

**A great life experience;
Serving needy children through homes and centers in Costa Rica**

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San Jose, Costa Rica (LAMNS)—Missionary Margaret Weir's pocket Bible has to be one of the most worn out, dog-eared copy of the scriptures in all of Central America.

It's no wonder. This veteran missionary who has served the children of Costa Rica for 31 years pulls it out perhaps a dozen times a day as she visits troubled families, counsels with coworkers and shares with others she encounters.

Margaret is the Director of Christian Education for Roblealto Child Care Association, a Christian children's agency that operates three day care centers in San Jose and the residential Bible Home in the mountains overlooking the city.



“The Bible Home began 70 years ago as an orphanage,” Margaret reports as she maneuvers her car along the edge of a shantytown near the capital. “The day care centers began 35 years ago when the Bible Home people saw a need to help working mothers in the city.”

“Most of the clients of the day care centers are single mothers,” she says. “All of them are low income and they have to prove their need.”

With over 100 children at the 15 de Setiembre Day Care Center, workers are kept busy watching them and helping them to grow. “The kids all need attention,” explains teacher Patricia Marchena. “We have Christian Bible classes every day to help them grow spiritually.”

Those at the day care centers come from troubled situations. “We see a lot of abuse, unemployment, drugs and alcohol in these families,” says social worker Roxana Perez. “The majority of the mothers are single with psychological and emotional problems. Through counseling, we try to lead them to Christ.”

Most of the children in the Bible Home come from dysfunctional, often one-parent homes that can't handle them. “The majority of the children at the home are boys that single mother's just can't handle,” Margaret explains. “They skip school and the mothers come looking for help.”

Currently the Home houses 80 children from 53 families, many of them described by Margaret as “difficult cases.”

When Margaret applied for missionary service 31 years ago, executives with the Latin America Mission weren’t sure how she would do. “They suggested that maybe I was too old to learn the language at 30,” she says. “I had worked with children at the First Baptist Church in Collinsville, Illinois, for years and felt that the Lord was calling me to serve overseas.”

Officials relented, however, and Margaret set sail for Costa Rica. “I was scared and shed a lot of tears,” she remembers. “I had a strong conviction in my heart to help.”

Now, three decades later the veteran missionary says that she does not regret one minute of her service. “I would have missed out on a great life experience of living and working here,” she says. “I have seen God sustain the centers and me and show His love for the children.”

“I have known God better through working here,” she reflects.



Margaret has seen the needs of Costa Rica’s children change during her more than three decades of missionary service. “At first, a lot of the children in the Home were orphans, now they are from troubled families.”

Yet, Margaret sees results flowing from her ministry.

She tells the story of a mother who, 25 years ago, was mistreated by her husband and separated from him. She put her son into a Roblealto childcare center. Later she became a Christian and the Lord has changed her situation one hundred percent. “Her boss helped her out with the down payment on a house.

Meanwhile, The Nazareth Bible Church helped to send her son to the Roblealto camp for many years. “He became a strong youth leader,” Margaret remembers. “Today he is married and studying in a seminary in Canada and is the sponsor of a youth group.”

“In 31 years, the Lord has permitted me to see the fruits of my work here,” she says.

The Roblealto Child Care Association (Roblealto means Tall Oak in Spanish) continues to serve children from throughout Costa Rica as well as a growing number of children from immigrant Nicaraguan families. But such services are costly. “We have set up a program through which people can help sponsor a child for only \$30 a month,” Margaret

says. "They will receive a photo and regular letters from their child. Plus, they can send gifts for birthdays and Christmas."

Sponsorships from outside of Costa Rica are channeled through the Latin America Mission in Miami.

After 31 years of service, Margaret seems to never tire of helping children and their families. Visiting a mother in her small home in a San Jose neighborhood, she puts her arm around an 11-year-old boy as he tearfully tells her about his problems with the other children at the Bible Home. Margaret assures him that she will talk to the housemother about his situation.

As he dries his tears, she pulls out her worn pocket Bible. It appears to open to exactly the page she wants without any search. Handing it to the mother, Margaret encourages her to read a few verses. "How does that apply to you?" she queries. The mother responds and Margaret smiles. "Now, let's pray for you and your son," she says as all join in a few moments of prayer.

Thirty-one years of fruit are evident in the eyes of this veteran missionary who has experienced "a great life experience of living and serving the Lord."

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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