

Honduras Mission Trip

April, 2011

Journal Notes

Keith Nichols, MD

4/2/11 Saturday, 11 AM, at the Miami airport.

I flew into Nashville Thursday night. I was greeted by Bob Martin, CIO of CCS, and John Foster, the doctor at Elkhart, Indiana. Bob and his wife Debbie were gracious enough to house John and me for this trip. They live in a beautiful house on a 40 acre farm outside of Nashville.

We had a group meeting at CCS headquarters yesterday, and we left for the airport at 3:30 this morning. Surprisingly, the airport was buzzing with activity at 4 AM. The flight check-in lines were long. Since we had a group of 21 people, we got to check in through the group check in counter. The logistics of checking in 21 people and 40+ pieces of luggage were impressive. My carry-on bag was confiscated at the boarding gate because it was too large. The airlines checked it through all the way to Tegucigalpa, so I don't have to carry it through the airport. I didn't get charged the \$100 excess baggage fee, which is a blessing.

I have 2 more hours before our flight leaves. We have a 4 hour bus ride awaiting us when we arrive in Tegucigalpa.

I learned yesterday how this trip came about. Jerry Boyle, the CEO of CCS, met Steve Hayes, a Nashville businessman, at a Christian businessmen's meeting about 8 months ago. Steve has been to Honduras several times and takes groups there annually. He had somehow connected with a Catholic priest in Olancho state, Honduras, who started Olancho Aid. It is a Catholic ministry to Hondurans.

Jerry and Steve brainstormed about the possibility of having CCS employees do a medical mission trip with Steve. Jerry, Judd Bazzell, MD, and Benjamin Sohr orchestrated this massive undertaking. It has been several months in the making, and they have poured their time and energy into this project.

What a blessing it is to have a CEO and other top-line CCS employees who want to follow the Lord and serve Him. I am blessed to work for this company.

The airport landing at Tegucigalpa is supposed to be the 2nd most dangerous airport in the world. It is a valley nestled among mountains and jungle. Thank You for giving Your angels charge over us, Father.

10 PM We made it. The landing wasn't that bad. We made it through customs relatively quickly and boarded a school bus that was purchased for Olancho Aid. The Honduras government was asking for a \$5,000 bribe to release the bus, but God intervened and we didn't have to pay it.

We took a 4 hour bus ride from Tegucigalpa to Juticalpa in Olancho state. We are being housed in a building at the church compound. It is actually pretty nice—I have a bunk bed and an oscillating fan. I took a shower tonight. It's cold water only and limited to 3 minutes. You have to be sure not to swallow any water when showering since it isn't purified. There is a 2 hour time difference, so it's really 12:15 AM now. I have been up since 3 AM, and I am tired.

4/3/11 Sunday. At the compound of Olancho Aid in Juticalpa, 10 PM.

We have had a long day. We went to Jutiquire, a neighboring city, to go to Catholic mass at Father Donohue's church. He is the Catholic priest who started Olancho Aid. We were greeted with open arms and hugs at the service. Afterwards, an older woman in the church invited us to her house for Cokes and cookies. I was hot enough and hungry enough to drink the regular Coke and eat the cookies. We drove the 30 minutes back to the base "compound," and we took a quick tour of downtown Juticalpa. They have a picturesque square in the center of town. A Catholic church and the mayor's office are on 2 of the square's sides. We then changed clothes, ate spaghetti with a Honduran twist for lunch, and headed to the special needs school, Esquelita Nazareth, to unpack 40 suitcases full of medical supplies. There is no air conditioning, and it has been around 90 degrees. The walk to the school only took 10-15 minutes, but it was on a hot, dusty dirt road. The sunscreen, sweat, and dirt made a nice concoction on my face.

We spent the afternoon and evening unpacking and organizing the contents of the 40 suitcases. We sorted and repacked medications into small, labeled plastic bags and then divided the supply into 5 days' worth of clinics. We finished at 8 PM and then had a dinner of rice and beans with a little Texas Pete hot sauce.

We met the 2 pharmacists, 2 doctors, and dentist—native Hondurans—who are going to help us. We also met a group of junior high school students from the bilingual school who will act as our interpreters. The children are all very well behaved, and the people are very grateful and humble.

There is no hot water, but a cold shower never felt so good. We have to be careful not to drink any of the shower water since it is not purified. We can't drink from the sink either. We have a water cooler with purified water, and we fill up our water thermoses frequently.

We leave at 7:30 in the morning to go to our first medical clinic. Hasta luego.

4/4/11 Monday, 8 PM

We went to Sincuyaba today—a small town about 30 minutes from Juticalpa. This was our first medical clinic. We saw 350 patients, and things generally went very well. I saw a lot of families with URIs, but I also saw someone with amoebic dysentery, children with pinworms, hypertension, diabetes, etc. The dentists, Stan and Keith, worked very hard.

I was at a table with Brad Hoover, MD, an ER physician from Nashville. We connected early on the trip since I was an ER physician and our sons both had the same type of brain cancer.

We are all pretty tired tonight, but in good spirits. All in all, it was a great first clinic day. I have never been so thankful for a cold shower and rice and beans to eat. It is a blessing. I have a clean bed to sleep in, and I will sleep well. Life is good, Father. It is good to be pulled out of my rut and see the world as others see it.

We had 11 junior high school interpreters today. They did great and were a tremendous help. They were well mannered, but fun. We all enjoyed the experience, and all of the patients were polite and appreciative. The children here are so well mannered. American children could take a cue from their Honduran cousins. Family is very important to these children. They are very respectful of their parents.

Tomorrow, we are expecting to see even more patients. May it go well, Father. Protect us and our families.

4/5/11 Tuesday, 9:30 PM

We went to Porterios today, a small town about 40 minutes away by bus. The bus driver knew all of the unmarked dirt roads well. No street signs, no pavement. Lots of dirt and dust. We had a large crowd awaiting us. Somehow, word spread quickly and people walked for hours to come to the clinic. We worked out of a school—several small buildings—quite primitive. The banos were 2 porcelain bowls without seats in an adobe outhouse.

We ended up seeing 640 patients. Wow! We're all tired, but happy. We ate at a Honduran restaurant, El Gordo, where the food is reportedly safe. I have a photo of me kissing an ox head mounted on the wall. It's a great, fun group of hard working people.

I saw a 6 year-old girl whose father was shot and killed 3 years ago, and she had part of her ear blown off by a bomb. Who would have thought that this would occur in this isolated, small rural town. I saw a woman who walked an hour with her 3 young children to get to the clinic—3 days after she miscarried twins. Many of the children had no shoes, and all of them had cavities. They were so excited just to get a sticker or a crayon—we have it so good.

4/6/11 Weds, 7 PM. At the “hogar,” or house.

We sort of had the day off. We started at 6:30 AM. We toured the Catholic elementary school, Escolar Santa Clara. It is a bilingual school, and the children take classes in both Spanish and English. Their English is very good, and they are quite advanced. They were learning about the scientific theory in 5th grade. I learned about it in college. There are 380 students, and there is a waiting list of 80 more. The school gives scholarships to several underprivileged children and even picks them up on the bus. The principal is Peggy McQuaid. She is from Rhode Island. She's about 25 years old. She knows every student by name, and appears to do a great job.

We have been to Esquelita Nazareth, the school for special needs children, several times. Their children are predominately Down's syndrome children. It is the only special needs school in the state of Olancho. Lizzy Canales is the director. It is a small, but nice facility.

We then went to the bilingual middle school, the Santa Clara Institute. The principle is Maki Faria from Boston. She has a master's degree in school counseling. Again, the bilingual elementary and middle schools are the only Catholic ones in Olancho.

We saw some children at the orphanage. One little girl had developmental delays, and one 13 year-old boy had malaria! I saw an 11 year-old boy with a severe case of shingles. I have never seen it in that young of a person.

4/7/11 Thurs, 8:15 PM

We went to El Rodeo today. It is about 35 miles away, but it takes 1 ½ hours to drive to. It is up in the mountains. We couldn't take the bus all of the way to the church building, so we had to walk about a mile to the church. The bus got stuck on a little bridge and sustained a little damage to the tail pipe.

It wasn't quite as crowded today. We saw about 340 patients. We got back at about 6:30. Tomorrow is our last clinic day. We get up at about 5:30 each morning and leave by about 6:30.

4/9/11 10 PM, Saturday. On the plane to Nashville

We had a good outreach to the village of El Retiro near the Nicaraguan border yesterday. It took about 1 ½ hours to drive by bus, but the roads were good enough to drive right up to the church. Not too many people were waiting for us when we arrived, which was all right with me since I was tired from a long week. We ended up seeing over 300 patients and still getting out of there before dark.

One of the greatest surprises was a good bano! It was in a little adobe outhouse building, but it had a real toilet with running water! Praise be to You, oh Lord.

The middle school bilingual students who assisted us as interpreters wanted our scrubs and wanted them autographed. We were like celebrities. It was a blessing to us and to them. It gives them

hope of what life could be and a chance to improve their English skills. It greatly sped us up in our treatments.

All told, we saw 1,825 patients in 5 days. It was a great blessing to them and to us. I have a heart for the poor that I have never had. Thank You for opening up more opportunities for medical missions, Holy Spirit.

Jerry Boyle, the CEO of CCS, has a tremendous heart. He plans to make this an annual event—at his own expense. His older brother Jack, a very successful retired businessman, and Benjamin Sohr's oldest brother Jim, accompanied us on our trip. Jim is also extremely successful and is now semi-retired. They worked at least as hard as everyone else, if not harder. To see such successful men who have it all in the material world is humbling. To see how hard they worked to help the poor and needy is amazing. God, You are so good. Thank You for good role models for me and the others on this trip.

The doctors, nurses, dentists, and all of the support staff pulled together in one accord. There was hard work and lots of laughter. No one grumbled or complained. We had a great time. Everyone was very appreciative of everyone else's gifts. It was beautiful to see.

At this point, I plan to return next year, if You are willing, Lord. I am forever ruined for the ordinary. I long to draw closer to You and to the poor and needy. I need to help bring Your love to the poor and the nations. I wait for Your instructions, Holy Spirit.