



Finding light in the darkness of 2020

Tomorrow is the start of advent and the journey to Christmas. We interviewed two members of the Paz y Esperanza teams in Ecuador and Colombia to ask for their thoughts on their work in 2020, share a message of hope this Advent and look forward to 2021. **Paulina Ortega** is the president of PyE Ecuador and **Giovanny Gomez** is project coordinator for PyE Colombia.



Both Paulina and Giovanny talked about the many challenges they have faced carrying out their work in the midst of a global pandemic. Paulina said: "*We have had to adapt our work as now we can't work face-to-face. It has been a challenge to reach vulnerable communities in the countryside but we have joined with other organisations to reach people.*" The team would normally work closely with families suffering abuse and help them denounce the abuse. But state and judicial institutions haven't been operating normally so they have had to find ways to tell people how to find help. They were aware of an increase in cases of abuse due to people being at home more and in pressured situations such as losing their jobs and getting ill.

Giovanny explained that people in poorer areas often did not have the necessary technology or internet access to connect virtually. His team managed to get some devices to communities they were helping so they could still connect with them during the lockdown.

Despite the challenges this year, there have been stories of hope and light. Giovanni said: *"This pandemic has led to much loss but has also brought us closer to the Lord"*. Communities have also been brought closer together. In the face of so many challenges, one church that PyE works with connected with community leaders for the first time in 30 years, to set up an initiative helping hungry children.

In Ecuador the team started a project offering psychological support by telephone. *"We helped a lot of people suffering anxiety and depression because of Covid. Some were ill and were scared of dying. One woman was having panic attacks and had separated from her husband. We helped her and she started to improve. A little while later she sent us a message to say thank you for helping her save her marriage and health"*. The team are also helping many Venezuelan migrants with the provision of food and hygiene kits.

Christmas this year will not be the same for many people globally. Normally families would come together to share food and fellowship and this won't be possible in the same way. Many people are facing the first Christmas without loved ones, lost in 2020. Paulina said: *"We are preparing virtual celebrations and church services and we are trying to find ways to connect with people and give them hope"*. In Colombia the team still hopes to provide some joy through providing food and presents, including to women and children at a project in Granizal, near Medellin.

Paulina shared this verse to encourage us all. She said it shows that we are not alone or abandoned and that God will help us and strengthen us. He will embrace us during times of pain and fill us with peace.

Numbers 6 v24-26: The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord makes his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

Giovanni said that this was a passage which had been given to the PyE Colombia team and inspires them to reach more churches and communities and to continue fighting with ideas and not arms.

Psalms 103 v1-6:

Praise the Lord, my soul, all my inmost being, praise his holy name.

Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits -

who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,

who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion,

who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

the Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.



We don't yet know what 2021 holds but Paulina and Giovanni continue to be hopeful and would welcome our prayers for their work as the new year begins. Paulina said: *"May God provide the finances and volunteers to serve the most vulnerable communities. God loves all of us the same and we need to share the little we have."* Giovanni's prayer is that PyE Colombia could continue reaching people's hearts and that the Lord would comfort those who are suffering and grieving.

May Jesus, the light of the world, bring light in the darkness to all of us this Advent.

The Coronavirus emergency is not going away, and work will need to be done for months to come. PyE groups around the region continue to need our support and our Covid-19 Appeal is one way of being involved.

Just click on this link to contribute:

<https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/pyecovid-19response>

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