

Empower Ecuador - March 2015 Visit Report

March '15 Visit Report Playas, Ecuador

Our team of four visited Southwestern Ecuador from March 9-13, 2015. The team consisted of David Thoresen (Director of Local and International Outreach), Robin Blumenthal (Family Pastor), Melissa Swanson (Visual Arts Manager) and Glen Elliott (Lead Pastor). We joined church leaders from other churches (most of whom Glen already knew) who have or are considering similar projects. We flew in and out of Guayaquil and visited 3 sites in Ecuador: one that had been in existence for many years (mature), one that was two years old (both in La Libertad) and our site in Playas that is just getting started.

The Project Partners and Plan

There are 4 main partners in this project. The purpose is to plant a church that will host a Compassion Child Sponsorship project and facilitate community transformation. Compassion International is a respected child sponsorship program. They only do projects through the local church. Many areas with the greatest poverty or need do not have a church. Stadia, a successful church planting ministry, has joined Compassion in a broad church planting effort throughout South America. Pantano Christian Church (PCC) has partnered with Stadia to plant all four of our Southern Arizona churches and campuses as well as with Compassion on a Child Survival program in Kenya. PCC includes active support and involvement by Elements City Church and Revive Community Church, currently campuses of PCC. Stadia and Compassion vet and select the local church planting group or church to start a new church. In our case, this is an Assemblies of God church called [Plenitude de Dios](#) (Fullness of God). Pantano Christian Church provided \$80,000 to build a facility where the church and the child sponsorship programs will be held. The only obligation of PCC is to fund the building. PCC is not responsible for oversight, salaries, program, etc. at the site location. However, it is suggested that we make every effort to sponsor the children of the Compassion project which we are thrilled to do.

This project fits several values and mission goals of PCC: immediate new church planting with a view to a larger movement and community transformation through the local church. Further, this is a vital way for individuals and families of PCC to actually engage in the mission through financial sponsorship, letter writing, prayer and even on-site visits.

Brisas de Playas, Ecuador

We arrived at Playas on Thursday March 12th. It was hot, humid and windy. The land looked dry and arid, however we did pass fields of sugar cane before entering the town. The coastal community of Brisas de Playas is about an hour drive (60 miles) south of Guayaquil (a modern and the second largest city in Ecuador). The temperature is quite warm (80-90's F) with high humidity. It is slightly below the equator and December - March is usually the rainy season (but this year it was very dry).

Playas is a resort and recreational destination, being only an hour from Guayaquil by car (90 minutes by bus). It has beautiful long beaches with a nice ocean breeze and powerful sunshine (the sun is straight overhead - being on the equator).

The community where the church property is located is called Las Brisas or "The Breezes." It is just over a mile northwest of downtown Playas and beyond the resorts and beaches. The reality in this part of Playas is that of poverty. The average monthly income for a family is between \$100 and \$120 (less than the average of \$180 for all of Playas). There are about 4100 people in that immediate district, but people are already coming to the church community from all over Playas. The typical house has a dirt floor and many use bamboo or wood for walls with zinc roofs. A few homes are using brick. The community needs a

sewage system, paved streets, garbage collection, permanent employment and of course, a life giving church.



60% of the families have two parents while the children of the other families are being cared for either by one parent (usually a mom) or a grandparent. Jobs are hard to find. Drugs are a powerful temptation. The real issue according to Pastor Looor-Mendoza is the loss of dignity. His passion is to bring the gospel to the people, serve the children and their families to empower them to recover their dignity.

However, while the Las Brisas barrio where the church buildings will be is a poor area, it does not have the feel of being run-down. You can see that the people are proud of what little they do have. They typically take care of their homes and property in a tidy manner. But what is most obvious and so enjoyable is how they are very kind, warm and welcoming of American visitors. Frankly I was surprised how well the Ecuadorian people embraced America and Americans.

Plenitude De Dios Church.

Pantano Christian Church, along with Elements and Revive, sent \$80,000 in January '15 to build the church building and begin the process of registering kids to be sponsored. The funding allowed the local church, which is actually a multi-site of Plenitude de Dios (Evangelical Christian Church) from Guayaquil, to set the project in motion. Plenitude de Dios has a main campus in Guayaquil that was started 20 years ago and today has added 4 multi-sites. They have a vision to plant at least 4 more churches at about 30 minutes driving distance from the church in Las Brisas. They have worked with Compassion for 12 years and have a great deal of experience in both multi-site and the Compassion project programming. They have an active leadership development effort in place to develop leaders for their sites. Plenitude de Dios is part of the Assemblies of God denomination in Ecuador.

The Compassion project in Las Brisas is called Bendicion de Dios Student Center or The Blessing of God Student Center. The official Compassion project number is EC-570. Plenitude de Dios embraces church planting by using the Compassion project to reach families and make a positive impact in the community. Through the 200 kids sponsored they have a personal touch and positive influence on about 1200-1500 people. As mentioned, they have been a strong partner with Compassion. The leadership doesn't see the children as just the future, but important to God now. They believe one of the best ways to reach lost people is through children. Most people who accept Christ do so between the ages of 4 and 14, so this is an important time to bring the influence of Jesus into their lives.

Bendicion de Dios Student Center will provide the sponsored children with Bible teaching, medical checkups, nutritious food, leadership training and school supplies. They also provide educational workshops, health education and counseling. The Center will use the relational connections to share Jesus with the parents and guardians of the sponsored children. The paid and volunteer staff for the Center have already been identified and have started serving in the ministry areas.

Plenitude de Dios has been applying for such a church partnership for several years and are tenacious about this and future projects. They see this partnership as vital to being able to impact the community and are

grateful to PCC for being that partner. They believe they can easily add to the 200 already registered children, maybe up to 350 total at that site.



Land and Building.

The church has purchased the land which was an old run down unused camp from the Foursquare denomination for the price of \$27,000. This is ideal in that it is a church and Christian denomination making a sale that benefits both. The transfer has been legally completed and they are waiting for the finalized already signed documents from the government. They expect these anytime. The property is one of the largest of the 50 plus church plants in Ecuador to date. The property is 3,700 square meters or 39,826 square feet or just under an acre. The property is on a bus route, right off the main road into downtown Playas and the beach area. They have electricity and running water.

Most of the existing buildings on site will have to be removed as they are too old and unreliable. The church has a plan, which we took pictures of, that includes a main auditorium, two sets of bathrooms, a classroom building and kitchen. They will also have a play area. They expect construction to begin in May 2015 and they expect it will take about 8-9 months to complete.



Pastor Freddy Looor-Mendoza and his wife Daisy.

Pastor Looor-Mendoza is the founding pastor and a visionary leader that is highly respected. He has created and trained a young staff to serve their

expanding ministry. He has already appointed and equipped the staff for the church and the Compassion project in Las Brisas.



Pastor Carlos and wife Elizabeth.

Carlos and Elizabeth Carbo have been married for 3 years and are just completing their training at the church's leadership school and seminary. Elizabeth is one of the daughters of Pastor Freddy and Daisy. They will move to Playas once construction begins.

Visits, Transportation & Housing:

The Guayaquil airport is very modern and new. The road from Guayaquil is mostly a divided road that is modern and many sections are new. Flights from Miami generally arrive late and depart late at night. The hotels we stayed in were high quality, clean and comparable to high end lodging in the U.S. The Compassion guides went out of their way to assure our safety and comfort. They constantly provided bottled water and did the little things that made a huge difference.

Compassion International arranges all transportation matters including picking up the team at the airport on a bus, securing quality hotels, the basic schedule and ensuring that meeting leaders and sponsored kids takes place, providing translators and guides, and getting to and from Playas, etc. All these aspects are included in the price. We are planning our next trip in November 7-14, 2015.

Ecuador is a fairly easy place to travel to. Ecuador uses U.S. dollars at no exchange rate. The electrical plugs and type are the exact same as the U.S. Ecuador is on the equivalent to Central time in the US (so 1 to 2 hours earlier than Arizona depending on the time of the year). We enjoyed the food both in the hotels and at restaurants and none of us had any gastrointestinal issues. And like I mentioned, Ecuadorians welcomed us with a very warm hospitality. I would have no concerns about taking my family or even children to visit Playas.

Submitted by Glen Elliott, Lead Pastor - Pantano Christian Church