

# NEWS FROM HONDURAS

MAY 2009

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Some of you have been saying 'it's nearly a year since your last newsletter!' and I didn't believe you – but looking in my files I find that my last newsletter was July 2008. Sorry... Actually I did write a Christmas 2008 newsletter – but somehow it never got sent.

It has been hard to put thoughts, feelings and news down in writing over the last months. No-one wants a newsletter filled with doom and gloom – and sometimes the issues that have been filling my time and prayers are not things that I can share in an open newsletter.

## HARVEST 2008

Harvest went very well at the Cays and at Mizpah – and with half of the money raised at Mizpah we were able, at last, to pay off all the debts of the Methodist School including, most importantly, the teachers' pension contributions. With the debts paid, attention started to focus on whether we could open-up the school again in 2009.



Bella – a small friend on the Cays

## WINTER TRAVEL 2008/2009

The winter season came early and with a vengeance in September – colder weather, rain and strong winds – which lasted with few breaks all the way through to March. When the weather is poor, it is hard to travel. One Thursday morning I went up to the airstrip at 6am with our preacher, Leighton Howell. He was due an appointment in La Ceiba ahead of cataract surgery. It was a rainy, blustery morning – and the airstrip shed was no protection from the damp. We didn't sit on the wet bench – but stood until about 9am when we decided to give-up on the plane. The following week we were booked for a 2<sup>nd</sup> try – but on Wednesday night at Bible Study I heard that the plane had lost its propeller

while taking off from La Ceiba to come to Utila. Mr. Frank from SOSA assured me the plane would be fixed and would arrive on time – but somehow I was not reassured – so we caught the ferry. It was nearly 6 months later before I ventured onto one of SOSA's planes again.



Utila Airport Terminal in good weather.

## A TRAGIC CHRISTMAS

On Christmas Day a small group from the church set out at 5:30am to sing carols around the streets. They sang outside my house but I was sleeping soundly. As they moved down the street they heard shouts and met people running. People were finishing their Christmas Eve parties and a father had been stabbed in the ribs as he was trying to persuade his son to come home. He died later on Christmas Day in hospital on the mainland. His attacker, a relative of one of our church members, suffers from schizophrenia and is now in jail but receiving no treatment.

On X<sup>th</sup> December I was in La Ceiba in a taxi on the way to the ferry. We heard shots – and as the taxi-man braked hard we saw two men running in front of us, guns still in their hands. We watched as they ran away from us – and then saw the man they had shot – blue jeans, white shirt and face down in a big red pool of blood. The taxi driver cautioned us not to hang around – no-one wants to be a witness – and at that moment I was wishing that I could catch a flight home to UK rather than catch the ferry to Utila.

For our Watchnight service we always get a lot of young people coming to church before their New Year parties. I preached from Luke 6:27-36 and the following text from the Black Eyed Peas:

*People killin', people dyin' children hurt and you hear them cryin'.  
Can you practice what you preach?  
And would you turn the other cheek?  
Father, Father, Father help us - send some guidance from above  
'Cause people got me, got me questionin'  
Where is the love?*

## CONFERENCE 2009 – BELIZE

District Conference in Belize was preceded by a quiet retreat for the ministers – a welcome change of pace. At Conference I was privileged to be asked to preach at the Memorial Service where we remember any ministers or conference delegates who have died in the previous year. I also had the wonderful experience of presenting two candidates at conference, both of whom were accepted. Mrs Esther Hanners was accepted as Minister-in-Training for the Local Presbyterate while Ms Nicola Welcome was accepted for training as an itinerant Deacon. Randy Webster, also from our Circuit, was advanced one year in his training to be a Local Presbyter – and so is now a probationer and addressed as the Rev.



Zulena, Antonio, Janet, Randy and Esther.

Short sentences here cannot contain the sense of excitement and achievement for the whole Utila/North Coast Circuit – being the only Circuit presenting candidates – and these candidates representing a huge leap forward in developing a Honduran leadership for the Honduran Methodist Church.

## DRUGS, DRUGS and more DRUGS

Have you ever been sitting in your favourite café enjoying lunch only to be joined by three men, black uniforms, big guns and faces covered by balaclavas? It is not uncommon in Utila to hear drugs planes landing in the middle of the night – and taking off again swiftly. On January 28<sup>th</sup> a small plane was captured on Utila airstrip but the crew escaped. On 10<sup>th</sup> May a larger drugs plane made a crash landing near the airstrip, killing the pilot and injuring two crewmen.

The planes were each carrying around 1.5 tonnes of cocaine. Do you know how much 3 tonnes of cocaine is worth on the streets? What do you think the temptations of millions of dollars can do to corrupt an island as small as Utila?



Captured cocaine is removed by the police.  
(picture by Utila Eastwind newspaper)

At the beginning of February a group of Utila and Roatan men went missing at sea. They were mainly fishermen – one is the son of our church steward on the Cays. Rumours were flying for weeks – but it appears they had been involved in drug running. We still do not know if they are dead or alive. During Holy Week we held a special open-air prayer meeting on the Cays to pray for the missing men, their families, and for all the fishermen in their hard and dangerous work that they will not be tempted by 'easy' money.

## LENT and EASTER 2009

I took a holiday in March and was at Wesley's Chapel in London for Ash Wednesday. I then spent 2 weeks in Tenerife with Mum and Dad. It was a quiet and restful time.

Several weeks before Easter I was invited to join Rev Antonio Trotman in baptizing 7 folk in the river near El Pino – and then confirming 11 new members. It was a new experience for me in so many ways. I had my truck full to bursting with people – I didn't dare count how many were sitting outside – but there were 7 inside.



My truck and a few passengers

After singing and praying together I preached in Spanish standing on a rock – and then tentatively walked fully clothed into the river.



After the baptisms and confirmations the children all stripped off for a swim and the adults tended to the BBQ. We ate well-marinated meat, beans, rice and tortillas. I was on the ferry back to Utila by 4pm and leading evening service at Mizpah by 7pm with a moderate case of sun-stroke.

The week before Holy Week Utila was again reeling from tragedy. A young Utila sea-farer was coming home from working in the USA. He had loaded all sorts of gifts, appliances and a golf-cart onto the freight boat in La Ceiba – but before he could be reunited with his family he was shot and killed in what looked like an organized hit. At the funeral I preached on Matthew 2:18 'In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are no more.'

Here are some words from 'Psalms of Lament' by Ann Weems whose own son was murdered.

O God, have you forgotten my name?  
 How long will you leave me in this pit?  
 I sang hosannas all the days of my life  
 And waved palm branches greened in the new spring world  
 Rich only in promises from you, I followed believing,  
 And then they killed him  
 whom I loved more than my own life  
 They killed him whom you gave to me.  
 They killed him without a thought for justice or mercy  
 And I sit now in darkness – hosannas stuck in my throat  
 Why should I wave a palm branch or look for Easter  
 mornings?  
 O God, why did you name me Rachel?  
 A cry goes up out of Ramah, and it is my cry!  
 Rachel will not be comforted.

(and years later)  
 My psalms of lament are not finished  
 anger and alleluias careen around within me  
 sometimes colliding,

lamenting and laughter sit side by side in a heart that  
 yearns for the peace that passes understanding.  
 Those who believe in the midst of their weeping know  
 where I stand.  
 In the quiet comes the image of Jesus weeping  
 Jesus wept,  
 and in his weeping he joined himself forever to those who  
 mourn  
 He stands now throughout all time, this Jesus weeping  
 With his arms about the weeping ones  
 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted  
 He stands with the mourners for his name is God-with-us  
 Jesus wept.

**GIVE THANKS** - It is good to report that the Methodist School reopened in February – with 34 students and an excellent group of teachers. They have enjoyed using the new annex at church for their excellent presentations on Fathers' and Mothers' Days. Give thanks for a good trip to Tegucigalpa to visit the United Methodist Mission Church – I was very inspired by their lay leadership and blessed by their hospitality. Give thanks for Sarah Watson – a volunteer from the USA - who worked with me for 10 months and was a great blessing. She is now at seminary training for ordained ministry.



Baptism and Confirmation Service at the river

**PLEASE PRAY** - that all our staff team and ministers in training will grow in grace, love, and humility and that we can learn to better support each other in ministry.

Pray for me – for God's wisdom and guidance in the final 3 months of my time in Honduras. Pray for all those who will continue in ministry here in Honduras.

With grace and peace  
 Janet xxxx