

A talk with Juan Carlos Mattos

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On Tuesday May 23, 2000 I had the opportunity to speak with Juan Carlos Mattos the Executive Director for Obra Kolping Bolivia (OKB). We had a chance to talk about a number of questions that ran across my mind. Regarding Kolping efforts in Bolivia.



On Kolping beginnings in Bolivia and how it has grown since then :

Kolping was founded in 1983 with the aim of developing individuals that could improve community and society. Operational offices in La Paz and Santa Cruz were opened simultaneously. Since then, offices have been opened in Tarija, Sucre, Cochabamba, Oruro and Potosi. This covers most of Bolivia. To expand coverage to all areas in Bolivia OKB is planning to open offices in the Pando and Beni departments in the North.

On the activities of the current offices:

All the Kolping offices are involved in working with Kolping families. The offices in Cochabamba, Sucre, Potosi and Oruro are currently dedicated exclusively to Kolping families.

Most of OKB's activities are directed toward health care and education which are two services needed by the low-income sector of the Bolivian population. In La Paz, OKB has three educational centers and two medical centers serving the city of El Alto.

The Santa Cruz office serves the city with two educational centers and two vocational schools one in carpentry and the other in metal works. There are also two medical centers one which serves over 200,000 patients a year. In the rural areas surrounding Santa Cruz OKB has a medical center in the town of Camiri which is about 200 km from the city.



Students from the educational center in Ciudad Satellite enjoy their physical education class.



Francisco Agramon talks to a Kolping family on how to free themselves from external circumstances

The city of Tarija in Southern Bolivia has a Kindergarten facility that opened xxx years ago.

On what indicators OKB uses to measure its success:

First, OKB looks at the local church's acceptance and collaboration. Then, we look for the recognition by the authorities in the area. Once we have total liberty, we measure our success by the growth in number of Kolping families and number of members. We also measure our success in the number of new initiatives that our members propose because this is a measure of their level of self esteem, intellectual and spiritual growth. We like to see our members feel like they can do projects using their own abilities.

On what people appreciate about Kolping:

What most of our members look for is a space where they can enjoy the company of friends that share similar interests. They appreciate the recreational part of the experience because they want to clear their mind of everyday problems. We create an environment in the Kolping family where they feel appreciated and protected. Many of the ladies that become members of a Kolping family start without education or trade. We provide them with training that is customized to their needs. If they want to learn about bakery we provide a bakery course. If

they want to learn how to weave, we provide a weaving course. We adapt the training courses to their desires and they appreciate this enormously. They end up learning a trade that they can then use to contribute to the household income if they need to. Through this experience, they feel more valuable and earn self-esteem.

For the youth groups, we provide them with training courses that bring out their potential. We bring in speakers that train them in leadership skills, global and political concerns, and teamwork. In many cases, young men and women that were extremely shy and reserved turn out to be active members and even leaders of their communities.



Youth groups meet to discuss upcoming plans for the national reunion

On OKB's future:

The goal of our centers is to be sustainable and even provide funds for additional projects with the Kolping families. In the future the finances of the centers will be better and this will bring stability to the programs we now have with our members. We will also have more experienced staff making our programs more professional and successful. We will continue providing training to our members possibly in more in depth and complex topics. We will continue to promote friendship and harmony among the people of these communities.



The children practice a dance for a Mother's day presentation

We expect to continue growing at the current rate, possibly opening offices in the Beni and Pando departments. These are the only areas in Bolivia we are currently not covering. The difficulty in serving those areas is the remoteness: The only reliable transportation is by aircraft.

We've had a grassroots-type growth where one of our members moves to a new city and start a new office. People who were once members of a Kolping family are now in

important positions in OKB: Franz Agramon is the national coordinator; Alex Cossio is the Administrative Manager of our educational centers in El Alto; Ramiro Mancilla is the coordinator in Cochabamba; Rolando Taboada is the coordinator for Sucre and Rudolf Bilbao is running OKB's centers in Tarija.



A group of third grade students work in their Biology assignment in class



Music class in the educational center at Villa Dolores

On how others can help OKB:

We currently receive funding from Obra Kolping International and Obra Kolping Switzerland who has taken Bolivia as its partner. They have helped us immensely with the construction of the educational and health centers. We expect to fund our programs in the future from the income generated by our productive centers (educational and health) but if anyone would be interested in helping we would appreciate the funding of specific initiatives that many of our Kolping families come up with. We have many on file that we haven't been able to fund yet. We are thinking of putting details of these on our website.