

News from Belize

October 30th, 2010

Greeting to everyone from Belize.

I write this newsletter 1 week after Hurricane Richard swept through Belize. We thank God that it was only a category 1 hurricane and that loss of life was minimal (2 people drowned at sea after their boat had engine problems prior to the hurricane's arrival - miraculously one person made it back to land on a piece of wood; and a young man was killed by a jaguar, after it escaped when its cage was damaged due to tree falling on it: wild jaguars (which this one wasn't) have never been reported attacking people, so this was exceptional!). However, there was a lot of damage to housing (going on for 1000 homes) much of it in



Wesley College yard after the hurricane. It was flooded to a depth of 2 ft, and all the debris from the sea ended up in the yard - along with a layer of mud - in all the classrooms too!

Belize City, where many families lost their houses totally. These are mainly the poorest of our population, who were living in the worst housing - wooden shacks, close to the sea. Efforts to assist them are underway. The citrus industry also took a major loss, as much of the fruit was shaken to the ground; they estimate around BZ\$32m (over £10m) which is about 80% of the grapefruit crop and 20% of the orange crop.

There was extensive flooding of homes, shops, and many schools, as well as the streets of Belize City, which left a layer of mud over everything, and has taken a lot of effort to clean up; some schools were closed the whole week as students and staff, the Belize Defence Force and the Fire Service, all joined forces to help get things straightened out. Two of our

manses were badly flooded and in Belmopan a tree came down in the manse garden, damaging the property next door but thankfully not hurting anyone. In September, Belize was also affected by tropical storms Karl, and Matthew and to a lesser extent, Paula in October, although thankfully all these caused less damage than was predicted.

And as I write, the next hurricane - Tomas - is attacking the eastern Caribbean Islands of Barbados, St Vincent, St Lucia, and their neighbours. We pray for the safety of all those living there, and that the hurricane will dissipate and/or take a track away from Haiti.

News apart from the weather?

Caroline (the EEP volunteer from England who has been staying with me) left in September, so I have been getting used to living by myself again. However, as everything gets underway after the long summer break and the September Celebrations, there has been plenty to keep me occupied!

We are very encouraged by the developments in the children's and youth work here in Belize. There seems to be new enthusiasm, and new Children's, Youth and Young Adults' fellowships are starting up in several circuits. We are also starting regular monthly training workshops for leaders in November.

The Encuentro Youth have been on a mission since their return from Trinidad, visiting all the circuits and each church in Belize City, to conduct the Sunday Service, bringing encouragement, and passing on the 'Jesus fyah' (fire) which they have burning in them since their return. We spent one weekend in Toledo in the south of the country, holding a joint retreat with the youth group there. We still have a few places to visit, due to the interruption of tropical storms!



Encuentro Youth, leading worship in Forest Home Church in Toledo, and at Wesley Church, Belize City.

At the end of September, I was invited to Texas to speak at a United Methodist Mission's forum in Houston, and stayed on to visit several churches and organisations, meeting people and team leaders who are thinking of visiting Belize next year. It was a very productive week, and I even managed to get a couple of days to relax in the lovely village of Salado, in central Texas - a big thanks to my hosts, both in Houston and Salado.

On the construction front, it is planned to dedicate the new church building in Belama, Belize City, before the end of the year. It won't be complete (and some of the new Zinc was ripped off during Richard), but as the fellowship are currently meeting in an office, they want to start to use the space as soon as possible. And the go ahead for the new high school building in Belmopan should be given when the church committee meets in November. This will be a big project for us, and is

desperately needed, to meet the gap between youths who should be in school and the number of high-school places available in the country. As I have mentioned before, there are only enough places for about half of all teenagers to actually attend school. We already have funding for most of the foundations, and several of those teams I visited in Texas are lined up to come and help - along with others. Local fundraising is also taking place and will gain momentum as we get underway. One way we are raising funds locally, for this and other projects is to ask people to sponsor windows, doors and even individual blocks/bricks for



building projects in the rural communities, such as Zion Park, where more classroom space is needed at the primary school there. A new play structure was built this past summer - by a visiting team from England! (there are swings - they just don't show too well in the photo, and they are hoping to add a slide too). On the 'play' side, I have recently been invited to deliver some play training, as new playgrounds are being built around the country, assisted by the rotary club from Canada.

Changing direction of thought, the drug related gun/gang violence continues in Belize City; recently an 8 year old girl was shot when a bullet went through the wall of her house and killed her in her bed. This prompted a city-wide peace march with all primary and secondary schools in the city taking part, and on a separate occasion, many of the city's businesses closed to show solidarity with the families of innocent victims. Although things are relatively bad here, they are much worse in Mexico, and we ask for your prayers for both countries.

Prayer points:

We thank God for the new youth and children's fellowships, and the interest shown by new leaders; for the enthusiasm of the Encuentro Youth; for building project developments; and for sparing Belize from the more damaging effects of the storms and hurricane.

We ask your continued prayer for the youth work developments, for more leaders, and for the training about to take place; for those affected by the storms, especially those who lost homes and their livelihoods; for the innocent victims of violence, and for a stop to the senseless killing and violence, in Belize and Mexico, and that our young people may come to see there is an alternate way for them. And of course, your continued prayers for the people of Haiti.

With love and prayers,

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