



Bringing reconciliation and restoration to Colombia

This month we would like to bring you an update from Paz y Esperanza Colombia. Director **Giovanny Gomez Molina** has shared some great stories with us about their work with the most vulnerable in society. He said: *"We continue to be God's instruments for reconciliation and the restoration of broken relationships as we focus on issues of justice, building a culture of peace and improving mental health."*

Helping young people

The PyE team work with young people in the very poor informal settlements in the outskirts of the city of Medellín and in the town of Turbo in Antioquia department. They are providing pastoral and psychological support to four groups. These young people are generally from families who have been displaced because of violence in the areas where they lived and are often poorly educated. Giovanni shared a number of testimonies with us from some of the young people involved in the groups, where they do all sorts of activities such as art and sport, and learn skills and tools to help them navigate the issues of adolescence and mental health problems caused by trauma and stress.

Daniela, aged 14, said: *"We girls have had someone to share our thoughts, feelings and dreams with. The people who have helped us have shown us that we are not alone and they have listened to us, understood us and not judged us."*

One of the groups in Turbo is focused on environmental issues in Urabá region and is called **'Creation lifesavers'**. The Christian young people in the group have done activities such as visits to ecological reserves to learn about the environment and wildlife and have campaigned in their area to raise awareness of the importance of protecting the mangroves in coastal areas. Johanis said: *"The programmes have transformed our minds and the outlook of many communities on the importance of looking after our environment, especially the forests and mangroves."*



1. Working with churches

More than 50 years of armed conflict, political exclusion and social inequality have left over six million people internally displaced within Colombia. In 2022, PyE started working with churches in the communities of Turbo, Apartado and Chigorodo in Urabá. This year they have created more links with churches in Carepa, Acandí and Necoclí. These are all areas that have been significantly affected by Colombia's armed conflict and many of the churches work with migrants. PyE now works with 32 churches giving them spiritual and professional tools to support them to be places that can bring communities affected by trauma together. The team have organised meetings for the pastors with Bible teaching, encouragement and practical ways that the churches can help migrants and refugees, such as reporting children who are travelling alone to the authorities and giving information to migrants on their rights. The pastors were able to share their experiences and learn from each other.

2. One of the workshops was in partnership with World Vision. Pastor Alex Mosquera from Acandí said that the workshop was a blessing to him and his church as he increased his knowledge and felt more empowered to help people.



Giovanny said: *"The goal of PyE is to reach and accompany many different communities directly through ourselves and through the extended arms of the churches."* Last year PyE worked in partnership with the United States Institute of Peace to provide mental health training in Medellín to local faith leaders supporting displaced people. PyE are now using these tools as they work in Urabá and the faith leaders are using them in their communities. Please watch this short video to find out more: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cfFNbluXuZ4>

Mujeres de la Memoria (Memory Women)

In Nueva Jersualen in Medellín, an informal settlement where 27,000 people live in cramped conditions without access to healthcare, water or the internet, PyE works with a group of 12 women who have been displaced, are migrants or have been victims of domestic violence. They also have a similar group in Vereda Granizal.

The women have been creating fantastic art to help them come to terms with their past experiences of trauma or bereavement and reflect on issues of truth and reconciliation that are so important in Colombian society for the process of healing from so many years of violence. A local museum has recently asked to display some of the women's work as part of an exhibition reflecting on issues of displacement and living in informal settlements.



We will share detailed prayer requests from the team in Colombia next month, but please pray for Giovanny and his team as they continue these projects. Please also pray for Colombia as conversations continue between the government and illegal armed groups in a quest for peace after decades of violence.

Thank you so much for your prayer and financial support. Please consider making a regular or one-off donation at: <https://www.justgiving.com/pazyesperanza>