

Foundation Bellevue

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New Year's seems like the most celebrated holiday in Ecuador, bigger than Independence Day and even the Christmas Weekend. During the afternoon, the celebration fires up with dragging the "Old Man" down into the streets. The old man is a scarecrow stuffed with woodchips and pyrotechnics dressed in men's clothing. The grieving widows come out to mourn the old man as afternoon turns toward evening. The streets continue to pack with mourners and onlookers. We would compare it to Mardi Gras but with a twist the mourning widows are actually young men dress as women of ill repute grieving their departed husband. The mourning widows block the streets throughout the cities but will allow passage through the streets for a small fee of candy or pocket change. The mourning turns into dancing around the old man until midnight. The onlookers gather close to the mourning widows and their old man then light him on fire. The old man erupts in fire and fireworks as they all put an end to the old year and start anew. As we look at this celebration of newness, we realize it is not so far off from our purpose down in Ecuador to help people know that Jesus offers this incredible gift of newness, only not just once a year, but every hour of every day. There is no need to carry around our burdens of life and pretend they disappear with the burning of the old man. He renews us constantly and in turn, we walk as a Holy Priesthood not mourning widows. Now that is a good way to bring in the New Year.

Over the past year, the outreach efforts of the church and camp took incredible strides. God continued to bless it despite our shortcomings and failures. The church continues to grow and mature as many have come to know Christ and grow in Him. Undoubtedly, this has been the most exciting aspect of the work to witness and take part in. Witnessing the joy and peace that comes when the lost find Jesus and walk with Him encourages us to reach out and share our own testimony. We have seen families like Marcelo and Marlene step into their faith through baptism together, live out such a change in their lives that they cannot help but share what they have encountered with their family, friends, and coworkers. They become compassionate with others suffering and struggling in life without knowing Christ and the help of the Spirit and take it upon themselves to provide that glimpse of Christ even in their poverty. Other new brothers and sisters dig deeper into how to live out life through Christ in real life through the efforts of small groups. These small groups offer them an opportunity to bring friends and family searching for truth. Over the year, we have continually crammed houses full of people looking to draw closer spiritually through the kindness of several families wishing to have the word spoken and shared in their home.

Through these and other outreach efforts by the families of the church, we have grown together in Christ and in relationship with one another far more than we could ever have imagined.

In our children and youth outreach this year, we changed up our educational strategies to supplement the deficits of the impoverished education system. Our overarching focus of this outreach is to provide the children and youth in the community an opportunity to share Christ and assist with homework in a safe environment. However, we began to concentrate in two additional areas this past year due to supplement observed deficits. We began implementing a time for English and creative thinking games. Through the interactive English course, the children and youth in the community are actually speaking phrases and responding in English through songs and organized activities. As the success in English has taken off, the independent and creative thinking process of these children has grown as well. These changes have not just aided the education of these children and youth but also allowed us opportunities to share Christ with them and their families.

As we push into the New Year, we will kick into gear another outreach effort by opening up the health clinic to minister to the sick and suffering in this impoverished community. This effort has been building up to this point over the last few years. While we opened our doors those with health problems last year for medical missions from the US, we start up this year providing medical assistance on a more continual basis. We intend to show and share the healing power of Christ in the new outreach.

Our family continues to be well. As Kaleb grows, he is becoming our personal Dennis the Menace. What more could a parent ask for? Kaidan surprises us daily with her humor and wit. Right now, she is learning to read and write, which is exciting for all of us. We are reminded each day of how blessed we are to have such wonderful children. Our prayer this year is for God to continue using our lives to glorify His name through His wisdom and strength upon us. We also pray each of you walk with Him through a wonderful year.

In Him,

The Reeger Family