

## Costa Rica Newsletter

June 21, 2010

Costa Rica's 6 ½ million people are mostly Roman Catholic—but there's a lively and active Anglican presence in the 17 Episcopal churches in the Episcopal Diocese of Costa Rica. Several years ago, Bishop Michael Curry and Bishop Hector Monterroso formed a Companion Diocese relationship, recognizing our relationship as members of the Body of Christ, and looking for ways to bring us closer together, to grow the Church in Costa Rica, and to help to support its outreach ministries. Despite Costa Rica's being one of the most stable and economically-solid countries in Latin America, there are still those who don't experience all the benefits.

Peter Macon, Martin McCoy, and I had a chance to build relationships and learn about those needs on a recent trip down to San Jose and Heredia. We began the trip with a delightful dinner with Bishop Monterroso and his wife, Sandra, in their home the day we arrived. On Sunday, we worshipped with the congregation of our partner parish, Cristo Resucitado, in their space over a storefront near downtown Heredia. We met Fr. Jorge, Melvin the music minister, Ana, Esteban, Senor Marcello, Alphonso, Gloriana...ate cake, and made a banner. We shared our banner from St. Alban's, took pictures, and introduced our congregation via the group photos we took on Pentecost. They welcomed us with open arms and hearts, and when they give the peace, you KNOW you've received the peace! I read the Gospel in English, and Fr. Jorge read in Spanish, and he preached on the Trinity as a community of love that is a model for how we should live. We had lunch at a great restaurant in Heredia, to the sound of a rooster crowing, while we ate what might have been his near relative.

We also visited the site of the Hogar Escuela that we're building in Heredia, a combination day care, pre-school, after-school for up to 150 children, and a job training center for their moms. Many of these children are the children of Nicaraguan refugees or illegal immigrants, poor single women and their children, squatters living in tin shacks or in public housing. The moms work up to 12 hours a day as domestics or in other low-paying jobs, and if their children can't stay with a neighbor or extended family, they're home alone. The Hogar Escuelas are a wonderful response to this need, providing a safe, supervised and caring haven for the children, and an opportunity for a better job to their moms. The land in Heredia has been initially graded, the plans are finished, and by the time you read this, all the permits should be in hand! We also met with Millie and Sylvia, the architect and engineer on the project, who have come up with a design that not only works incredibly well on a small site, but also is highly replicable for other Hogar Escuelas. Building in Costa Rica isn't exactly like building here, but there are building codes, permit regulations...even rezonings that have to be gotten through.

We also visited the existing Hogar Escuela Barrio Cuba, which has been operating for 40 years and is the model for the program. In the midst of a very low-income area, a brightly-painted entrance welcomes children and their parents. Inside, there are classrooms, a chapel, a modern kitchen, an area for Godly Play, and a great playground. Christ Church in Charlotte provided a beautiful computer lab for kids and their moms, in memory of one of their young members who'd died. It was dedicated the day before we arrived in Costa Rica. The kids look truly happy and receive such good care.

Peter provided an educational program for the pastors and senior wardens of the parishes, and we'll be seeking funding to expand that program. It's important to build up and empower the lay leadership of the Church—because in a hierarchical Church, most people don't realize that the lay order is at the TOP of the pyramid, and the clergy is there to support them in their growth and ministry! Martin and I played hooky to explore the Central Pacific coast and Manuel Antonio National Park, where we saw white-faced Capuchin monkeys, squirrel monkeys, and iguanas galore. But it wasn't all play—we were made aware of the issues of rural poverty, and small pockets of people who need help in an area where there is no Episcopal presence.

We are going back...in August! If you want to join our mission trip, to work on Hogar Escuela and do other projects, to meet and worship with the wonderful people of Cristo Resucitado, to see how YOU can make a difference...just contact Peter Macon or myself. Trip dates are August 27 through September 1, and you CAN use frequent flyer miles to reduce the cost. We'll stay at Diocesan House, which is cozy and relaxing, and take Sunday off for worship and visiting a volcano. We'll save space for YOU!

-- Deacon Rebecca Yarbrough