

## The Good News in Bolivia

Cascades Presbytery has taken on a transformational mission with the people of Bolivia. Transformational mission works on the principal that it is better to teach people to fish, than to give them a fish. In the case of Bolivia however, the issue isn't fish to eat, but access to Water, a true necessity of life.

### The Bolivia/Cascades Presbytery Connection.



The mission team from Cascades Presbytery

Brad and Ali Kent will become the interim Presbyterian Hunger Project (PHP) facilitators, until a new facilitator is selected, trained and placed. Retired from a full career in ministry and education, Brad Kent served most recently as an interim pastor at First Church, Bend and at Bandon. The Kents were members of the Presbytery's mission team to Bolivia, in April 2008. The PHP facilitators work with UMAVIDA, a network of community groups whose goals include seeing that the people will have sufficient water to support their lives. Prior to the Kents taking on this assignment, Julie Dunsmore served in Bolivia. She grew up in Cascades Presbytery as the daughter of Rev. Dick and Mary Morgan who served several congregations in this Presbytery. Julie and her husband Robert concluded their work in Bolivia in October living at present in Atlanta to be near their grandchildren.

The Kents will be serving as volunteers, receiving only housing and air transportation to Bolivia from the denomination. Ted Magnuson, from First Portland was also a member of the Cascades Presbytery mission team that visited Bolivia for one week in April 2008. Other participating churches include Valley Community in Portland, Milwaukie, First of Bend, and the Community in Redmond. Don Shaw, Peacemaking and Hunger Action Advocate for Cascades Presbytery chairs the Presbytery's committee on Bolivia and also traveled with the group.

### Bolivia--The History

The people of the Alto-Plano in Bolivia live in an arid climate, 10,000 feet and more above sea level. Water, a commodity we here in the Northwest too often take for granted, has become even more precious in Bolivia. There, like here, it is a basic necessity of life. Scarce to begin with, too often the mining industry has preempted the populace's need for water. The result is water tainted with heavy metals, a practice dating from centuries of primitive mining practices.

These days, when the world has become increasingly "flattened". as "undeveloped" countries enter stages of "development". as technology advances at an ever increasing pace, giving, in the process, a vision of a better life to the disenfranchised of the world...as the balance between economics and sustainability has shifted...is it prudent to let the "huddled masses" thirst and sicken due to untested and questionable sources of water?



Ramirez spoke of the loss of access to water when the mineral rights to his village were sold by the former government



Building Codes in Bolivia are lax. A family lives in this neighborhood condemned by the city.

To put a handle on this daunting task, UMAVIDA has taken on an examination of practices at the San Cristobal open pit mine. In 2006, Apex mining began operations in this southern Bolivian locale on what is reputed to be the largest silver mine in the world. It will have an expected production of 400 million ounces of silver. In the process, 40 million tons of dirt, and billions of pounds of zinc and lead will also be moved. The mine is expected to employ 164 people.

In keeping with Jesus' commandments in Matthew 25, the Presbyterian Hunger Program has become a presence in Bolivia, standing with UMAVIDA and its consortium of local groups to work with mining industry executives and government officials to balance the economic needs of industry with the life-support needs of the community.

Democratic values and stable government have not necessarily come to full flower in Bolivia. This landlocked South American country is in many ways still haunted by the colonial practices of the past. According to the US Central Intelligence Agency, Bolivia has had 200 governments since achieving self-government in 1825. Instability, corruption, and poverty have been a way of life for its population of 80% indigenous and mixed ancestry.

We wish the Kents well as they enter into this challenging environment, in an effort to make a difference for this isolated country by their Christian (Presbyterian!) Presence.

submitted by Ted Magnuson

PS- Should your fellowship group care to hear more of Bolivia, Ted is taking speaking engagements.

