

Reflections: Our time in Honduras



July 8 - 15, 2017

Youth Missioners

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The Episcopal Church of the Holy Spirit once again participated in an International Mission trip to Honduras in support of LAMB Institute in July of this year. But unlike last year, this was an ECOHS trip — rather than join an existing group of missionaries to LAMB, we initiated our own trip for ECOHS parishioners and friends.

There was another team first this year, as several of our ECOHS team members have now been missionaries to Honduras more than once. There's a real sense of awe as we *return home* to a place that has become a permanent part of our hearts. We recognize both what has changed and what remains the same; reconnect with growing children, beloved workers, and dedicated staff; and opening our hearts in a new way to ever-deepening relationships.

Thank you, to all who prayed for us, donated airline tickets, and gave of your time, talent, and treasure to support this year's trip. Our exciting January Fundraising Dinner and Silent Auction, plus generous gifts from so many of you, made this trip a reality. And a huge thanks to all who kept praying for us during our trip, particularly our prayer partners who took on the extra role of writing prayer notes for our team members and praying for us individually. Our Holy Spirit family's tender prayers and deep caring for us all, as we challenged ourselves to experience Christ's love in a different culture far from home, is deeply appreciated. This trip would not have been possible without you.

Short-term mission trips can be both joy-filled and heartbreaking. Joy-filled, as we experience God's love in new ways and recognize God's hand in the greater world. Heartbreaking, as we see poverty that we have never experienced, hear of great sorrow that we cannot fully understand, and learn of problems we cannot solve. These experiences have the potential to open our eyes to new ways to live our lives: to more fully trust in God, to work together as a community, and discern the movement of the Spirit among us. This team has taken that first step to begin a new journey.

These reflections tell a piece of our story and we happily share with you our early thoughts and memories from this trip. Some of us will be called to join these trips multiple years, others will come only once . . . but these experiences will be with us throughout our lives, and in some ways, we are forever-changed by this faith experience.

Mother Bonnie+
September 2017

*P.S. One final thought: if these reflections warm your heart or leave you wondering whether this ministry of mission is calling you, please contact me. We already have the dates for next year's trip: **July 7-14, 2018**. Perhaps you too are being called to participate, in some way, with mission work and LAMB Institute.*

This week in Honduras has taught me so much. I had no clue what to expect and little did I know that this was going to be one of the best weeks I've ever lived.

Stepping out of the airport was a bit of a shock. There were kids selling gum trying to make a living, moms with kids asking for donations, people who had lost limbs. It was very sad to see, to say the least. And then there was the shock of driving. I didn't know that when I had heard that "driving rules don't apply in Honduras," they actually meant "driving rules don't apply in Honduras." No seat belts and crazy rides (aka totally rad drives). And I also didn't know that when they said "traffic is bad" that could mean a 5 1/2 hour long *cola* (aka a party when the traffic stops on the highway — all the cars get turned off, the people get out on the side of the road, and food and drink vendors arrive). As strange as it sounds, totally worth the experience.

But one thing I can truly say that is when people tell you that Hondurans are some of the most hard-working, Jesus-loving, kindest people in the world, they mean it. From random strangers, police, and military on the streets, to the workers at Lamb, we saw real kindness. Angel — so sweet and full of love for God and life, with his amazing voice that brought me to tears every day, his face so happy when he sang God's praise and laughing whenever I attempted to speak Spanish. Mario — the happiest, smartest, wisest man with a smile that could light up a room. Ariel — the shortest, youngest, liveliest man who happened to turn 26 the first day we started working. And Jose Luis — who is currently studying at night at the 3rd/4th-grade level, learning to read and write, so he can become an engineer. I saw God in so many ways this week as I laughed while working on the prayer wall and perimeter wall with the four workers. This time at Lamb was truly amazing and so heartwarming

And I met others. Daniel, a boy who lived in the house across from us, who I met while sitting on the balcony at the guest house. He reads his book every day and night while walking around the gated neighborhood. At the beginning of the week he was a total stranger, but by the end, he was a friend. One time I couldn't get a black bag full of lunch boxes and water bottles for the kids at the children's home into the van (being the weak person I am) and Daniel tapped me on the shoulder and said in amazing English, "Hey, do you need help? I can help you." He took the bag from me and placed it into the van with what seemed like no effort at all. This is one of the many examples I have of total strangers being kind and welcoming to us. I'm surprised we didn't scare him off, between Luke yelling "*TE AMO!*" to all of us bombarding him with questions. Daniel is trilingual — French, Spanish, AND English — and it was great to make another new friend.

This week in Honduras also made me realize how truly ungrateful and materialistic we can be in our own culture. The kids in Honduras would do anything for a chance to get educated, be safe, and feel loved. If it wasn't for Suzy McCall, founder of LAMB Institute, and God's help, the 70-ish kids that live at the children's home could still be living lives of abuse, neglect, or worse. With God's help, this ministry and the people leading it provides education for 200+ children at the school in Flor; encourage kids to stay out of gangs through the Alonzo movement; and help adults make the money they need to care for their kids through the micro-credit business program. I truly saw what it meant to serve the Lord with a servant's heart, by loving others as He loves us, and humbling yourself by putting others before you, and not expecting anything in return.

Following God's call makes such difference. When I think about what could have happened if Suzy hadn't answered Christ's call, my heart hurts. But then, what could happen if we all answered God's call? How much is possible if we all carry Christ's unconditional love into the world?

I was only gone a week, but it really did change everything.

Going on a mission trip for the first time, I didn't know what to expect. I had never been outside of the U.S. or experienced the culture of a foreign country. Upon arrival, the differences were obvious. The moment we stepped foot outside of the airport there were people begging for money and garbage-lined the streets.

But of all the differences, the most shocking was how happy and kind the people were, in spite of their circumstances. These people have SO little, yet were so happy and optimistic about life. It took me some time to realize where their joy came from.

Their joy wasn't found in the items they possessed but in Christ. Their knowledge of Him and His Grace gave them a joy that they could not contain. I saw this joy in the children we visited at Lamb Institute, in the workers we spent time with, and in every person we met. I saw God in each person I came in contact with, and now better realize what it means to know God and the possibilities of sharing His love, one person at a time.

Luke Blair, 9th grade

I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to go to Honduras. I had no idea what to expect going into this experience. I was nervous at first for leaving the states for my (technically) second time. I had no idea what the country would look like or how the local people would be or the kids at the orphanage. I pondered if the people would be rude or accepting to the fact we were there.

It was weird when we got off the plane and through security to have everyone staring at you. It made me realize how much I hate having the spotlight on me. Once arriving at the house, I felt more comfortable and my worries were lifted after seeing some of the views of the drive from the airport.

This week consisted of so many great memories that I wish I could re-live every single day! One of my favorite things to do is play soccer, and when I was told that we were going to be able to play with the Hondurans, I was super excited! One evening we went to the Alonzo Movement where we got to pray as a group and then play soccer. I was very excited to play, but intimidated at the same time. Hondurans are very good, so I was ready to get destroyed.

Instead, it ended up completely different than I thought! My team was very welcoming and I connected to them instantly. It was hard at first because of the language barrier, but I found a way around that. I realized I couldn't talk to them very well, so I decided if I couldn't verbally show my emotions and excitement to play with them, I would physically. I did the American way of giving high fives, thumbs up and saying one Spanish word, *bueno*. They caught on quick to my actions and ending up doing it back to me. I was overwhelmed with joy that night. It was hard to say goodbye to them since I knew I wouldn't see them again, but those boys will be forever in my prayers and heart.

That was my favorite part of the trip because I saw God so much through those boys and I know God will do remarkable things for them. In all honesty, I did not think that I would see God so much in something like soccer. The fact I was doing what I love but also experiencing the presence of God at the same time, was a moment I know I will never forget.

At the end of the trip, I fully realized what true happiness in a person can look like. The adults, kids, and the workers all had so little and lived in an area of immense poverty, but they didn't mind not having the newest clothes, let alone a lot of clothes. They showed me that having a positive outlook on life and living every day thankful for what you do have is all you truly need to happy. This changed my perspective on life and I am so grateful!

I personally thank the Church of the Holy Spirit and my team for this amazing opportunity that was life-changing for me!

Tatyana Blair, 12th grade

The magnitude of the change this trip has had on and in me has me at a loss for words. I know what has changed most is my relationship with Christ. I feel this time has been the beginning of a long-term, strengthening experience that will extend throughout the rest of my life. I've seen, heard, and felt what could only be the presence of Christ: the blessed lives of these extraordinary children with their clear love of each other and Jesus; the inspiring stories of the ladies who are part of the micro-credit program; the amazing and driven people I have been surrounded by this past week. I've been truly touched by this experience and feel so blessed to have had this opportunity and I look forward to returning in the future.

The children were a highlight of the mission trip for me. The light and love in their eyes are unlike anything I've ever seen in my entire life. This was best displayed at the school in Flor del Campo on Wednesday morning when we attended a morning devotional with the students. The entire school gathered on their outdoor concrete soccer field, to be led by a 1st grader wearing a blazer, a button-down shirt, and tie (which was adorable, but that's beside the point). This 1st grader led us first in prayer and then in learning a Bible passage. But then he also led us in song. There was one specific song, one moment, that moved me and brought me to tears. It was amazing to watch all these wonderful children from such an impoverished area sing their hearts out to God. I saw something new, a living picture, that our God is the God of all, no matter where we are from. The singing echoed throughout the neighborhood around us on this peaceful morning, for all to hear. My heart was opened to the importance, the gravity of this trip, this time, all at once. That moment was the most centered and whole I had ever felt.

The workers and fellow youth and members of the mission trip were amazing. I got incredibly close to my fellow trip members after hanging out with them 24/7 and I was surrounded by people I love and people who love me. People like Jack DeArmey and Carly Morris who, prior to this trip, were complete strangers to me, are now people I talk to periodically and I have shared some of my best memories with. People I already knew are now so much closer to me and I feel I could come to them for help or advice or maybe just to talk about our trip or just plain hanging out. The workers were incredibly charming and were extremely nice. They were patient with us very inexperienced people, guiding us on how to make walls and picking the right stones for said walls...and making *mezcla*. They have excellent senses of humor and some of the most amazing voices I have ever had the pleasure of listening to. Angel, who plays the guitar, sang with such a passion and love for God, that he inspired me to become that close and that passionate about God, too. I wouldn't trade my experience for anything in the world; not even for a *ground spoon*.*

Andrea Cardona, 9th grade

*-Love you, Colleen

*P.S. **ground spoon** is a team inside joke: one day, Colleen Norris was struggling to remember the Spanish word for shovel — so instead, she translated it as **ground spoon** — which is now officially memorialized forever. . . MoBo+*

This was my second year going to Honduras. Although it may sound funny, I wasn't sure what to expect this year. I hadn't worried about what to expect the first time but did wonder if things would be different this time. I knew there would be fellowship and I'd reconnect with friends I'd been missing all year long. However, I wasn't sure what experiences I'd encounter. Happily, I saw so much more than I thought I would, particularly more of the *Honduran Joy* I had been longing for.

Two moments particularly touched me. The first was on Wednesday when our team visited Valley of the Angels to sightsee and shop. While we were there, I was in a small shop waiting with MoBo+, as she collected her goodies for next year's Honduras Mission Silent Auction fundraiser. I watched some military personnel walk into the small shop, followed by a woman, who was a doctor. She picked up a child's toy. It was a clapper! She began playing and laughing, as all around her smiled while seeing her joy. I was delighted as I glanced back and saw such a playful and thrilled look on her face.

The second was a regular occurrence for me and the team. Angel, one of the Honduran workers, played guitar after lunch for about 20 minutes every day we worked at the children's home. He always played with such vigor and happiness. He sang his own songs and ones that are known across the world, with that same wonderful look on his face.

What I came to realize is that this *Honduran Joy* is common among so many of the people we saw! Whether in Valley or at the Children's Home, this joy is something you can breathe in the very air. It surrounds the people because they have God in their lives. They know that they are God's beloved children and live their lives with happiness and joy.

Colleen Norris, 10th grade

A website called "Lonely Planet", described Honduras as being a place "... so often hurried through or avoided entirely due to its dangerous image, (but) is actually a vibrant and fascinating place with an enormous amount to offer intrepid travelers".

And in fact, Honduras is just that. Over the past two visits I have made to Honduras, I have seen the glory that it holds for those who are open to experiencing God's love and spreading God's love around. From the children in San Buenaventura to those at the school in Flor del Campo, it is amazing how much they believe in God's miracles and how much they seek to share God's love with one another.

I have seen God's love first hand through these kids who we have worked with and come to know so well. As I hear people tell about their difficulties and how they have escaped some terrible parts of their lives, I witness just how much God's hands have lovingly wrapped around His precious children, showing them the way.

Lamb is a wonderful organization and has done so much in Teguz, from housing children who were orphans or homeless, to providing education, and even helping young people find a path away from gangs and fighting for their lives out in the world. Lamb has changed both children's and adults' lives, through the love and care they provide through services like the micro-credit program. I've seen those in the ministry drop virtually everything to help those who have nothing, and provide a healthy, supportive environment. It's remarkable to watch. All involved have so much love and deeply care for the children. It is amazing to see the possibilities — what can happen, with God's help.

I don't think I would have seen God's miracles first hand if I had not gone to Honduras. Although we too have places that need people's help, there's something about Honduras that touches you and sticks with you for a long time. Perhaps it's because life there is so different from our own and the culture shock makes it easier to see. But it seems to be simpler to recognize how grateful people are for what they do have, even when they seem to have nothing. They are open to seeing God's work in the world and even appreciate the time we are there, helping with some of the work and playing with the kids. It touches each and every one of us. We're open to sharing ourselves, and we grow with these kids — even in a week — creating bonds with the children and one another that are hard to leave behind.

And we leave with hope. Hope that the children will continue to grow and know God's love, hope that we can return again and see how they've grown, and hope that God is with us all. For we are all God's beloved children.

Mary Edwards, Freshman, Kennesaw State

My second time here in Honduras was amazing. When we arrived at Casa Lamb, the guest house, it felt just like home, almost as if I hadn't been gone a year. And when we first arrived the next day at the children's home, I was so excited to see the children. I couldn't believe how grown up so many of the kids I knew were. How could this happen in only a year?

When we started our work projects, I was so excited to make *mescla* (somewhat like concrete), which I didn't get to do last year. A new project, a new chance to learn something different, and even though it was hard work, it was super cool to get to see the wall we were building come together. Things are done so differently in Honduras, reminding me that different's not bad, it's just different and that through difference comes new knowledge and experiences to take home.

This new project allowed me to get to know some of the workmen better as we worked together in small groups most days. Ariel and Jose Luis were a lot of help to us, and I was surprised at how much of my Spanish resurfaced and had improved, year over year. Though there was still some sort of a language barrier, I was able to break down walls and unite through song, which is divine in itself. There is something so beautiful about connecting through the simple action of strumming a guitar. Angel sang just as amazingly as he did last year and I often find myself listening to the video of our team singing "Seek Ye First." The video captured a spontaneous moment after lunch on our final work day, as we sang the final verse — lifting our voices in English *and* Spanish — in praise of our living God. Amazing.

A new part of this trip was getting to see the devotional at the school in Flor del Campo, which we did not get to do last year. They have amazing programs at Flor and, as I experienced last year, and we got to learn more about the microcredit program and the Alonzo movement. I took new things away from hearing the speakers this year. It is so inspiring to witness the strength, resolve, and perseverance of the people involved in these ministries. I find it amazing that even in one of the poorest areas in Honduras, God's light is so obviously present.

What was particularly meaningful for me this year was getting to spend time once again with the kids I had met last year, and learn more of their stories. And I built new relationships with some wonderfully crazy little boys who made my heart smile every single day, as they would follow me. Every one of these children, each individual lamb, has such an amazing spirit. With God's help and all the helping hands and feet of those who follow Christ, I can trust that these precious lambs will continue to know God's love and grow into amazing people. It is such a blessing to be part of Christ's body, and serve as the hands and feet of Christ in the world.

Laura Schlecht, 12th grade

This was my second trip as an adult leader to Honduras in support of LAMB Institute's mission there. In many ways, I felt this trip was more meaningful to me than the previous year. Several things were different. First, our group was only people from Holy Spirit, along with a couple new friends. Second, I was more at ease because I knew the terrain and the schedule we would follow. I am always struck by the amazing faith of the people in Honduras that we interact with. They have very little in the way of material possessions but have a tremendous faith in God. The same, I believe, can be said for the general population in Honduras. Everywhere we went there were signs with phrases praising *Dios* (Spanish for God) and Jesus Christo. These were displayed on cars, trucks, buses, businesses, and homes. Not something we see a lot of in the US, but very common in Honduras.

The work we do for LAMB is very important and the people there are clearly appreciative that we have come in person to support them. This has much more meaning than simply sending a check, although contributions are important too. One of the great joys is interacting with the kids at the children's home in San Buenaventura (SBV). I was looking forward to seeing how much the little ones had grown since last year. They had grown some in size but also were now speaking some English thanks to a US teacher named Jenny that is working with them. They clearly understood more English than they wanted to let on. Even a special needs boy named Elias was speaking some English. I don't usually do well with special needs kids, but I was really impressed by how much Elias had improved since last year. On Sunday when we arrived for the church service at SBV a little boy I knew from last year named Alex Edwardo grabbed my hand and we walked together to the church and sat together through the service (well some of it, because Alex is a little monkey that can't sit still for long). When Alex came to LAMB he was 14 months old, weighed only 11 pounds and was near death. A Tia was assigned just to care for him and today he is a healthy, but small, boy — almost 5 years old and full of energy.

I again worked on the Prayer Wall...it's final stage. The Honduran stone mason leading us is named Angel and I enjoyed working with him again. Angel's English has improved since last year too. I found that our team was always trying to speak in Spanish to Angel, but he would many times answer us in English. His singing and guitar playing during our lunch break is always very moving, even though we don't understand all the words, it is truly a special time.

LAMB is doing wonderful work through all their various missions in Honduras. My wife, Carol, and I are now discussing the idea of helping to sponsor one of the children at SBV. Yes, it was again a most meaningful experience for me and I do plan to go back.

Jay Franklin, Adult Leader

After so many years traveling to Honduras, I can't help but smile when *that moment* occurs on a trip. It's that time I'm caught by surprise when something I had never noticed before strikes me so clearly, it almost takes my breath away . . . or in some cases, like this year, causes my tears to flow. These moments are a gift from God, a time when I'm reminded to slow down and see — see Christ's light in the world around us.

Seeing Julio was one of those moments for me. I caught sight of him during Sunday worship at the Children's Home. He's easy to spot, as the lead singer and keyboard player for the praise band, helping to lead worship. But my mind didn't just see the Julio of today but flashed back to the young Julio, one of the early arrivals at LAMB. He was a beautiful child, with warm, brown eyes and a quick smile, who, even at 7, was lovingly protective of his siblings.

So many images went through my mind: a skinny, fragile-looking 7-year-old; a shy adolescent; a growing, somewhat awkward teenager; and now this confident young man — a sophomore at the university, studying to be an architect and the first of what we pray will be many more Children's Home youth, seeking higher education.

After the service, I was thrilled to hear that Julio would be spending some time with us at the guest house that evening. He'd been working on a major project for his architecture class and been pulling all-nighters for a few days. Our guest house location would provide quiet time and space for those finishing touches, as well help to avoid the *cola*, the unpredictable traffic delays due to major road construction in the area.

That evening we invited Julio to join our devotional time, beginning with each of us sharing our "rose, bud, and thorn" of the day. A rose was that high point, something that showed us God's light in the world; a thorn, those prickly parts that stung us and hurt our hearts; and the buds: the hope and potential for things to come.

When it was my turn, I shared with Julio and the team that he was my rose and bud for that day. I had seen him grow from that scrawny boy — one who faced challenges that I would never experience and by all rational accounts would have virtually no hope for his future. Yet here he is today: a strong, self-assured young man; firm in his faith; knowing that God is with him in all that he does.

On this day, Julio was a living sign of God's hope. He was a sign of the possibilities for these beloved children helped by LAMB, but also represented hope for us who travel to Honduras and come to know this ministry. Hope that we will have our eyes opened to see God's work in the wider world, that we will be vulnerable enough to have our hearts broken open, and that we will discover the great joy of coming to know and care for God's Littlest Lambs.

Thanks be to God who breaks down the walls that separate us and unites us in bonds of love. May our hearts continue to be warmed by the Spirit, that we can serve our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in our daily lives.

Mother Bonnie+
Associate Rector

*For more information on LAMB Institute:
www.lambinstitute.org*

*For the ECOHS blog on the 2017 Honduras Trip:
www.ecohshonduras.wordpress.com*

*For Amanda Scott's blog on the Lamb Institute ministry in Honduras:
www.amandablogspot.com*

Amanda is a full-time Episcopal missionary, working with Lamb Institute in Honduras.

*Search your heart. Are you called to come? Or help those who do?
Or support the children of LAMB?*

Planning is beginning for next year's trip, July 8 - 15, 2017.

Prayerfully consider joining us in this work.