



SEMINARY in the Jungles of Ecuador

In a remote jungle, seminary is making a huge difference for these youth.

By Joshua J. Perkey
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East of Quito, Ecuador, past the volcanoes and Andes Mountains, the terrain drops swiftly to the Amazon jungle. There you'll find thick forests, abundant rivers, monkeys, toucans, and even pink dolphins.

You'll also find a city called Puerto Francisco de Orellana. It's a long ways from, well, everything else in Ecuador. Fifteen years ago, there were relatively few people in the area. But the discovery of petroleum brought industry, people seeking jobs, and members of the Church.

Seminary in a Small Branch

A few of the youth, like Oscar R., were already members when the branch was formed, but most are recent converts. And a fire burns in their hearts. "We are strong," Oscar says.

In September 2010, just a year after it was created, the branch started a seminary program. "When we first started gathering a few years

ago," says Oscar, "there were very few of us. I was the only youth. But we kept growing. Soon we had 6, then 10, and now even more youth."

Because some of the youth attend school in the morning and others in the afternoon, they organized two seminary class schedules—one in the morning from 8:00 to 9:00 and one in the afternoon from 4:30 to 5:30.

There may not be a lot of youth in the program, but for those youth who attend, seminary has changed their lives.

Why Go?

"Seminary is a great blessing for me," says Luis V., a recent convert. "It helps prepare me to be a good missionary. I have faced many challenges and temptations since I joined the Church, but I have been able to keep myself strong because I know I'm doing what's right."

And it's not just Luis who feels that way. "I have been a member of the Church for just a short while," says Ariana J., "but I have been attending seminary since I was baptized. I'm happy attending because I'm

Seminary strengthens youth such as these in Ecuador, many of whom are recent converts.



learning many true things regarding the gospel of Jesus Christ that fill my heart with hope and my mind with understanding.”

Attending seminary has helped ground Ariana in the gospel. “For me, it is a blessing to be a part of these classes,” Ariana says. “They strengthen my spirit and help me prepare so



that one day I can be a good spouse, mother, leader in the Church, and perhaps a full-time missionary.”

Ariana’s brother, Gerardo, feels the same. “I’m grateful because seminary has become an important part of my life,” he says. “It’s preparing me to serve a mission someday. There I have learned about the plan of salvation that God prepared for me. Each class I attend gives me hope that I can inherit the celestial kingdom and gives me the certainty that I have received the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Gerardo is pretty tired during class sometimes. He has to take his little brother to school first and then return home quickly to pick up his

sister so they can go to seminary. But he doesn’t mind.

“All of this is so new for me, but I am full of happiness,” says Gerardo. “I know I am on the correct path that will give me the opportunity to see my Heavenly Father again. The Holy Spirit gives me this assurance. I just have to make an effort and persevere unto the end.”

No Need to Be Nervous

For Walter A., seminary was initially a little intimidating. “I was nervous the first time I came,” he says. “But when I entered the class, I felt special because I felt the love you feel when you study the scriptures. And when I left, I felt strengthened with happiness in my heart for what I had learned. One of the greatest blessings Heavenly Father has for the youth is seminary.”

“The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has changed my life,” says Abel A., who is also preparing to go on a mission. “I’m learning about the teachings of the prophets. I love Joseph Smith. He was valiant in bringing to pass the Restoration of the true Church in

spite of all the problems this caused him. I want to be valiant like he was.”

A lot of youth have to make sacrifices to attend seminary. It’s not always easy, but for the youth in Puerto Francisco de Orellana, Ecuador, it’s worth the effort.

“When I think about pressing forward, like the scriptures say,” Abel explains, “I think it means to set our priorities for life. Seminary is one of these. Just as it has changed my life, it can do the same for other youth.”

Even in the deepest reaches of a jungle in Ecuador, the Church of Jesus Christ and its seminary program for youth are thriving and changing lives for those who choose to let it. ■

