

Revival Breaks Out at Bolivia Gospel Festival

A sea of white flags have blanketed the stands of the Rafael Mendoza Castellon stadium for three nights since March 8—a sign of surrender to God for Christians and many who trekked as far as several hundred miles to attend the Festival of Hope in La Paz, Bolivia.

What took place on the fútbol field March 8-10 trumped the towering mountains and brownish-red cliffs that surrounded the venue.

Each night, tens of thousands of people sat elbow-to-elbow to hear a gospel message from **Franklin Graham** at the Festival de Esperanza (Festival of Hope).

There was also entertainment, including colorful dancers, lively acts like clowns and chickens, and music by popular Latin American Christian artists including Alex Campos, who took the stage on Sunday.

What was perhaps most encouraging was the number of young people that either volunteered for the Festival or simply decided to tag along and sit in the stands with friends.

And that's the good news, considering the social issues Bolivian youth face.

One translator said human trafficking of girls is an often unspoken issue. Then there's easy access to alcohol and drugs.

"Young people today are coming under the influences of things that are very troubling," Franklin Graham said. "There is a battle for the youth of this nation."

But the battle is not lost.

On all three nights of the Festival of Hope, many of those who came to Christ were under age 25. The most salvations were from young people ages 10-18.

Andrea, 14, was one of them. A friend who's a Christian invited her to the last day of the Festival.

"She said there are a lot of problems in her home. Her parents fight a lot and she doesn't want her siblings to do what they do," explained Paola, a Festival counselor.

As Franklin Graham preached from Mark 8:34-37 (*...what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?*) Andrea felt a nudge inside.

"Are you sure your soul is secure?" Franklin Graham asked the crowd.

Andrea wasn't sure so she walked forward. Paola was waiting with open arms to pray for her and her family.

Valeria, 19, had a similar experience while sitting in the stands. She didn't want to come to the Festival at first.

"But when she heard the word of God, her heart was captivated," Valeria's counselor, 19-year-old Rebecca, said.

Although happy about her decision, Valeria's family members aren't Christians, and she was sad that "they couldn't feel the love she felt in her heart like she had never felt before."

Peace of God

La Paz means "peace" in Spanish and by day three of the Festival, there was a sense of serenity among Festival leaders and volunteers.

The long journey many attendees took parallel the work done behind the scenes to pull off the event. It took 18 months to

prepare.

"We saw unity of the body of Christ that is impossible to create, humanly speaking," Festival committee chair Johnny Dueri said.

Now a year-and-a-half and nearly 5,000 salvations later, the effort has been more than worth it.

Before leaving the stage, Franklin Graham summed it up best:

"If I don't get to see you again, I'll see you in Heaven."

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