

**Dear friends in God's mission:** this is our LIZWAN – Emmaus Road Foundation update for the month of May 2011. In this update we share about the recent visit to Colombia of Messiah Lutheran Church in Marquette, Michigan.

**People to people mission relations:** from April 29 through May 6, 2011 the Lutheran Church of Colombia and we as LIZWAN/Emmaus Road Ministry were blessed with the visit of Messiah Lutheran Church in Marquette, Michigan. Messiah is the sister Church of Light and Life



Lutheran Mission in Caracoli, a poor community located in Ciudad Bolivar in Southern Bogota. Messiah has accompanied and supported this Lutheran Mission for a period of three years through prayers, personal visits, financial and material gifts.

Members of Messiah Lutheran Church and Light and Life Lutheran Mission after the worship service on Sunday May 1, 2011

Messiah group of five people included Pastor Dave Van Kley. This is the fifth time Pastor Van Kley blesses us with his joyful and encouraging presence here in Colombia. The goal of this visit was to experience firsthand the hospitality of its sister Lutheran Mission Luz y Vida (Light and Life), the overall mission work of the Lutheran Church of Colombia–IELCO and our work as LIZWAN/Emmaus Road Ministry. It also involved immersing as much as possible in the local culture of Bogota and learning first-hand about the political, social and economic situation of Colombia. On their Sunday here in Colombia, Messiah's group worshiped among the families and members of their sister Mission in Caracoli.



Worship service at Light and Life Lutheran Mission in Caracoli



Lisa, Danny and Helen helping children of Light and Life Lutheran Mission to complete their activity

Meaningful and life-changing experiences took place as part of one and a half days spent visiting families at Light and Life Lutheran Mission. During these visits our brothers and sisters from Messiah experienced the struggles, life stories and hopes of their mission companions in Caracoli.

It was a precious time for sharing, playing, painting, embracing and seeking ways to strengthen the mission relationship, a precious time which God used to make companionship in mission a down to earth reality and to foster shared faith and deeper communion.



Some members of the Women's Solidarity Group at Light and Life Lutheran Mission who receive training and lead processes to create small enterprises and become self-sustainable. Activities include sawing, handcrafts, beauty, seminars on values and psychological accompaniment.

The group also had the opportunity to visit the Soup Kitchen at the Good Samaritan Center in Soacha. This pioneer project among a predominantly displaced senior population is implemented by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia and supported by the Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritan Society and by LIZWAN/Emmaus Road Foundation.

Messiah Lutheran Church during its visit to the seniors' soup kitchen in Soacha.



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Here at the Good Samaritan Center Messiah's group shared a meal with 38 seniors who benefit from this holistic ministry which includes daily food, Christian community of care, recreation, handcrafts and spiritual accompaniment. Here our Messiah friends learned about this ministry and danced to their best.

Messiah's group also experienced firsthand how life is like in the countryside. The group traveled two hours to Quetame, a town affected by the earthquake that took place in Colombia three years ago and the place where the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia has been present providing relief to some of the affected families and communities. Here in rural Quetame two families



were visited and testimonies of gratitude to IELCO were expressed. The hospitality, welcoming and generosity of the families visited were most appreciated by the group, as well as the beautiful scenery of this place deeply nested in the Andean mountains.

The opportunity Messiah had to experience how life is like in the countryside was among the most meaningful experiences for the group.



To share the mutual transformation and mission impact these visits accomplish, we have asked Pastor Dave Van Kley to give us permission to share the sermon he preached at his congregation of Messiah Lutheran Church the very first Sunday after his return from Colombia. Here it Pr. Dave's sermon. We hope and pray it will inspire and challenge you!

### People of the Journey...by Pastor Dave Van Kley

"Just yesterday, we returned from Colombia: Helen Koski, Danny Stone, Lisa McCarthy, Tanner Delpier, and I. We traveled 4500 miles in less than a day, yet the contrast between the world we left and the one we have returned could hardly be greater.



It was a magical trip in many ways: a journey that renewed our faith and reframed the way we look at the world. Often, journeys do that. We leave our comfort zone and encounter strangers. The new world we experience surprises us, alters us. I wish I could have taken all of you with us.

Did you know that, before our religion was called Christianity, it was called "the Way?" And that the first Christians were called people of the Way or people of the Journey?

During our visit to Colombia, there were journeys within the journey. I could tell of many, but for the sake of time I will limit myself today to one. On Tuesday, our van bounced up the rugged hills surrounding Bogotá, into the vast shanty-town known as Ciudad Bolivar—between two and three million people living in extreme poverty. Here, among shacks clinging to mountainsides and unpaved roads littered with rocks and garbage is Messiah's companion congregation, the Lutheran Mission of Light and Life at Caracoli.



An Afro-Colombian woman about 50 years old named Maria meets us, leading us on foot up one steep hillside and down another, past hundreds of tattered houses and people in the streets, watching us. We realize: we are the strangers here! The walking is difficult, but finally



we arrive at Maria's home, perched precariously on the edge of a mountainside, the edge of oblivion. A tiny home made of concrete and tin, it consists of a living area and bedroom, in which Maria, three of her four daughters, and several grandchildren live. Despite the conditions, her daughters are strikingly beautiful.

Messiah's visit to Maria and her family.

Like so many Afro-Colombians descended from the days of slave trade, Maria had lived along the tropical Pacific Coast, near the town of Choco, where civil war still rages. She and her family subsisted there, raising plantain, coconuts, and fruit. They owned little, but had enough to eat. Five years ago, a band of armed men from one of the illegal actors of the armed conflict seized one of her three sons, from whom she has not heard since. It is not safe to stay once one of the armed groups has targeted your family, so Maria fled to chilly and crowded Bogotá. There she lives like so many displaced people—on an eroded hillside where nothing will grow, vulnerable to mudslides and earthquakes, listening to shots ring out at night.

At times, she works as a domestic servant for the wealthy in the north of Bogotá, two hours away by bus. She makes \$250 per month, pays \$100 of that in transportation, and with what is left, must pay \$75 in rent and provide for a family of at least six. Now, she is not working at all. Her story is the same as millions of others.



Maria receiving gifts brought by Messiah.

"How do you survive?" we ask. She is not sure, other than to say that it is by the grace of God. Some months, she walks the streets with an open bag, begging money and bread from other desperately poor people. She loves the mission. It's different from all the churches she's attended before, she says: more tranquil, less emotional, offering real peace and community, rather than false promises. And we are learning to make crafts, she says, holding up a humble cross made of discarded corn husks. We present a blanket from Messiah's quilters. Maria weeps for joy, hugging each of us without restraint, kissing our necks and crying out, "Gracias, muchas gracias, Senores!"



Then one of her daughters arrives, holding a liter bottle of strawberry soda and two small packages of pound cake, purchased in a store. I remember the poor widow in the Bible, who gave everything she had in the temple, her whole living. I remember the widow at Zarephath, who made a cake from her last jar of flour and shared it with Elijah the prophet. I think of the Crucified One, pouring out his lifeblood for all of us.

Maria breaks the cake into pieces and distributes it. She pours the red pop into cups and hands one to each of us. My heart sings: I know that this is more than a snack; this is a holy communion. I know that Christ is alive and with us here, in this humble home. Too soon, our Colombian hosts lead us out of the house and back on our way. It is not safe to stay too long in such a place. We may never see Maria again, yet in that fleeting moment she had shown us Christ. The implications for our lives are many.

I wish I could have taken you all to Maria's house. But this is the best I can do for you.

The first Easter afternoon, Cleopas and a friend, disciples of Jesus, walked to Emmaus, a village seven miles distant from Jerusalem, two and a half hours on foot. As they walked, they talked, just as we do, when we walk together. Journeys do that: you discuss your son's report card, what your daughter wore to prom, the death of Osama Bin Laden, the latest round of budget cuts.

"It's windy, today, isn't it?" said Cleopas.

"Hardly noticed. My mind's still on Friday," said the other.

"I know. Can you believe it? Four days ago we ate breakfast with him!"

"Four days! It seems like a lifetime!"

"How could we desert him when he needed us most?"

"I don't know. We were scared. But I'm ashamed of myself, all the same."

"What do you think of Mary Magdalene's story?"

"About the tomb being empty?"

"Yes."

"I don't know—there must be some explanation!"

They were too engrossed in their conversation to notice that a stranger had come alongside, matching them stride for stride. "What are you two talking about?" he asked. So began the encounter we have come to call "the walk to Emmaus." When the disciples described Jesus' death, their disappointment, the stranger became a rabbi, interpreting Scripture for them in a new way, which the One they hoped would save the world needed to suffer and die, in order to do that. They couldn't understand, much less believe him, yet they couldn't stop listening, either. Miles flew by as they walked and talked. By the time they arrived at home, it was getting dark. They extended hospitality to the stranger. When the table was set, he took the bread, blessed, and broke it—immediately, they knew! The stranger was the risen Christ! Yet, in that same moment, he was gone and they were on the road again, back to Jerusalem, to tell their friends. This time, they ran all the way.

Many things could be said and have been said about the walk to Emmaus. But it is only good news if the risen Christ also reveals himself to us in 2011. Today, I would proclaim to you that the risen Christ comes to us on our journeys, often surprising us through strangers, among the poor, in acts of hospitality, through the Word of God, whether in sermons and the Bible or in everyday conversations which go deeper than weather and sports. At this table, when bread is broken and wine is poured, yes, but also around all kinds of other tables, when food and drink are shared.

As you leave this place and go on your way, think of it as your Emmaus walk. Whether you traverse the hillsides of Ciudad Bolivar or walk around the Presque Isle. Whether you fly to Colombia or drive to see your kids in Lansing. Look for signs of the risen Christ! Where do you see him? How do you know the Savior of this world is alive? That your sins are forgiven and death cannot destroy you? That poverty, violence, and injustice are being overcome?



Then tell of your meetings with him. Tell your friends, as I have told you. Tell your neighbors. Tell those who are struggling and alone and those who think they've got it made. Tell the poor and the wealthy. Tell a story so good it changes the world. Amen".

On behalf of the Lutheran Church of Colombia-IELCO, the LIZWAN/Emmaus Road Ministry and Light and Life Lutheran Mission we take this opportunity to express our heart-felt gratitude to Messiah Lutheran Church for their recent visit and for their faithful spiritual and financial support. We do celebrate these growing people-to-people mission relationships and thank you for supporting God's ongoing mission in our country of Colombia.

**We invite your ongoing prayers:**As always, the gift of your prayers is a precious gift.

- ✚ Individuals, families and communities in Colombia affected by the La Niña Phenomenon which has brought heavy rains causing floods, landslides and additional internal displacement. It is estimated that about two million Colombians are currently affected by flooding and have lost everything. This is taking place on top of the reality of over four million Colombians who have been internally displaced by the armed conflict.

Feel free to communicate with us!We like to hear from you!Our e-mail addresses are the following: [ldlizwan@ielco.org](mailto:ldlizwan@ielco.org) (Colombia) [lizwan@alliancecom.net](mailto:lizwan@alliancecom.net) and [4290@flcsf.org](mailto:4290@flcsf.org) (USA). If for any reason you change your e-mail address, we greatly appreciate letting us know so that we can keep you in our e-mailing list. If you know of anyone interested in our ministry, feel free to share this information! Our English and Spanish Webpage is now in place. We invite you to communicate with us that way too. You can find us at <http://www.emmausroadfoundation.org>. Follow us on [Facebook](#) by searching for Leadership & Development LIZWAN.

In Christ's love,

Stella Lizarazo - Executive Director Emmaus Road Foundation – Colombia