

Tennessee church supports mission school-building effort in Paraguay

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

Paraguay may be several thousand miles away from Blount County, but there is a direct connection between several local churches and some missionaries in that poor South American country.

Just ask Mable Love Brown of Maryville. Every Tuesday she joins with a group of volunteers at Fairview United Methodist Church to operate the church's Samaritans Hands Paraguay School program. That effort gathers and processes hundreds of donations from across the country that are used to sponsor children at the New Horizons school in Paraguay's capital, Asuncion.

The school is being established in a poor neighborhood where up to 75 children fill each classroom and over 5,000 children do not attend school because there just isn't enough room. Even now, some public schools run morning, afternoon and evening sessions to squeeze in as many children as possible.

At the heart of the Paraguayan project are former Maryville residents Mark and Jo Waltz and Canton, Ohio, resident Sue Givens. "Mark and I have worked on the school for 5 years," said Jo Waltz. "We worked first in the praying, fund raising, and planning stage. The land was purchased in 1997, a ministries center was built and a religious education program was firmly established."

"Mark is an engineer and has directed the building project for 4 years including the ministries center," she reported.

As the Waltz family began the school project, they approached churches to provide funds for land purchase and construction and to develop monthly sponsorships to pay for the children's education. When the school is completed, it will house over 700 children from pre-school through high school grades, plus serve as a center for adult continuing education classes.

"When Mark and Jo asked me to coordinate the sponsorship program, part of me said 'I'm not ready for this,' but the other part said, 'don't count on yourself, count on God,'" remembered Brown.

Last year Brown and her volunteers found supporters for 52 children. This year she has almost doubled the sponsorships. But, she knows that in another year she will have to find sponsorships for over 175 children and the number needed will increase by 50 each succeeding year until it reaches 700.

"When I get discouraged, I drop to my knees in prayer and get a resounding message," Brown said. "God tells me, 'your job is to put the word out, my job is to touch hearts.'"

In addition to developing sponsorships for the children, Brown is also raising funds to help complete the building. "I challenged our church, Middle Settlements United Methodist Church, to raise \$50,000, one fourth of the amount needed to finish the construction," Brown said. "One family in our church offered to match any gift up to \$25,000." So far, church members have raised just over \$12,000, which, with the matching donation, means that half of the goal has been reached so far.

"We challenge our members to make donations on special holidays such as Christmas, Mother's Day and Father's Day," Brown explained. "We really don't need more gifts ourselves, we have so much."

As if raising funds was not enough, Brown is organizing a two-week work trip to Paraguay in September to help put finishing touches on the school and run a vacation Bible school for the community's children. "We need people to do construction and medical personnel to help in the clinics," Brown said.

The Fairview church is also home to another project that sends used eyeglasses to the Paraguay mission and other Christian programs around the world. Glasses for the Masses collects around 5,000 pairs of glasses a year according to Tom Beard of Maryville who directs the program.

"We can use any type of old glasses, even sunglasses," Beard said. Volunteers measure each pair with a laser beam to determine the prescription and then pack them for delivery to projects overseas.

Of the 5,000 glasses collected each year, 1,000 are sent to the Paraguay ministry according to Waltz. "The optical program of our mobile clinic is always in high demand since most of the people served by the clinic cannot afford to buy glasses," he said.

"We began with the Paraguay project, but now we provide glasses to Christian medical clinics in ten countries including Kenya, Liberia, Ukraine, Haiti and Cuba," explained Beard who assumed the directorship of Glasses for the Masses four years ago.

"The program has strengthened my faith to see God's work around the world," Beard reported. "I had never been outside of the United States before, but I was able to go to visit a project in Guatemala and it changed my perspective.

Information about supporting the New Horizons school or Glasses for the Masses may be obtained by contacting:

Samaritan Hands Paraguay School
Glasses for the Masses
% Fairview United Methodist Church
2505 Old Niles Ferry Rd.
Maryville, TN 37803

Contact: Mable Love Brown 865-984-4111
Tom Beard 865-681-4567

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