

# LOS HERMANOS

Villanueva Brigadistas Newsletter — Volume 13.1

Fall 2022



## Their own rides—finally!

As part of an ongoing program to provide Brigadistas with their own transportation, in May 2022, five more volunteers received bicycles,



thanks to the generosity of All Saints and St. Lucy's parishioners. In addition to the bicycles, these long-time volunteers were given bike locks, tire pumps and replacement inner tubes. In each case, the Brigadistas were chosen because of their dedication to the program and because of the lack of access to transportation in their communities.

From the left, the first Brigadista is Francisca Chavez from the community of La Concepción. She has been a volunteer since the 1980s. In her rural community, there is only one bus in the morning and one in the afternoon. She supports the Ministry of Health by teaching strategies to pregnant women.

The next recipient is Izabel Rocha from the community of Genizaros. Prior to getting her bicycle, she had to travel on foot to the Base House in her community where basic healthcare is provided to

Brigadistas with their own transportation

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her people including preventative care. She works as a healthcare liaison in her remote community connecting those in need with services provided by the Ministry of Health.

The third Brigadista is Ramiro Morales, from the community of Obraje who has also been a volunteer since the 1980s. Some of Ramiro's responsibilities in his community include visiting pregnant women and making sure parents are aware of the recommended immunization schedule for their children.

The next recipient is Dulce Maria from the Guasimito community. She is a young Brigadista who works with the Ministry of Health supporting prevention strategies and promoting community health.

The final bicycle was given to the community of Achiote where four Brigadistas will share the bicycle in order to carry out health promotion activities in their community.

### Villanueva.... Our past and ongoing Impact

The history of our relationship with this village started in the 1990's with Frank Woolever, a parishioner at St Andrew's. Frank knew two Maryknoll nuns who had started to work with locals to provide needed health care. This care included combating infant mortality but also addressing malaria and other health issues.

Over the years, Frank and St Andrew's, and now St Lucy's and All Saints parishes were and are in regular contact with Candida and Maria Antonia, leaders of the Brigadista community in Villanueva. It was after the 1999 hurricane Mitch that St Andrew's started sending monthly funds to assist in the reconstruction of this community. Later, groups from St Andrew's began witness / support trips to this community. When St Andrew's parish closed, the members of St Lucy's and All Saints continued these trips.

In 2004, a maternity center was built where women could go to have care during the last weeks or days of their pregnancy. This care had a huge impact on lowering birth fatalities. Prior to this, the Health Department was showing a greater number of infant fatalities due to home births. Maria and Candida still run the program that we support and its mission is to train women and men (Brigadistas) in pre- natal health care who then can travel out to the countryside and assist pregnant women with health care issues. This, too, had a huge impact in lowering infant mortality numbers as well as assisting in general health care issues.

The emphasis at the Brigadista center was not just training Brigadistas but a push toward general education of the community on issues such as birth control, etc.

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**A Brigadista weighing a child in the community of Picaira to ensure appropriate development**

### Opportunities to get involved

We have made mission trips to Villanueva in 2013, 2015, 2017 and 2019. The political situation and pandemic have prevented us from returning recently, but we plan to resume trips when possible.

People with Spanish language skills can help translate

If you're interested in joining our Steering Committee, new members are always welcome

We need occasional help with sending thank you letters to donors and helping distribute wreaths after masses in late November and early December at our wreath sale.



## Waiting to deliver

These ten women in their final days of pregnancy are among the over 400 women each year who stay at La Casa Materna in the town of Villanueva so they can be ready when the moment arrives to give birth at the Villanueva Health Clinic across the street. Women typically stay at La Casa Materna for about a week prior to delivering. While there, they are monitored by doctors and nurses, and can engage in activities with their fellow pregnant mothers. Because of La Casa Materna, a service supported by All Saints and St. Lucy's, women from the rural communities surrounding Villanueva can be assured of having quick access to an assisted birth. This is one of the primary reasons that not one woman has died in childbirth in in the Villanueva region over 30 years!

When St Andrew's closed, a partnership was formed between St Lucy's and All Saints and a Villanueva committee was formed. Both parishes have committee members who go out and speak to other parishes to make them aware of our story and seek financial support. Other activities such as Peg Barnet's Christmas sale proceeds also contribute to this financial support. The result has been successful. We have met our commitment to this community as well as kept our relationship going through "on the ground" experiences for many years.

I, myself, traveled to Villanueva in 2018 and the experience changed my life. The kindness and gratitude that was shown to me was amazing. While Covid put a damper on travel in the last year or so, we are assessing the possibility of future travel. The current political situation in the country is also a concern. We are watching this closely but continue to find ways to support this community despite this.

After almost 25-30 years, our relationship with our sister community is solid. The impact of our relationship and assistance has had a positive impact in the lowering of infant mortality rates and awareness of health care in general.

Eileen M Clinton: Villanueva committee co-chair

*Prayers are needed at this time as our community deals with increased government oversight and scrutiny.*

*In the 30+ year history of the Brigadista program, not one woman has died in childbirth!*



## Stuck in the mud!

The October rains turned the dirt road to mud on the way to the community of La Consulta, making it nearly impossible for the Villanueva ambulance to pass. But being experienced in the ways of muddy roads, the crew did not give up easily. Scan the code for the [video](#) of how it turned out.



## Contributions Welcome

Thank you from both of our parishes for being so generous during this year!

*If you wish to help support our Sister Community and their efforts, you can make a tax deductible contribution as follows:*

Make checks payable to either

**St. Lucy's Church, or**

**All Saints Church**

*Be sure to put in the memo section: "Sister Community".*

*Or place your contribution in the envelopes available in the back of each supporting church*

**Contact us if you want to sponsor our next newsletter !**

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**Fundraising note:** We did not ask for money in 2022 because your previous generosity had set us up with a strong financial position. We will resume fundraising in 2023 in order to make our \$14,000 annual commitment to our sister community in Villanueva. As always, thanks for your support!