



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,
Saint Francis Xavier Parish in Medina and Archbishop Hoban High School, Akron**

A January 15 – 22, 2020 Honduras Medical Mission Diary – 15th Year

By Father Mike Ausperk

As in years past, I emailed Mae Cruz of Sociedad Amigos de los Niños (SAN) in Honduras in late June to begin planning our 15th Honduras Medical Mission. Mae is the International Group Coordinator for SAN and is the contact for many groups from the US and Canada. Our medical mission was set for January 15-22, 2020. I emailed my over 300 Honduras contacts, those who have traveled and those who have ever expressed an interest in the medical mission and also advertised in our partner parish bulletins. For the last 9 years, we have included Honors Spanish students from Archbishop Hoban High School to join us to serve as interpreters. This is a great help to us and practical experience for these students.

Mary Jane Coleman formed a committee to begin working on the 'Banquet of the Clam' fundraiser. Helping MJ were Denise Lazzaro, Brian O'Malley, Nancy Walker Gerbetz, Christy Horner, Jim and Tina Schiely, Jim McClarnon and many other hard-working people. The BOTC was held on Sunday, October 13 at the St. Clarence Church Pavilion in North Olmsted thanks to the generosity of Fr. Neil Kookoothe. Great food was served and raffles and auctions were held to help raise necessary funds for procuring of medicines, vitamins, cough and cold medicine, toothbrushes and toothpaste, anti-parasite meds and other needed items. Many generous donors who respond to my annual request for support helped us cover many other costs.

As has been in the past, the fundraiser was more successful than the Cleveland Browns that day. 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 BOTC raised more than \$6,000, a little less than in years past, which meant the 'donation' to participate in the medical mission was \$1,500 per person. This covers each team member's airfare, lodging, meals and transportation.

In August and September, veteran and new team members signed up and applied to be on the team. Dan Krinsky and I began working on what we would need for our brigades, applying to various non-profit organizations. The medicines and supplies came from the Catholic Medical Mission Board in New York City, AmeriCares in Connecticut and Blessings International in Oklahoma. The vitamins were purchased in bulk. 'Pharmacy angels' from NEOMED, Holy Family and St. Clarence began helping to prep medicines. The Honduran Government surprised us in early December with a new requirement that we had to submit an inventory of all of the meds, vitamins and supplies we wanted to bring into the country with us and they had to approve the inventory prior to our arrival. They are also now requiring us to bring everything in original packaging as we receive it from the non-profit organizations. This meant that the work we and so many others did prior to our leaving had to be done in Honduras by the team members. This would also cost more since we would have to bring more suitcases. The Charity in Action group at St. Clarence Parish in North Olmsted provided toothcare kits each with a toothbrush and toothpaste. Ladies from St. Clarence parish in North Olmsted donated handmade dresses for the girls. A number of people made and gave me Rosaries to distribute. Sacred Heart School in Wadsworth had a 'grub day' and donated more than \$500. Many others and organizations made monetary donations to assist with the costs of the medical mission.

*"I truly felt the Holy Spirit in everyone I met.
Their gratitude was overwhelming. The children
are so happy."*

- Kim Nagy (nurse)

The medical mission team was made up of 68 people with various levels of medical knowledge, expertise and mission experience and each with a mission-spirited heart hoping to help others in need. Mae and I continued to work on details of the medical mission: brigade sites, personnel, accommodations, transportation, room assignments, meals, supplies, finances, etc. We also talked about safety concerns should any of the team members or their families have questions.

On Sunday, January 12, 2020 team members and their families gathered at Holy Family Church in Stow for the 11:30 am Mass. After Communion, Pastor Father Paul Rosing blessed the team members and the wooden cross made in Honduras given to each of them as a reminder who sends us to Honduras. After Mass, we met in the Szabo Parish Center for each team member to pack 2 suitcases with the medicines, vitamins, toothcare kits, eyeglasses, sunglasses and supplies that Dan and our team of workers had prepared. The packing session went very smoothly considering we packed 120 suitcases in about 50 minutes.

On Wednesday, January 15, team members met at the Akron Canton Airport and the Cleveland Hopkins Airport at 4:00 am. Other team members traveled from Louisville, Phoenix, Orlando and Miami. The Hoban group flew out of Akron Canton to Atlanta and then

Tegucigalpa. Those who flew out of Cleveland had a short layover in Houston (where my friend Oscar who owns a cigar factory in Honduras came up to me and asked me where I was going ha ha) continuing on to Tegucigalpa; we landed within 40 minutes of each other. Suitcases full of medicines and supplies were checked as luggage and team members' personal items for the week were packed in their carry-on. A great expense is the cost of checking the suitcases; due to our group airfare arrangement, checked luggage is not free. Some have suggested meds and supplies be shipped ahead of time. I have heard of a number of groups who do this and have no meds or supplies when they get to Honduras. Though checking bags is expensive, we have what we need when we get there. Jim Schiely was able to use his United Premier status to get 18 suitcases through for free. Hoban and I applied for and were granted a baggage fee waiver for 15 suitcases each...so that helped some.

In baggage claim in Tegucigalpa, government officials looked in 3 suitcases and waived us on. AMAZINGLY all of the suitcases were accounted for. Mae and Cato and other Honduran staff members greeted us, the suitcases were loaded on a truck and we departed the airport at 3:00 pm. It was 80 degrees and sunny when we walked out of the airport. During the week, it was in the upper 70's, sunny and dry except for a couple of very short sprinkles of rain.

At 4:30 pm we arrived at Nuevo Paraiso (SAN's compound about 1 hour and 30 minutes from Tegucigalpa) with children welcoming us with signs and balloons. The children live in the hogares (homes) for orphaned and abandoned children which is SAN's primary ministry.

*"Honduras is not simply a place; rather it is an opportunity to fully experience the love that others bestow in their hearts."
- Adam Geary (Hoban student interpreter)*

Our guest quarters are located across the street from their homes. Our suitcases were taken to our makeshift 'pharmacy' (a room near the Chapel) to be unpacked and organized. Because we had work to do in prepping the meds and vitamins, I decided we would have Mass the next morning before breakfast. Our 5:30 pm dinner was baked chicken, rice, mixed vegetables, rolls and fruit. Toward the end of dinner, I reviewed life at Nuevo Paraiso and assignments for the brigades. At 7:00 pm we gathered again in the dining room to prep meds and vitamins for the next day's

brigade. After a very long day I was in bed by 11:00 pm.

On Thursday, January 16 we gathered for Mass in the Chapel at 7:00 am. At 7:30 am we prayed 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 was scrambled eggs, pancakes, tortillas and oranges. Juice, coffee, cereal and peanut butter and jelly were available every morning. At 8:30 am the trucks were packed with suitcases of supplies and we boarded our buses for Guadalajara, about 10 minutes from Nuevo Paraiso.

Bob Plona oversaw the triage team of nurses and paramedics who took initial patient information, blood pressure, pulse, temperature, glucose screenings and pregnancy tests if advisable. The triage team was made up of nurses and Hoban student interpreters: Kim Nagy with Alex Coleman and Stephanie Conley, Kim Stafford with Honduran Hugo Diaz and Cathryn Knapp, Henry Stitzel with Pete Stitzel and Abby Kamenar, Monica Talmage with Natalie Vrobel and Allison Jansen, and Buzz Seiple. Assisting the interpreters was Sergio, a friend of Mae.

Offering patient exams were Dr. Nick Bisconti with interpreter Hoban chaperone Pachy Bell, Dr. Jenny Dwyer with Honduran Pedro Caceres, bilingual Dr. Preston Houston, Dr. Jim Lavery with Katie Linger, Dr. Anthony McKeen with Luis Diaz, physician assistant Katherine Mead with Jackie Turk, bilingual Dr. Carlos Saavedra, bilingual physician assistant Leah Schiely, and Dr. Lance Talmage with Becca Kubick. Honduran Doctors Omar Pozas and Alberto Torres (who began as a Honduran interpreter for us 15 years ago) also examined patients as we are required to have at least one Honduran doctor on our team to assist the visiting doctors with tropical medical issues that may be unfamiliar to our doctors. The Honduran interpreters are now adults who have taught themselves English and are a valuable help to our team members who do not speak Spanish. We pay them well for Honduran standards to interpret for us.

*"On a trip where we are constantly exposed to astonishing poverty, so removed from our everyday lives, it's the happiness and gratitude of the people that leaves the greatest impression on me."
- Dr. Anthony McKeen (medical doctor)*

Dentists Dr. Ken Hudak and Dr. Mike DiMauro with Honduran interpreters Kevin Zazo and Jimmy Ilias saw patients in the Nuevo Paraiso clinic in the equipped dental clinic where they could do restorations rather than just extractions. Dr. Mark Ford, dental assistant Tina Schiely, interpreter Larry Gerbetz and sterilizer Christy Horner were on brigade each day with us primarily doing extractions of rotted teeth.

Dr. Michelle Ford, Dr. Jeff Durkin, Dr. Cindy Rich, Dr. Sabine Ziegelhoffer and Dr. Melissa Ford (Michelle and Mark's daughter) staffed the eye clinic with the help of interpreters Ellie Durkin, Annabelle Haas, Mae Cruz and Mariana Gonzalez. Assisting with eye tests and fitting of glasses were Michelle Bisconti, Jim McClarnon, Sandy Mellon, Dale Osmun, Joe Turk, Nancy Walker Gerbetz and Mary Helen Wright with Hoban student interpreters Clare Esposito, Adam Geary, Maggie Kreiner, Joey Osmun, Rachael Rice and Riley Scofield. Thanks to Dr. Michelle Ford and Dr. Cindy Rich who spent countless hours preparing specialty glasses and organizing glasses...many people received glasses for the first time in their lives.

The pharmacy team was led by pharmacist Dan Krinsky with Bill Leahy and Dr. Dale English from the Sullivan University Pharmacy program in Louisville, Kentucky, along with pharmacy students Tim Davis and Rachel Prater. Assisting in the pharmacy were Tom Cirner, Kim Lavery, Jim Schiely, Mike Stafford and Joann Wirtz. Hondurans Cato Fontecha, Jose Angel Argueta and our bus drivers Armando, Freddy and Bayron distributed and explained medicines to the patients. Honduran policemen Caceres and Baca provided security. Trista Piccola and Hoban chaperone Jason Dzik assisted me with forming lines. Local community leaders assisted by writing the patient name, age, gender and community info on the patient forms at the registration entrance to get things going.

Most of the medical problems the nurses and doctors see are cough and cold, dry skin, scabies, lice, high blood pressure, parasites, lower GI problems from the parasites and vitamin deficiency. Lines of local villagers welcomed us each morning as we arrived. We set up quickly and tried to begin seeing patients within 15-20 minutes of arrival. Each team member is to bring purified water with them in their water bottle, the purified water is amply available near our guest rooms. They are also to bring granola or energy bars with them for their quick snack break and lunch. The meals at our guest quarters are substantial. The kitchen ladies provide about 20 meals for the Hondurans working with us. This all helps us focus on our patients and not on us and what we eat. By 4:00 pm we finished seeing the last patients and returned to Nuevo Paraiso at 4:30 pm.

At 6:00 pm we had dinner: pork, potatoes, salad, avocados, tortillas and fruit. We celebrated Kim Stafford's birthday which was that day and Stephanie Conley's which was the day before with cupcakes (made by a bakery with a wood fired oven in La Villa de San Francisco), candles and singing...I invited the 4 others with January birthdays to join up front for the singing. After dinner we spent another couple of hours prepping meds and vitamins. The Hoban students had their nightly reflection at 8:30 pm. Pairs of students prepared prayer and reflection questions for discussion in small groups. They then put toothcare kits in shopping bags to prepare for the next day's brigade. Some of the adults played cards and socialized after the work was done!

On Friday, January 17 at 7:00 am we ate a breakfast of fried eggs, chicken nuggets, avocados, tortillas and fruit (I made myself avocado toast with a fried egg...mmmm). We left Nuevo Paraiso at 8:00 am for La Villa de San Francisco, about 20 minutes from Nuevo. I had visited this town 2 years ago with Claudio Paz who knew the director of the school and joined us as an interpreter; the school director requested we consider having a 3-day brigade at the school. I committed to 2 days (which was more than enough). We spent 2 days on brigade there last year. The school is very large and served the needs of our brigade and the people who came to us very well. The school staff had spent a week of their Christmas vacation cleaning and setting up tables and chairs for us which was very helpful. We started seeing patients by 8:30 am. In the early afternoon a 50 year old woman named Lidia came to the triage team with 2 large open lower leg wounds from diabetes. Since we didn't have the right supplies, I asked one of our drivers to take her to the Nuevo Paraiso clinic and we would pay for her care which came to about \$60. By 5:00 pm we departed for Nuevo Paraiso. At 6:30 pm we had dinner: Honduran spaghetti, (meat served separately and gluten free pasta was offered), tomato and cucumber salad, garlic bread and fruit. Med prep resumed after dinner with socializing following the work. I joined the Hoban students for their reflection time.

On Saturday, January 18 we ate breakfast at 7:00 am: scrambled eggs, bacon, hash browns, toast and fruit. We departed Nuevo Paraiso at 8:00 for La Villa Day #2. Jim McClarnon and Honduran Daniel Matus stayed at Nuevo Paraiso to replace street light bulbs for safety and security. We began seeing patients at 8:30 am. Lidia who had been taken to the clinic at Nuevo Paraiso the day before came to thank us for helping her and getting her medicine that she needed. We stopped seeing patients at 6:00 pm and returned to Nuevo for dinner at 7: tilapia, rice, plantain chips, salsa and fruit...still my favorite meal each trip. With meds all prepped, we were able to relax.

On Sunday, January 19 we ate breakfast at 7:00 am: scrambled eggs with ground meat and tomatoes, corn tortilla cheese sandwiches, beans, bananas and Sister Maria Rosa sent cinnamon rolls made in the SAN kitchen in Tegucigalpa by one of her staff members. At 7:35 am Cato came to Mae and me to tell us that there was a protest in Tegucigalpa that day that he and the bus drivers learned of on social media after dinner the night before. The protest was against the Honduran government's decision to not renew an anti-corruption oversight group contract. Mae and I were upset that they didn't bring this to our attention the night before when they knew about it...he didn't have a good answer as to why they waited. I asked how big he thought the protest might be. He thought it could be big enough to cause traffic delays for us. I think they didn't want to go to Tegucigalpa and used the protest as an excuse to go to Valley of the Angels instead. I gave in and we moved our departure time to 9:30 am, our original departure time for Our Lady of Suyapa Basilica was 8:00 am. At 9:30 we left on our buses for an hour ride to Valley of the Angels for an 11 Mass (which is really 11:30!) yet more frustration. Before Mass began, a retired Canadian bishop from near Montreal came out of the sacristy to invite me to concelebrate the Mass with him. I was honored. Bishop Francois Lapierre was working in retirement as a chaplain to a local retreat house run by the Catholic University of Honduras. He was most gracious and thanked us for our work for the poor people of Honduras. After Mass I invited him and his driver (who turned out to be a high school classmate of Mae's....no surprise to us who know Mae). We boarded our buses for a 20 minute drive to a local resort where friends Neftali and Ibis had prepared a huge buffet lunch for us: beef, chicken, chorizo, rice, tortillas, tasty pupusas, refried beans, salads, tortilla chips and salsa and ice cream for dessert. Bishop Francois and his driver joined us for lunch. After some relaxing time to visit and rest, we left for the nearby souvenir shops in Valley of the Angels for two hours of shopping. By 5:15 pm we were back on our buses headed for Nuevo Paraiso arriving at 6:30 pm. At 6:45 pm we had a light dinner of chicken soup and salad.

"It was rewarding to provide healthcare to those in need and experience a trusting and gracious connection with the people of Honduras."

- Kim Hall (Pharmacy team)

On Monday, January 20 our breakfast at 6:00 am was scrambled eggs with green peppers, beans, toasted cheese sandwiches, avocados and fruit. At 7:00 am we left Nuevo heading east for Danli arriving at 8:45 at the Oscar Valladares Cigar Factory. Oscar used to drive buses for brigades and always had a dream of having his own cigar factory someday...his dream has become a reality and he is very successful, his employees make 10,000 cigars a day! Some of his employees were setting up tents, tables and chairs for us. We started to see workers and their families at 9:00 am. The workers are very grateful to us for offering the medical brigade to them because they work 6 days a week and have a hard time getting to the doctor. After all were seen front office manager Adriana offered tours for our group and offered to sell us cigars and shirts in their factory store. Oscar thanked us taking care of his employees. We departed from the factory at 4:15 pm and arrived in Nuevo by 5:30 pm. Dinner was served at 6:00 pm: fried chicken, French fries, salad, tortillas and fruit. I again joined the Hoban students for their reflection in the Chapel. While many played Euchre, a few of us played the Honduran medical mission version of the French racing card game Mille Bornes.

On Tuesday, January 21, we ate breakfast at 8:00 am: egg and hash brown omelets, tortillas and fruit. A large number of our team stayed at Nuevo to offer patient visits to the children in the children's homes, their Tias (house mothers), the staff and others from the area around Nuevo. Dr. Ken Hudak and Dr. Mike DiMauro, Kevin and Jimmy worked at the Santa Rosa de Lima Dental Clinic. Trista led 4 doctors, 3 nurses, 4 interpreters and 4 pharmacy team members on a 30-minute bus ride to El Zarzal near Yuscaran to setup a brigade in the Episcopal Church but sponsored by the Catholic Community of El Zarzal. We visited this community last year and they were so appreciative we promised we would return. They claim no one cares about them. Like last year, we were asked to make a house call to Listenia, a 78-year old woman who is homebound. Dr. Bisconti and interpreter Pachy Bell trekked 20 minutes to Listenia's house with policeman Vaca for security. Listenia has skin cancer over a good part of her face and head and is in great pain. She is much weaker than last year. She again talked about her faith and the comfort she receives from the people in the community. She was

*"My experience in Honduras was incredible. I saw God work through absolutely everyone and everything."
- Riley Scofield (Hoban student interpreter)*

very grateful for the comfort, care and medicine we offered her and again she promised her prayers for our team. The team at Nuevo Paraiso stopped seeing patients about 2:00 pm. The group from El Zarzal returned to Nuevo Paraiso about 2:30 pm. The pharmacy team began the huge task of packing 60 suitcases we would leave in storage until next year. Dinner was at 6:00 pm: stewed beef with green peppers, rice, salad and fruit. During dinner, we thanked our Honduran staff of kitchen

ladies, interpreters, drivers, security and housekeepers and gave them their pay or tips. At 7:00 pm we hosted a party for the children from the children's homes with music, dancing, chips and juice. At 8:00 pm we gathered in the dining room for some reflections on our brigades and the Honduran people, and thanked the groups that made up the medical team. Mae presented me with a Certificate of Appreciation signed by Sister Maria Rosa and a painting of the Last Supper by a local artist for 15 years of service to SAN and the Honduran people...it was very nice of them. I reviewed the next day's departure information. At 9:00 pm some gathered for games and socializing.

On Wednesday, January 22 we ate breakfast at 8:30 am: scrambled eggs, French toast, refried beans, tortillas, avocados and fruit. After farewells to the children and staff and some last group photos, we boarded our buses and departed Nuevo Paraiso at 10:15 am. We arrived at the airport at 11:30 and began to check in for departure. After a long day of travel, all arrived at their destinations safely with many happy memories of their week in Honduras.

In years past, I have stayed at Nuevo Paraiso for another week to spend time with my Honduran friends. This year however, I was asked to celebrate the wedding of a Hoban grad and friend who was marrying a young lady from Lima, Peru in Lima. The day after the group left Honduras, I flew to Lima to preside at the wedding on Friday and then spend a week with relatives of my aunt who lives in Cleveland. All of her siblings and family is still in Lima. It was a beautiful wedding and wonderful week.

Muchas gracias to all who helped in any large or small way to make the 2020 medical mission another 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 15 years of offering medical, dental and eye care, we have seen over 43,000 people, extracted more than 9,500 teeth and filled over 150,000 scripts. Congrats to all of the team members over the years and thanks for your generous and loving service to the poor people of Honduras in the name of Jesus Christ and His Church! Amen!

	Thursday Jan 16, 2020	Friday Jan 17, 2020	Saturday Jan 18, 2020	Monday Jan 20, 2020	Tuesday Jan 21, 2020	TOTALS
Village	Guadalajara / Dental @ Clinic	La Villa de San Francisco / Dental @ Clinic	La Villa de San Francisco / Dental @ Clinic	Oscar Valladares Cigar in Danli / Dental @ Clinic	Nuevo Paraiso / El Zarzal / Dental @ Clinic	
Medical Exams						
Adults	246	414	363	338	135 / 83	1,579
Children	281	310	319	126	166 / 72	1,274
Total Medical	527	724	682	464	301 / 155	2,853
Dental Exams						
Adults	21 / 20	28 / 18	28 / 12	29 / 3	5 / 15	179
Children	26	27 / 7	27 / 13	19 / 16	7 / 9	151
Total Dental	47 / 20	55 / 25	55 / 25	48 / 19	12 / 24	330
Teeth extracted	44	124 / 10	116 / 17	34 / 11	2 / 4	362
Restorations		50	50	28	92	220
Eye Exams	165	232	217	208	108	930
Eyeglasses	148	207	220	178	89	842
Scripts	2,413	3,314	3,703	2,564	1,603 / 739	14,336

Photos are available at <https://www.holyfamilystow.org/mission-to-honduras>