

2009 Honduras Mission Trip Report – Tegucigalpa Team

Dos Equipos de Misioneros

When Park Plaza began sending a mission team to Honduras in March of 2006, we had thirty-two members join the team. Because our mission has continued to expand each year, we split the one large team into two teams in 2008. One group led by Carey Robertson now works primarily with Predisan in Catacamas, Honduras and the other group led by Mike Hawkins continues to work around Tegucigalpa. This year the teams were made up of 16 and 15 members respectively.

Sunday Worship Services

On Sunday morning, May 31st, the Tegucigalpa team loaded up the big, yellow, un-air-conditioned bus at the Baxter Institute and made the one hour trip (45 minutes by car) up the mountains to Sabana Grande for worship. The 2007 Park Plaza mission team was instrumental in planting the church at Sabana Grande. Park Plaza supports the minister, Elmer Garcia and several of our members visit Sabana Grande each quarter to encourage the congregation and mentor Elmer. Attendance at the little church has remained steady, and they have experienced slow growth.

I have never seen a member arrive in a vehicle. All of them walk to church several miles each Sunday. They also have Bible studies at the church building on Thursday and Friday nights. It is always a blessing of encouragement for our team and the local members to worship together. We usually have prayers spoken in English and some songs sung in English. It wouldn't matter. Where two or more are gathered to gather in the name of the Lord, He is there also. We witnessed the baptism of one young lady after the service.

Student Night Out[™]

Park Plaza supports three students at the Baxter Institute in Tegucigalpa. Baxter offers a four year liberal arts curriculum for ministerial candidates who earn a degree in Religion. The student body comes from twelve different Latin American countries. Our mission teams started to get to know the students better during our 2007 trip. We have done this by hosting them for dinner at a local mall each year. Wives and children are invited, too. Lifelong relationships are slowly being built.

I am amazed at their English improvement since we started the event. I give credit to Doña Gloria Perez who took over the English department in 2008. Park Plaza also supports Gloria. She has a BS in English from the University of Oregon. Her husband, Noé, is a former Vice President of Baxter but has returned to work in private business.

Our teams have grown very close to the students. Their dedication to becoming evangelists is humbling to us. One young man from Cuba, Daniel Blett, has left his family behind because the Cuban government will not let them leave Cuba. Daniel is hoping that they will be able to join him when he becomes a fourth year student in two years.

Mission Lazarus

This was our first year to work with Mission Lazarus in Choluteca. Jarrod Brown, the founder, was the Abilene Christian University Alumnus of the year in 2008. Jarrod, with God's leading, is building a ministry that will rival any in the world in scope, cost efficiency and results.

It takes a three hour bus ride to get from Tegucigalpa to Choluteca which is located very close to the southern Pacific coast of Honduras. When coming down from Tegucigalpa, add 20 degrees to the mountainous temperature to reach the local temperature at Choluteca. That is hot in a very humid atmosphere by any standard.

We arrived in Choluteca before lunch and had been instructed to eat at the local Wendy's. Cameron "Cowboy" Hartsell - an intern from Gilmer, Texas - and our group leader met us at Wendy's and took us to our job site. We knew ahead of time that our team's assignment was to build playground equipment for a church sponsored elementary school. The playground apparatus we would build was made of wood and it consisted of two towers of four levels each and a bridge connecting the two towers. Three swings were installed under the bridge. We were fortunate to have several men who are at ease with hammers and nails, but having Piper Huey on the team was a real bonus. Call on Piper if you need help building a deck or other wooden structure.

A little about the school: The Honduran government approached Mission Lazarus and asked if it could operate a school in the community of Ciudad Nueva that the government could not afford to keep open. Homeless families settled Ciudad Nueva after Hurricane Mitch ravaged Choluteca in 1998.

Jarrold was given permission to operate it as a private church school. Parents are required to pay 20 Lempira a month, about a dollar, for tuition. This gives them ownership in the program and they don't feel they are getting a handout. Some of the families send their children for the lunches that they couldn't afford otherwise. The government has now given Mission Lazarus two more schools around Choluteca to operate. Each school costs about \$20 thousand per year to run. The students get a good healthy portion of Christian teaching, Christian mentoring and Christian example from the staff.

At 4:00 PM, we stopped work and drove up the mountains for an hour to the Mission Lazarus refuge compound to check into our dorm rooms. The playground project was about 75% finished. The first thing I noticed upon checking into the men's dorm was that the beds were fitted with blankets. (Surely blankets would not be needed, I thought.)

If you were to pick the most beautiful place on earth to start a mission work, you might pick the Mission Lazarus refuge. I never quite got enough of the view of the surrounding valley and mountains in the three days we were there. Everything about our stay at Lazarus was outstanding. (Even the food!) Mission Lazarus' outreach probably encompasses 40 or 50 square miles. It provides medical clinics, an orphanage, elementary schools, vocational schools and supports nine local churches and ministers in surrounding communities.

Evidently, Cameron recognized the Park Plaza team as a real work force. We did not return the next day to Ciudad Nueva to finish the playground. Instead, Cameron took us to help a team from Nashville build a retaining wall so that a new church building could be built on the property. The wall needed to be 150 to 175 feet long and 6 to 8 feet tall in some places to keep back a creek prone to flooding. This was the hardest job we have ever done in Honduras. It required carrying large rocks by hand and smaller rocks in a wheelbarrow...all day long! Wheelbarrow, after wheelbarrow, after wheelbarrow of cement was pushed to the wall. This effort really tested the physical resolve of the team. At the end of this day, total fatigue would be an understatement. Brad Hawkins suffered heat exhaustion and the help of a doctor on the Nashville team was needed to treat the emergency. We were lucky a doctor was present.

On Thursday, we returned to the school at Ciudad Nueva and finished the playground. Cameron said we did more work in two and a half hours than some teams do in two days. When we were done, the teacher released the kids to play on their new playground. As they darted exuberantly towards the new structure, they were heard saying, "¡Qué regalo!" ("What a present!") After a ton of hugs and pictures, we boarded the bus to return to Tegucigalpa.

Building a House in Sabana Grande

On Friday, the team went back to Sabana Grande to build one of our Master Crafted™ houses for a family that had taken up residence in the church building. The construction team had seen the lot that the house would be built on during the previous Monday workday. If you can imagine, the lot sloped from northwest to southeast with a vertical drop off of five feet in twenty feet. On Monday, the team had built a retaining wall and moved about a half ton of dirt. It didn't help much.

We finished building the house according to specs but the family will have to solve the slope problem before they can live there. A description of the house: about 16' by 17' of floor space; one 3' by 3' window and one 6' tall door; wood siding walls; galvanized tin roof; an architectural masterpiece!

Saturday Bible School at the Sabana Grande Church of Christ

While the construction crew worked on the house, some of the team finished planning for Saturday Bible School, a new event for the Sabana Grande church. Sindy Flores, the children's teacher, had wanted to have a Bible School for some time but lacked the resources that Gringos can provide. The plan included sending our team bus up into the mountains to pick up children and bring them back to the church building. When the 68 energetic children arrived, Sindy lead them in singing for fifteen minutes. Sindy can control a group of 60 to 70 kids of mixed ages like no one I have ever seen. Incidentally, she is twenty years old.

The kids were divided up into age groups for Bible study. Sindy took the youngest kids to teach them about some of the miracles of Jesus and our own hermanas - Debbie Quinn and Millie Davila - shared a prepared lesson with the older group on Noah with visuals that they had worked on for two days. Everyone broke for a mid-morning snack of instant lemonade and cookies. The time before lunch was designated craft period.

Lunch consisted of Bologna sandwiches, chips and a juice box. After lunch, we introduced the kids to Gringo games. (That would be every relay game we could think of from our own childhood.) I don't know why it is, but kids in every culture like to play relay games. After the games, our own theatric puppeteers, Jason Tenison and Leedy Smith entertained young and old with there own brand of Honduran comedy (?). (Note: Jason and Leedy also serve as two of our team's Spanish translators. Jason worked for a year in Costa Rica after college and Leedy is a Spanish teacher in Bixby, Oklahoma.)

The afternoon snack was ice cream which was a real treat for the kids; poorest of the poor in Honduras. (The unemployment rate in Sabana Grande is at least 75%. These families exist on \$1 to \$2 per day.)

As I reflect on the description of the activities I just related, I recognize a very similar pattern that takes me back to my own youth in VBS. These kids had never experienced it before. The plan is to continue the Saturday Bible School on one Saturday each month. If it continues to be successful and they can get help from Sabana Grande lay members, Sindy wants to have it every Saturday.

Our Honduras Church Planting Partner

After two years of experience in overseeing the church at Sabana Grande, we have come to realize that we need a local presence to help us with our next church plant. The Guanacoste church near downtown Tegucigalpa approached us in 2008 and asked us if we would like to partner with them in a church plant. Absolutely! The congregation has about 300 members and several of them are business professionals. They are self supporting with the ability to help support a new church. Plus, they can take on the oversight locally where it has been very difficult for Park Plaza to help Sabana Grande, being 1600 miles away.

Guanacoste has been interviewing preachers, in order to select one that will work with a new church at Talonga in 2010. Park Plaza will join an evangelistic campaign and provide the support for the new preacher for a pre-determined number of years. Guanacoste will gradually take over the support until the church can become self sufficient.

We worshipped with the Guanacoste congregation on Sunday, June 7th. It seems that all Honduran congregations are following the dual language protocol in worship. Jason Tenison led singing for the Gringos and then was asked to translate the sermon into English.

After worship, we took the afternoon off to go to The Valley of the Angels for souvenir shopping. "The Valley" is one of the oldest towns in Honduras and it has become the artisan center for the whole country. It is an hour bus ride from Tegucigalpa in the opposite direction of Sabana Grande.

Watch for Mike Hawkins and Cliff Albright in a movie later this year. They were filming on the town square and a film crew member with dreadlocks came up to us and asked us to act natural. We tried. The camera crew finished and left after seven or eight takes of what seemed to be a simple scene set at a table with one line of dialog. One of the two actors looked like a blonde headed Gringa - Gweneth Paltrow, maybe??

Returning Home

We left Tegucigalpa for Tulsa on Monday morning June 8th with the same feelings we have every year when we leave Honduras. There is a twinge of melancholy about leaving; a feel of attachment to the team; a sense of accomplishment; and a higher spiritual consciousness.

To our mission partners, who did not go with us, but prayed for us, thank you! To the many friends and family who supported us financially, thank you!

We encourage you to join one of our Honduras mission teams in the future. God bless you.

In Him,

Mike Hawkins
For the 2009 Honduras Mission Team – Tegucigalpa

Cliff Albright
Millie Davila
Angela Guillory
Brad Hawkins
Carol Huey
David Huey
Piper Huey

David Mahaffey
Steve Mahaffey
Chris Quinn
Debbie Quinn
Leedy Smith
Jason Tenison
Ken Wiley