

Five weeks in heaven!!!!



Colette Burke who leads our spirituality project “Life to the Full” has recently returned from helping the Missionaries of Charity Brothers in Lima, Peru. Colette says “the Brothers’ lives are shining examples of the call by Pope Francis to be the Church of the Poor”.

Hola amigos!

I hope you and your families are well – you have been in our prayers during my five weeks with the Missionaries of Charity Brothers in Lima, Peru. I returned mid February from my 11th trip as a volunteer in their Home. As some of you know, the Brothers care for 27 severely disabled boys in Hogar de la Paz (Home of Peace) in Callao, Lima.

As always, life is full on in the Home. There are 4 Brothers working there at the moment, these Brothers originate from Guatemala, Honduras, India and Haiti. They rise around 4.30am to shower and dress the boys, then there is Mass in the Home at 7.00am, followed by a quick breakfast (coffee and delicious fresh bread rolls and ‘quaker’ or a sort of porridge). After that, it’s the boys’ breakfast and the day starts in earnest. All the boys have been abandoned by their families and have lived with the Brothers for most of their lives. They are aged between early 20’s to mid 40’s and all suffer from varying degrees of mental and physical disabilities.



Brothers Sebastian, Nati, Juan and Kinzi

If I am honest, I was never attracted to working with the disabled, indeed, quite the opposite. As a teenager, it would cross my mind from time to time, how would I ever cope if I had a disabled child.... strange how God works... without any shadow of a doubt, my days with these very special boys have been some of the happiest of my life.



A few of our ‘hidden gems’

From Law to Lima.

It amazes me how I was led to find these ‘hidden gems’ of boys. I had been a family solicitor since 1987, then in 2005, after many prayers seeking an opportunity to find a life full of ‘living’ and not of routine, traffic jams and paperwork, I was able to negotiate a 6 month sabbatical. I was astonished at the prospect that God

actually had heard my, seemingly ‘impossible’ prayers!! I went on my first silent retreat at the beginning of this time, as a way of ensuring that I made the most of my precious 6 months. What did I discover in the silence...? God seemed to be saying, I have come to give you a new life, and to my astonishment, that is exactly what unfolded!!!

At the end of the sabbatical, I had decided to take early retirement from my law practice and went on further retreats (not to mention holidays!!) including, and most importantly, the full Ignatian 30 day retreat with the Jesuits in St. Buenos (North Wales).

Not known for my silence, some friends wondered how I would cope. However, in the silence, I encountered God in a much deeper and profound way than ever before, and that encounter quite simply changed the direction of my life.

I had never experienced silent, meditative prayer before and oh how crucial it was to discover what was really happening in me, what I really longed for in life and what God was seemingly offering to me.

In the meditations, God became a real person to me. During the long retreat I was handed the address of the Missionaries of Charity Brothers in Manchester. From there, after a series of events, I was given the opportunity to help in their Lima Home. My first visit was in 2009 and I have recently returned from trip number 11 (to date!).

I have discovered in my work with Brothers in Manchester and Lima, so much about the real meaning of life, of true Christian values and yes... Life to the Full!! Lima is the dirtiest and poorest of places, with, on occasions, an element of danger in the local streets, and yet I am drawn like a magnet to it.



Homes built into the dust hills surrounding Lima

The gift of Ricardito!

As with all of my trips to the Home, my time is focused caring for one very special boy, Ricardito!!! Ricardito is said to be severely disabled, however, it grieves me to describe him in this way, as in reality he is one of, if not *the* most 'alive', person I know. Ricardito is doubly incontinent and does not speak, but he is the most beautiful person I have ever

encountered. He has a spark of light in his dark brown eyes that is rarely found in any of us 'normal' and 'fortunate' people. He is full of mischief and lives to be loved. He is forever thirsty for hugs and kisses and oh, how it delights me to pass my time, giving him just what he craves!! We spend hours together, playing, helping him to eat, dress and shower. These are the most simple of tasks and yet I have never felt more needed, loved and filled with a deep and fundamental purpose in my life, which blocks out all my 'trivial' and life draining issues that can so easily clutter up the my 'other life' in England. Strange as it may sound, but Ricardito is such wonderful company!!



The Streets around the Home



Ricardito

God of our deepest desires.

It crossed my mind before I went on this last trip, how in my dreams I would be so thrilled to be able to take Ricardito on a little holiday - never did I think that this would be possible. Amazing how God sows the seeds of an idea!! Ricardito is hyperactive and whilst he is around 23 years old, he has a mental age of around 2.

However, the Ricardito I encountered this time was like never before. Br Juan who is in charge of the Home is totally and selflessly dedicated to providing for the best possible care for the boys. Br Juan has assigned to some of the boys including Ricardito, a new psychiatrist, Dr Bravo and his medical treatment is probably the best he has ever had. He was a bundle of giggles, tickles, laughter and love!! Like many of the boys, Ricardito lives for his trips out of the Home. This time, somehow God made it possible for us to take him with some of the other boys, on outings like never before and oh what fun we had!!



Br. Kinzi and the boys on a trip to the beach

We went on boat trips round the harbour - Ricardito was the happiest passenger they had ever had aboard!! By the end of the trip - everyone knew him, from his shrieks of delight and stamping feet!!!! Then there were trips with the boys to the beach and into the sea!! Oh my, the laughter and looks of wonder as the boys sat, unrestrained at the edge of the sea.... grasping handfuls of pebbles and sprinkling them around, to yelps of delight. I said to wonderful Brother Natividad (from Honduras)... *"This feels like a holiday"* and then I remembered.... how much God answers our deepest desires!!!!!!



Cruising with Ricardito!

The psychiatrist, Dr. Bravo, with the help of Mariela (our totally devoted and caring nurse in the Home), have together had a major impact on the health and wellbeing of these most needy boys. However, funding is of course required for this specialist care and the Brothers, who rely on divine providence, place their trust entirely in God for the provision of all that is needed for their boys. They hope to be in a position to invite Dr. Bravo to attend regularly in the Home.

Some of the boys come into the chapel in the Brothers' house, for Mass every morning and for evening prayers. These are the 9 or so more capable boys... but in truth, there are several of these boys I have never really made time for. This trip however was different. Somehow this time, some of these other boys also became 'special' for me.



Mariela our Nurse, with the boys



With Juan Carlos

Smiling sessions in the chapel!

One *such* boy, Juan Carlos, is very much a loner. He does not speak and needs a great deal of encouragement to participate. He was brought to the Home with a deep scar all round his neck, presumably from someone having tried to garrotte him when he was young. I watched him in the chapel one evening and began to think what I would feel like if I had been so rejected that someone had tried to kill me in my youth. I caught his eye and smiled at him. Like a child, he

began to peep at me from behind another boy. The more I smiled, the more he looked for me... I spent the last 20 minutes of prayers smiling and playing eye

games with him and indeed other boys also began to join in. After this, so often my time in prayers consisted of 'smiling sessions'!

All this is of course nothing in itself but somehow I was given the patience and a sense of joy in doing this seemingly insignificant thing, and yet I was amazed how much it delighted me to get a smile back from these boys! I hasten to add that the Brothers spend their lives caring for the boys' every need, but this new experience taught me, what a difference it can make if I can only make a few of them feel a little special and noticed... and all through a smile. This trip I had a growing sense of gratitude for the gift of feeling so well and full of life and for my all important energy levels that enabled me to look for new little missions each day. And what a difference that made to my time there!!

Painting classes in the juvenile prison.

In addition to the day to day delights of spending my happy days with Ricardito and the boys, I was also able to attend once again, the Maranguita Juvenile Prison close to our Home, as part of the Pastoral team with Brother Nati. In addition to attending Mass in the prison chapel, I was also given the wonderful opportunity with Brother Nati, to give two art classes in the prison patios to groups of sometimes very boisterous teenage boys!! After this, Brother Nati and I gave a class in Mime Make Up to a new group of prison boys who are budding mime artists. How rewarding this work is! The boys are talented and so enthusiastic to learn and to hear news about 'Inglaterra' and of course - Manchester United!!

Painting in the Home – with a little help from a friend!

Always there is a painting project in the Home and this time I repainted the patio where the boys spend much of their time. One boy, Raimundo who has a withered leg, decided to make the most of being left for around 5 minutes on his own in the patio. In the heat and humidity of the day (30 degrees most days), I had virtually finished painting one of the walls, when I returned to discover that Raimundo had speedily got himself across the patio, discovered a roller full of blue paint and proceeded to paint over much of the wall!!! If nothing else, I discovered, Raimundo loves to paint!



Painting the Patio in the Home



Juan Carlos and Andres give a helping hand...



Beto – my trusty assistant!



The New Home

Since my first visit in 2009, the Home has been transformed. So many things have changed - vastly for the better in the lives of all the boys, as a result of a total reorganisation in the running of the Home and the living conditions of the boys. With the support of the Brothers, this transformation has spearheaded by the work, ideas and tireless efforts of Brother Ruben Sanchez, who worked in the Home from 2009 - 2014 and I thank God for all he has brought to the lives of these deeply deserving and vulnerable boys.

The Brothers have finally been able to build a new Home for the boys within the boundary of the old Home. It has been so long awaited and so desperately needed. The boys had not moved in when I left but it is a beautiful place - thanks to a very thoughtful and well planned design. It has a totally different ambience, wide corridors, light modern bedrooms and oh so very modern showers and toilets. Ricardito lights up when I walk him round. This is a huge landmark in the lives of our boys – a beautiful home which they so very much deserve. When I next return, I will see how life has changed for them in their beautiful 'Hogar'.

We live to love...

I have called this newsletter '*Five Weeks in Heaven*' as more than ever, I spent my time in very simple ways with the boys and oh what delight that brought me. These boys do not have any notion of what I own materially, where I live, my profession, they do not judge me by worldly standards, and they are not weighed down by the 'worries' of our world... how to pay the mortgage, problems at work, all the challenges of daily life. All they want outside their basic care is to be loved and to be shown affection and attention and the more I was able to give them, the more alive I felt. As always, I receive SO much more than I give in this Home, and it seems to me clearer than ever before, that we fundamentally live to love and to be loved... little else matters. The challenge now is to apply this in the complex demands of my 'other life'... God bless the boys, the Brothers and all who support the work in the Home. Gracias a Dios for this glimpse of heaven!!

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