

Thanksgiving Day at the Colegio Americano

Danny Potts, Secondary Section

Thanksgiving Day 2011 was a very special day for everyone at the Colegio Americano. The Colegio had been alive with activity for days if not weeks leading up to the celebration of this very important American holiday. Teachers, staff and students were involved in decorating and preparing special programs to be presented on the big day. The theme for November was "Gracias a Dios por tus bondades," (Thank you God for your kindnesses). Much time was spent leading up to Thanksgiving Day teaching the students the history and meaning of this day.

The students were instrumental in collecting non-perishable food items for those who are less fortunate so that they too could enjoy the Thanksgiving holiday. In the afternoon, families in need were invited to the chapel at the Colegio where all of us shared in a time of worship and praise to God because He is the one we are thanking. Afterward, the students of the secondary section distributed the food to the various families. There were approximately 200 men, women and children present to receive the food. It was a real blessing to see the joy in all faces, those receiving and those sharing. There was a time during the festivities when the students escorted the children outside for refreshments and games. I thought, "this is what Thanksgiving is all about." We show our gratitude and love to God by showing it to those around us, our family, friends, and even those people we don't know. The Bible says that if we say we love God whom we cannot see and do not love those we can see, we are liars (1 John 4:20).

The big day culminated after 3pm when the staff and teachers of the Colegio with invited guests came together again in the chapel for a time of worship and a message about the giving of thanks was shared by assistant Chaplain Blanca Camacho. Afterward, Danny Potts gave a brief presentation on the history and meaning of Thanksgiving as an American holiday and tradition. There was then a time of sharing among the families present and prayer and praise was offered to God before we sat down for Thanksgiving dinner. This was to be the first Thanksgiving celebrated at the Colegio with turkey! Everyone was waiting in anticipation for their portion of this traditional Thanksgiving bird. Turkey is very expensive in Colombia and so it is not eaten very much. Due to the generosity of our family in Christ in the U.S., we received money for purchasing the turkeys. Everyone enjoyed the meal which also included mashed potatoes and some good Colombian food prepared by many of the kind employees of the Colegio, too. There are so many people who worked to make this possible and not enough room in this article to thank them all. Joey Potts (who's been battling mosquito bites) oversaw the preparation of the turkeys and the nice folks at a restaurant in Jamundi, a small town near Cali, cooked them for us. They used a huge adobe oven to cook the turkeys. What a blessed time it was, God is good!

Finally, Thanksgiving Day did not end that evening. It concluded with a celebration with those who work in the Transportation department of the Colegio on Friday morning. We were happy for them to share in this holiday and a taste of turkey and the trimmings because they couldn't be with us the previous day. I appreciate Angelica Poveda and Robert Nuñez for their help in translation for the program. It was great for Joey and me to share in this holiday with our new family at the Colegio Americano and we look forward to more celebrations together.

Primary Section

In its more than 80 year history, the Colegio Americano has celebrated Thanksgiving as a school numerous times. What makes this year special is the American style turkey being served for the teachers and staff. AND THE SCHOOL HAS GONE ALL OUT TO CELEBRATE! From bulletin boards to art projects to class presentations; Thanksgiving is everywhere.

The origin and meaning of the holiday is explained in each class as they prepare their artwork, songs, readings and skit for the school assembly. It seems that just about all of the artwork has been centered around the turkey. I didn't know you could make so many different kinds of turkeys. The Pre-primary Art Kiosk looks like we've been slaughtering birds en mass with colorful feathers flying furiously everywhere. Makes my nose itch to think about it. Did you know you can turn a tennis ball into a maracca gobbler? Just need paint, googly eyes, pipe cleaners and lots of glue and feathers. I wonder how long they'll look like a turkey after its been bounced around their homes a few times. (Parents just love the art projects.)

Emphasis is placed on being thankful, though. A collection of food is gathered to distribute to the less fortunate with each grade being responsible to bring a particular item, like rice. There are so many poor and desperate people; we have so much to be thankful for. As I write this, I think how comfortable my home is, that I'm not hungry or in pain. I have so many friends near and far, and a great family back home who support what we're doing here. There have been some tragedies in the past 2 months, but God is still on His throne and He carries us through them all. I feel for those touched by these tragic events and continue to pray for their peace and comfort.

Word was given for students and teachers to dress up as Pilgrims, Indians, and turkeys as part of the holiday festivities. So I went with 4 teachers to a downtown market area looking for feathers and the necessary items to transform themselves into colorful turkeys. Imagine several streets covered with various venders hawking their wares to a crowd of people that can barely squeeze through to buy anything. All of the stores have their doors open and are coaxing you to buy from them. You go up a flight of stairs that open up to even more entrepreneurs. From what I'm told, after Thanksgiving, prices go up and the crowds get more intense as shoppers begin their Christmas quest for gifts in earnest. Black Friday at Wal-Mart is a walk in the park compared to these bargain hunters. It was a great opportunity to teach my friends the phrase "mad house". From what I've seen, you can buy anything at these markets. My friends helped me maneuver through the people and make some purchases. They also forced me to practice my Spanish. I didn't talk much. These girls were my kind of shoppers though. We shopped 'til we got too tired to do any more, which was about 7 hours! All of this leads to that grand Turkey Day. It all started with someone at school asking if I knew how to cook a turkey. It snowballed "butter-balled" from there. We get the okay from the school's administrators and the plan is set in motion.

The Thanksgiving Dinner, for about 200-300 teachers, staff and their spouses, is to be after school Thursday. The students will be treated to a huge variety of fruits following their program early in the day. In the midst of preparations, the birds need to be bought, thawed in time, and ready to eat by 3:15 that same day. Less than a week before the big "T" Day, one of the teachers offers the use of a friend's restaurant. It has a fairly large, handmade, adobe-type, outdoor oven, AND we can smoke all of these lovely birds at one time!

I just need to be there the entire time to prepare, cook and then have them ready to take back

to the school before 3:00. The restaurant owner needs to have the oven ready in order to start his cooking for the day at 2:00. Did I mention this place was about 20-30 minutes away from the school?! It was nerve –wracking! Of course , everything went smoothly after that.

We hope everyone had a blessed Thanksgiving and received a smile and a full tummy. My Thanksgiving meal was at that restaurant with a specially prepared steak dinner by candlelight in the middle of the afternoon. The owner and his wife were so generous with the use of their oven, and so patient with the mess that my fellow pre-school teachers Robert, Andres and I made in their kitchen. The owner's wife took time with me to help me learn a few Colombian cooking tips as I shared how to prepare a turkey and make gravy. We hope you enjoy the pictures of the Thanksgiving event on the website!