

We hope the following highlights will help you find and read what interests you!

**Main Topics**

**Main Points**

**Praises/Requests**

**Dear Friend, Encourager, Partner-in-Mission,**

**Dec 18 - Nazarene Church Christmas Program**

**Finally, after our 3rd Christmas here, we were able to get most of Carmen's family together with us for a photo at our church.**

Left to right, back row - - - >

Carmen (head of the family), Verito (Carmen's oldest daughter), Sondra, Alyson (Verito's oldest daughter), Jennifer (Carmen's youngest daughter).

Left to right front row - - >

Nicolas (Verito's oldest son), Beli (Verito's youngest daughter), Darrell, and Isais (Verito's youngest son). Stefanie, (Carmen's middle daughter) was studying and working.

**We are so grateful to God that we have such a family to love, and to love us!**

(Carmen volunteers at our church as an usher and accountant. Verito teaches Children's Sunday School. They were both were wearing pink sashes because it was Missions Sunday.)



We enjoyed the children's Christmas program and mingled with everyone after church discussing what each other's plans were for the holidays and exchanging holiday greetings.



**the children of the Nazarene Church were given Operation Christmas Child shoe box gifts!**

Isaias, - - >  
Nicolas, and Beli,  
were all blessed  
with the shoe box  
gifts they received  
from Operation  
Christmas Child.

**This year, due to Ecuador's economic crisis and so many families losing their jobs,**



## **Dec 19 - Dunamis Christmas and Year End Parties**

**Early in December, Extreme Response (ER) threw a Christmas party for the girls of Dunamis (girls rescued from human-trafficking).** The staff and volunteers shared craft activities with the girls, took their photos, and brought them shoe box gifts from Operation Christmas Child (OCC). As a special surprise, the program director had prepared a contemporary Christmas worship song for the girls to sing for the volunteers. We have a video of the event but can not share this video with you until the girls complete and leave the program; be watching in future newsletters for this video. **The event was held outdoors on Dunamis' beautiful new piece of property where the future home is being built for the girls.**

**Then on December 19, the staff and volunteers of Dunamis held a Christmas/New Years party for the girls,** where we watched a movie, shared special crafts activities, a time of worship and prayer, and a catered lunch. Crystal, a social worker and missionary of Dunamis brought teddy bears for each of the girls and I, Sondra, brought colorful hand-made scarves and personalized cards with words of encouragement for each of them. **The girls faces were covered with smiles and tears upon receiving their gifts and reading their cards. Please pray for each one of these precious girls!**

## **Dec 21 - Christmas Meal at our House**

**This year, we decided to invite 14 guests (newer missionaries, a firefighter, and a single woman from our church) to our home for a meal during the Christmas season.** Darrell had made homemade lasagna, salad, garlic bread, and sparkling juice and our guests brought home-made apple pie and chocolate cake. Unfortunately, because of the stomach flu going around in Quito, only two guests were able to attend. Needless to say we all ate too much but then what we didn't eat of the lasagna we froze until the following week when we re-invited the missing guests. **We enjoyed getting to know our two guest missionaries who joined us that evening and look forward to getting to know them better.**

## **Dec 22 - Firefighter's Daughter's Class Christmas Party**

**Nico, Darrell's firefighter friend, and his wife and daughter, stopped by our house one evening asking for Darrell and whether or not he still had his beard.** Darrell had gone to run errands so I invited them in for tea and a little something to eat (a traditional gesture of hospitality in this culture) until Darrell returned. I knew that because Nico was asking about Darrell's beard it most likely meant that he wanted Darrell to be "Papa Noel" for some event. When Darrell returned home, Nico explained that he had been working as a replacement at a fire department in the jungle area for the past six weeks and he just returned today to finally be back with his family. **Because of his long absence, he wanted to do something special for his daughter by providing "Papa Noel" for her class Christmas party at school.** Well, with his little girl and his wife (the president of the class who organizes events) sitting right there we could hardly say "no!" So, a few days later, the morning of Dec 22, Darrell had the privilege of making Nico's daughter's classmates, their parents, and teachers very happy.



Darrell Passing Out Gifts



Darrell with Nico's Daughter



Papa Noel, Kids, Parents, Teachers



## **Dec 22 - QFRC After School Program Christmas Party**



**This year we had so much fun making up Christmas bags for the 36 Zambiza children who attend the after-school program at ER's Quito Family Resource Center.**

Because we knew that the children had already received bags of chocolates from an earlier Christmas party put on by the local Nestle Company employees in Quito, we decided to fill their bags with yummy but nutritious items such as flavored yuca chips, banana chips, walnuts, almonds, raisins, roasted corn nuts, roasted haba beans, oranges, bananas, and vitamin C. We also added a balloon, a heart with a Scripture message, and a friendship bracelet.

**Then, on the afternoon of Dec 22, Darrell and I took a taxi, transporting a sack full of goodies, to visit the children.**

**We spent the afternoon having photos taken of each child sitting on Papa Noel's lap while each one received his/her treat bag.**

What was especially memorable when children opened their bags was hearing one young boy exclaim, "Wow, vitamin C!" and to see little Tyra, hugging and kissing her bag of goodies all afternoon! We also helped the children make foam Christmas ornaments which they would take home to display on the walls of their home. (There were no Christmas trees in the homes of these families who work in the local dump).



And, of course, we could not forget teachers Robbie, Aldolfo, and Ericka so we brought them a goodie bag as well!

< - - Robbie, Program Coordinator, got into the fun by sitting on Papa Noel's lap for a photo.

**We are grateful to you, our partners, and to God for the awesome opportunity to help bring a little cheer and hope into the lives of these children. THANK YOU!**



## Dec 23 - Surprise Daycare Visit and the Quinche School Christmas Party

Our long-time friend, Edhisson, a firefighter, called us in December wanting us to meet with him and his wife, Mary. We met them at HCJB and then spent time together for lunch. Mary, is the director of the school in Quinche, a poor community northeast of Quito. Mary and Edhisson asked if Darrell would be Papa Noel for their school Christmas party on December 23 and of course, we said "yes". The day began at 7:00 a.m. riding for one hour in Mary's car to Quinche. When we arrived, Mary parked her car in the school staff parking lot (a dirt lot three blocks from the school, with roosters and chickens .) As we walked to the school, several adults and children on the street noticed Papa Noel sharing hugs and asking if they could take photos with their cellphones. **One very excited group of women took their photos with him and then asked if he could please come inside their building to see the kids - it was a daycare!** Mary said we had plenty of time before the school Christmas program would begin and thought it was a wonderful idea. Most of the 40 toddlers just shyly stared at him in wonder and a couple of the babies began to cry - after all, how often would they see a large white-faced bearded man in a red suit? Most Ecuadorian men are small, dark, usually do not have beards nor mustaches, and very few older men have white hair. All in all, the teachers seemed more excited than the kids! One woman kept saying, "Oh, I am so emotional!" and had tears in her eyes the whole time. **We thank the Lord for every small opportunity to spread a little cheer!**



Those of you who know Darrell know how much he enjoys children. So being Papa Noel is as much fun for him as it is for the kids. But today was a special day because of the number of children reached - 1,850 students! The 3-story 5-wing school in Quinche is the only one in the area and the majority of these student's families live far below Ecuador's standard poverty level.



Mary sneaked us into the large schoolyard and then into the school cafeteria as quietly as possible so that Papa Noel's appearance would later be a surprise to all. But the feat was nearly impossible and the secret was out! First one, then two, then several little ones made their way closer to catch a sneak peek through the doors and windows!





**And soon, we were surrounded by a small crowd of little ones bombarding us with questions - "Are you really Papa Noel? Are you Mama Noel? Where do you live? Did you travel here by bus? By train? Or by plane? Are you going to bring presents? Our hearts simply melted. So, Darrell replied, "Yes, I'm real!, Yes, this is Mama Noel, We live in the North Pole, we came here in my sleigh, and you have to wait until Dec 25th to receive your presents". With their eyes as big as saucers they were now thrilled that they actually talked with Papa and Mama Noel and ran to tell their friends. With huge smiles on their faces, the cooks then closed and locked the doors to avoid a small stampede until the Christmas program would begin.**



*Papa Noel On His Throne  
And Surrounded By His Elves*



*Crowds of Children Everywhere  
Even On The Patios of Each Floor Of The Buildings*



*Snowman Made From  
White Plastic Disposable Drinking Cups*



*'Jingle-Bell Rock' Dancers  
With Costumes Made From Green Trash Bags*





*As children patiently waited in line to see Santa Sondra gave each one a high-five or a hug.*

< - - -

*Dozens of teachers brought their classes one by one to see Santa and receive an ice-cream bar.*

- - - >



*Many children were more excited to share hugs than receive ice cream.*



**WE THANK THE LORD FOR AN INCREDIBLE DAY!**

**Dec 24 - A Surprise Reunion and An Unexpected Visit**

**Knowing that we had 19 of the 31 days of December filled with activities we were intentional to spend Christmas Eve home together - and alone. Our plans were to enjoy the Christmas lights, listen to Christmas music, eat a simple meal of home-made pizza and watch a Christmas movie in the evening. I plugged in the lights only to discover that our star in the window wasn't working. Darrell diagnosed the problem as a short in the wire so I walked several blocks to 'Christmas Alley' where several Ecuadorians set up tents filled with Christmas items to sell. Yes, it was Christmas Eve but the vendors would be there until near midnight hoping to make enough money to still buy presents for their families on Christmas Day. After searching every tent, I was disappointed to discover that they no longer had 'my star' so instead I purchased a large snowflake with lights; it would have to do.**

**Then, as I walked away, one of the female vendors behind me shouted, “Senora! Senora! I thought maybe I had dropped some change from my pocket. But when I turned and looked, it was Gladys - the woman vendor to whom I gave a Bible two years ago!** We exchanged hugs, kisses and warm greetings of Christmas and the New Year. She told me she still reads the Bible I gave her and thinks of me each time she reads it. We then exchanged email addresses and promised to be in touch this year. Gladys lives in far southern Quito and we live in the far north. **But with God's help, we hope to have her and her family for a meal in our home sometime soon.**

**Heading home with snowflake in hand I couldn't wait to settle in and relax. But we soon received a phone call from another of Darrell's firefighter friends, Pablo.** The conversation went like this, “Hello. Darrell. Where are you? At home? Good. I and my family are coming to visit tonight. What time? At 7:00 p.m.(which normally means 7:30 at the earliest in the Latino culture). Okay. Good. I will see you.” **Our hearts sank for now we would not be spending the evening alone.** In this culture, it is rude to say “Sorry, we have other plans” because people come first. And if for some reason you already have guests, you invite more. **And so, we live in Ecuador, where people stop by with little notice and never ask if it is okay to visit, and visiting people and taking visitors into your home is always quite spontaneous.**

So we quickly made and ate our pizza and postponed our movie hoping they would only stay about an hour. Seven-thirty came and went, then eight. We were beginning to wonder if this night would be 'a wash'. Finally at 8:15 we received another phone call from Pablo. He was outside of our apartment wanting us to open the door (our doorbell doesn't work.) He explained that due to a vehicle accident on the highway he and his family were stuck in traffic for over an hour. **Exhausted from the entire day's events, his wife and children wanted to go home. Then he said, “But I told my wife that I told my good friend, Darrell, that I was coming to visit so I am going to keep my promise and am still going to visit him, and here I am.”** He then gave us each a big hug. We made him some hot tea and shared some snacks and spent the next two hours visiting. We never started our movie until 10:00 p.m. **But it turned out that we didn't mind because Pablo said he would visit his 'good friend' - and so he did! After we said our good-byes for the evening, we realized what a gift Pablo's visit was. Here, without family, in Ecuador, we have friends who keep promises - we are blessed.**

### **Dec 25 - Christmas Party at Sarita's (Carmen's Sister)**

**Christmas Day, Carmen, Darrell, and I traveled by bus to her sister, Sarita's home in Carapungo, northwest of Carcelen. We spent the entire day with friends and relatives of our adopted family.** More than 35 people squashed into their tiny house and patio - talking, eating, talking and eating some more, and then playing several hands of the card game 'Uno'. Last year, we had taught Carmen's family how to play and later bought the Spanish version for Nico, Carmen's grandson. Now, it seems, the entire clan knows how to play and it is now the highlight of their Christmas!

### **Dec 28 - Christmas/New Years Meal at Our House**

**One last Christmas celebration was another gathering in our home for the guests who had not been able to attend our Christmas meal the week before.** This time five of the eight formally absent guests were able to attend. We shared re-heated lasagna (frozen from the week before), fresh garlic bread, salad, cookies, sparkling juice, and a little wine that was brought as a gift. **It's such a blessing to have our home filled with good food, good people, and laughter!**

### **Dec 31 - Celebrating New Years in Ecuador**

**It was not a surprise that Darrell made the decision to spend New Year's Eve at home.** We were both tired and I, Sondra had not been feeling well off and on since Christmas Day. The flu has been going around in Quito and the night air was quite cool. With me curled up under a blanket, we chatted away about how much fun we had this month and how the Lord has blessed so many lives this year.



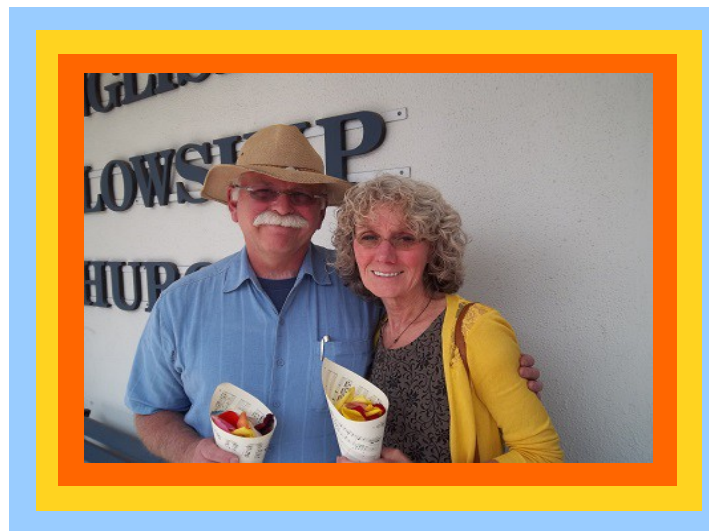
**Since about noon, the streets had been filled with people** in costumes, 'viudas' (men dressed up as widows, each searching for their 'old man', which represents the old year leaving), very loud music, and street vendors. Fireworks are set off all day long, but from 11:00 p.m. until just before 1:00 a.m., everyone in the city brings out the last of their stash to set ablaze, along with glowing Chinese lanterns floating throughout the city skyline! We watched the display from our rooftop terrace and then joined the neighbors on the street as they set afire their 'viejos' (life-size political and cartoon figures made of wood, paper-mache and filled with sawdust.) Before they burn the figures, they hit and kick them as a way to express their dislike for the bad things of the old year. And then once afire, they share New Year greetings and then jump over the blaze 12 times to represent each month of success, prosperity, and good health they wish for. In addition, one couple came running down our street with empty suitcases in hand, circling around the block, wishing for safe travels in the New Year! **They say that some of the most interesting ways to celebrate the New Year exist in Latin America - here, in Quito, Ecuador, we definitely agree!**

**MAY YOUR NEW YEAR BE FILLED WITH MUCH HAPPINESS  
AND GOD'S ABUNDANT BLESSINGS!**

**Darrell and Sondra Holden**

**Ripe For Harvest Missionaries - Partnering with Reach Beyond - Ecuador, S.A.**

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