A Partnership of

Holy Family Parish in Stow, Ohio
and
Sociedad Amigos de los Niños in Honduras

with the support of Saint Vincent DePaul Parish in Cleveland, Saint Clarence Parish in North Olmsted, Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish in Wadsworth and Archbishop Hoban High School, Akron

A January 13 – 20, 2016 Honduras Medical Mission Diary – 11th Year
By Father Mike Ausperk

In June of 2015 I began the annual conversations with Mae Cruz of Sociedad Amigos de los Niños in Honduras about the January 2016 medical mission. Mae coordinates many groups from the US and Canada each year with the Sociedad calendar. Our mission was set for January 13-20, 2016. I then began advertising this wonderful opportunity of service and global outreach to the parishes involved and in an email to my Honduras email list. I also contacted Jason Horinger of Archbishop Hoban High School in Akron to again invite students from the Honors Spanish classes to join us as interpreters.

The annual ‘Banquet of the Clam’ fundraiser was led by Trista Piccola, Sally Benjamin, Denise Lazzaro, Maureen Hudak, Jim and Tina Schiely and a hard-working committee of very generous people. The clam bake was held on Sunday, September 13 at the St. Clarence Church Pavilion in North Olmsted thanks to the generosity of Fr. Neil Kookothe. With 350 people in attendance, great food was served and raffles and auctions were held to help raise necessary funds.

Thankfully the ‘Banquet of the Clam’ was again successful more than the Cleveland Browns that day. The great weather helped make the event enjoyable and fun for everyone. Many generous people donated items or services to the silent auction. Lots of hard work was done by those who assisted in food preparation and serving. The clam bake raised a very helpful amount of more than $18,000 which kept the ‘donation’ by each member of the medical mission team to $1,300.00 again this year. Considering the costs of the mission continue to rise, especially the airfare (now almost $1,000), the proceeds from the ‘BOTC’ were very much appreciated.

Beginning in August, people interested in being on the medical mission team began submitting their application and a copy of their passport. By mid-October I began working with our lead pharmacist Dan Krinsky to contact various non-profit agencies to obtain the needed medicines, vitamins and supplies. Then the ‘pharmacy angels’ began de-packaging, counting, bagging and labeling between October and January – this prep work helps us greatly when we arrive in Honduras to begin our brigades immediately (unlike some other groups who have to organize their supplies the first day in Honduras). The medicines and supplies came from the Catholic Medical Mission Board in New York City, AmeriCares in Connecticut and Blessings International. The vitamins were purchased at a discount from Brewster’s. The Charity in Action group at St. Clarence Parish in North Olmsted provided more than 3,000 toothcare kits each with a toothbrush and toothpaste, and was a great help preparing meds and vitamins, especially Dennis Calsin who moved the items between Stow and North Olmsted and back again. Ladies from St. Clarence parish in North Olmsted donated 300 handmade dresses and shorts for the children. Many NEOMED pharmacy students assisted by packing vitamins in one day! The Holy Family Parish Girl Scouts and Brownies made gift bags for children with toys and other goodies in them. Holy Family School Librarian Chris Krinsky (Dan’s wife) purchased 50 bilingual books to distribute with proceeds from the annual Holy Family School Book Fair. Print Digital in Stow printed our patient forms.

The medical mission team was made up of 70 people with various levels of medical knowledge, expertise and mission experience but all with mission-spirited hearts hoping to help others in need. I worked with Mae Cruz of Sociedad Amigos de los Niños, the organization Holy Family Parish has a partnership with in order to provide an annual medical mission to the poorest of the poor in rural and mountain villages east of the capital Tegucigalpa. Mae and I worked on various aspects of our stay: brigade site ideas, personnel, accommodations, transportation, room assignments, meals, supplies, etc.

On Sunday, January 10, 2016 the team members and their families gathered at Holy Family Church in Stow for the 11:30 am Mass. At the end of the Mass, Pastor Father Paul Rosing blessed the team who were gathered on the steps of the sanctuary. After Mass, we met in the Szabo Parish Center to pack our two suitcases with the medicines, vitamins, toothcare kits, eyeglasses, sunglasses and

“This trip really opened my eyes to the blessings I’ve been given and that by doing good for others, you in return are rewarded in ways beyond the physical means of this world.”
- Hoban student interpreter Carson Miller
supplies that Dan and his team of workers had prepared. The packing session went very smoothly considering we packed 116 suitcases in under an hour (a new record!).

On Wednesday, January 13, most of the team members met at Cleveland Hopkins Airport at 4:00 am to check-in at United. The Hoban students and other members of our team met at the Akron-Canton Airport to fly Delta through Atlanta to meet us in Honduras. Suitcases full of medicines and supplies were checked as luggage and team members' personal items for the week were packed in their carry-on luggage. United and Delta allow one suitcase to be checked for an international flight and charge $40 for a second suitcase which came to over $1,000 this year. Our plane departed for Houston shortly after 6:00 am and we arrived in Houston early for our layover. Our flight from Houston took off at about 9:30 am and at 12:05 pm, following a very bumpy landing in the bowl of Tegucigalpa (the capital of Honduras also called ‘Tegus’), we were greeted by sun and 80 degree weather. The Hoban students and team members who flew from Akron to Atlanta to Honduras included Dr. Carlos Saavedra who flew from Miami, Isabel Nolte who flew from Savannah and Matt DeGrand who flew from Chicago, all arrived about 30 minutes after we did. All but one suitcase and one-carry on were accounted for. We then met Mae and Cato (one of our Honduran translators and a pickup driver) outside baggage claim. After the suitcases were packed in a truck for transportation to our guest quarters, we were on our way.

We left the airport about 2:30 pm and stopped to see Sister Maria Rosa, the founder of Sociedad whose health prevents her from visiting us at our guest quarters. Sister offered us coffee, pop and water and a freshly-baked coffee cake as a snack. Earlier that day, a group of Columbia University students on a medical mission on their way to the airport were involved in a bus accident that caused the death of three students and many injuries. Sister was very upset by the tragedy and spoke of the importance of our relationship with God through prayer and our parents and family. After receiving Sister’s blessing, we left her home at 3:30 pm traveling east of Tegus for a little over an hour. We arrived at Nuevo Paraiso about 4:45 pm to unpack. Our suitcases were taken to our ‘pharmacy,’ a room near the chapel to be unpacked and organized. At 6:00 pm we gathered in the Chapel for Mass with some young Honduran friends who provided the music for us. After Mass, I led a short intro meeting in the Chapel about health, safety and the next day’s brigade assignments. At 7:00 pm dinner was served in the dining room: chicken, rice, salad, carrots and chickpea salad, rolls and pineapple. Some team members bagged parasite meds while the triage nurse team had a short meeting.

On Thursday, January 14 we gathered in the dining room at 7:30 am to pray our Medical Mission prayer which we prayed each morning asking God’s blessing on us, on the people we were going to serve that day and those who were supporting us back at home. Breakfast that morning was scrambled eggs, pancakes and bananas. Peanut butter and jelly, cereal, juice and coffee were available every day. At 8:15 am the trucks were packed with suitcases of meds and we boarded our buses for the short 10 minute drive to Guadalajara. This spacious brigade site and the smaller town has helped our team in the past to become familiar with each other and work out any kinks the first day.

Bob Plona and Diana Harvey oversaw the nurses working triage, taking initial information, blood pressures, temperatures and glucose screenings. The triage team was made up of nurse Claire Bohne assisted by Hoban student interpreter James Parisi and Christian Salamon; nurse Carol Cain was helped by Colleen Cain (her daughter) and Maddie Grosklos; Hoban student Joe Rich interpreted for nurse Kristin Fortunato; nurse Hannah Greczianik was paired up with her sister Hoban interpreter Rebekah Greczianik; Hoban student Bailey Booth assisted nurse Diane Harvey; Rich Harvey was assisted by Hoban students Natalie Hudak and Ellie Durkin; Hoban students John Durkin and Joe Brennan helped paramedic Jen Oleksy; nurse Janet Rooney was assisted by Hoban students Margaret Wiedt and Bella Tassiello; paramedic Buzz Seiple was assisted by Claire Stock and Hoban students Anthony Ursetti and Sam Parri assisted nurse Rita Stem.

Offering patient exams were 11-year mission team veteran Dr. Carlos Saavedra, Dr. Nick Bisconti who was assisted by Hoban student interpreter Andy Ross; Hoban chaperone Katie Buzzelli assisted Dr. Brian Cain; Dr. Anthony McKeen who was assisted by interpreter Isabel Nolte; Honduran interpreter Claudio Paz assisted Dr. Shannon McKeen; Dr. Kiran Mian who was assisted by Honduran interpreter Hugo Diaz; and Physician Assistant Joan Hayes who was assisted by Hoban student interpreter Carson Miller. Honduran Dr. Claudia Zuniga and Dr. Sandra also examined patients as we are required to have a Honduran doctor on our team to assist the visiting doctors with Honduran medical situations that may be unfamiliar to them. The Honduran interpreters are college-aged students who have taught themselves English and are a valuable help to our team members who do not speak Spanish. We pay each of them a good day’s wage to interpret for us.

The dental team was staffed by Dr. John Blakemore who was assisted by dental assistant Tina Schiely and interpreter Travis Pero; Dr. Ken Hudak who was assisted by dental assistant Libby Knotts and Honduran interpreter Kevin Zazo; and Dr. Mark Ford who was assisted by Matt DeGrand and interpreter Larry Gerbetz. Irene Blakemore and Christy Homer assisted by sterilizing the dental instruments.

“Honduras has shown me that interactions with others, whether it’s the patients we saw or the medical mission team we traveled with, can truly help you to learn who you are and grow into the person you wish to be.”
- Dr. Shannon McKeen
Dr. Michelle Ford led the eye clinic with Dr. Jeff Durkin and Dr. Cindy Rich and with the help of interpreters Mae Cruz, Fidelma Lammarino and Bryce Dzubara along with the help of Sally Benjamin, Michelle Bisconti and Nancy Walker Gerbetz. Dr. Ford and her eye care team were extremely popular as eye care is rarely offered on medical brigades. We brought 1,400 pairs of generic glasses and readers along with 4,000 pairs of sunglasses to give away.

The pharmacy team was led by pharmacists Dan Krinsky, a 11-year veteran, and Dale English. They were assisted by pharmacists Emily Gaborcik and pharmacy students Diana Flounders and Danielle Thomas along with Tom Cirner, Jane Hutchison and Marilyn LaRosa. Hondurans Cato, Tango, and our bus drivers Hondurans Armando, Marvin and Will also helped by distributing and explaining medicines to the patients. Trista Piccola (‘Numero Dos’) assisted with patient registration and crowd control making sure the Hondurans were in the right line or getting them to the right place. Hoban Chaperone Jason Dzik helped make sure people were in the right lines and entertained the children with card and magic tricks. Hondurans Pedro and Jose Angel assisted by completing the name, age, gender and community info on the patient forms at the intake gate. On this first day, sunny and 85 degrees, Jim McClarnon, Jim Schiely, Joe Turk and Honduran Daniel Matus worked in Nuevo Paraiso replacing street lights and installing some new outdoor lights near the children’s homes, a project paid for by some extra funds we raised in order to make some improvements at Nuevo Paraiso.

Most of the medical problems the nurses and doctors see are coughs and colds, dry skin, scabies, high blood pressure, stomach and lower GI problems and a lack of vitamins. By 2:30 pm we finished seeing the last patients and returned to Nuevo Paraiso by 4:00 pm. The Hoban students played soccer against the Hondurans and lost. Dinner was served at 7:00 pm: tilapia, rice, salsa, plantain chips and pineapple...still my favorite meal of the week. We sang to Jen Oleksy for her 30th birthday. After dinner some team members visited and played cards in the gazebo.

On Friday, January 15 we ate a very early 6:00 am breakfast of scrambled eggs, bacon, toast, avocados, and cantaloupe. We left Nuevo Paraiso at 7:10 am escorted by the Danli Fire Department heading east to Danli for an hour and 15 minutes to the Plasencia Cigar Factory to offer healthcare to the factory workers. We had been at this factory two years ago for two days to offer healthcare to the works and their family members. By 9:00 we were set and seeing patients. In past years, the kitchen staff at our guest quarters insisted on providing lunch which often caused slower lines and some guilt feelings among the team as we knew the Hondurans were not eating much all day except maybe the apple we offer each patient with their meds. It was decided that since we get a good size breakfast and dinner in the dining room at Nuevo Paraiso, team members would bring energy or granola bars with them as a snack during the brigade days. The kitchen ladies would provide 20 meals for the Hondurans working with us and water and sodas would be offered to all team members. This has proved to make the day smoother and focus our attention on patient care and not us. By 4:00 pm we served the last of the patients and by 4:30 pm we were on our way back to our guest quarters where we arrived at by 5:45 pm. At 7:00 pm we had dinner: beef, rice, carrots and zucchini and salad. Team members gathered in the gazebo for visiting and card playing. I participated in the nightly reflection with the Hoban students and chaperones talking about the experiences of the day and how we are honored to serve others in this unique way of expressing our faith.

On Saturday, January 16 we again ate an early breakfast at 6:00 am: fried eggs, mini sausages, toast, beans and watermelon. We departed Nuevo Paraiso at 7:00 for another ride to Danli, this time to Las Cajetas (a cigar box factory, first time we have been there) to offer healthcare to the workers. It was sunny and 80 degrees. Jim McClarnon, Jim Schiely, Joe Turk and Daniel Matus joined us on the home leaving the rest of their work at Nuevo Paraiso for Tuesday. Hondurans Gustavo and interpreter Luis Diaz also joined to assist us. We began seeing the employees at 8:45 am. Hoban student interpreter Ellie Durkin took over for her brother John to interpret for her father and eye doctor Jeff Durkin. Hoban student interpreter James Parisi helped Dr. Nick Bisconti. The dentists find a lot of rotted teeth from lack of tooth care and fluoride in the water and too much sugar consumption especially from pop. By 4:00 pm we saw the last patients. The factory manager offered to sell cigar boxes to our team and we assembled for a group photo. At 4:30 pm we began our trip to Nuevo Paraiso. Dinner was served at 7:00: pasta with chicken, vegetarian pasta, parmesan bread, tomato and cucumber salad and cantaloupe. At 8:30 pm we gathered in the gazebo where Carol and Collen Cain played guitar and sang a few songs.

On Sunday, January 17 we ate breakfast at 7:00 am: hash brown omelets, tortillas with cheese, sausage and mango. At 8:00 we left on our buses for an hour ride toward Tegus for the 9:30 am Mass at the Basilica of our Lady of Suyapa. There is always great music; the priest mentioned our group at the beginning of Mass which was followed by applause from the congregation; at the end of Mass newborns were blessed by the priest and then the priest blessed us with holy water using what looked like a small mop! Many of us visited the Eucharistic Chapel passing through the Holy Door for the Jubilee Year of Mercy artistically decorated with flowers and fabric. After a visit to the chapel behind the basilica, we traveled about 45 minutes to the Valley of the Angels to a small resort run by friends of mine, Neftali and Ibis, for a huge buffet lunch beautifully presented: beef, chicken, rice, tortillas, pupusas, refried beans, tortilla chips and salsa as well as a large veggie buffet. After some time relaxing, playing soccer and Ken Hudak taking a rather large dip in the pool (a real sight!!), we left for the nearby souvenir shops. By 4:45 pm we were back on our buses heading for Nuevo Paraiso. At 7:00 pm we had a light dinner of vegetable soup, potato salad and lettuce salad.

On Monday, January 18 our breakfast at 6:00 am was omelets, sausage, toast and papaya. At 7:10 am we left Nuevo with a Danli fire department escort again two, this time for Corral Falso, a neighborhood north of Danli. We began seeing patients at 9:00 am. Two of our buses went to neighboring villages Robledad, San Mathias and Urrutia to bring patients to us since the villages are too small to have

“To watch my teenage daughter and son become stewards for the less fortunate was a unique and valuable experience.”  — Dr. Jeff Durkin
a brigade our size. As I was directing Hondurans to the doctor, dentist or pharmacy, a woman saw my ‘Padre Miguel’ name tag and asked if I was a priest. I said ‘Sí.’ She put her hand on my head and said in Spanish “May God bless you and your friends for helping us.” That simple and powerful gesture made all the effort of the last six months’ worth it. By 3:00 pm we saw the last patients and packed up our gear and supplies. At 4:30 pm we began our trip to Nuevo Paraiso. Dinner at 7:00 pm was pork chops, yucca, tortillas, salad and grape jello. At 8:00 pm we gathered in the gazebo for Mae to tell her story: how she became associated with Sociedad and Sister Maria Rosa and how she has become a ‘Tía’ (aunt) to the children of Nuevo Paraiso…her adopted children since she has none of her own.

On Tuesday, January 19, we ate a late breakfast at 7:30 am: scrambled eggs, French toast, frijoles, watermelon and oranges. At 8:30 am the dental team left on one of our buses to go to Moroceli where a medical brigade will go in weeks but without dentists. The remainder of our team set up at Nuevo to offer medical and eye care to the people of Nuevo Paraiso and the nearby villages of Nueva Esperanza and El Campo. Again two of our buses went to those and other villages nearby to bring people to us. It was 82 degrees and sunny again. By 3:30 pm, the dental team had returned and we stopped seeing patients. The pharmacy team began the task of sorting meds and supplies we could store locally for next year and packed a number of suitcases of meds to supply the small medical clinic in Moroceli which we found out has not had any meds for many months. Dinner was served at 6:00 pm: chicken lasagna, salad, garlic bread and cake for Jen’s birthday last week and to celebrate our successful week.

On Wednesday, January 20 we ate breakfast at 7:30 am: scrambled eggs, tortillas, sausages, watermelon and peaches. After farewells to the children and some last photos, we boarded our buses and departed Nuevo Paraiso at 9:10 am. At 10:30 am we arrived at the airport and began to check in for departure. In past years, Mae and I would have to go to the bank in the airport to pay the exit tax while everyone else waited. Finally after years of suggesting the airline collect the exit tax at the time of ticket purchase like every other country, the Honduran government began requiring the tax with the fare purchase as of last June…this made the airport process so much easier! By noon travelers started going through security to the gate for the 1:15 pm departure for Houston. The Akron arrival group had a later departure, so they went through security by 1:00 pm. I again stayed at Nuevo Paraiso for another week to spend time relaxing, visiting with local families and writing this diary. During this time I was able to visit my friend Oscar who owns a new cigar factory in Danli. I was also able to visit friends who own an avocado, plantain and coffee farm behind their home in nearby Yuscaran. They are very generous with their freshly grown and roasted coffee beans! With some extra funds from our mission trip, Holy Family was able to purchase radios for communication between our trucks and buses and another light for a dark area near the dining room.

**Muchas gracias** to all who helped in any large or small way to make the 2016 medical mission a great success touching the lives of almost 3,000 people with no access to healthcare or medical professionals and making a difference in the lives of many Hondurans and us. Over the 11 years of offering medical, dental and eye care, we have seen over 33,000 people, extracted more than 7,700 teeth and filled over 115,000 scripts. Congrats to all of the team members over the years and thanks for your generous and loving service to others in the name of Jesus Christ and His Church! Amen!

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<tr>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Medical Exams</th>
<th>Dental Exams</th>
<th>Scripts</th>
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<td><strong>Thursday Jan 14, 2016</strong></td>
<td>Adult 207</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td>Adult 1,635</td>
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Photos are available at [http://www.holyfamilystow.org/Mission-to-Honduras](http://www.holyfamilystow.org/Mission-to-Honduras)