

DIRECTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

Opportunity Opens for Clinic of Hope #2 in Remote Indian Region

By Larry Brady

God is opening another great door of opportunity for Panama Missions.

During my 36 years as a missionary to Panama, many of the "doors" that have opened for our work were unexpected and unplanned. But how could we turn our backs on flood victims who were seriously ill from contaminated water; or on refugees desperate for food, clothing, and especially medical care; or on a child who needed a wheelchair or a surgery?

Since 2010, the Clinic of Hope in Sanson, Panama, has provided healthcare where little or none was available.

I am excited to tell you about the opportunity Panama Missions has to establish CLINIC OF HOPE #2.

Our efforts have generally targeted the most needy and neglected populations of Panama. This has taken us deeper and deeper into the remote areas of the Darien Province and beyond to remote indigenous Indian villages reachable only by boat or airplane.

Since 2014, with the help of the Senafont Police, we have taken Operation Christmas Joy to the region of Sambu, an Embera Indian settlement (known as Comarcas Two) which is a 3-4 hour boat trip from the mainland.



Diane Edrington (above, left) interviews Embera men in native costume and (right) comforts an Embera child who has suffered a seizure.

Left: Dr. Francisco Mayorga, a medical doctor and evangelist from Honduras, is a valuable member of Diane's team. In addition to his medical training, Dr. Mayorga is a graduate of the Baxter Institute, a Church of Christ preacher-training school in Honduras.

In 2019, Diane Edrington, Panama Missions Medical Director from Long Beach, Miss., led the first of three medical teams to the region. Diane is a highly skilled Nurse Practitioner with advanced training in tropical diseases. She has made an amazing 86 trips to Panama in the past 20 years, mostly involving medical efforts.

Diane has seen **such a great need** for medical care and health education in the isolated Embera communities, she is investing a great amount of personal time and resources to develop relationships with officials and to propose a long-range plan to serve these marginalized Panamanians.

Medical Director, Diane Edrington, Proposes Plan for Second Clinic of Hope

"I believe Panama Missions holds the answer to the many problems associated with health care in the Sambu region," reports Diane.

Diane says that she finds the Embera to be very spiritual people. "As Christians, they have a favorite motto, *Dios Primero*, which means *God first*. They are very open to the word of God!"

Diane has met numerous times with local officials (the regional governor and mayors) to explore specific health needs, seek a location for a permanent clinic and to propose a long-term commitment of medical care on behalf of Panama Missions.

In 2020 (before COVID) Diane hosted two mayors and two Embera representatives for a visit to the U.S.

Central to the visit was an invitation from her brother, Mark White, a Tennessee State Representative, to meet the governor, to be introduced in the Tennessee assembly, and to visit The University of Tennessee where a Latin American program offers grants for projects in remote areas.



Diane Edrington with Gov. Bill Lee, flanked by two of the Embera officials from Panama.

WHAT'S NEXT?

1. A possible trip this month to work on details for acquiring an unfinished building for the clinic located in the centrally located village of Puerto Indios.
2. Tentative plans for a medical mission team to Puerto Indios in late March or early April.
3. Begin seeking grants and donations as well as the medical equipment that will be required.

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Panama Missions

February 2021 News Update

Operation Christmas Joy Delivered on Schedule!

"God provided an amazing "back up plan" for 2020 Operation Christmas Joy," exclaims Larry Brady, director of Panama Missions. Larry and J. W. Furr arrived at the Montgomery Airport at 4 a.m. on December 8 to begin the annual OCJ trip to Panama. With no advance warning, they learned that their Delta flight had been cancelled with no plans for resuming travel to Panama anytime soon!

This was the first time in 23 years that Larry had not led the effort to deliver the gifts, often dressed as Santa Claus at the hospitals and church parties.

Larry immediately began calling key people in Panama who would get the job done in his absence:



Urian Ponce has served as Panama Missions' Representative in Panama for more than six years, handling necessary paperwork and financial matters. She plays a key role in the details of the OCJ program and knows what needs to be done.

Dianne Edrington, Panama Missions Medical Director from Long Beach, Miss., was on Larry's call list. Diane was already in Panama waiting for Larry's arrival. She and three associates from the U.S. had been in Panama since December 2, making arrangements for the annual February medical effort she *hoped* be to leading in the remote river villages of the Darien. As the others returned home, she was staying for OCJ. On the phone she heard Larry saying, "You're in charge!" She recalls how "amazing" Urian Ponce was. "Urian was really in charge."



Another key figure to notify was **Roger Mojica**, the Sub Director General of the Senafont Border Police. Since 2014, the Senafont police have partnered with Panama Missions on the project, providing physical aid and security, along with any mode of transportation needed including trucks, vans, buses or boats. (See *In the Spotlight*, p. 4, for more about Sub Director Mojica.)



The shipping container loaded in Montgomery on Nov. 8 and unloaded at the Clinic of Hope in Sanson, Panama, on Dec. 12. Police and church members helped to unload, sort and organize the gifts.



Police high speed boats delivered Christmas gifts and Panama Missions workers to remote river villages where children eagerly awaited their arrival.



Scenes of Operation Christmas Joy 2020



HEROS of Operation Christmas Joy 2020 included (left & clockwise) Diane Edrington, Urian Ponce, the Senafront Police Clown, minister Didiel Midre and wife, Claudia, and Raul Cabrera. These and other church leaders and police officers delivered 7,000 Christmas gifts throughout Panama, even door-to-door when necessary.



Relief Provided During Pandemic

Larry Brady expresses his gratitude to congregations and individual supporters who have made extra donations to provide relief for Christians in Panama he describes as "devastated for a lack of food."

"Travel restrictions and lack of transportation made it almost impossible for our church members," he adds.

With close to \$20,000 provided, church leaders in Panama were able to purchase and deliver food to several hundred families.

Two of the many families helped during the Pandemic.



Yati Chami Attends Faulkner

Yati Chami, Larry and Betsy's "Panama granddaughter," has transferred from Freed-Hardeman to Faulkner University in Montgomery for her junior year. She has changed her major to psychology and forensic science and is "loving it," says Larry who also proudly mentions that Yati made the fall Dean's List.

"**THANK YOU** to all who supported Yati in high school at Prattville Christian Academy, and now in university studies. I know that God will use her for good in her home country of Panama."



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IN THE SPOTLIGHT

By Larry Brady

One of the best friends that Panama Missions has in Panama is a high ranking police official.

Since 2014, the Senafront Border Police have partnered with us in our humanitarian efforts in the Darien of Panama which borders Columbia, the most dangerous region of the country. It began with their concern for our safety and includes their mission to serve and protect the residents of the region.

I made the acquaintance of **Roger Mojica**, the Sub Director General of the Senafront Border Police, several years ago. We have become good friends and usually get together every time that I am in Panama.



He has gone above and beyond to support our programs, providing "whatever is needed." He has a big heart for the poor and has shown compassion for the refugees passing through the region. "You can not blame people who want a better life," was his comment.

Because of the Senafront police, we no longer have to worry about security or transportation. We are provided vans, buses, trucks or boats - "whatever is needed." If luggage or vital supplies are missing or delayed, we can count on Senafront to take care of it.

The men and women officers assigned to us become our friends and co-workers. They aid us with medical clinics, relief efforts, and Operation Christmas Joy. Sometimes the officers have delivered our aid supplies or Christmas gifts to dangerous or difficult places *for us!*

Important 2021 Dates (Subject to Change)

Medical Mission to Puerto Indio ~ TBA March/April

Evangelism/Medical Mission to Clinic of Hope
Sansón, Darien, Panama
June 7-18

OPERATION CHRISTIAN JOY 2021:
Gifts Due in Montgomery ~ October 13
Truck Route ~ October 14-15
Load OCJ Container ~ November 1

Panama Missions is hopeful that by 2022 the pandemic will be history and a regular schedule of mission efforts can be resumed.

Some have attended our devotionals and requested prayers and study materials. A few years ago, J. W. Furr baptized one of the female officers.

I recently told Roger that "God is using you and your position for the good of the people in the Darien." It is individuals like Roger who make the work of foreign missionaries so much easier!

PEOPLE WHO "MAKE A DIFFERENCE"

By Sara Bills

I can count on a receiving a special phone call every year soon after the Operation Christmas Joy shipment leaves for Panama. It is from a wonderful Christian lady in Swifton, Ark., named Marsha Harvey.

"Sara, it's Marsha. Our ladies are meeting in a few days and we want to know what you need for us to do for Operation Christmas Joy for next year."

Swifton is a congregation of 75 and the "ladies group" consists of 15 amazing women who take on good works. Fortunately for us, Panama Missions is one of their major projects.

Their 2020 contribution was more than 1,000 small toys for children under the age of 5 - just what we always need in Montgomery to make up extra gifts for those ages. We were eager to have the toys, so Larry Brady and J.W. Furr made a special trip to Swifton in early October to pick them up. We have asked for "toys" again in 2021!

The group also provided approximately 700 "outfits" of quality used children's clothing donated by a consignment shop - carefully checked and packaged by sizes.

I never cease to be amazed, and grateful, for the love and generosity of those who support Operation



Available to hand over toys for Operation Christmas Joy to J. W. Furr and Larry Brady in October are Swifton ladies: Kathy Roberts, Brenda Templeton, Patty King, Marsha Harvey and Mary Smith.