



## *“... Moments So Pretty”* To Panama and Back

By Janice Kerper Brauer

It was dark as I looked out the airplane window on our descent to Panama City. I knew we were still over the Atlantic Ocean and was surprised to see a row of lights below. Then I realized they were ships, lined up and waiting to go through the Panama Canal.

The heat and humidity of the tropical night smacked me in the face when I got off the plane, maneuvered through the airport, and climbed aboard the 12-seat van with my ten teammates — en route to the LCMS mission house in Panama City where we were to stay as guests of missionaries Thomas and Jaime Brinkmann.

Our plan was to travel to six Lutheran churches — three in the city, three in rural areas — to hold women’s seminars (mini retreats with worship, Bible studies, crafts, and sharing designed to encourage the women in their faith and equip them for outreach) and a children’s ministry program.

Some of my teammates had been on previous mission trips, but it was my first experience — I didn’t know exactly what to expect.

*Top: Friends enjoying fellowship at the women’s seminars*

On the evening of our first full day, we attended a Communion service at one of the small, rural churches. Instead of lining up at a communion rail, we stood in a circle around the modest altar. In the background, children of the congregation played hymns on cuatros, simple four-stringed guitars, while babies cried and a persistent dog repeatedly tried to get in on the action.

I looked around the group encircling the altar: Panamanian families in simple dress, Kuna Indian women in bright traditional clothing, several North Americans besides those of us on the mission trip. Many of us would probably never meet again, but I sensed the sweet unity of the Holy Spirit as the bread and wine were distributed with the familiar words, recognizable even though spoken in Spanish: “This is My body...this is My blood... given for you.”

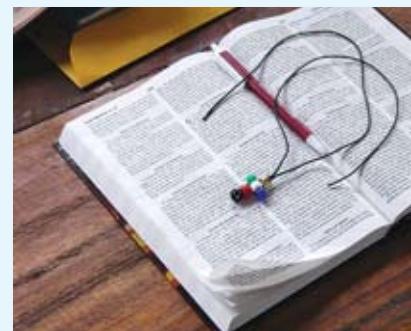
This sense of unity — of our common humanity and our common need for the Savior’s grace — began a theme that ran through the week. At each location we discovered a bond: We are all women — daughters, sisters, wives, mothers



Two women show off their Scripture-decorated LWML tote bags.

— experiencing life’s ups and downs. What a joy it was to share hugs, smiles, laughter, and tears! And how meaningful to open God’s Word together and let it speak to our hearts!

At each church we visited, the women received a Bible — a gift from our team, and when we ran short of Bibles, God opened the door for us to make a quick purchase of more. One woman told us: “Thank you for the blessing of this Bible. I asked God yesterday for a



Bible.” It was exciting to hear pages rustling as the women looked up their favorite Scripture verses: *The Lord is my Shepherd* (Ps. 23:1) ... *The Lord is my light and my salvation* (Ps. 27:1) ... [Jesus is] the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6).

Though each day of the mission trip was long and tiring, the week went by too quickly. Soon we found ourselves on another airplane headed back home. The anticipation behind us, we now had time to reflect: We had experienced the joy of sharing God’s love with others. We felt the power of the Holy Spirit as we worked together serving the Lord. We knew we had received far more than we had given.

Our hearts echoed the sentiment of one Panamanian woman who told us: “These moments so pretty I will keep in my heart.”

*Janice Kerper Brauer is former Associate Editor of the Lutheran Woman’s Quarterly.*



Children enjoy coloring in storybooks telling the story of creation.

This mission trip was sponsored by Northern Illinois District LWML in conjunction with MOST (Mission Opportunities Short Term). If you would like more information about mission trips, visit [www.mostministries.org](http://www.mostministries.org) or contact your district officers.