

## PANAMA AND "WELTWÄRTS"

Neither "fund raisers" nor "intermediary service providers", but mentoring and mutual growth supporters.

Sarah Ament and Judith Manusch were the first volunteers of "Claim for Dignity e.V." who went to Arequipa (Peru) for a whole school year (2010-2011) with the support of the Development Volunteers Service "Weltwärts", under the authority of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (Germany). It was a dream come true. A dream that for some of us responds to a style of international cooperation that gives priority to personal experiences, exchange and mutual growth of both volunteers and locals of all the involved countries (Peru, Germany and Spain). We do not focus on "fund raising" to help the poor –however necessary it may be- neither on the provision of "intermediary services" to bring together European volunteers and humble realities in developing countries. Our vocation towards the international cooperation wants to prioritize mentoring and mutual growth. The path offered by international volunteering and our contribution to education and training responds to this need, not seeking for publicity or prestige, but aiming to serve specific people with specific needs so that they can be the main actors of their own development while we grow together with them.

In the year 2007 "Weltwärts" began its activity and soon afterwards we heard of its existence. After a short time we started to consider the possibility to let CfD be recognized by Weltwärts to directly manage CfD's volunteers. The limited infrastructure of CfD at the time led us to decline this possibility and we decided to collaborate with the Servicestelle für Weltkirchliche Freiwilligendienste und Globales Lernen of BDKJ (Bund der Deutschen Katholischen Jugend) of the diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart

## editorial

instead. CfD had to select and accompany the volunteers while BDFJ was in charge of their training during a total of 25 days (15 days in Germany before the start of the volunteering period, 5 days during its execution in the assigned location and 5 days after the experience back in Germany) and all the activities related to the administrative requirements of "Weltwärts". During the training period the CfD volunteers had the chance to get to know other volunteers (about thirty) from different organizations (usually other parishes of the diocese) in a similar situation to CfD in terms of infrastructure, not being able to take part in the program offered by "Weltwärts" as a single organization. The collaboration between BDKJ and CfD obviously implied certain costs to CfD, approximately 800 Euros per volunteer and year. These costs had to be assumed by the volunteer since CfD did not have any resources for this purpose.

Some time afterwards, a few of us decided to go a step further and turn CfD into an organization directly recognized by "Weltwärts" to manage CfD's volunteers without intermediaries. This implied not only to coordinate and organize the training of volunteers (apart from their selection and mentoring) but also the management and administration of resources. Also, we had to find a new counterpart to collaborate with since the agreement with BDKJ regarding the volunteers sent to Peru covered a period of three years. Therefore we contacted the Spanish catholic priest Narciso Vioque, a friend of the author of this paper, who currently lives in Panama. After a first visit and the corresponding evaluation of pros and cons of sending volunteers to Panama, we finally decided to go ahead with this initiative.

In this issue Amparo introduces the reality of Panama and Sarah makes an evaluation of the year she spent as a volunteer in Peru.

Édison Fañanas Lanau

## MERCEDARIAN RELIGIOUS IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF EL CHORRILLO (PANAMA)

Today the Mercedarian spirit continues to liberate other forms of human bondage as ignorance, hunger, abuse and violence wherever they may be found

The Order of Mercy is a work inspired to San Pedro Nolasco by Our Lady of Mercy, on August 2, 1218. Initially its main objective was to give complete freedom to the captives. Today, the Mercedarian spirit is not only a way of life, but also a *modus operandi* driven to liberation, following the charisma of San Pedro Nolasco, developing his redemptive work in places and areas where in a notorious way other forms of human bondage appear: captives by: ignorance, hunger, abuse, violence.

Fatima Parish in El Chorrillo, was given to the Mercedarian Religious on March 23, 1980 by Archbishop McGrath, who previously had requested the presence of the Mercedarian in El Chorrillo to the Provincial Father of Barcelona (Spain).

The neighbourhood of El Chorrillo is a community on

## thoughts

the outskirts of Panama City characterised by a high risk and with great social problems, like unemployment, drugs sale and consumption, family breakdown, crime, and a high rate of youth gangs. El Chorrillo surface is less than half a square kilometre, with a police station and 13 gangs. According to research reports, the average age of entry of the gang members is 12 years. Social problems of this neighbourhood are aggravated by overcrowding as families grow. Houses are very small and the damned wooden mansions are dangerous traps where children play innocently. In a space where everything seems bad, there are projects that focus on people, one of these projects is the HUMAN SUPPORT CENTER OF FATIMA PARISH IN EL CHORRILLO managed by the Mercedarian Religious. Current Mercedarian mission in Chorrillo consists on redeem the new forms of slavery that have arisen in high risk societies: malnourished and abandoned children, neglected elder people, captive people in jails, junkies, sick people, abused women and children. Within our purpose, there is a charisma, "a Mercedarian instinct", which has led us to see the face of Christ in the suffering faces of many children. We wish to train new men and women, able to be the builders and makers of the civilization of love.



# thoughts



Parish Social Work

1. Home for Boys and Girls: It houses about 40 girls and boys aged between 6 and 17, who for various reasons do not have family members to take care of them, or who cannot be kept inside the family environment because for economical reasons.

2. Elder people Home: The elder people Home, "San Pedro Nolasco" was founded February 17, 1985 due to new concerns and needs. Today the home hosts about 20 elderly men and 20 elderly women who have found there a home. In this way, the Parish becomes the home where they will spend their last days.

3. Dining room: In former years, the dining room was set up as assistance to children and elderly people malnutrition. Afterwards, as the Our Lady of Mercy Institute was created, the dining room nourishes over 500 children attending the children centre, the preschool, and the primary school.



4. Institute of Our Lady of Mercy: preschool and basic education center that provides a safe space for students where they receive comprehensive care, both in academics, values, and arts education. Approximately, there are 560 youths aged from 4 to 12 years, with the project to increase to higher educational levels in next years.

5. Clubhouse: The Computer Clubhouse is an innovative center, supported by Intel in collaboration with the Boston Museum of Science, and the Media Lab of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), where youths gather outside the school to design and create technology. The program goes beyond to just providing access to new technology and helps young people to develop skills that will open up new opportunities, build self-confidence and stimulate their creativity using the model of "learning by doing".



6. COIF: Family Child Guidance Center: It takes care of children from 6 months to 3 years. To help mothers who have to go to work to provide their family's livelihood.

7. Popular Clinic: The mission is to prevent, cure, and improve the quality of life of low-income people, especially children. We have a dental program and program support to the dental area.

Liliana Ramirez Amparo Fernandez ( aliliana.r24 @ gmail.com )  
Coordinator of special programs in the school of El Chorrillo

## AFTER ONE YEAR IN PERU

How is it possible that huge shopping malls like those in the United States are arising in Peru at the same time that there are people with no water supply at home?

It's been almost two months since I am back in Germany but I don't have the feeling that I am here already. I miss my students, they used to greet me with kisses and hugs every morning. I also miss the music on the street, the simplicity of life, the sun... It's difficult for me to describe my experiences. I am constantly asked about them, about if it was hard to deal with poverty. Of course it was tough and sometimes I became sad because it was not fair. Why did I deserve not having to worry about something to eat daily or drinking water coming out from the tap?

And while I am explaining this, I'm thinking that Arequipa is not only poverty. There are also cinemas, big shopping malls. You can find Nutella in the supermarket and you can take a coffee in Starbucks. I turn over the same question: we have done a volunteering work that is part of a politic developing program... it's all quite complicated. How is it possible that huge shopping malls like in North-America are arising in Peru but at the same time there are people with no running water supply at home? Is there any sense sending German people abroad to support development cooperation programs? What if all these organizations stop their aid to Peru?

Questions and more questions that those who are involved in developing projects may ask themselves. I think about the children in the dining room, with their tangled hair and wounds on their faces or about that mother in the school crying for two hours because she didn't know what to do or about the house of one of my students which was only

## experiences

provided with beds and a gas cooker. Or when I visited Laika, where I received a great welcome and I was insistently invited for breakfast. They shared the room with some guinea pigs and some chicken and there was no table to sit at.

These are some of the pictures that come to my mind and which I will surely always carry with me. What about having water from the tap? Always, at any time, with no limits... when in La Mansion there was a project about brushing teeth which almost failed because the amount of water calculated for person was exceeded.

I have been thinking lately on the expression "poor but happy" when I remember how I danced, partied and sang in Peru. This expression could be real at first but after talking to one of the mothers you realize that you cannot be happy when you don't know if you'll have a job the next day or if you will have to give a tablet for a toothache to your child, because you cannot afford to take him to the dentist.

Getting angry or grieving does not solve anything. We try to do our best and we have to get used to the circumstances. Sometimes we'll have to fill up bottles with water in case there is none the next day or to buy candles when electricity is cut off.

I am grateful for all the experiences I have lived. I have learned to love Peru as a country and I would like to thank all those who take daily commitment in order to make this world a bit more human, especially to Deisi and Pamela who work daily in La Mansion. To Guillermina, who is really involved with the children and obviously to Stephanie, Edison, Michael, Maria José, Christian and to all those daily heroes.

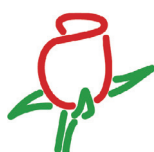
Sarah Ament

Translations: Leire Sarachaga, Teresa Delàs, Laura García-Faria Coll

### Edita Clam per la Dignitat

Depósito legal: B-21.862.2004  
C/Pare Miquel de Sarrià 8  
E-08034 Barcelona  
Tel: (+34) 932 700 239  
Registro Asoc. Generalitat:  
Nr. 27.209, sec. 1a de Barcelona  
NIF: G-63.112.189  
C/c: 3025-0004-33-1433212631

clamdignitat@clamdignitat.org  
www.clamdignitat.org



info@evivo.org  
www.evivo.org

### evivo e.V.

eingetragener gemeinnütziger Verein  
Kählerweg 8  
D-72072 Tübingen  
Te.: (+49) (0)7071 / 5683533

Kontonummer: 7024710500  
GLS Bank (BLZ 430 609 67)  
Vereinsregister Nr. 1870  
Amtsgericht Tübingen