



GOOD WORKS

Worldwide Mission of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur

COLLABORATION: Village and Parish

ENABLING WOMEN WITH NEW SKILLS

Sr. Mary Isabel Kilpatrick, SNDdeN

A few years ago, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur began a new mission in San Clemente, Pisco, south of Lima, Peru. In this region, the people continue to experience lasting effects from the earthquake of 2007. In February 2010, Sisters Miriam Montero Bereche and Mary Isabel Kilpatrick, SNDdeN visited this area in an effort to determine the best way to reach out in a new mission to the people. The needs were obvious. At first only those who could prove they were "damnificadas" received any grants for housing. With such little assistance and a lack of housing, multiple difficulties resulted in physical and emotional health problems, including poor nutrition, family violence as well as delinquency among the youth.



Sr. Miriam (center) began to offer workshops to help displaced people dealing with stress.



Sr. Mary Isabel (right), Maria, and a few women volunteers produce litres of yogurt.

Yogurt Project

Sr. Mary Isabel saw the need to provide some employment for women seeking a source of income. She searched for the possibility of developing small projects with the women. She called on a friend, Maria, a food engineer who had helped her previously in Lima. Maria had given a course on the preparation of fruit drinks and yogurt with the mothers of the children in the Fe y Alegria School in Lima. Again, Maria was willing to give lessons in making yogurt, now in San Clemente. First, someone offered their house for the classes, the women contributed ingredients and shared the product at the end. While in this area, Sr. Mary Isabel and her volunteers discovered a small hall that had been built recently for people with special needs. The watchman, a blind man, offered the use of

this hall, far from the centre of town but with better conditions and more space for the course. This location put the Sisters and volunteers in touch with some of the families with special needs in the area.

Project Becomes Sustainable

From this contact, they developed two small lunch programmes, one in this centre for disabled persons and another in the Santa Rosa barrio, in collaboration with the Dominican Sisters ministering also in San Clemente. Various groups of women enjoyed taking the courses but they had difficulty in organizing themselves to be able to continue. Later, we were able to rebuild one of the rooms damaged by the earthquake next to our house in the Parish. This space is large enough to have the necessary equipment and reasonable conditions for groups to learn different skills. With the help of our engineer friend, Maria, a small group of women developed successfully the Yogurt Project. At present, by working two days a week, the six women are able to produce 60-80 litres of yogurt. This amount covers the cost of the ingredients and gives a small profit for each participant as they sell the yogurt. It is possible to increase the capacity but the women are not yet ready to take that step.

Although the project is small, it is significant as a source of income for the families involved; the product itself has health benefits for the recipients; the participants have developed friendships, learned to deal with customers and to cope with fluctuations in prices and availability of ingredients. They have their trials

and tribulations but also a place to share them. They bring more life to the parish community. They hope eventually to provide catering services for groups that come for baptisms and funerals.

Development for Women

Besides the *Natural Yogurt Project*, Sister Mary Isabel is creating an Integrated Development Program for Women by providing workshops and hands-on training. *Sewing Projects*, such as painted tablecloths, which are sold, give training and income and cover as well the cost of the materials and supplies for the women workers. The *Baking Project* allows saleable goods yielding some income for the women workers after financing initial expenses. A growing program, *Healing Touch*, trains pastoral health group members to use “energy medicine” as a tool for overall wellness. An educational component is growing slowly yet positively as two women prepare for Level 5 certification. About 50 women have benefitted directly from these projects while many more members of the parish community also received assistance.

Although family responsibilities continue to make demands on the women’s time and energy, those who choose to work together and learn new skills, do become more self-sufficient. They grow in confidence in their own abilities and a sense of God’s goodness in their lives.

