

“When you go back to the U.S., you will take my heart with you.” This was the last thing one of the Honduran children said to a member of the Holy Family Mission Honduras team. Led by Holy Family parishioner, Steve Hayes, thirty four people (mostly from Holy Family) embarked on a mission trip in May that would forever touch their hearts and perhaps change their lives. The team consisted of teens, college students and adults/parents. Through the careful planning of Steve and the efforts of all the team members, we were carrying with us luggage stuffed with clothing, games, medicines and school supplies as well as almost \$15,000 of funds donated by businesses, and friends/families/fellow parishioners of the team members.

The Honduran mission known as APUFRAM was started in 1970 by American missionary Fr. Emil Cook, OFM Conv. APRFRAM is an acronym that translates as “Association of Franciscan Boystowns and Girlstowns.” It’s purpose is to provide academic and spiritual education to the poor children of Honduras. The goal is to teach the poor “how to fish” instead of simply providing a fish (breaking the cycle of poverty....one child at a time). APUFRAM now has twelve facilities in Honduras that are Boys and Girls boarding houses/schools with very spartan facilities and churches. The site we visited and stayed near was an all girls facility and nearby was also the Mothers Project which houses abandoned and abused women and their children.

Upon arriving in Honduras we were greeted by beautiful scenery. The mountains in the background gave way to vibrantly colored flowers. Contrasting the beauty we could immediately sense the poverty as there were thousands of shacks lining the mountains and roadways. We were also greeted by Jerome Cabeen (House Director for Honduras volunteers) who works and lives at the Visitor House that would be our home for the next 9 days. Jerome is a tall man with a booming voice and great sense of humor. He was informative and funny and amazed us when he had all our names memorized after the 2 hour bus ride.

Our home away from home was very different from what we are used to in the U.S. Cinderblock walls, bunk beds, cold showers and a few bugs were just a few of the ‘luxuries’ in our new digs. No one was worried about the facilities as we were there to serve, to give and not receive, or so we thought.

Our mornings began at 7:00 a.m. with Mass in the chapel led by Fr. Andy, a Franciscan priest who was there with a group from The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. Fr. Andy’s thought provoking homilies spiritually motivated us every morning. Then it was off to work. Each day we would work with a different group of people. This provided a wonderful opportunity to get to know everyone on a personal level. We painted a security fence and the living quarters at multiple locations, dug a 15 x 60 foot trench to redirect sewage, picked up trash that has littered grounds where the kids live and did several other projects that were requested.

Every afternoon was spent visiting and playing with the children at the two facilities near our visitor center and also at two other boarding locations in the area. Words alone do not have the power to describe the impact on all of the team that came from our interactions with the children (roughly 3 years old to sixteen years old). We played in totally unstructured fun and also provided some structured games, contests, art work etc. Here are the observations of three team members that provide some insight to our time with the children:

“The overall highlight was spending time with the kids. They have so little, yet they have so much!!! They don’t get consumed with the “stuff” we are accustomed to. What really matters to them is time...smiles...playing with each other...praying, etc. They taught us so much about what really is important in life!!!”

“I will never forget the feeling I had when we walked to the Mother’s project on the first day and we were greeted by the kids running towards us with open arms. That image will always stay with me as well as Fr. Andy’s comments that those kids are so similar to all of us, running with arms wide open to God.”

“Once I met the kids and started playing I saw how much joy our attention brought to them, the real treasure is what they gave back to us. They taught me that even though they don’t have cell phones, iPods or Xbox they are happy. They are also a great example of God’s unconditional love for us. They barely knew our names, let alone what we might be like...but they loved us for what we were.”

Each of our evenings was spent in spiritual enrichment. Following dinner was a voluntary attendance at a gathering for the rosary at the Mother’s Project. After the rosary gathering our team joined together in a time of reflection on the day’s activities through music, readings, prayer and thought sharing carefully and inspirationally developed and nurtured by Matt and Angelle Hayes. This time allowed us to truly understand the purpose of our Mission and to individually and collectively grow closer to God.

Finally, the money that was donated went toward purchasing the supplies we used for the projects completed while we were there...and we also left money that is specifically directed to purchase the supplies that will:

- put a new roof on 2 schools – currently rain leaks through the roofs onto the kids while they are working
- build a safe outdoor deck / area where the kids can eat lunch, do homework and play together
- 2 slides, a large swing set and a complete basketball court with 2 goals for an all boy’s boarding school that currently has no playground equipment.

For virtually all of the team members the experience was a significant positive impact on our relationship with God. Many of the comments reflected on the impact that our own personal connection with anyone in need of help can have on that individual’s life. Perhaps this thought says it all:

“My friends multiplied....and our spirituality united into the one body of Christ”.

For those interested in reserving a seat on our journey back to Honduras, please contact Steve Hayes (Steve@HumanCapitalGroupInc.com) as soon as possible. Seats will be reserved on a first-come-first-serve basis.