

Eternal Value:

Missionaries build school in Paraguay to provide quality education

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

LAM News Service

Asunción, Paraguay (LAMNS)—
Missionary Sue Givens says that she would have difficulty returning to a teaching position in the United States. “While my years of teaching in the United States were very fulfilling, I always felt that I was missing something. Being able to freely pray with the teachers, the parents and the children, and being able to share about God at any moment at any time is a wonderful freedom,” she reports.



Sue, a Stark County, Ohio, native, left a 25-year career as a public school teacher and principal to move to this South American country two years ago. Now, she is busy building a Christian school that, when finished, will provide a quality education for over 700 children.

“When it’s finished, it will become an elementary and high school, and we are already talking about providing adult education programs in the evening,” Sue explained.

The new facility will fill a desperate need in Lambare, a poor neighborhood on the southeast side of Asunción where construction of the school building is already underway. “In our survey, we found that over 5,000 children here are not able to go to school because there isn’t sufficient room for them,” Sue said. “Many classrooms have over 75 children in them.”

Lambare is a poor community, Sue says. “Not everybody has electricity or running water in their homes. Some streets are dirt gullies, some are cobblestone,” she explains. “Many homes look nice on the outside, but, when you enter, they have a dirt floor and many do not have adequate windows to protect from heat and cold. Extended families live in a home with maybe three or four families living together.”

While the building construction is underway, the New Horizons School is already providing an education to 106 children in preschool, kindergarten and first grade. “We have two classes running in the morning and two in the afternoon,” Sue says.

“Classes started in February, 2001,” says Mark Waltz, also a Stark County native who has worked in Paraguay through The Mission Society for United Methodists for the past

seven years. “I felt the Lord impressing on me the need for a Christian school here, a quality Christian school.”

Waltz, whose main ministry in Paraguay is working with mobile medical clinics says, “I felt the Lord wanted us to do something that was more lasting than medical work. That helps for today, then tomorrow there’s another problem. I asked what we could do to help these people help themselves in the future, and the Lord just impressed on me that we needed to start with education.”

“We have learned that sometimes our plans are not God’s plans,” Sue reflects. “Last year we just planned to do kindergarten and preschool classes, but mid-year, God provided us with 20 computers. All of a sudden we were running adult classes.” She explains that to move out of low-paying jobs, a person in Paraguay must know how to operate computers and how to speak a little English.

Sue, who serves with the Latin America Mission, says that while growing up near Paris, Ohio, she always had a longing to go to church. “When I was ten, my family moved three miles from our church, Paris United Church of Christ. My dad worked long hours and on Sunday mornings many times I didn’t have a way to go to church and I could hear the church bells. I would be so despondent and sad because I wanted to be there.”

That experience explains one of Sue’s current ministries, transporting children and parents from all over the sprawling Lambare community to worship at one of two Paraguayan Methodist Churches in the neighborhood. “I feel that children need to learn, so I have a strong commitment to make sure that children get to church.”



That kind of second-mile service is paying dividends. “I want to be a missionary,” says 16-year old Nathaniel Cañete who attends the church on the school property. “I was attending a prayer vigil when I was 14 years old and God gave me the idea to be a missionary.”

Now, Nathaniel goes to high school in the evening, attends music classes three afternoons a week, studies English and occasionally works part-time on the construction of the building.

Initially, Sue resisted the idea of relocating to Paraguay and accepting the position as director of the school. “Mark and his wife, Jo, kept inviting me to come down to Paraguay, but I kept saying that I was happy where I was. I loved what I was doing with the children.” In recent years Sue served as the principal at the Eastgate Early Childhood & Family Center in Louisville, Ohio and as assistant principal of the Southgate School in Canton, Ohio, both facilities for special needs children.

Finally, Sue, a member of High Mill Church of the Resurrection in North Canton, Ohio, relented, and in 1999 spent a month helping the Waltz family with medical clinics and surveying the needs of children. “Little did I know that when I left here, my heart didn’t go home with me,” she remembers.

Now, as construction crews put up walls and begin to lay tile roofing, Sue is planning how to hire more teachers and assure the continued operation of the school. “I came here to help them organize the school. Now, I’m the director, but only for a short time. We want this to be a quality school, and for it to be quality, it has to be run by the Paraguayan people.”

One plan for the future is to develop a trust fund. “We are recruiting sponsors in the United States for each child,” Sue says. “It costs \$30 a month. This is for their education and includes their books, materials, teacher’s salaries and other expenses.”

Those wishing to help sponsor a child may write to Samaritan Hands Paraguay School, c/o Fairview United Methodist Church, 2505 Old Niles Ferry Road, Maryville, TN 37803.

Sue is also looking for new missionaries to come and work alongside her. “We need construction people for the next year or two,” she says. “We desperately need a doctor to take over the running of the medical caravans. We also need pastors and people to help set up more schools. There are ministries in hospitals and jails and garbage dumps and opportunities to work with street children.”

“For me, it has been a real walk in faith,” Sue reflects. “In the U.S. we have so much. Here, I’ve had to trust God for so many little things with the school. It has been a real step of faith for me to let God do things and not just do them on my own.”

“My work in Ohio was worth while and very good, but I didn’t have the opportunity to share Christ. What I’m doing here has eternal value.”

Latin America Mission works in partnership with churches and Christian agencies throughout Latin America and supports missionaries and projects in many Latin countries as well as in Spain. LAM is seeking to place new missionaries throughout the region. The U.S. headquarters can be reached at Latin America Mission, Box 52-7900, Miami, FL 33152, by e-mail at info@lam.org, or by calling 1-800-275-8410. The mission’s web site may be found at <http://www.lam.org>. LAM’s Canadian office is at 3075 Ridgeway Drive, Unit 14, Mississauga, ON L5L 5M6.

Related web sites:

<http://www.lam.org>

<http://paraguaynewhorizons.lam.org>

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