

## Humanitarian Efforts Bear Fruit in Bolivia's Altiplano

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As the Church helps struggling communities around the world, those who oversee the welfare program of the Church are finding that a new way of working based on long-proven welfare principles is bearing fruit—and vegetables and mobility and better health care—in Bolivia's Altiplano.

Early in 2009, representatives of Welfare Services went to El Alto and Suriquiña, Bolivia, to start a pair of projects that combined their resources with those in the community to provide aid to those in need.

The projects were based not only on the time-tested self-reliance principle of teaching a man to fish rather than giving him a fish, but they also reflected the next logical step in the Church's commitment to self-reliance. Project leaders worked closely with local government and community leaders to decide together what needs the Church could meet and to involve the community more heavily in the projects.

Wade Sperry, a manager of field operations in Welfare Services, said since the funding for the programs lasts only for a limited time, the Church involved local priesthood leaders, physicians, health officials, and residents in hopes that the results would last indefinitely.

"The more we can involve local citizens in the solution of their own problems, the better it is for all," said Dennis Lifferth, managing director

of Welfare Services. "The project becomes more sustainable and realistic."

### El Alto

El Alto sits on the edge of the Altiplano, or high plateau, overlooking Bolivia's capital city, La Paz. It has a population of about one million, about 3,500 of whom are Church members. Since 2001, as people have moved from rural areas to the city,

El Alto's population has doubled, making it the fastest-growing major city in the country.

When representatives of Welfare Services met with local leaders in El Alto, they identified four needs in the community. First, El Alto Women and Children's Hospital needed remodeling. Second, people needed gardening and nutrition training. Third, physicians and specialists needed neonatal resuscitation training and supplies. And fourth, many people in the community needed wheelchairs.

Subsequently, the representatives worked with the El Alto Ministry of Health to donate needed medical equipment such as newborn incubators, a generator, beds, monitors, and other hospital equipment to the only hospital in the city that serves pregnant women, newborns, and children. With the help of previously trained Bolivian physicians and specialists, welfare representatives helped arrange for the training of an additional 150 midwives in neonatal resuscitation techniques.



***Helping members and their neighbors learn to produce a greater variety of nutrient-rich foods is just one way the Church is helping others help themselves.***

The Church also provided 250 wheelchairs to El Alto's Department of Social Services and used the local meeting-house to teach about nutrition.

One of the community's less visible but more widespread needs was a more varied and balanced diet. In El Alto, food choices in the markets were limited. Before the project started, none of the members in El Alto had gardens. And many of the houses and apartments the people live in do not have access to a garden plot.

Representatives of Welfare Services are now teaching members and their neighbors how to plant vegetables in empty household containers that they can place on their windowsills or porches. The Church provides some vegetable seeds to get them started.

Brother Sperry said when members and their neighbors started growing vegetables in container gardens, other neighbors started growing gardens too. In close quarters such as those in El Alto, Brother Sperry believes the gardening techniques will spread.

### Suriquiña

Suriquiña, Bolivia, a town of about 5,000 people 25 miles (40 kilometers) north of La Paz, sits at 14,173 feet (4,319 m) above sea level. The vegetation is limited to what can survive the altitude and the cold, arid conditions of the grasslands.

Church representatives and community leaders in Suriquiña identified that the community needed to learn basic nutrition and food production in the environment. The diet of the people in Suriquiña consists mostly of potatoes, fava beans, quinoa, lamb jerky, and eggs. More than half of the children in the town are malnourished.

With a goal to reduce malnutrition rates



***Bernita Choque, a member in Bolivia, gathers produce from a greenhouse the Church helped her build to provide needed nutrition.***

among those who participate in the program to 10 percent by 2012, Welfare Services representatives are using the meetinghouse where the branch of about 350 members meets to teach the people how to build adobe block greenhouses. The structures are 16.5 feet (5 m) long, 10 feet (3 m) wide, and 6 feet (1.9 m) tall, though half the greenhouse's height is underground. The wooden A-frame roof has a plastic cover and a trapdoor that provides access.

Less than five percent of households in Suriquiña were growing gardens when the project began. Welfare specialists hope those who attend the classes will have one garden to care for their family's needs and another for surplus produce that the family can sell. Some families have already starting producing vegetables in their greenhouses. By 2011 welfare specialists anticipate there will be 100 such structures producing fresh food.

Allen Christensen, a director in Welfare Services, said the children who have already participated in the local school's initial greenhouse project are healthier and doing better in school because of their improved diet.

"These projects provide tangible hope that the people can improve their circumstances," Brother Christensen said.

And as welfare representatives work with local leaders and communities, they hope to increase self-reliance and faith among the people as well.

"One of our goals is to help people set their own course and solve their own problems," said Brother Lifferth. "We're confident that with a little bit of help where needed and inspiration from the Lord, they can and will improve conditions for their families." ■