

A Report
Colombia 2013 - Rev. Steve Parelli and Jose Ortiz in Colombia
16 Days (Two Weeks & Two Days) of Pro-LGBT, Faith-Based Activism in Colombia
August 17 – September 1, 2013
Other Sheep – othersheepexecs.com

Written by Rev. Stephen Parelli
September 26-27, 2013

Table of Contents

Part I – The People with Whom We Worked in Colombia 2013
Presented in Chronological Order page 1

Part II – The Events and Activities of Other Sheep in Colombia 2013
Narrated around the Key People with whom Steve and Jose worked page 1

- (A) **Miguel Vargas**
Our Host and Other Sheep Book Distributor
- (B & C) **Christina Rojas and Carolina**
Two Women working with the Transgender and their Families
- (D) **Carlos Serrano**, Executive Director of **Radio Diversia**
Jose and Steve to create a weekly radio program in Spanish on faith and sexuality
- (E) **Fidel Ramirez**
A student working on his PhD – and at the same time a real activist
- (F) **Rev. Antonis De J. Calvo**, Trinity Episcopal Church, Cali, Colombia
Episcopal Priest Ministering to the LGBT Community

Part III – (Misc.) An Additional Contact: Clinical Psychologist Carolina Herrera
Initiated by Jose through an advertisement he saw page 5

Part IV – Personal Enrichment through Museums and Points of Interest
Culture, Education & Local Awareness page 6

In Bogota: Monserrate Mountain (with Miguel Vargas), The Gold Museum, The Art Museum and Botero Museum (with Fidel Ramirez), The gay neighbor of Bogota - Chapinero (with Fidel Ramirez), The Louvre Classical Greek Exhibit at the National Museum (with Fidel Ramirez and two friends), The Historical Center: Cathedral and Seat of Government (with Fidel Ramirez), President's Mansion, Calima Mall, Bolivar House Museum.

In Cali: Chipichape Mall, The Museum of Colonial Religious Art housed in La Merced

Part V – Summary of Activities Accomplished page 6

1. Two Literature Items Distributions
2. Two Internet Radio Program Interviews
3. Three Seminars (as featured speakers)
4. Two scheduled Meetings with leaders from two LGBT organizations
5. The Creation of one New Weekly Radio Program with Radio Diversia
6. Misc.: Personal Meet-ups with two LGBT-related leaders

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Part I – The People with Whom We Worked in Colombia 2013

Our time in Colombia, and what we were able to accomplish in two weeks and two days, can best be narrated around the six incredible activists with whom we worked. It is especially because of their efforts, their constant activism, and their connection to other LGBT activists, that we were able to do as much as we did, and for that we thank them.

These activists, named in the chronological order in which we first met, are:

(A) **Miguel Vargas** (Bogota), whom we first met, along with his partner, in **January of 2013**, in our home in the Bronx. As Couchsurfers, Miguel and his partner were our guests for two weeks. Miguel is especially appreciated for his successful efforts in accomplishing the Bogota printing of the book TCAF. He was not generally connected to the LGBT community (although he fast became connected once he began the distribution of the books), and to our knowledge, this was his first time ever to be involved in activism.

(B & C) **Christina Rojas** (Bogota), and **Carolina** (Bogota), whom we first met in Peru, **June 2013**, at the 5th Convention of Latin American Families for Sexual Diversity. Upon meeting, they invited us to be guest speakers on their Internet radio program, “Even in the Best of Families.”

(D) **Carlos Serrano** (Bogota), Executive Director of *Radio Diversia*, whom we first met when he pre-recorded us for an Internet radio program “Even in the Best of Families,” a radio broadcast featured on *Radio Diversia* (Tuesday, **August 20, 2013**)

(E) **Fidel Ramirez** (Bogota), a long standing friend and associate of John Doner, Other Sheep Coordinator for Latin America. It was John Doner who upon learning of our interests in going to Colombia, connected us with Fidel with whom we immediately began to make plans for a meeting in Bogota. It was during this first visit to Colombia that we met Fidel in person (Wednesday, **August 21, 2013**).

(F) **Rev. Antonis De J. Calvo** (Cali), Trinity Episcopal Church, Cali, Colombia. We first met Rev. Antonis in Cali upon the occasion of presenting a seminar on the Bible and homosexuality that was held in his church facilities for the general LGBT community of Cali (Saturday, **August 24, 2013**)

Part II – The Events and Activities of Other Sheep in Colombia 2013

(A) **Miguel Vargas**
Our Host and Other Sheep Book Distributor

Our Host While In Bogota

- How Miguel provided for us, and helped us with some specifics

Miguel and his partner opened their home for us providing us with our own bedroom and private bath, a desk area, and kitchen access. Thankfully, they were just doors away from an Internet café. They were the perfect hosts. Miguel helped us by (1) taking Jose to the mall to get a sim card, etc.; (2) assisting us at the Internet café with the purchasing of our tickets for R/T to Cali, Colombia, for a meeting there; (3) with sightseeing, taking us personally to Monserrate, the mountain overlooking Bogota; (4) introducing us to local eateries and one special high class pizzeria together, and (4) giving us general guidelines and instructions/directions on how to get about.

- 9 nights in Miguel's home; Six nights elsewhere

Of our 15 nights in Colombia, 9 nights were spent in the home of Miguel. (Of the remaining nights, three nights were spent in Bogota central; and three nights in Cali)

Other Sheep Book Distributor

- How Miguel became introduced to TCAF

Miguel is excited about the book The Children Are Free (TCAF) in Spanish. In January, earlier this year, when staying with us for two weeks in the Bronx, New York, Miguel was introduced to The Children Are Free and immediately asked how he could become a part of distributing the book in Colombia. Miguel is an evangelical Pentecostal church-goer and saw the value in getting the book into the hands of Bible-believing Christians.

- How LifeJourney Press makes available the local printing/distributing of TCAF

Because of LifeJourney Press's vision to see the book (TCAF) distributed worldwide, LifeJourney Press has initiated a written "agreement" between Other Sheep and the distribution party (Miguel Vargas in this case), granting permission to the third party to print and distribute TCAF in a local setting (such as Colombia). Other Sheep's part is quality control. LifeJourney Press forgoes all royalties so that the Distributor can affordably print and distribute the book. Albeit, LifeJourney Press maintains the right to withdraw the permission for any reason sufficient to itself. Miguel signed the agreement, with Other Sheep and LifeJourney Press. LifeJourney Press provides the digital text for the printing of the book.

- Cost, and Miguel's oversight of the printing

With 2/3s of the money coming from Other Sheep, and 1/3 of the money provided by Colombia (an individual not named here), Miguel oversaw the printing of 1,000 copies of TCAF, completed just in time for our second week in Bogota with two meetings scheduled. Miguel negotiated the printing, costs, quality, and timing (as soon as the funds became available).

- The selling price of a single copy of the book TCAF

Note: The 1,000 copies are general to be sold at a price just above printing costs (of the purpose of recouping the initial investment in order to print more); the books are not being distributed free of cost. However, the signed agreement indicates that Miguel is the sole proprietor of the project, including at what price to sell the books

Miguel's activities in distributing the book TCAF

- Miguel is creating a separate store/office space in his home for the storing, displaying and selling of TCAF.
- Miguel attended the following events with Steve and Jose where he could make known and/or display the book:
 - **Thursday, August 22, 2013** – LGBT Center, ABBA PADRE, a Christian fellowship and bible study group. With the book ready to come hot off the press, Miguel attended this meeting announcing the forth-coming book

- **Tuesday, August 27, 2013** – Meeting on “Spiritualties, the Bible and Sexual Diversity.” Miguel attended the meeting, bringing a box load of TCAF (hot off the press), creating an attractive display table. Several copies were sold.
- **Saturday, August 31, 2013** – Meeting with Bogota’s PFLAG/ or Families for Sexual Diversity group. Again, Miguel displayed copies of the book TCAF. A few copies were sold.
- Miguel is in contact with Rev. Antonis Calvo of Cali; they have made arrangements for bringing books to Cali for distribution there.

(B & C) Christina Rojas and Carolina
Two Women working with the Transgender and their Families

Christina and her transgender son; And how we became involved with their ministries

- Christina is the mother of a transgender man. Carolina is her friend. Together they work with the transgender and their families through an Internet radio program and through a parents-son-&-daughter meeting they lead primarily for transgender. Christina and Carolina asked Steve and Jose to be involved with both their radio program (as well as their son’s radio program, so it turned out) and to present before their meeting with parents and sons and daughters. Christina and Carolina met Jose and Steve at the June 2013 Peru 5th Convention of Families for Sexual Diversity and invited them to join in ministry with them when in Bogota. With Christina and Carolina, Steve and Jose were involved in the following two radio programs, and the one meeting/seminar:
 1. **Tuesday August 20, 2013** – Internet radio program interview, making a pre-recording. Steve and Jose made a pre-recording at the studio of Radio Diversia with Christina and Carolina with their radio program “Even in the Best of Families.” Jose was featured primarily (being a Spanish speaker). Steve, however, did contribute some in English with Jose translating. The interview primarily was testimonial: telling our stories, but also our view point on some of the issues. The show can be found at <http://www.radiodiversia.com/#!hasta-en-las-mejores-familias/zoom/cihc/imagetq9>
 2. **Friday, August 23, 2013** – Live internet radio interview with Camilo, a transgender young man and the son of Christina, for the radio program Transgender Traffic Signals. Jose was featured. The show can be found at <http://www.radiodiversia.com/#!senales-de-transito/c1t3e>
 3. **Saturday, August 31, 2013** – Steve and Jose presented at a regular meeting for the parents and trans-sons & trans-daughters of for sexually diversified families. Jose presented a PowerPoint on the Bible and homosexuality at the request of the leaders who testified that the topic is extremely important. **17 or more people attended.** Miguel Vargas, Other Sheep book distributor for Colombia, was present and displayed and sold the book TCAF

(D) Carlos Serrano, Executive Director of *Radio Diversia*
Jose and Steve to Create a weekly radio program in Spanish on faith and sexuality

How this new radio program came about

- Carlos, the director of Radio Diversia, was the technician who recorded our Tuesday evening pre-recording for the radio program “Even in the Best of Families.” He said he was impressed with two things: (1) Jose’s radio voice, and (2) Steve’s answering a question on gay marriage by sharing his personal experience around his marriage with Jose - the telling of a personal story. With that, Carlos asked Steve and Jose to produce a weekly program from the Bronx on faith and homosexuality for broadcasting over Radio Diversia. To be broadcast on Sunday mornings.

4. **Friday, August 30, 2013** - Steve and Jose spent the greater part of the day with Carlos discussing the radio show and recording segments announcing the show and the credits of the radio show which would be incorporated into every show - signing on, signing off.

(E) Fidel Ramirez

A student working on his PhD – and at the same time a real activist

Fidel was our key contact in Bogota from the standpoint that he has a long-standing history of being connected with Other Sheep (through John Doner Coordinator for Latin America). Jose and Steve did not have to introduce Other Sheep to Fidel (as was the case with our other contacts in Bogota). In fact, Fidel was able to give Jose and Steve a little more insight into the history and impact of Otras Ovejas (Other Sheep in Spanish) in Latin America, remarking how much he appreciated John Doner as Coordinator, and Tom Hanks' seminar(s). When we mentioned the book TCAF, he told us how he knew about it, and he was all smiles (as he always is all smiles), and said he was the one who thought of the Spanish title for the book!

Fidel was key in connecting us to other LGBT activists in Bogota

5. **Wednesday, August 21, 2013** - Fidel arranged for, and conducted us to, a meeting of the General Coordinator of Kairos Educativo, in the offices of Kairos Educativo. **Fernando Millian**, the General Coordinator, spent the hour giving us an in depth understanding of the mission and vision, and the principles behind the work, of Kairos Educativo (of course, as always, Jose translated). Later, Jose and Steve introduced Fernando Millian to Carlos by email. Fernando and **Judith Baptist Fajardo** (Coordinator of Care Education and Theology for Kairos Educativo) participated in the Tuesday, August 27, meeting that Fidel organized (see item # 7 below)
6. **Thursday, August 22, 2013** – Fidel met up with Steve and Jose and conducted them to the Bogota LGBT center to attend ABBA PADRE, a gay-Christian Bible study fellowship that meets weekly. Miguel arrived later at the meeting and took the opportunity to mention the book TCAF to be available the following week. Fidel announced the Tuesday, August 27, seminar and invited people to sign-up for that night (for security reasons, for entrance to the campus). Steve and Jose were given a couple minutes to introduce Other Sheep to the group. Following the meeting, Steve and Jose with Fidel and Miguel, accompanied a few people from the meeting, including the group's leader **David**, to a local eatery for snacks and chat.

Fidel orchestrated an Interfaith, multi activist-group seminar – around 50 people attend

7. **Tuesday, August 27, 2013** – A seminar on “Spiritualties, the Bible and Sexual Diversity” at which Jose was the featured speaker presenting a PowerPoint on the Bible and homosexuality. Fidel orchestrated the meeting, incorporating several LGBT groups who each gave a few remarks on their organization, and commencing the meeting with an attitude of self-reflection (God-ward). The seminar took place at the Universidad Minuto de Dios, Cundinamarca, Bogota, Colombia. About 50 people attended. Steve provided 50 complimentary copies of his paper “Talking Points” (in Spanish, on the topic of the Bible and homosexuality). This is the paper that Jonatan of Guatemala translated from English to Spanish (just two weeks before), making the paper finally available in Spanish.

Fidel spent much of his “free time” just getting to know us

8. **Wednesday, August 21, 2013** – Upon our first meet-up with Fidel – about a couple hours before we were to have our appointment with Kairos Educativo (which Fidel had arranged, above #5) – Fidel gives us a whirlwind tour of the art museum (Bank of the Republic Art Collection) and the center (where the old Cathedral stands), before walking us down blocks of the very popular Carrera 7 street to where our appointment was). Following the appointment, Fidel continues our walk northward to his university campus for a quick view, and then from there a taxi to the LGBT neighborhood where we have dinner in a Mexican restaurant and visit a couple LGBT bars before spending the evening at

his favorite live drag-show (great entertainment) bar (a very popular place), and then finally conducting us to his apartment to see his living quarters. From there we take a taxi to Miguel's home (our residence while in Bogota)

9. **Thursday, August 29, 2013** – Steve and Jose meet Fidel for lunch in the gay center of Bogota to discuss further his possible involvement with Other Sheep as Coordinator for Colombia (upon approval of the Other Sheep board). While at lunch two of his friends (two young ladies, both speakers of English as a second language, and very fun-loving) happen to see us and join us at our table. They continue the remainder of the afternoon with us, going with us to the National Museum where we see, together, an exhibit from the Louvre (Paris) on classical Greek vases! (Just fantastic!). The museum closes suddenly, early, due to demonstrations and a nation-wide strike for fear of vandalism to the museum itself. We are hurried out of the museum, into the streets, where we can observe already the effects of the strike (vandalism on the walls of buildings up and down the street). Fidel accompanies us a little longer (the two young ladies having left by now) and then, because of other commitments, Fidel says good-bye to us, after being sure we have our bearings.

(F) Rev. Antonis De J. Calvo, Trinity Episcopal Church, Cali, Colombia
Episcopal Priest Ministering to the LGBT Community

A contact through John Doner

- I believe it was John Doner Coordinator for Latin America who gave Rev. Calvo's contact information to Jose upon hearing we were making plans to visit Colombia. In turn, Jose contacted Rev. Antonis (as we came to call him) who expressed his desire to host possible meeting(s) in Cali.

Our R/T flight Cali-Bogota

- Steve and Jose flew from Bogota to Cali on Saturday, August 24, in time for the same-day seminar (an evening event) at Rev. Calvo's church. Steve and Jose returned to Bogota, by air, on Tuesday, August 27, in time for the same-day seminar (an evening event) with Fidel.

What we were able to accomplish with Rev. Antonis

10. **Saturday, August 24, 2013** – Using the facilities of Trinity Episcopal Church, Steve Parelli and Jose Ortiz presented a PowerPoint on the Bible and homosexuality to a group of about 30 - 40 people from the LGBT community; following the seminar, Quiron, an LGBT organization, celebrated a mile-stone anniversary with memoirs, testimonies, and drag shows. It was a fantastic time. Rev. Antonis provided transportation to and from our hotel in Bogota.
11. **Monday, August 26, 2013** – During the morning, Rev. Antonis with two leaders from Quiron, met up with us for coffee and an informal meeting to discuss, among other things, the possibility of doing something together in the future. It was during this time that Steve asked Rev. Antonis if he would be interested in being a Co-Coordinator for Other Sheep with Fidel. Fidel and Rev. Antonis were immediately connected by phone and together they were agreeable with the idea of being Co-Coordiators for Colombia.

Part III – (Misc.) An Additional Contact, Initiated by Jose through an advertisement he saw

- Jose, having seen a brochure in the offices of Radio Diversia, contacted Carolina Herrera, a clinical psychologist who provides therapy counseling with individuals of, and with parents and families of, the

LGBT community, and made an appointment to get to know her. Of course, since Jose's MA is in applied psychology, and since he is a counselor in the public schools of NYC, he was personally interested in meeting Carolina

12. **Saturday, August 31, 2013** – Fortunately, Carolina (the clinical psychologist) was to be at a meeting in the same building Jose was to give a seminar just prior to Jose's meeting. So Jose and Steve arrived early and Jose was able to have a private meeting with Carolina for about 30 minutes. They informed each of their respective work and exchanged contact information.

Part IV – Personal Enrichment through Museums and Points of Interest – Culture, Education & Local Awareness

In chronological order per city, we visited the following places of interest. But first some notes:

- Often we toured these places with someone from the LGBT community so that we had the additional advantage of getting to know someone with whom we were working
- These places of interest were predominately cultural, educational, or gave increased general awareness of the city's attributes, which we believe adds to our effectiveness
- These attractions are a diversion from our Other Sheep work which refreshes us for the work.
- These places were squeezed-in between meetings and administrative responsibilities, with as little as an hour or 90 minutes available for the visit, in some cases.

In Bogota:

- (i) **Montserrat Mountain**, a mountain top overlooking the city of Bogota (**with Miguel**, our host with whom we stayed)
- (ii) **The Gold Museum**, a fascinating, world-renowned museum that gives an historical accounting of the Inca's life around gold, having the world's largest "pre-Hispanic gold work collection" (with just ourselves)
- (iii) **The Art Museum and Botero Museum (with Fidel Ramirez)**
- (iv) **The gay neighbor of Bogota, Charinero** – bars, restaurants, drag show (**with Fidel Ramirez**)
- (v) **The Louvre Classical Greek Exhibit** on exhibit at the National Museum (**with Fidel Ramirez and two friends**)
- (vi) **The Historical Center: Cathedral, President's Mansion, Seat of Government** (by ourselves)
- (vii) **Calima Mall** – (by ourselves, at the end of the day after creating the spots for new weekly radio program; we invited Miguel to join us, but he was unable to come. From the elevated parking lot, we took in an awe-inspiring view of Bogota's skyline against the mountains; we enjoyed one of our best-tasting meals ever (so it seemed), and viewed 3-D movie in the mall!)
- (viii) **Bolivar House Museum** (just ourselves)

In Cali:

- (ix) **Chipichape Mall**, we visited this mall for the purpose of purchasing a camera, which we did (Steve's camera was stolen); however, the mall is an attraction in itself, and on Sunday (as it was), it was teeming with people and activities, a car show and amusement rides for children.
- (x) **The Museum of Colonial Religious Art** housed in **La Merced** (an old church and functioning convent)

Part V – Summary of Activities Accomplished

7. **Two Literature Items Distributions** (TCAF & Steve's paper on homosexuality and the Bible)

- The printing of 1,000 copies of the book TCAF in Bogota, to be sold at close-to-cost
 - Book distributor Miguel Vegas – (arranged with JourneyLife Press), designated Other Sheep Book distributor in Colombia
 - Steve’s paper on the Bible and homosexuality (in Spanish) – distributed at Fidel’s Tuesday, August 27 seminar (about 50 attendees) and at the Saturday, August 31 parents/family sexual diversity meeting (about 17 attendees)
8. **Two Internet Radio Program Interviews** Aired with Radio Diversia
 - One pre-recorded interview with “Even the Best Families” radio program (Tuesday, August 20)
 - One live interview with “TRANSit Signals” radio program (Friday, August 23)
 9. **Three Seminars** (Jose is the featured guest speaking showing a PowerPoint, created by Steve and translated by Jonatan of Guatemala)
 - Cali – with about 30-40 people attending from the LGBT community; hosted at Trinity Episcopal Church by Rev. Antonis Calvo and Quiron, an LGBT organization (Saturday, August 24)
 - Bogota – with about 50 people attending from the LGBT faith and non-faith community; hosted at Universidad Minuto de Dios, Cundinamarca, Bogotá, Colombia, organized by Fidel Ramirez (Tuesday, August 27)
 - Bogota – with about 17 people attending from the LGBT community, primarily a transgender audience of parents and family; hosted by Cristina Rojas and Carolina (Saturday, August 31)
 10. **Two scheduled Meetings with leaders from two LGBT organizations**
 - Bogota – Fernando Torres Millan and Judith Bautista Fajardo of Kairos Educativo, arranged by Fidel Ramirez (Wednesday, August 21)
 - Cali – Javier Uribe Ruiz and Hector of Quiron), arranged by Rev. Antonis Colva (Monday, August 26)
 11. **The creation of one New Weekly Radio Program with Radio Diversia**
 - Created by Radio Diversia Director Carlos Serrano with Jose and Steve, to feature faith and sexual diversity, a weekly Sunday pre-recorded program for those with interest in religion and faith (August 30, 2013)
 12. **Misc.: Two Personal Meet-ups with LGBT-related leaders**
 - David, the spiritual leader of the LGBT Christian fellowship ABBA PADRE, arranged by Fidel Rameriz (August 22, 2013), by attending an ABBA PADRE meeting and going out afterwards
 - Carolina Herrer, a clinical psychologist. Meeting arranged by Jose after reading an brochure on Carolina (August 31, 2013)