



Fall 2008

News of the Niños

Dear Godparents, Friends and Board of Directors,

Comayagua, Honduras

Please receive much love and respect from our home and our desire that God blesses you abundantly.

It is a great pleasure to be able to write to you, and above all give thanks to God for having put you in our lives. Our children and young people are happy to have you in their hearts.

Recently we have been through a great sadness, as we almost lost Daniel, being that he was on the brink of dying from Hemorrhagic Dengue fever. Thank you so much for your prayers and support. He has gotten better, and is recuperating.

He is a great boy and very strong.

Cristina, Glenis, Doris, Mario, Denis and Júnior started in the university last week and we beg for your prayers for them.

At the Granja we have had a great harvest of corn and the milpa (a native variety) was very productive. It has given enough to provide for all our projects including Hogar Amor. We have been eating: tamalitos, montucas, atol & elotes (all corn dishes) that were all very tasty and no one ended up with indigestion.

The panadería (bakery) has started running and it is well-suited for its various functions. We are waiting for the October group to have a celebration to give thanks to God and all our friends who made this project possible.

The girls and babies are well in the Casa de Buen Pastor (House of the Good Shepherd) and Sobeyda will probably give birth this week.

The Casa Misericordia (Mercy House) turned two years old on September 2, and we celebrated by giving thanks to God. A pastor was present and we prayed as well for all the godparents and friends. Many thanks for making our projects possible. Through your help you make them function and really aid those who are in need.

We want to help Miskito children (an ethnic group within Honduras) who live in this very remote area of Honduras which is forgotten by the government and society. There children die of hunger and illnesses. We pray fervently that God will guide us in how we can help. A few years ago we purchased land for vocational workshops to be able to help young Miskito & Garifuna people. We find the situation they face very alarming as the rate for AIDS within the Garifuna people is 60%.

Mr. Allen and Mr. Brian made a short trip to the area and we have made more tours. Also we have collected clothes, medicine, shoes and given these donations to children there. During the last trip we were accompanied by a doctor who worked very hard. If anyone of you desires to donate shoes, medicine, clothes or money to the Miskito people please communicate with Mr. Allen. We thank you very much!

In September we are celebrating the independence of our country. There are various patriotic parades on different dates. On the 13th our children from kindergarten parade, on the 14th the school-age children participate, and on the 15th, which is the official independence day, our high school students march in the parade. Because of this our children and young people have been very involved preparing themselves for the parades to honor our country. In the high schoolers' parade there were many protests against the government because the president is not governing justly.

Many thanks for your help, God Bless you, Carmen and the children

"Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me." Mark 9:37

This past summer I was given the opportunity to go on a mission trip with my youth group to Honduras. We were able to help the community by painting a house and starting to add another story to a building by lifting cement blocks onto the roof. The main reason we went though, was to build relationships. God is love, and we help start communities by building relationships with the people around us. We had the privilege of actually reaching out to the people in our world, starting with an orphanage in Comayagua, Honduras. To say the least, it was the most impacting of all the mission trips I have ever been on.

Most of my group at Elmhurst CRC probably thought like I did as we started on the journey: we would be able to see another part of the world and help some orphans. But that was only a small part of the experience. These children taught us so many things during our time at their orphanage. The people there have so little compared to the United States. The fact that they have this unimaginable love, happiness, and helpfulness about them blew our minds away.

The first day of our trip, we traveled for about three-fourths of it; we were tired and feeling disgusting. But when our youth pastor Ron asked us if we'd like to go see the orphanage the same day, we were obviously thrilled and excited about it. As we drove in there the first time, we didn't get very far into the grounds when the children ran towards the bus and had it surrounded within seconds. When we stepped off the bus, we weren't exactly sure what to do, but the kids made the decision for us quickly. Each child found one of us and immediately grabbed our hand or, in my case, wrapped her arms around me in a big hug. These kids have groups come probably 11-12 times a year or even more, and every time I'm sure they give each one as big of a welcome. And just as many times as a team comes, they leave. Imagining the pain and heartbreak consistently breaks MY heart, let alone theirs. They still have, though, this unending love that makes the strongest relationships you could imagine.

Each mid-morning we went to the other part of the orphanage, to do our daily work. We were split into two teams, one painting and one doing blocks. The block team had, undoubtedly, the harder job. On some of the days, the older orphaned kids didn't have school. As most Americans, we thought that they would just chill about. Yet again they surprised us; instead of being lazy they volunteered to help us work! They offered to help with

this grueling job under the intense mid-day sun. Even the little boys were so excited to help with anything. When they saw the paint crew cleaning up the paint we spilled, they ran forward and stole some rags from us and started rubbing with turpentine. It was an absolute attitude check for us.

It is hard to choose, but one of my fondest memories of this trip was when we had a chance to visit another orphanage (*Hogar Amor*) run by a couple for many years. We had the opportunity to listen to the man's (*Arvil's*) testimony, which was inspiring. Afterward, we went into the kitchen where the kids were having their daily song practice just like a choir. We were able to listen to them singing praise songs and hymns to their Savior, and it was quite a sight and something to hear. On one song, the mother (*Miriam*) motioned to us to start singing along. So here we were, all children of God, singing Him praise in two different languages. It was an incredible experience that can't be duplicated.

That trip to Honduras was a memorable experience and those same feelings are still intense today. It left an imprint on everyone of our lives, just as we hope we left something in the hearts of the Honduran orphans, shown with the shared tears at our goodbye fiesta. I left a few pieces of my heart with a couple of my new friends, and I hope to someday go back and meet them again.



As part of its continuing effort to interact with special education ministries outside of the USA, teachers and professional staff of Elim Christian Services (an educational ministry for disabled individuals in Palos Heights, Illinois) returned to CasAyuda in August. Laura O'Rourke is a Behavioral Therapist in Elim's autism program. This is her report to the Elim Outreach Committee of the groups' experiences at CasAyuda and Hogar.

When I was asked to go on a trip with Elim for an outreach mission, I didn't need to think about whether or not to go. This was a once in a lifetime experience that I couldn't pass up. I had never been on a mission trip before. I tried (unsuccessfully) to come without expectations; only thoughts about what I needed to do to be of the most help. I was never anxious or scared, just excited and grateful that I had been given this opportunity.

I was given some information about where we were going- a little school in Comayagua, Honduras called CasAyuda. This school is similar to Elim's school in that it is a school for children with disabilities. Approximately half of the children have developmental disabilities and the other half are deaf. I remembered when this group from Honduras visited Elim a year or so ago and being amazed and inspired by their stories.

I was the new member of the group, so I relied heavily on what I was told from the group who came a few years ago and who were also there again this trip. Our goal coming in was to go into the school and provide any resources, ideas, or strategies we could to help the staff of CasAyuda better serve their students. In addition, we were also going to provide an afternoon of training to the teachers of the school about some basics of working with children with developmental disabilities. I felt comfortable and prepared with this aspect of our trip and looked forward to being able to help.

When we arrived, we met up with another group of missionaries from the Chicago area there through an organization called All God's Children. This organization, run by a wonderful man named Al Heerema, aids CasAyuda as well as other places in Comayagua including several orphanages, a group home for women with more severe needs, and a home for young mothers, all of which we had the opportunity to visit. Al was also responsible for our food, lodging, and transportation arrangements while we were there. One of the wonderful unforeseen blessings of this trip was the friendships and connections we made with the people from All God's Children. Because our groups spent time praying, sharing experiences, eating meals, and riding in the same small bus together, we were able to spread Elim's mission not just on a global basis, but a local one as well. We were able to inspire families in our local area and share with them what Elim is and why we are so passionate about serving people with disabilities.

We spent two days at CasAyuda observing in the classrooms of both the special education and deaf wings of the school and applying our ideas in the moment. We also introduced communication, sensory integration, academic and behavior management ideas to the staff during our training session. The students of CasAyuda are similar to the students at Elim in their levels of need. The staff are passionate about their jobs and adore their students. They inspired me by their unwavering efforts to help the students be successful members of the society. With little or no resources (we later found out that the only outside resources for consultation and collaboration the school has are Elim and a set of two occupational therapists from California who each have visited less than a handful of times in the past four years), CasAyuda has worked to build a place to help educate people with disabilities in a country that has little or no use for them. What CasAyuda lacks in resources, they make up for in heart and faith in God. I was excited to be able to share some of the few resources that fit into my suitcase, but saddened that we could not do more.

The most visible difference in the amount of progress we see at Elim and the progress being made at CasAyuda was the unbelievable amount of resources at Elim's disposal. One of the reasons I came to Elim was the support and amount of resources that were available. What CasAyuda and other grassroots schools around the world, needs are organizations like Elim who can be long term connections for information and support to aid them in their path to provide meaningful education and services to people with disabilities. Elim has a responsibility to those less fortunate than

us to be a resource in whatever way we can. Countries other than the United States do not look at disabilities in the same way we do. For many of them, including Honduras, it is above and beyond to see that basic needs are met of people with disabilities. Education and quality of life barely scratch the surface. Other than a few exceptional people like the staff at CasAyuda, children with disabilities are left behind in a world of darkness. The incredible ability Elim's outreach program has to affect the way that the world sees people with disabilities should not be taken for granted. We have a responsibility to share our knowledge to those who will listen.

Another area we spent time at was an orphanage called Hogar, a home for approximately 200 children who are orphaned or disadvantaged. We spent time playing with the children, taking them to buy shoes for school, and spending time with a few of their children with disabilities. One of these children was a 7 year-old boy who was blind and deaf. He spent most his time laying on his favorite stuffed bear and interacting with the outside world through what we in the autism world call "stimming". This little boy had no formal education and had not been taught any means to communicate with others. By working with him for just 30 minutes over two days, the potential of this young boy was obvious. Unfortunately, because we didn't have the time, nor was this the main purpose of our trip, we could do no more than give a few small items to him with no training for the staff on how to use them. This little boy was another example of how Elim could make a difference to a person's quality of life through just a little time and effort. Imagine the possibilities if he had been our mission. Perhaps next time.

Although I knew this was a mission trip and that we were going to Honduras to do God's work, the thing that I was most caught back by was the overwhelming presence of God surrounding this trip. While I was preparing for this trip and collecting resources to bring to CasAyuda, many of Elim's school staff volunteered their time to share their areas of expertise. Speech therapists, teachers, paraprofessionals, occupational therapists and others shared their gifts and knowledge with me so that I could bring it to the staff of CasAyuda. I am so grateful to those people. While in Honduras, there were countless obvious signs of God's power and presence. God was actively present every moment of every day... in each person we met, every interaction, every conversation, every beautiful day, and every child's face you saw the blessings you were given to be a part of this incredible experience. You knew that the Lord was using you in a special way. I have never felt His presence so strongly in all my life.

This experience was more than I had ever imagined. I thought it was a simple opportunity to give some resources to a school in need. What I found was an experience that has changed me forever. This trip not only strengthened my faith in God, but showed me how much one small group can do to make a difference on so many levels. Not only did we connect with the people of CasAyuda and share resources, we built new friendships, maintained old ones, opened new possibilities, and spread the mission of Elim. I have faith that God will continue to use Elim as a global messenger to serve people with disabilities. I can only hope to continue to be a part of it. I will be forever grateful and blessed to have had this opportunity.



"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses...let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." Hebrews 12:1

Lately, I've been considering the reasons I look forward to my travel to Honduras and Hogar. There are many. The niños, of course, are the main reason - the chance to give hugs and smiles, observe their growth, and accept their unconditional affection and gratitude. There are other reasons too. I look forward to some sun and warmth in February, as well as the sense of adventure that comes with a different culture, a different language, and fewer conveniences. It's rewarding to spend time with my friends, doing unaccustomed physical labor and sharing countless laughs. It's a week of spiritual renewal, experiencing new awakenings to God's grace, and a rejuvenated prayer life.



But one of the paramount reasons for our visit, I've come to realize, is the testimony of the great people of faith there. There is a "cloud of witnesses" in Honduras that always strikes me, much like the heroes of faith enumerated in Hebrews 11. Some call it the "hall of fame" of the Old Testament patriarchs of faith. My faith has always needed people like this - people both from times past but also those present in my life now, writers living and dead, individuals whose entire being portray the purpose driven lives we all respect. These great people of faith inspire me and as-

sure me that my beliefs are not foolish, but sound. It's probably a need driven by weakness I know, but I'm pretty sure that I'm not alone in this, and that this is precisely what Hebrews 11 is for.

It's not that I can't see my witnesses at home. They just stand out so much clearer in Comayagua, kind of like the afternoon clouds that move in over the mountains and hang suspended below the peaks. They direct our vision upward, while they overshadow much of the valley below.

Who are they? You know most of them but let's mention them anyway: There's Carmen of course, as well as the many other caregivers at Hogar; Nellie Zelaya who champions the cause of the disabled at CasAyuda; Father Erminio Padilla, the local priest who provides a special ministry to innumerable children in what must be the poorest parish of Comayagua; The Franciscan Friars of the Renewal who have taken vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience in order to provide food, care, and a community center for the destitute.

Last time there were a few new witnesses to meet: Arvil and Miriam Smith, a Baptist preacher from Georgia and his Honduran wife who have founded a church, a Christian school, and another orphanage *Hogar Amor*, a home for another 25 beautiful children; and finally (for now) Sisters Adrianna and Divya, two of Mother Theresa's Sisters of Charity who provide a tranquil home for terminal AIDS patients in the heart of Comayagua.

These are some of the people I've come here to see, even though they have no idea of their significance to me. They probably wouldn't consider themselves heroes, and they may not have a lot to show for it now. Like the writer of Hebrews observed in Chapter 11, none of these "will receive all they had been promised." It's a poor country after all, and just rewards aren't easily secured. But I'm coming to see Honduras less for its poverty and more for its clouds. It's God's assurance to me, and His eternal promise for them.

BOARD BULLETS - Sept. 2008

- Confused by all the new ministries AGC now supports? A new AGC brochure is in the planning, which will include information about the more recently supported programs at CasAyuda, Transitional Housing, Misericordia, Hogar Amor, and Casa Buen Pastor.
- Thirty or so of the older girls were recently invited to a "tea party" hosted by Board member Brent Brewster at Hogar. The object of the event was instruction in table manners and etiquette. The young ladies had a ball, and thoroughly ate it up (presumably with their mouths closed and hands in their laps). Way to go Brent!
- The new bakery is up and running, after many delays waiting for delivery of a new transformer. A recent work team assisted in moving all the equipment from the old site. A baker from Tegucigalpa has been training 12 -15 girls and 3-4 boys in baking skills and new recipes. A dedication ceremony during an October Faith Dyer visit is planned. A portion of the second story is now occupied by the library.
- On July 28 Carmen and the children and staff celebrated the 20th anniversary of Hogar de Ninos (the day Carmen left the convent to care for 2 niños). The day was marked by fasting and prayer.
- As noted in Carmen's letter, Board members Allen Heerema and Brian Kamstra accompanied her, one of the Franciscan friars, and other Hogar staff on a visit to the remote Misquitia Coast area of north-eastern Honduras. Several of the Hogar children originate from there, as did Carmen.
- A Board trip is planned for early December.
- The Board expresses its deepest sympathy to the Van Tholen & Engbers families in the recent passing of Sheri VanTholen Both families are long time sponsors and supporters of AGC.

AGC Board Members

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