

Daily Journal

Jim Rooks

Parish delegates traveled to San Wenceslaus, our sister parish in Bogota, Colombia. Each delegate kept a daily journal about their experiences, their ideas and thoughts about future trips.

1/27/2015

Left for Colombia on United with Enrique Llanes (fluent in English and Spanish and my interpreter), Deacon Bill Eckert, and Jim O'Neill (also fluent in English and Spanish). Long ride with fun time in Houston Airport. Met in Bogota by Stella, Patrizia, Sister Valerie, and Sister Carolina. Bill and Jim O taken to San Wenceslaus (SW), Enrique and I taken to Convent. They fed us, and we had a great get acquainted conversation. Met the other Sisters: Sister Margaret, and Cathy Johnson, RN Plus their housekeeper Morena.

1/28/2015

Woke early. Prayer with sisters, breakfast at convent. Spent morning at clinic reviewing the unit, which had been damaged by storm. Drs. Luz Stella Jimenez and Maria Camilla Yanini, very nice and professional. Dr. Jimenez is a family doctor and Medical Director of the Clinic. Dr. Yanini is a family practice resident in her first year. This is a year of service for her. The clinic was severely damaged by a storm before Christmas and is being remodeled. The elder barrio people were there for the Wednesday clinic. The elder Barrio men and women really taken with Enrique and Jim O. both of whom are fluent in Spanish. We presented them with prayer shawls that had been made by the ladies at St. Patrick's. Lunch at convent and then presentation to 7-8th grade class on our parish. Bill led them in a rousing Seahawks cheer. Tour of the school. Met principal. Santa Pasha is a girl's school run by the sisters and mainly attended by girls from families of means. The school that we sponsor for the poorer students is Colegio Annexo Santa de Francisco (CASFA). It is a coed school from preschool-12 grade.

Ran two miles with Enrique. Altitude kind of got to us. Went to Saint Wenceslaus. Church appears to be in poor area. Lots of graffiti and bicycle shops. Went to restaurant in mall with Father Libardo and women from church. Had a traditional Sopa Ajiaco--very good. Back to convent after hair raising cab ride. The traffic in Bogota is CRAZY! Got to bed late.

1/29/2015

Really rather sick early AM with lower GI symptoms. Reason? Ate and drank light rest of the day. Prayer with the sisters and very light breakfast. Trip to Barrio with Dr. Camilla Yanini, Cathy Johnson ARNP, Enrique Llanes and Sister Margaret Kiefer. Barrio unbelievable--the poverty on a par with what I saw in the villages of Vietnam when I went on Medical Civic Action program. Saw 32-year-old man shot by stray bullet and paralyzed at age 16. He had just moved from the country when he was shot. Needs lots of rehab, care for decubiti, etc, still positive, wants to be a wheel chair lawyer. Young woman with neonatal hypoxemia, mental retardation and multiple problems. Amazingly well cared for in what seems like a hopeless situation. Saw Minerva, 60-year-old black lady post stroke, multiple medical problems depression etc. Dr. Yanini did wonderful job. Came back and toured, CASFA

Light lunch for me but others had big meal at Crepes and Waffles. (Sisters Valerie and Carolina, Principal of CASFA, Costanza-Academic coordinator at CASFA, and four of us. Rested. Trip to Mont Serrat with the ladies from Saint Wenceslaus. This is a beautiful mountain, accessible by long hike or cable car. Wanted to hike, but rest of group wanted the cable car. Beautiful church at top with great views of the city. Amazing contrasts in Bogota. Long hair raising cab rides to and from the mountain. Got back to convent late collapsing into bed.

1/30/2015

So this AM rose early went for one mile run, felt much better. Prayer with the sisters, a time that has become very special for Enrique and me. Like being on a wonderful spiritual retreat. The sisters here are so very special and so close to God. We then went to CASFA for a tour of the school and what a special place it is. The Children are so attentive, loving and always want to hug us. Yesterday Jim O'Neill had given them candy, but I gave a presentation to the classes on 5-2-1-0, which they enjoyed, as did the teachers. (5-2-1-0 is a program to combat obesity we used at Multicare. 5 fruit and vegetables every day, No more than 2 hrs. of TV or electronics a day, 1-hour vigorous exercise daily, and no sugary drinks.) These children come from poorer families than Santa Pascha kids and are on assistance. We were escorted by Costanza, the Academic Coordinator (and wonderful lady) and two very beautiful 10th grade girls, one of who is Angie Alejandra Rodrisquez-Funeme. After the tour was over she came to me telling me of her desire to be a physician. I gave her encouragement and connected her with Dr. Maria Camilla Yanini, who was already familiar with her. It will be hard for Alejandra as her father is a laborer and her mother sells clothes from door to door. Dr. Yanini will do her best to help. Then we went back to SW for lunch with Father Libardo and a meeting with the people who work in the parish Saint Vincent de Paul group. Very touching bringing tears to our eyes. In their poverty, their sweetness, generosity they have given us more than we can ever give them.

Going to dinner tonight with Julia Narvaez's parents. Julia is a member of our church in Tacoma and had sent money for the dinner to her parents. The dinner at the restaurant, Oubres, was a fabulous experience of Colombian culture. Got picked up at 6:30, finally got to restaurant about 8:30. Appetizers at 9:30, main entree shortly after. Music, Colors, Salsa dancing. Sat next to Julietta and her husband. She is Julia's first cousin and best friend. Julia's brother and his wife, and her sister and her husband plus her parents, father Libardo and us. Quite a crowd. Finally got back to convent at 12:30 AM exhausted.

1/31/2015

Short run this AM and going to S W for breakfast and other events.

We had breakfast at the home of Patrizia Bernal and her family. She has been one the guides at SW, lives with her 17 year old son and mother in a very small but nice and clean apartment. Her brother, his wife, and 2 boys were there too. Then we walked the streets around the parish visiting fruit and vegetable stores, which actually are good. They eat lots of meat but it is raised on grass, big haciendas and no feedlots. (I checked!) We then visited 3 other Religious women houses. Sisters of Immaculate Conception, Sisters of Divine master where Bill got a new Alb that is made there, and Sisters of guardian angels. All wonderful orders doing great things for the lord.

Back to parish house for lunch and then over to CASFA for a presentation by the students. Met with Alejandre Rodriquez and her parents. She wants to be a physician and shows real commitment.

Back to SW for a short rest then 6:30 mass which was just beautiful. They introduced us all, Deacon Bill gave the homily and Jim ONeill translated. The own Deacon SANG the gospel in his very beautiful voice. One could hear the power of God coming through. We then sang the Diego Si Senor (I say Yes my Lord) song in English and Spanish and it was a big hit.

After mass we met with all the church leaders followed by a supper of rice and pork-- they literally had cooked a whole pig! So many other beautiful moments and snippets of poignant exchanges filled with the love of Christ. These are such wonderful giving and spiritual people.

2/1/2015

It's early Sunday AM will be a long day. Have arisen early plan a run (ran 30 minutes with Enrique) and then on to Church where we will be presented at all 4 masses today.

Things I have learned: I have been arrogant about my country, status, and what we have. I vow to recognize all people in this hemisphere as Americans: North, South, Central. Have always felt close too Enrique since he came to SP, feel even closer since coming to Colombia. He has become a brother, and a terrific translator.

We went to first Mass followed by breakfast at Fr L's. At that breakfast, Deacon Camille and his family were with us including his children. He is a wonderful musician and gave us a CD "Let me Live" (great story there). Then 11 ARE mass. Both services very touching. People very accepting of our songs that we sang for them, Diego Si Señor, and the Irish Blessing. Lunch at Stella's and her family: Husband Emilio, Son Jonathan his wife and Children, Tatiana and her son, Pedro, Mariana. Patrizia and her son Matteo also there. Great meal, conversation, music, dancing, joy, laughter, love. Some rest in afternoon. Masses at 5 and 7. Approx 500 people each mass. Memorable people: Couple who had moved back from NJ. The two doctors and their sons, the poor lady with the massive tumor (very poor-Contrast to USA poor), girl with Bell's palsy. Arrived back late. Sisters want us for Dinner tomorrow. Conflict with Fr. L's schedule.

2/2/2015

Arose at 5 AM and after breakfast at convent, went to Cardiac hospital for visit. This hospital was as good if not better than many academic hospitals in the USA. They specialize in both children and adult cardiac surgery. I noted state of the art equipment and the superb cleanliness of the facility. Even the cafe had cheerful servers who brought your order to the table. They had a beautiful roof garden and a gym for the use of their employees. Took photo of barrio from roof garden--so near yet so far away. We then left, Enrique, Cathy Johnson, RN, Dr. Luz Stella Jimenez-Matiz, Sister Carolina, and I went to the Barrio to see patients. One was a fine 16-year-old boy who has been relocated for hostile reasons. He had had 2-3rd degrees over his face and body at age 2 when he tripped on wire knocking over boiling water. Has suffered incredible burns, peer abuse, and psychological issues. We evaluated him and made some recommendations. He did not need surgery but counseling and education--hard for him

to get at this point. Enrique did outstanding job giving grandfatherly advice in addition to translating. We were accompanied by a young doctor who had been educated in Venezuela and felt the system there (a communist country) had better access for poor than in Colombia, whose system is patterned after the USA. I can in no way believe a communist system could possibly be better, but realize access to health care for the poor can be improved with the system they have in Colombia. Back to SW and Bill, Jim O, Enrique and I accompanied Fr. L to the residence of Monsignor who heads to San Pedro area of the Bogota Archdiocese. What a wonderful man, approachable, warm, engaging, and fun. Was interested in each of our stories and opinions of Colombia. Had another hair rising ride in the SUV belonging to Emilio a friend of Fr. L's. We all had lunch with Monsignor at a nice restaurant, and then went back to his residence for tour. Then went to Fr. L's home where I examined his sister who has otosclerosis and gave counsel for her condition. A beautiful home but surrounded by huge thick steel fence topped with concertina razor wire. Very common throughout all of Bogota. Then Back to SW (more hair raising rides.) Then Enrique and I were taken back to the convent for prayer, supper, and great conversation. We shared, we shed tears of joy, and I shared Deacon Camile Martinez's CD song "Let me Live". The sisters were just wonderful: Sister Valerie, 70 their leader--she witnessed to me what leadership is all about. Sister Carolina, 45 a teacher and psychologist with great sense of humor, Cathy Johnson, RN a conjourner with them, Sister Margaret 90 who knew and lived with Dorothy Day at the Catholic Worker in NYC (so did Cathy).

2/3/2015

Arose 4:15 AM and Sister Valerie and Sister Carolina took us to airport, where we met Bill and Jim O (he is staying another day or so) who were brought by Stella and Patrizia. We had breakfast together and then off--We sang the Irish Blessing for them as we said goodbye with tears of joy streaming down our faces. What a wonderful visit, what a blessing from God!