



Marianist International Volunteers

MARIANIST FAMILY - Newsletter 15 - April 2009 - www.marianist.org



- **New experiences in Peru and Malawi.**
- **A volunteer on his way to Argentina.**
- **Kenya and Peru, volunteers renewing their commitment...**



Dear friends of the Marianist International Volunteers program,

Here's the first edition of the MIV Newsletter, in which you will read several articles written by some of our MIV volunteers 2009 in different corners of the world:

- Miguel, from Spain in Peru
- Michael, from the US in Argentina
- Liz, from the US in Kenya
- John, from the US in Peru

We have also included the latest news about the MVP Marianist Volunteers US program, which offers a wonderful experience to its volunteers following the Marianist style, though for the time being it only accepts US candidates.

On the other hand, we would like to mention that in Argentina we will host our very first MIV volunteers, both called Michael, and both from the US! The younger one has written an article about his expectations for this mission in this edition of the MIV Newsletter. We are very enthusiastic about this new venture, especially now that in 2009 the FMI Marianist Sisters have founded their first community in Argentina. We hope that the arrival of the MIV volunteers and of the FMI sisters will strengthen the local mission and renew the spirit of the local Marianist Family.

We would also like to highlight the mission that 2 other MIV volunteers, John from the US and Miguel from Spain, are carrying out in Peru, one in Callao, the other one in Otuzco. Both have had a first contact with these Marianist works before upon a previous shorter visit to these sites, and, inspired by them, they have decided to make a long-term commitment. Congratulations to John and Miguel for the energy and enthusiasm they are

investing in this mission!

We are also very proud of another MIV volunteer, Liz, from the US, who is now doing the second year of her term of service in Kenya, a place where many other Marianist volunteers have served before. All of them speak wonders of this place, of the people, the kids, the work at Our Lady of Nazareth school, and particularly of the local SM community, especially of Martin Solma SM and Chola Mulenga SM.

A final word of gratitude to all of you who strongly support the MIV program, so it can grow and strengthen its mission year after year, and so further volunteers may join the wonderful mission of being missionaries of Mary, bringing peace and justice to this world through her Son Jesus.

A better world is possible!

José Luis Pérez
MIV Coordinator



A letter from the Andes Mountains

I'm writing from the Marianist Community "Maria Madre del Buen Consejo" in Otuzco, northern Peru. The Marianist Region of Peru is made up of 15 brothers who run 14 works!!! (schools, parishes, radio stations...), yes, it was surprisingly difficult for me to figure this out too!!!! One of the key things here is the role of the laity; they are confided with many responsibilities shared with the religious.

The city of Otuzco bears the surname: "the Capital of Faith", and as Manolo Madueño SM wrote it: "Yes, it may seem like a very pretentious title, but the local people from Otuzco take great pride in this name. Otuzco is a village of around 10,000 inhabitants, and it's the capital of one of the 12 provinces of the Libertad department, in the northwest of Peru. The capital is called Trujillo, around 800 km north of Lima.

It's called "the Capital of Faith" because in Otuzco the image of the Immaculate Virgin of the Puerta is venerated, and it's a very popular pilgrimage center, especially on weekends."

And so, what's the work that we do here? The main goal in this community is the Evangelization, the faith formation of the local communities, which are very scattered from one another; they have very large lands called "chacras" with adobe

houses where families live. The most populated communities have around 300 families and the smaller ones around 20. Most of them live on the harvest of pineapples, avocado, mango, potatoes, lentils, oat, wheat... and of other fruits and vegetables I had never seen or heard of before: oca, camote, yuca, guabas, carambolas... In each of these communities there are 2 pastoral agents living there, who are in charge of gathering the local people on a weekly basis so they can have their meetings, their masses, and training sessions...

Our mission is to support, train, accompany, visit, animate... these pastoral agents, we hold formation meetings here in the center, training sessions in the villages, youth meetings, shared masses... This year the goal is to create communities with a more solid formation basis, more committed to the mission, who can later evangelize in other villages by themselves. 6 villages have been selected (2 in each region) and 5 three-

day visits have been planned to the village Casmiche Blanco. The communities that are now integrated into this Marianist mission are Pagash Bajo, Samne, Chagapampa, Huacaday, Capulí, Casmiche, Tarnihual, Rayampampa, Campo Nuevo, José Balta, Pichampampa, Machigón, Tambillo... and Chamiradio (www.chamiradio.org.pe) a wonderful means of communication for this reality, in which in many villages, though they don't have electricity, their families listen to this station with their batteries radio.

This radio station has a clear critical profile, it broadcasts reports on corruption (unfortunately very commonplace here), about the defense of



Preparations for a wedding in Chagapampa.



people's rights, and about comments on the news. It also has many programs devoted to Faith formation, such as the program "Good News", which we broadcast from the Pastoral Formation Center every night from 7 to 8:30 pm (it can also be heard on the Internet!).

The other Marianist work in this charming village is AMAS (www.amasperu.org), it's the Social Action Marianist Association, a group of highly committed lay people (a biologist, an anthropologist, an educator, a social communications specialist...) who defend the rights of the villagers affected by the disastrous ecological impacts provoked by a mine 4 or 5 hours from here. They are in charge of controlling

the water, they train people, and they organize demonstrations... I call them the "Marianist Greenpeace"!

Well, and we have come to the most interesting part of this. It goes without saying that the experience of mission and evangelization is really awesome ("chévere" as they say here), but what truly captured me from the start, when I met the community, was precisely that, the **COMMUNITY!**

I mentioned at the beginning of this letter that in the Marianist Region of Peru many responsibilities are entrusted to the laity. As an example, I'm living in the Rural Pastoral Formation Center with quite a "special" community: there's a couple in

charge of it, José Luis and Isela, with their 2 small kids Sebas and José Mariano, and there's 4 other pay persons: Susana, Teresa, John and I, all of us around the same age, and then there's two Marianists, a brother Douglas, and a priest, Juan Carlos. 2 days ago I finished reading "A Sober, Honest and Religious Life Proposal" by José Eizaguirre SM, and while reading it I thought: "but this proposal is already a reality! It's my local community here!"

Before this experience I had never lived in community (an apartment with other students is not really a community, is it?) and I need to confess that I truly love it, we share prayer, the mission, the household chores and



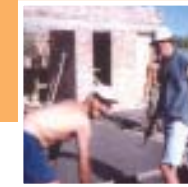
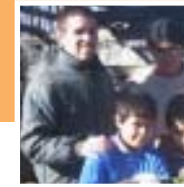
A group of kids on a missionary retreat.



Blessing of the wedding banquet.

responsibilities... I've been here for a few months now, but I know that this will be a turning point in my life. During the time I've spent here I felt that my heart beat strongly when confronted to God's favorites, the poorest and most marginalized. The reasons why I decided to join the VIM in Otuzco are many: the first one was a linguistic one, I was looking for a place where the local language would be mine, I didn't want to "spend" time learning another language. The second one was the scenery; I preferred the mountains, though "I was born in the Mediterranean" as Joan Manuel Serrat would sing, I have always been attracted to the mountains, to the sunrises here, the people, the vegetation, the birds, I'm therefore living here like in Paradise... at about 9800 feet! The third requirement was the mission itself, I was looking for something related to education or evangelization... The truth is that at first I never thought about the community aspect to this experience, about the kind of "community" I was looking for, therefore the surprise was bigger when I met this community, this structure, and surrounded by this scenery... INCREDIBLE!!! And now I'd like to encourage all young Marianist lay people to take the plunge and live

this experience. Within the Marianist Charism the mission is one of the basic pillars, in our cities we can also have some experience of ministry (which is of course very good!) but I believe that the difference between a service and a ministry of this kind is that the first one for example entails visiting a home for immigrants or a sweatshop once a week, whereas a mission like the one I joined here involves a much wider commitment, which comprehends all aspects of our lives, like the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella, or a week in Taizé, these experiences involve a commitment of the 24-7 kind. I personally consider that the ideal moment to live this experience is after finishing college, before getting a regular job. I finished my studies last year in Art History and this is why I thought that year was the "perfect" moment! Well, that's all for now! If you have any questions or queries about this magnificent place, do visit the Center website: <http://buenconsejo.marianistas.org>



or if you want you can e-mail me directly at perlegrino@marianistas.org and I'll be delighted to get back to you, ok?
A big hug from the wonderful Andes of Peru, 9800 feet closer to heaven...
Peace, and in permanent mission,

Miguel Perles Alabau / MIV Volunteer from Spain in Peru (2009)
(<http://perlegrino.marianistas.org>)



Mikel at the Chagapampa school community.



A VIM volunteer from the US on his way to Argentina.

During my sophomore year at the University of Dayton, I felt an inner pull to spend part of my upcoming summer in service to others. So to answer this call, I joined a team of healthcare providers on a mission trip to Port Maria, Jamaica. While spending time with and providing company to patients stricken in an underfunded and understaffed infirmary, I realized that it was only through serving others that I truly feel alive and invigorated. At the infirmary I consoled a patient named Lee (incidentally my middle name), who asked me to assess his medical condition. Though I had already explained to him that I was just a premedicine student, his deep need for aid and advice left him the only option of asking for help from a *prospective* medical student, not the competent healthcare provider that

he so desperately required but had been deprived of from his poverty. This longing for help, from anyone that Lee thought might be able to provide it, regardless of their ability, demonstrated to me the dire situation that so many people face.

This experience influenced my decision to devote part of my life, a year after graduation, to serving others. As I reflect upon my upcoming service with the Marianists in Buenos Aires, Argentina, I have struggled with the idea of volunteering in the seemingly well-to-do city of Buenos Aires, the "Paris of South America." However, as I recall Pope John Paul II's statement that the 4th world exists for the poor of 1st world countries and cities; I think the disenfranchised porteños of Buenos Aires, though residents of a

modern city, have many needs that I, with the help of the Marianists, am eager to help meet during my year of service in Argentina.

Specifically, my interest in volunteering with the Marianists is rooted in their commitment to discerning the "signs of the time" to bring social justice to the world. I am also attracted to the Marianist's desire to be in solidarity with the poor by being voices for the voiceless and to be committed to living simply. I believe that these characteristics, espoused by the Marianists, are important aspects of volunteer work and I am excited to join their efforts after graduation!

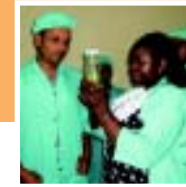
Michael Elliot / VIM Volunteer from the US in Argentina (2009)



Michael with his patient Lee in Jamaica.



Michael with some school kids in Jamaica.



Second year in Kenya.

Liz Ramey, from the US, is doing her second year as a Marianist volunteer in Kenya at the Marianist school Our Lady of Nazareth. Even if Liz originally thought of dividing her 2 years as a volunteer between the cities of Nairobi and Mombasa, she finally decided to volunteer only in the city of Nairobi, working at the same school, and living with the same community. In the following pictures you will be able to see some of the activities that Liz is doing in Kenya, and the faces of some of the people that Liz is serving as a volunteer. Amongst these responsibilities, Liz is teaching English to a group of young adults, and she's collaborating in different projects of adults' training in areas like hair-dressing, catering and carpentry.

Additionally, this year, our dear Spanish VIM volunteer Maria Pilar Liz, who has already volunteered in Kenya several times during her summer breaks as a teacher, has decided to go back to Kenya to volunteer for a whole year now as from July 2009!

If you are appealed by the reality in Kenya and by the wonderful work that the local lay and religious Marianists is carrying out in this country, don't hesitate to contact the VIM to volunteer in Kenya for a few months, for a year, or for two. The very same VIM coordinator will volunteer in Nairobi in July this year for a few weeks before participating at the MLC (Marianist Lay Communities) International Meeting, which will take place in the same city in the month of August.

Liz Ramey / MIV volunteer from the US in Kenya (2008/9)



Another experience in Peru.

After returning to the United States following an amazing experience volunteering in Peru last summer, I decided that I wanted to do some long-term volunteer work following my college graduation. I researched various volunteer opportunities in Latin America, but I ultimately chose to return to Peru for about 7 months to continue helping at the Instituto Chaminade Marianistas. I am currently working at the school and assisting in various ways with the maintenance and advancement of the school's technology.

In addition, I am also helping a group of students practice and improve their English-language skills. I am having a fantastic time living and working in Peru, and I hope to do some traveling within the country in the coming months.

John Ventimiglia / MIV volunteer from the US in Peru (2008/9)





Life is so hard sometimes, but we can survive!

I have been a volunteer in Karonga, Malawi for a little over a year and a half. In this time I have become a different person and I have learned a lot. I have enjoyed every minute of my experience. I am not saying that it has always been easy. I have made mistakes – many, actually - but I learned from them. I faced obstacles, but I overcame them. I have cried, but I wiped my tears away and moved forward. And as I approach the end of my two years of service in August, I have reflected back on my experience and the lessons I have learned, five of which I would like to share.

“Life is so hard sometimes, but we can survive.” This is the refrain of a popular reggae song played on the radio three to four times per day. It is a simple sentence, but has a powerful message. We go days without electricity or go to class in 120 degree temperatures. We struggle to find food or go for months without running water, but we can find ways to go on. We face many hardships and think life cannot be any worse, but we can go on living and continue to survive.

“Dancing ameliorates most problems.” Dancing is a part of every day life here. Malawians dance in meetings, in church, in

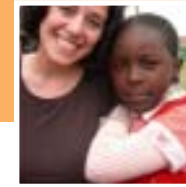
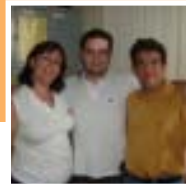
class, while listening to music, while standing in line at the market, or while walking several kilometers to town. It can be a simple toe-tapping, snapping of the fingers, or it can be a more involved step. There can be music playing on the radio or it can be people singing or playing the drum. It can even be music playing in a person’s head.

Before I came to Malawi, I was a classic wall flower. I would run from organized dances like the “Electric Slide.” I dreaded school dances. However, when I began my volunteer service, I soon realized I would have to get over this fear of dancing because dancing finds its way into part of each day. No matter how stressed, tired, bored or frustrated I am, I have discovered that taking a few minutes to dance both literally and figuratively shakes off the negative energy I had felt just moments before.

“If you cannot laugh at yourself, life will seem a whole lot harder.” I am white. I live in an African village where I am one of the few white people for many kilometers in any direction. This I cannot change. I am often seen as an outcast or as a source of entertainment. I mispronounce words in the local language, Chitumbuka. I look ridiculous

when I try to dance like a Malawian. When I run on the football pitch or jump to shoot a basketball, I am looked at like an attraction at an amusement park. I have engrossed myself in all aspects of the culture here. While I look silly doing it and am laughed at more frequently than not, I try every new experience. When I first arrived, I was shy and embarrassed. However, I have since learned that it is okay to look ridiculous trying something new. Malawians truly appreciate my effort and attempt to adapt to the culture and now I can see, too, that I look a bit funny, but who cares, really?

“Friendship is simple.” My entire life I have had a set group of friends. In grade school, I ate with the same five girls every day at lunch. In high school, I studied with my best friends in the library. In college, I lived with the same seven girls all four years. Yes, I had friends outside of these groups, but most of my time was spent with my small clique. Once I arrived here, this all changed. I can honestly say that every person I have met is my friend. I am friends with the teachers I work with and with the brothers that live next door. When I travel, I make all sorts of friends. I am friends



with the woman sitting next to me on a mini-bus. I have made friends from all over the world. I have walked for hours around Malawi with people I may never see again. I have eaten with, drank with and laughed with people from all walks of life. I have exchanged emails with people I barely know and have kept in touch since that initial encounter. Having all kinds of friends opens me up to new ideas, conversations and ways of thinking. Relationships should be simple. There is no need to exclude anyone or decide whether or not a person is “friend-worthy.” No exceptions.

“Challenges are a blessing in disguise.”

Before I came to Malawi, I was told that I would be teaching English and Biology. I immediately started thinking about what I wanted to teach and how I would do so. When I arrived, I was forced back to reality. I am teaching in a school where approximately five students in each class of fifty have a textbook. I am teaching in a school where the science labs do not have even one working microscope. I am teaching in a school where I, as the teacher, am the only source of information for these students. So what I write

on the board is all they have for the given subject. In my first month here, I was appalled at the fact that there were no books.

I quickly began fundraising to buy books for the school and I raised over \$3000 from the United States. This money helped somewhat but did not eradicate the problem completely. The school lacks most resources necessary for instruction and for learning. However, I have learned that I am capable of coming up with solutions to these problems. Actually, I now love the challenge of trying to get my students to understand

what I am teaching with different projects, diagrams that I draw and exercises for them to try. For instance, the students hate writing compositions. This is one of my passions in

life and I was so disheartened to find that they do not like writing.

After a few months of practically pulling teeth to get them to write a simple composition, I came up with an idea of starting a school newspaper. The school newspaper – the Chaminade Times - includes short stories, poems, news articles, editorials, cartoons, puzzles, brain teasers, jokes, drawings and photographs that they take with a digital camera. I have a staff of more than seventy-five students. Each student participates in



Emily teaching as part of her mission as a Marianist volunteer.



the department of his choice. The students take pride in this newspaper. They have something to work towards and their writing has improved drastically. In fact, the newspaper is now sold for a small cost at many schools in the northern part of Malawi. Challenges may seem impossible. Yet, they show you what you are made of and what you are capable of accomplishing with the little you have to work with.

I am so grateful for the experiences I have gained from my volunteer service in Karonga, Malawi. As I face my last six months, I am sad to think I will be leaving this place I now call my home. However, I am comforted by the fact that this has become my home and I can return any time.

Emily Richardson / MVP volunteer in Karonga, Malawi



The MIV offers the possibility to volunteer for six months to a year or two in pastoral ministry and/ or development projects animated by the Marianist Family in different parts of the world, such as the ones presented in this newsletter. For further information, contact the MIV Coordinator, Mr. José Luis Pérez at joseluisperez@sinectis.com.ar