

“I came to give;”

Louisville church ministers in Paraguay

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Asunción, Paraguay (LAMNS)—Going on a mission trip to Paraguay was supposed to be a service opportunity for a group of Louisville-area church members. Instead, it turned into an experience of being served.

“I came to give,” explained the Rev. Jeff Seims, pastor of Bethel-Saint Paul United Church of Christ in St. Matthews. “But, I have received much more.”

Siems led a work-team of eight church members on the week-long trip in early August. They worked at a Methodist school in a low-income neighborhood of Asunción. The group painted school rooms, did electrical work and helped teachers with lesson plans.



The school currently serves children through the second grade, but will be adding at least one new grade each year as the building is expanded and completed.

“When it's finished, it will become an elementary and high school, and we are already talking about providing adult education programs in the evening,” said Sue Givens of Canton, Ohio, a missionary with the Miami-based Latin America Mission who serves as the school’s director.

The new facility will fill a desperate need in Lambaré, a poor neighborhood on the southeast side of Asunción where construction of the school building is nearing completion. “In our survey, we found that over 5,000 children here are not able to go to school because there isn't sufficient room for them,” Givens said. “Many classrooms have over 75 children in them.”

Lambaré is a poor community, Givens said. “Not everybody has electricity or running water in their homes. Some streets are dirt gullies, some are cobblestone,” she explained. “Many homes look nice on the outside, but, when you enter, they have a dirt floor and many do not have adequate windows to protect from heat and cold. Extended families live in a home with maybe three or four families living together.”

While the building construction is underway, the New Horizons School is already providing an education to 323 children in preschool, kindergarten, first and second grades and adult computer and literacy classes. “We have two sessions running in the morning

and the afternoon," Givens said.

"Classes started in February, 2001," said Mark Waltz of Maryville, Tennessee, who has worked in Paraguay through The Mission Society for United Methodists for the past eight years. "I felt the Lord impressing on me the need for a Christian school here, a quality Christian school."

"It was good to work here, knowing that I was able to do something that they needed," said Greg Wheeler of Louisville who is a professional electrician. Wheeler installed a number of lighting fixtures in the school's science lab and connected up other electrical services throughout the new school building.

"I was a little hesitant to go at first because I felt that I needed to feel called to go," Wheeler explained. "But little signs appeared that this was where I needed to be."

Participating in a mission trip often changes the lives of those who go.



"I appreciate more the things that I have," said Mary Ellen Hornung who lives near Middletown. "I will be trying to raise my kids differently as far as what is really important in life." Hornung has gone on three previous mission trips, two to Ecuador and one to Nicaragua.

"We were able to witness a different culture and way of living," said Erin Pille who

lives in the Highlands. "I feel that I am refreshed as a teacher and am ready to start my job again." Pille taught classes and helped to prepare lesson plans for teachers in the school.

Reflecting on the modern school building that is being built for the community, Jennifer Wheeler said that she was impressed by how much the missionaries have done with so few resources. "I have learned that in our church we don't need the stained glass windows or the sanctuary. What is important is what is in my heart."

"From now on I will be a little less patient in meetings about trivial things," she said.

Nathan Pfahler of Louisville agreed. "I will start taking the small things in life a little less seriously and I will be more willing to get myself out there a bit," he said.

Most of the group said that they are willing to serve on another mission trip. “If the opportunity was presented later, I would like to do it again,” said Carolyn Ball, a retired teacher from Fern Creek. “Hopefully we have touched somebody.”

Wheeler said that he would consider participating in a short-term mission trip in the future. “There are needs for this kind of service outside of the U.S.,” he said.

“It was a real blessing for us to have the group here,” Givens affirmed. “They helped to rejuvenate us.”

Givens said that work groups help the missionaries to accomplish tasks they just don’t have time to do. “Plus, they learn more about other cultures and they are able to share with others what God is doing. It multiplies,” she explained.

Givens and her colleagues are planning to construct other schools in Paraguay and are looking for more missionaries, both short and long term, to help build and teach. 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.

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