

By Kris Konick Special Correspondent Have you ever been on a mission, received a mission, and had it change your life entirely? A mission by its very definition is an assignment or a calling. That is exactly what happened to former East Washington Elementary School teacher Kellie Stewart. Kellie was living a comfortable life in a job she loved, teaching at East Washington where she had been for 16 years, 14 of which she spent teaching fourth grade.

In addition to teaching, Kellie coached girls basketball for 12 years while at East Washington. So her life was just that, comfortable.

She was in a job she loved, with the best people, the best boss, and was sure that she would one day retire from her teaching career. But those were “Kellie’s” plans.

At the time Kellie was living in apartments directly behind Northside Christian Church and she would sometimes commute from New Albany to the church in Pekin where she grew up, Mt. Zion Baptist Church. But on those not always regular times when she would set out to make the trek, Kellie would inevitably get tied up in traffic going into and coming out of Northside Christian Church. At one point Kellie claims she got so frustrated with the traffic that she decided to quit fighting it and instead go and see what all the fuss was about at Northside. It

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was with that small and what she thought insignificant decision that the course of her life began to be drastically altered.

Kellie grew up in church but once an adult spent some time with it not being in the forefront of her life. And then there was traffic. In 2007, at Northside she found what she wasn’t even looking for at the time.

It was that year where she rededicated her life to Christ and felt a strong desire for serving and missions, specifically international missions.

She left her coaching position that same year as she felt the direction of her life just beginning to change. And in 2008, Kellie went on her first mission trip through Northside Christian Church, to Costa Rica.

In 2009, she found herself again on a mission team to Costa Rica where she served with L.A.D.O. (Latin America Discipleship & Outreach) Ministry.

Relationships were formed between LADO founders Edgar and Julie Zuluaga and Kellie.

Kellie continued to teach and to serve at church but felt a strong desire to serve internationally.

She was approached by Edgar with the idea that Kellie could take a year off of work to study Spanish, a must for serving in that part of the world. That being a little more than she thought she thought she might be ready for, Kellie presented the idea to her church (Northside Christian Church) that she lead a mission team to serve in Costa Rica for six weeks in the summer of 2011.

Expecting to have a list of teachers and college students (normally off in the summertime), not one person responded with an interest in the trip. After much prayer and consulting with the Zuluaga's, Kellie made the journey alone. She spent four weeks living with a Peruvian family in Costa Rica where she studied Spanish and the remaining two weeks she spent serving with the Zuluaga's in Columbia. It was during that time that Kellie says "God really wowed her heart" with many intricate details which all seemed to point to Kellie continuing to serve with L.A.D.O. abroad.

Upon returning home in the summer of 2011, Kellie said she dove into the Bible and asked what it was God wanted from her, for her to do with her life.

Again it was mentioned by the Zuluaga's that Kellie could possibly take a year off from her job and study Spanish.

After six months of prayer, Kellie applied for a sabbatical from her teaching job. She spoke with the principal of her school as well as the school board and all were in favor with their full support.

In June of 2012 she began her journey, again overseas. From June to December of 2012 she lived with the same Peruvian family she had in 2011 where she spent time studying Spanish. And from January to June of 2013 she went to live with the Zuluaga's in Columbia where she again served with L.A.D.O. While in Columbia, Kellie says that God "started chipping away" at her heart. She loved serving the Latino community in Columbia and how evident it was that the Latino people in that area put so much emphasis on relationships. During that time she took part in teaching English, discipling women, and working with children.

Kellie says it was undeniable that God moved in her heart and showed her that he wanted her for ministry. All of which was the furthest thing from "her" mind and "her" plans. According to Kellie she "loved her job, worked with the best people, for the best boss. "The only better boss is Jesus Christ and that is who I want to work for." While she loved serving, Kellie had always planned that she would retire from East Washington Elementary School and live in Southern Indiana.

But through much continued prayer, God continued to change Kellie's heart and the course of her life.

Considering that it seemed crystal clear that God wanted her for ministry in Columbia, Kellie still thought she might go back to her teaching job, save up for another trip, and then return to Columbia. But continued prayer led Kellie's return to Columbia sooner rather than later.

And after just returning home in June of 2013, on July 3, 2013 Kellie resigned from her teaching position of 16 years. Her life and her plan began to be one where she was doing everything she could to get back to Columbia where she felt called to.

She began to sell everything she owned and in a matter of months was able to do so with the exception of still needing to sell her vehicle and her home.

Kellie said she knew the most difficult thing would of course not be things but telling her family about the move. Closeness and spending time with her parents, sister, and her sister's family were things Kellie treasured. She said it was gut wrenching to think of telling them but again she prayed and the words came.

Her message to them was, "I love you, but I love God more" and she of course received their support, too.

If someone had told Kellie not long ago that she would be making these changes and moving to Columbia to serve in missions she would never have believed it.

She remarked that when people ask her "So you must really like it in Columbia?" Her answer is "I really love Southern Indiana." But again, it is the strong desire in her heart that has caused such significant change in her and in her entire life.

In the support letter she sent to friends and family this September, Kellie's words were "I have felt the Holy Spirit pressing upon me a great urgency to tell people about Him, burdening me with the salvation of others, and giving me the desire to only spend my time on the eternal." And later, "I wasted many years living for myself and now only desire to spend the rest of my life glorifying God by telling people the Good News of his son Jesus Christ."

When she returns to Columbia early next year, Kellie will continue to serve with L.A.D.O. She will work in many of the same areas such as discipling women, working with children, and teaching English. There are many in Columbia who want to learn English. They see it as a way to better themselves as it then enables them to get jobs where speaking English is desirable. So L.A.D.O. missionaries give a 45 minute English lesson, then offer a break, a devotional completely in Spanish so that it can be best understood, they teach worship songs in English, and then finish with the English lesson. It is a great opportunity to not only teach and enable the people they work with but to give them something of much greater value at the same time.

In addition to those opportunities, Kellie is most excited about a recent addition to the village in Columbia, a water purification system and working with an entire "squatters' village". Previously, the residents all purchased water that still contained some parasites and some suffered illnesses as a result. But just this past summer, the water purification system was installed in the local church so that residents could receive not only clean water but "Living Water". And then there is the squatters' village. This is an area where about 1,000 displaced families live outside of the city in a state of poverty. Many live in houses that are made from sticks and manure with dirt floors inside their makeshift homes and no running water. Kellie is very excited about the opportunity to build relationships with the people in the squatters' village.

She will also be teaching, discipling women, and working with the at risk children in that village in addition to the other work that L.A.D.O. focuses on in Columbia.

A common theme repeated by Kellie when telling her story is “why me God?” And not the why me most would think of as in “Why me? Why should I have to give up my life to go and serve?” But Kellie’s “why me” is one that says “Why me God? Why would you choose someone so ‘normal’ with no particular or special talents or skills and abilities?”

In addition to her strong desire and heart for God, she has a spirit of humility for having been called to serve.

Kellie said many think and have openly told her that she must be crazy to leave a great job, a great life, her family, to give it all up, to sell everything she owns, and move away. To most that does sound crazy and

of course Kellie understands. Only she has walked through this process of hearing the call and spending many hours, days, months, and years in prayer throughout. So only she can fully understand what has been placed in her heart but truthfully even she doesn’t fully understand it.

She only knows as much as where she is today and what she feels she is supposed to do. She has watched and marveled at how God has provided the rest time and time again and she has faith that he will continue to. A worst case scenario once popped into her head as she thought “I could be homeless but I still have God.” She is often met with many asking her why would she choose to serve internationally and not here in our country where there are plenty of needs as well. Her answer is that she never chose it at all but she is only following a path chosen for her.

As mentioned earlier, ever since Kellie returned home from Columbia over the summer she has been doing everything she can to get back to the mission field there. She has sold most everything she owned, sent support letters letting her friends and family know of her journey, and she has been invited to speak at local churches and events to share her story. If you are interested in supporting Kellie or having her speak at your church or event you can contact her directly at (812) 967-3140 or via email at [stewart34@sbcglobal.net](mailto:stewart34@sbcglobal.net). And if you are in the market for a nice vehicle or a home in the Pekin area or know of someone who is you can contact her for that as well. Most importantly, prayers are always welcomed.

From teacher and coach to missionary, certainly not a journey Kellie ever remotely expected for her life.

But she says “God changed me, He changed my thought process and my perspective. It is only because of God.”

If you would like to continue to follow Kellie on her journey you may contact her via email with that indication.

And you can get more information via facebook on the LADO Ministry page or from their website [www.ladoministry.org](http://www.ladoministry.org).

Who knows, it may spark a desire or a calling in another life or heart, maybe even your own.