

The Newsletter of the  
**Maine-Honduras Partnership**

June 2008

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### **Through the Refiners Fire**

The Honduras Partnership of the Maine Conference has been through a year of growth and discernment. It has been a difficult year, but it has been a good year. We have come through the process stronger and even more committed to the relationship which we have with the Evangelical and Reformed Church of Honduras. The events of this year have been communicated to the Conference through reports at last year's Annual Meeting, ACE mailings, discussions with members of the Partnership Committee and reports to the Co-ordinating Council. We are not going to go back to the beginning in this report, but instead, update the Conference on the developments since the last Annual Meeting, and share a vision for the future.

It takes two current partners to have a partnership. Much of the time from September 2007 until January 2008 was a time of waiting to be introduced to our new partner team in Honduras. The Evangelical and Reformed Church of Honduras held its

"I believe that the Gospel teaches us to love one another even in the midst of daily adversity. That call sustains me in the Partnership, and in the relationship with our Honduran friends." –Rev. Bruce Burnham

elections for new officers in January. Feliciano Rivera, the President of the Synod, or governing body of the church, could not run again, as they have term limits. We waited with prayer to learn from the Synod who would be the new partner/leader in San Pedro Sula. We were very pleased to hear that it is Rev. Carlos Ortega.

In early February the Partnership Committee asked Rev. David Gaewski and one of our bilingual members, Sarah Bigney, to go to Honduras to meet with Rev. Ortega and the new "junta" or Executive Committee of the Synod. David reported back to the committee:

"There is a deep concern on both sides regarding lines of communication and the need for regular and open communication. Therefore I am copying this report to Carlos Ortega as a symbol of our sincerity to be completely transparent. There are deep rooted hopes for the future of our partnership from both sides and this meeting seemed to represent a "new beginning".

In regards to the Pronouncement which we received last September which is critical of social and theological positions of the United Church of Christ; the Junta explained again the reason that prompted them to take this position, i.e. criticism from beyond and within their church as a result of easy access of information (and mis-information) on the internet. By association with the UCC, the Synod was "labeled" as a Honduran church accepting of homosexuality, which they are not. The Junta stands by their Pronouncement and says it has been a useful

"Honduras is no longer a country on a map, but people whose names I know, and there is more to gain by staying and working through the issues than to walk away from the table." –Kris Galasyn

“The commitment to true Partnership, not just mission, called me to stay on and work through the difficulties to a relationship that is stronger than it was before.” –Sarah Bigney

tool for them as a form of self-definition. They regret if the Pronouncement was painful for members of the UCC, yet, they believe the Pronouncement is a true statement which they stand by.

The vote which they took at the General Assembly "To continue with the fraternal relations and social action work which we have maintained in the past", was emphasized as a sincere effort to keep the door open, not only to future joint projects, but ALSO to continued theological dialogues. This last point is an important one. They do not want us to hide our differences from one another, not ignore the fact that we have significant differences. They emphasized their hope that we will continue to talk openly about them, however, conversations need to be well structured and planned."

#### Into the Future

The Honduras Partnership Committee has spent a great deal of time in committee struggling and assessing the Maine Conference's priorities for mission work in Honduras. David and Sarah reported these priorities to the new junta and heard their response: "Work with communities in projects that benefit the wider community; working along with Honduran church members; projects which help the "poorest of the poor"; Fair Trade, CEVER, and medical mission. They said that they needed to have time to discuss among themselves their priorities. One priority, however, which they can name, is theological education and their hope to re-open the Seminary. They need to train teachers first before they can consider reopening the seminary. Carlos Ortega emphasized that his own priority as president is first and foremost to care for the clergy of the Synod. In addition they expressed hope that we would continue to be interested in youth and pastoral exchanges. They said that these events have been extremely important to them.

#### Recent and Upcoming Mission Trips

So we are moving into the future. As of January there were still several mission trips which were scheduled at the last Mission Council and which now could proceed as planned. As of the February meeting it was confirmed that the following trips would take place: La Vueltoza (April); Morazan/Windham Hill (July); Trinidad/York Assn (July) and Los Naranjos/Waterville (December). The La Vueltoza trip took place and the report appears separately. It was a great success. There is further work to be done in La Vueltoza.

The next Mission Council is scheduled for August 2008 in San Pedro Sula. Representing the Maine Conference Honduras Partnership will be Rev. Bruce Burnham of Alfred, who is currently in Honduras on sabbatical in a Spanish language immersion course, Nancy Olmstead, a bilingual member of the committee from the Foreside Community Church, and one other member to be appointed. This group will take the new applications for mission trips for the years 2009 – 2010 to be matched with applications from churches and villages in Honduras. This is the time to get new applications in to the committee.

We have been tested and tried, we have shed some pieces of our relationship which seemed extraneous or burdensome. We have evaluated programs attempted on a trial basis. But what is left after the refining is the gold of long term respect and friendship between the Maine Conference and the Evangelical and Reformed Church of Honduras. Vaya con Dios.

-Sally Colegrove, Chairperson

“I became involved with the HPC because I wanted to serve God by helping brothers and sisters in the developing world, and because I speak Spanish. Also, I bring a diverse church background to bear on issues of partnership and unity in the body of Christ, since I have worshipped and learned in many evangelical churches.” –Nancy Olmstead

“Mission is a central part of how I understand ministry. From my first visit to Honduras, I realized that our cross-cultural relationship would not be easy, but would be of great value. It is necessary to continue to work on our communication skills, but isn’t that important in any relationship?” –Rev. Sally Colegrove

## Transforming Lives

*“Give them fish and they eat for a day.  
Teach them to fish and they eat for a  
lifetime.” -Loa Tzu*

On a recent Honduras Partnership trip to the community of La Vueltoza, someone said, “I wish there was a way to make a permanent difference in the lives of some Hondurans. It’s great to build houses, but what about after we leave?” Good news! There is a project in Honduras called CEVER. CEVER is a vocational school project of the Evangelical and Reformed Church of Honduras. CEVER is located in Yoro, about 4 hours from San Pedro Sula. It provides basic and vocational education to nearly 200 students, ages 12-24, who come from a variety of backgrounds, but are motivated to work hard and develop skills in the technical areas of industrial mechanics, auto mechanics, welding, sewing, and wood working. In a country where the main options are subsistence level jobs, factory work, or joining a gang, these skills bring amazing new possibilities into the lives of CEVER graduates and their families.

So...how can we support CEVER as a mission project?

- Financial support is an ever-present need. A commitment of \$60/month (sent to CEVER, c/o the Maine Conference office, PO Box 966, Yarmouth, ME 04096) will support one student in this program.
- Get involved! CEVER has a vision for the future. A production center, classes in business administration, and microenterprise loans will move CEVER toward true sustainability and self-sufficiency.

- Let’s plan an annual mission trip to CEVER! There is nothing like building real relationships with real people to make a dream become a reality. And like all our other projects in Honduras, it is important that our work represents a *joint* vision and not just *our* vision for CEVER. People on this trip could serve as ambassadors for the CEVER Project once they return, encouraging more churches to become involved.

For more information contact the CEVER subcommittee of the Honduras Partnership:

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"As we interact with our Honduran sisters and brothers, we can merely give them one-time assistance--or, more effectively, we can jointly improve both their lives and the fabric of their communities. As a Partnership Committee member, I am pleased to see the Committee's increasing and intentional focus on projects which promote sustainability."- Dr. Dale Bardo

“The first time I went to Honduras, it was the work we were going to be doing that seemed so important. Once I went that first time, I realized it was all about the people and the relationship and being one in Christ. As we continue to make our trips to Honduras it would be easy to get caught up in the project at hand. Being on the Partnership keeps me grounded in the sacred covenant that we have with our Honduran brothers and sisters. It was my commitment to this covenant – to the people, and not the projects – that kept me involved during difficult times.” –Rev. Marcia Charles

“Friends have disagreements all the time, but in the end, resolving them is better than aborting the relationship. My friends are in Honduras, and no matter how many disagreements we may have, I will not walk away from them.” –Becky Muller

“Over the past two years I have reassessed my volunteer commitments across the board, and the Honduras Partnership continued to say “stick with it.” It is for me a real link to a world beyond my own borders – both geographic and cultural.” –Rev. Susan Winter

## **Sustainability**

How can we make our work with Honduras more sustainable? Over the past few years, the Honduras Partnership Committee has asked this question. Sustainability is a common word these days, but what does it really mean? And what does it mean for the Honduras Partnership?

If we really want to make a difference in the lives of the Honduran people, it is important for us to not only ask how we can help, but how we can make a difference in the economic and social inequalities that exist between our countries. Instead of just building a house, can we ask – what are the economic conditions that create and continue the poverty we see in Honduras? How can we find solutions to those problems, instead of important but short-term band-aid fixes?

One way to begin this conversation is with fair trade. Many Hondurans are coffee farmers, but the average price they receive for each pound of coffee, or day worked on the plantations, is very low. Most of the world's coffee farmers live in poverty. We are working on a project to promote fair trade coffee, a system of certification that ensures the farmers receive a higher price for their product. You can buy fair trade certified coffee (and other products like sugar, bananas, chocolate, and tea) in most grocery stores. Changing what we buy is just one way we can begin to address the root causes of poverty and build a more just and sustainable world economy.

Another sustainable project that the Partnership is supporting is the CEVER School. This is a vocational school for teens in Yoro, Honduras that trains them with skills they need for a technical career. It transforms lives and helps young people coming from a background of poverty have what they need to be financially stable. We are currently seeking sponsors for CEVER. This is a way we can make a huge difference

in the lives of young people who in turn will be able to take care of themselves and their communities.

There is a power dynamic and inequality that exists between our Honduran partners and us because of our two countries' economic situations. We hope that through our work and our commitment to addressing issues of economic injustice, we can build a world of equality and sustainability.

–Sarah Bigney

“I am proud of the Partnership Committee because I went to Honduras in 2007, and want to support this relationship in whatever way I can.”  
–Rev. Franklin Anderson

## **Get Involved in the Partnership**

The Maine Conference has a growing and ever-changing relationship with the Evangelical and Reformed Church of Honduras. This has been a challenging and rewarding mission activity, which has included work team visits, Honduran visits to Maine, medical brigades and clinics, pastors' retreats and project funding assistance. Over the last ten years it has been one of the largest, most exciting programs in the Maine Conference.

The work in Honduras is structured and supervised by a Mission Council which meets biennially to pair mission partners: projects at churches in Honduras with volunteer mission groups from churches in Maine. During the 2007-2008 mission cycle, some nineteen groups have gone from Maine to Honduras.

Now it is time for the next Mission Council to determine the work to be done in 2009-2010. Representatives from both churches will meet in San Pedro Sula this August to review the applications from prospective partners. Application forms for this cycle of mission work are available at the Honduras Partnership Committee booth or online at the conference website at: <http://maineucc.org/honduras/honduras1.htm>

“Having had the privilege to spend an extended time in Honduras, I have stayed with the Partnership to bring the voice to the table of those whose stories I am gifted to carry.” –Liz Charles