**Semi-Annual Report**

**August 1, 2013**

**David H. Shenk**

1. An outline of my activities during the last six months:

**Refugee Project:**

I have fulfilled the responsibilities as coordinator of the Colombian Refugee Project which include:

-Monthly financial reports

-Constant coordination and communication with other entities and participation in biweekly meetings with other organizations.

-Writing reports, requests and proposals to MCC Colombia on behalf of the project

-Home visits to refugees

-Office interviews on Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 9am to 1pm

-Close accompaniment to refugees in highly vulnerable situations

-Managing two students volunteers from January to May 2013

-Administration of the refugee house

-Purchasing monthly food rations for the project’s food aid program

-Carrying out workshops every two months

-Planning and carrying out meetings with the refugee support committee

-Answering phone calls and emails

-Buying and distributing emergency aid (medicine, mattresses, blankets, stoves, gas tanks, etc)

-Accompanying families that start productive projects and following up on their progress

-Organizing psychology appointments every Thursday with Dr. Vicky Rosas

-Communication with Azucena Cifuentes from Voz Andes Hospital for the health care affiliation program

**Youth Group**

-Planned a youth group committee meeting which was held on April 23, 2013

-Along with the youth we planned the May 12th worship service for Mother’s Day with dramas, music, a Biblical reflection and special questions for each mother in the congregation

-With Alyssa Rodriguez, planned an activity held on June 22 with activities, a barbeque and games with an attendance of 13 youth.

-With Alyssa Rodriguez, planned and carried out the agenda and budget for the Youth Venture group from July 11 to July 28th as well as accompanying them in their daily activities

-With Alyssa, planned the budget and preparations so that 3 youth from Quito Mennonite could accompany the Youth Venture group in their trip to Arajuno and Riobamba

-With Alyssa, planned the “Amazing Race” activity which was held with the youth from Quito Mennonite and the Youth Venture group, with an attendance of 16 total youth.

-I have planned and led the youth Sunday school class regularly

**Other Activities**

-On January 22nd I helped receive the visit of Wayne and Lois Hochstetler from MMN in my house for a conversation about my work and life in Quito

-I helped with the visits of folks from Colombia, U.S. and the partnership in January and March

-I attended the inauguration of the church “Iglesia Fe y Esperanza” in Arajuno with Cesar, Patricia, Alba and Benito Miller on the 2nd and 3rd of February

-I did the planning and coordinating for Doyle Roth’s work group from the US/Colombia which was in Ecuador from February 21st to March 4th.

-I preached in Arajuno on February 24th during the work group’s visit

-From March 18th to 26th I traveled to Colombia to participate in the partnership meetings, the IMCOL national assembly, visits to the Colombian churches and projects and I helped with the simultaneous translation.

-I participated in a workshop for psychosocial support held by CLAI on the 25th and 26th of April

-I helped with the preparations for the 4th Anabaptist Retreat from the 23rd to the 26th of May and participated in the worship music and translation.

-I have worked in preparing for the arrive of Wendy Palencia to Ecuador with YAMEN—gathering documents for her visa, communicating with Cesar, Patricia, Wendy, MCC Colombia, Linda Shelly and Maribel and Julio who will host her.

-I have led worship singing at church regularly on Sundays.

-I have helped monthly with the Moment for Peace

-I have been present at prayer meetings

-I planned and worship led during the Foot Washing service and I preached one of the 7 words in the Good Friday service during the absence of Cesar and Patricia.

-I have been present in the planning meetings and workshops for Peace Education and helped with the surveys of families in September 2012

-I have completed two levels of Theology courses with PROPAZ

-I have worked as the secretary of the church council in the council meetings, congregational meetings and the meeting with the church councils of Quito and Riobamba.

-I have actively participated in the small group “La Luz”

-I participated in the meetings to discuss and approve the church statutes

-I have worked on planning the STAR training that we would like to have with Pablo Stucky in October 2013.

-I have attended several worship services in Calderon and helped with the music

-I attended the inaugural worship service in Jardines del Inca on July 28th and helped with the music

1. Fulfillment of Action Plan and Goals

I feel that during the last six months I’ve been successful in fulfilling the goals mentioned in my action plan. Our small group from church has been meeting for the past few months and I’ve been able to be an active member of the group. As I was hoping, it’s been a great space to talk with other church members on a more intimate level about issues of faith, prayer, and things happening in our daily lives. I’ve been able to express joys and concerns among this group which makes the church community feel even more supportive and encouraging for me. I feel that I’ve also been able to listen to others and share in their joys and struggles.

During the past six months, a major goal of mine was to learn how to better manage the stress of working with refugees and the combined workload of juggling various positions and responsibilities. I feel that I have been able to progress in this area of my life and work during the past six months. I am more aware of my limits and what I can and cannot do. I have been able to manage my time more effectively and have also been more aware of giving myself a day of rest. All of these things give me more energy to work hard and be more productive while I’m working, but also help me separate that time from my time of rest. It continues to be difficult for me to see so many needs in refugee families and not have time to attend to all of their situations the way that I would like, but I recognize that what I can do is significant and that it’s simply not humanly possible to do everything. I’ve also gone to three appointments with a therapist, which was something recommended to me by Cesar and Patricia. It’s been a helpful space to express and release the stress that has built up over time. The therapist has given me very useful advice for both my work and personal life and has suggested concrete steps in order to make my work and rest time more effective. I’m thankful for the excellent support network that I have that provides me with guidance and strength to continue forward.

During the past six months a big concern of mine has been my discernment for the future of my work with MMN in Quito. Deciding whether to end or extend my term wasn’t an easy decision, but I was able to come to the decision of extending another year thanks to lots of reflection, prayer and advice from many people. I’m very excited about extending another year and feel that it is the correct decision. It’s fun to think about what God will do in my life during yet another year here in Ecuador.

I continue to be involved in church community life in a positive way. As time passes I continue to get to know the people in the congregation better and they get to know me more fully as well. It’s been a true blessing to be a part of this community for more than two and half years and feel like a full member of the community. I feel that I continue to grow in my own spiritual journey while helping others to do the same.

One goal that we have had during this whole year is to start a productive project with funds from the Refugee Project. We have brainstormed various ideas, but haven’t yet put anything into practice. It’s an exciting opportunity for the Refugee Project and for the people in our community that need employment. I’m looking forward to implementing some kind of productive project before the end of the year and I anticipate that Wendy Palencia will be able to help us with some of the details when she comes.

Regarding the youth group, one goal of mine is to formalize and regularize the youth group activities with the help of Alyssa Rodriguez. I am thrilled that Alyssa is willing to help out with the youth and during the past few months our youth activities have worked so much more smoothly because of her help. It’s a huge moral boost for me to have someone that can help plan and do activities with the youth. I don’t feel the large burden that I felt before when I was doing most of the youth activities by myself. I am also excited because the church approved me and Alyssa as the joint coordinators of the youth group. I feel like since we’ve started to work together, things have progressed very nicely. It was also a really positive experience for our local youth to interact with the Youth Venture group from the United States. We were able to have lots of fun and share in very meaningful ways. I really hope there can be another Youth Venture group next year in Ecuador.

1. Challenges

Although I feel that I’ve made progress in the last six months, I think time and stress management continue to be a challenge for me. I’ve made small changes that have helped, but I want to continue to be aware of my well-being and stress levels so that I don’t burn out. As I mentioned before, it’s hard to constantly feel behind on refugee work or feel that I’m doing the bare minimum when I would like to do more. I am hoping that with the arrival of Wendy Palencia, my emotional stress will lessen. I’m looking forward to working alongside Wendy in the refugee work and sharing some of the responsibilities, decision-making and stress.

Along the same lines, Sunday mornings at Quito Mennonite Church continue to be a challenge for me because of the situations of many refugees. Many times when Sunday arrives, I feel the desire to go to church and have a relaxed time of reflection and prayer in order to simply spend time with God and others from the community. However there are many refugees that go to church and want to talk with me about their situations and receive help and advice. This is very understandable, but sometimes a difficult thing for me to manage after long weeks of working daily with refugees and wanting the space at church to be somewhat separated from those situations. Many times I have to remind myself that this is simply part of following Christ’s example, but it doesn’t cease to be difficult for me because of the time and energy that it takes. We’ve tried to remind people that during the week there is attention for refugees and that the space on Sundays is for everyone to enjoy the worship service, however many times people’s needs don’t wait and people want someone to talk to. Also, there are times in which it’s difficult to play the role of being a brother in Christ and also the coordinator/administrator of resources for refugees. It’s hard to find a good balance when personal relationships get mixed in with administrative decisions that affect people’s lives.

1. Recent events and developments in the local church

In late May we held the 4th Anabaptist retreat with participants from Quito Mennonite, Riobamba Mennonite and the new church in Calderon. We had a really great retreat with lots of good reflection, learning, fun and fellowship. We had excellent input from Tim and Carol Detweiler from Central Plains. I think people left the retreat newly refreshed in the gospel and with a renewed sense of community.

A new development in Quito has been the opening of two new churches in Calderon and Jardines del Inca. It’s exciting that there are new churches sprouting in places where folks from Quito Mennonite live and it’s great to think about the potential that lies in these new communities. It also presents a challenge for those new communities as well as Quito Mennonite since there needs to be solid leadership and financial stability in each church. These new churches will surely demand a renewed commitment from all those involved, but I am excited to see these new churches blossom and serve in their respective communities.

A major development for our church is the pastoral adjustment that we are currently experiencing. We are preparing for the departure of Cesar and Patricia and looking for new leadership for Quito Mennonite. This is a very important and delicate process since it’s the first time that Quito Mennonite has needed to look for permanent replacements for Cesar and Patricia. I know that God will guide this process and take care of our church, but there is definitely a lot of uncertainty right now and we are praying for new leadership. A pastoral committee has been formed in order to take charge of this process and make sure that the church continues to function normally until a new pastor/s are brought in. I think this process will be difficult for the church because it is accompanied by a huge change in leadership, but I hope that it will also help local members become more involved in church activities and help the church community grow and mature.

1. Inspiring Stories

I met Jose last year. He is 60 years old and lives by himself here in Quito as a refugee. During the past couple of years his vision has slowly started to decline and he had to quit his job in a mine in southern Ecuador about two years ago because he could no longer see very well. He moved to Quito with some money that he had saved from working in the mines, but his money quickly disappeared when he paid for an expensive eye surgery in order to improve his vision. Unfortunately there were complications in the surgery and it left his vision even worse that before. Without money and with his vision worse than before, Jose started to work in the streets selling sunglasses in order to make money and survive. Last year he showed up at our church wondering if we could help him with a microcredit to buy sunglasses to sell because the police had confiscated his sunglasses since he doesn’t have a permit to be a street vendor (very few street vendors actually have a permit). We agreed to help him invest in more sunglasses after getting to know him a bit more and doing a visit to his home—a small room that he rents for $40 a month with only a mattress and few clothes as belongings. After the new investment in the sunglasses, Jose did fairly well for a number of months. He was able to eat 3 meals a day and pay his rent every month. However a few months ago, his vision took a turn for the worst to the point that he was almost completely unable to sell his sunglasses in the street. He would fall in the street because of his lack of vision, he was no longer able to navigate the streets of Quito and people would take advantage of him and steal his sunglasses since he couldn’t see. This is when Jose asked for our help again. This time I decided to accompany him to a local eye clinic in order to see what possibilities there might be to improve his vision. We paid for his doctor visits and medical exams, but the diagnosis was grim. There was very little that doctors could do for him in order to recover his vision. Nevertheless, Jose continued to maintain a positive attitude. He was determined to provide for himself and continue to be independent despite the fact that he was practically unable to move around the city by himself—not to mention his lack of recourses. At this point I decided to recommend his case to the United Nations and other organizations that work with refugees in Quito. We had a meeting and decided to look for an organization that could help him learn other trades and work with other people that are blind. We found an excellent organization and Jose started to attend classes where he is currently taking computer classes, learning to make crafts, taking therapy and learning how to move independently around the city. The plan is for Jose to form an association with other people who have a severe vision handicap so that they can support each other and sell their products in the street together. Jose feels great to be a part of this support network and loves learning new things that he can use to survive that make up for his lack of vision. We continue to be aware of Jose’s situation and monitor his progress. We are currently helping him with food aid since he is not making money due to his dedication in his classes. He is also behind on his rent payments and is feeling pressure from the owner of the house to pay as soon as possible. Please pray that Jose will be able to make enough money to pay his rent and that he’ll be able to thrive as he works alongside others who are also visually impaired in the streets of Quito.