



## MINUTE FOR MISSION

February 15, 2007

### LA CANGREJERA: VOLUNTEER TEACHERS START A SCHOOL

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At the request of the Presbyterian Church of Colombia (IPC), the PC(USA) sends short-term volunteers to accompany IPC church leaders as they work to safeguard human rights and minister among those displaced by violence. These volunteers are trained by the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship (PPF) working with World Mission of the PC(USA) and the IPC. Since the program began, thirty-eight have served as accompaniers, and eighteen of them have asked to serve again.

This report was submitted by accompaniers Jane Wood and Christine Caton in November 2007. The full text is available at <http://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/cgi-bin/dada/mail.cgi/archive/colombia/newest/>

La Cangrejera is a beach community of mostly displaced people from various areas of Colombia. (Cangrejo is the Spanish word for "crab," and there are many crabs at this place on the beach.) In 2006, Egda Gaitán began teaching eight children on the front porch of a house. Her efforts grew into a school named Simón Bolívar that now has 206 students aged five to sixteen, nine teachers, and a principal. Eight of the teachers, are volunteers.

In the beginning the teachers taught the classes under trees to avoid the very hot sun. Then the parents decided that they didn't want their children studying under trees, so they put up a roof, with poles around the space. They now hold classes in rented rooms in a house.

Marcela Guerra, the only paid teacher, teaches first grade B, the class for children learning at a first-grade level who are older than most first graders. Some students have to work to help support their families early in the morning,



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Marcela Guerra, the only paid teacher, teaches first grade B, the class for children learning at a first-grade level who are older than most first graders. Some students have to work to help support their families early in the morning,

selling the fish their fathers have caught and finding crabs that they can sell to restaurants for \$2.50 a bucket. Carlos usually didn't come to school on time because his father would beat him if he didn't sell the fish he caught before he came to school. The teacher told him to go sell his fish, bathe, and come back to school. He did, and everyone was pleased.

We heard about some especially difficult situations. Felipe was twelve or thirteen years old and had been forced to leave five other schools because of his hyperactivity. His mother brought him to school, saying that this was his last chance or she would have to send him off to work. He couldn't read, write, do math, or relate to other people. Bit by bit, with a compassionate teacher, he improved, and he is now in second grade. He is especially good at math.

Aldarí, age eleven or twelve, is cross-eyed and had never felt accepted at school because the other children had teased him. A teacher went to his home. She told his mother that no one would call him cross-eyed at school. His mother had reservations but gave her permission. Aldarí now likes school so much he gets there at 6:00 A.M. every school day.

We were very impressed by what the extremely dedicated teachers are doing for the children. They use photos and written reports to record what they have accomplished. The parents, who are mostly day laborers, are so enthusiastic about what the school has accomplished with their children that they are holding raffles to raise money to dress the children well for the end-of-semester ceremonies.

If you have questions about the accompanier program, please be in touch with Sarah Henken ([sarah@presbypeacefellowship.org](mailto:sarah@presbypeacefellowship.org)), or Anne Barstow ([annebarstow@peoplepc.com](mailto:annebarstow@peoplepc.com)).

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*Do you have a mission story to tell? Would you like to read inspiring stories of Presbyterians in mission? Visit the Witness Season Web site: [www.pcusa.org/witness](http://www.pcusa.org/witness). New minutes for mission are posted on the 1st and 15th of each month.*

*For more information on the Witness Season mission education emphasis contact Billie Healy, Associate for Mission Education Resources (888) 728-7228, ext. 5689, or [Bhealy@ctr.pcusa.org](mailto:Bhealy@ctr.pcusa.org).*

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