

Friends at Saint Michael:

Saint Michael and All Angels is blessed to have one of the premier Mission/Outreach programs in the Episcopal Church. Our parishioners have been extremely generous with their time, talent and treasure in helping people outside our parish in many different ways. One of the organizations Saint Michael supports is Amistad Mission, a U.S. nonprofit that runs an orphanage and medical clinic in Bolivia. I serve as Secretary and legal counsel to Amistad, and our fellow parishioners Barry Crossman, Maria D'Antoni and Todd Foster, as well as former Saint Michael priest Christie Olsen, also serve on the Board of Directors, while Dana Juett serves as Executive Director.

I returned from my fifth trip to Bolivia for Amistad in May. It is a joy to watch the children at the orphanage (the Villa) grow up a little more each trip. Roxana was a 13-year old in Casa Esperanza when we first met her; she is now 17 and living in the Casa de Jóvenes for the teenage girls, graduating from high school next year. Douglas could not speak Spanish, only Quechua, when we first met him; he is now a 6-year old proficient in both Spanish and fútbol. Two years ago Mario had serious health problems; today he is a healthy, rambunctious 4-year old.

Saint Michael sponsors one of the eight houses at the Villa, Casa Esperanza (House of Hope). Jhenny is the Mamá, and the children are Mayra, Lizeth, Wilmer, Jhasmine, Carla, Douglas, Mario and Freddy. All of the children at the Villa are either orphaned or abandoned. If Amistad did not support them, they would be living on the streets or in the horrible conditions of the state run orphanages. There are very few adoptions in Bolivia. The United States, as well as nearly every other western nation, has no treaty with Bolivia providing for adoptions. Therefore part of our mission is to provide long term care and training in life skills, including Christian formation and education, for our children.

One of the most difficult things for me to read is the periodic report from the teachers and psychologists at the Villa, which has a notation by far too many names: "needs more love and attention." It is not that the children do not receive love and attention from their Mamás and other workers at the Villa – they receive an abundance. But they need more. Many are dealing with deep rooted issues of abandonment; others have developmental disorders because of early malnutrition and lack of prenatal care; others have third world diseases such as Chagas disease or tuberculosis. They need more love and attention than the Mamás and Villa employees can give.

Amistad means "friendship" and we rejoice in the friendships we have formed. While we provide the funding that houses, clothes, feeds and educates our children, even more important is the long term relationship we have with the children, and with the dedicated workers and others who give generously of their time and resources in Bolivia. In doing God's work together, we are all equals and partners. We truly learn as much from our Bolivian friends we hope they learn from us. We are honored that they remember us in their prayers while we pray for them.

Bolivia is one of the poorest countries in Latin America. The poor are not a priority for the Bolivian government or Bolivian businesses. The only realistic way to ease the plight of the poor in the near future is for help to come from outside the country, whether in the form of large organizations or small efforts. Each effort makes a tremendous difference.

Amistad needs your help. We need your prayers. We need parishes to sponsor Casas at the Villa so each house knows it has someone who cares about the orphans living in it. We need people to travel to Cochabamba to hug our children and give them the love and affection that money cannot buy. Please let us know how you might be able to help. You can obtain more information about Amistad on its website at www.amistadmission.org or by contacting Amistad's office at 214-369-0406 or the Rev. Anna Neitzel, Saint Michael's Director of Mission/Outreach.

May you be blessed however you may choose to serve our Lord.

Faithfully,
Sharon A. Alexander