

## DESERT BLOOMS

August 2011

Sometimes opportunities spring up before us in life that we know can only come from God Himself. In the spring, Sr. Janet and Tracy, a volunteer at Proyecto Santo Niño, received an invitation from the Sisters of Charity of Greensburg to go to Ecuador. The Greensburg congregation is made up of two provinces - one in the United States and one in North Korea. Four Sisters from the Korean province live and work in a small town in coastal Ecuador called Pedro Carbo, where they run a 24-hour clinic and a school for kids with special needs called INESEM. The congregation planned a trip for Sisters from both of its provinces to travel there for some cross-cultural community building. Sr. Marlene, the Superior General of the whole congregation, invited Janet and Tracy to go along since they have Spanish skills and experience working with kids with special needs. So, on July 16th, Janet and Tracy boarded a plane to Ecuador, unsure of what awaited them but very excited for their two-week adventure!

The trip was filled with unforgettable experiences. The group spent time visiting the ministry sites of the Sisters. INESEM was especially touching for Janet and Tracy because although it is a school and not a community center like Proyecto Santo Niño, it is filled with the same spirit of joy. The school is divided into three sections - one for children with intellectual disabilities, one for children with auditory disabilities, and one for children with multi-disabilities. As Janet and Tracy entered into the room where the children with multi-disabilities have class, they felt like they could've been in Anapra. The kids had similar struggles as the kids in Mexico and were just as adorable. The teachers at the school are also incredible. Some of them take a bus an hour each way or more to get to work everyday. They are dedicated and so loving in their labor. It is easy to see that the job is much more than that - it is a vocation that they live out quite gracefully, just like the therapists at the clinic in Anapra.

There were many unexpected adventures throughout the week. Janet ended up being in charge of a few medical missions. She did check-ups for all of the children and teachers at INESEM as well as their families and even saw 86 patients in one morning in a small remote area outside of Pedro

Carbo. Tracy was part of a group that spent time teaching music to all of the classes at INESEM. It was quite a challenge when she had to teach music to the hearing-impaired class, especially because her partner teacher spoke only Korean! Throughout each day, Janet and Tracy referred to a small sign hanging in their room for inspiration. It read: No se preocupe ("Don't worry"). And of course, as God always is, God was in charge, filling each experience with lessons, grace, and joy. The trip culminated with Janet and Tracy leading a retreat for the teachers at INESEM, the employees at the clinic, and some young people from the local parish. It was a wonderful day for everyone to reflect on their unique part in the mission of Jesus and on the experiences shared throughout the week.

Even though the trip was wonderful, of course Janet and Tracy were excited to get back to El Paso and especially to the little ones in Anapra. Things were marching on as normal at Proyecto Santo Niño. Last Saturday, we had an "end of summer" carnival-style party for all of the kids who went back to school this week. The Sisters and volunteers ran a face painting station, made balloon animals, and did crafts with the kids while they all munched on popcorn. After that, everyone played musical chairs and water balloons. The kids and adults alike had a great time celebrating such a fun-filled summer and the beginning of another school year!

What blessed experiences! In the faces of the children and dedicated workers in Ecuador, Janet and Tracy saw the face of Christ. Their trip reminded them that there are special children just like those in Anapra all around the world and, thankfully, that there are loving people who care for those children, too. Their homecoming reminded them even more how special their Santo Niño special kids really are. Thank God for life's adventures, big and small!



## Photos

- Top right: Mili shows off her beautiful face painting at the clinic party on Saturday. Isn't she cute?
- Center: Janet and 2 students from INESEM in Ecuador show their smiles.