

Bolivia Mission

Mission to Bolivia—a Growing Partnership



Methodism took root in Bolivia in 1906. As in the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean, the Evangelical Methodist Church of Bolivia is an independent church affiliated with the United Methodist Church. The Encounter with Christ Bolivia Mission Program was started in 2001 by then District Superintendent Jane Allen Middleton in the New York Conference of the United Methodist Church. After coming to the Central Pennsylvania Conference, Bishop Middleton worked to establish a similar mission here, and the two conferences now work together on many Bolivia mission programs. Volunteers in Mission (VIM) Teams have traveled to Cochabamba, Bolivia, since 2002 to work with the Bolivian Methodist Central District.

Bob & Ginny Stevenson, who joined First UMC Hershey in 2009, were involved in the Bolivian Mission in the New York Conference from its inception, leading VIM teams to Bolivia annually from 2002 through 2008. Several Central PA volunteers traveled on joint VIM Teams organized by NY Conference in 2005, 2006, 2009 and 2010, and in 2011, 2012, 2014 and 2016 the Susquehanna and NY Conferences formed a partnership and formed joint VIM teams. In 2007 two teams organized by Central PA went to Bolivia—a medical team that started a clinic in El Alto and a multi-functional team that worked in Cochabamba. Another Central PA team traveled to Bolivia in 2010 to perform medical and construction work. A full container of medical equipment also was sent to the El Alto clinic. Financial support is provided by various Susquehanna Conference congregations for children's and women's ministries in Cochabamba and missionaries in La Paz, Cochabamba, and surrounding areas. Bishop Jeremiah Park assigned to Susquehanna Conference in September 2012, was a member of the 2007 NY Conference team.



Mission to Bolivia is about Empowerment, Caring and Sharing the Love of God.

The Mission is a multi-faceted connection with our brothers and sisters in the vicinity of Cochabamba in central Bolivia. This connection focuses on strengthening:

- Children's programs
- Medical & health programs
- Christian education
- Evangelism
- Church and community development and
- Numerous self-help programs, especially to empower women.

Financial and prayer support are provided as well as personal contact through the VIM trips.

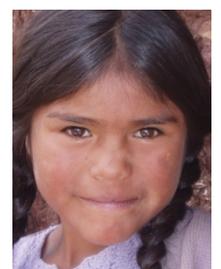
Encounter with Christ VIM Teams working in the Cochabamba area participate in programs such as the following:

- Construct or renovate church, daycare, clinic & other program facilities. (to date, we have helped in the construction of three churches)
- Teach & celebrate with children in vacation bible school,
- Assist with various workshops that, e.g., train daycare workers; help empower women to regain their emotional, spiritual and financial strength to care for their families; or improve marriages
- Work with other programs (e.g., medical & dental clinics) depending upon the talents and experience of the team members.

In addition, we worship, play, learn and share love with our Bolivian family.

Children's Programs

Children are a major emphasis in the Central District. Four churches have active daycare programs that enable women, many of them single parents, to work to support their families. Even the small financial charge made for this service is sometimes beyond the ability of mothers to pay, and church funding is needed to keep the programs going and provide a safe, nurturing Christian sanctuary for the children. In three congregations created in the poor areas on the edge of town where many rural poor have migrated seeking a better life, programs to provide breakfast for children and after-school tutoring and day care have grown rapidly over the past few years serving 45 children daily while



also bringing many of their parents into the church fold.



"If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time.....But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, and then let us work together."

Lilla Watson, A Brisbane-based Aboriginal educator and activist

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Medical and Dental Health

Gifts through the Bolivia Mission have contributed to significant improvements in the health of people in Cochabamba and in rural Andean villages. Emmanuel Church has a medical and dental clinic that has served the surrounding community for many years. Bolivia Mission support for this has come from such activities as having VIM teams carry medical, dental and optical supplies to the clinic and helping with construction and renovation of facilities, e.g., the X-Ray room built in 2005. More recently, a smaller facility was established at Nazareno Church and at the church in Cotani, a rural Andean town near Cochabamba. Start-up funding was provided by the Mission to establish a program providing basic nursing care and nutritional advice in the daycare centers. One of the churches recently established a fund to provide loans to cover emergency medical expenses, and while in Cochabamba the 2007 VIM's contributed money to establish a similar fund at the Central District level.



As noted earlier, the 2007 medical mission team from Central Pennsylvania Conference was instrumental in starting the clinic in the La Paz/El Alto area. Early in 2009, Sue Edris lead a campaign in the Central Pennsylvania Conference to ship a container of medical equipment to that clinic. The April 2010 VIM Team led by Bishop Middleton included a medical group under the leadership of Dr. Bob Davis, internationally known surgeon from Aldersgate UMC in York, which worked with the staff at a regional Children's burn hospital and a related OB/GYN hospital unit, assisting with many difficult cases.

Rural Health Programs-- Sanitation Facilities, Chagas-Safe Houses and Other

Programs to promote better health for indigenous inhabitants of small villages in the rural areas of the Andes Mountains around Cochabamba have a significant impact on the lives of these descendants of the Inca's, not only because of the immediate effects on their health but also because the organization skills learned in implementing such programs, and the hope generated by their success, usually result in the villagers originating and carrying out their own programs to further improve their living conditions. The Bolivia Mission has supported a Central District program to construct sanitation facilities in the area around the Methodist Church in Cotani, a mountain village outside Cochabamba where over 600 inhabitants had no toilets. This was patterned after a recently completed program of an ecumenical organization supported by the Bolivia Mission that enabled rural villager to construct replacement homes that protected future generations from the debilitating, deadly and incurable Chagas Disease (a parasitic ailment transmitted by a beetle that lives in the thatched roofs and porous walls of the traditional houses in these villages. About 85% of adults in these villages already have this disease, but they have worked with this program to protect the children—born and unborn. Each \$500 contribution to this unique Bolivia Mission program (a) provided a tithe to future church development through the GBGM Encounter with Christ permanent fund and (b) funded 70% of the materials for a new home with a metal roof, concrete floor and plastered walls to keep out the beetle. The villagers provided funding of the remaining 30% of the materials, not an easy task given the limited economic opportunities they have, and all the labor to build the houses. Valuing this labor at local rates, the villagers provide about 70% of the total cost of each house, but it was that critical first \$500 contribution that planted the seed that grows into a village in which all houses are Chagas-safe, and that same initial financial seed in Cotani to help the whole village construct ecologically sound toilets (designed by Engineers Without Borders) and drastically reduce the incidence of diseases spread through human waste.



Bolivia Boutiques

"Bolivia Boutiques" are presented at Annual Conference sessions and at various events of congregations and other groups within the two conferences and at a few locations in New Hampshire. These promote the sale of unique Bolivian fabric goods sewn by Bolivian women, principally members of the "Sewers for Faith" cooperative at Emmanuel Methodist Church in Cochabamba, Members of the cooperative donate 30% of profits to the daycare program and 10% to their church while also supporting their families. In 2009, aided by the "Sewers of Faith", an additional cooperative was formed at Luz de Vida Methodist, an outreach of Emmanuel on the outskirts of the city.

Additionally, Bolivia Mission was able to contribute seed funding for the women of Emmanuel to developed micro banking. Loans are made for a variety of needs, such as housing, food, medical bills. The women learn financial management and help each other pay back the loans by praying for one another and holding each other accountable,

