

Articles:

- How we made room for Christ this Christmas season
- Colegio Americano Menno graduates 37, loses 2 teachers
- Youth group retreat inspires future pastors

Prayer Concerns:

- Pray for us as we travel Dec. 15 to Jan. 2 to Pennsylvania and Virginia to be with family and friends over Christmas.
- Pray for Martin and Elsy González as they bring closure to their 9 years of ministry at La Mesa Mennonite Church in February, and for the congregation as they make this transition in pastoral leadership.
- Ask for guidance for the growing holistic church planting project in Anapoima which Martin and Elsy are planning to expand in the coming year. We anticipate increasing our own involvement in this project next year.
- Remember school leadership as they make hiring decisions for the coming year. Pray that qualified teachers with strong personal faith can be found.

News from the Kauffman family in La Mesa, Colombia

Leaving the Gate Unlocked: A Christmas Story



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"She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." Luke 2:7

Tap, tap, tap.

I looked up at the front door, trying to figure out who could be there at eight o'clock at night. Why didn't they call out, *buenas*, like most visitors do?

I opened the door, with a fleeting sense of trepidation. *I suppose a thief wouldn't knock, would he?* We'd heard recent reports of break-ins and robberies, so I was feeling a bit cautious.

A boy and a girl dressed in grubby clothes stood outside the door.

"Good evening," I said.

"Hi mister, we're just going around with our mother asking for food. We don't have anything to eat."

"Where's your mother?" I inquired. *Could be just two kids trying to take advantage of the gringos.*

"She's sitting up on the corner." I followed the girl out the gate and she pointed up the street, where I could just make out a slumped figure on the edge of the sidewalk.

"Well, I would prefer to talk to her, first," I said, a bit more convinced of their story.

As she ran up the hill to retrieve the slumped figure, I went back in the house. *Why did I leave the front gate unlocked?* I thought to myself. *At least they're not asking for money.*

"Laura, there's some kids at the door asking for food. I told them I wanted to talk to their mom, first. Do we have any extra food around?"

While she rummaged in the cupboards, I went back outside to talk to our visitors.

"Good evening. How are you?" I said as I shook the hand of the forty-something, bright-eyed woman who stood with the

boy and girl outside our gate.

She told me they were getting evicted from their apartment. Her husband had left her with five kids, and since she had no steady work, they had no money to buy food. They were forced to ask for handouts.

"Well, we haven't done any shopping lately, but we'll share what we've got," I reassured her, adding, "I'm not sure it's a good idea to make your kids do the begging, though."

She agreed. They had sat outside on the corner for several minutes, she explained, getting up the courage to knock on our door. They were ashamed to beg.

Back inside I asked Laura what she had found. *Should I have invited them inside? They don't look dangerous, but they're still complete strangers.*

"Here's an unopened pack of noodles." She held them out while I stuffed some eggs into a plastic bag. "And some beans."

"Potatoes. Do we have any? Maybe an onion, too, to add a bit of flavor."

I took our meager but nutritionally balanced offering to the family, who continued to wait outside our gate. They received it graciously.

"If you ever need any work done, or know someone who does, you can give 'em my number," the woman told me. I took down her name and number.

Once they had left, I went through the gate, and closed it.

Then, I locked it.

But I had left it unlocked just long enough for Christ to visit us that evening.

Others stories on page 2.

Aaron & Laura
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*Trust in the Lord with all
your heart and lean not
on your own
understanding; in all
your ways acknowledge
him, and he will make
your paths straight.*

Proverbs 3:5,6

**Our Support Team
from
Zion Mennonite Church**

Chairperson
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Prayer Coordinator
Mark Mast

Church Communicator
Sharon Showalter

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We're on the Web!

See us at:

kauffmanhome.net



Laura delivers a personal care kit to Alirio, a member of the community where La Mesa is doing outreach.

Abigail shares a new birthday toy with Mary, daughter of Chet and Holly Miller-Eshleman, MCC workers in Cali, Colombia. Highlights of the trip were visiting the Mennonite Brethren school, attending an MCC-sponsored AIDS conference, and connecting with other mission workers.



In Focus: Colegio Americano Graduation



Otilia Garzón bids farewell after 39 years of teaching

On December 1st we celebrated the graduation of the senior class. The ceremony also honored Otilia Garzón, who is retiring after 39 years of teaching with the school; Emilse Ortega, who is moving to Canada with her family after 13 years at the school; Martín González, pastor of La Mesa Mennonite Church, who is moving on to other ministry after 9 years with the church; and Peter Stucky, out-going president of the Colombian Mennonite Church. Aaron compiled a touching slide show presentation of photos of the people leaving, and also a presentation for the seniors. Otilia also gave a tearful farewell speech – there were not many dry eyes in the auditorium. She has been a pillar in the school for so many years that it's hard to imagine replacing her. So while we celebrate the end of a successful year, we anticipate a number of difficult changes for the coming year.

Youth Group Retreat a Success

On November 4 we left with 25 wound-up teenagers for three days of spiritual reflection and growth. We had been hoping it would allow the youth to deepen their relationship with God and each other. Our hopes were surpassed in every way.

The entire weekend was an amazing time of bonding as a group and spiritual renewal for all of us. Each day had a specific focus: celebration, confession, and finally commitment. Luz Mary, the pastor of the church where we held the retreat, led some powerful times of worship and reflection. Though the atmosphere had a charismatic flavor, we sensed genuineness in both the leadership and in our youth, many of whom had unforgettable experiences of God's presence.

For us, however, the important part is the evidence of changed lives. We see a dramatic difference in many of the youth since the retreat. They now show a greater interest in participating in church life, taking their discipleship seriously, and accompanying the outreach efforts of the church. Several spend hours in the afternoons practicing in a newly formed worship band that leads music on Sundays. And four of the youth are now interested in going to a Bible college to prepare for a life of ministry!

We are thrilled to see potential church leaders come out of this group. We are also excited to see these 25 young adults making healthy friendships, life-giving decisions and having a lot of fun together in the process.