

**Scott Petersen Missioner Report from Our Little Roses  
For Episcopal Education Society  
C/O Mrs. Penny Saffer**

**“Dios te bendiga, Dios te bendiga, Dios te bendiga”**

It has been quite a summer here in Honduras. Even though we are very much here there has been a surreal element to all of this. The culture itself has been very much different than what I expected. So too is mission or at least my limited exposure to it. What strikes me most deeply is that regardless as to whether we can bring any lasting benefit or not, we needed to come and experience this. Regardless, if American Christians can bring any benefit to the world or not, they need to leave America to see the world more fully. If only, to begin to “see” more clearly. If only, to begin to see ourselves more clearly.

Our mission has been to experience life at Our Little Roses ministry in San Pedro Sula, Honduras. Our Little Roses is a compound that sits between a home for the blind and a home for the mentally ill ministered by the Sisters of Charity. On one side sits a neighborhood of gated and razor wired houses that bleeds into the city. On the other is “el bordo” or the Levy. The Levy is a stretch of land along the river. It is a squatted land of cement, wood, wire, and stolen power. There, amidst this, lies the home. Our Little Roses is a compound surrounded by high walls and razor wire. Within are two large buildings which house both the older and younger girls, two kitchens, a bilingual school, the official offices, an apartment, and a dorm that can house up to 30 visitors. Behind the two large buildings lies “La Cancha” or a tin roofed play area that serves both the girls and the bilingual school.

Our Little Roses is a home that serves the needs of 78 girls. Many of the girls have come from situations of extreme poverty, abuse, dying parents, and alcoholism. What is striking about the home is the girls themselves. Beyond the attributes of youth they demonstrate a resilience, caring, and love which one might figure absent from where they have come from. While not every child demonstrates this all the time the theme of Our Little Roses is a place of caring and hope. While it is not without its difficulties from staffing, upkeep, and the curse of institutionalism, OLR manages to keep them at bay with its spirit. I may dare say that it is kept at bay by the Spirit.

There has been for my wife and I a sense that we are more observers than missionaries. My family was given a privileged view not only of the home but how the home interacts with the very different churches that come here on mission. Thus far we have lived in the home not only with the girls but, seven different mission groups who have come from around the United States. They have allowed us the opportunity to not Witness in the Christian sense but witness. My family was allowed in and we have been able to watch this fascinating ministry.

Mission, at least as I understood it coming here, has a connotation of “purpose”. To be missionaries is to bring the Gospel. As an individual from the North East Corridor we are trained by our culture(very well, I might add) to be people of purpose. Our value

is measured by with our ability to network, achieve goals, and multi-task. Naturally, I applied that drive to mission work. There was a sense prior to coming here that we would come, finish projects and in our finishing projects we would make OLR, Honduras, and even the world a better place. While one should read the last paragraph with a little humor, my sense of mission was really the fusion of Steven Covey and the Gospel. What I was to discover in the conversations with the many other American missionaries who came through this summer, that this “purpose ness” was a shared conception. It was never stated but, it was there. This is the stuff of two cultures colliding. It has left me wondering over the course of the summer who was missioning to whom? Was it us coming to help the girls or the girls and the wider culture missioning to us? In answering honestly, I think it is us who needed the missioning to. We’ve experienced a place that has certainly received us. The girls have taken in our children. In fact they have taken in all of us, sharing not only their home but their lives.

This trip, as long as it was, is not long enough to bring any real change. Yet as short as it has been I have caught a further glimpse not so much into Honduras but myself. This became revealed most clearly during a recent trip to Omoa. I was to come face to face with my culture and the legacy it has left with me. Thankfully in coming to see how “encultured” I am as an American I was able to be blessed by a God who is not bound by our culture. God and country are not synonymous.

It was about our forth week here and the walls of the Compound were starting to creep in. One of things my eldest son Henny has sought this summer was to see the blue water of the Caribbean. We decided to travel to see the Fortuleza de Omoa which also happened to be on the coast. We set out for our hour and half journey on two local “directo’s”. We thought we might find that blue water. It would be a day of relaxation.

When we got to the town is was very much like all the others we had seen. It was dusty and there was a lot of trash. We were hot having been packed in like sardines. The air in town smelled of exhaust and dying sea creatures but at least it was a little fresher than the stink of hot bodies on the bus. Benjamin my two year old was crying because he was hot. Rebekah my four year old was hungry and my eldest was bugging me for a Fanta. And then we saw the beach... it was a mess. The water was not blue but brackish. It was doted with dead limbs and trash. The beach itself was full of trash and to our amazement there were many people swimming. My expectation of a nice get away came crashing down on that shore.

I wanted to leave. I didn’t want to simply leave Omoa. I wanted to leave Honduras. I was tired of the smell. I was tired of the trash. I was tired about being vigilant about what we eat and how often we wash our hands. I was fed up with being worried about my children and their little bouts of sickness. I wiggged out essentially. This was to be my lowest point. It was my desert. It was if I was trapped and I did not want the next breath. I simply felt dirty and I wanted to flee. Four weeks in Honduras had left me raw. So much of what I take for granted are comforts. What I’ve grown accustomed to in the states is simply not the norm in all the world. I experienced what I believe to be a

cultural brake down. I had been stripped. I understand for the first time the Israelites plea for the vegetables of Egypt. I wanted leeks and onions not what I was getting!

I had regained some composure Monday morning. We managed to get our things packed up and needed to return to the home. We managed to catch a local bus or “chicken bus” from Omoa heading to Puerto Cortes. The bus was an old American School bus. It belched out a black cloud as it lurched off down the road. My eldest son Henny and I had to stand. My wife managed a seat and a woman sitting next to her took turns passing Benjamin and Rebekah back and forth. We were the only Americans on the bus. If anyone was gawking I didn’t notice. Mostly it was simply the blank faces of people riding a public bus. Not having anywhere else to go I watched and began to see.

The first thing I noticed was that women and children always got a seat. If a mother got on a young man or girl would get out of their seat. If she had more than one child and they were small grandmothers or other woman would sit them on their lap. I was to experience as I had experienced before in Honduras that you would always get your change. Once a price is settled the proper change was always returned. In the middle of this crowded bus there was a man who walked, dodged, jostled his way back and forth collecting the fare from all incoming passengers. The price for my family was 40 lempira (just over two dollars). I only had a hundred lempira note. He rolled his eyes a bit but took the money. He did not have change at the time. He pushed his way passed toward the end of the bus. It took about five minutes and I have to admit I thought he walked off with my three dollars of change. Yet five minutes later he weaved his way back toward the front giving me the 60 lempira. It was the next experience on that bus which has made me glad I did not return to that old slavery.

When we got to Honduras in the beginning of the summer I was told that Hondurans will not really let you know what they need. They tend to keep their thoughts to themselves. This was evidenced by the man who cuts the trees and grass who never once asked for food or water even though it was incredibly hot. This was also evidenced by Ella the housekeeper who I heard never complained that she washed the girls clothes by hand prior to the home getting washers and dryers. For someone to brake that code of silence, I think, is given more merit then say, in the states. As we rode along a blind man being led by young boy got on the bus. As the bus lurched off again the man took off his dark glasses revealing eyes that would not focus. They were glossed over with a film. He was obviously blind. He began to shout out his story to the whole bus. It was hard to tell if anyone was listening.

From what I could understand he had lost his sight at work. My wife told me later that he had had several surgeries but nothing worked. He himself was unemployable. He was asking for money. I was to see a depth of charity that would be hard to find in the states. He began to walk toward the end of the bus. Lempira began to be thrust into his hand. A little at a time the dollars were placed there and as he went he repeated over and over, “Dios te bendiga, Dios te bendiga, Dios te bendiga.” “God bless you, God bless you, God bless you.”

Sixty to seventy percent of the people riding toward Puerto Cortes placed money in his hand. These were people riding the “chicken bus”. They didn’t have cars. These were people who were also in need. They did not have insurance. They were hanging on with low paying jobs. They were people who lived closer to “daily bread” than my family did. They reached over and shared what they had. They slipped Lempira's in the blind mans hand. No one congratulated themselves or hung a plaque. They barely changed their expression. They were simply on the road to Puerto Cortes and the meek came calling. He was received. His daily bread came. He blessed us. “Dios te bendiga, Dios te bendiga, Dios te bendiga.”

Thankfully God is not bound by our expectations. Had I left Honduras that night I never would have seen the “other” Honduras as evidenced by the giving to the blind man. I think that at this point in the mission that has been the greatest effect. I’ve had to look beyond the surface of things. By coming I’ve seen beyond what was told to me about Honduras. By coming I’ve also seen beyond what I have been told about the United States. This culture has allowed me to see it again. The experience in general and specifically in Omoa has stripped away many of the comforts of home. In the process I have been exposed to God in ways I never would have expected. By coming to Our Little Roses I have certainly been exposed to a people and place that needs assistance. There is a gross inequality in the world. But what I discovered is that this place does not need to become like us, for on its own it holds a depth and richness that I could not have imagined. I have found that by coming to look I have been forever enriched. So I ask again, who has missioned to whom?