

March 1, 2007

Hola!

We are already starting the last leg of our stay here in Chulucanas since we will be leaving at the end of the month. Although we are enjoying our work, it will be nice to return to our familiar surroundings of family, friends, and places.

The headlines have recently been telling the harsh reality of life that will be experienced by the vast majority of citizens of both Chulu and the State of Piura because of the impending sequia (drought).

Bishop Dan has been meeting with government officials to see if any relief will be available for those who will be without water and food. Unfortunately, the government has no financial resources. Bishop Dan says the last hope is March 19, the feast of St. Joseph. If there is no rain by then, there will be none to speak of. We told the bishop that he should invoke the powers of his heritage on March 17...St. Patrick's Day...and hope for a little Irish luck. Unfortunately, the drought will take it's toll on the farmers but also on the merchants since there won't be money to make purchases. We ask you to keep our brothers and sisters here in your prayers for the gift of rain; and if there is no rain, then for the grace of endurance. Needless to say, life here is harsh.

On the local level, last week the Mayor of Chulucanas announced that he is initiating a program in March to clean up the garbage throughout the town and on the main drag coming into the city. He is requesting that the citizens volunteer to participate. The clean up day is March 25, but March 26 they will begin throwing their garbage along the streets again. It is a matter of education...or lack thereof! One of the reasons for the campaign is to create tourism, especially for the purchase of ceramics. This would generate the need for restaurants, hotels, etc... One doesn't have to be a rocket scientist to realize that no tourist in his right mind wants to walk through garbage-strewn streets.

Chulucanas boasts of several products of or for human consumption: mango, lemons, ceramics, and "chisme" (gossip, which is deadly and destroys families and individuals). The former products need to be expanded and exported, but the last one needs to be eliminated.

On a recent occasion, Pat had the opportunity to speak with people who have very good leadership skills in the community. Pat, who has been championing the cause of public washrooms for the past few years asked them why, if the mayor wants to clean up the city, he wouldn't consider constructing public washrooms for a city of 50,000 people. Pat said it is disgusting to have to walk around the block and have to avoid piles of human feces on the sidewalk. The answer was simple. It's not a priority. The people don't see a need. Asi es la vida. Again, it is a lack of education in sanitary conditions.

We accompanied Bishop Dan to the town of Salitral about 2 hours from here. He went to celebrate the Eucharist and to bless an old convent that has become the new home for five nuns from Columbia. Their community is called The Small Apostles of the Redemption. An Italian Priest founded the group to work with children. There are plenty of children here to keep them busy. This is the parish that was presented to St. Margaret Mary as a possible sister parish.

Last week I awakened from my daily siesta and commented to Pat that the heat was unbelievable. We checked the thermometer and lo and behold, the temp measured at 140 degrees in the sun. In the shade it was only 120. Thank God, in the morning and evening it gets more comfortable.

On Sunday, March 4, approximately 20 volunteers arrived from Villanova University to give one week of free labor. Some are painting the Asilo (old peoples' home) and the nurses are doing house visits and health care. Today was their first day of work and they were bright eyed and bushy tailed. We will see how they are by Friday.

Life in our rented house is a rat race, and the rats are winning. They are very smart and are keeping one step ahead of us but we shall overcome someday....

God bless you all. Keep us and the people in your prayers!

Pat and Ed