



Before I begin a review of what I've been up to since I arrived in Bogota, Colombia, I guess I can briefly remind you what I'm doing here. I am a Mission Intern with The United Methodist Church, part of the Young Adult Missionary Program, which gives young adults an opportunity to do 2-3 years of service and justice work. The Mission Intern program is 3 years, half international and half domestic (US-2, the partner program, is 2 years and only in the US). For my international placement, I am in Bogota, Colombia working with an organization called the Centro Popular para America Latina de Comunicacion (People's Communication Center of Latin America, henceforth referred to as CEPALC).

Thank you for all of your support (financial, prayer, emotional, spiritual, etc.). Knowing that I have people around the US and around the world who are looking out for me is a beautiful sense. Looking back on my first few months in Colombia, I recognize how insanely busy they have been. Almost immediately upon my arrival to Bogota, I found myself working hard (and occupying myself in lots of other ways outside of my work hours). So here's a taste of what I've been up to since moving to Bogota:

On September 9, there was a meeting at CEPALC called Fe y Cafe (Faith and Coffee) of the Colectivo de Sororidad, Ecumenismo, y Democracia (Collective of Sorority, Ecumenism, and Democracy – which I shall henceforth refer to as SED), a group of women that works with CEPALC creating ecumenical spaces for women to form friendships and talk about issues they might not otherwise be able to talk about in their churches. This night of Fe y Cafe was a celebration of Amor y Amistad (Love and Friendship, celebrated in Colombia in mid-September), and the group's welcome of the other volunteer (a young woman from Switzerland) and me was evident and basically immediate.

In mid-September, I went for the first time to work with the children of Caracoli, in Ciudad Bolivar, a barrio popular (very poor neighborhood) in the far southwest end of Bogota. The children were preparing for an upcoming radio broadcast, in which they would talk about their barrio and its realities, as well as their fears, hopes, and dreams. Common fears were pregnancy (the girls often said “que me embaracen”, which literally translates to “that they get me pregnant”, suggesting to me that rape and violation are common problems in the barrio), as well as other forms of violence. One of the most common dreams was to become a police officer, which is a very common profession in Colombia (at least, in terms of official employment). It was interesting to hear about their lives and to really realize for the first time the importance of the communications work CEPALC does, giving those children a chance to be empowered and for their voices to be heard. It was also this day that I began to make the connections between the social problems which I witnessed in Chicago and those in Bogota. Of course, the two cities have their own individual problems, but there are many connections which can be made.





On September 20, I traveled with four coworkers to Aguazul, in the department Casanare, which lies in the lowland plains region between the mountains and the Amazon jungle. Our trip was delayed by a couple of weeks because there was violence in the region during our originally planned dates by the guerrillas or the paramilitaries (I think it was the latter, but I can't remember for sure). We arrived in Aguazul and the weather was really hot (that region of the country is very hot). The first day we had our workshop planned, it poured, so the workshop didn't go over quite as planned, but we were able to have an interesting conversation with one of the women who came and her family. The organization

there which CEPALC works with is a group of displaced families and people who, for whatever reason, do not have land of their own. The family who we were able to converse with for a while, if I recall correctly, had been displaced from their land and were living on and caring for someone else's finca (small-scale farm). This was another insight into one of the most serious problems of the Colombian reality which really put a face to the problem of displacement.

Some time in early October, I went to spend my first day with the youth of Suba. Suba is an area of Bogota which was once its own municipality but is now integrated in as part of the city. Suba is an area of huge contrast, where one of the richest people (if not the richest person) in Bogota lives, alongside some of the poorest people in Bogota, who live in the shadow of his mansion (which, by the way, is surrounded by a giant wall to keep other people out). The first day in Suba we simply talked about what their experiences had been so far with CEPALC in the past, and they asked me questions about life in the US. Then we got lunch together and two of them (cousins) bought me a piece of cake as a "welcome to Colombia" present.

Later in October, I spent another day with the same group. We met up and went to a local library where I gave them a short talk on a human rights abuse in the US – the anti-immigrant legislation this year in Alabama. Then they began talking about the various forms that human rights abuses take in their lives. They talked a lot about the way they are treated in school, as well as some of the violence and police abuses they see around them. After our talk was over, we went to a nearby park at the top of a mountain with an incredible view of Bogota, and we just wandered for a while, enjoying the fresh air and the beautiful view. Later, we got empanadas (a typical Colombian food – so delicious!) and parted ways.





On October 14, I left for Sogamoso in the department Boyaca with two co-workers. We did a workshop with a group there on radio broadcasting. After we went over the basics of radio broadcasting and writing a script for radio, I gave a brief on human rights and broke the group into small groups to talk about what they understood to be different types of human rights (women's rights, children's rights, and workers' rights). They then used those ideas to create a script for a practice radio recording, a sort of public service announcement about each type of rights. It was a fun and interactive way to both add a practical element to our communications work and to talk about human rights.

Towards the end of October, I went for a second time to Caracoli. This time we were collecting ideas to create the scripts for their next two radio broadcasts. So this time we asked them to tell stories from their lives. They could be scary stories, or stories of joy, or stories of problems which have occurred. It was a fun afternoon, and the kids were really excited to be able to write down their stories so they could be incorporated into the broadcast.

On October 29, I went to my first Encuentro Infantil, a monthly all-day workshop for children and youth from all over Bogota where they come for the day and learn about Colombian history and then they spend the rest of the day creating some sort of art or communications media presentation about what they learned in the morning. I spent the day with the youngest kids, and after their morning session on Colombian history, I talked to them for a while about issues of respect for human rights. Then they spent the afternoon making artwork which represented different contrasts between respect for various rights and denial or abuse of those same rights. At the end of the Encuentro, the kids presented what they had worked on during the day.





On November 19, CEPALC (specifically SED) hosted a day-long workshop for women from all over Bogota called "Mi Cuerpo, Mi Territorio: Una Mirada desde lo Politico" (My Body, My Territory: A View from the Political). Between 50 and 60 women were in attendance. We began the day with a devotion on the story of how Jesus healed the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years. After that, someone talked theoretically about the connections between women's bodies and politics. Finally, we did an awesome activity with the women where they pasted pictures cut out of magazines to silhouettes of women's bodies that they thought had to do with oppressions, realities, and dreams of women, then they were recorded stating their oppressions, realities, and dreams. It was a really creative and powerful activity that really got to the point of how women's bodies are treated in politics (broadly conceived).

On November 26, I went to my second Encuentro Infantil. This one was set up like the previous one, though with the youngest kids, instead of doing a lesson on Colombian history, the other volunteer and I told the kids about two individuals who are remembered as heroes in the movements for peace and justice – Martin Luther King, Jr. and Albert Schweitzer (the latter a German who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952 and who spent much of his life doing medical work in Africa). Then the kids made puppets and put on a puppet show at the end of the day to depict these two prolific figures. I enjoyed being able to share a little bit about US history with them and about people who have worked for peace and justice for all.



From November 30 to December 8, I was with a group from my university, DePaul University, which came with a program that was integral to my DePaul experience. The Service Immersion program sends groups of 10-15 students to various US and international sites each winter and spring break to do service (though not always traditional service) and learn about the history and reality of the places they visit. A group of 14 students and 2 staff leaders came to Bogota to learn about and immerse themselves in the Colombian reality. I had spoken to the woman who was organizing

their activities here about the possibility of meeting up with them for an afternoon to talk about postgrad volunteer programs, but she instead invited me to spend the entire week with them and help with translation. My bosses graciously allowed me the week away from work so I could accompany the group for the week. During the week we spent a lot of time learning about the Colombian reality – displacement, violence, poverty, inequality, polarized politics, and guerrillas and paramilitaries. It was a breath of fresh air to be able to spend the week with my fellow Blue Demons (DePaul's mascot) and really immerse myself in the Colombian reality in ways I hadn't really had much chance to do it yet. It was educational, refreshing, and reassuring to spend a week with like-minded young adults.

On December 13, I spent the morning with the youth in Suba again. This time we talked about responsible choices in relationships, specifically in sexual relationships. I understand that preteens and teens often don't have safe spaces in which they can talk and question about issues of sex. At the end of our time together, I emphasized to them that one of the most important things when confronting questions about sex is honest communication – with their partner, mentors, friends, and parents. I hope at least opening the conversation helped to break some of the taboo-fueled discomfort around talking about the subject which they may have, because talking honestly about sex and asking questions is the best means to educate oneself, and holistic education on the subject, in my opinion, is the best protection.

I have also had two ongoing commitments while I have been here. One was a meeting every two weeks with SED called “Mujeres en los Textos Sagrados” (Women in Sacred Texts). The purpose of this group was to explore women's roles in and treatment by the sacred texts of various religions. Most of this fall was spent in conversation with a Muslim woman who informed us about the women in the Koran, the emergence of feminism in Islam, and the treatment of women in different Muslim-majority countries (for instance, the imposition of the burka in some countries has little to do with Islam itself, but rather an extremely strict cultural interpretation of the Koranic requirement that people should dress modestly). It was refreshing to be in this space, especially with a group of women for whom these were likely completely new revelations. I feel like the time talking about women in the Koran and Muslim women was very informative and interesting, and helped to break down the images of Muslim women as “oppressed.” I am excited for the coming year and what it has in store for this group. I hope we can continue our dialogue, breaking down the barriers, prejudices, and stereotypes that so many of us hold about other groups of people.

My other ongoing commitment has been with my church - “Principe de Paz” (Prince of Peace) Colombian Methodist Church. The church sits in a barrio popular which is in an area of Bogota where land developers are buying up all the land owned by poor families and building expensive highrise apartments. The church holds its ground, though, struggling against the gentrification of the barrio. I have attended church every Sunday I could since arriving in Colombia, and have been able to share in some great experiences with them. First, we had a celebration of Amor y Amistad in which we had a potluck lunch (though not the typical Methodist potluck with six kinds of jello salad and eight varieties of mac and cheese) and a white elephant gift exchange. It was a lot of fun and really made me feel more like a part of the community. I have also been a part of developing a youth group at the church which meets every two weeks, with whom we do community-building, Bible study, and talk about how we, as Christians, can begin to engage in interfaith dialogue. I'm excited for where we will go with this work in the future. Lastly, on December 4, we took a trip out of Bogota to baptize two children and have a time of reaffirmation of faith and baptism for three of our members. The bishop



was there for the baptisms, and we spent the rest of the day relaxing and enjoying each other's company and the warm weather. It was a beautiful experience and I am glad I was able to share in it.

It is thanks to you and your prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness (have I mentioned lately I'm a Methodist through-and-through?) that I am able to be here, and I appreciate the continuation of that support, because it is truly what sustains me. Here are some ways that you can continue to support the Young Adult Missionary Program, the other Young Adult Missionaries, and me:

Applications for the Young Adult Missionary Program class (to be commissioned during summer 2012) are now available. If you are or know a young adult between the ages of 20 to 30 and feel called to address the root causes of injustice so that the gospel is lived out alongside communities and organizations seeking peace and systemic transformation, applications to become a United Methodist US-2 or Mission Intern are due February 5, 2012. [Click here](#) for more details on the program and a link to the applications.

From the Mission Intern in Bethlehem, Palestine: The World Week of Peace in Palestine Israel will take place from May 28th to June 3rd across the Globe. The initiative is a project of the Palestine and Israel Ecumenical Forum intended to highlight not only obstacles to restorative justice but also emphasize shared Hope and solidarity with those most effected by the conflict. Mission personnel, non-profit organizations, and other players in the grassroots peace movement encourage everyone to start conversations in their communities. Visit www.worldweekforpeace.org for event details and pief.oikoumene.org to learn more about Palestine and Israel Ecumenical Forum. Contact John Daniel Gore (Mission Intern in Bethlehem, Palestine) at jdanielgore@gmail.com to receive regular updates and bonus materials.

If you wish to provide financial support to either me or my partner organization, CEPALC (or any other missionary or United Methodist-affiliated mission project), you can donate through [The Advance](#). To make your lives easier, you can donate to me through [my Advance page](#) and you can donate to CEPALC through [its Advance page](#).

And, of course, I always appreciate contact, and there are a variety of ways to maintain contact with me. You can email me at kara.gbgm@gmail.com, contact me via Skype at karajcrawford, find me on Facebook at www.facebook.com/karajcrawford, follow me on Twitter @revolUMCionaria, and follow my blog at revolUMCionaria.wordpress.com.

So until the next time, take care, stay in touch, and may God's grace and peace go with you in this holiday season and always.

Peace,
Kara Johansen Crawford
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