyard and pulled teeth outside. There weren't too many takers on his services this year, but some days he stayed fairly busy.

Zirle is a best friend and almost constant companion to Padre Jaime and Lilian. Her family owned a restaurant for many years and for the past several years, Zirle has been paid to provide lunches for the missionaries, Ecuadorean physicians, and translators. This year, we had tuna sandwiches two days, pizza one day, and, on the day we were at their home, we had the mission all-time favorite - lasagna! The lasagna they make has layers of chicken, tuna, and ham among the noodles and cheese. Along with these, we always had small bags of various chips (some familiar, some not), fresh pineapple (yum!!) and bananas, slices of cake, and soft drinks or water. Most of the days, the bananas were what we were told are called "oroitos" (spelling?), or "little gold." They are very small and have thin skins, but are incredibly sweet. Apparently, these only grow in the higher elevations, not along the coastal areas, and are not an exported crop. Generally, the clinic closes from noon - 1:00, so people eat as their area of responsibility clears from patients, then things gear up for the afternoon session.

Thursday we went to Iglesia de Jesus in Mapasingue, a part of Guayaquil - a very *poor* part of Guayaquil. The houses are built on the sides of the hills and are almost stacked on each other. We're always glad we're there during the dry season; with the steepness of those hills, we can't imagine being able to even get to the church in the bus with muddy conditions. This church has no bathroom, so arrangements had been made for us to use the bathroom of a family who lived close-by. When several of us went over after lunch, there was a wait for them to carry water to put into the tank of the commode so they could flush. (Think about that the next time you take flushing for granted!) We're always amazed and humbled by the graciousness and generosity of the people there who will open their homes - and their bathrooms - for us to use.

Almost every day, more people came to the clinic site than could be accommodated. Of course, only a small portion of the people who are seen actually attend the churches we visit, but it's good PR for the priests and the Episcopal Church to see as many people as we can in those communities. However, there *does* have to be a cut-off point, so we try to provide antiparasite medicine to those waiting in line and pass out packets of vitamins so lovingly packaged here at St. Michael's, if we see we will have enough. The people are generally content if they get at least something. Occasionally, things get a bit out of hand, but we've learned about avoiding crowd control issues over the years and it's not uncommon for some of the locals to straighten out unruly neighbors. Some of them are actually quite good at that!

On this Thursday, we had to shut down the clinics a little earlier than usual, but still saw 326 people that day, so we didn't think we'd slighted the people there. The reason for our early closing? We had been invited to attend a special service at Cristo Rey, the cathedral for the Diocese of Litoral, upon the occasion of the visit of our Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori. We returned to our hotel, cleaned up and changed clothes, then took our seats that had been reserved for us on the front rows of one side of the church. Presiding Bishop Schori impressed us immediately as she processed in, singing along with the Spanish song which she apparently knew. She delivered her sermon in Spanish, so we didn't know what it was about.....

Dear

Kate Redding, who had been translating for us so beautifully all week, was on "overload," and wasn't where she could translate as the sermon was given, did say that the P.B. made the point that females should be given equal opportunities to males in all aspects of life - education, health, etc. We're sure there was more, but nobody passed out an English translation; however, she *was* there to visit the Ecuadoreans, not the Tennessee contingency. After the service, we did have an opportunity to meet her and she told us that she appreciated what we were doing and that such efforts are important to her. In the courtyard, we were treated to a series of entertainment (a skit, singing, traditional dancing, etc.) and some food was brought around to the crowd gathered there. It was the Ecuadorean version of "putting on the dog."

Friday morning, some of the people took vitamins, antiparasite medicine, school supplies, etc. to one of the Episcopal church schools in Guayaquil. They were entertained by a younger version of one of the traditional dances and made to feel welcome.

Some people left Friday for other parts of Ecuador, some of us did one more trip to the artisan's market, and others wandered the part of the city near the hotel before packing and leaving on Saturday morning. It had been a long week, but a short one - lots done, but lots more that we'd like to have time to do. In the four days of clinics, we had seen 1,128 people through the medical clinics, given out over 400 pairs of reading glasses, and given antiparasite medicine and vitamins to over 400 additional people. Also, we left vitamins and Tylenol for the staff of the hotel, who go out of their way to make our stay comfortable and help us lug bags and supplies, hail taxis, open doors, set up breakfast early so we can leave for the airport - whatever they are able to do. Many times we are told by people that they appreciate what we do for their countrymen. As some have said, it's that we care enough to come and that they know people somewhere know about them and want to help that is the real gift of these missions. It certainly helps with perspective.....

Many thanks to all of you for your prayers, your kind words, your interest, your time in packing pills, your contributions of supplies and money - all those things without which these missions would not be possible.