Panama is a Central American country best known for the Panama Canal, which allows ships access between the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean. Christopher Columbus visited the land in 1502, and during its colonial days, it served as a key shipping point between Spain and South America. Today, it is home to the widest variety of wildlife in Central America, including the Harpy Eagle.

Home to rich mahogany forests, Panama is also an exporter of gold, as well as pineapples, watermelons, and bananas. However, most of its economy relies on services that revolve around the Panama Canal, such as operations, container ports, tourism and offshore banking.

Panama’s people are called Panamanians, two-thirds of whom are mestizo, a blend of indigenous and Spanish European ancestry. Nearly half of Panama’s 3.7 million people live in the capital, Panama City. Drug trafficking poses a significant problem in Panama; its strategic location allows for heavy drug exportation. The issue also drives Panama’s murder rate higher.

**Ministry Response**

There is tremendous opportunity to share God’s love and reach out with the Gospel in Panama. Lutheran Hour Ministries (LHM–Panama) responds to the spiritual hunger across this Central American country through a variety of strategies:

**HOLISTIC OUTREACH.** Clothing distribution is an important outreach opportunity for us. Through our social work program, we work with high school students to collect toys, which we distribute to children living in low-income areas. We also visit hospitalized children from these areas, as well as call on elderly individuals whose families have abandoned them.

**LIVE EVENTS.** We work with local congregations to organize movies, puppet shows, and other special events to proclaim the Gospel to communities. We also participate in public holiday parades. Partnering with the Bible Society of Panama and the Lutheran Heritage Foundation, we distribute Bibles to people who do not have them.

**YOUTH MINISTRY.** As adolescents struggle with conflicting moral and social choices, our Project JOEL program tackles tough topics—from relationships to sex to drugs—in an honest, relevant manner, rooted in God’s love for them. Because Project JOEL is approved by the Ministry of Education, we are authorized to bring the program to schools. We also aim to expand community outreach by offering youth forums, contests, and other activities.
EQUIPPING THE SAINTS. LHM–Panama staff and volunteers partner with local pastors to conduct Equipping the Saints (ETS) workshops. Each session provides Christians with practical ways to carry the Gospel into their local communities. After attending the workshops, believers feel more confident sharing the Good News with their neighbors and inviting them to local congregations. We continue to keep in touch with the participants to help them apply what they learned.

BIBLE CORRESPONDENCE COURSES. LHM–Panama offers Bible Correspondence Courses (BCCs) to introduce the Gospel to people who don’t know Jesus, and to reinforce a biblical understanding for people who do. When someone responds to an outreach activity, LHM–Panama will typically invite the respondent to begin a BCC as the next step in his or her spiritual journey. One key avenue for promoting BCCs is LHM–Panama’s live events.

DIGITAL OUTREACH. Young adults gravitate to the internet seeking help, including millions who are curious—or have doubts—about Christianity. The Vivenciar.net website serves as our hub for digital outreach in Panama and throughout Latin America. Through Vivenciar, we establish online relationships with individuals and provide biblically-based answers for their lives. Eventually, as God opens their hearts, we share the Gospel with them and guide them into church.

Impact

HEART OF A CHILD:
How a Child Experienced God’s Love through Lutheran Hour Ministries

Arjun is in the fifth grade. He lives in a less privileged area of a large city, but he takes part in a program that allows him to attend school in a more stable area. Many children like Arjun come from dangerous places. Oftentimes, exposure to violence at such young ages leads to harassment and other behavioral issues in school. Because of their divergent home lives, children like Arjun struggle to build healthy relationships with other students.

LHM staff first met Arjun when he was in kindergarten. LHM brings its popular Project JOEL program to his school, a program whereby we promote positive values among youth that will set them up for a safe, successful future. Starting at a young age, Arjun began to participate in LHM’s puppet shows, songs, games, and readings. He also participated in presentations for the students and staff every Monday.

Today, LHM and Project JOEL have made a difference in Arjun’s life. His confidence has grown as he learns how to make responsible choices. One step at a time, he is learning how to escape the background into which he was born. By God’s grace, we celebrate with Arjun as he prepares to enter a bright, more hopeful future.

LHM.ORG/GLOBAL