



Building a house and a home

With significant differences in weather, building materials, financing, and building codes, houses in Venezuela are not constructed in the same way as those in Minnesota. Let's look first at how a typical house in Minnesota



gets built. Prior to building, you need to get a loan from the bank, find a lot, a general contractor, and work out a plan with him of what your dream home will be like. Then the work begins. Bring in a bulldozer and back hoe to dig a basement and trenches for water, sewer, and gas lines. Pour the foundation. Put up basement walls. Install a waterproofing membrane and backfill around the basement. Have it inspected. Get lots of lumber. Rough in the floors and skeleton of the house. Cover the exterior walls

and roof with plywood and protective sheathing. Put in windows and exterior doors. Install plumbing, heating, air conditioning, electrical, venting pipes, and ductwork. Pass more inspections. Insulate the exterior walls, basement ceiling, and attic. Hang and tape drywall. Shingle the roof. Finish off the exterior with brick or siding. Paint and finish the interior with doors, cabinets, countertops, and flooring. Install lighting and plumbing fixtures. Pour the steps, walkways and driveway. Grade the yard. Plant grass, trees and shrubs. Pass the final inspection. Move in. Don't forget to make your monthly mortgage payments for the next 30 years.

Much of what went into building that house was necessary due to Minnesota's climate which can range from over 100° in summer to -35° in the cold of winter. Here in our part of Venezuela temperatures never go below 65°. Houses don't need basements, attics, heating systems, insulation, or steeply pitched roofs to keep snow from building up...just enough pitch for water to run off. Here's how a typical house gets built here.

First is finding a lot. Most folks just stay on the same property where their family already lives, building behind or beside their parents' house. Those moving to a new location either buy an inexpensive lot or just start building on public land and wait to see if the government kicks them off or lets them stay. Chances of getting a homestead in this way are pretty good if the land is rather marginal or if they join in an "invasion" where dozens of families move into an undeveloped area and claim sites at the same time. Next, you'll need to stockpile building materials...some 2" x 10" wooden planks for forms, loads of sand and gravel, several bags of cement, lots of steel tubing and reinforcing rods and over a thousand cement blocks. Construction will proceed as you are able to purchase these materials, so it may take several months before you can actually begin building. No problem if you're on the same property as the rest of the family. If you're in another location, however, you will want to put up a tiny tin shack to hold claim to your site. You'll need to live there and make sure there is always someone around to keep watch so thieves don't steal all your building materials.



Once everything is ready, level the area. Dig a trench about a foot deep around the perimeter of the outside walls, construct forms with the wooden planks, mix concrete and pour the foundation. Do the same to build concrete pillars reinforced with steel rods at each corner with one or two more on the longer sides. Run water and sewer lines. Pour the concrete floor. Fill in the walls with concrete blocks, leaving space for doors and windows. Construct the roof support with steel tubing. Add a roof of corrugated metal panels. Put in doors and metal window frames with enough metal bars to keep thieves from breaking in. Connect a cable to the power line in the street and run wiring inside along the ceiling. Break channels in the wall blocks with a hammer to install wiring for electrical sockets and switches. Refill the blocks with concrete. Add electrical and plumbing fixtures. Put a light coat of stucco on the walls if you can afford it. Paint if available. No inspections. Just move in. Forget the bank. With no loan, the house is all yours. When you save up some money, you can put on an addition, a better roof, or a second floor if you made your foundation and posts strong enough.

Houses in Venezuela may be different from those in Minnesota, but what makes a house a home is the same everywhere. Parents, providing for and forming their children with strong values, faith, mutual love and respect, don't just build a house. They build a family, making the humblest hovel or the most splendid castle a home.

Points to ponder

What do you like most about your house? How do you go about making your house a home?

The Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis has staffed and supported parishes in the diocese of Ciudad Guayana in Venezuela since 1970. These "Did you know?" papers are designed to give you a better understanding of life in Venezuela and to strengthen connections between the parishes of the Archdiocese and their archdiocesan mission during our 50th anniversary year. Please direct any comments or suggestions for future papers to Fr. Denny Dempsey at ddempsey@churchofstdominic.org or 651-368-7324.