

Bolivians lean on big shoulders of Chicago medical missionaries

By Michael D. Wamble
STAFF WRITER

Santa Cruz, Bolivia — Walking through the cemetery, Juan Hinojosa honors the culture's Day of the Dead custom. Suddenly a voice cries out to him.

It's not a representative of the deceased, but an advocate for the living, concerned that too many poor people will face a grim fate in Santa Cruz given due to the lack of medical services. "We need missionaries. Please help us," said Juan Hinojosa, director of the Hildebrand Institute of the Center for Development in Ministry based out of the University of St. Mary of the Lake. Hinojosa told this story before 100 medical professionals at a Salesian-run retreat center in the countryside.

The voice belonged to Teresa Aspazua, director of Niño Feliz, a foundation that provides necessary, life medical care for the children of Santa Cruz's poorest families.

Listening to his words, Aspazua flashes a smile that lights up the well-lit room. Why wouldn't she? A year later, through the turbulence of countless meetings, political maneuvering and a rocky ride from Chicago to Santa Cruz, Hinojosa has returned with a medical team of 40. And the group hasn't come empty-handed.

"We've brought 40 pacemakers. And these are just the first of many more to come," said Hinojosa. Outfitted in missionaries, T-shirts and wooden croses, 22 lay representatives of the Archdiocese of Chicago began the exchange of conversation and collaboration with those living in the poorest nation on the South American continent.

Being a "pioneer" brings both a rush of excitement and uncertainty to each moment of the 10-day mission. NIKKI NIBO, a nurse in the cardiobiochemistry/surgical ICU at Northwestern Memorial, jumped at the invitation to join the Archdiocese's first lay medical mission.

"When I talked to people about the mission, I said, 'I'm going to have fun.' To see the looks they gave me... That's what you're looking for. How this was going to be fun," said Nibo, smiling widely.

During the retreat, Hinojosa cited the priest's call for solidarity, and his own desire to "awaken the sleeping child lay to carry forth the work of the church."

"By abating in this healing mission, we find Christ, therefore we find God," said Hinojosa. "But really, it is God who is finding us."

The medical mission, in essence, is an opportunity for doctors and nurses to evangelize through the healing arts.

"Our mission should, and always will be about the sick and the poor among them, those who are closer to God because of their need for God," said Cheri McKeely, family care coordinator at Children's Memorial Hospital and medical coordinator for the mission.

The need is great. Chicago, a diverse town afflicted by a drug trade that undermines a paradigm of success as well as a culture of hope, has a high unemployment rate. The pauper economy in refers with the heart and without a vaccination or cure in sight, accentuates the installation of a peace make.

In Bolivia, the infant mortality rate is high. Yet here a clear separation from politics and the plight of the poor is difficult.

Signs line the streets of poverty-ridden neighborhoods urging children to vote in upcoming mayoral elections. "Votamos Santa Cruz" posters about cast to passers by.

Advocates like Aspazua don't invest much hope in political theories. Aspiration said the child mortality rate is 186 per 1,000 children. She hopes, however, that the government's "school" system of

36 per 1,000.

"That's why I seriously doubt that the changes needed to be made here will come from politicians. But I try to remain hopeful; changes will eventually come," said Aspazua.

White numbers are in dispute, the fact that 1,000 families are fed by Niño Feliz is a reality that keeps her engaged and ever in search of donors and sponsors.

Since 1990, the foundation has offered medical, legal and social services, along with trade skill training lessons to light a path for needy people into the workforce. Sponsors support children (and often their families) at an annual fee of \$85.

At Primero de Mayo, a hospital/clinic in one of the city's barrios, sacks of quick-dry cement and wooden planks litter the path from the Primero's storage space to the main facility. They are signs of the ongoing 40-bed clinic to aid a

wing onto the hospital. Already the hospital services over 300 people each day.

Missionaries move the cardboard containers of medical supplies to their primary destinations. Niño Feliz (Cherry Child), a center for children and community development, is among many a growing medical clinic.

Santa Cruz's prison, and the surgical supplies that will remain at the hospital. A string-haired dog tied to a fence watches the movement of boxes.

When asked his name, the reply is, "We." In general, stray dogs are regarded as a nuisance. They are treated as if they don't exist. They are left to fend for themselves. In other words, their days mirror those of Bolivia's poor.

found that comes from urban growth. Most of the city's poor have traveled from elsewhere in a mission. They are treated as if they don't exist. They are left to fend for themselves. In other words, their days mirror those of Bolivia's poor.



While a surgical team (above) including, from left, Christiana Macchessa, Dr. Enrique Vique-Franque, Kibang Po and Dr. Eugene Broccoli (not pictured) collaborate with Bolivian counterparts during a gallbladder operation at Primero de Mayo Hospital, Dr. Albert Dieter (photo left), an orthopedic surgeon, examines a patient for possible signs of tuberculosis. Doctors and nurses worked marathon schedules to serve those who traveled great distances to be treated. Surgical teams pushed themselves to complete as many as eight operations a day during the two week mission.



Chaper: New World photo by Michael D. Wamble



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Ricky Martin and the Cup of Life: Synod for America

Into the Dodge bus awaiting our arrival, the first voice that greets our medical mission group in Santa Cruz is Ricky Martin crooning "Living Is a Wild Race."

Besides hearing the widely popular song, along with his World Cup Soccer anthem, "The Cup of Life," on Es-pañol, there are few audible clues that we've just traveled 12 plus hours into another season, into another hemisphere.

Martin, like the beloved Bull Michael Jordan, is a pite-norm. But unlike Mike, the second coming of the former Memphis star may be evidence that Pope John Paul II did indeed read on critical paths over did.

Let me explain. In 1999, journalists scratched their heads regarding the title of the pope's January Synod in Mexico City. To gether, North America, Central America, and Caribbean and South America, and the Caribbean and South America.

Wrong, says His Holiness. Right? In his Synod for America, the pope brought home the message that these nations, need to be joined in solidarity with one another.

"The decision to speak of America in the singular was an attempt to express not only the unity which in some way already exists, but also to point to that closer bond which the people of the continent seek and which the church wishes to foster as part of her own mission," the pope wrote in "Ecclesia in America."

At the close of his recent concert at the United Center (the house that Jordan built), a Chicago Daily Paper reported that even Martin was a witness to the culture. "I first became quite clear that this is the U.S. population," said Ricky Martin, who had just finished his performance. "I think I have had a dream to unite the Americas. And that's what I am doing at the United Center."

Traveling through the nation that Bolivia, the father of

Pan-Americanism, blossomed in the early 19th century, missionaries manage to enter a section of Santa Cruz with people from numerous "American" countries.

Down the winding paths of simple and duplex dwellings, one might pass a pizzeria, a soccer game, a general store or our destination, a medical clinic.

The farther I walked with Dr. Albert Dieter and registered nurse Rudy Valenzuela into this city within a city, the more I forgot exactly where I was. As a Brazilian patient raised his shirt to reveal the scar made by a bone

made mark, I remembered that this was a Catholic town that had, but one person. It houses over 3,000 men, women and children (up to age 6). With the significant exception of drug addicts, it is a modern take on the English-ubiquitous "prison of old."

President, in general lock-up, actually purchase their "cell."

Ask about living a crazy life one day, and you'll find that many of the residents are and some have identified their life as "called Third World nation, as another inmate, though he could not have been below the Southern Cross, just as in the United States, it's Martin's star that's in accordance.

It's also in Bolivia that "The Cup of Life" takes on meaning even more universal—more catholic—than the world's most popular sport.

"Cup of Life" is symbolic of the continents' parents use to wash down prescriptions. It is a reminder of the challenge, one of the ways we receive Christ at the start of each day, in mission. It holds the one blood we each draw thru mission deeper than our shared "American" heritage.

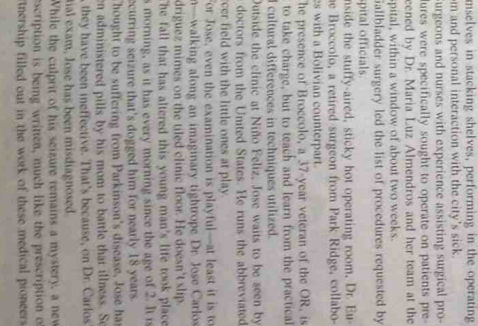
—Michael Wamble



The missionaries (above) receive a warm greeting from their Santa Cruz hosts at Moyuna, a Salesian-run retreat center in the nearby mountains. Auxiliary (photo right) hosts the group via Masses to Sebastian Baza later in the day. A teacher (photo right) hosts the group via Masses to Sebastian Baza later in the day. A teacher (photo right) hosts the group via Masses to Sebastian Baza later in the day. A teacher (photo right) hosts the group via Masses to Sebastian Baza later in the day.



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The daughter and brother of children (above) as the first school one teacher when entering Santa Cruz. The group in the evening, inside, 3,000 children (up to age 6), women and men) who within the preschool from a school in a city that fronts the new life.