

BOLIVIA ROUNDTABLE REPORT

PRAYER



Bolivians are a people of deep faith and intercessory prayer. The Bishop of the Evangelical Methodist Church in Bolivia, Antonio Huanca, started off our roundtable meeting by sharing the testimony of how his wife was diagnosed with cancer last year. As soon as his local church heard about this, the women in the church called for four days of prayer and fasting. God heard their cry: during the Bishop's wife's next hospital appointment, the doctors confirmed that the cancer had gone. Glory to God! Prayer, fasting and vigils are an integral part of the spiritual discipline of the church.

Bishop Antonio Huanca

The Facts

When: 12-15 May 2019

Where: Bolivia, La Paz

Who: The Evangelical Methodist Church in Bolivia

Why: Partners roundtable meeting with the General Board of Global Ministries, Connexio, the UMC Conference of Oklahoma, Koriwanakwa's Children's Home in La Paz and CREAS.

WOMEN



Nemecia Copa

Nemecia Copa, the President of Methodist Women in Bolivia, is an indigenous Aymara woman and a mother of four children. Her work for the church means that she travels the length and breadth of Bolivia (over 424,000 sq miles) by bus to visit Methodist women, often travelling for days to reach a particular community. She says that she is blessed because her husband is also a Methodist and hugely supportive of her ministry. This may not sound unusual to us, but in indigenous Aymara culture, it is highly unusual to have a husband that supports a wife's work that would take her out of her traditional role of homemaker, child bearer and child raiser.

Nemecia was so thankful to Methodist Women in Britain who raised funds to support the construction of Tabita House in El Alto, which is an adjacent city to La Paz, at over 4,000 metres above sea level. Tabita House is the vision of Methodist women in Bolivia to have a 5 story building that would be a refuge for homeless women and victims of domestic violence. Other rooms would be used as teaching classes for sewing, weaving and other crafts that would help empower women with skills for personal income generation. Methodist Women in Britain supported this vision with funds to construct the roof.

GROWTH



This is also a growing church, with a growing ministry among indigenous Quechua and Aymara communities in the departments of Potosi, Santa Cruz and the towns of Sucre and Charazani. There are now 8 new churches in Chaparé, a rural province in the department of Cochabamba. The Methodist Church in Britain had been supporting both pieces of work through a National in Mission Appointments grant, which helped employ an evangelist to spread the gospel in these communities. This growth has also highlighted the need for training of lay workers, children's workers, Sunday School workers, chaplaincy, local accountants and administrators, ministers wives, environmental protection and more.

NEW MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES

A new law on Religious Freedom, Religious Organisations and Spiritual Beliefs passed in April this year has given the Methodist Church access to state institutions. All Christian denominations now enjoy the same rights as the Catholic Church, and can offer chaplaincy in the country's schools, hospitals, universities, police, military and other public services. The church is seeking to train chaplains to ensure they take full advantage of the new law and have a Methodist presence in these areas.

AREAS OF SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY

The church is focused on four areas of community service: education through its 350 schools, health through its 5 clinics and one hospital, agriculture through its rural development programme and other social services. It has agreements of cooperation with the government in education and health. The church relies heavily on external funding partners for its rural development work, but recognises that this is not sustainable. Its schools fund over half of their connexional budget, which is also not a sustainable model of income for the church

PRIORITIES FOR EXTERNAL PARTNERS



Safeguarding and sustainability. These two topics were widely discussed during the roundtable meeting in Bolivia. Local churches in Bolivia are largely self-sustaining, but the connexional work that the church does in its context is highly dependent on external funding from overseas partners and on its schools. The Church is committed to reformulating the strategic 2019-2022 plan in order to rethink structures, activities and strategies to have greater and more sustainable impact in Bolivia.

Safeguarding was an issue pushed by partners as a priority, given the link between charitable overseas funding and ensuring that overseas partners have and are implementing safeguarding procedures. It was agreed that partners would offer the Church support in developing its own safeguarding policies and procedures so that it may also meet recently passed laws that offer better protections for children and vulnerable adults. The Church committed itself to developing safeguarding policies and procedures for vulnerable groups in all its areas of influence, including the local church, schools and local communities.

Follow up actions/outcomes

- To explore the possibility of inviting the Church to apply for a SALT group training grants for training chaplains and local churches in basic church booking/church administration
- To work with other partners to support the start of a journey towards robust safeguarding policy and procedures. The UMC Oklahoma Conference has committed to setting up a virtual forum where all external partners and the Evangelical Methodist Church in Bolivia can share safeguarding resources, GBGM/ UMC Conferences sharing resources that they have developed for their Safe Sanctuaries programme: <http://www.uminure.org/safe-sanctuaries>. MCB and Connexio will also share relevant safeguarding resources on this forum.
- To put CREAS in touch with All We Can to explore how the Church Can capacity and sustainability programme could help Methodist churches in the region develop sustainability strategies

Other info:

CREAS (the Ecumenical Centre for Christian Consultancy Services), one of our ecumenical partners in the region, chaired the roundtable. [Here](#) is a google translate of their website.

Websites

Evangelical Methodist Church in Bolivia: <http://iemb.org.bo/>

CREAS: [Here](#) is a google translate of their website.

General Board of Global Ministries: www.umcmmission.org

United Methodist Church: www.umc.org

Connexio: <http://www.connexio.ch/en/home.html>

