

Honduras Mission Team 2003 Report

The 2003 Grace Honduras Mission Team at Rancho El Paraiso

(From Left to Right: Heather Potter, Kendall Morris, Judy Riekse, Barbara Cuthbert, Greta Miller, Joe Miller, Nancy Sterling, Paula Rudolph, Peggy Suess, Greg Suess and Beth Ann McClelland)



This year we left for Honduras on June 28, 2003 and returned to the USA on July 5, 2003. The mission trip to Honduras and the village of El Quebrachal SE was very exciting this year since it would be our last year to work in the village. We were looking forward to learn what our four years with this village had done to transform the lives of the villagers. The trip was organized through Honduras Outreach Inc. (HOI) and our church, Grace Presbyterian Church, which is located in Springfield, Virginia. HOI provides support services to villages located in the Agalta Valley, Honduras. HOI's Mission of Ministry is "Helping Hondurans Help Themselves" and through the help of organizations like Grace Church they do achieve that mission very effectively. We stayed in this village for a much longer time than recommended by HOI. Typically, HOI recommends that a group adopt a village for 2 years. In the case of El Quebrachal SE, the village needed so much work, we stayed an additional 2 years and it was worth it to us and to the villagers.

Grace Church, through the leadership of Charlie and Conoly Barker, decided in 2000 to adopt a Honduran village through the HOI model village program. The village adopted by Grace Church is named El Quebrachal (Pronounced: El Kay - bruh-shal) SE, which is close to San Esteban. The SE (San Esteban) is placed at the back of the village name to identify this particular village since there are other villages named El Quebrachal in Honduras. Grace Church committed to the two-

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year model village program for El Quebrachal, which is solely sponsored by Grace Church through HOI. The HOI model village program supports a selected village by helping missionary teams from the United States travel to the adopted village in Honduras so improvements to the village can be achieved. The model village program's goal is to equip each dwelling in the village with a concrete floor, a chimney, a latrine, and additional rooms and roofs as needed. Some villages ask for additional support to help build a school and/or church. Additional support can be given to HOI through the Scholarship Program and through special donations to help HOI continue to fund the ranch facilities in Honduras. The Scholarship Program provides monetary support to needy high school children in the HOI support area of Honduras. The ranch facilities are called Rancho El Paraiso and these facilities provide housing accommodations to missionary groups from the United States. One to three US missionary groups come to the Ranch every week. They arrive on Sunday afternoon after spending the night in Juticalpa and leave on Friday. HOI provides a Honduran guide for the missionary group, daily transportation to and from the village and full sleeping and eating accommodations for the week.

The 2003 Grace Honduras Mission Team was composed of eleven individuals. The team member names are Heather Potter, Kendall Morris, Judy Riekse, Barbara Cuthbert, Greta Miller, Joe Miller, Nancy Sterling, Paula Rudolph, Peggy Suess, Greg Suess and Beth Ann McClelland. The HOI guide was Martha Espinoza and our driver was named Ubaldo. The 2003 Grace Honduras Mission Team flew into Tegucigalpa, Honduras, which is the capitol of the country, on the afternoon of the June 28th. From Tegucigalpa, we were bused to Juticalpa where we spent the night. The bus ride was about 3 hours long and started our trip into the Honduran countryside. It is interesting how HOI initiates the missionary group to the Honduran culture. We spend the first night at a hotel in Juticalpa, which had a shower and little else. Then we were bused to the ranch from Juticalpa. This trip was over some fairly rough roads for about three hours. We spent the second night at the ranch, which has no TVs, no telephones and no air conditioning. This integrated us further in to the Honduran village culture. We actually stayed at the ranch for the next five nights, but every morning we would leave for the village, which is located about 1 hour and 20 minutes from the ranch over some very rough and muddy roads. July is wintertime in Honduras, but it was hot and arid with no rain. This was very different from the year before when it rained everyday. The village, El Quebrachal (San Esteban), consists of about 480 people and 78 families. They have neither electricity nor telephones nor clean water. Their main mode of transportation is by horseback. Honduras is a third world country and is one of the poorest countries in the Americas.

On Sunday, June 28, 2003, we arrived at Rancho El Paraiso where we unloaded our bags and were assigned room accommodations. During the afternoon, the team took a trip to the waterfall. This was unusual, since we typically take the trip on Thursday, but in Honduras, schedules are never the same. We had a

wonderful time at the waterfall where we could jump into the water from the high bank.

On Monday we traveled to the village on an old army truck that we affectionately called "The General". The General was our typical mode of transportation to and from the village. The first day that we drove into the village was very special. The village children lined up to greet us as we pulled up in the General. It was a very touching site to see these children, who have been waiting for a very long time in the sun to celebrate our return to the village. One of our team members noted after our return to the US.

"The most exhilarating event was our arrival into the village that first morning. Hearing the horns of the General announcing our arrival I had the feeling of our being rather intrusive but when we all laid eyes on those children so serenely standing proud in their uniforms each with their hands on the shoulders of the child in front of them it was like a vision I'd never seen before and when they began to sing so gently and lifting it just took my breath away. They may as well have been angels at the gates of heaven. It was a most emotional moment bringing tears to my eyes and a feeling of electricity through my being. If I could keep just one memory of our trip this vision would be my choice."



The Children of the Village Waiting for Our Arrival on the First Day

The time at the village of El Quebrachal SE was from Monday (June 30, 2003) through Thursday (July 3, 2003). During the four days at the village, we were involved with many projects. One was the support to the school by teaching Bible lessons, the second was to mix concrete and sand so we could provide concrete floors in 5 new houses, a third was to install roofs into the houses and the fourth project was to construct mud walls.

One of our four teams spent the morning in the elementary school (grades 1 through 6) and provided Bible school lessons, crafts and English lessons. During the first morning at the elementary school, hygiene kits were distributed to all the students. The other three teams helped the villagers mix cement for the floors and mud for the walls. The concrete was created on the ground by building a crater out of cement and sand mixture (1 100 lbs. bag of cement with 75 full shovels of course sand) and mixing the concrete and sand mixture with water. In some cases a large crater was created with a mixture of 3 bags of cement and 225 full shovels of sand. The cement and sand would be thoroughly mixed before creating a crater like mound of the cement/sand mix. Next, water was poured into the center of the crater. To create the final concrete mix, the dry cement/sand mixture was taken from the edge of the crater and put into the central area of the crater with the water. As the workers proceeded to mix the dry cement/sand mixture with the water in the crater, they moved in a counter clockwise direction around the crater. This is referred to as the crater dance.

Once the cement/sand mixture was mixed with the water, a concrete mix was formed with the proper texture for pouring onto the floors. The concrete mix was transported from the concrete mix mound to the house floor in buckets. The buckets are filled with cement, carried into the house and poured onto the floor where workers used hand tools to make a flat and even floor.

The roofs were constructed from framing materials such as small trees and limbs and some scrap lumber. The tin and nails were provided by HOI through Grace Presbyterian Church's contribution to HOI for the model village program. The mudding of a wall was performed in three steps. The first step was to mix the dirt and clay with water, which was performed by a villager. Then the mud/clay was carried by hand to the wall where it was placed into the wall lattice. The wall lattice was constructed from small trees and scrap lumber that were crossed to form a square lattice. The mud/clay was placed in the lattice square. About half way up the square, a rock was laid onto the mud/clay and then the mud/clay mixture was packed around it. This provided support to the wall structure. After some molding by the villagers and drying, the walls became very smooth and solid. In looking at the situation in the village, it looked like the villagers had worked about 3 months preparing for our arrival and they will probably work another month in completing all the projects that were started. We only spend four days in the village, but the net effect is that the villagers did most of the work. The over all result was that the village was able to change significantly and gain in knowledge with just a short visit from us. This is certainly God's work.

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Waterfall Fun Before We Start the Mission Work



Greg Helps the Villagers With the Roof



Children Deliver Water from the River to the Homes



Barbara Helping the Villages Get Sand from the River



Villagers Mixing Concrete With Beth Ann



Villagers Getting Ready to Mud Some Walls



Heather With Some Children in the School



Leaving the Village After the Fiesta

For the couple of years, the support from the villagers was inconsistent. This year it was completely different!!! The work was a mixture of many facets of building a home in the village. Mixing, pouring and leveling concrete for the floors, mudding and building the walls, and putting a roof on for cover were our primary duties. From the beginning, the villagers were there in large numbers and provided most of the work. All members of the family were actively involved in helping complete the tasks and it was very exciting to see the enthusiasm of the whole family working as a team and also helping other families finish their projects. This was very different from the first trip to the village where many of the villages would stand around and watch. Now they were taking the lead in

building a house for their family. A true transformation of the village was accomplished with the help of the Holy Spirit in three years. With God's help for our Mission Team's nurturing as Disciples of Christ, the village was transformed, in a very short time, into teammates working together to improve their own lives. I can't think of any better way to spend my time in sharing God's love and peace for mankind.

Sue Church, Executive Director of HOI, put it all so succinctly when she described the transformation as follows.

AT FIRST THE VILLAGERS OBSERVED THAT WE LOVED EACH OTHER FOR NO APPARENT REASON.

THEN THE VILLAGERS OBSERVED THAT WE LOVED THEM FOR NO APPARENT REASON.

THEN THE VILLAGES OBSERVED THAT THEY LOVED US FOR NO APPARENT REASON.

AND AT LAST, THE VILLAGERS FOUND THAT THEY LOVED EACH FOR NO APPARENT REASON.

By sharing some of the thoughts of the mission team, one can get a general feel for the exhilarating, uplifting and transformative experience the trip was for the villagers and us.

“My favorite part of the trip was interacting with the people, both in El Quebrachal and at the ranch. The strongest image I have is when I was reading with the children at one of the work sites. Five or more of them were close to me looking at a “Where’s Waldo?” type book, searching for a specific number of objects in a complex picture. We counted in Spanish. Their joy and enthusiasm were contagious. And I was gloriously and wonderfully “infected.””

“I think my favorite part, though, would have to be sharing our days with the villagers. They truly love us and we them. The spontaneous moments of song, dance and laughter were truly gifts from God. We were there to bring with us the love of God while working to improve their lives. What we saw was their willingness to help themselves and embrace the Lord.”

“I love the time with the kids, in school, playing at the homes, having fun at the fiesta. Why, because they are so open, so eager to try new things, and patient with our Spanish. They have the most beautiful faces and smiles. They just light up the day. I like the feeling of accomplishment when we complete a floor, or wall, or any of the many projects. Why, the feeling of being part of the community. Not just looking in, but becoming a part of the community, making a difference, being accepted. The Great feeling of God's Love! I feel like I'm going to a special place, like Grandma's house, and I look forward to it each time.”

On the last day at the village, the team organized a Fiesta for the villagers. At the beginning of the Fiesta, a special ceremony was conducted where we provided a speech to the villagers and they provided a prayer of thanks by the lay Holy Person of the village and speeches by the teacher, Anna, and the Lay Holy Person of the village. We presented the villages with specially decorated crosses that were prepared by the youth of the church. We also gave them work gloves and took a picture of each family. The villagers presented to many of the mission team members special gifts that were made by them or that they valued in a very special way. The villagers had a wonderful time dancing and celebrating with the mission group. The villagers were all wonderful and delightful to know and the time spent with them was a "grande" experience.

The 2003 Honduras Mission group flew out of Tegucigalpa, Honduras on Saturday July 5, 2003 and landed at Ronald Regan National Airport at about 10:00 P.M. Saturday night. The Honduras Team 2003 had a marvelous time and saw the culmination of a wonderful experience in helping a whole village help themselves in God's love of humanity.

The 2004 Grace Honduras Mission Team will leave Ronald Reagan National Airport on July 10, 2004 and if you would like to be part of that team or contribute to the team in any way, please contact Joe Miller by dropping a note in his mail box at the church (Grace Presbyterian Church, 7434 Bath Street, Springfield, VA 22150) or by calling Joe or Greta at (703) 313-6216. You can also visit our web site at <http://www.josephsmiller.com/gho/> for more information. If you are interested in providing financial support to the mission, please send your checks to Grace Presbyterian Church for the Honduras Fund.

Best Wishes and God Bless,

Joe and Greta Miller