

Jim Byrnes' CHIRIKAYEN EXPERIENCE

April 2010

My name is Jim Byrne, I am living and volunteering in Chirikayen in order to put in practice the ideas of solidarity with the oppressed as expressed by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Freire believes that true solidarity with the oppressed begins when a person enters the world of the oppressed in order to be with them, to fight at their side in order to understand the life, the experiences, and the conditions in which they live. This approach has the purpose of dialoging with the oppressed, speaking with them in the terms of their living conditions, in order to pose questions of their conditions as problems within the context of their material conditions so they may better contextualize their world within the conditions imposed on them and the systems that have created those conditions.

My length of stay is 24 weeks, which is enough time to understand their conditions and have conversations about their conditions but is certainly not enough time to carry through the learning cycle embedded in Freire's theory of Popular Education. However, the previous 10 weeks have allowed me to experience how this community produces things necessary for their reproduction of themselves. For example, the staple crop of the indigenous here is yucca, which they harvest, peel, clean, grind, and bake into a bread called casabe. To perform this production much hard, physical labor is involved. If they are able to produce a surplus, some bring that into Santa Elena to sell in the market for a wage.

This understanding, which one attains only through a significant amount of time will allow me to take the steps of dialoging with this community in order to more deeply understand their world and begin to pose questions to them as problems they could address. I am looking forward to my remaining 14 weeks and the potential that exists to learn more with the people of Chirikayen.

If there any questions about my experience in Chirikayen so far, please email me: jbyrne2@gmail.com

Thanks.

