



"Connecting and Advancing Leaders in Mission and Service...to Win the Lost for Christ"

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May 2009

Panama Lutherans Impact their World!

During a nine-day trip to Panama May 21-29, Pastor Steve Hughey, CALMS' executive director, saw evidence of significant growth in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Panama (IELPA). He was accompanied on the trip by his wife Grace; CALMS' board member, Bruce Collet; and Pastor Ricardo Sinisterra from Houston who is originally from Panama.



Bruce Collet, Grace Hughey, Steve Hughey and Ricardo Sinisterra ministered to Panama leaders during April survey trip.

Introduction

NOTE: Trip notes below in italics provided by CALMS' board member Bruce Collet.

CALMS invited a small number of people to make this trip in order to evaluate the church and to provide training where team members had expertise. Steve Hughey planned visits to each congregation for first hand observation and also provided time with the national church leaders for insight, encouragement and support.

Steve Hughey led the team as Executive Director of CALMS. His extensive background in mission work and as an LCMS mission executive gave the team sound leadership and history. He moderated all meetings and planned our schedule in conjunction with Milton Castillo.

Milton Castillo is the Panamanian Church president and resident of Panama. He dedicated himself to the team 24 hours a day, including sleeping on an air mattress in the Balboa church just like the rest of us. Milton speaks excellent English and has a great personality. He is intelligent, competent in every way and a very gifted leader.

Grace Hughey who has led small group ministry at St. John Ellisville for over 10 years has been a career missionary in Latin America and has tremendous skills in equipping effective small group leaders. Grace complements Steve's ministry in so many wonderful ways and provides insight and perspective that made us much more successful on this journey. Her presentation on cell groups to the assembled churches not only provided some new thinking among the churches, it also gave the team an incentive to start thinking about a more organically designed church rather than following the traditional top-down approach so common in mission field thinking.

Pastor Ricardo Sinisterra is a Panama pastor who was trained at the Lutheran seminary in Mexico and has lived in the U.S. as a naturalized citizen for over thirty years. He is now nearing retirement age and he and his wife Raquel are planning to return to Panama to live. Pastor Ricardo is interested in getting connected with the church of his youth – the Lutheran Church of Panama. When he attended El Redentor in Balboa the church was a chaplaincy for US military personnel serving in the Panama Canal Zone. He was confirmed in the church and moved to Mexico and then the US. So he is now coming full circle. God alone is responsible for allowing him to get in contact with me in advance of our trip and permitting everything to fall in line for him to make the trip with us. The very least of his contributions was to act as my translator. God has bigger plans though as Pastor Ricardo hopes to be a significant part of the Church of Panama in the future and to serve as requested.

Bruce Collet – As a board member I had the opportunity to return to Panama to offer an extra pair of eyes to complement Steve's for the board. I can't speak Spanish yet but I'm learning fast. I also taught Stewardship to the churches and I believe that was well received by the pastors and the laity.

Following are some examples of how God is working among our fellow Christians in Panama:



CALMS Sponsor-A-Child coordinator in Panama, Deaconess Renate Gibbs, leads a Bible class with children in the program from El Redentor Lutheran Church in Balboa, Panama.



Renate Gibbs reviews the Sponsor-A-Child program with the CALMS survey team.

Sponsor-A-Child Program – Under the guidance of the IELPA coordinator, Deaconess Renate Gibbs, children receiving scholarships through the CALMS' program are not only making better grades than ever before, but are learning to serve in their congregations and communities. Renate visits children in five different congregations each week to provide tutoring to children needing help, teach leadership principles, encourage parents, and work with local pastors and leaders to choose new students for the program. Renate works closely with CALMS to administer the program with the goal of helping these children to be leaders now and to prepare to lead the growing Lutheran church in Panama in the future. Currently she is also working with CALMS to develop a new program for qualifying Lutheran college students who will serve as tutors for the younger children in the Sponsor-A-Child program and receive scholarship assistance in exchange for their service.

Three New Sunday Schools Begun – Three IELPA congregations have begun new Sunday schools in recent months. These are being done in neighboring communities and are led by lay members of the congregations. Lutheran churches in Loma Cova, Los Andes and Rio Rita have begun recently reaching out to children with the Gospel and are already seeing results as more children come to the new classes.



Pastor Jose Angel reads God's Word during the CALMS' stewardship seminar led by Bruce Collet on April 25. The event served 35 Panama leaders.



Newly prepared pastor, Demetrio, from Loma Cova, Panama is already serving as a missionary to a nearby Kuna village, Los Nubes.

New Workers Prepared to Serve – Several new pastors have recently finished their training in Nicaragua and are already serving. Pastor Jose Angel is already serving in Rio Rita where he had previously been living and serving as a lay minister. The congregation is in the process of officially calling him as their pastor. Pastor Demetrio, who grew up in the congregation at Loma Cova is now serving as a new missionary pastor working under the guidance of Pastor Jorge Villamil and is focusing on helping that congregation plant a new church in the village of Los Nubes, which is a growing community made up of Kuna Indian people who have moved their from their native villages in order to be closer to Panama City. Four deaconess students have also finished their preparation and are serving in their congregations in various human care projects and in Christian education.

Conclusion

Note: Trip notes in italics provided by CALMS' board member Bruce Collet.

The Panama church has many challenges and many opportunities. We are fully aware that God is providing the leaders, the resources and His Holy Spirit to lead this church into the future. There are many opportunities for short term mission teams to come, but we want to make sure those teams serve in ways that make sense for the church. The churches will accept any help they can get, but CALMS needs to provide judicious care when designing mission service opportunities.



Pastor Miguel Torneire and wife Diane now live in St. Charles, Missouri.

Pastor Miguel Torneire begins full-time work with CALMS

After nine months of studying English and working part time with CALMS, Pastor Miguel Torneire has now begun working full-time with CALMS.

Originally from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Pastor Miguel studied at the Lutheran seminary in Brazil and in Buenos Aires, Argentina where he learned Spanish prior to moving to Guatemala to serve there from August, 2004 to August 2008.

While in Guatemala, he helped his congregation share the Gospel in the Zacapa area through various outreach programs. He also worked closely with CALMS to help develop a growing housing program in Guatemala and to build the capacity of his congregation to impact their community with the Gospel.

Pastor Miguel will be working with CALMS to strengthen existing congregations, assist national congregations to plant new churches, expand the Guatemala housing ministry and develop strategic short-term mission projects for future CALMS teams in that country.

Pray for Us...

Pray for Pastor Miguel Torneire as he begins his full-time involvement with CALMS and continues to reach out to lost people and to help the hurting in Central America.

Thank God for the opportunity for new deaconesses in Panama to be part of a continent-wide conference for Lutheran deaconesses in Argentina in early May. Ask him to use this event to strengthen the relationships among God's workers and to build their faith to serve Him in Panama and elsewhere.

Ask God to bless the upcoming CALMS' counseling training in Belize to be held in June to help equip over 40 Christian workers to provide better counseling to their members and those assigned by the courts.

Thank God for nine seminary students and their wives from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis who will be traveling with CALMS Executive Director, Rev. Steve Hughey to serve with Dr. Ely Orozco at the Holy Cross Clinic in Amatitlan, Guatemala later this month. Ask him to make the students a blessing and to help them be blessed as they work side-by-side with Guatemalan Lutherans to help the poor and share the Gospel.

Thank God for the successful trip to Guatemala in March by CALMS' board member David Reed, CALMS' Executive Director Rev. Steve Hughey and Miles Richmond, a Lutheran layman from Arkansas who served for 10 years as regional director of Habitat in Southern Africa to evaluate the CALMS housing ministry there.

Ask the Holy Spirit to give guidance to CALMS as we seek ways to expand the housing ministry in Guatemala in response to recent requests from partner congregations to build over 400 houses for needy families who desperately need adequate housing.

Pray for a team of students from the University of Florida, Gainesville, being led by Pastor Dan and Vicar Luke to Panama where they will be working with Pastor Jose Angel and his congregation in Rio Rita during the first week of May. Ask the Lord to protect the students and help them grow in their understanding of the Panamanian culture as they work side-by-side with their Panamanian hosts to expand a new Sunday school outreach in a nearby village, repair a home of a widow in Rio Rita, and study God's Word together.

Ask God to bless the efforts of Pastor Demetrio as he works with fellow Lutherans to plant a new church in the community of Los Nubes, a Kuna Indian village. Ask the Lord to continue to bless the new Sunday school that Pastor Demetrio and volunteers from Loma Cova are leading each week.

Thank God for the music training ministry in Panama of long-term missionary volunteer, Jack Johnson, designed to prepare future music leaders for Panama. Ask him to also bless the efforts of Crystal and James Neuendorf, long-term missionaries to Panama responsible for ESL training and communications.



Long- term LCMS Missionary Volunteers, Jack Johnson, Crystal and James Neuendorf are serving for two years in Panama to help equip Panama church leaders.
