

PANAMA MISSIONS

UPDATE

SPRING 2018

February Medical Team Focuses on Darien Province

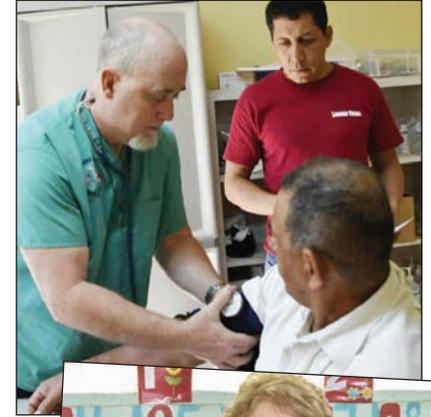
The Clinic of Hope in Sanson was home base for a medical mission team sponsored by the Long Beach (Miss.) Church of Christ, February 2-10.

Volunteers from Alabama, Florida and Mississippi were brought together to provide medical services at the Clinic of Hope and at two other locations in the Darien Province.

At the Clinic of Hope, the medical team saw several hundred patients, including 32 women who took advantage of the Women's Clinic established in 2012 by Diane Edrington, CRNP, from Long Beach. Pap smears were transported to a lab in Panama City for evaluation.

Select members of the medical team traveled to the mountain community of Cucunati where they treated 450 patients over a 2-day period. Later in the week, the group traveled to an Embera community in El Tiroa for a one-day clinic.

Over \$1500 worth of food was delivered to extremely poor families, thanks to the leadership and fundraising efforts of "Nurse Beverly" Martindale of Batesville, Miss. One family received much-needed formula for a handicapped child.



(Above) Nurse Practitioners, Diane Edrington and Jeff Tipton, from Long Beach, Miss., and (right) "Nurse Beverly" Martindale of Batesville, Miss., are veterans with Panama Missions medical teams.



Compassionate Medical Team Provides Emergency Aid to Cuban Refugees

Larry Brady, director of Panama Missions, describes an unexpected and dramatic encounter the February medical team had with a band of Cuban refugees.

"A desperate situation" is a good description of the condition of a group of Cuban refugees that the medical team working at the Clinic of Hope in Sanson realized was being detained at the police station next door.

The police welcomed the medical team in to check on the wellbeing of the 17 men and women in custody because it was obvious that they were in serious need of medical attention.

According to a young woman who agreed to tell Larry Brady her story, the group had escaped Cuba and had been traveling for about a year by way of Venezuela and Brazil, through Peru, Ecuador, Columbia, and finally through the Darien Gap into Panama.

As they approached Panama through the jungle, they were accosted by four men on horses who robbed them of their backpacks, even their shoes. One woman was struck with a weapon, breaking several bones in her wrist.

Because they had to continue barefoot, their feet were swollen, bloodied, and full of infection. Some could barely walk.

The visiting medical team immediately went into action, setting the woman's wrist and washing and medicating the

damaged and infected feet. "I was reminded of when Jesus washed His disciples' feet. Our folks were giving loving care to the feet of those suffering people," describes Larry.

The gospel was shared and literature distributed. The next day one of the men asked how he might find a Church of Christ if he was sent back to Cuba!

The team checked on the refugees daily. They also collected enough money among themselves to purchase shoes and food for each one.

Diane Edrington recalls: "They were so appreciative. One who spoke English asked me, 'Who are y'all that would help us like this?'"

Larry Brady reminded the team of the importance of "sowing the seed" and valuing opportunities to touch the lives of others by demonstrating Christ."

The fate of the refugees was still uncertain when the U.S. team departed.



Surgeons Praise Spiritual Emphasis of Medical Teams

Since 2000, Dr. Russ Burcham, Christian ophthalmologist from Denver, Col., has been assembling a team of highly skilled eye surgeons, medical doctors, nurses, and other support personnel to spend a week in late January in an area of Panama where there is a great need for medical care.

Beginning January 26, both an eye clinic and a general medical clinic were set in place in Buena Vista, Panama, where thousands of people gathered to seek medical attention, particularly the sight-restoring cataract surgery that Dr. Burcham's team provides free of charge.

When two of Dr. Burcham's regular eye surgeons could not make the trip to Panama this year, he sought replacements available and willing to go. Dr. Kenn Turley of Idaho Falls, Idaho, and Dr. Ron Snow of St. George, Utah, answered the call and were both very complimentary of the program.

Dr. Turley included these comments in an email to Dr. Burcham: "Thank you for a most fulfilling and memorable surgical expedition to Panama! Every member of the team was cheerful, loving and willing to do whatever it took to assist us and the patients in every detail. Among the highlights for me were the evening devotionals of singing, praying, and religious instruction. What a pleasure it was to be part of your selfless efforts to serve needy fellow beings in Panama."

Dr. Snow added these words: "Your experienced team performed admirably. It was truly an honor to be a part of something so worthwhile. I thoroughly enjoyed the evening devotionals and singing."

One of the greatest challenges each vision team faces is choosing candidates for surgery. Some 1,000 individuals were screened, and 132 cataract surgeries and 62 pterygium surgeries were performed. Other eye conditions were also treated and 1,000 pairs of reading glasses were dispensed, all blessings.

The general medical team, led by Dr. Duke Jennings of Jonesboro, Ark., treated approximately 1400 patients, dispensing care and medications for both acute and chronic conditions.

An evangelistic team shared the gospel with people waiting in the lines, and several agreed to further Bible study. Two people confessed their faith in Jesus and were baptized into



Clockwise from the top: Skilled ophthalmologists, Dr. Ron Snow, Dr. Kenn Turley and Dr. Russ Burcham, team up to perform delicate eye surgeries. Hundreds gather each day to be screened for eye surgery or to be seen by the general medical staff. Dr. Duke Jennings counsels a family with a special needs child. Nurses Debra Cleary, Diane Johnston and Renee Davis try to make each eye patient feel special.

Christ. Members of the team also distributed food and other needed supplies.

"We continue praying for the people we touched, that they will give God the praise for their blessing of health and vision, and that more will come to Christ," concludes Dr. Burcham.

NEWS & NOTES

Yati Chami will graduate with honors from Prattville Christian Academy on May 17. Yati will attend Freed-Hardeman University to study nursing. She has lived with Larry and Brady Betsy since 8th grade.

Chama Saenz of Sanson continues to recover from a stroke, traveling to Meteti for physical therapy. He is able to walk with a cane but has not regained the use of his left arm. Prayers are needed for this wonderful family.

MISSION CALENDAR

JULY 23 - AUGUST 1

Shiner Church of Christ, Corbin, Ky., mission team to the Torti Church of Christ. The focus will be to encourage and strengthen the church with a gospel meeting and VBS plus construction projects and water filters.

AUGUST 29 - SEPTEMBER 8

Evangelistic campaign led by Larry Brady, J.W. Furr and John Henry to El Tiroa among the Embera Indians and to new mountain communities to take the gospel and install water filters.

OCTOBER 16-19

Operation Christmas Joy gifts are due in Montgomery by **October 16**, except for those picked up on the truck route, which will be **October 18-19**.

NOVEMBER 3

OCJ container loaded in Montgomery.

DECEMBER 3-15

OCJ trip to Panama.

Operation Christmas Joy Relies on Committed Workers

Michigan Teen Delivers Own Gifts

“It was amazing,” exclaims Quinn Clark, 14, of Highland, Mich., referring to her trip to Panama last December as a member of the Operation Christmas Joy team.

With the help of her dad, Jeff, an internet search in 2015 for a Christmas shoebox program run by churches of Christ turned up Panama Missions and Operation Christmas Joy.



Quinn Clark, 14, wears a “Miss Santa” costume while giving out gifts in Panama.

Quinn committed to making as many shoebox gifts as she could that year, which turned out to be 103. She shopped thrift stores, yard sales, the internet, and had her friends give her items for her birthday. Since then, her home congregation, Waterford Church of Christ, has pitched in, helping Quinn to an amazing 3-year total of 534!

Pretty early, Quinn started talking about “going to Panama.”

The answer was, “Maybe when you are 14.”

Quinn’s best memories of the trip include: “visiting an orphanage; seeing extremely poor children get very excited when opening gifts that I made; and making friends with Josephina, 15, and hanging out with her.”

When Quinn returned to her school, a student was showing off his \$300 pair of shoes. “I couldn’t help but think how much that amount of money would mean to a family in Panama!”

Quinn has set a goal of 350 to 400 gifts for 2018. She plans to put together 200 herself, and hopes that several nearby congregations will do the rest. Go, girl!

Columbia, Tennessee Church Goes Extra Mile

The year-round efforts of members of the Highland Church of Christ, Columbia, Tenn., in support of Operation Christmas Joy are remarkable.

Since 2011, this congregation of about 300 has dedicated several rooms in its building as “Panama Rooms” where supplies are stored and where both adults and children work throughout each month to make a variety of items for Operation Christmas Joy.

One room is dedicated primarily for sewing and features 3 sewing machines, a serger and 3 ironing boards. In 2017, the congregation’s efforts produced 164 handmade quilts and blankets, 143 handmade hats for the cancer center, and 60 home sewn dresses.

About 20 adults participate on a regular basis, many working on items at home as well as at the building. Other church members donate money and provide needed items.

The children, ages 8 and up, create hair bows, tie quilts, make jewelry and ornaments, sew on labels, and stuff handmade bears.

The clothing and craft items went into the 240 gift boxes and bags the congregation completed last year. The quilts, blankets and hats were for the children’s hospital.



Highland Church of Christ youth spend a Sunday afternoon tying quilts for Operation Christmas Joy.

Members also purchase a lot of things, both new and second hand. This past year’s bargains included 104 dresses and 62 quilts.

Karen and Doug Germeraad are beginning their third year as coordinators, following Larry and Karen Jones who initiated the effort but have since moved to Florida.

“We love doing this,” says Karen. “Doug and I have been to Panama, and the people are dear. They have so many needs!”

Larry Brady’s 2017 OCJ Report

“It was one of the best trips I can remember,” exclaims Larry Brady, who calculated that the team distributed more than 6,500 gifts including shoebox gifts, stockings, gift bags, school backpacks and an uncalculated quantity of clothing and stuffed animals.

A “heart stopper” was the visit to the children’s cancer center in Panama City. “As the children came up to sit on Santa’s lap, we knew that some would likely not be with us next year.”

Larry recalls that Operation Christmas Joy began “in a very small way” in 1998 when gifts were taken only to the Children’s Hospital.

Currently, 76 congregations of churches of Christ in 14 states contribute to the project. **For more information: Sara Bills, Coordinator • saratoga4000@gmail.com**



A variety of gifts spell JOY for children in Panama: (1) a personalized school backpack, (2) a shoebox gift for a child in the Cancer Center and (3) a filled stocking and a stuffed animal.

Volunteer Workers in Panama Serve 'To the Glory of God'

All to the Glory of God!

That is the theme of mission-minded Christians who unselfishly travel to Panama each year to meet specific physical needs of the ministry. In January, a crew of skilled men from Tennessee and Alabama joined forces with Panamanian workers for a week at the Clinic of Hope.

Traveling from the U.S. were J.W. Furr from the Luverne (Ala.) congregation; Gary Owens from the Salem church, Honoraville, Ala.; and Phil Carter and his son, Ronin, along with Harvey Briggs and Doug Germeraad from the Highland church in Columbia, Tenn.

While the primary goal of the team was to do maintenance and improvements to the clinic, these Godly men were also engaged in evangelistic and humanitarian projects.

The entire exterior of the building must be pressure washed annually to combat the mold and mildew of the tropical climate. For the same reason, the main room of the clinic receives a fresh coat of paint most years.

Gary Owens worked in the dental office, installing a dental compressor and getting both dental chairs operational with water and air.

During the course of the week, several homes were visited where water filters were installed, food delivered, and at one home, four mattresses were purchased and delivered. One family was open to a Bible study.

The highlight of the trip was witnessing six people restored to the Lord's church on Sunday morning.

Scholarships Established in Poorest Area

Panama Missions has initiated a scholarship program in the Darien Province of Panama where there are children of church members who would like to attend school, but their families do not have the financial resources.

Although public education is "free" in Panama, there are costs for books, uniforms, food and transportation.

Currently, seven K-12 students and one college student are being supported by sponsors in the United States. The monthly cost to sponsor a student is \$50 for grades K-6, \$75 for grades 7-12, and \$100 for university.



Larry Brady with children in Sanson who are receiving scholarships to attend school.

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New Website: panamamissions.net



The maintenance team was (top row) Gary Owens, Harvey Briggs, Phil Carter and Doug Germeraad. (Front row) J. W. Furr, Raul Cabrera, Baudilio Leon and Ronin Carter.

"I am grateful for those who support this ministry in whatever way is needed. Maintaining the Clinic of Hope makes it possible for future groups to be comfortable and effective," says Larry Brady.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

By Larry Brady

Several years ago, when a medical team was working in the remote community of Sambu, I noticed a young man standing under a tree in front of the clinic. When I met him, I was pleasantly surprised that he spoke very good English.

I learned that his name is Raulson Cabrera, an Embera Indian. He and his mother are members of the local Sambu Church of Christ which was established by the Skyline Church of Christ, Jackson, Tenn.

Raul was drawn to our work and offered to help us anyway that he could. He began joining us when we came to Panama on campaigns, which meant that he had to travel three hours by boat to the mainland, and then overland to our location.

With his easy smile and kind ways, Raul quickly won the love and respect of team members. Most recently he worked with Operation Christmas Joy and with both the maintenance team and the medical team at the Clinic of Hope.

Raul is intelligent, ambitious and a fine Christian. He has studied English in Canada under a government sponsored program and has recently received a grant to study aviation, possibly becoming the first Embera Indian to be a licensed pilot. Another impressive fact about Raul, he is the Embera Indian representative to the government of Panama.

We consider Raul a valuable member of any Panama Missions effort!



Raul Cabrera