

A letter from Jo Ella Holman serving as Regional Liaison for the Caribbean region, based in the Dominican Republic



Advent 2014 - God, Take Control!

"Dios, toma el control!"

How many times have I heard this phrase uttered in Caribbean prayers, whether in Spanish, French, Creole or English: "God, take control!"—of this situation, of this weather, of this grief, of this necessity.

In the community where I live in the Dominican Republic, I buy food at a local produce stand. The family that owns this small business sends their two sons twice a week to the big outdoor market in the capital for fresh fruit and vegetables. So Mondays and Thursdays are the best days for the largest selection. I have my list ready and join my neighbors in line to be helped.

The lady at the counter has three tubers of yucca, two plantains, a small onion and a packet of two tablespoons of cooking oil. The next woman buys one tablespoon of butter, which the son cuts off from the stick kept in the refrigerator and carefully wraps it in a small square of paper. Who knew oil and butter could be sold by the tablespoon?

She asks for 15 pesos worth of rice, about three-quarters of a cup, and it goes into a small plastic bag whose ends are tied. She buys one piece of chicken and one stalk of celery.

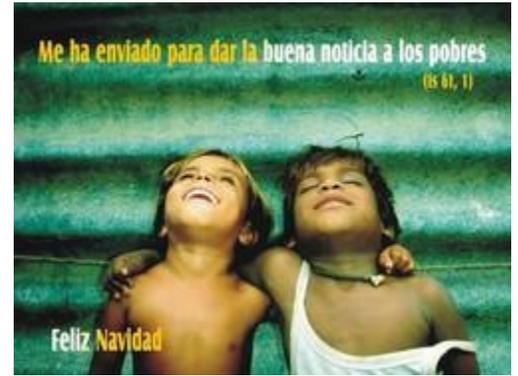
And so it goes, each woman or child carefully counting out a few pesos for the day's meal. When it is my turn, I find it impossible to fill my list in the presence of such scarcity. The memory of that single stalk of celery burns in my mind. *"Dios, toma el control"* and *"give us this day our daily bread."*

My neighbor Ramon works in two different restaurants in the area. Neither job is full-time. His little 2-year-old son has been sickly since birth and is prone to respiratory infections. The biggest challenge is the lack of a full-time health clinic in our community, so Ramon lives in fear of a bus ride to the larger clinic in the next town, should there be an emergency.

My friend Marta had that problem one day when her grandson was suddenly writhing in pain. They suspected appendicitis, so his mother got him to the bus stop and on the bus to the hospital in San Pedro, two towns away. Despite the many stops, he arrived, was admitted, and then waited all night and into the next day before he was seen by a doctor. Doctors diagnosed appendicitis and finally whisked him off to surgery. *"Dios, toma el control!"* and may *"your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."*

With our partner church in the DR, the *Iglesia Evangélica Dominicana*, we are embarking on a new approach to these daily experiences of hunger and hopelessness through a wholistic ministry called "community health evangelism." The wholeness of God's *shalom*, the abundant life that Jesus says is available to all is at the heart of this approach to health: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health of individuals, families and the community. Rather than giving food or providing health care directly, this approach develops the community from the grass roots, empowering and training leaders for community transformation over the long term.

Won't you be part of this ministry? If this way of working sparks your imagination, be in touch with me. Please pray for and consider financial support for my ministry and that of the Dominican church. You might even engage this approach in your own neighborhood for God's transformative action in your own community and as well as in those around the world. In this season of waiting for the coming of the Christ Child, we remember his birth to a poor family in an occupied territory. And we recall his first sermon in his hometown of Nazareth, reading from Isaiah, "...sent to bring good news to the poor, release to the captive, sight to the blind." May you richly experience the good news of God this Christmastide and join me in prayer for God's transformative work in the brokenness of our lives and world.



"I was sent to bring good news to the poor."
(Isaiah 61:1)

Jo Ella

The *2014 Presbyterian Mission Yearbook for Prayer & Study*, p. 35
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