

“But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.”

(John 21:25, NRSV)

Dear friends,

This is a double issue of this newsletter, because it includes Holy Week, which was not only incredibly busy but also coincided with the time at which I would have been writing the March newsletter, and also the start of my colleague Rev Hanners' Long Leave (Sabbatical). I therefore took the editorial decision to do a double issue this month, a decision which I am now regretting in the light of the amount of information it contains. Jesus is still working hard blessing people in Utila. To minimize duplication, I will jump around time-wise, summarizing developments in each section of our life and work, which continue to evolve.

Sunday School continues to delight and challenge. The Sunday school class (age 11-14) Linda was taking to cover for a teacher who was away, she is now keeping, as the former teacher is happy to cover for absent colleagues, or join the adult class if not needed. Linda has been doing really well with them, as the attendance (up to 15) shows, though she does wonder what they think of her attempts to engage them. The former teacher of the adult class I was covering has also returned, and is also now happy to be part of the class, and to take it when I'm unavailable. I am also now called up every week to pray a blessing over anyone whose birthday it is that week. Over Holy Week we had 'specials'- on Palm Sunday I ran an ad lib prayer station as part of a 'Walk through Easter', telling the children about Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane, praying with and for the children, then telling of them briefly of His arrest and trial and sending them to the next station to hear about the cross, having received them from the lady who did foot washing, even for some of the teenagers! Linda accompanied her group as they visited the stations, keeping them under control. There were 120 there that week. On Easter Sunday afternoon there were presentations by all ages, with a total of over 150 people- we ran out of goody bags having assumed 150 would be enough!

During Lent I led a series of Lent Bible studies based on D. Kevin Jones' book 'Seven last words', which went down well and challenged people, who are eager to learn more. Linda was also asked to lead the (formerly Women's) World Day of Prayer, which is more than just a service here. I summarized information about Taiwan (who put the service together) for prayer points, led a Bible study with their and some of my own material, then led a prayer meeting before Linda led the service, aided by volunteers she had recruited, which went well and blessed people. I also attended a couple of our weekly Spanish-language services, to understand how to lead them in April, May and June (only once a month while Rev Hanners is away). We get mostly children now, who come up and sing at the front (another local tradition). In April I took my first Spanish service- with 2 other adults and 9 children. I did a short talk, chose some hymns and children's choruses, prayed and encouraged contributions, all in Spanish, but I found it slightly stilted because my Spanish still isn't good enough to lead unscripted. The adults in the congregation said it was OK and appreciated it though.

Rev Hanners' phone was not working, so she arrived 24 hours early for a planning meeting here before beginning her Long Leave to discuss expectations and strategies. I am

still finding pastoral work challenging here- though I have many people's phone numbers, nobody has an address and everyone gives directions by referring to landmarks I don't know, often with obsolete names (eg Mermaids shop and restaurant is normally referred to as Hoo-hoos). In addition, I'm not always informed of pastoral needs and people tend to go straight to Rev Hanners (even during her Long Leave), partly because everyone knows her as the Methodist minister and also because they may not all know how to contact me (especially people in the wider community). Having said that, I have begun pastoral visiting to people I have been able to locate, which is already yielding some positive results. In addition, I've started recording voicemail devotions on the church WhatsApp group every day via my laptop, as Rev Hanners normally does one. It takes me a while, as I'm following the Methodist Prayer handbook readings and recording my own rather than reading one. There are lots of public ones also posted by various people, which on some groups can overwhelm important information requests. There are so many groups here it's hard to believe, most people here communicate through it rather than e-mail, and there are over 30 groups active each day on my feed, which can be a little overwhelming, even though the e-mails are easier!

The Holy Week services were memorable if exhausting. On Palm Sunday we processed in at the start waving palm branches after the bell had stopped calling everyone to worship- no donkey though. The next day we had 30 people for the first daily 6am prayer meeting! There were 38 the second day, and 50 the third. As going shopping in La Ceiba had failed to locate any matzos or horseradish for our seder meal, Linda made the matzos the day before, and the haroseth on the day. As I couldn't find the old seder service I'd used before, I rewrote one using the old order of service and several internet sources. In the actual service, held in the annexe with fans, open windows and the door open in case Elijah turned up (he didn't), to keep cool. Unfortunately the wind blew plates and papers everywhere, and even Bible pages shut, but we managed, and one of our stewards wants to adapt the salt water and bitter herbs to reflect the slavery within Garifuna history as part of the local culture (the Garifuna people are descended from a group of ex-slaves who escaped or were emancipated). The church have had similar but different services before, but we had good feedback next morning at breakfast (which always follows early prayer meetings- we didn't go every time).

The following night Rev Hanners led a foot washing service, after which we were surprised by a large reddish moon on the way home (the photos don't do it justice). The Good Friday 6am service was led by an elderly matriarch of the church, with many of her friends singing solos or duets of (mostly) old hymns. The excellent 9am service Linda led with three mini-sermons and various dramatic interventions. On Saturday, after the prayer meeting, was an Easter Egg Hunt, hosted by a lady who usually lives in the USA, who wanted Linda to read a Peter Rabbit story (!), but she did Rocky the tombstone instead- more suitable for a church event, though the garden was decorated with numerous Easter bunnies!

The Sunrise service on Easter Sunday morning at Paradise Cove saw about 50 people at gathered on benches at 4:45am in the dark. I finished the main service shortly before the sun rose, after which we sang praise songs and hymns until it did. Linda preached on the Cays at 10 am, I preached at Mizpah at 9. There is no Easter Holy Communion at Mizpah, that

always happens on the first Sunday on the month no matter what, but there was a flower cross made with tropical flowers people brought, including one from our garden.

The Cays are providing a particular challenge. Not only can it be difficult to get there (we are in a bay, but they are in the open sea where big waves and strong winds can make the last stretch dangerous), but the few active church leaders are becoming increasingly elderly and tired, and, with five churches on a small island, and an increasingly Spanish speaking population, there are not many English speakers unattached to any church. I finally made it over to the Cays to preach and take communion during April, though Linda was supposed to accompany the women's group to a service there which was cancelled again due to the weather. Fortunately they have a very reliable senior preacher who is always happy to step in at the last minute.

I also led my first congregational meeting in March- it would have finished quicker than usual but for one extended item of Other Business. At the end of March we then went over to La Ceiba for the Circuit meetings, which were rather lengthy again, including lengthy discussions on property and finance. I also had an extra tuition meeting with some of the North Coast Local Preachers, and we had the first ever Local Preachers' meeting of the Utila and North Coast Circuit, at which I was officially appointed Circuit Homiletics Tutor and Linda Mentor, though it was admitted that five was too many for one preacher to mentor, especially remotely, so I was permitted to help. I was also surprised at the length of time some preachers have been preaching unaccredited. Our major difficulty is that we live a ferry ride away from them, leading to difficulties with supervision and assessing services, as well as tuition, mentoring and assessment, as both ministers and the qualified Local Preacher all live here. We agreed to record certain of their services to help with assessment and monitoring. The Superintendent, Rev Cayetano, stayed over on that occasion to preach and lead Holy Communion in La Ceiba and at El Pino.

The March service at La Ceiba represented a breakthrough- it was very hot so I was allowed not to wear a robe, which was a great relief- it's hot enough without one! I also had my first MCCA baptism there, a 6 year-old boy connected with the church. Later in March I took my first baptism at Mizpah, a young girl whose mum had left the island, but who is cared for here by relatives. Our font is sealed and very shallow. On the mainland I also took a Local Preachers' tuition session, had lunch then preached and led Holy Communion in Spanish at El Pino- this was the first time I felt able to emphasise and adjust my tone appropriately nearly all the time. Afterwards we took a local bus to the bus station, then a taxi to my hotel- they couldn't find my booking (it had been entered as Hinds, a common name in the Bay Islands, including our local Adventist pastor). I also held my first online meeting for local preachers, but only one turned up, and she was working, so I abandoned it. Some of them have difficulties connecting, at one meeting four were sharing one phone in the church.

Rev Hanners kindly lent me a bag of theological books on the New Testament to lend to the preachers to help with their assignments. A helpful church member staying in La Ceiba between visits agreed to allow them to take their assignments to her hotel to hand in. Linda ended up preaching at Mizpah on Local Preachers' Sunday- she had been supposed to swap

with a La Ceiba preacher but it fell through- and did an excellent job. We had requested they record that service at La Ceiba for assessment- this didn't happen unfortunately, but we did get snippets recorded on phones posted on our WhatsApp group. Excerpts were also recorded of Linda's service as an example of good practice by an experienced Local Preacher.

The last major thing to report church-wise is the youth confirmation classes. Some of Linda's Sunday School class and the older teenage group (six in all) said they'd come, but most didn't show up, so we only have two. The confirmation syllabus is based on the catechism, which is a little dry but gives a good overall view of Scripture. We also started arranging our furlough, and the visit of the Global Relationships Regional Coordinator in May.

The big innovation we managed to achieve at the Methodist School was the reintroduction of Upper School Bible classes. Last year these were apparently taken by the Head Teacher, who was a Christian, but the new Head was open about not feeling equipped to do this, so it was delegated to me. With the Head's support, I negotiated a mixture of Board members and upper school teachers to do this, using the modified Belize curriculum, modified a second time when it became clear we would have to combine year groups. We were finally ready to start 3 weeks before the end of term, but as the last fortnight was given over to end-of-term revision and exams, (for which we prayed for them all), the start was delayed until after Holy Week (they had one week off). The new classes, tacked on to the end of the school day at noon, were not universally popular- there was a loud groan from one young man when announced in assembly- but we felt were essential in a Christian school.

I took on teaching extra 4<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> grade classes, to cover for volunteers visiting the US, in addition to Rev Hanners' 6<sup>th</sup> Grade class. On Wednesdays Linda now has two classes, second then 8th/9<sup>th</sup> Grade, I have 10/11th Grade (the oldest ones, up to age 17) last lesson, and am free the lesson before to troubleshoot, see the Director, check with staff, help with the library (I spent some time grading books by reading age), practice my Spanish or whatever. The children achieved excellent results in their first term exams, with several marks in the high 90s even in 11<sup>th</sup> Grade, and one of my G3 students got 100%! I suspect our (mostly teacher-set) exams may be easier than UK exams, especially after the furore over this year's Y6 SATs. However, there was some consternation as the local Council came round to drop off an external Maths exam for some year groups, because at bilingual schools like ours they're taught Maths in English and the exam was in Spanish, and also because they follow a different syllabus! There are some behavioural issues with younger children getting excited, but the older ones have been well-behaved so far. However, both Linda and I struggle with inaudible incomprehensible questions, especially in Spanish, especially in the noisy double room.

We have also reintroduced prayer buddies, whereby a teacher is paired with a Board member from the Church. We meet with them from time to time, providing a listening ear and praying for and with them when appropriate. We have kept most continuing teachers on our lists, added those new teachers whose classes we are in for Bible class, and allocated buddies for the other staff members. This has enabled a certain amount of involvement in constructive pastoral care for some teachers who have been facing various difficulties,

including adjusting to living on a small island where prices are higher than on the mainland, from whence some have arrived. I now have four prayer buddies, Linda has three.

I attended an 'Acto Civica' for Fathers' Day- each class performed some dance, song or dramatic interlude- this was nearly all in Spanish, only 7<sup>th</sup> grade did theirs mostly in English. I also attended a 'class management' session in Spanish, led by the Head (mostly educational principles), and attended a couple of Board meetings. Also Kindergarten (age 3-5) has a new schoolteacher from England, with whose help I was able to repatriate some excess teabags (because you're English, you must use loads of teabags)...

We have experienced various frustrations at the Missions House, which come with living here. The washing machine stopped working, Linda investigated and found green algae from the tap water in the filter, she removed it and it is now fine. Our nextdoor neighbour, who hires out cycles, jetskis, motorbikes and plays loud music all day even when they have no customers, was starting a new beach bar, so the disco that night was extra loud and directly outside our bedroom. The study and lounge still await soundproofing. Our hose, which we use to top up the water tank when we are close to running out, was stolen from our garden so we had to buy another. The Internet man came to look at our increasingly poor internet, said he was happy with it, though he admitted it was slow, and blamed our devices, though we explained that they worked far better in La Ceiba that weekend, and had previously done so here. We have really been struggling with this- it is still getting worse, one day I took 30 minutes to get into my emails, another day I gave up after 30 minutes trying to open the translation site I use a lot to plan lessons. Linda has been having difficulties printing, as the internet won't allow her laptop to talk to the printer, mine is still OK so far...

Our food on Good Friday was different- Linda couldn't make our traditional Jersey wonders (like a cross between a cake and a doughnut- delicious), because there is no butter here, but she did make a delicious prawn risotto in coconut milk with chayote squash and green plantain, then banana bread with custard- lovely. She's also perfected breaded chicken in lime, which replaced conch after it disagreed with her. On the subject of food, in La Ceiba we visited a (very) well-hidden restaurant suggested by Lonely Planet, Linda had garlic squid, I had chicharrones (pork crackling) with yucca and salsa, and soursop juice- delicious.

We were surrounded by three loud discos on Good Friday night, which continued until at least 2:30 am, as another full boat had arrived with partygoers- there is such a contrast between the solemnity of the church communities and the extra-wild partying of the visitors, many of whom come from the mainland to celebrate the long weekend with little regard for local Christian tradition. We also had an instructive meeting with the local immigration people, who said that they couldn't help us extend our stay here, but advised us to use a man down the street, and on our next visit said it was best for us to do it ourselves online- Linda did, but we were in the queue for about 5 days, and are still waiting to hear from them.

Insects are found here in profusion. We've had ant infestations in the kitchen, of several different kinds, including in the cupboards, and even found a couple of large cockroaches on the floor. There are lots of flies, so the bin needs emptying often to avoid maggot invasions, and there are numerous biting insects, especially the tiny sandflies, the bane of Linda's life.

We've had a lot of heat and haze recently, apparently from the seasonal burning of fields and forest fires on the mainland, so their mountains disappeared and haven't been seen since. We've also had a number of power cuts- during one of these the UK clocks changed, so we didn't notice the devices on UK time in the living room changing, we only realized when we went to the bedroom, where the clocks are on local time.

There are many blessings of living here though, we are especially blessed by the public beach at frustrating times, where we can float in the beautiful azure waters and talk stuff through- that is one of our 'happy places' we were told we needed during training, though exploring the island in the golf cart is pretty good too. We also have the occasional treat from our neighbour inviting us round for pigtail bando, my favourite local delicacy, which leads onto the section on leisure below...

Linda had a trip to Neptune's beach, a boat ride away though still on our island, with the Women's group, where she caught the sun chatting in the sea. We discovered that the chocolate factory and the iguana station are both closed on Thursdays when we had one off, but they're open Fridays, which is our usual. I enjoy the soursop tea at the chocolate factory, and we finally discovered the rather wonderful tea room and its visiting migrant warblers.

I remain delighted with the local wildlife. Even in the garden I watched a Cuban brown anole displaying from our shed to a sandy female, and photographed a golden-fronted woodpecker in our almond trees. At the public beach Linda was watching a young dark brown Southern stingray when I reached the sea, which was beautiful but swam off. Round the back of the church I watched a bay-breasted warbler and common yellowthroat on successive days, but didn't have my camera either time sadly. I also saw a rufous-tailed hummingbird, which hasn't been officially recorded here for some time, but I saw some in Belize and had a very good view. I also saw one chasing off some Canivet's emeralds (the common hummingbird here), and was surprised how much bigger they are. One day off we went to airport, where we were surprised to be allowed onto the tarmac, which was great for birds-mangrove cuckoos, Altamira and orchard orioles, and a male summer tanager coming into its red breeding plumage. We also finally saw a tagged wild swamper (the endangered endemic Utila island iguana) loose at the iguana station. We have also recently explored both sides of a distant beach where the sea turtles come in to nest through the waves, it was not the best for swimming but provided a change of scenery.

Prayer points for May- please pray for:

Rev Hanners, visiting her son and friends in the USA this month as part of her Long Leave  
The visit later this month of Sandra Lopez, our Regional Coordinator at Global Relationships  
Discussions and decisions relating to all Mission Partners, helping us and the others to discern God's will for our lives beyond August 2024

Plans for our furlough in July and early August- we still have spaces for more church visits  
Wisdom for how to cover our Bible classes at the school while Linda and I are away

May God richly bless and prosper you all,

Yours in Christ's service,

Chris and Linda

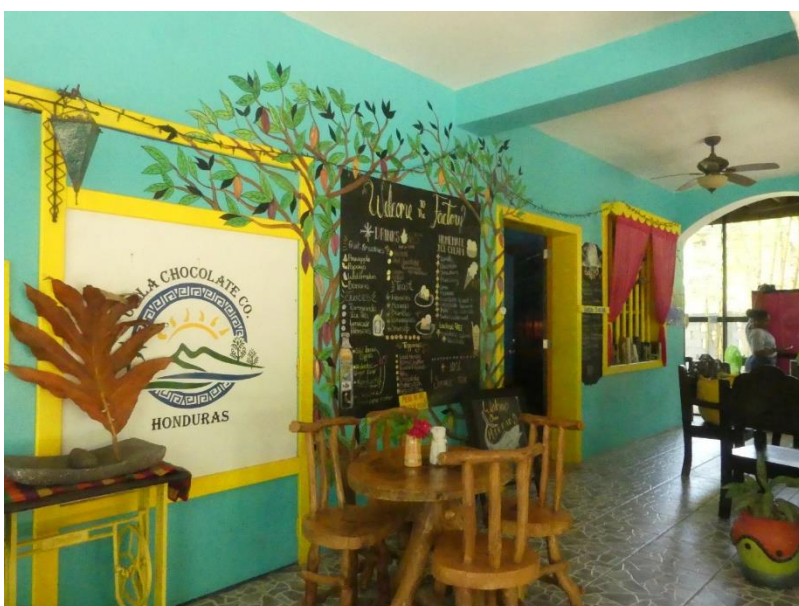




Neptune's beach



Mango, chayote & papaya



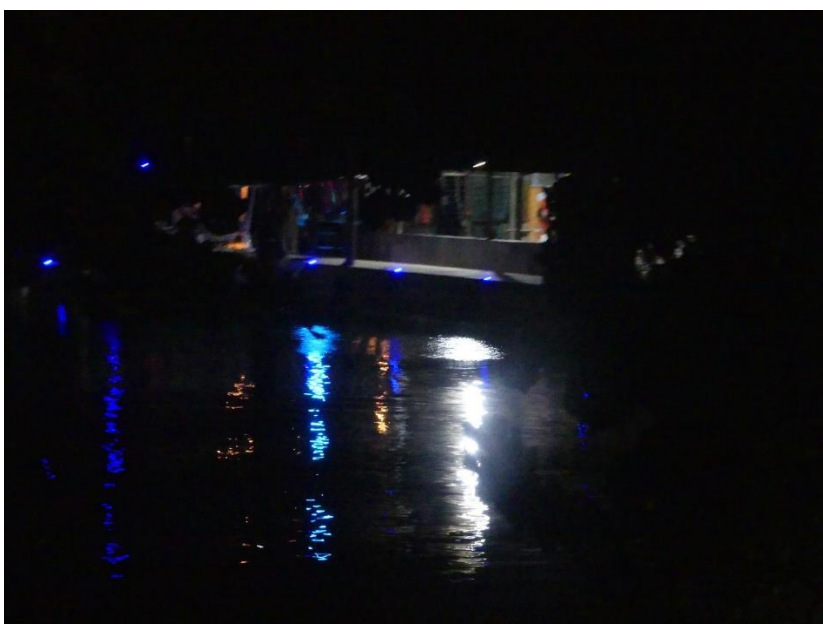
Chocolate factory cafe



Fathers' Day at school



Swamper running wild



Disco in the garden





Selfie at a rocky beach



The sandy side



Rainbow whiptail lizard



Says it all really...



Golden-fronted woodpecker



Black and white and  
blue-winged warblers





Jetskier and frogpeople



Susannah's Garden



Local Preacher's meeting



La Ceiba pier



Random outdoor psaltery



Reddish moon (the photo doesn't do it justice)





Storytelling Easter Saturday



Easter egg hunt



Manzanitas, starfruit, mangoes





Tropical flower cross



Sunrise service



Linda's group's 'Crucifixion'



Mangrove cuckoo



Summer tanager





Airport 'security'



Herding cows across the road



Cuban brown anole