

Mastering the Mouse; Missionaries help train pastors, leaders in computer use

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

LAM News Service

Lima, Peru (LAMNS)—To see Kevin Wilson's face light up, put him in a room full of computers.

Kevin and his wife Sarah are LAM missionaries serving in Lima where they are helping a large church establish a computer center for the church's growing school and a seminary extension.

"Some pastors don't know how to use a mouse," Kevin said as he looked over a center with 15 connected computers that were donated by a church in the United States. "Much of what we can teach them is very basic."



Kevin is working with the 1,500-member Comas Christian and Missionary Alliance church in Lima to install the computer laboratory in the church's Jack Goldfarb School.

Currently Kevin is instructing teachers in the school how to use MS Word and Windows. In addition, he is teaching several pastors how to access material on the web as well as basic computer studies for students at the seminary extension located at the church.

The C & MA denomination in Lima also has plans for the expanded use of computers and networks to serve its churches throughout the country. "It's an issue of training," affirmed Sarah. "The pastors need to be trained how to use the computers."

"The denomination wants the pastors to be able to tap into Bible studies on line, and they want to be able to create a common data base for use by all of the churches," Kevin explained.

The church's elementary school currently provides an education for children in the area. "We are looking for sponsors for 70 children," said Nora Flor Porras Almerco, an administrator at the school. "We don't give the children the money, but it helps to pay for their tuition," she explained.

While Kevin is busy getting the computer center up and running as well as teaching courses, he and Sarah are also providing important training for students at the Missionary Formation School, a ministry of Lima's Emmanuel Baptist Church.

The school, which began offering classes in 1999, provides a multi-year training program for Christian leaders from Peru's mountainous indigenous region. "The director was a missionary in the mountains and found that people did not have training as pastors," explained Sarah.

"She began teaching and discovered a lot of illiteracy, so she came up with a method of teaching similar to flannel graphs," Sarah added. "They take classes on how to organize a Sunday school and how to teach basic Bible classes."

Each student develops their own set of flannel characters and scenery. "That way, they can take the set back to their own church where the people do not read or write," she said.

While in Lima, the students also learn woodworking on modern tools donated by a Swiss Christian man who visited Lima and was impressed with the work of the school. Working through the British Christian charity Tear Fund, he raised fund to purchase the machine tools. Now, the volunteer visits Lima for a month each year to help train new students in woodworking skills.

"People from the churches back home send wood from the jungle for the students to use," said Kevin. "Students can sell the items that they make at church fairs and use the skill to supplement their salary."

Students cook their own meals while they are studying at the college. The cooking stove is fueled by sawdust from the woodworking shop.

Most of them live in dormitory rooms in the school building, or in a modular two-room building that has been constructed on the flat-top roof. "They used this model so that, if the school should move to another location, they could take the dormitory building with them," Kevin said.

"These students are missionaries within the country," Kevin explained. "They go back to their provinces where the churches need help. "There are many needs back home where these student live but, most of them do not have the money to attend seminary."

"While they are here they learn how to cook, to do construction and how to wash clothes," Sarah said. "They take back many skills as well as well as their Bible studies."

"The men learn to cook as well," said Berselia Aquilar, a graduate who stayed in Lima to help in the school's management. "We are helping them to form their character."

"Many of the students have always lived with their families, so they don't know how to live alone," Sarah added. "So, they are learning to work and how to live alone."

The couple is teaching basic computer skills to the students at the mission school as well as a course on life skills.

Kevin and Sarah are first-term missionaries in Peru. Kevin spent much of his childhood in Quito, Ecuador where his parents were missionaries with HCJB.

Sarah is from Michigan, but the couple calls Colorado Springs their home.

The couple's work in Lima is appreciated. "Kevin and Sarah are the first missionaries in our church," said Rossemerie Zárate Amaro, administrator of the Alliance church in Comas. "We can use more missionaries to help in education and administration."

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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