



Winter 2008

News of the Niños

Comayagua, Honduras

Dear parents, friends and executive board.

What a joy it is to greet you as we approach Christmas and the end of the year.

We are so grateful to our Lord for His infinite grace. Each day we pray for a great blessing for you and your family and we thank God for making us a part of your family..

Our homes have been very happy with the visit from the group of men. Some of the children ask Mr. Allen, "Why are there only men and no women?" But it is unbelievable the love and tenderness the children receive from the group of men. The children can see the men as their fathers. Now, they've grown accustomed to the group of men visiting once a year.

The graduation dinner the men prepared for graduation was very elegant. Among the graduates there are eight who will probably attend the university. Their names are: Hilda Nohemy Martinez Zambrano, Nestor Daniel Castellanos Vallejo, Miguel Angel López Rodas, José Roberto Oliva Aguirre, Juan Francisco Sánchez, Gerson Eli García Guzman, Julio Adán Gómez Martinez, Merlin Ramon Vasquez



The students who finished grade school and will attend high school accompanied us at the dinner.

In El Hogar there was much nostalgia at the loss of Sherri and Dr. Marty. We remember them with much love.

Each of our locations is preparing for the celebration of the birthday of our Savior of the world.

The bakery is working well and the sales have been great. Thank you so much for making possible all of our projects. Thank you too for your love, the work, and for volunteering.

We wish you a merry Christmas full of many blessings and a prosperous new year. Receive our love and respect from each of our homes: Girls' home, Boys' Home, the farm, Home of the Good Shepherd, and Home of Mercy.

God bless you,

Carmen L. Beteta

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

Ever look at a situation, a place, or an event and think, "that's not the way it's supposed to be!" Something is out of whack, off the mark or is badly missing. You sense that there's another way of doing things, a different set of rules that should apply, or different values that should be controlling.

Maybe that's the way Christians should look at our world. Cornelius Plantinga, the President of Calvin Theological Seminary does just that in his book *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*. His book opens with a scene from the movie *Grand Canyon*, in which an immigration attorney finds himself in his disabled luxury vehicle confronting a group of urban teens, who perceive an opportunity for some immediate redistribution of wealth. Mack the tow truck driver shows up in the nick of time and admonishes the youths "the world ain't supposed to work like this. Maybe you don't know that, but this ain't the way it's supposed to be. Everything's supposed to be different than what it is here."

Plantinga defines the world as God intended it as "Shalom," a rich state of universal flourishing, wholeness and delight, where natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed. Shalom is the way things ought to be. On the other hand, sin is the violation of shalom - a breaking of the peace, an interference in the intended order of things, a deviation, and an affront to the Creator.

How are things supposed to be? It's not a bad question for any of us to ask, and it's a good way to evaluate the state of affairs and programs at Hogar. What should a home for 200 abandoned children look like? Surely it should provide shelter, safety and compassion. Education, opportunity to develop life skills, socialization, and a plan for graduation and departure are all essential components. We all have a general sense, a set of instincts of what it should be. In following those we've been blessed to assist in developing Hogar with a bakery, carpentry shop and metal working facilities, townhouses for university students in Tegucigalpa, soon to be operational transitional homes for young adults, a home for the emotionally and psychologically challenged at Misericordia, and a shelter for abused women at Casa Pastor.

While we take some satisfaction in this growth we know that things still aren't entirely what they're supposed to be. We recognize that the answer isn't always in the end result but in the trying, the pursuit of real and lasting improvements, and we need to dedicate ourselves to working toward those goals.

In recent weeks, two of our friends who did this well passed away suddenly and inexplicably. Dr. Marty Doot and Sherri Venhousen were long time AGC supporters, sponsors, and Hogar work team members. Marty was a skilled physi-

cian and a prominent administrator at Lutheran General Hospital, where his focus was in the treatment of physical addictions. Sherri was an educator at Timothy Christian Schools who specialized in instructing learning disabled children. Both used their skills in various ministries, including working with Hogar children.



Like Mack the tow truck driver, Marty and Sherri had a clear vision of how things were supposed to be. They were committed to using their unique gifts to the restoration of God's world. Marty saw a world released from addictions, and Sherri envisioned children free from disabilities. Their efforts enabled others to fruitfully employ their gifts. Marty and Sherri were restorers of Shalom.

We share in their loss with their families and spouses, Judy and Bob. We can best honor them by committing ourselves to making Hogar and its ministries the way they're supposed to be.



Band of Brothers 2008 *by Ray Carter*

It began like other trips to Honduras. An early flight, a longer bus ride and an inaugural meal at Mang Ying. Many of us had been together on mission to the Hogar before but along with the new men who were part of this trip, we began this journey with both a bit of anxiety and a few unspoken questions about what God may do in and through us in the five days we would share together. One can come with certain notions and preconceptions about how they will feel or in what way they may be impacted by such an adventure, but no one can fully predict what God may do. Our past experience only tells us it will be deep and lasting if we are open to it.

The first couple of days were somewhat "normal" for such trips. There were reunions for some and first exposures to the kids for others. We had a chance to visit Nellie and the school for handicapped children and meet some of the new residents of the Transitional housing we had been part of building. We set up a new Frisbee golf course for the boys at the farm and passed out the new soccer uniforms one of our families had so generously provided. The pride on the faces of the boys as they assembled for a team picture was indeed "priceless". There was some physical labor but no major projects to occupy our time. All in all, the pace was a bit slower and less frenetic than past trips but as we would soon discover, God was doing some profound work in all of us. It is what those of us in the Fellowship are learning is always the case when we "show up" in the broken places of our world and this trip would be no different.

Evidence of what God was doing in us began to come to the surface at dinner on Friday night. We were hosting the kids and some of their leaders in celebration of the kid's completion of requirements for graduation from high school. We stood and applauded as the students arrived and just the looks on their faces began to take us apart. After everyone was seated, there were introductions and the giving of some gifts to the students in recognition of their accomplishments. The students were asked to share a few words with us if they wished and all of them did. It was in these moments that it began to happen. For each man, in ways known only to them, God was showing us something about Himself and what it means to follow Him that only such moments make possible. You see, one cannot witness a kid who had no family and no future celebrate and give thanks for the reality of both and not be impacted by it. One cannot listen to words of gratitude for the small part any of us may have played in making these kids feel like they were part of "our" family and not be changed. Two nights later, in our final "circle of sharing", the breadth and nature of that change began to make itself known.

We began our time that night, as we had every night, with a brief devotional to get us started. On this night, we looked together at Leviticus 25 and the Old Testament practice of Jubilee. That time in the history of God's people when once a generation, land was returned to its original owner and anyone enslaved was set free. It was God's way of reminding His people that all things belong to Him and no man or woman is of lesser value than another. Having just witnessed what hoarding and injustice can do to rob children of rightful opportunities, the practice of Jubilee seemed especially relevant.

Of particular interest this night, however, was an often overlooked and related practice that was part of the Jubilee celebration. In addition to land being returned and slaves being freed, a slave who had been given his freedom could make a decision of his or her own free will to obligate themselves to their former master for the rest of their lives. That is, believing in the character and purposes of their master, they could make themselves a "bound servant" of that master forever. They could give up ownership of all they possessed and surrender all of their plans and agendas to Him. Foreign as all of this may sound to us, it is an invitation and call to devotion extended to all of us who have been set free by the redemptive work of Christ. Having been redeemed by God's grace, we are all challenged to give ourselves fully and freely to Him and His redemptive purposes for the remainder of our lives. From where many of us live, such a decision can be frightening and seem far too costly. We might question the wisdom of such a decision or wonder if such a sacrifice might even be worth it. And yet, as men began to share that final night, it became evident that such questions before us were being answered in new and powerful ways. It became more and more evident that our experience was turning our fear into courage and our doubt into desire and faith. How? Why?

As was said many times during our sharing, "I can describe what I am experiencing but am not quite sure I could ever explain it to anyone". That being said, let me close by trying to do a little of both. The night of the graduation celebration, there were three individuals present who had played key roles in bringing these students to that moment. Three individuals who had willingly made themselves "bound servants" of Christ for the benefit of the students being honored that night. They had given hundreds of hours, shed countless tears, and invested the greater portion of their resource, all to give these kids a chance. Well, we might ask, was it worth it? The looks on the faces of those three individuals as these students received their gifts and expressed their thanks was more than answer enough. On the faces of these three individuals there was no fear and no doubt. On their faces was a look that all who might witness it would envy. On their faces was the look of deep joy, priceless reward and a profound declaration that the investment they had made was far more than worth it.

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In 1 Thessalonians 2:19 - 20, Paul is writing to some people in whose life he had made an investment not unlike the one just described. Almost as if he anticipated the questions that beg to be asked when considering such things he writes: "For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when He comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and our joy." This is it. This is the answer we saw in the faces of those who had given so much. They did not need our praise for what they had done, though we freely give it. They did not need to be recognized by us that night or at any other time. Apart from the one who introduced the students, none of them even spoke. There was a sense that night that they didn't even know the rest of us were there, they could not take their eyes off the kids. I can only wonder what images were in their minds as they thought back on the lives of these kids that had come so far and accomplished so much with their help. The tears in their eyes were tears of joy and the students before them their reward.

We left that celebration and came to our final night of sharing committed to facing with courage the question that begs to be asked by all of us. The question is this: "Are there any persons in our life we are able to look at in this way?" People in whose lives we have made an investment. People who alone are our "...glory and joy...?" As a Band of Brothers, we are committed to answering that question in the affirmative. To challenge each other to keep showing up. To get outside ourselves and our own self interest and to obligate ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ who freed us and invites us to join Him in His redemptive work. We want this because every time we have made such a decision, the joy and reward we have experienced have greatly exceeded any seeming cost. We invite you to join us.

Our thanks to the three people who played such an important part in this experience for us. Your lives challenge us all and we are better men for having known you.

To God be the Glory!

All the Brothers

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 - "For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy."

Hilda, Daniel, Miguel, Roberto, Juan Francisco, Julio, Gerson and Manchito

To these courageous young people - to all who have gone before them and all who will follow - You indeed are our glory and joy!

Board Bullets
December 13, 2008

- The 4th annual AGC golf outing was a great success. \$20,000 + was raised for our ministries. Thanks to all who organized and participated in it.
- The new bakery was dedicated during a Faith Dyer trip in early October. The theme for the occasion was "bread of life."
- Board members Pam DeBoer, Brian Kamstra, and Paul Lagestee will be visiting Hogar with their families and friends to distribute Christmas gifts and joy to all of the children.
- The residents of Casa Pastor and Misericordia are being temporarily housed in the completed sections of Transitional Housing. Work teams visiting in January and February may begin constructing the site for these programs in an area just outside the bakery.
- The Board appointed Allen Heerema to the position of Executive Director of AGC.

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All God's Children

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