

February 5, 2009

Guayaquil, Ecuador

Dear Salesians,

I remember back in 2007 when I first expressed my interest in working with less fortunate children. I invited Juan Carlos Montenegro, my CYM, to breakfast. As we began to order, I told him how I wanted to volunteer in Ecuador with orphaned children. For the past eight months, I have been working with the children in Guayaquil, Ecuador. I believe I have found here my passion in life, and if I had to choose a highlight of my life so far, this would definitely be it. This experience has changed my perception of the world; it has opened my eyes to the reality of poverty, hunger and third world circumstances that are so widespread. It has opened my eyes, and inspired me to become a better person.

In the beginning, I was scared to be in a new country, away from my family and friends, but once you see these children, all of your inhibitions disappear. I used to brush it off when JC would tell me how the experience would change my life. I had no idea how right he was. It's life changing to see an innocent child on the ground and it is a blessing when he makes the decision to return to the oratory with you. I didn't just pick up Vince or Eric, I picked up God, and that is when I knew that God favors those who always have a hard time. Everyday spent here is a gift from God which has allowed me to understand what love for Him is, and I am extremely grateful for that.

The most important thing I've learned here is not to take for granted the things we have, whether those things are shoes, a bowl of rice or parents. Sadly, I took all of those things for granted. Looking back to a year ago, my life was headed downhill, and I had no motivation for school or work. I am leaving Ecuador with a new outlook on life, with new hunger and motivation to continue to help others. This new motivation growing in my heart is the best gift I received from my kids, and it's something money can never buy.

So, where do I see myself in ten years? I see myself making a difference in the world and helping others, maybe not in Ecuador, but hopefully as a firefighter. I thank all of my Salesians brothers and priests who prayed for me and believed in me throughout this experience. You have helped make me become the person I am today.

Sincerely,

Giovanni Garcia