

**We give and take and they give and take;
Work team ministers in remote Nicaraguan town--renovating a radio
station, changing lives**

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Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua—It was hot! It was humid! The mosquitoes swarmed every night!

But, in the midst of discomfort, a group of volunteers from Kansas and Pennsylvania worked to improve the ministry of an evangelical radio station in this remote Nicaraguan community.



“I’ve never been on a mission trip before, but this is right up my alley,” said Chris Miller of Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania and a technician at radio station WGRC in nearby Lewistown. “I’m here using the skills that God gave me,” he explained as he tore apart and rebuilt a control board for Radio Veca, a Christian broadcaster serving a large Miskito population along the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua.

Radio Veca (la Voz Evangelica de la Costa Atlantica—The Evangelical Voice of the Atlantic Coast) is a 1,000 watt FM station that serves the 100,000 residents of Puerto Cabezas and the surrounding rural area.

The station signed on the air nearly eight years ago and ranks as the number one station among the community’s eight broadcast outlets.

Local pastors and Christian leaders say that the isolated town faces numerous problems including drug abuse and drug trafficking, prostitution, crime, unemployment and a lack of sufficient education. Public schools provide classes only through the 6th grade, so many students supplement their education at church-run high schools.

Mostly, the community faces serious spiritual problems according to Pastor Salvador Sarmiento who founded and operates the station. “We provide programming to address these needs and to teach biblical truths,” he said.

The station’s isolation from the rest of the country (it takes 24 hours to travel to Managua, the capital, on a bus over a muddy dirt road plagued by bandits) makes it difficult for the station to obtain equipment, programming or technical assistance.

To help overcome the deficit, Radio Veca has teamed with Ecuadorian Christian broadcaster HCJB to receive advice and assistance.

In partnership with HCJB, the work group was put together by Great Plains Christian Radio in Meade, Kansas.

“We came here to give technical expertise and funding,” explained Bill Lurwick who is the Production Director and announcer at KJIL and KHYM, two stations in Meade operated by the Great Plains group. The organization also operates several dozen repeater stations throughout Kansas and is heard in portions of surrounding states.



“We have helped them install a new antenna, new wiring and a new antenna ground system,” Lurwick said. “When we got here their transmitter was running at only 87 watts. Now it’s operating at 980 watts with an effective radiated power of 5,800 watts.”

Sarmiento said that the increased power will allow the station to more effectively reach farmers in the rural areas surrounding Puerto Cabezas. “Their greatest need is spiritual and we are trying to help them understand what the Bible says about their lives,” he said.

The volunteers are excited that their efforts are paying off. “I felt that the Lord was calling me to come and help with the radio station,” said Ileana Reimer of Meade, Kansas. “Now I know it can reach so many people with the Gospel. That makes the whole trip worth-while.”

HCJB works with Christian radio stations in Latin America to assist them through the providing of training, equipment, technical advice and programming. In addition, the mission matches local groups from North America with projects in Latin America to provide support and encouragement.

“We have three levels of assistance that we provide,” explained Dan Koenig of Atlanta, Georgia, HCJB’s Director of Guest Ministries. Koenig accompanied the Kansas group to Nicaragua to help with the Radio Veca project.

“There are some projects where we simply provide programming from our ALAS network and some limited training and technical evaluation. Then, there are other projects where we may provide the satellite downlink and partner to help raise funds. Finally, there are projects, such as this one, where we may provide

equipment, send engineers and trainers, and link with work groups to complete a project.”

In addition to providing, upgrading or repairing equipment, the Great Plains group also assisted the radio station by painting the building, starting construction on a recording studio and counseling room, and initiating construction of an entrance gate to the property.

“It has been a great experience,” Lurwick said. “I toured HCJB a year ago in Quito and was very impressed. We were looking for a ministry project and they gave me several options.”

Many of the participants expressed their appreciation for and love of the partners in Puerto Cabezas. “We give and take and they give and take,” Lurwick reflected.

“The people have been so gracious,” said Randy Morris of Johnson, Kansas. “The pastor’s family moved out of their house so we could sleep here.”

Jodi Swihart of Quinter, Kansas agreed. “I wanted to share my faith,” she said. “Jesus is my best friend and I wanted to tell others about Him.”

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