

Honduras June 2023 - All Are Welcome



Honduras Mission Trip – Day 1 – June 16, 2024

Twelve intrepid travelers arrive at KCI airport at 2:50 am Friday morning to begin their journey to the beautiful country of Honduras. Stopping in Miami we met with Brenda, who arrived from Ohio to join us. Flights were smooth and on time. Arriving at Comayagua, we were met by local guides Milton, Rigo and Jaan. Several of the team have been here before, so friendships were renewed with great joy. The novice missionaries were welcomed warmly.



We began our journey through beautiful and winding mountain passes. Many local vendors displayed their wares, baskets, delicious local pastries, and large bottles of local honey. We stopped to eat at a local restaurant where we dined on tasty fajita platters, fresh chips, salsa, and fried plantains.



We stopped at a local work site to visit with a team from Jackson, Mississippi who has been here for the last week, working with a local church to expand their kitchen facility to provide meals to even more people. This was the vision of the women of the church to expand their ministry. The team was here to provide labor and work alongside the locals. It felt less like a service from outside, and more like a journey together. Seeing the youth smiling, laughing, and working together was an inspiration for us.





Besides works of service, there is a cultural immersion to help us to experience the beauty of this country and the people. Everyone is very warm and friendly, and the local teens enjoy practicing their English language skills. It makes me aware how limiting it can be to not speak the language. I applaud these teens for their efforts, and it inspires us to learn a bit of Spanish.



We spent the night at a local resort, Honduyate, located within the Joya de los Lagos District on Lake Yojoa, to enjoy the beauty of this land. We are near a lake and have the opportunity to witness the glory of God's creation. Hearing the local birds and seeing the fragrant and beautiful flowers is awe inspiring. Tomorrow, we will travel to Tegucigalpa, the capital city to check into our lodgings at the mission house, which will be our center of operations for the week as we meet serve and journey with the students at the Juan Wesley School.



Through our preparations, we have spent time with the other team members. Each brings special gifts and blessings. We know that lifelong friendships will be formed through the joy of serving as Christ's hands and feet. Each evening we end our meal with a devotional. It is a time to share scripture, sing hymns and reflect. The trials and joys of the day are summarized by the phrase, "Great is your faithfulness." We are uplifted by the faithfulness of God. We will begin our day tomorrow with Psalm 5:3 "Lord, in the morning you hear my voice. In the morning I lay it all out before you. Then I wait expectantly."

Honduras Mission Trip – Day 2 – June 17, 2024

Today was a day of contrasts as we moved from the country to the city. We spent the night in a rural part of the country and our hotel was on a beautiful lake. Adjacent to the property were an arboretum and butterfly sanctuary. After our breakfast we took a boat tour of the lake. The weather and scenery were spectacular. As we learn more about each other we discussed the importance of having margins in our lives. More on that in a bit.



We toured the arboretum and learned about the flora and fauna in Honduras. The shoreline was covered by hundreds of white egrets. Their songs were very different from our mid-western birds, creating a beautiful soundscape to the wonders of the tropical plants and flowers.





We toured Lake Yojoa and enjoyed a peaceful time on the water. The lake was active with egrets, hawks, and grazing cattle. Local fishermen were enjoying the serene calm to harvest the day's catch. You can imagine the scene on the Sea of Galilee when Jesus approached the first disciples who were fishermen. "Come follow Me". This team has heard that call and traveled to this beautiful country to be his eyes, ears, hands, and feet.

We shared lunch with the mission team from Jackson, Mississippi who we met yesterday. They were at the end of their time. We got to break bread and learn about their church and service in Honduras.



We visited a butterfly sanctuary and that was magical.



We see God's wish for us in the life cycle of the butterfly. As a caterpillar, or oruguita here in Honduras, it is a time of busy preparation. That has been our formation and preparation experience for this mission. The past two days have represented the chrysalis stage. A time of waiting and transforming. We have an opportunity to grow as a team, encouraged and supported by your prayers as we stretch outside our comfort zones. We are preparing to break free as mariposas and fly with the students, their families, and the community. We are ready to fly to God's use in this beautiful land.

We drove several hours to the capital city, Tegucigalpa, where we will be working with the students from Ciudad Espana. Along the way we experienced a powerful thunderstorm, quite a contrast from our lakeside weather. Tegucigalpa is a vast and crowded city. We are at the Methodist Mission house and preparing for the week ahead. There is a special energy here in the big city hustle.



During our reflection time, we revisited a conversation we had on having margins in our lives. Dedication to service can leave us feeling stressed and overcommitted. Having margins, space for reflection, rest, and peace, can be so invigorating and healing. We reflected on the story of Martha and Mary. Martha had no margin in her life, and Jesus lovingly reminded her that having physical, spiritual, and emotional space was essential to experiencing a relationship with Him. Jesus created margin in his life through prayer, time away and by leveraging the gifts of others like his disciples.



John, who spent time with the Peace Corps in Kenya, shared a Swahili saying that summarized our day. “*Haraka haraka haina Baraja.*” It translates as “*Hurry, hurry has no Blessings*”. We treasure the peace and beauty we have experienced to this point in preparation for the blessings to come.

Honduras Mission Trip – Day 3 – June 18, 2024

Wow, the blessings keep accumulating for the team here in Honduras. We are settled at the mission house in Tegucigalpa and the local team is fully engaged with us. Isaac, Bessy and Franklin arrived, after sending off the team from Jackson, Mississippi.



We joined the local congregation from the mission church for service. The warm welcome and friendly smiles translated easily to those of us who do not understand or speak Spanish. One of the great blessings of an international mission experience is stepping far outside of your comfort zone. Although we could not understand all of the words we certainly felt the warmth of their welcome. Rigo helped by translating during the service. 1 Corinthians, Chapter 13 reminds us that without love, our words are a clanging gong or clashing cymbal. It was certainly evident today in the testimonies of the congregation that love is clearly communicated even in a language we may not understand. They said that they have been praying for our journey for the past several months. It was wonderful to know that the community was thinking of us in that way.





We were invited to sing a song for the congregation. We chose “Santo, Santo, Santo...”, a song with verses in both English and Spanish. The congregation joined in and the sanctuary was filled with song. The pastor, Magdalena, was pleased to talk with Penny about her experience as a female leader and the challenges of a post-COVID worship experience. After the service we shared hugs with the children who were very curious to meet us. It was so humbling and many of us had tears in our eyes, missing our families.





The message was based on Matthew 9: 35-38. “The size of the harvest is bigger than you can imagine.” Jesus was filled with compassion for the crowds who were like sheep without a shepherd. We take up the effort to assist here as we can with the gifts with which we have been blessed. Being here for only a brief time, we are surrounded by love and it feels like we are with family. We know that will only grow stronger.



Planning is underway for our first visit tomorrow with the students from Ciudad Espana. Local issues have prevented us from traveling to the school, so in the spirit of creative pivoting, they are traveling to us. We have several activities planned for the remainder of the week in support of their curriculum. Students can learn more English and practice their skills with the team through games, plays and songs.



We shopped for supplies. WalMart is universal with a very familiar feel, excluding signs being in Spanish and the currency in Lempira, it was hard to imagine we were not in Kansas anymore.

Honduras Mission Trip – Day 4 – June 19, 2024

I wake up at 5:00 and put on my Juan Wesley uniform in time to board a bus at 6:30 am for the two-hour drive from Ciudad Espana to Tegucigalpa. This is different from past trips because the team is not traveling to us, we are visiting them. Fifty-five other students are on the buses with me. I am nervous because I will be meeting my sponsor family for the first time. I met them briefly on a Zoom call two years ago during COVID. I asked if they would visit me, and they have. We arrive at the mission church after a long drive through the busy streets of the capitol. We gather in the plaza, nervous and excited to greet the team from the US. I know they live in the very center of the country because we have seen it on the map.



I recognize my sponsor by her long auburn hair, but I am shy. I can tell they are looking for me. My friend Mario, who is very friendly, pushes me to meet them. They see me, and we meet for the first time. They smile and hug me. There are tears in our eyes and it is very emotional. Josue is a local translator, and he helps us to have a conversation. I feel pretty shy, but confident Mario is very chatty. I get to introduce my sister and am feeling more confident. There is joy in my heart. I will get to spend more time with them this week.



We divide by grades and our first stop we learn a brief play. Our English teacher asked the team to focus on numbers, colors, time, places and professions in English. We get to be a fireman, a teacher and an alien from another planet. It is very silly and fun. We learn some simple phrases, dress up with costumes and use props. I am the alien and wear a headband with antenna. I have to fuel my ship with fruit. Mario is a fireman, and he is very theatrical.



After thirty minutes we switch and the team has a large clock drawn with chalk on the plaza. We learn the hours and minutes. Josue translates for us. I know my numbers pretty well but the leader will surprise us by skipping numbers. "Five, ten, fifteen,..." wait, he steps quickly to the six and now we have to think. "...thirty" some say confidently. "Trienta" say others reverting to Spanish. We help each other when we don't know. Even when Mario makes a mistake, he is very confident.



Our next station is singing. I love to sing and we do this together. We start by singing “This is the day...”. The team sings first, then we repeat. The words are familiar and since we repeat them it is fun. We are very loud and the singing can be heard throughout the building. After that we sing a song “Heads, shoulders, knees and toes...”. That has some actions and the words are less familiar. We laugh as we make mistakes, but we eventually get it.



At the last station we played a game where there were lots of numbers on colored pieces of paper. They would say “Red - two and green - seven.” We had to quickly search and find those correct pieces. It was very fun. Then we played Simon Says. That was very fast and exciting. Being shy helped me because I listened carefully. Mario always got fooled because of his confidence and was usually the first out.



I participate in the school dance team. We practice a lot. I get to wear a bright and colorful flowing dress. We learn traditional dances and have the opportunity to perform three of them for the mission team. Our Principal, Olga informs the team that they should pay attention because they will have to perform a dance for us. We love dancing and don't miss a step. We are fully in our element. Now it is time for the team to dance.





They pair off and we teach them the basic steps. My sponsors are dancing partners. They all struggle to learn very basic steps. It is similar to how we felt using English. Everyone is kind and happy, even a bit silly. Everyone is smiling and laughing. The students pair up with the team members to try to teach. All different skill levels, just like us. They dance and do pretty well.

My sponsors throw in a few spins to embellish. That is very popular and in the end, they win the competition and receive their championship tee shirts.



It is time to return to Ciudad and we begin to say our goodbyes. We take a group picture. I hug the team members and especially my sponsors. We will see each other again this week and will get to spend more time. Mario is his silly and happy self and we leave with warm feelings and happy memories.



Honduras Mission Trip – Day 5 – June 20, 2024

Yesterday, the focus was on the children. Today, we met with the mothers of the students at the Juan Wesley School. They traveled from Ciudad Espana to the Mission Church. Pastor Magdalena was gracious to open the sanctuary. Several of the mothers spoke of the impact of the scholarship program on the lives of their children. In an area with limited educational resources, these scholarships provide a springboard to provide greater opportunity. One mother spoke with pride of her two sons who graduated from the program and are now doctors. Thanksgiving and appreciation were the predominant themes of their testimonies.



We then gathered in the kitchen to make doughnuts from scratch. This process involved the mixing of the flour, sugar, yeast, water milk and butter. They were very skilled bakers. Several of the mission team assisted with the mixing, stretching, and kneading.



The dough was left to rise while we gathered in the sanctuary to have a discussion of the challenges parents face in raising children. The fears, dreams, aspirations, and joys were evident from both cultures. The main theme was unconditional love of a parent reflects the unconditional love of God. Faith is a strong foundation upon which to build a family.

Mental health is an important issue, especially related to loving oneself. Sometimes the responsibilities of life leave little time for self-care. Marta provided some practical exercises for reflection and growth. This was a time for the mothers to have space to discuss how they can take these ideas back into their lives.



We returned, after the dough rose, to fry the doughnuts. We shared a sugary snack and enjoyed some wonderful local coffee. Then it was time for the women to return. They enjoyed a day of focus. There was lots of laughter and hugging, a universal language based on love and mutual respect.



We traveled to an economically disadvantaged part of Tegucigalpa to visit a worksite that several team members worked on last year. What was a foundation and cinder block walls was a fully functional kitchen. They provide meals for the students at the local school. Pastor Bill showed their worship space and spoke of the dreams they have, expand and serve more people.



We returned to the mission to meet with Dennis, recipient of micro loan from the COR Global Impact Ministries. We teamed with Victor from CADREH, who provide local training and support for small businesses. Dennis was able to buy a taxi, to provide an income for his family. They both spoke of the impact this program has had on their lives. It was another way that the generosity of missions at COR are impacting lives.



Honduras Mission Trip – Day 6 – June 21, 2024

Vacation Bible Camp is a universal experience for youth in Methodist churches. Today we had the opportunity to engage with the children from Ciudad Espana at vacation Bible camp. Since we are not traveling there, we had the opportunity to host them at the mission church. Thirty active students and their teachers arrived in high spirits. We opened with a multilingual prayer experience. You could feel the Lord's presence from the start.





The focus Bible passage was Matthew 14 when Jesus walks on the water. This was a scary experience for the disciples and Jesus arrived, calmed their fears, and then calmed the waters. It was easy for the children to relate to, as they often are afraid. We talked with the students about their fears and how Jesus is always with us.



We helped the students prepare for two small skits with props and costumes. One was walking on water and the other was Jesus feeding the five thousand. After preparing, they put on the plays for the other students. It was wonderful to see the seriousness in their efforts.



We sang several songs and there were a lot of fun actions that got the kids moving. It was fun for the children to see us struggle with Spanish lyrics. They were very helpful and kind with us. We divided into smaller groups and worked on a drawing project of Peter getting out of the boat at the Lord's direction. The students were very engaged and careful.

We sang several songs in Spanish and then played a game called “Squirrels and Houses”. It is like a fast-paced version of musical chairs. The students had so much fun and were very determined to be the last squirrel. One of the translators was the last squirrel in the house.



We ate lunch and then sang a song from yesterday’s activity “Head, shoulders, knees and toes...”. Even the parents and teachers participated. It kept getting faster until it erupted in laughter. We ended the day with hugs and tears, as it is sad when these times end.



We are so grateful to have this time here in the community. Tomorrow is our final full day. It has been such a blessing to walk with what is becoming our long-distance family.

We traveled to Valle De Angelis for some relaxation and retail therapy. This was an opportunity to experience the wonderful craftsmanship of the Honduran people.



Honduras Mission Trip – Day 7 – June 22, 2024

Our final full day in Honduras was spent at Picacho National Park. Most of the students at the Juan Wesley school joined us for a field trip day. There were over 300 students and staff. While they were completing a science project, we arrived at this beautiful location. This is a favorite experience for the students. After their homework was complete, we gathered for greetings and instructions. Our first assignment, from Principal Olga, was to vote on whether the students would have school on Friday. After playful consideration we unanimously voted that they have a free day. There was much cheering.

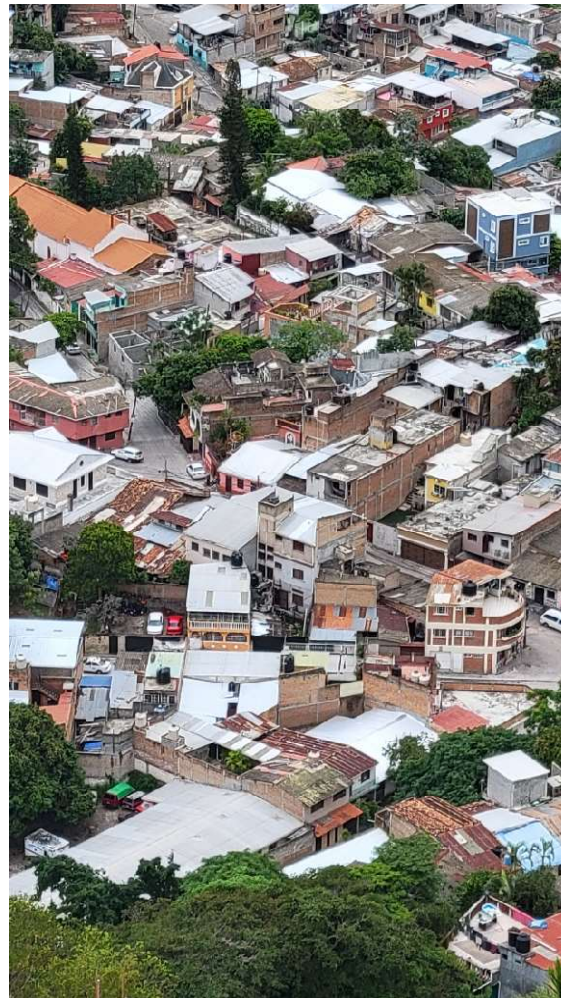


Next was the inter grade soccer tournament. We were asked to join the students, so several of the team volunteered to participate. The matches started and it was obvious to the Ted Lasso fans that to these young players, "Football is Life". They were very talented. The team worked hard to not injure ourselves. There were several close matches, including one shoot-out. In the end the older boys emerged victorious and took home the trophy.





We said our final goodbyes to the students and teachers. Many close bonds were made this week and leaving is hard. The team walked to the nearby statue of Christ. The Christ is a sculpture of 2,500 tons and 98 feet in total height (an image of 65 feet high on a pedestal of 33 feet). Its opening was on January 16, 1997. The massive Christ rises on the west side of Cerro El Picacho, and can be seen from far away by at least sixty percent of the population of the Central District, especially at night. It provided wonderful views of the city, including a monument that is recognized as the geographical center of Latin America.





The team gathered at a local Honduran restaurant for a farewell dinner. It was a way for the team to thank the staff of the mission. We could not have had the energy without the wonderful meals prepared by Cindy, Alexandria, and Isabel. Our translators Rigo, Franklin, Josue, Isaac, Bessy, Jaan, and Melissa were an essential part of our ability to communicate with and serve the people of Ciudad Espana. We return home to Kansas, Missouri, and Ohio tired, yet transformed. We have developed lifelong friendships. We have experienced directly, through those we served, the blessings of our faith in Jesus Christ.



Honduras Mission Trip – Day 8 – June 23, 2024

Returning Home and Reflections

Nancy - This mission trip allowed me to observe God's love in action in Honduras. The beautiful Honduran people displayed strong faith in our God. Although they live daily with extreme poverty and the potential of violence at any given moment, they appear to build their joy, strength, and endurance on our Lord God.



This mission trip provided heart-rendering and eye-opening moments through a glimpse of the Honduran's Walk of Faith...

I am thanking Jesus for sending me on this mission, as I walk out Matthew 28:16-20.

Brenda - The week was definitely a spiritual high for me! I received inspiration from the other team members as well as the Honduran people as we shared our faith stories. I was particularly moved by the testimonies of several Honduran individuals whose deep faith and trust in God allow them to experience joy in the midst of extremely difficult circumstances. The children from the school were delightfully affectionate, polite, and enthusiastic about our activities. A highlight for me was meeting the little boy whom I have been sponsoring and his family; he is so sweet and smart!



Overall, through the interactions of our team with the Honduran people we met, I believe we were a blessing to each other. I know that I was blessed by them!



Terri - *Pan de vida - Bread of Life*

I am struck by how the ingredients for our doughnut making day, summarized the trip for me as an amazing symbol for our team and what we experienced. There was a bowl-shaped mound of flour, with a central bowl hollowed out. This was reminiscent of Tegucigalpa, surrounded by mountains. Inside were placed all the ingredients, each of us, staff, translators, students, parents, teachers, and missionaries. Into this mix was placed the yeast, symbolizing the Holy Spirit to act as a leavening agent and lift our efforts to God's glory. It is gently folded and mixed, each ingredient losing its individual form as it combines to create a new thing, fresh dough. We are all being activated by the Holy Spirit, and we are becoming one. There is stretching and kneading, shaping, and mixing as we were challenged and stretched. This is an important part of the process, and we are outside of our comfort zones, transformed.



Like a towel covers rising dough, we are gently covered from drafts by God's precious love, then the waiting, time to reflect and time to rise. A crucial part of the process that cannot be rushed. The yeast / spirit has caused us to grow and become more, expanding, and filling the room with a delicious yeasty scent. In the Old Testament, the sacrificial offerings created a pleasing scent for God. All our senses are activated.



Fresh dough needs to be cut into smaller pieces, not torn, to retain the rise and keep it healthy. This recalls the image of Jesus as the vine and us as the branches and the necessity of pruning to deliver a healthy harvest. Taking smaller amounts and reshaping, just as we have been reshaped by this experience, we create the smaller balls of dough that must rise again. Just as Jesus resurrection call us to be reborn for a greater purpose. Again we wait, listen, pray, reflect and share. Each is perfect, just the way they are, just the way we are, especially in God's eyes.



Wow, the Holy Spirit was so present during that time with the women of Ciudad Espana who were able to put down the yoke of their burdens for that sacred time. We had a safe and warm place to come together and rise together and after, a powerful communion in the breaking and sharing of bread. It was beautiful and transforming.