

THE SHOESHINE SPECIAL

NEWS FROM THE WORKING BOYS CENTER • QUITO, ECUADOR • WINTER 2011



Padre's Message

DEAR FOLKS,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit saw that people on earth couldn't get along with them because the people had lost their ability to get along with each other. Competition had replaced fun. A new plan was needed. It took a mighty intelligent Father to know that Mary would agree to bring Jesus into the world and that an innkeeper in Bethlehem would lend stable space and everything could work out gradually. Jesus would be a permanent reminder for everybody to know, feel and recognize their need for each other and for God. He set the new scene in miniature to make it easier to grasp the plan's simplicity.

Outside in the streets and all over the surrounding hills, happiness wasn't an ordinary thing. Good souls and bandits eyed and faced one another with all the usual tensions. Not sure that God had made space and stuff enough for everybody or if one had to stomp and steal enough for one's self. Everybody pleading not guilty. The situation always getting more out of hand and the growing need for crackdowns or, at least for setting limits, or for negotiating respect for the rights and wrongs of everybody clever enough to find and add two cents.

But inside the stable it was all trust and confidence.

An ox yawned, a goat scoffed and little lambs cuddled up close to the manger. There was no Board of Health to worry about. Everybody and other things living or clinging into everlasting existence made room for each other, happy with the arrangements made. The angels wanted the shepherds to be the first to see that happiness

without the need for constant alert.

Soon enough would start the glorious and awful work of bringing that happiness outside onto the streets and on over the hills. Jesus would be lifted up and gradually, Christmas by Christmas, He would draw everybody together. In heaven for old time's sake, everybody makes a Christmas pilgrimage to the stable to ask Jesus to stay working at it with us.

Merry Christmas,
John J. Halligan, S.J.



The Volunteer Challenge

Double your gift by making a donation by end of year

Two former WBC volunteers are so interested in encouraging those who have spent time volunteering at the WBC to support the Center, they'll match every \$1 former volunteers donate from now until December 31, 2011 with \$1 of their own!

That means if you send a gift of \$100, \$75, \$50 or \$25, they will double it. If you send a gift of \$100, they'll transform it into \$200 and so on. And they'll double every gift you and other WBC volunteer alumni send -- up to \$30,000!

If you spent time volunteering as a year-long volunteer, on a volunteer trip or minga project, you can help us reach our goal of \$60,000 to provide meals, medical and dental care and education for more Ecuadorians. Please help us reach our goal by returning the enclosed donation envelope or making an on-line donation at <http://www.workingboyscenter.org/make-a-donation>.



Remembering Christmas Past

A reflection of Christmas festivities in the early years of the WBC

By Father John Halligan, SJ

The Working Boys' Center's first home in the attic of a Jesuit Church was certainly poor enough to pass for the place where Jesus was born. But it was also big enough for Santa Claus, Christmas stockings, bundles of used clothing, Bingo, a stage for skits of every kind, an ecological tree, the Holy Family, all the other families of the working kids and memorable Christmas dinners. In the earliest years, celebrating Christmas in a big way was something very new for the kids.



Some of the Christmas gift-giving was serious happiness. Each working boy member had candy plus a couple of small surprise things in a red stocking identified with his name. These gifts were rewards for their help to their families by earning money. But the most popular gifts were the great big bundles of used clothing, one for each family. For purposes of

prestige, the working boy had to receive it personally and give it over to mom or some other family member. But don't imagine that a shoeshine boy would put his precious shine box out of reach just to carry a clumsy gift bundle, no matter how valuable. The balancing acts were a tribute to their street survival expertise.

Each year, the kids spent more than a month using whatever we had on hand to get things ready for Christmas in the Center with their families. There was a box full of artificial Christmas tree branches but no tree trunk. One of the kids got a carpenter to drill holes in a long piece of two by four and put a point on it to hold the angel. We had to give it a strong ugly base to stand it up with all the branches stuck in it. The result was an attractive section of forest under an avalanche of tinsel.

The nativity scene was unlike any other because the only animals the kids knew were cats and dogs and



pigs and it would take years for us to acquire statues of them. We told the boys that each of their families could lend treasures from home that would stay in the Bethlehem scene or on the tree for the season and be

returned to the families after Christmas. That was the beginning of a tradition that helps us know Jesus shares the way we live. The pre-Christmas season was packed with visits by parents and sisters and little brothers delivering decorations on loan and grabbing lunch.

Most of the preparation time was given to the piles of other donated stuff that was on hand. Folks had donated cast-off costume jewelry, assorted dishware, drinking glasses, framed paintings, you name it, and a huge variety of still packaged hardware store stuff and small articles donated by stores getting rid of no-sale stock. We invested in Christmas gift paper. The kids spent days wrapping each article with loving care. All of it was destined to be a traditional pile of surprise gifts for their Catholic families to celebrate Christmas with BINGO. The winners could pick any gift but couldn't know what it was until the treasure was unwrapped. Of course, Christmas Day was always heavenly, a loud liturgy, a meal eaten with total dedication, the hilarious BINGO teaching the letters and numbers somehow related to winning surprise gifts.

To read more about Father Halligan's memories of Christmas past, visit www.workingboyscenter.org/news



A look into how Christmas is celebrated today.

By Audrey Raemisch, WBC Volunteer, 2008-2010



As I think back on the two years I spent Christmas with the Working Boys' Center, I can't help but smile. There are so many fun things going on that you don't have time to think about the fact that you're in Ecuador celebrating Christmas without your family and friends. By this time, the WBC has become your family, and it is a joy to spend the holidays with everyone!

I re-read my blog that I had written while I was a volunteer, and here is a direct quote of what I wrote: "Where do I even begin? Christmas here is incredible, beautiful – plain amazing. I am having the time of my life with these people celebrating an amazing time of year. Christmas here isn't about Santa or presents; it's about the birth of baby Jesus." That says it all, Christmas really is an amazing time in the WBC, and I will never forget the years I spent there.

The Madres and Padre are always amazing at helping bring the Christmas spirit into the volunteer house! One of the first things we do a few weeks before Christmas is decorate the house. They give us freedom to decorate the home as we want while we enjoy hot cocoa and cookies and listen to Christmas music. It helps make the house feel a little more like home during the holidays.

The Saturday before Christmas there are Masses at the two centers. This is the day that the first graders give their hearts to Jesus to show their devo-



tion. In return they get a new present. After the mass we handed out the bultos or bags of clothing for the



families that we made the weekend before. They are always so excited to see what is in their bulto!

On Christmas Eve, we have the "gringo mass", which is mass at a church for English speakers living in Quito which Padre Juan gives. From there everyone goes on the bus to a mass in Guangopolo, which is right outside of Quito. Then we come home and Madre Cindy has made food and desserts for us to eat!

On Christmas Day, we celebrate both Christmas and First Communion for the 2nd graders at Mass. The 2nd graders are so proud and adorable dressed up and excited. Later in the day, we have the Christmas celebration in the house. There is always a big meal (thanks to Madre Cindy again), and Madre Miguel always has gag gifts, which with her sense of humor make us laugh until our sides hurt.

Christmas in the WBC is amazing. It's not centered on Santa or presents. It's focused on the real reason we celebrate Christmas at all, the birth of Jesus. It is so refreshing after celebrating so many years in the US, where all you see and think about is Santa and presents. Although far away from home, I never felt alone in this time of year where being away from your family can be difficult. I felt blessed to have the opportunity to celebrate with some of the most amazing people I have ever met.

To read more about the Working Boys' Center Christmas of today, visit www.workingboyscenter.org/testimonials

Helping ensure future **WBC Christmas celebrations**

Planning for the Future

It's no secret that the programs of the Working Boys' Center depend on your goodwill. We've created this easy-to-understand website to help you plan, for your future and ours. There are many easy giving options from which you can choose—strategies that enhance your personal well being, as well as the Working Boys' Center. *Learn more at www.workingboyscenter.org/giving*

Automating your support

Your regular gifts can make an even greater impact when you sign up for our electronic donation program.

Get started with monthly giving today

To get started visit us on-line at www.workingboyscenter.org/make-a-donation. When filling out the on-line form, remember to set your donation frequency to monthly.



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