

Village Updates Spring 2009



Who Are You People?

A few months ago I was leaving from the Tegucigalpa airport when a nice American couple struck up a conversation with me. They were also returning to the states following a visit with their adult children. Living in Honduras for two years, their children were part of a Missions Team running an orphanage.

They went in detail describing all the wonderful things their children were doing for the orphans and what their lives were like. Exhausting all their accolades, curiosity got the best of them and they asked me what I was doing in Honduras.

Our work in Honduras is difficult to describe succinctly, and so organic that it keeps morphing into something better each year.

That thought was going through my head when the strangest answer popped right out of my mouth. "I suppose what we do here is try our level best to put your children out of business!" Then I sat back and smiled broadly as they all but glared at me in abject horror.

Knowing full well that orphanages are needed, but sort of enjoying the shock value of that declaration, I let them stammer about for a bit before I told them I was teasing. Sort of...

While Honduras is one of the poorest nations on earth, it is loaded with NGOs (Non Governmental Organizations) and has been for decades. It appears that precious few are making any long-term difference or dents in the overall economic situation or social fabric of the country. In fact, things are going from bad to worse.

And so from that little conversation in the airport a more succinct Mission Statement was born. What we are doing in Honduras is: *Working ourselves out of a job one village at a time.*

But it takes a very long term and committed vision to reverse the inertia. Honduras has been the recipient of handouts for so long that an entitlement mentality has taken the place of industry, imagination, and responsibility among many of the poor.

In the case of the older generation it is simply too late to change their mindset. To have any real affect in the culture we must start with the children and train them to think differently. To do this requires a lot of time and exposure to new ways of thinking.

Funneling children into our sphere of influence requires three forces of containment. First and foremost we need the cooperation of the parents. We visit each home in the villages we serve at least twice a year – more often if necessary to implore the parents to leave their children in school. This is on top of regular meetings we hold with parents on a quarterly basis. This year we rescued over 400 children from working the bean fields instead of going to school, by talking to parents and providing needed supplies.

Another must in keeping children in our center is enlisting the support of the local school teachers. Our staffs' weekly interactions with all the public school teachers tell us what students need and how we can assist in educating them. Some teachers have asked us for attendance

records to give students who attend our center extra credit.

Teachers report the grades of the students who attend our center are significantly higher than those who do not. We find this fascinating because the children who do not attend the center tend to be the better off children in Linaca. Those with more advantages are presumed to do better in school. But this is not the case here.

The third aspect of containment is meeting regularly with a group of men and women leaders in the village to help them shape their vision of what needs to be accomplished in their towns.

Keeping the flow of children into our circle of influence is quite challenging when public school teachers are always going on strike, the world economy combined with droughts and floods cause parents to send their children to the bean fields instead of school and our center, and the brain drain keeps on sucking the best and brightest leaders out of their villages to find work in the big city or the United States.

What has aided us enormously this past year is the crop of teens that have grown up in our center. In exchange for High School scholarships, some fifty incredible young leaders assist in the work of tutoring the younger children and doing other social services in the villages.

Another boon to the work in the new villages was the request by the District Head of the public school system in Paraiso for us to offer our services in the Jamastran Valley.

His commendation gave us immediate access to the leaders and parents of the five new towns where we began working this past year.

Of those five towns, three that are in reasonable proximity of one another, contain a large number of teachers, parents, community and teen leaders who are very enthusiastic about our programs.

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Who Are You People *continued*

To build relationships and community we need contact with the children more than once a week. So we began serving each village on a specific day of the week, while encouraging children from the other two villages to walk, bike, or come on horseback so we could all be together.

Those who live too far away with no form of transportation are rounded up in the back of our pickup and taken to the meetings. In only two months time we were able to turn children from three villages into one unified team. The energy created from this union is very powerful.

We expected to uncover some competition and village feuds. However, the principles we have been reinforcing in the teens and children over the past six months seem to have made such a difference we were all stunned.

In fact, one of the elder leaders in a village we serve stopped our team one day and said, "WHO ARE YOU PEOPLE?"



In all his years the man had never seen anyone able to bring the children together. We attribute this success to some very basic teachings our team lives by: we are a family, a network of friends; our purpose is to learn to love; and our ministry is reconciliation, among many other things. It was evident to all concerned that the teachings were seriously taken to heart.

As you may recall each day our teams begin their day with what we call Cheque Shalom (a funny little term we made up for checking your peace).

Each participant in the work is asked to evaluate how they are doing with God, how they are doing personally, and how they are doing with the other members of the assembled group.

What this requires is honesty, not perfection. If a person has little or no faith in God, they are not kicked off the team. But they are kicked off the team if they refuse to be honest about their relationships and work on them when there is a problem.

One of the most powerful Cheque Shalom times ever happened recently in a new village. Over 60 children, from three villages, ages 8 – 18 participated. As the team went around the circle everyone reported being Cheque Shalom with the rest of the group.

However one little nine-year-old had learned her lesson well. When asked where she stood, the child got tears in her eyes and pointing at a sixteen-year-old in the group she proclaimed she was not Cheque Shalom with her.

Our policy in Cheque Shalom is if you have a problem with another team member, you first go to that person in private and attempt to work things out between the two of you. Failing that, you take another person as a witness to resolve the issue. If that fails, you take the problem to the group.

Our mentors took the girls aside and learned that the nine-year-old's father had moved from home - taking up residence with the sixteen-year old. Sadly, this is not uncommon in the villages where we work. However, the older girl had been learning a lot from our mentor team about how to live. She was so remorseful that she left the child's father and has turned over a whole new leaf on life. This was one of the most powerful lessons ever to all the teens and children in the village.

One of the first things we teach the children is their purpose in this life is to learn to love God and one another. That lesson also has made profound differences in the lives of the children.

Some of the rougher young men in the new villages were curious about what we were doing and began to show up at our meetings. No one had ever paid any attention to these kids, much less loved them.

The boys were described as hooligans, at best, when they started attending. It was soon revealed that the families of two of the teens were at war with one another due to a murder and revenge killing between the older generations. Yet these boys continued to attend and learn.

Then something miraculous happened. These boys found that they did not hate one another at all. They actually became friends and have nothing to attribute it to other than asking God to help them learn to love instead of hate.

In some cases, what took five years to accomplish in Linaca has



happened in a few months in the new villages. It is not that we are so smart or had all this planned from the get go. There is no doubt God has supernaturally brought us to where we needed to be and taught us each step of the way.

In this season of relative peace in the work, it is a pleasure to watch the simplicity of these new friendships, fanned with the fire of love and a few new ideas, create communities of hope.

More clearly than ever, we see the possibility of working ourselves out of a job in each and every village we enter.

During these tough economic times the team thanks you for your sacrifices. Together we are making a significant difference.

WE HAVE A \$50,000 MATCHING GRANT

AND WE ARE ALMOST THERE!

Thanks to your generosity, even in these difficult economic times, a little over 37,000 has come in! The remaining \$13,000.00, when combined with other pledges, will fund the children's work to near the end of 2009.

One hundred percent – yes, 100% - of your designated donations are spent in Honduras for teen scholarships, tuition, school uniforms, supplies for our centers and public schools, nutrition, medical care, and all other needs associated with our children's work.

WRG is different than most 501(c)3 organizations in that 100% of your giving goes to your designated choice. Administration is funded separately.

All undesignated giving is used where our board deems the need to be the greatest. Please make your check out to World Resources Group. Designated giving should be specified on the memo line.

