

Greetings from Belize

Greetings from Belize. First of all apologies for the long gap since my last newsletter. This does not mean I've been sitting around doing nothing - in fact just the opposite; there has been so much going on I have had difficulty finding time to sit down and write to you all.

Here are some of the things which have taken place so far in 2011:-

The Annual District Conference this year took place in January in Dangriga, in the southern part of Belize and included the children and youth 'Festival of Praise' on the Saturday, and the youth service and 'Young People's Demonstration' - a parade through the streets of Dangriga,



on the Sunday. Our theme this year follows on from last year's - 'Forever Young for Christ - Building up the Temple' - so keeping the focus on developing our youth and Children's work in the district.



Wesley College 1st form Retreat

Wesley College, the Methodist High School's 1st form retreats took place in January too - each of the 6 classes spent a day away from school, under the theme 'Who I am makes a difference', looking at the issues of self-esteem and respect.

In February, we held a 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ day leadership seminar for Methodists (and some others), both lay and ordained, from all over Belize, assisted by some members of the International Leadership Institute from Texas. This was a truly motivational and inspirational time, and we hope to repeat the sessions in more local settings, run by

those who attended the seminar. And this started with our Young Adults, at the start of March, where 20 young people went on retreat for 3 days, developing their leadership potential.

In March, the ground-breaking for the new Methodist High School to be built in Belmopan took place, coinciding with the first of many planned



visits from teams from United Methodist Churches in the USA. The foundations are coming along in leaps and bounds now and we have more teams coming to assist in the project throughout the year -with some already making plans for next year too. That's good, as we plan to open the school over the next 4 years, starting from Sept 2012, with a new year group being added each year.

Zion Park School, one of our rural primary schools, is also getting 2 new classrooms - relying mainly on local fundraising and help from the parents and the local community at the minute, but with other assistance promised soon.

The YES building also got a major boost as a team came from The Woodlands UMC in Texas to work on the interior. This, together with enhancements to the other buildings at the training centre mean the facilities are really improving.

In March too, I had a visitor for three weeks. Sharon, a manager with Action for Children, decided to spend her annual vacation in Belize, to see what life is like here and to gain some experience and insight into social work in another part of the world. She visited the Youth Enhancement services, and ran a training session for the staff there, as well as working alongside one of our primary school counsellors for several days, and meeting with various other people and organisations in the social work field here.



March was a busy month - we also held 'Youth Week', a joint venture between the 2 city circuits, with activities nearly every evening of the week and culminating in a joint youth service at Wesley church. This year the emphasis was on the history of our local churches, in connection with the annual conference theme, 'Building up the temple', encouraging the youth to value our Methodist Heritage at the same time as looking forward to the future. The photo is of one of the youth groups telling the story of their church.

Before Easter I went to the south of the country, along with newly commissioned lay worker, Salome, to train, encourage and support those working with the children and youth in the Toledo Circuit, and since Easter I have been to the 2 circuits in Honduras doing the same thing. It is very encouraging to see the commitment and desire to improve the work shown by many of the children and youth workers; on Utila, one of the Bay Islands, the teachers from the Methodist Community College also attended, and in total we had over 80 people attending youth leadership training sessions in the past 3 months. The trip also gave me the opportunity to visit nearly all the churches in the Roatan circuit - and they have some beautiful settings!



Mount Gideon Church, Camp Bay,
at the Eastern end of Roatan

We are also in the process of identifying circuit youth coordinators in every circuit, who we hope will be able to continue the process and provide more local support for activities as well as for the leaders.

In Belize City, the violence and shootings continue, mainly between rival gangs, but also spilling out into the general public at times too. For a country with such a small population the number of deaths has a devastating effect on the 'mood' of the people; but there continues to be protests at what is happening, as well as action groups trying to do something about it.

Personally, I continue with my local preacher training, and all sorts of other activities; one recent highlight was having my sister and family visit over Easter for 3 weeks - I must admit I did turn into a bit of a tourist - or tour guide - as I took them to see various places in this beautiful country in which I am privileged to live. Going to Honduras 3 days after they all left eased the pain of having being on my own in the house again.

Please keep in your prayers:

- The development of the high school in Belmopan, and other building projects, as well as the many people supporting this work, here in Belize and those who visit or send assistance, so increasing access to education
- The newly appointed (and to be appointed) circuit youth coordinators
- The many people here in Belize who have attended leadership training over the past few months, that the church and the work may be strengthened and grow
- Those working with the city youths and others to try and reduce the levels of violence

May God continue to bless each of you.



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