

CHRIS AND LINDA HAINES' MISSION NEWS FROM UTILA

ISSUE 2 SEP 22

“His master replied, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” (Matthew 25:21a, NIV)

This month's opening quote was inspired by the lifetime of service Queen Elizabeth II has given to Britain and the Commonwealth, as well as to her Saviour, after her death recently. The worldwide mourning and record viewing figures for her funeral didn't surprise me, but what did was the strength of people's reactions here- one neighbour got up at 2am to watch the build-up. Honduras isn't in the Commonwealth, but people at church and school came to us to offer their condolences. Our Bishop (like a District Chair) asked us to sing 'God save the Queen' (not King) at our welcome service. I was asked to take a Social Studies lesson for eighth graders (age 13-14) about Britain, the Queen, the Commonwealth and Empire. I recently discovered that Utila and the Bay Islands were a British colony between 1852 and 1861, and many older people are proud of this.

Honduran independence is also celebrated in September. As representatives of the main church on the Cays, Rev Hanners, Linda and I were invited to help lead the independence parade there, which meant a 6am boat the day before (so the marching band could come from Utila). Having not been invited to march in the Utila parade, we watched it from our front yard. We were also invited by the Pentecostals to join the Bible Day march one Sunday afternoon, with some of our teenagers and pre-teens. We walked almost the length of the main street to the public beach, where I and one of the other pastors testified as to how the Bible had enabled Jesus to transform our lives.

Linda and I are finding our place in the life of the church and community. Mizpah is a busy church- the Sunday service starts at 9am to avoid the worst of the heat and traffic noise (the windows are left open, but I still felt faint that first week). Sunday school is at 2:30pm, with over ninety students aged 5 to adult in six classes. Linda has been covering classes for absent teachers, I've helped where I can. Tuesday afternoons Rev Hanners and I usually visit 'shut-ins', which involves far more singing than visits in the UK. That evening at 6pm (the default time) we have Teen Tuesday, when about twenty teenagers turn up at the church annexe to sing choruses, have devotions, and play some (very energetic) games. This week I led the devotions and got them to write collaborative psalms, some of which were excellent (some found this hilarious). There are evening meetings on Wednesday (Bible study), Thursday (Ladies' and Men's groups), and Friday (a Spanish language service). On Saturdays we have the 6am(!) prayer meeting (we go for breakfast afterwards) and the 3:30 Christian Endeavour group, for children aged 3-12, which Linda helps with).

Church is proving challenging in different ways. There is a different hymnbook, Voices in Praise, which includes regional hymns plus lots of Wesley hymns, but very little from Songs of Fellowship, the book I know best (we also have the MHB). Even with familiar hymns, the tunes may differ, Love Divine being one example. There is also Spanish language content in the (English language) service, as some members who come only speak Spanish. There are other differences too- Church Council and the Circuit Meeting are replaced by Congregational Council and Circuit Council, which may require a ferry journey; and the Plan is organized much later. We are greatly blessed by the love and generosity of church members, who were delighted by Linda's first preach.

School has also been a challenge and a blessing. The week starts at 7am on Monday with high school devotions at church, mostly in Spanish, though last time I spoke in English and a teacher translated. The national anthem is sung there and at school at 7:30 for the primary section, and lessons start at 7:40. The school year runs from January to November, with different age classes, eg

1st grade is for children born in 2016 (Reception & Year 1 in the UK). Rev Hanners or I teach a weekly (bilingual) Bible class to 5th grade on Tuesday and to 1st grade on Thursday, though I have also picked up extra classes for church volunteer teachers who often go to the US to visit family. Linda and I have also joined the School Board (like a Governing Body), who have already introduced a Careers week for 9th-11th grade students and an initiative to offer support, including prayer, to teachers. It is rather different though, especially concerning finance and terms and conditions. I now also share Linda's WhatsApp account, enabling me to keep in touch with Board members and other groups.

We have travelled off island a few times already, to the Cays for services, to a clinic in La Ceiba for ultrasound on my swollen leg (plus a hotel stop and buying the prescriptions), and to Roatan for the welcome/homecoming service for a colleague, the day after he came here for our welcome service. He also lent me a spare robe, being only a few inches shorter than me- services here get very hot. Bishop Benguche conducted both services, which were very different despite identical liturgy. We also ate delicious sopa marinera (seafood soup, more like bouillabaisse) from a petrol station (!), and I enjoyed some birdwatching and fresh soursop tea at the Superintendent's house.

Most jobs around the manse are now done- my desk has been modified, the fans are in, there are clothes lines up inside and outside, we now have a ramp and have hired a (temperamental) golf cart, useful for work and days off, and the water tanks have been refilled after we ran out (we still need a water pump to fill them on town supply days). We still lack hot water- I'm happier with cold showers than Linda is. There are shelves in the study (though we are still awaiting the freight). This is now stuck in San Pedro Sula, where they opened all the boxes, added a customs surcharge, and demanded an exact list of everything and the composition of the printer ink. It previously got stuck in Toronto en route from London to Miami, because we didn't have clearance for Canadian customs!

The rainy season has now started- after parking the cart we've had to wade over to retrieve it three times. This also brings the risk of tropical storms, which may not be as bad here as elsewhere, but can still stop food and goods from arriving. Other challenges include late loud discos (we are now sleeping better through these, despite earplugs not helping much), itching from the bites of even more mosquitoes, flies, and ants, which the resident geckos are failing to control adequately, and technical difficulties stopping Linda talking properly to her mum. A more serious issue is not having a postal service, which has led to essential documents not having reached us yet. Meals have changed too- Linda still cooks with healthy ingredients where possible, but it isn't always possible- she makes delicious fried breaded conch and breadfruit. The national sweet tooth also mitigates against this, with tempting cakes and ice cream to complement the delicious tropical fruit- mango, pineapple, starfruit, sapote, rambutans and obos so far- the latter are tiny sweet plums.

Our prayer requests for October are:

Dealing with the heat, rain, storms, noise and mosquitoes

For the freight and missing certificate to arrive, and good communication with Linda's mum

Learning people's names at church, Sunday School, various groups and school

Wisdom for the different new meetings and being able to contribute helpfully

Discernment as to in what roles we can best serve the churches and Circuit

Once again we've used up all the space without photos, so will attach those on separate sheets. We want to thank you all for your interest and your prayers, which are undoubtedly helping as we continue to get used to life in Utila.

Wishing you all peace, love and blessings,

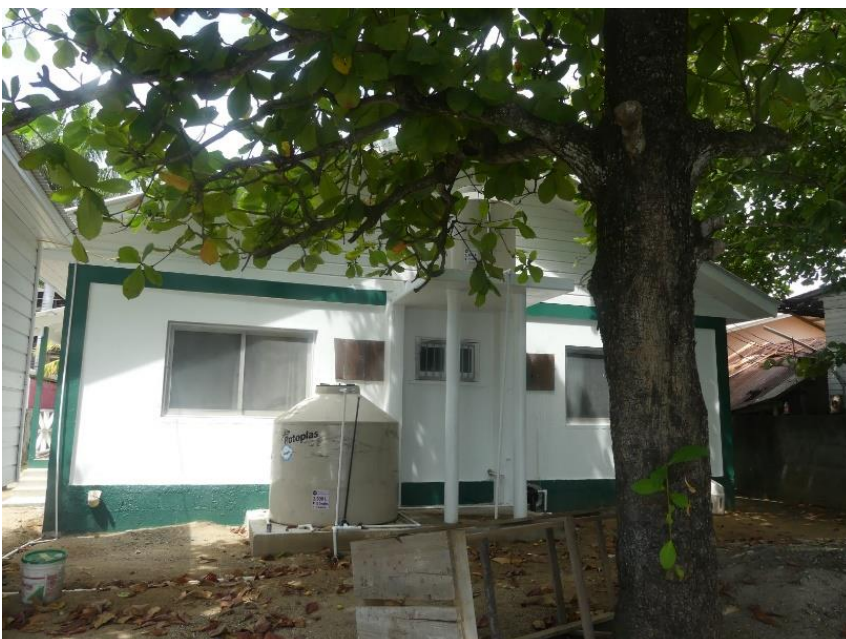
Chris and Linda



Leaving La Ceiba (back this week)



Our back garden



Back of manse with water tank



Breaded fried conch & plantain



Sapote



Caramel cake (like fudge)



Learning to prepare fried breadfruit



Breadfruit tree



Leading the independence parade on the Cays



Utilian band at the Cays school



Utila parade passing mission house



Methodist school section



Chris, Linda and Bishop Benguche



Welcome service at Mizpah



Wesley church, Roatan



Woodpecker, Roatan



Central American agouti



Teen Tuesday



Sunday school



Linda teaching the preteens



Taking part in the Bible Day march



The peace of God



Bible march at the public beach



Children at the Methodist school



Our hired golf cart



Coast road looking back to town