

**Mission Newsletter - Venezuela Lutheran Mission Partnership - Lutheran Church of Venezuela
January 23, 2010**

Rudy & Ramona Blank, Volunteer missionaries to Venezuela

Workshop and Intensive Course

As I write these words pastor German Novelli Sr. should be arriving in Venezuela to lead a workshop on stewardship and a weeklong course on Law and Gospel. On Sunday, January 25 Pastor Novelli will be preaching in El Salvador in Caracas. Pastor Novelli is a native of Venezuela, a former journalist and TV reporter, who is currently serving a Lutheran congregation in Milwaukee. Pastor Novelli's visit to Venezuela is sponsored by VLMP, the Venezuela Lutheran Mission Partnership, as will be the trips of other visiting professors during 2010. VLMP continues to work in conjunction with the Juan de Frias Theological Institute in the preparation of Venezuelan church workers. This coming summer the last LCMS missionaries serving in Venezuela, Dale and Sandra Saville will be redeployed the USA. This means that in the future most of the volunteer professors and volunteer teams coming into the country to serve in partnership with the national church will need to come through VLMP.

Prayer Request:

A few days ago we received an urgent prayer request for El Paraíso Lutheran Church in Barquisimeto on behalf of Sr. Gerardo Mendoza, the brother of Belkis Mendoza who was kidnapped this week. At the latest report he has not been found. Belkis is one of the members of Church Council of that congregation, one of the newest groups in the Lutheran Church of Venezuela. Kidnappings are becoming more and more common in many parts of Venezuela – especially in the large cities such as Caracas and in rural areas close to the Colombian border where terrorist groups often cross into Venezuelan territory to kidnap ranchers and landowners for ransom. Tourists and foreigners thought to be carrying money or valuables are also favorite targets. In spite of such dangers, the work of the Lutheran Church of Venezuela goes on. Please keep all of the pastors, deaconess, congregational members and volunteer groups in your prayers.

Kidnappings and rising crime rates are not the only problems currently facing Venezuela at this time. An extremely severe dry season has caused water levels to fall to record lows in all of the nation's reservoirs, especially at Lake Guri, the huge reservoir behind the giant Guri Dam in Estado Bolivar not far from where we used to live in Ciudad Guayana. The drought has caused not only water rationing throughout the country but also the rationing of electricity, since there is not enough water coming through the dam to keep the turbines generating sufficient electricity. This has meant cutbacks at the huge steel mills in Puerto Ordaz that rely solely on electric furnaces.

ONGOING MISSION

Recently a team of members from Barquisimeto led by Pastor Miguelángel Pérez visited members of the Barquisimeto congregation that have moved to the city of Acarigua located in Estado Portuguesa – about an hour's drive from Barquisimeto. A small service was held in the home of the members and there is talk of starting a cell of the Barquisimeto congregation in Acarigua. We pray that the Holy Spirit would continue to open doors of opportunity for our church in Venezuela and raise up dedicated leaders willing to trust the Spirit in their efforts to bring the Word of the Lord into new areas. Another group of Lutherans in Ciudad Guayana continues to travel regularly to newly reopened Lutheran chapel in La Morrocoya, Estado Monagas. With the opening several years ago of the new bridge over the Orinoco River, it is now easier to travel between Estado Bolivar and Estado Monagas. Gone are the tedious four

and five hour waits for the ferry across the river that we had to endure before the inauguration of the new bridge.

Recently we have established contact with Olga Pinto, formerly a member of La Ascensión Lutheran Church in San Félix. Olga is now married and living with her husband and three children in northern Italy, about an hour and half drive from Milan. Unable to find a Lutheran Church anywhere near her home, Olga has been holding well attended Sunday School and Bible Classes in her own home. I have asked all over for some help in getting some Italian language Lutheran S.S. and Bible Class materials to Olga, but have not been able to find anything. If any of our readers can help, please let us know. If you know of anyone willing to help start a Lutheran congregation in Italy; we would like to hear from you. Olga's email address is olga.pintoscipio@gmail.com.

SPECIAL LATIN AMERICAN ISSUE OF LOGIA

In last summer's newsletter I mentioned that I had been asked to write an article on Lutheranism in Venezuela for a special issue of LOGIA, a Journal of Lutheran Theology. That issue has now come out (Volume XIX for Epiphany 2010). The issue contains not only my article on Venezuela but also very interesting articles on Latin American Lutheranism by Dr. Leopoldo Sánchez of the Saint Louis Seminary, Dr. Douglas Rutt of the Fort Wayne Seminary and Dr. Douglas Groll, the retired director of the Hispanic Institute of Theology and former missionary to Venezuela. You can order your copy of this issue from logia2@nvc.net.

Sunday School in La Morrocoya

