

Candlelight Christmas carries different meaning in Dominican Republic

By Rev. Connie DiLeo* | Dec. 5, 2013

Editor's note: Today we begin a series of reflections about Christmas in faraway lands, written by some of the missionaries supported by the Florida Conference. Rev. Connie DiLeo, based in La Hoya in the Dominican Republic, kicks off the series. Coming Monday, Dec. 9: Christmas in Angola.

There are many things I miss about Christmas in the United States. I really miss the Christmas Eve services at my home church (Aldersgate UMC, Seminole). I loved the 11 p.m. services when you can see all the college students who have returned home for Christmas. Oh, how they have grown since I taught them in their confirmation classes. I loved seeing the families sitting together in their Christmas finery!



Christmas by candlelight, above, is often a necessity in La Hoya, as electrical power is spotty at best. Below, the La Hoya mission provides a Christmas meal of moro, a rice and beans mixture, to those in need in the community. Photos from Connie DiLeo.



Mostly I loved when the lights went out and we began singing “Silent Night.” Our pastor would light his candle from the altar candle, then light the candles of the ushers. They would pass down the aisles of the church and begin passing the flames to the first person in each row. Soon the church was lit up with all the individual candles as we raised our candles to the chorus of this beautiful song.

I miss all the house lights and the Christmas displays in the stores and office buildings. I miss the progressive dinner where we would go from beautiful house to beautiful house to share our meal together. I miss the “adopt a child” program, where gifts were bought to help needy families.

What I don’t miss is the commercialism. The early decorations to me were a desperate call to buy and buy more. People spend money they don’t have feeling the obligation to buy and buy.

Here in the Dominican Republic, presents are not given at Christmas time. Christmas here is more like our Thanksgiving in the U.S. It is about being with family. Everyone here knows why we celebrate Christmas, even if they are not personally a follower of Christ. Christmas Eve dinner is the biggest activity. In my small village, I can walk from house to house visiting and wishing a Merry Christmas. I am invited into each house and after about the third house, I have to beg not to have to eat yet again!

People sit outside with friends and family and simply experience the special night.

I remember complaining one year when in October they began singing Christmas carols in the school assemblies.

“Oh, no, it is only October!” I was complaining to a friend and she said, “But, Connie, Christmas brings us such joy we want to extend it as much as we can.”

Wow! What a different way to look at the October start of Christmas: “Christmas brings such joy!” Not thoughts of buy, buy, buy! Not thoughts of commercialism, but joy.

I haven’t started Christmas Eve candlelight service in our new church because everyone is home with their family. Most of my young believers are from non-churched families, so I do not want to take them away from their families. I have started progressive dinners and they love to go from humble home to humble home, usually eating by candlelight because there is no power. In a way, this is our candlelight “Silent Night” service, and it is beautiful!

****Rev. Connie DiLeo is an ordained deacon who has been serving as a missionary in the Dominican Republic since 2001. Her work includes getting youth and young adults off the streets and introducing them to Jesus Christ, as well as ministering to the Haitian immigrant population in La Hoya. For information about her work and ways you can help, click [here](#). To check out newsletters and blogs from Florida Conference-supported missionaries, click [here](#).***



Comments

1. Doris Campbell wrote on 12/7/2013 4:31:09 PM

Connie, I enjoyed your letter about Christmas in LaHoya! And, yes, it is WAY TOO commercial here in the US. We need to get back to the real meaning of Christmas where giving is the main thing! Loved your photo...you haven't changed! Blessings. Doris Campbell, Friendship UMC, Clearwater

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