

Our Dear Brothers & Sisters and Friends,

2015 May

The Lord is my strength and my song;
He has become my salvation.
This is my God, and I will praise Him,
my father's God, and I will exalt Him.

Exodus 15:2

We celebrated 7 years here in Catacamas, Olancho on the 31st of May. So hold on to your hats and take a breather after every page; this report is going to be a long one.

Las Trancas

May started off earlier than any previous month of ministry, with Joanne and Andrew leaving the house at 5:55am on May 1st to pick up a preacher, Javier Perez, and his son, Sony, and head to the western mountains of La Paz with a truck load of clothing and household items for the community of Las Trancas. Given the improved roads, great weather, good travelers, breakfast eaten in the car while traveling and a new cut off around Tegucigalpa, they made it to Comayagua in less than five hours! The trip used to take us over 7-1/2 hours. After lunch, they toured a pig farm funded and run by several countries and government organizations to investigate the potential of a similar project in Javier's community of Jicaro Gordo. Then it was on to the city of La Paz, where they stayed again with Catalina Ramirez de Gomez before starting off for Las Trancas at 7:30am.

In Las Trancas by 9:30am, Javier presented a short Bible reading about everyone's ability to share with those less fortunate before we distributed suitcases or bags to 30 households and one individual. They also provided the local health promoter with a plastic tub filled with medicines and treatments for the community, and two of the older ladies with blood pressure medications. During our last visit in January, Joanne discovered their high blood pressures and worked with our doctor in Catacamas to provide proper dosages to control it.

The community shared lunch with us and loaded the empty truck bed with firewood for the Perezes' and with black berries for all of us. Joanne explained the medications and items in the medical tub to the health promoter before we headed for Mercala at noon. There we met with the local preacher who was arranging for an evangelist to visit the Las Trancas community every two weeks. Unfortunately we were not able to meet with the evangelist ourselves because he was working several hours away for the day. We made it all the way back to Catacamas before 8pm.

Meet Oscar

Oscar Rodriguez is 46 years old and was born in Florida, La Paz. He has been a christian for five years and has a widespread reputation for his strong faith and sacrificial works involving evangelism covering long distances. When he is not delivering the Gospel, Oscar works as a coffee harvester in different mountainous areas around western Honduras. He has agreed to take the Gospel of Christ to the remote community of Las Trancas and will travel the two hours each way twice a month over alternating weekends to deliver Bible Studies to everyone interested and willing to listen. He came all the way to Catacamas, 10 hours on three buses, to meet us and discuss our goals for his new ministry. Oscar's monthly travel expenses are being covered by members of the Wednesday Ladies' Bible Class at the A&M Church of Christ in College Station, TX, who have already collected and forwarded his support through April 2016. Thank you, loving ladies! God will shine brighter in western Honduras because of your generosity.



Joanne explains to the community matriarch, Doña Marcelina, how to take her blood pressure medicines. We provided enough to last her for six months.



Who Wants to be an Actspert?

On Sunday, May 3rd, Dwight's competition challenge on the book of Acts from the Bible continued in his pre-teen Sunday School class at the El Colegio congregation. Several students who had missed previous weeks decided to take up the challenge, but all except two people were disqualified by wrong answers. One of those two made it to level eight before the end of class. Especially desired prizes for that level included a large tin of Skittles.

And the Winner Is....!



Marcos with his new Asus laptop and some of the other participants who did well.

On Sunday, May 10th, Dwight's pre-teen Sunday School class celebrated their first grand prize winner of Who Wants to be an Actspert? Marcos Hernandez, took home the laptop computer after completing all eleven levels of questions. His classmates were impressed with his accomplishment and even students from the older classes pleaded to compete in next year's competition. Other prizes available to all participants included jewelry, pocket knives, perfumes and toys. So now, the students are eagerly studying the Gospels, which will be the basis for next year's competition. There will be a few changes to the competition that will help students remember the information they learn and thus to better prepare to make it further in the game.

Chimie-What?!

Joanne has gained the distinction of being our first household member to contract a tropical disease since we arrived here seven years ago, in the form of Chikungunya. "A mosquito-borne viral disease first described during an outbreak in southern Tanzania in 1952.... The name 'chikungunya' derives from a word in the Kimakonde (African) language, meaning "to become contorted" (or "that which bends up") and describes the stooped appearance of sufferers with joint pain (arthralgia)." (WHO) " (Pronounced 'chik-un-GUN-ya') The most common symptoms of chikungunya virus are fever and joint pain. Other symptoms may include headache, muscle pain, joint swelling, or rash. Outbreaks have occurred in countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Indian and Pacific Oceans. In late 2013, chikungunya virus was found for the first time in the Americas on the isle of Martinique in the Caribbean." (CDC) Until 2008 it was not documented outside tropical Asian and African countries, but is now reported in 60 different countries. While it is still not common, Chikungunya has even been reported in the states.

One difference between Chikungunya and most other mosquito-borne diseases is that it can be hosted by monkeys, birds, cattle and rodents, whereas both dengue and malaria can only be hosted by primates. Javier Perez, the preacher with whom she has been working on the latrine project in Jicaro Gordo, and Catalina de Gomez, with whom we stayed in La Paz six days earlier, both also had Chikungunya. So it is impossible to determine if Joanne contracted it in La Paz, in Jicaro Gordo, or even locally where it is also epidemic. Thankfully, her severe symptoms were quickly relieved and she was out of bed by Monday, May 11th. Practically the whole community of San Isidro, where Joanne did her Doctoral project have contracted it, and one of the ladies who works with us has come down with it. The best news about Chikungunya is that, since it is a viral infection, Joanne's body has developed antibodies to the germ and she will not contract it again.

Seminar at Baxter

After teaching Thursday morning, May 14th, Dwight bussed to Tegucigalpa for the annual Baxter seminar held each May. It is a good time to network with many of our friends and co-workers that we do not get to see regularly. For

Dwight, one of the highlights of the annual event is the combined worship with some of the local churches of Christ in the nation's capital, before boarding the 2:15 bus back to Catacamas. This year he made it back in record time – arriving before 6pm.

Mother's Day for Maritza (“Got Lights?”)

On Sunday, May 17th, we recognized Maritza's first Mother's Day without her husband, Lidio, by taking her and her three teenagers to lunch. Since Mother's Day is normally managed by the father until the children are adults we decided to take care of her Mother's Day celebration. June 1st will mark the one year anniversary of Lidio's death from a brain aneurism. Soon after Lidio's death, many generous donors supported the new widow and her children by funding important improvements to the house that the family had been working on little by little before his death. A covered, enclosed and concreted bathroom and shower area replaced the open toilet with no privacy; water lines and a septic tank replaced the runoff into the field behind the house that often remained standing; concrete floors replaced dirt floors inside; a used refrigerator replaced theirs that broke a few months earlier; and, most importantly, the entire property was enclosed with a 6 foot cinder block wall topped with serpentine wire to



Leopoldo (l), preacher at Mateo, and Antonio, who was always there to help us build houses in Tegus.



Keydi, Yesica, Maritza, and Orlin

protect the three single women who would possibly fall victim to rampant crime and abuse without the protection.

The Young Professionals Sunday School Class at the A&M church of Christ in College Station, TX has also been financially supporting the family as they settled into a new chapter in their lives without their husband/father. The year of support comes to an end this month. However, we would like to make an appeal to everyone willing to help with one more blessing for the family; electrical wiring for their home. Right now they have only one plug socket in the house, which

was jury-rigged by her nephew with a wire run from the street line to accommodate their refrigerator. The same nephew also rigged a single light in the living room with a switch dangling along the wall to turn it on and off. But the wiring is inadequate as well as unsafe. We had a certified electrician visit the home and give an estimate that includes: an electrical meter on the street, a fuse box on the house, a single plug socket in every room, ceiling lights and safe switches for every room and in the wash area out back, and all code and load appropriate materials. Chip Bloecher, a missionary from Farmer's Branch, TX, and his crew helped greatly by putting channels in the concrete block walls for the wires to run at no cost. The total for the rest of the project is equivalent to \$500. If anyone can help with this final project for the special family of a late preacher it would be a blessing to them.



Finishing Latrines

After a two week break for both to recover from Chikungunya, Javier and Joanne completed the latrine project in Jicaro Gordo with the last cement slabs being poured over the last week of May. Next we will invite all women in the community to a jewelry-making class to be held on Saturday, June 13th, and all community members to computer classes taught by Dwight with his mobile lab (started the 6th of June).

Networking Honduras

Joanne concluded this record month with a trip to Orlando, FL to glean valuable information from a Networking Honduras seminar presented by an organization of that same name. The event registration fee was waived for

members of the Honduran Fellowship of Missionaries and Ministries, of which we are a part. Joanne's round trip airfare was generously provided by her mother's cousins who have been long time supporters of our works and ministries here, especially that of education for the underprivileged. Since she will be staying with old friends of ours from our first years as christians in Orlando, the entire trip is essentially free. Her mother will also be in Orlando from VA. for a family event. Joanne will be in Orlando as the month closes out and rolls into June. Please keep her travels and the benefits of this seminar in your prayers. (She did get back safely.)

Prayers

Thank you for praying for Dwight's debilitating cough. He is doing much better. And thank you for your prayers for Katie and Raul, Dwight's two first graders who are struggling. Raul is doing much better and Katie has completed several assignments.

Love, Dwight and Joanne Tomkins

Living in Honduras

Here is another fruit (?) that is not uncommon here, but never seen in the states. It has a distinctive flavour, the texture of a well-ripened plum, and no internal seed (or seeds). Dwight enjoys using it to make liquados (smoothies) with mangoes and bananas. It blooms and produces mainly during the dry season and our tree produced an abundance of fruit this year just three years after planting. Do you know what it is?



A hint: The seed hanging off the bottom is very popular in the states.



Who says it is impossible to pack 67 cu.ft. of luggage and bags into 48 cu.ft. of 'paila'? OK, 4 bags were packed inside the truck cab.



Laughter and play cross all language and cultural limitations. Andrew is the boy in the red shirt.





Of these two first graders, Raul (in back) has struggled, but is improving. Yohana (right) is one of those special students who completes everything you throw at her and asks for more!



These two second graders are good friends. Susan (left) is by far the best student in 2nd grade. Those who know Catacamas would not be surprised to know she is related to Guillermo Ordoñez. Tatiana is new to the school this year and struggled at first, but is now doing much better. They are both external students.



Hector, a 4th grader, has really blossomed this year. He gladly does 6th grade math when Dwight gives it to him. He usually completes his assignments in half the time of any of the other 4th graders.



Rosa and Jossela doing a great job in a Mother's Day play. Rosita (left) has grown so much. When younger, she could never complete a math assignment. Now she often beats her fellow 5th graders.