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June & July Newsletter

1 message

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By the way, what is Amparo all about?

Perhaps that's a question you have had after seeing in various newsletters that I (Marina) have been volunteering with this ministry for over a year now. Perhaps, you haven't wondered and are satisfied with the brief description we've given so far... either way this newsletter is dedicated to describing Amparo and how God has led our family to be a part of this ministry in different ways this year.

In Bolivia 1 in 3 girls will be the victim of sexual violence prior to the age of 18. Because of Amparo, our family has meaningful relationships with 10 girls for whom this statement isn't just a sad statistic, it's a reality that marks their whole being. Because of Amparo, our church and family is getting to brush shoulders consistently with 10 beautiful girls who need a family not only to help them heal, but also to be able to share their unique gifts with.

Amparo's mission is to end the sexual exploitation and trafficking of girls in Bolivia by providing protection, education, restoration and the love of Jesus. They do this with two programs. The prevention program is an outreach program that serves girls between the ages of 6 and 16 that live in vulnerable communities in Santa Cruz. The girls in the prevention program are at medium to high risk of being victims of sexual violence due to the high rates of violence, poor access to basic services and education, and high levels of illicit substance abuse in their communities.



A prayer time at the "Club Amparo," the center for the prevention program.

The second initiative is a restoration program to serve up to 12 girls with full-time, holistic care. Casa Amparo, as we call it, is a girls' home with many of the same family dynamics you might have in your home, sibling love one minute and rivalry the next, chore division, homework dread, simple delights like movie nights and birthday parties, visits from beloved Aunts and Uncles (Tios y Tias), and more. Of course, it's unlike your home or mine because the underlying reality, the elephant in the room, is that each of these girls is a victim of violence and neglect that is unspeakable. Because of that reality each girl is in a home that is not her own, submitting to authorities that are not her parents, building memories with people who usually* have no blood relation to her. The ministry of Amparo and the AMAZING staff and volunteers of the ministry acknowledge this reality head on. They love these girls as their own, with discipline, expectations, and lavish grace.



The girls from Casa Amparo.

How did you learn about the ministry of Amparo?

Some of our first friends, who have become some of our dearest friends, are Aquiles and Elsa. Aquiles is the national director of Amparo. Over time we have observed how Aquiles and Elsa lead Amparo with excellence and passion. We have been impressed with their commitment and their thoughtful investment in the lives of many girls.

About a year after meeting Aquiles and Elsa, we met Aquiles' sister, Matilde and her husband Pastor Osmar. If you've been following along with the details of our newsletters you'll have put the pieces together: not long after meeting Osmar and Matilde back in 2023 we decided to join their church. (If you didn't put those pieces together no shame, there won't be a test). Matilde is the prevention program manager. Just like her brother, Matilde is an extremely skilled person, using her gifts and passion to serve the vulnerable. Because of Matilde's direct role in Amparo, our church has had multiple opportunities to learn about Amparo and invest in this ministry too.



Our friends: Rosita (Aquiles & Matilde's mom & the kids' adopted grandmother), Samuel, Elsa, Aquiles, Matilde, Emma, and Osmar.

Why did you get involved?

Before answering that, you may remember that we decided to join Osmar and Matilde's church (Iglesia Biblica Palabra de Dios) with the goal of helping this young church grow into maturity. We wanted to be a blessing to Osmar and Mati and help them as they lead the church. Our desire is for our church to be robust not only in its knowledge of God but also in its participation with God. We believe that the Church should be a blessing in its community. The unfortunate reality of our community in Santa Cruz is that child neglect and violence is everywhere. Participating in the work Amparo does was an easy outlet for serving our community. We decided to follow in the footsteps of our friends, being personally invested in the service to the vulnerable in order to then call others to do the same.

What do you do?

Our main involvement is in the girls home, Casa Amparo. I (Marina) teach English there three times a week. In the midst of homeschooling, toddler chasing, and church support, teaching the 10 girls** at Amparo has been a fun outlet for teaching English. It is not without its challenges! The girls have varying degrees of interest, academic acumen, and attention spans. Additionally, in order for this commitment to work for our family, I bring the kids

along 2 of the 3 times that I go to the home. This means I am parenting on display just as much as I am teaching English. Aquiles was the one to not only “allow” me to bring my kids along, but to actually encourage me to do so. “It will be good for them to see you interact with your children in a healthy, loving way,” he had told me. I didn’t realize the depth of this statement until one day, when trying to soothe a crying Marilyn while teaching the ever-present “verbo ‘to be’”. I had kissed Marilyn on the head only to look up at one girl staring at me with such awe, “Tia, do you love your daughter?” she asked. “What? Of course I love her!” I laughed... only to realize it wasn’t a joke or a rhetorical question. She was really curious... I was dumbfounded. I don’t remember how I moved forward in what had become a slightly awkward moment for me. But I will never forget that question. Maybe she was wondering for herself, “Was I loved like that as a baby? Could I be loved like that now?” I can’t say what she was thinking of course, but I can say that the question was telling. It became, for me, the moment when I realized that the times I go to Casa Amparo with my loud and demanding (albeit stinkin' cute) kids are just as important as the days I go by myself to teach undistracted. That question became the fuel for me to show each and every one of them (even the ones who don’t do their homework) the unconditional love that the Father has for them.



A read aloud with the girls. Once a week I try to do something aside from a structured class time. Being read to, playing games, and storytelling are some of their favorite things.

In God’s timing and sovereignty, the girls from Casa Amparo are now a part of our church body too. We get to see them on Sunday mornings, we get to hug them and worship with them, and we get to introduce them to other people in the church. My hope is that through my involvement in Casa Amparo, I can help facilitate other deep connections between the girls and other families in our

church. (I have already successfully recruited one volunteer to be what I am calling an “English learning buddy” and am on my way to recruiting another!)

How can I pray?

Thanks for asking, here are some Amparo-specific prayer requests for you this month.

- Pray for the “Tias” that rotate 24/7 care for the girls at the girl's home. Tia D, Tia R, Tia A, Tia J and Tia C are the ones that are there the most. Pray for them to be guided by the Holy Spirit in their parenting of these girls.
- Pray that more people from Iglesia Biblica Palabra de Dios would become committed, long-term volunteers with Amparo.
- Pray that each girl (both in the prevention program and in the girl's home) would make a personal decision to follow Jesus. Some would say they are Christians, others would be less explicit, others openly question God’s goodness. They have heard so much about God. Pray that the Gospel takes root in each of them, transforming and healing them.



Top left: Celebrating L's 18th birthday. She will officially graduate out of Casa Amparo next month. Top right: fun with Moses and Marilyn after class. Bottom Left: A Pizza making night at our house with the girls. Bottom Right: Marina and C during a group outing.

OTHER PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

For those of you who love to pray, here are a few more requests/updates:

- Praise God that our church has taken the step to name elders and deacons! Mike is one of ___ that has accepted the call to be an elder, officially supporting Pastor Osmar in the leadership of the church.
- Pray for Bolivia's presidential elections scheduled for August 17th. Pray for God's protection over the country and for truth and justice to prevail.

With Love,

The Shanks

Notes:

** There are some girls in the home that are related, siblings, cousins etc.*

*** The home can host 12 girls, but currently there are only 10*

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You may also make a check payable to South America Mission and write our account number "Account #10548" in the memo line and mail it to SAM's US office:

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Thank you for your prayer, encouragement, and partnership with us in the Gospel!

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How To Contact Us

To contact us, please email or message us on WhatsApp. We would love to talk to you personally about what God is doing in Bolivia and how you can get involved!

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Marina's WhatsApp +591 7780-0529 - Please note, Marina has a new number!



South America Mission

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