

Shining a light during the pandemic in 2020

In this newsletter, we would like to highlight some of the great work carried out by PyE across Latin America in 2020 and into 2021 and how they have helped people during the global coronavirus pandemic. We will be looking at initiatives from Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador and hearing some testimonies from some of those who have been supported in their time of need.



Yo Te Escucho (I Am Listening) is an initiative, originally set up in Peru last year, to give free spiritual, emotional and practical advice by telephone or video platforms such as Zoom. It has been run by 170 trained volunteers in **Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia** (we reported on its progress in Colombia in September). By the end of December 2020, 8,170 people had benefitted from counselling. People have sought advice about all sorts of topics, including domestic violence and economic issues. The volunteers have also proactively phoned people they know are vulnerable to see if they can offer a listening ear and any help.

One volunteer based in Lima, **Peru**, said that she particularly remembered a call from a man called Carlos who was very upset: *"He had just received the news that his wife had died in hospital from Covid 19. He didn't know how to do the paperwork to access her body or understand the process to bury her. He was also very upset that she would not have the send-off she deserved. We listened to his pain and gave him practical advice about what to do and how he could honour his wife's memory. By the end of the call, Carlos was much calmer and said he was going to reach out to friends and family to support him."*

A volunteer in Salinas, **Ecuador** said: *"We have helped people who need a kind word and encouragement. We have been able to listen and let them know that there is someone they can trust in. Many people have been blessed by PyE."*

In **Colombia**, as well as the listening service, they have carried out an online campaign

promoting self-care and they have held 40 online gatherings involving 112 people from different Christian denominations nationwide to give them training on how to help their parishes and communities. One participant in the gatherings said it had been valuable to have dialogue with different parts of the body of Christ and feel strengthened by having a space to support each other. In addition, the PyE team provided food for 130 migrant and displaced families in partnership with other organisations and churches



The food and hygiene crisis

In **Ecuador**, one way the PyE team has responded to the pandemic has been by providing practical help in the form of food and hygiene essentials. In Guayaquil they have provided 2,500 kits to families with young children, pregnant women, elderly, disabled people and migrants. PyE was able to collaborate with other organisations and church and community networks to reach those most in need. They also helped Venezuelan families in Guayaquil and Quito who had lost loved ones because of the virus and did not have the money to pay for funeral costs.

A Haitian migrant in Quito said: *"Thank you to PyE for all your help. I couldn't go out to work because of the pandemic and I had nothing to eat, but now they have given me enough to last a week."* Another person helped said: *"We are elderly and disabled and alone in this pandemic. Thank you for helping us."*

Confronting the pandemic in Brazil

Brazil has been hit hard by the pandemic. The team there have been involved in various activities in the face of the pandemic. The first involved bringing together a group of journalists who verify information, principally in religious media. The aim is to combat fake news about the pandemic so people know how to protect themselves from the virus. Fake news has been a particular issue in Brazil as President Jair Bolsonaro has been accused of mishandling the crisis and failing to promote preventative measures such as wearing a mask or social distancing.

The second initiative is the development of a questionnaire concerning domestic violence within the evangelical church during the pandemic. Thirdly, the team have brought together a team of Christian lawyers who offer legal advice in human rights cases. This team closely followed the collapse of the healthcare system in Manaus in the Amazon region and a lack of oxygen in hospitals which led to thousands of deaths. The team denounced the failures of the federal, state and municipal governments and wrote a statement signed by 43 leaders of Christian organisations. This has contributed to an ongoing investigation into the Brazilian government's handling of the crisis.



We are sorry to inform you of the sad news that Jose Regalado Gutierrez passed away on 9th March due to Covid-19. Jose, a lawyer, played a central part in the life and work of Paz y Esperanza since the beginning, setting up the office in Moyobamba and leading the advocacy at national level. He was a tireless advocate for those on the margins of society, helping them understand and claim their rights. He will be dearly missed

Latin America is continuing to be hit hard by the pandemic in 2021. Thank you for your ongoing financial support for projects such as these, as well as your prayers for the ongoing crisis. Please pray for the PyE staff and volunteers and for all those who receive their much-needed help. Your one-off or ongoing donations are always welcome at <https://www.justgiving.com/pazyesperanza>

P.S. - We mentioned in our January Update that this year marks the 10th anniversary of PyE UK! We don't know how we are going to be able to celebrate it yet, but keep the date of 16th June clear so we can celebrate it together.