



The Zirkel Family

Serving with the Methodist Church in San José, Costa Rica

Quarterly Newsletter, July 2011

Dear Partners-In-Ministry,

They are here! The first children to live at the Methodist Children's Home in Costa Rica have settled into their new home. Our first children are a family of four: two sisters and two brothers. Their ages are 12, 9, 4 and 3. They are lovely children, beautiful, smart, and kind; we could not have asked for a more precious group of children to begin this ministry. But, I (Lidia) must back up and tell you the whole story of their arrival. It is a moment in ministry, and a testament to God's faithfulness, that Ray and I want to share with everyone.

After we held the dedication ceremony for the Home in March, we had lots of little details to finish. By mid-April, the house was ready to move into. So, we submitted our completed paperwork to the Health Ministry. Three weeks later we had permits in-hand. With these permits from the Health Ministry, we were able to apply for the operating permits from the Child Welfare Ministry. Yet, before we were able to complete the final details on our application, the Child Welfare Ministry phoned us and said they had some children they needed to place at the Home. They asked that we submit our application immediately and they would expedite our operating permits. The next day, I was at their office signing the completed application. Three weeks later, Ray was at the Child Welfare agency signing for the permits. Two days later, I received a fax from one of the placement offices regarding the four children who are now at the home.



Work begins on the front gate at the Children's Home

On Wednesday, June 29, I went to the office at the Home around 8 am and waited for "the call" that the children were on their way. Ray was out of town with a team, but had made arrangements to drive into San Jose from the Caribbean coast early in the morning. The placement office could only tell me it would be sometime late in the morning when the children would be arriving. A team from south Georgia was working at the land on house number two. They too knew the children were coming. The mixture of excitement and nervousness was overwhelming.

Our Children's' Home psychologist, Ileana, a lovely Costa Rican woman and dear friend for many years, plus the social worker, Susana, another lovely Costa Rican woman and I went to the house and put the children's names on their beds along with a stuffed animal that a mission team had left for each one. We hung clothes in each of the children's closets. We organized shoes, toys, school supplies . . . we were running around like new parents bringing a baby home from the hospital. It was the most incredible experience! Finally, when we had done all that we knew to do, we gathered and prayed. Mostly, we thanked our Heavenly Father for the opportunity that He had given us.

Around 1 pm the phone rang and it was the social worker from the placement office, the van was just down the hill from the Children's Home. Ileana, Susana and I ran outside. The van pulled in and there they were . . . four little heads poking out the van windows. We followed the van down the drive to the house and the children began getting out of the van. At first, they were very shy. They looked at us but said very little. We went inside the house and began showing them the home. They met the house parents and the Costa Rican house assistant who is also living at the home.

Then we took them to their bedrooms. I was with the 9 year-old boy. The "little boys" bedroom is decorated with a sports theme. The bedspreads are all sports . . .baseball, football, basketball and soccer. Each child has a single bed, a bedside table and a lamp, plus, his or her own double closet with shelves and drawers. We had placed a Ziploc bag on each of the beds with toiletries inside. This sweet little boy sat on the bed running his hands over the bedspread as if it was his first new car. "Is this my bed? Just mine? Where does my brother sleep?" he asked. "He will sleep in the bed next to you," I said. He looked at me puzzled and asked, "Will he have his own bed too?" "Is this my table and my lamp?" He took the Ziploc off of the bed and put it inside the table and asked, "Will my things be safe in there?" "Yes," I assured him. He sat on the bed with his hand on the table and quietly repeated to himself, "Mine, all mine." I tried not to remember the report the social worker had faxed to me a few days earlier regarding the children's living conditions before they were removed from their previous residence. My eyes filled with tears and my heart with thanksgiving.

The younger children, the three year-old boy and four year-old girl, immediately began playing with the toys. And, the 12 year-old sister, asked if it would be okay for her to try on her new clothes. Besides the children, three government employees accompanied the children to the Children's Home. It was their first time to see the project and so we gave them a quick tour of the grounds and shared the overall plan for five homes with them. We then went back into the house and sat down at one of the dining room tables. They shared the history of the children with us, their school records, the medical records, etc., then I had to sign an acceptance form of responsibility that I was receiving the children. My signature was so shaky, I couldn't even read it. I had not prepared myself for this step. But, as I scribbled across the paper, I felt an overwhelming presence of the Lord, a calmness that can only come from Him. And, I knew that He, and only He, had gotten us this far and that He would see all of us through all that lies ahead.



Work continues on the retaining wall for house #2

Thank you. Thank you to each and everyone of you who have made this possible. Thank you for your prayers, your financial support, your presence with and work on mission teams. Thank you so very much!!

I wish I could send pictures of the children, yet it is imperative that we protect them at this time. There may be a day that we can take pictures of them in groups or maybe from the back and send them to you. Since the children arrived, Costa Rica school children have been on a two week semester break from school. The two older children will return to school next week. Both children are good students, though they are a grade

level or two behind. Please pray for them as they make this transition. Changing schools is never easy, and add to this all of the other changes these children have been through in the past few months and they need showers of blessings.

And, yes, we have already been contacted by the Child Welfare agency about receiving additional children. We have 7 more beds in the first house and we want nothing more but to see it filled with children. Pray for wisdom and for God's guidance in every aspect of the Children's Home as we move forward in the days and months ahead.

Though the Children's Home has consumed a great deal of our time the past few months, we (especially Ray) has been busy in other areas of ministry as well. Here's a brief update on all that has been happening outside of Coronado!

Agape Medical Clinic:

Several mission teams have helped us at the medical clinic this year. The walls of the building are up, the plumbing is being put in this week and the concrete floor will be poured by several teams over the coming weeks. We are praying that the clinic construction will be completed in the coming months and then we will begin the programming and furnishings stage of this outreach ministry to the people in the Sarapiquí region.



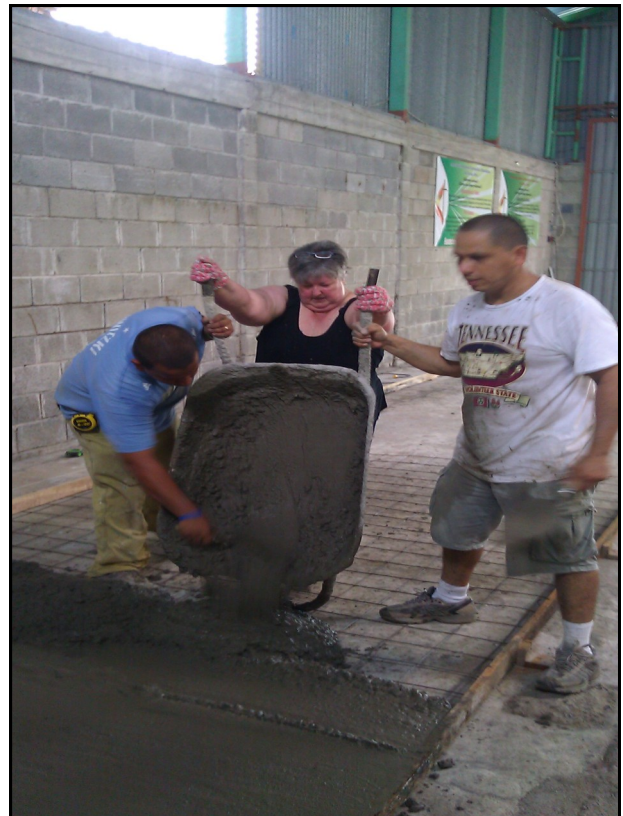
The walls are up on the clinic!

Horquetas Methodist Church:

A number of short term mission teams have been busy repairing the sanctuary floor in the recently acquired property. The church could not be more excited to have the teams ministering with them and providing much needed repairs to this building and outreach in their community.

Loma Linda Methodist Church:

This is another one of our early church plants. It's hard to believe that some of these first churches have been in ministry for over 10 years. At this church, mission teams have begun work on new Sunday School classes. This church has an outstanding ministry to the children and youth in the area. They do have a few small classrooms, but the membership and attendance of the church continues to grow and more classes are needed. We have a few teams working on this project, yet we will be scheduling teams to work here for at least another year or so as well.



Sanctuary floor renovation in Horquetas

Pocora Methodist Church:

This is the very first place we took a mission team after we were married and one of the first church plants we ministered with. It has been an incredible blessing to watch this church grow. Thirteen years ago we assisted in the construction of two bathrooms on this site. Today, with the help of several mission teams, we are building new bathrooms and Sunday school rooms. The walls have just begun to go up, so we will be working at this church for some time into the future as we look towards the construction of a permanent sanctuary once the classrooms are completed.

Cabecar Indian Reservation:

A few weeks ago, Ray hiked into the Cabecar Indian reservation (far southeastern part of Costa Rica) with a group of youth from Dallas. It was the first time he had the opportunity to minister along side this special group of teens. As the group hiked into the rainforest, they stopped at one local Methodist Church where the ladies prepared lunch for the team. Then they continued on their three hour trek to the next church “up the mountain.” Once there, they held Bible school for the children, where the message had to be translated from English to Spanish and then to the Cabecar language. After Bible school the teens swam a bit in the local river before having dinner at the church. They spent the night sleeping on the porch of the church with the stars above and the pigs underneath them. The following morning, the entire group returned to the first church, held another Bible school with this congregation, and ended up their time with us laboring on the Pocora construction project mentioned above. We give God great thanksgiving for the opportunity to minister with this amazing group of youth and experience ministry together through the sharing of testimonies with our Cabecar brothers and sisters in Christ. (Ray does have a funny story about rice and hot dogs that you’ll need to have him share with you sometime!!)



Arriving at the Indian Village



Bible School with the children on the Reservation

Camp. On July 2, four of the most excited young people you will ever meet boarded a plane for Alabama. They attended camp from July 3 through July 8 before spending the last few days with families from Asbury Methodist Church. Today, they return to Costa Rica and we cannot wait to hear the stories they will tell. We are so grateful for the generosity of this one man, members of Asbury Methodist church, and the folks at Space Camp who were able to make this experience possible for these Costa Rican youth. Given the success of this year’s experience, our thoughts have already turned to wondering how we might be able to repeat or even expand such a trip in the coming year!

The Methodist Seminary:

In April, Ray finished up the second half of his class on Methodist History with an eager group of 15 students. During the month of May we once again welcomed back to Costa Rica and the seminary, Dr. Billy Abraham from SMU. As always the classes were at least as much of a blessing and treat for the professors as they were for our regular students who so appreciate Dr. Abraham’s lectures and times of sharing with all in attendance. In addition to housing our seminary students when they come to study with us, many of you are aware that the seminary facilities also serve as home to all of the work teams that come to serve at the Children’s Home. Though remodeling efforts are slow, they are

nevertheless steady as we strive to increase our capacity for both more students and team members. To that end we recently completed a new series of bathrooms on the San Pedro campus and an additional office, thus freeing up more “dorm space” on this site. In fact the night the bathrooms were finished we broke our lodging record with 58 guests snugly tucked into every available bed!! We’re hoping by year’s end to finish with this project and have the capacity to house 75 persons with minimal waiting time for showers!!! We are most grateful for all of the teams who stay at the seminary and work at the Children’s Home. The money these teams spend on housing and food while at the seminary helps to finance the education of our students and offsets the salaries of our Costa Rican professors. Thank you so very much for this extra means of supporting, equipping and preparing leaders in the Methodist Church of Costa Rica.



Dr. Abraham teaching and Ray interpreting during seminary

Praise Reports and Prayer Request:

- **WEBPAGE, FACEBOOK AND TWITTER:** Okay, we know you may find this hard to believe, but we actually have someone working on a webpage update for us. We may actually have it up and running in a few weeks. Plus, several years ago now a church set up a Facebook page for the children’s home, yet, the pastor who was updating it moved to another church. Well, the church has given us permission to manage this page and it too will be updated in the coming weeks. So, become a “friend” of the Methodist Children's Home of Costa Rica—soon! In addition, the new web tech also will be opening a twitter account for the Children’s Home. With all three of these updated and running, we hope to keep everyone better informed on what’s happening at the Home and with all of our ministry areas.
- **PERSONAL FINANCIAL SUPPORT:** We are most grateful to everyone who financially supports us and our ministry. Your gifts are an incredible blessing and make it possible to be on the mission field. During the summer our monthly support tends to drop a bit. Please pray with us for God to supply for all of our needs.
- **HANDS OF GOD FOUNDATION:** Now that we have children in the home, the difficult work begins . . . Raising the finances necessary to operate the home on a long term basis. 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. We have some printed material that we can send to you regarding expenses per child and would earnestly ask you to assist us in moving towards becoming or finding monthly supporters of the Home itself.
- **ADVANCE SPECIAL:** Many of you know that the Children’s Home has applied to become an Advance Special project with the United Methodist Church. We should find out during August if our application has been approved. Please pray that this project finds favor with those who are involved in the approval process.

- **PRAYER FOR OUR FAMILY:** I (Lidia) believe of our now 17 years of ministry, these past five months may just be shaping up to be some of the most challenging months we have experienced in ministry. My sweet husband assures me that we are just experiencing growing pains as ministry expands on a number of fronts all at the same time! I pray that he is right. This will be one time that I would welcome his words, "I told you so." I could go on in depth regarding all that has taken place, but as my mother would say, "this newsletter is getting long in the tooth," meaning I'm rambling a bit. So, I will close with simply asking you to **please** remember us all in your prayers.

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 (new website under construction)