

BUA volunteers share gospel in four Latin American countries_20705

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BUA students and members of a local churches in Guayaquil, Ecuador, spent the pre-dawn hours on Christmas morning giving hot chocolate and sandwiches to homeless people, including a man living in a cardboard box. A group of boys in Ecuador listen to the gospel, presented by students from Baptist University of the Americas. (Photo courtesy of Baptist University of the Americas)

BUA volunteers share gospel in four Latin American countries

By **Craig Bird**

Baptist University of the Americas

SAN ANTONIO—Students at Baptist University of the Americas take the “Americas” part of their school's name seriously.

Case in point: Between semesters, three student-initiated and student-led groups and one group recruited by a short-term mission agency went “on mission” in four Latin American countries.

As a result, in Chile a Brazilian led a group of pre-teens and young teenagers to Christ. In Colombia, a leadership training team prayed for 175 conference participants, and 300 showed up. In Costa Rica, four BUA students worked as interpreters for Anglos from the United States, holding crusades in San Jose. In Ecuador, students walked the streets of Guayaquil from 1 a.m. to 6 a.m. Christmas morning, sharing hot chocolate, cheese sandwiches and the love of Jesus with homeless people. And that's just for starters.



Nahomi Munoz, a senior at Baptist University of the Americas, made new friends of all sizes during a between-semesters mission trip to Chile.

“The Bible says that where there is no vision, the people perish. So, I guess it is equally true that where there is a great vision, people thrive,” Marconi Monteiro, dean of students at the San Antonio school, said after listening to reports from the students when classes resumed in mid-January.

“These young men and women have a heart for spreading the gospel, a love for people and a passion for service that not only reflects what BUA is about but enhances it. These students got guidance and advice from faculty sponsors and help with paperwork from BUA staff, but the vision was theirs, and so was the working out of those dreams.”

The Colombia group began planning and raising funds in spring 2004, and the Chile and Ecuador teams were sparked by the formation of a student missions organization at BUA last fall. The Costa Rica connection came through Javier Elizondo, the school's academic dean, who has a longtime relationship with International Commission.

In Colombia, the mission emphasized strengthening the local church so it could be more effective in evangelism and ministry, said Joel Gomez-Bossio who headed up that effort.

“We wanted to help meet a huge need there to train leaders for new churches,” he said. The seven-member team, working closely with Iglesia Bautista El Calvario in Barranquilla, led four days of simultaneous workshops.

Participants could choose two from among nine options-worship, Christian

education, children's education, youth ministries, church planting, pastoral ministries, marriage enrichment, women's ministry and dealing with family violence. Aided by promotion on the city's Christian radio station, attendance exceeded expectations.

"One group even rented a bus," Gomez-Bossio said. "And we've already been asked to come back again."

Four students went to Chile, partnering with three local Baptist churches to work in four locations.

"We started out in small towns outside of Santiago, but when we worked in the capital, we totally changed our approach, because people in the city are so different from those in the rural areas," Daniel Munoz explained. His group worked with youth groups, using clowning, mime, drama and workshops in addition to evangelistic preaching and witnessing.



Claudia Munoz, a Baptist University of the Americas student, clowns around with Chilean children during an evangelism event in Chillan, a small town south of Santiago.

The Chileans were amused by the unusual accents of the students but were a bit confused when Rodrigo Serrao preached. Although he could talk with

them in Spanish, his sermons were in English and had to be translated.

"That's because my Spanish isn't good enough to preach in. When they found out I was from Brazil and spoke Portuguese, they understood," he explained.

"God reminded me of my purpose on this earth, and that is to show my love for others by using my gifts and talents completely to minister to children," Claudia Munoz said. "From the beginning, people were open and listened to us. ... In some way, we left a little of us in each of those we met."

Six students, including a husband and wife medical team, ministered in Ecuador. A women's conference in Babahoyo attracted 120 women, 40 percent of them non-Christian; youth rallies and children's activities were very popular, and the volunteers at medical clinics treated 220 people in six days while providing the opportunities to evangelize and give professional counseling, said group leader Enrique Ramirez.

Two cases were particularly memorable, volunteers said. Nelly Monroy, a 51-year-old who came for a check-up without knowing anything was wrong, registered a blood pressure reading of 200/140.

"We thought the gauge was broken, but it really was that high," Maura Moran Escobar explained. "We told her she was in danger of having a stroke at any minute and immediately started her on medications we had brought with us."

Later, a 36-year-old woman came to a clinic. The doctors were puzzled at first because of the black coating in her mouth and throat, until they discovered she had been eating charcoal for the past three years. The team provided both medical treatment and psychological counseling.



The BUA student mission team that went to Chile improvised a children's game involving a volleyball net and catching water balloons in a towel.

"The best thing is that both of the women, along with many others, were saved out of those experiences," Ramirez said. "Senora Monroy was a living illustration of a spiritual truth we shared—she was in danger of dying but didn't realize it until someone took her blood pressure. And lost people are in danger of dying and going to hell and don't even know it unless we love them enough to go and tell them."

Perhaps the group's most emotional experience came in the pre-dawn hours Christmas morning. Equipped with five gallons of hot chocolate and 150 cheese sandwiches, they walked the streets of Guayaquil, sharing food, cheer and their faith with homeless people.

The last week before classes resumed, four students worked in Costa Rica after International Commission, an evangelistic association focused on church-to-church partnership projects, contacted Elizondo with a need for translators.

All four came back wanting to go again. Each was assigned to a different team working with individual churches.

Jaime Masso was assigned to Iglesia Bautista Misionera in Alajuela, where the team "reached 77 people for the Lord." Masso, from Puerto Rico, added he had "never in my life experienced anything like this. It was a great experience I would like to repeat."



Iglesia Bautista Roca De Salvacion, a church that serves this poor neighborhood in Barranquilla, Colombia, was one of scores of congregations "Baptist and non-Baptist" that BUA students trained leaders for during a intra-semester mission trip.

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