

# News from Belize Christmas 2008

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## Seasons Greetings from Belize.



Dawn on Caye Caulker, Belize

'As o're each continent and island  
The dawn leads on another day  
The voice of prayer is never silent  
Nor dies the strain of praise away.

The sun that bids us rest is waking  
Our brethren 'neath the Eastern sky,  
And hour by hour fresh lips are making  
Thy wondrous doings heard on high.'

*Wishing you Peace and Joy this Christmas*

*wherever you are in the world,  
from Maggie .....in Belize*

I still find it hard to believe that Christmas is just around the corner when the temperature is in the 80s and 90s. However all the other signs are here – carols on the radio; the stores full of decorations and presents; Advent services; Church Christmas bazaars; and invitations to Carol Services and carol singing. So it must be time for me to write my next newsletter so you receive it before Christmas.

Over the past few months the weather has had a big effect on people's lives here in Belize – as in other parts of the Caribbean and Central America. Although Belize did not suffer from a hurricane this season, tropical depression number 16 'stalled out' over Central America and caused extensive flooding over the whole region, and the worst flooding Belize has known for many years. All major waterways rose to record levels, and many villagers had to be evacuated, and many roads were closed. Thankfully, the water levels dropped enough to allow all our annual Church Harvest Festivals to take place in October and November, although getting to the rural churches was an adventure in itself. Many donations from the Harvests this year went to the flood victims. Although the water has now subsided, the consequences are still being felt, with the rural populations the most affected, and many roads, including the main highway out of Belize City to the north, left in dire need of repairs. Many local firms and individuals have assisted in providing help to those in need, and slowly things are returning to normality.

In October I had a wonderful surprise, when my son Andrew, came to visit me at short notice. Unfortunately for him he arrived just as the rain mentioned above arrived too. We did manage to have a few days on the cays before it got so bad that all the national parks were closed; he got to see more of his Mum and less of Belize than expected! And I mustn't miss out the news about my elder son, Kevin, who has just completed his PhD.

As you will know by now, part of my role is to assist YES, and other organisations, in writing funding applications. We have had a major success with funding due to come in the New Year from the International Development Bank to continue the advocacy campaign on sexual abuse and exploitation. However the effects of the global financial crisis were felt when funding indication for 2009 from HIVOS, a Dutch donor organisation, supporting work connected to Gender Based Violence and HIV/AIDS, was cut and then further reduced due to the bad exchange rate of the Euro to the Dollar, leaving Haven House, one of only 2 domestic violence safe houses in the country, wondering how it will manage to get through next year.

Working in partnership with the United Methodist Church (in the USA) Volunteers in Mission programme and assisting in matching projects here to volunteer teams from the States is another area of my work, liaising closely with our local clergy and circuit stewards. One thing that has been done through one of these teams is to set up a scholarship fund to support students from Zion Park, one of the rural congregations where there is also a small Methodist Primary school, who are attending the Methodist High School, Wesley College. And there has just been a team of 30 doctors, dentists, opticians, and nurses here, from another organisation called School Bells; they visited 3 villages and then spent 2 days in Belize City, seeing an average of 250 patients each day. They also brought a lot of supplies for the local schools and one volunteer, Lisa, ran a soccer (football - for the English people) training programme with 2 of the schools. Yvonne, their coordinator, who is Belizean, but lives in the States, visited YES with a view to seeing what assistance they can give here too.

I continue, with assisting in strategic planning for a variety of voluntary organisations, and within the Church here, especially in the area of children and youth work, including Wesley College; hearing stories such as that of a 13 year old final year primary student, who was a victim of sexual exploitation and is now pregnant, or the children who don't come to school because they don't have anything to eat, is really heart breaking; this is countered by the concern and dedication shown by of

some of the Methodist School teachers and others in the church who are dedicated to making changes for such families.

I have also had the privilege of working alongside the young adults group at Ebenezer, who every 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of the month, cook and/or collect around 50 Sunday Lunches from various other church members, to give to the homeless in the city. A special Christmas Dinner is planned for December, which will include praying with them, and singing carols.

Once again, thanks for all the emails, letters and even phone calls which I receive. I really appreciate them, even if I don't manage to reply to you all individually. As Christmas approaches, I will be thinking of you all; I think I will miss the cold weather (if you can believe that) as well as my family and many friends, as I spend my second Christmas here in Belize, in the sun, with my Belizean (and other) friends.

Praying that this Christmas is a truly meaningful time for you, and that we all have a peaceful New Year,

With love and prayers,

*Maggie*