

Panama Missions

NEWSLETTER

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Clinic of Hope Continues as a 'Beacon of Hope' in Panama

The Clinic of Hope in Sanson, Panama, continues to be Panama Missions' visible "beacon of hope" for residents of remote communities of the Darien who otherwise have few options for medical care.

Located along the famous Pan-American Highway, the clinic sits on a hill adjacent to the Sanson Church of Christ, quite noticeable because of its beauty in an otherwise tropical jungle setting.

Constructed in 2009 by generous donations and volunteer crews, U.S. medical teams work at the clinic and in the surrounding villages several times each year.

On a year-round basis, Baudilo Leon, a licensed medical technician, provides daily nurse level services and dispenses medications for chronic conditions.

"From a sick child who needs an antibiotic, to a lady with a machete cut that requires sutures, the Clinic of Hope is serving people on a daily basis," states Larry Brady.

The dental clinic continues to be upgraded, thanks to the dedication of

Dr. Jim Foster, retired dentist from Broken, Bow, Neb., who in February installed a new dental chair and, in general, put the clinic in good order. Dr. Foster and his wife, Joan, have made numerous trips to the Clinic of Hope to provide dental services.

Recent cosmetic/comfort improvements include the installation of suspended ceilings in the waiting area of the clinic and in the Sanson church building, which is also used as a waiting area for patients. Plans are to add air conditioning to the church building as funds are available.

Last year, a separate kitchen and dining facility was constructed adjacent to the clinic for the use of visiting teams and the Sanson church. It is in the final stages of completion.

Larry Brady credits a maintenance team from the Highland Church of Christ, Columbia, Tenn., and his co-worker, John Henry, who lives in Panama about 8 months each year, for much of the physical labor in making these and other improvements.



The Clinic of Hope, constructed in 2009, is situated along the Pan-American Highway leading to Colombia where it is a standout in the tropical setting of the Darien. There is no other nearby structure of its kind: two story, 4,000 square feet with plumbing and air conditioning. The first floor is designed for medical services while the second floor provides dormitory style housing and a large gathering room. By Sanson standards, it is grand!

Larry Brady especially recognizes three men who shared his vision and who unselfishly donated construction expertise, time and resources to the project: Allen Gunn, co-owner of Frame Tech Industries of Tallahassee, Ala.; longtime friend, Bill Watts, a retired home builder; and his son, David Brady, a Birmingham building contractor.

Medical Teams Fill a Great Need in Remote Areas of Panama

"Are you coming back?" is a familiar question to veteran medical workers who travel to areas of Panama where the "poorest of poor" have little or no access to medical care.

Diane Edrington, Nurse Practitioner from Long Beach, Miss., has made 49 trips to Panama since 2000. This year she was the medical team leader for 17 medical/humanitarian workers who spent February 12-18 at the Clinic of Hope in Sanson "to bring both medical support and encouragement to a forgotten people."

The following day (February 19), Dr. Russ Burcham, Denver ophthalmologist and a 16-year veteran of Panama medical missions, arrived with a team of doctors, nurses, and support staff to conduct their annual one-week medical/surgical clinic in an area of Panama selected for its "great need." This year's site was Buena Vista in the Colon Province. (See article, p. 2.)

Diana Edrington's Report

"Yes, we are coming back!"

Diane reports that 150 patients were seen at the Clinic of Hope and a total of 650 received medical attention at three remote river villages.

For the third year, Diane and her staff provided women's health services including pap smears, wellness exams and counseling for women. As a result, several women have been successfully treated for cancer.

While team members can treat and provide medications for many acute and chronic conditions, more serious conditions are sent to Panama City for further evaluation. This is a service, and a blessing, that Panama Missions, and its generous team members, have made possible on many occasions.

This year, two children were referred to Children's Hospital.



Jesse Stanfill, NP, is concerned about a seriously ill child.

An 8-year old girl the team recognized as "failing to thrive" was sent to Panama City. The child was diagnosed and treated for a severe, life-threatening parasite infection caused by polluted water. (Larry Brady observes that such situations can be alleviated by the water filters Panama Missions is providing to many communities.)

A crippled 19 year old, Eliana Menbache, was also sent to Panama City for evaluation. She was diagnosed with juvenile rheumatoid arthritis and needed intensive physical therapy to be able to walk. The director of the hospital, well acquainted with Larry Brady and Panama Missions because of Operation Christmas Joy, insisted on treating the young lady free of charge.

The humanitarian team accomplished one of the most difficult tasks that Larry has ever suggested. Elaina's shack of a house is situated on a steep incline which made it very difficult for her mother to get her to the family's bathing place. Team members hand-carried twelve 80 lb. bags of cement and 50 bags of sand some 200 yards up the steep incline to build a concrete pad and ramp. "The end results were beautiful," Larry reports.

This hard-working team was led by Robbie Kiihnl of Courtland, Miss., and included two teen boys from the Long Beach church, Marty Moore and Donovan



ACT OF SERVICE: Concrete and sand were carried up a steep incline to make a pad and ramp for Eliana Menbache, a 19 year old with juvenile rheumatoid arthritis. Panama Missions previously helped to provide the wheelchair. The structure in the background is the family home. Note the completed ramp.

Rillion. They also installed 125 water filters in three communities and helped in many other ways such as delivering bags of groceries to needy families.

"I have never been with finer Christian people who worked harder or performed better with such grace and humor - implementing the tenets of Christ," comments Levi Abell, ER Nurse from Ocean Springs, Miss., who was a "first timer" with Panama Missions. Levi was dubbed "McGuiver" because of his many useful skills.

Providing groceries and other necessities



Levi Abell



Navigating the Chucunaque River to conduct medical clinics in remote river villages is a memorable experience.

is a project that Nurse Beverly Martindale of Batesville, Miss., has initiated. Beverly raises funds to purchase the goods in Panama and also brings along special grocery bags for the project, many hand-painted by Joan Kiihnl. (See Tributes, p. 3)

Medical Teams Meet Greet Needs in Panama – Dr. Burcham’s Report

“This was the greatest trip ever,” elates Dr. Russ Burcham, whose team was “welcomed with open arms” by health officials and community leaders of Buena Vista, Feb. 19-25. “We were given access to their entire hospital facility. Our medical and surgical teams worked hard to try to help as many needy people as possible in the name of Jesus.”

The vision team performed a record 164 cataract surgeries and 102 pterygium surgeries. Dr. Burcham notes that many patients were totally blind. “The morning following surgery, people were praising God for the ‘miracle’ of vision they experienced!”

The eye team also performed 850 eye exams and gave out 250 pairs of reading glasses.

Dr. Burcham relates a favorite story from this trip:

“A 39 year-old man had white cataracts in both eyes and could not see his hand in front of his face. He had not seen his wife and children for a long time. He was led into our exam room, looking pretty emotionless.



“The next morning, he was smiling and looking around, anxious to see his family. We told him to consider his new vision a gift from God and to honor God with his life.”

The general medical team, led by Dr. Duke Jennings of Jonesboro, Ark., treated over 1400 patients with a variety of health problems, including severe hypertension, diabetes, infections, skin rashes, and musculoskeletal pain. Multiple skin cancers and other tumors were also removed.



A valuable new member of the general medical team was Dr. Jason Booton, a board-certified emergency room physician from Nashville.

A Community Service Team helped several extremely poor families by delivering food and basic necessities and performing repairs and construction projects. An example of the level of poverty: The team found four families living under one roof – a “shack” that was only 150 square feet in size!

Dr. Burcham observed that many others in the community – medical staff, police, and community officials – were powerfully affected by the team’s witness for Jesus. “Thousands of people were blessed.”



Following thorough examinations, the best candidates for eye surgery are selected and the process begins. Following surgery, patients are bandaged for a day. The following day is “discovery,” and then elation by doctors and patients as sight is restored. Finally, there is gratitude and thankfulness to God. Patients are provided with detailed instructions and the needed medications for a complete recovery.

Tennessee Team Makes Impact with Medical/Evangelistic Efforts



Pediatrician, Dr. Apryl Hall (front row, pink shirt), examined hundreds of children in Panama as part of a team of doctors, nurses, and student nurses that impacted more than 2,000 lives last July. Below, left, dental hygienist, Becky Hammond, at work. Below, right, Youth workers engage the Panamanian children with both Bible teaching and fun activities.

During July 2-11, 2015, a highly skilled medical team and a compassionate support team of Bible teachers and youth workers touched more than 2,000 lives, working in and beyond the Clinic of Hope.

The Collegeside Church of Christ, Cookeville, Tenn., provided two medical doctors, Dr. Matt Bolton and Dr. Apryl Hall, along with a support staff of medical and dental professionals including a registered pharmacist, and two dental hygienists. Nine nursing students and two professors from nearby Tennessee Tech were “added blessings.”



Dr. Matt Bolton

Dr. Hall, Chief of Pediatrics at the

Cookeville Regional Medical Center, was a tremendous asset as 722 children were examined and treated. Dr. Hall observed that the overall health of the children “was good” although she saw a lot of dental problems and skin issues. “The children blessed us more than we blessed them.”

A total of 200 children, many from a nearby school, had their teeth cleaned by two dedicated dental hygienists, Tammy Smith and Becky Hammond. Of course, each child left with a toothbrush and toothpaste - treasured hygiene items!

A mobile team traveled to some outlying communities to conduct clinics. Students at two schools were checked over and provided vitamins and parasite medication.

Two emergencies occurred at the clinic during the week including a child with severe asthma whose lungs were not responsive by the time his mother got him to the clinic. Quick action by the doctors saved his life! Another person had a severe machete cut requiring stitches which was cared for by Baudilio Leon, the Clinic’s fulltime medical tech.

Sunday through Wednesday, Joe Roberts, Collegeside minister and team leader, taught a discipleship seminar for area church members, training and encouraging them to become more involved in their communities as an outreach for the church. A husband and wife were baptized during the campaign.



Joe Roberts

A children’s program of lessons and activities was conducted by Dr. Bolton’s wife, Taryn, his daughter, Ashlyn, Larry Brady’s grandson, Caleb, and several others.

The Senafont Border Police partnered with the team, providing transportation, security, and many other support services.

The Collegeside team will be returning to Panama on June 3, 2016.

Water Filters Make a Difference in Quality of Life

Since 2010, Panama Missions has provided more than 1,500 water filters to individual families who live in communities where the water sources are contaminated. In addition to homes, water filters have been placed in numerous schools and outlying police stations.

Some have commented that the water filter program is the “best humanitarian program that Panama Missions has going in Panama.” Dr. Joe Wilhite from Lexington, Tenn., has made many medical trips to Panama. He has often said that having clean drinking water improves health a hundred-fold. He saw it with his own eyes many times when he would return to a village a year later after filters were installed.

During the recent February medical mission to the Clinic of Hope, a child was referred to the Children’s Hospital in Panama City because of a serious parasite condition. That’s a problem that Panama

Missions is helping to correct by distributing water filters!

“It warms our hearts when a mother report to us that her family no longer has



Left: Robbie Kihnl of Courtland, Miss., and a team of teen helpers install water filters in three villages. Right: Children with clean water to drink have a better chance for good health.



stomachaches, nausea or diarrhea. They also tell us how good the water tastes! We are very thankful that our supporters make this program successful!” concludes Larry Brady.

Operation Christmas Joy 2015 Surpasses Previous Records

Operation Christmas Joy 2015 surpassed all expectations with a record 6,500 total gifts. This included about 4,500 shoe boxes plus gift bags of various kinds, diaper bags, school backpacks, and hospital care bags.

In addition, there were hundreds of stuffed animals along with many hundreds of home sewn dresses and sets of new “store bought” and “gently worn” clothing for both boys and girls.

There were also bags and boxes of flip flops, extra toys, church and school supplies, and items needed at the Clinic of Hope. Larry Brady is anticipating that a second container may be required this year!

Larry and Betsy Brady and J.W. Furr (Luverne, Ala.), arrived on December 7 to work with native brethren in sorting the gifts for the different locations, a major undertaking.

With that accomplished, the trio traveled by boat to a remote Embera Indian community to deliver school backpacks to the students in a pre-selected school.

“As you might expect, many ‘extra’ children showed up for the party. Thankfully we were prepared, and every child received a gift and new clothes,” recalls Larry.

A few days later, Donna Bentley and Olivia Burt from the University Church of Christ in Montgomery, Ala. (the OCJ hub), joined the team.

From this point the entourage traveled from community to community where children were waiting expectantly at schools, churches and community centers.

Once again the Senafront Border Police provided vehicles and officers to assist the group in any way needed. They even had officers who portrayed “Luis the Clown,”

“Spiderman” and “Tinkerbell” to help entertain the children.

A memorable part of each year’s gift distribution involves the visits with sick and injured children at the various hospitals in Panama City.

First was the Rehab Center where Santa (i.e. Larry Brady) gave gifts to all of the disabled children. At the Cancer Center, Santa gave gifts to every child who was undergoing cancer treatment.

“Some of the children were so weak, they had to be helped to stand close to Santa Claus to receive a gift,” he recalls.

Later, visits were made to the Children’s Hospital and the Social Security Hospital. “As always, our experiences in the hospitals are emotional. Our aim is to bring a little light and joy into the hearts of the children and their parents.

“One frail boy, who we were told had only days to live, told his doctor that his dream was to see Santa Claus. When the doctor related this to me, I went directly to his room along with Luis the Clown, Spiderman, and Tinkerbell. His mother was overjoyed and grateful. I prayed with this family,” relates Larry.

Veteran missionaries, but “first timers” to Panama, the ladies from Montgomery made this comment: “It was the hardest mission trip we have been a part of, but we would go again – and not change any of it.”

Anyone interested in becoming involved in Operation Christmas Joy is invited to contact Sara Bills, Coordinator, (see directory, page 4) or through the website, www.panamamissions.org, where information about the program is posted.

The 2016 deadline for gifts to be in Montgomery is October 21



“Giving out the gifts is such great fun, words cannot describe the experience of watching the smiles and listening to the sounds of joy. My wish would be that everyone who makes Christmas gifts could witness it,” recalls Larry Brady, who enjoys playing Santa at some of the parties. “The stuffed animals are such a big hit that everyone, including mothers and grandmothers, wants one.”

TRIBUTES

Heart-warming stories come to our attention each year of special folks of all ages who have a heart for mission work in Panama.

We were especially touched by a tribute paid to **Joan Kiihnl**, 75, who passed away on February 6. Joan was a member of the Jackson Grove Church of Christ in Enid, Miss.

Beverly Martindale, a nurse from the Batesville (Miss.) Church Christ who has traveled to Panama many times, wrote this:

My friend, Joan Kiihnl, was always thinking about things she could do for others, and Panama was never far from her mind. She hand-painted beautiful bags for us to fill with groceries for needy families and hand-painted hats and tee shirts for the children. She also bought a lot of toys for Operation Christmas Joy.

Joan loved the water filter program, and requested that her family donate money to Panama Missions for filters instead of giving her Christmas gifts.

During Joan’s last day on earth, she was making more bags for us to take on the February mission trip.



Left: Joan Kiihnl. Right: A child in Panama wears one of Joan’s hand-painted hats.

Note: Joan’s son, Robbie Kiihnl, helped to install water filters during the February medical trip while his wife, Jennifer, served in the pharmacy, and

their daughter, Whitney, a Physician’s Assistant, worked with the medical team.

Belinda Tipton of Long Beach, Miss., posted on Facebook:

Thank you, Linda Simpson, for the hundreds of diapers and receiving blankets you share with us each year! I am honored to have passed them out among the moms with newborns on our recent mission trip.



A newborn baby and its mom are pictured with Larry Brady and Belinda Tipton. The baby is wrapped in one of Linda’s blankets.

Beverly Martindale also commends **Ruff Cole**, 14, from Batesville, Miss., who bakes cookies to sell and mows lawns to purchase water filters for Panama.



John Henry Uses Many Skills in Panama

John and Barbara Henry of Florence, Ala., continue to be valuable “boots on the ground” in Panama. Since October, 2013, John and Barbara have been spending at least two out of every three months in Panama where they work with several native churches and assist visiting mission teams.

The couple lives in a rented house near Torti. They worship with the Platinilla Church of Christ on Sunday mornings and hold Bible studies with the El Tiraio congregation Sunday nights. John keeps his van busy transporting up to 20 people to worship on Sundays.

Typical of their activities, in a January report to the Salem Church of Christ in Florence (which is the couple’s primary source of support) John mentions 36 home visits, 11 Bible studies and four baptisms associated with the Platinilla congregation.

He describes one of their home visits: “Barbara and I visited an elderly lady who lives in a shack with a dirt floor. Before we left, she insisted on giving us six eggs and six oranges. We find the people of Panama very generous and hospitable.”

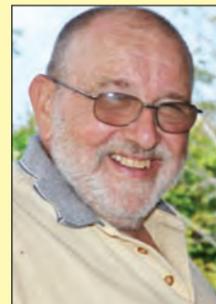
During January they also showed religious films, hosted several groups for meals, and helped the Santa Fe brethren build a front porch and install a new roof on the church building.

In February, John and Barbara

worked with two U.S. medical Teams: Dr. Russ Burcham’s eye team in Bueno Vista, and the general medical team from Long Beach, Miss., at the Clinic of Hope in Sanson.

While at the Clinic of Hope, John used his handy-man skills to help install a toilet, a door, and suspended ceilings in both the clinic and church building waiting areas. He and several mission team members also poured two concrete porches and installed a water tank in homes of church members.

February was another good month for evangelism as the cousin of his translator was baptized. There was also a baptism at Colon.



John Henry



John Henry was instrumental in the construction of the new El Tiraio church building.

A sad note in February: José, the son of Juvenel Castro, preacher for the Platinilla church, passed away after being hospitalized with a pneumonia type illness. He was only 25, the eldest of two sons.

John and Barbara returned to their home in Florence in mid-March after spending three consecutive months in Panama.

DIRECTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

By Larry Brady

I put together the first medical team in 1996, some 12 years after I began my mission work in Panama.

Everywhere we had traveled outside of Panama City, we found extreme poverty, and little or no access to medical care. There was a sense of hopelessness among those who had health problems, and nowhere to turn.

Since that time, I have honestly lost track of the numbers of medical, dental, and vision teams I have taken to Panama as well as the exact dates and places, but I can never forget the impact that they have had, and continue to have on the lives of the people we touch.

I wish that you could see the expressions on the faces of mothers who bring their children to be examined by a doctor, and carry home a small packet of medicine and ointments. Then there are those who are found to be seriously ill, and we make it possible for them to receive care in Panama City. The most amazing of all, are those individuals who come to us blind, and have their sight restored by our eye surgeons.

Often I have been asked, "Is this evangelism?"

My answer is, "Yes, medical care is a resource for evangelism; one of the best ways to reach the masses." I often refer to the compassion that Jesus had for the sick and dying as recorded in Matthew 9.

³⁵ Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. ³⁶ But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them . . . ³⁷ Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. ³⁸ Therefore, pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."

Just this past February, I challenged our medical team to "look out over the



The 2016 Eye Surgery/General Medical Team. Denver Ophthalmologist, Dr. Russ Burcham, assembles his highly skilled volunteer team every year "to relieve suffering and spread the love and compassion of Jesus in Panama." See the full report, page 2.

crowd as Jesus did. Look into the eyes of the people and let them see your love, and Jesus' love, for them. I remind them that we are 'seed sowers,' and that God promises to give the increase."

In many situations, we conduct Bible studies, evangelistic services, and children's programs in conjunction with a medical effort. Several of the congregations we work with today resulted from the evangelistic efforts associated with medical teams.

I came back from our most recent medical efforts this past February on a new "high."

I can never say enough about the

medical professionals and support staff who give up their vacations, pay their own expenses, and provide all of the needed medications and medical equipment. In addition, these individuals are working outside of their comfort zones in very difficult living and traveling conditions.

I find that these folks cherish their experiences in Panama because the people are so grateful. I have heard more than one say that the blessings received were more for themselves.

I close my thoughts with this scripture: *I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, "tis more blessed to give than to receive."* ACTS 20:35

Panama Missions Announces New Oversight Eldership

Larry Brady announces that the eldership of the Salem Church of Christ in Crenshaw County, Ala., where he serves as pulpit minister, has assumed the oversight of Panama Missions. "These men know me well and are very supportive."

Larry expresses gratitude to the Childersburg Church of Christ elders who have overseen the work for more than 15 years, recalling that one member, Mike Ray, made several trips to Panama with him, and his wife, Etta, handled donations while she was church secretary. The congregation continues to provide monthly support and to participate in Operation Christmas Joy.

Donations to Panama Missions should be directed to:
Panama Missions c/o Salem Church of Christ
P.O. Box 451, Hope Hull, AL 36043

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

By Larry Brady

Larry and Sara Bills invited Betsy and me out to dinner sometime in early 2003 to find out more about Panama Missions. Sara, in particular, said that she was "looking for a ministry." She was already helping to sew dresses for Panama with some other ladies at University Church of Christ in Montgomery where they attend, but thought there might be other ways that she could be involved.

Larry was especially interested in making trips to Panama with me, which he did for the first time in July of that same year. In 2007 they both traveled to Panama with a mission team from Mississippi, and in 2008 they were part of the Operation Christmas Joy trip with Betsy and me.

The Bills moved to Montgomery in 2001 for Larry to serve as interim choral director at Faulkner University. Although he had just spent the past 14 years as president of Crowley's Ridge College in Paragould, Arkansas, choral music was his educational background, and his first love. He worked at Faulkner until he retired in 2008.

Sara explained to me that her career had been in college public relations and that her skills included editing publications, planning and promoting special events and working with volunteer groups. I gladly turned my newsletters over to Sara.

Shortly after she began on the newsletters, I asked Sara to also take the leadership of Operation Christmas Joy, which we had gotten started in 2000. I really needed someone like Sara to "take ownership" of the project, giving it more attention than I could spare. That Sara did! The University Church not only backed her up with working space, but provided startup funds for supplies.

For a couple of years, Sara purchased and gave away plastic shoeboxes to area congregations who would agree to get involved, and our numbers grew. She developed a detailed Guidebook and provided support to the group leaders.

She also built a team of volunteers to help her get the job done in preparation for the November shipments.

I am not sure how many churches were making gifts when we started, but nothing close to the 80 or so congregations, schools, and individuals who are now providing almost 7,000 gifts each year. We are literally known all over Panama for this project, from the Offices of the President and First Lady, to the U.S. Embassy, and down!

The newsletters that Sara has edited these past 12 years have been an asset to our work. Sara reminds me that "quality printed materials give an organization credibility" and that her job is "to make Panama Missions, and me, look good."

Sara also maintains our mailing list, helps with fund-raising appeals and thank you letters and promotes the annual Friends of Panama Missions Dinner.

Larry pitches in where needed such



Sara and Larry Bills

as leading singing at gatherings, advising me on fund raising, or helping load the Christmas Joy shipping container. He keeps telling me that he wants to make one of my Panama "river trips."

That's the great thing about Christian retirees like Larry and Sara – *they can choose to give away* their talents in the Lord's service.

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www.panamamissions.org*

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