

Siripaca Greenhouses, Mandatory Meeting

15 March 2013

Early this week Jeff went to La Paz to meet Pastor Orlando Moller, a citizen of the U.S. and Bolivia, who's here to lead a three-day seminary course for Titicaca-area pastors and church leaders.

While Jeff was away I attended an emergency meeting that ran two hours longer than expected. So Pastor Juan Paz, Fausto, who's a leader in one of the church plants out on the peninsula, and Pastor Dionisio, newly assigned here to help Pastor Juan, and I were late getting out to visit four rural sites – two schools seeking mission funds to help re-roof an existing greenhouse and build a new one, and two existing greenhouses to ensure there's reinvestment and proper use of profits. Heavy morning rains had flooded some mountain roads, so it was hard to find a taxi driver willing to take us.



We arrived at the first site, the village of Siripaca, three hours late. The rains had made some of the mountain paths impassable for some of the school board members. But nine of them greeted us warmly and enthusiastically.



At meetings such as this, “important” people make at least one speech. Mine was embarrassingly short, but delivered partly in Aymara. The school director, speaking in Spanish, said that although the village is geographically hard to reach, it's not isolated. No one is isolated. He said “We are all *pasajeros* (travelers) in life. God wants us to help each other and live in harmony.”

He said that in a project like the proposed greenhouse, in which students, teachers and parents will work together to build, plant, raise, harvest and sell produce to meet school and students' needs, the students will learn about generosity as well as work and responsibility.

Pastor Juan took the floor. He noted that the Bible tells us how to help each other, focusing on health, food, shelter and education. Then he shifted gears. He cited the mostly mission-funded greenhouse built last year for Cusijata school. School and community leaders there were slow to plant, so the mission is reluctant to respond to the community's more recent requests for mission help. "This sort of thing can happen," he said.

"So," Pastor Juan continued, "if the mission helps fund a re-roofing project and construction of a new greenhouse, Siripaca can expect follow-up visits to ensure they are investing time and effort to make the project profitable. "You will have to earn our trust," he said, and reminded them that many other projects also need money. "If you manage your green houses poorly, it is a bad thing. If you take care of them and work to make them successful, it is good. And then there is a possibility that the mission will provide school supplies for the students and teachers."



Man, he was on a roll, teaching and motivating them. (Since January the mission has paid Pastor Juan Paz a small monthly stipend to do exactly this, and advise us.) He moved on to planning and sustainability! I was so very proud of him -- and grateful, because these are critical elements, but quite unfamiliar to local folks, especially out in the *campo* (rural areas).

Photos show Pastor Juan discussing the concept of sustainability to the school board while board members look at photos of the operating mission-sponsored greenhouse in Sicuani.





Pastor Juan asked me to draw a simple pie chart divided into thirds. About a third of the produce should be consumed by local folks as compensation for their work, he said, and the rest should be sold. Half of the proceeds should be used for school and students' needs, and the other half should be reserved to maintain the greenhouses – to buy more seeds, fertilizer, and eventually new roofs (the

intense sun at 13,400 feet above sea level destroys the heavy plastic in four or five years). He laughed a gentle scold and reminded them that if they had they *planned and budgeted* to replace their existing greenhouse's roof (*above*), they wouldn't need the mission's help now ... "So," he said, "you see how important it is to plan and to budget."

He concluded by telling board members that God and the mission will help the community. But the community also must help itself. Bravo, Pastor Juan!!!



We checked out the existing greenhouse, attached to a school of 111 students. Next, we walked a mile or so downhill, almost to lake level, to the site for the new greenhouse. On the way, we passed 500-year-old pine and eucalyptus trees, likely planted by Spanish colonists. In a cycle-of-life moment, I was touched to see cows and alpaca grazing in the local cemetery (*Below left*).



Conversation is an important tradition here, and Pastor Juan is good at it, and strategic. By spending a lot of time talking indoors with the school board, and again at each of the sites, he showed them that the mission is interested and wants to hear their ideas and concerns. He was also sizing them up to see if the community seemed likely to deliver, willing to invest time and sustained effort. We spent another half hour back at the first site talking with teachers and sharing 2 liter bottles of Quina Cola.



Alas, after all those conversations, it was after 4 p.m. We were supposed to have visited an existing green house up the mountain at Santa Ana, where our taxi driver had pledged to meet us at 3 p.m. – and it's more than an hour-long hike from Siripaca to Santa Ana.



On the hike up to Santa Ana we rested a couple times, one of which involved a 20-minute chat with a local woman. We reached Santa Ana school after 5, to find no one there, and the taxi gone. Worse yet, Pastor Juan couldn't reach the driver by cell phone. We were planning to hike over the mountain behind the school, the shortest route to a small town where we *might* find a taxi to get us back to Copa, probably well after dark, and too late to visit the other two sites. But in yet another 20-minute chat with a man who was helping mix concrete by hand for a new bridge, Pastor Juan explained our predicament. The man called a driver he knows. We were picked up in 20 minutes, and back in Copa before sunset – a relief to me, because I wasn't dressed for after-dark, mountain cold.



Mandatory Public Meeting

Early last week the Copacabana Municipality announced a mandatory public meeting. At least one adult from every household had to attend, or pay a fine. (*At right is our attendance card*) The advance radio announcements said the meeting would start at 2 p.m. in a pavilion at Plaza Sucre.

Jeff and I were there at 2, and saw a few people duck in and back out again. Clearly the time or the location had been changed. Pastor Juan called Jeff's cell and told us the meeting would start at 3 in a big courtyard behind the cathedral. We walked over and met him there, amid a crowd of about 800 residents, mostly women. For about 40 minutes we all watched water commission members fumble with microphones and speakers. Finally, the meeting got started.



The president and a commissioner sketched out the problem: Copa's growing population and the constant flow of tourists have run the village wells nearly dry. The commission was seeking public input on whether to build a new system to pump in and filter water from Lake Titicaca, thereby ending the water shortages that regularly plague the town – some neighborhoods have no water supply for months at a time.

The president interrupted the meeting to announce it would be immediately relocated to an arena down the street.

In this part of Bolivia there's a weird tradition among crowds of people walking: they make a strange, playful sport of jamming themselves together and pushing hard against people in front of them. All 800 of us shoved and squished



ourselves through a narrow doorway, laughing (except for me, because I dislike this game).

The crowd was so dense there was no avoiding a repeat of the same process going into the arena. There we waited another 30 minutes or so while engineers from La Paz set up a PowerPoint presentation, totally obliterated by the late afternoon sun blazing through the upper-deck windows. Meanwhile, another 200 people trickled in and sat on the floor, because the bleachers were full to capacity.



The meeting resumed with an illegible “display” of water and population statistics, followed by some questions and answers ... and an announcement that the meeting would relocate to the courtyard we’d left about an hour before. Yes, of course: we did the moving-mob, body-crush game again.



More Q&A followed. In Bolivian culture, this part of a meeting involves the president or meeting leader inviting people to speak by saying “*Tienen la palabra,*” or “You have the word.” To indicate a desire to speak, an attendee asks, “*¿La palabra, por favor?*”



I asked for *la palabra*, and said (in Spanish) that “the tourists who throng through Copa use a lot more water than we residents do, and have more money than we do. So why doesn’t the municipality charge a tourist tax at the high-end hotels to help the town pay for this \$200,000 project?” Our fellow Copacabaniños applauded the fairness of the concept. But generally they accept that the annual household water fee of 27 Bolivianos, just less than \$4 U.S. dollars, will have to climb to 30 to 32 Bolivianos.

Roundup of Mission Projects

Again and again and again we thank you for the many ways you support our work, with emails, Facebook exchanges, prayers, encouragement, and of course, financial donations that make it all possible.

Here's a quick project summary:

- Teach the Teachers – Regional English language program (to start in April when Katie Yaun arrives)
- English as a Second Language Manual for Spanish Speakers (in production)
- Green House Construction – (4 functioning, 4 more requested)
- Family-based Quinoa Production Project (now in planning phase)
- Church Construction (two underway)
- Chicken and Cuy (guinea pig) and possibly trucha (trout) Cooperatives (regional or family-based)
- Nutrition training (regional and occasional, usually led by visiting mission teams)
- Pastoral training (regional, usually 2 or 3 annually)
- Dental hygiene training (regional and occasional, usually led by visiting mission teams)
- School materials distribution (regional and occasional, usually by visiting mission teams)
- Potato Harvester (now rusting in the jungle where there are no potatoes; if we can get to the jungle and transport it back to Copa, we would rent it out as an income source for the church's sub-district)



We welcome and need your support to keep all these good, and mostly self-sustaining projects going. If you're willing and able to help, please make a donation at <http://www.umcmision.org/Give-to-Mission/Search-for-Projects/Projects/3021288>

We and the people we work with and for thank you!

Deb and Jeff

P.S: Please email or send a Facebook message. We miss you and would love to hear from you!

Friend us on Facebook at Mision Fronteras.