

WATER WATER EVERYWHERE

(Jeanine Boucher-Colbert, Catholic Relief Services)



Tuesday was like none other in my life. Imagine a community whose women had to walk over two hours each day to get water and then send their children 2 hours to fetch water in the afternoon. They have had to do that as long as they have lived there..."forever" one woman said. Yesterday when they christened the well system in this highland town in Bolivia – after 3 years of collaborating, sweat equity and funds by **Catholic Relief Services** and Caritas and the local municipality plus a huge labor buy in from these very poor, proud Quechuan speaking people, the water was turned on!!

The jubilation was intense. After the local cowboy hat-wearing Bishop blessed the water spigot, women were running their hands under the water blessing the crowd, washing their faces, drinking with cut off pop bottles, laughing, crying.

Unbelievable.

Dancing ensued and the "eldest" 67 year old woman grabbed me to dance and then put me to shame, of course, as the altitude is so intense and we were all out of breath and our hearts were pumping through our shirts! It was a beautiful, really powerful experience to be there. I really don't even have the words to describe the joy that was palpable everywhere. Their children will be able to go to school all day now, women can form support groups and have small businesses, their health and nutrition will drastically improve!

Because we were there to celebrate with them, we were the honored guests: they gave us the first dance with their children and older people (so strong!) and gave us the best of their multicolored potatoes which we later shared....and our names too will go down in their oral and written history of these struggling, beautiful people. I was the one who was honored to be there and I am humbled...God was vibrantly alive and wow, am I so soooooo proud to work for Catholic Relief Services- the U.S. church walking with the poor around the world. Be proud!

Today we will visit a Bishop in the highlands of Peru who is fighting for the lives and health of his people - a US owned company's smelter polluted a whole region's water, air and soil and put all their children's health in danger. CRS and its partners are in the process of working to advocate for the people and their health. Just found out last night that a group of lawyers are taking up this case and are submitting a class action suit in a NY court with the Peruvian bishops on behalf of the first 100 children suffering from lead poisoning. Hurrah!!!!!!!!!!

(Editor's Note: **The Catholic Relief Services Annual Collection is Sunday, April 3rd.** CRS is the official international humanitarian agency of the U.S. Catholic community, alleviating suffering and providing assistance to people in need in more than 100 countries, without regard to race, religion or nationality.

Catholic Relief Services carries out the commitment of the Bishops of the United States to assist the poor and vulnerable overseas, including bringing water to villagers in Bolivia).



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