

A Lenten Invitation: Joining Hands in Prayer



Photo by Christian Lombardi.

Demonstrators protest a stalled land reparations law in front of the Bolivian Senate.

The Joining Hands Initiative of the Presbyterian Hunger Program connects U.S. presbyteries and congregations with networks in nine countries around the world, working together to end hunger and to change the root problems that keep people poor. Groups of churches in 11 U.S. presbyteries are linked to networks in nine countries. UMAVIDA is in partnership with three U.S. presbyteries, Cascades, Newark and San Francisco. Bob Dunsmore is the Joining Hands facilitator in Bolivia and PC(USA) mission personnel

Resurrection Hope

When Marlen Rojas was killed, she was hiding in her home, so there is no picture of Marlen here. She was seven-years-old.

It was Oct. 11, 2003, when the Bolivian army opened fire, putting down a demonstration intended to stop a military escort of gas trucks to the city of La Paz, Bolivia's capitol. La Paz was suffering from a fuel shortage because of blockades in the road, set up by Bolivia's indigenous population.

This Easter morning, Bolivians are rising and holding onto resurrection hope and onto the names of thousands of forgotten others like Marlen. With their voices. With their prayers. With their bodies: All to protest a system of governance that has historically shut out the indigenous, ensuring that they remain in the poorest people in the poorest nation in South America.

The day that Marlen was killed her neighbors were in the streets protesting the export of natural gas and blocking highways with their empty fuel tanks. They were demanding that the revenue from the nation's rich natural resources – like gas and water – be used to address the urgent needs of Bolivia's ignored poor.

The average Bolivian earns about \$900 a year. Not enough to pay for gas to fuel cook stoves or water to drink.

The Joining Hands Network in Bolivia is called *Uniendo Manos Por La Vida*, or, *UMAVIDA*, *Joining Hands for Life*. It is a diverse group of both secular and faith-based organizations who are teaching communities nation-wide that their voices count. It is slow work to teach a silenced group that – if they speak in an organized way – their voices can influence policy makers. But *UMAVIDA* is saying loudly that the poor have a right to education, health, water and fuel to cook the food that feeds their families – and that the government is accountable to meet the most basic needs of its marginalized.

“Easter is a time of transformation of people,” says Sara Flores Quinones, *UMAVIDA*'s coordinator, citing the work of the 12 institutions – including three denominations, Lutheran, Methodist and Presbyterian – that compose the organization. “We have the same objective: To change injustice. To improve lives.”

This Easter morning, the Rojas family are asking you celebrate resurrection with them: Not just the resurrection of thousands of Marlens, but resurrection hope for life here and now. They are asking that Christians across the globe pray together so that the church may rise to new life by joining hands with the poor:

Resurrecting and Gracious God,

In Holy Week, we remember that the poor of Bolivia are waiting still on liberation, waiting still on a full resurrection . . . to reconstruct a new world.

Still . . . the poor are oppressed with little hope for the future.

And we must continue our fight. Children are working in mines to survive.

Youth feel so hopeless at home that they emigrate to bigger cities in hopes of a liveable wage.

Women must work to keep their families afloat, but the children are at risk of neglect.

With recent political changes, we see rays of hope. But so much more must be done.

In faith, we cling to what we know:

That like the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the poor, the oppressed and the excluded of Bolivia will inevitably rise into new life.

Amen

(Prayer is written by the Rev. Luis Perez, the honorary president of UMAVIDA; Material supplied by Bob Dunsmore, a PC(USA) Mission Personnel and Joining Hands facilitator in Bolivia.)

TO DONATE TO THE WORK OF THE JOINING HANDS INITIATIVE, VISIT THE WEBSITE AT WWW.PCUSA.ORG/JOININGHANDS/SUPPORT.HTM. DONATIONS MAY ALSO BE MAILED TO **THE PRESBYTERIAN HUNGER PROGRAM**, 100 WITHERSPOON ST., LOUISVILLE, KY 40202, ACCOUNT NUMBER **E051608**; OR TO THE ACCOUNT FOR **BOLIVIA: JOINING HANDS-BOLIVIA**, **H000101**.