

Kidnapping convinces missionary to invest life in what is most important; Grace Morillo serves students, faculty in Colombian student ministry

By Kenneth D. MacHarg
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Miami, FL (LAMNS)—Missionary Grace Morillo is rather unassuming about her life. “I live a pretty normal life,” she says. “My parents are happily married, an oddity these days, I love to cook and I have been kidnapped.”

Perhaps her low-key approach is typical of someone who has lived all of her life in Colombia where kidnapping, unfortunately, has become an every-day experience.

Grace, who is the granddaughter of U.S. missionaries in Colombia and serves with the Latin America Mission, was held for two months by insurgents of Colombia’s National Liberation Army (ELN), a Maoist group which is the smaller of the country’s two guerrilla armies. She was taken hostage along with 45 other passengers when the airplane in which she was traveling was taken over by commandos in April, 1999. She was held for 68 days.

That experience convinced Grace that God had something in mind for her. “I came closer to Colombia’s difficult reality when I was kidnapped,” she reflects. “The final result of this experience is that I decided to invest my life in what matters the most to me, and that is the Gospel.”

Grace has lived all of her life in Colombia. She is the granddaughter of Cathryn Morgan, a pioneer missionary whose husband was martyred in the early 40’s. “I have always been very interested in environmental issues,” she says, explaining her undergraduate studies in biology. “When I was at the Universidad de los Andes, I came in contact with students who were part of the Unidad Cristiana Universitaria (UCU), and was impressed by their testimony of love for others and for the Word.” (UCU is a student Christian group).

“Somehow I never thought of being a missionary,” Grace confesses. “I always thought that was for others who were more gifted. But through my hands-on experience with student ministry, I have understood that God’s calling can also be what I most like to do and what He has put as a burden on my heart.”

As part of her student ministry in Bogotá, grace spends her days talking with students, attending meetings related to peace issues, gender issues, Bible studies and prayer groups. She also writes



for the UCU bulletin, presents studies to various groups and meets with UCU organizations in eight other Colombian cities.

“The Lord works in the missionary as well as around him or her,” Grace says reflecting on her missionary service. “I really liked the book “These Strange Ashes,” by Elisabeth Elliot. In it she describes her first two years of missionary work and how they were a failure in terms of achievement of outside goals, but how God use it to show her His sovereignty in doing mission and that in His mercy, He uses broken vessels such as you and me.”

Grace says that her captivity at the hands of guerrillas was frightening, but that she learned from the experience. “I learned what it is like to walk as He (Jesus) walked. Because others’ suffering has touched me, I can now participate in life in a new way. This has helped me to grow in sensitivity to racial and cultural issues.” She says that as a result of coming face-to-face with the violence that wracks her country she is now more interested in the nation’s peace movement.

“I also witnessed unity in the Body,” she adds. “I was in a group with a nun and a non-ordained Jesuit priest. We prayed the Lord’s Prayer together. I remember one of the most precious moments was when we passed the peace of God to one another through handshakes. We also did this with the guerrillas. That moment was a gift from God.”

During her captivity she says that she did not directly witness, “but I didn’t hide the fact that I was an Evangelical either. Two of my captors said they were ‘ex-Evangelicals.’ The direct presence of the Holy Spirit was the most powerful witness though. His grace in my life spread His scent. Sadly, I didn’t have my Bible because we were only given what was in our hand luggage.”

Through her work with students, Grace says she is “trying to invite others and myself to integrate our faith in what we study in order to serve others better.”

The Latin America Mission works in partnership with churches and Christian agencies throughout Latin America and supports missionaries and projects in many Latin countries as well as in Spain. LAM is seeking to place new missionaries throughout the region. The U.S. headquarters can be reached at Latin America Mission, Box 52-7900, Miami, FL 33152, by e-mail at info@lam.org, or by calling 1-800-275-8410. The mission’s web site may be found at <http://www.lam.org>. LAM’s Canadian office is at 3075 Ridgeway Drive, Unit 14, Mississauga, ON L5L 5M6.

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