



# COLOMBIA 2018

**Hello! I am back from Bogota and want to share my experience with you and show you how meaningful your contribution is to me and the people of Bogota.**

My team and I served the people of Bogota, a vast and vibrant city in the heart of Colombia. We were very well integrated into the community in Bogota for we stayed in a retreat house ran by the Congregation of Dominican Sisters of Bethany right in the center of the city. The city made visible the disparity between the rich and the poor within its colorful graffiti and murals on walls and buildings. Our original plan was canceled a few weeks before the trip but a local priest Fr. Carlos took us under his wing providing us with various ministries all over the city. Every day we had different opportunities to encounter Christ. We fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and visited the sick.

We worked alongside two Colombian groups of college and young professionals El Jóvenes del Espíritu Santo and Setenta Siete. They welcomed us with such warmth and joy. It was astonishing to know that they found out that we were coming just a few days before we landed and dropped everything to be of service to us! El Jóvenes del Espíritu Santo embraced us with a vibrant party of prayer, food, and dancing the second day we arrived. A small group of them became our permanent navigators for the two weeks. They showed us great love by giving their time and radiant joy. I am still in awe of their commitment to community, their selflessness, and their faith. It is truly a gift to be a part of this universal family we get to call the Catholic Church.

Each day of the trip we served a different group of Colombians. The archdiocese assists and ministers to three native indigenous groups who have been neglected by the government and are not given proper work documentation. These people survive through begging, making beaded jewelry, and performing their cultural dances. We were able to watch their many children on the day of Colombian Independence while the adults performed. During other days, we spent our time visiting an elderly home, a recovery home for children with cancer, cancer hospitals, residential centers for people with HIV/AIDS, and a homeless center.

Each day, we prayed for an hour and attended Mass. It was a time when I conversed with God, a time when I allowed God to heal my broken wounds, and a time when I reflected on His presence and his purpose in my life. In this time for spiritual growth, I not only grew closer to God but also in virtuous friendship.

\* the photo above is an example of a mural explaining the indigenous cosmologies.

# REFLECTIONS

**My three greatest takeaways from the mission trip were: humility, joy, and openness of heart.**

In this vibrant city, I witnessed humility and was challenged to grow in this virtue. C.S. Lewis describes humility has not a matter of thinking less of ourselves—but less about ourselves, forgetting ourselves and turning outward in love. I witnessed the Colombian college students and young adults willing to put God and other people ahead of themselves. I learned how humility does not deny our identities, but, instead, it affirms fully who we are as sons and daughters of God by submitting ourselves to our Creator who truly knows us. In dying to my ego, I was able to fully embrace others on the trip and love them as an older sister.

The joy and openness of heart were two gifts I encountered in the Colombians we served. For example in the cancer hospital, every patient we visited and talked with was open to praying and talking about God. I was greatly moved by their receptiveness and willingness to share their life with us. This was something I could never imagine happening in the United States. The smile of Alondra, a patient we prayed with, will be ingrained in my heart forever. Natalie, one of the children with cancer we visited radiated such joy and love in her presence. Her generous heart moved me so profoundly. Being American was no obstacle for the embrace of their love and reception.

I cannot thank you enough for participating directly in this trip and in the mission of the Church by supporting me in this endeavor. I know that many lives young and old were changed forever. I know that God wants me to be bolder about sharing my faith – not just in Colombia, but right here in Berkeley. I will continue praying for you. If there is anything new that I can be praying for, please don't hesitate to let me know. Also, if you have questions or want more details about anything on the trip, I would be glad to answer them and share with you my stories.

Thank you & May God richly bless you,  
Olivia Buak

\* top photo: a view from the top of Mount Monserrate; bottom: left to right: Natalie, Vivian and Jose

