



The Zirkel Family

Serving with the Methodist Church in San José, Costa Rica
Quarterly Newsletter— March 2011

Dear Partners-In-Ministry,

Monday the trucks began arriving. First the furniture arrived: beds, mattresses, tables and chairs. Then the appliances for the kitchen and the washroom were delivered. We cleaned all day. Months of dust covered everything. Paint was splattered all over the floor, the windows and the walls. Construction debris was piled throughout the house. Outside a group of mission team members were painting the lower half of the house “Tico” blue. And, yet another group had begun planting flowers and grass.

Tuesday we began unpacking. It was so exciting: unwrapping the linens, making the beds, hanging the curtains, counting the cups, spoons, plates. Knowing that in a few short weeks children would be sleeping in the beds, black beans and rice would be prepared in the kitchen and a family would be gathering around the dining room table. During the afternoon several airport runs were made to pick up folks coming in from Alabama and Texas.

Wednesday morning was beautiful. Not a cloud in the sky. A cool tropical breeze blowing. A few members of the mission team from Dallas who had been helping us with the final details all week did one final walk through dusting and mopping. Then, we were ready. The guests began arriving, first the Methodist School Choir arrived, then another bus of teachers and students (including Sarah and Emma) arrived from the school. Pastors, district superintendents, ministry associates, missionary friends and our special guests—pastors and church members from the USA. We all gathered under the tent to praise God and give Him thanks for all that had been accomplished.

Five years ago, we stood on this avocado farm with a small group of friends from Dallas and dreamed . . . dreamed of a home where children would feel safe. A home where not only their daily needs would be met, but a home with a mother, a father, and siblings who would love them and would help them heal and become whole. A place to call Home—a place where they could come to know Christ as their Lord and Savior. Over the past five years, hundreds



Clockwise from right:
Over 100 people attended the dedication service. Lidia and Bishop Palomo cut the ribbon. “Casa Esperanza” ready to receive children. Ray speaking at the dedication service.





Above: teen girls bedroom.
Right: family room and dining room.
Below: girls bathroom



Above: Kitchen and dining room.
Below: back porch



of individuals from United Methodist churches have given generous financial gifts, others have given generously of their time and talents for fundraisers. Many church members have spent hours in prayer, and over 400 individuals have come to Costa Rica on mission teams and labored long hours digging, pouring concrete, laying block, tying rebar, painting, laying tile—all to make this dream a reality. We want each of you to know how very grateful we are to you. This has been a labor of love by so many people . . . ***Thank you all so very much.*** We pray that someday each and everyone of you will be able to come to Costa Rica and see the Home that you have built.

One tremendous blessing which has come from this experience has been the noted changes it is making within the Methodist Church of Costa Rica. In his sermon during the dedication service, Bishop Palomo spoke of the tremendous opportunity that the Children’s Home represents for the Methodist Church in Costa Rica. In particular, he mentioned how it represents a new chapter in reaching out to those who are in need with the love of Christ expressed both in words and deeds. And since the dedication, we have already begun to see fruit from the Bishop’s words, as many church members have already come to us with desires to volunteer at the Children’s Home and other local church sponsored outreach ministries.

On Friday, April 1, the child welfare agency came to the Home and did a personal walk through. Lorena Ortiz is the director of accreditation and all she could say was, “*Wow, we are going to use this as our model home. All homes for children in Costa Rica need to be built like this.*” Well, needless to say we just couldn’t stop grinning. After we completed the walk through, we presented our “**Care Model**” to Lorena. She has been working with us on this document for several years now, so it wasn’t the first time she had seen it. Yet, she did ask that we make a few small changes in the wording.

So, what happens now? We are waiting to receive our permit to operate as a children’s home from the Health Department. We will turn the Health Department permit along with the Care Model and Procedures Manuel into the child welfare agency. Then we pray and wait. Lorena told us it could be up to 30 days until we receive our final permit to receive children. Once we have this in hand, the children will begin arriving!

The Methodist School Celebrates its 90th Anniversary

The Methodist School celebrated 90 years of Christian education on March 28th. To mark this special milestone in our history, Rev. Marion Woods and his wife, Mary were honored for their many years of ministry with the Methodist Church. Rev. Woods was the director of the Methodist school in the late 50s. About 25 of his students from the classes of 1956, 1957 and 1958 were also in attendance. Rev. Woods spoke to the student body about the history of the school and its role in the future of Costa Rica. The celebration included praise choruses by the high school students, a balloon release by the preschool, and a pigeon release by the elementary school.

The 2011 school year has gotten off to a great start. Our enrollment is quickly approaching 1200 students, Pre-K through High School. Plus, the elementary school students are now taking Mandarin classes. The teacher is a lovely Christian Chinese-Costa Rican woman. Many of our Asian students are Buddhist or do not practice any form of religion. The teacher has filled the classroom with Scripture in Mandarin. The students are listening to praise choruses in Mandarin. We see this as incredible opportunity to not only prepare our students academically, but yet another avenue for the children to know Jesus Christ.



Members of the classes of 1956, 1957 and 1958



Preschool lines up for their balloon release

We continually give God great thanksgiving for the Methodist School. As parents, we feel incredibly blessed that our children are able to attend the school. As missionaries, we stand in awe of those who have gone before us and paved the way for this remarkable ministry. We continually pray, and would like to ask you to please pray with us, that all the students, administrators, teachers and families who are associated with the school will come to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

We also give God great thanksgiving that Ray has been re-elected president of the board of directors of the school, this is his 12th term on the board and his 11th as its president.

We continue to pray for, and are diligently searching for, a bilingual youth pastor for the high school. All of the students at the school attend chapel services and Christian Education classes; yet, we feel an incredible burden to build a Christian community, outside of school hours and outside of an academic setting, where the students can grow in their personal relationship with Christ.

And, we need native English speakers who are certified teachers to teach English and Science. So, if you are graduating in a few weeks and are looking for a teaching position, or a current teacher looking for a change, we would love to talk with you.

Finally, we would like to begin an International Baccalaureate program at the Methodist School. Lidia has begun the initial process, yet it takes between 2 and 3 years to be approved. We would like someone with experience administering the IB program to come to Costa Rica and serve as a missionary with the school and head up this program. If you are interested.... Please contact us!



Sarah and Emma with the Bishop, Dr. Luis Palomo and his wife, Doña Zulay, releasing pigeons at the celebration.

Methodist Seminary Returns to San Pedro for new school year

Following a year of operating at the Methodist Center in Alajuela, the seminary returned "home" to its San Pedro campus in March. We welcomed nine new students to the program and have the potential of at least 25 more students ready to begin their studies in August. Ray began the new school year (March and April) teaching one of his favorite classes, Methodist History, to 13 eager students. The two weeks of classes proved once again to be a special blessing for him and the students.



Ray and his Methodist History class April 2011

Praise Reports and Prayer Request

- **FURLOUGH FOLLOW-UP:** We were able to visit with several churches during December and January. It was good to visit with many of the churches who have been ministry partners with us for several years and update them on the progress of the ministry. Plus, we were able to visit with a few new churches who we are praying will join us in ministry. Thank you to everyone who allowed us to share with their church families. And, we would like to ask that you please pray that there will be fruit from our time on furlough.
- **PERSONAL FINANCIAL SUPPORT:** We are most grateful to everyone who supports us and our ministry financially. Your gifts are an incredible blessing and make it possible to be on the mission field. Thank you. During the past 24 months, the value of the dollar has been in decline in Costa Rica. Plus, our monthly support has also declined during the same period. Please pray for God to supply all of our personal and ministry financial needs.
- **HANDS OF GOD FOUNDATION:** We were able to attend the January board meeting of Hands of God Foundation in Fairhope, Alabama. You may remember this 501 c (3) non-profit has been established to raise financial support for the Methodist Children's Home in Costa Rica. It has been so exciting seeing the Home completed. Yet, now the difficult works begins . . . Raising the finances necessary to operate the home. If you are interested in helping support the children who will be living at the first Home, you can contact us at the email addresses below or contact Steve Pearson or Jennifer Myrick at: www.handsofgodfoundation.org.
- **TEAMS AND INTERNS:** We've had a few teams already this year, thankfully more are on their way for the Summer and through the Fall. Plus, we have four Summer interns who will be joining us in ministry during the coming months. Please remember all of the mission teams and our summer interns in your prayers.
- **UMVIM:** We rejoice that both the Methodist Children's Home in San José, and the Agape Clinic in Puerto Viejo, have been approved as official UMVIM projects with the Methodist Church. Several of the church conferences have begun announcing these projects. Please pray that churches will send mission teams to work with us as well as financially supporting these ministries.
- **ADVANCE SPECIAL:** Last week we submitted an application for the Methodist Children's Home to be an Advance Special project with the United Methodist Church. We will not know if the application has been approved or not until August. Please pray that this project finds favor with those who are involved in the approval process.

*I think my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you,
I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the
first day until now . . . Phil. 1:3-5*

Ray, Lidia, Sarah and Emma Zirkel

Mailing Address: J.B.C. SJO #1441, P.O. Box 025240, Miami, FL 33102

Financial Support: FUMC-Outreach Committee,
301 N. High St., Uvalde, TX 78801

Email: ray.zirkel@gmail.com or ljzirkel@gmail.com

Website: www.zirkelministrycostarica.com