

Construyendo Nueva Esperanza

Building New Hope

08.07.13

Claire Ault, Jeff and I spent Sunday June 30 helping a team of nearly 60 indigenous volunteers build a new *Iglesia Nueva Esperanza* (New Hope Church).

Note the saw hanging on the cross-like scaffolding in the photo at the right.



Located in the Huacuyo Valley, the church is about a half-hour, dusty, bumpy ride from Copa. The mixed crew of volunteers included little kids, a bevy of teenagers, the lay pastor and his wife who are in their late seventies, and a Catholic family with Methodist relatives. Valley residents are enthused about the new church and more than willing to help build it.





In return for a full day of hard work the church served a colossal lunch of chicken, rice, potatoes, and a heap of chuño, small potatoes that turn black during a three-day process of overnight freezing and day-time drying. *(on the ground and a close-up in photo below)*



It was an upbeat day of cheerful camaraderie. During a break a young Aymara woman chatted with her husband, who was perched in a window opening. As she headed back to haul sand bags, she playfully smacked his butt and jogged away laughing.

By mid afternoon most of the kids splintered off to play soccer or chase baby lambs in the hope of cuddling with one of them.



While the men mixed cement, most of the women – and Jeff -- dug sand from the nearby river, sifted it, and hauled it back in bags and *aguallos* (“ah GWIY ohz,” colorful blankets used to tote everything from produce, to bricks, to babies).



A 13-member team from Grace United Methodist Church, North Augusta, South Carolina, will work with us and our Aymara neighbors in the third week of July. Thanks to GUMC’s generous \$4,000 gift and their hands-on help, *Nueva Esperanza* will have a new roof, four dormitories, a kitchen, and a 400-meter water line tying the church to a mountainside springhead. Money goes a long way here! The SC mission team will be working with local folks on all aspects of these projects, and will also teach several Bible study classes for local kids.

We and our local friends can’t wait to welcome them!



Looking Towards the Future

During a break, Pastor Juan Paz (who’s like a district superintendent and works part-time for the mission teaching sustainability, planning and budgeting) pulled us aside. He reminded us that the two Methodist churches in Huacuyo own quite a lot of land ideally suited for growing quinoa and cattle. With the new dormitories at *Nueva Esperanza* we could provide seasonal agricultural training. That would improve quality of life for individual families and the region, and would also enhance the churches’ income, enabling them to provide more human services for more people.



Four Latrines



Spending an entire day in Huacuyo reminded us and church leaders that neither of the churches there have bathrooms or latrines. People relieve themselves on the banks of the valley's central river, the local water supply. The photos at left and below show women retrieving water for use in cooking and construction from the river that is also used as a baño. Similarly the church at Chani has no latrine. People shimmy down a creek side for relief. And, though the Manco Kapac church has a slime-floored, crumbling, outhouse, it is past due for replacement. Jeff and I would like the mission to help fund construction of a latrine at each of these locations. We've yet to carefully project costs, but we figure that together they will run \$4,000 to \$5,000.



It's not a particularly glamorous project. But these latrines are important for human health and the health of animals that feed humans. If you or your church or other service-minded organization are interested in helping fund this budding initiative, please let us know!



Update on English Classes

We're poised to launch the Teach the Teachers ESL program as soon as we get the go-ahead from the superintendent of education, who's preoccupied with a nationwide teachers' pension crisis. Meanwhile, Katie Yaun has been teaching enthusiastic groups of school kids and adults. Most of the kids are so eager they show up 20 or 30 minutes early for class and stay afterwards to play ESL games and puzzles. When they see any of us in town, they often literally jump on us and wrap us up in affectionate hugs. Likewise, adult students greet us warmly and often walk arm-in-arm with us and like to linger after class to ask questions.



To be able to work in Bolivia for eight months Katie has needed to jump through quite a lot of bureaucratic hoops, including three trips to La Paz, and two trips to Puno, Peru, to get a crucial document from the Bolivian Consulate there. On all these trips Jeff accompanied her. While he and Katie were crossing into Peru, the chief of the Bolivian Border Police struck up a conversation with Jeff -- the border police now recognize us and are interested in the mission's work. Among the mission's projects, Jeff mentioned English classes.

Chief Lorenzo was mighty interested! He took Jeff's cell number, and he and his men bought several ESL guides I wrote and recently published to help Spanish speakers learn basic English. The upshot: I'm now teaching English to Bolivian border police!



Creating lesson plans, traveling to and from the border, and teaching are all time consuming. But I agreed to because the officers explicitly said they need English so they can help non-Spanish speakers suffering from altitude sickness, missing documents or stamps, or outraged that their worn bills are worthless in Bolivia. In class, from the edges of their seats, the officers call out urgently and passionately the verbs and phrases they need so they can help. It's reaffirmed my faith that most people are good and well intentioned.

Festival of the Coronation of the Virgin

Throughout Bolivia, and especially in Copacabana, the July 6 celebration of the Festival of the Coronation of the Virgin was ramped up dramatically. Residents and thousands of visitors converged on Copa to seek the Virgin's blessing, comfort, and forgiveness, and to pray for a turn in our recent run of bad luck, fear, and grief.

You may recall from recent newsletters that Copa was blockaded for three weeks in late March and early April; for two of those days the village was under siege by people from other villages who hurled lighted dynamite toward Copa. Peninsula residents have been heatedly fighting over the location of a bridge that will more efficiently link this area to the rest of the country. In the third week of April, the statue of Copa's treasured patron saint, the Virgin enshrined in the town's cathedral, was



robbed of millions of dollars worth of gold, silver and precious gems. On June 23 during the Feast of San Juan Bautista, a driver trying to avoid running into a crowd of street dancers crashed into a gas tanker truck, igniting and exploding it and many nearby cars. Dozens of people were burned and 15 died, burned beyond recognition.

So for this year's Coronation Festival, the town's ten *zona* presidents organized a mandatory-participation march and a sacrifice of fruit or bread from every family. We were told to meet with our neighbors at 6:30 a.m. on the La Paz road. Knowing that events always start later than scheduled, we showed up at 7:15. Dark clouds thundered in from the Peru border to the west, while woolly gray clouds crawled over mountaintops to the east.

The first of our neighbors joined us at about 8 a.m. and worried with us about the threatening storm. Our *zona* president showed up a few minutes before 9 a.m. with flowers, vases and a table. Like all the other zones, we and our neighbors decorated the table in the middle of the road which was still open to traffic. Our neighbors carefully laid out flowers and petals to create designs and spell out our zone's name, *Munaypata*.



Soon a red Toyota truck carrying a replica of the Dark Virgin of the Lake headed uphill, away from town to the procession's starting point. (The 430 year-old original statue is never taken from the Cathedral.) In the few minutes it took for the statue to be mounted on her ornately carved litter and hoisted onto the shoulders of four community leaders, the storm clouds lightened and rose into brilliant, billowy, fair-weather clouds!



The procession finally started at 9:30 with the Toyota broadcasting songs and prayers from two jumbo-sized speakers. Next came two Aymara *yatiris* (“yah TEER ees,” priests) carrying bowls of sweetly aromatic burning *palo santo* (holy stick). Behind them came the virgin and her litter, followed by a white-robed cardinal and several bishops swaying along with Franciscan priests and brothers.

Every 100 yards or so the procession stopped at a gathering site; there was one for each *zona*, and others for groups such as the bus and taxi drivers’ syndicates and the associations of ice cream and *salchipapa* (hot dog and French fries) vendors.



At each stop the *yatiris* and Catholic leaders blessed the people and led prayers. All the while fireworks exploded, and bystanders and marchers showered the statue with confetti and flower petals. Each time the procession advanced, another 25 to 200 people joined it. If a brass band walking with us wasn’t playing dirges, we all sang songs of adoration.

The procession threaded its way through packed streets to the Cathedral where it was joined by a bishop from La Paz and more than 400 Cathedral San Francisco congregants. High Mass was broadcast from loud speakers in the bell tower. Afterward, with the cathedral bells peeling continuously,

the procession circuited the main plaza and processed up and down Copa’s two thoroughfares, both painstakingly adorned curb to curb with flower-petal designs.



After siesta, festivities resumed with marching bands and traditional dancers in elaborate costumes. Women dancers typically wear hand-made *polleras* (“poy AIR ahs,” wide, horizontally pleated skirts, often decoratively stitched) over at least four – and up to 12! – full, colorful, petticoats.

All around the plaza people had previously dug up granite pavers to set posts on which to hang *aguallo* banners decorated with flowers, teddy bears, dolls, wigs and masks, and antique silver plates and flatware across the parade route. We asked several friends why they use only those things. The unanimous answer: “Because we like them. They’re good decorations for a celebration.” One friend elaborated: “In the past we used antique *aguallos* sometimes decorated with gold. But those are too expensive now, so we use new *aguallos* and silver. Bolivia has a lot of silver.”

As temps dropped with the sun, the dancing and music wound to an end. People gathered around huge baskets and *aquallos* filled with their zona’s fruit offerings. At a signal, everyone dove to grab fruits to take home to their families

Above & below: Our neighbors with the zona’s banderas.





Banderas of Salchipapa and Ice Cream Vendors



The Virgin exiting the Cathedral after coronation ceremony



At right: Our zona president being interviewed by a TV reporter



We're glad that the Coronation celebrations boosted tourist traffic, and Copa's mood. Even so, please say a prayer for Copa and her people.

And please keep us and the mission in your prayers, too.

Deb and Jeff

On A Mission:
One of the younger volunteers at the Huacuyo building site

