

Honduras March 2011: Sometimes God Calls You to Go

The trip to Honduras by the delegation from the N/W Lower Michigan Synod was planned quickly as a way to support the ICLH and the health projects supported by our synod. Four members of the team had been to Honduras and had close relationships with several pastors and lay leaders of the Honduran Lutheran Church. We also hoped to learn ways we could help the people who are living in a dangerous and unhealthy situation. The worsening political climate, the takeover by the military and the escalation of gang violence meant that the church was facing serious issues. We prayed that our presence would give the people we met hope for the future and strength to continue their mission.

The Team:

John Schleicher, Bishop of the N/W Lower Michigan Synod

Lindsay Mack, seminary student in Chicago and missionary in Honduras for three years

Dr. John Fox, MD, MHA, Senior Medical Director and Vice President of Medical Affairs for Priority Health and member of Trinity in Grand Rapids

Linnea Fox, daughter of John Fox and freshman at the University of Illinois

Mike Lenkowski, retired CPA and member of University Lutheran in East Lansing

Connie Lenkowski, retired media specialist and member of University Lutheran in East Lansing

Sometimes God calls you to go.

Day 1 – March 20, 2011:

Our team, minus Lindsay, met at the Grand Rapids airport early Sunday morning for a 6:00 a.m. flight to Atlanta. Lindsay joined us in Atlanta, and we had a smooth and fast trip to Tegucigalpa, the capital city of Honduras. This was a return trip for Bishop John, John and Linnea Fox and Lindsay so we were greeted at the airport with smiles and hugs by Josefina, coordinator of the health project in Honduras whose salary is paid by three Lutheran synods. With Josefina were other Honduran friends and members of Lindsay's family. Even though Mike and Connie were new to Tegucigalpa they were included in the warm welcome. There was a lot to talk about and news to share. Our days in Honduras had begun.

Our bus driver, don Sabastian, took us to our home for the week at Hotel Linda Vista (pretty view), a charming bed and breakfast. We found our rooms and freshened up for our trip to La Canada and our worship service at "La Luz del Mundo" (The Light of the World) which was established in 1991.

It was not a long trip in terms of miles but, we soon left paved highways behind and traveled on dirt roads and then dirt paths. Conversation was good and spirits were high as we bumped along to our destination. Along the way we saw many areas of Honduras – downtown devastated by Hurricane Mitch in 1998, markets along the road, homes built on the side of hills, deforestation on the mountains, trash dumps which were evident in several places, and beautiful hills and valleys.

Finally we arrived at La Luz del Mundo. A team that came last summer spent a lot of time in this area, so they wanted to see how some of their projects had fared. We looked for the trees they had planted and found several around the grounds. They were small but stood out because they had stones around them.

Before we even entered the church we could hear the music – singing and guitars. There were groups of young people singing on the porch and inside the church. The church was filled by the time the service started. Roger, the youth director of the church, led the service. The voices of the people filled the church with song. Many of the members assisted with the service by reading Bible passages, leading prayers and helping with communion. Bishop John was invited to share a message.

The service was a celebration of the word and our time together. Although most of the service was in Spanish, an effort was made to translate so that everyone could be involved in the experience. The sincerity and faith of the people was evident. This was truly a celebration of their faith and the good in their lives. For a while hardships were forgotten and only the blessings were considered. Following the service, we introduced ourselves and were welcomed with hugs and kisses as we shared the peace of God. It didn't matter if you were a stranger; in God's house we were all family.

Linnea presented the youth of the congregation with a scrapbook which she made of their time together last summer. There was much laughter and reminiscing as they looked at the pictures. Finally, it was time to leave. Getting everyone on the bus proved to be quite a task because there was an intense soccer game going on, children were gathering mangoes to share and conversations with old friends were continuing.

Once Josefina got everyone on the bus, the trip down the bumpy road began. We took a quick detour to the Martin Luther Kindergarten School where the team from 2010 worked. Our synod provides funding for the lunch program for the children who attend this school. We enjoyed the murals of cartoon characters on the outside of the building. The kindergarten program has been so successful that the principal of the local school has asked the Lutheran health volunteers to train the parents so they can institute a similar meal program for the older grades.

Back on the bus conversation slowed and some even slept. The trip seemed to go quickly, and we were soon back at Hotel Linda Vista and a family style dinner at a local restaurant. Even though we were tired, there was much discussion of the day's events.

Once we were back at Linda Vista we had a meeting led by Pastor Stephen, regional representative of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Latin America, about the events that were to take place the following day. He said that, "Sometimes ignorance is bliss." But at times like this ignorance can be dangerous. He informed us about recent events in the area beginning with the proposed law that was to be imposed on churches. However, most disturbing was the news of the death of a teacher during a teacher's union demonstration in the area near the University two days earlier. The union and their supporters were protesting the government's attempt to loot the teachers' retirement fund and transfer the money to cover a deficit in the government budget. We were told that a large demonstration was planned at the University the next day, and that there was apt to be signs of unrest around.

Finally, it was time for bed. There was a lot to think about from all the day's events and anticipation of what tomorrow would bring.

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Day 2 – March 21, 2011:

After a good night's sleep and a wonderful breakfast at Hotel Linda Vista we were ready to begin our busy day. However, we had no idea how exhausting the day's events would be.

We started out at the offices of the Iglesia Cristiana Luterana de Honduras (ICLH). A large group of pastors, lay leaders, ICLH staff and the guests from Michigan and Illinois met to hear about events in San Pedro Sula from Julio and Mario, members of the Lutheran Church in San Pedro Sula. Bishop John started the morning with a reading from Romans where we were warned that we must not be foolish, but that God will be with us. We have trials but will not be defeated. Those words proved to be prophetic of the messages we would hear.

With the help of an interpreter Julio explained that their community began as a faith community and was started by squatters. They worked together until gangs appeared in 2000. In 2004 they experienced the death of a soccer player and Ruth, a great leader, died defending her son. The violence continued to increase, and there were always confrontations between gangs. There were three things they could do: "watch, be quiet and listen". They lived uneasily until December 24, 2010 when shortly before the Christmas Eve service began there was a murder, and the people had to flee to save themselves. Fear took over!

Julio told us that on January 9, 2011 they held a worship service because they needed to hear God's word. They later met in the Episcopal Church where they assessed the future of their congregation. For a while things calmed down, but then there was a confrontation between the police and the "18th Street Gang" that left bullet holes in the walls of the church. The gang wanted to take over the physical church building and make it their own. The members of the Lutheran Church held worship services in other churches, but these churches were a distance away and some people could not make the trip. A church service was held the end of January and activities continued with adults. A priority now is to restart the children's Sunday School by May 1, 2011 and eventually restart the women and teen groups again.

With great emotion, Julio told us how a gangster with a fragmentation grenade and an AK-47 came into his parent's home. When the police responded they took the gang member into custody but then robbed the house planting drugs before they left. The gangs and police are both part of the problem. Then, with extreme difficulty, Julio told us that his family lost three members to violent deaths in one month. You would expect that this would be more than anyone could endure, but the people would not leave their homes. Julio quoted Psalm 21, a Psalm of Thanksgiving for victory. Verse 6 says, "You have granted him unending blessings and made him glad with the joy of your presence." The people of San Pedro Sula are not alone. God is with them. They live by faith and hope.

Mario told us how the pastors and church leaders met on January 25-26, 2011 to talk about immediate solutions to their problems and came up with a six-point action plan. One decision was to give their pastor a period of rest because he had recently been diagnosed with melanoma. They would also provide psychological support to his family. A day of fasting and prayer was held on February 13, 2011, and a

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World-Wide Day of Prayer is planned for May 29, 2011. They would form an advocacy group to work with the government. On this point they have received a strong response of solidarity from the national church. The Lutheran World Federation agreed to grant the pastor time for rest, but he declined and wanted to stay with his congregation.

A Pastoral team was created to keep the church going, and three people were elected to take the place of the pastor. They took turns guiding the services. On February 13, 2011 the entire Lutheran community attended church and were joined by pastors from other churches. Once everyone was inside, they shut and locked the doors. Their vision was to “not let the church die!” The people would not close the church. They would try to have a normal life. They would ask God to care for his people

On March 6, 2011 a worship service was held again in the Episcopal church. They tried to have one worship service a month and moved around to different churches which were outside of the neighborhood.

Honduras is a poor country. They have high unemployment. Julio stated, “In San Pedro Sula we are not living. We are only surviving.” The people are not even safe in their own home. Mario quoted 1st Corinthians 15: 58, “Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” Bishop John reminded us of Matthew 6:34 which tells us, “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” Mario’s final comment was, “We must work together in the spirit of love and faith to solve our problems. There is always hope for a better tomorrow.”

Rubi, the coordinator of Diaconal Ministry for ICLH, reminded us that our most important relationships are with God and each other. She quoted Ephesians 4:12 where we are told that God “Equips his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.” We think we can’t go on but we do. We must continue as one organized body of Christ to find community based solutions. Rubi thanked the group from Michigan for visiting and said that such visits and the support of others give Hondurans hope and energy.

A much needed break allowed us to explore the offices of ICLH, and we quickly found the roof which had a wonderful view of the city and a pleasant breeze that reminded us of God’s goodness. After the intensity of the morning conversation, we were able to relax a little and prepare for the next presentation.

We met Hector Hermilo Soto, Coordinator of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) – World Service in Honduras. The LWF has a rights based approach which respects human dignity. He said there is a national consensus that Honduras is going through a crisis. However, there is no consensus of either the causes or solutions. The government says that the causes come from outside the country and are imaginary. The oppressed groups claim that resources are unequal among the people. The country lacks ways to help those in need.

Some of the solutions being imposed by the government are longer prison sentences for criminals to combat crime, breaking full-time work up into part-time to decrease unemployment, and turning over resource management to foreign investors to improve the economic situation. A “model cities” program has been proposed to be developed by a foreign corporation. Others say that they should keep resources in

Honduras, and the people should have a say in what happens. They want water, health care and education available to all. Hermilo said, "Because there is no agreement on the causes of the problems, there is no agreement on the solutions."

Honduras has had advances and setbacks. In the 1990's there was the demilitarization of society. The government worked for human rights, and the police were helpful to citizens. But Hondurans didn't have the capacity to sustain these advances. At the present time the people of Honduras are moving backwards.

Currently, there is a three party system in Honduras with the Liberal and National parties accounting for 92% of the legislative votes. These parties are not competitive but rather collaborate. Competition is necessary for a thriving community. The parties are also distant from the general population but close to the powerful and elite. The general population must get involved in social situations in order to bring about change.

The oppressed are at least partially responsible for the struggles of the social movement because they have never disputed political power. Now the social movements are disputing the power of the government. The people are afraid and are demanding a Constitutional Convention to make changes.

Honduras is at a crossroads. The government has decided to resolve the problems with radical solutions that infringe on basic human rights of the people. They are criminalizing social action. 80% of the population does not report crime because they do not trust the police. The government doesn't recognize the opposition and represses dissent. Therefore, the crisis is invisible to the whole world. There are basically 10 powerful families that run the government and are accountable to no one. These families were behind the June 28, 2009 coup, and continue to hold power and oppose change.

The Universal Periodic Review requested by the UN Human Rights Organization documented the problems in Honduras, but no improvements have been made. Demonstrations are considered to be criminal offenses and protestors are severely penalized. At this time the population is polarized. The Catholic and Protestant churches are the last institutions with any clout. People are looking to them for help. We are told again that our visit brings solidarity and hope to the people.

The worst problems are experienced by youth and women. There were 7,000 violent deaths in Honduras in 2010, and yet the media indicates that everything is fine. The people are trying to fix the problems with a peaceful movement rather than by replacing those in power. The Resistance Movement is talking about "fixing democracy with more democracy". Many youth immigrate to the United States. They send money back to their families and this is sustaining the Honduran economy. Hermilo claimed that the opportunity for social change is slipping away.

At Iglesia Cristiana Agape we talked with Pastor Dr Rigoberto Ulloa, the coordinator of Ecumenical Human Rights, and Pastor David Del Cid. The new law affecting evangelical churches was passed by the National Congress in an attempt to regulate those churches. It would void the tax exempt status of churches that refused to join a governmentally approved national confederation of evangelical (non-Catholic) churches. No one was able to get a copy of this law that violates constitutional rights. The law applies to small non-Catholic churches and denies privileges to those churches that are available to Catholic and larger

evangelical churches. The government wanted the people to accept the law without question. The Catholic cardinal refused to denounce the military government following the coup and has been rewarded with governmental funding for the Catholic Church. Many Honduran Catholics oppose the Cardinal's position.

The Ecumenical Human Rights group attended a meeting with the president of Honduras. They declared the law unconstitutional and plan to go before the Supreme Court with the hope of getting the law annulled. Pastor David said, "It is hard for people to believe that a law would be passed with bad things it."

Later in the day we met with Bertha Oliva, the Coordinator of the Committee of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared in Honduras (COFADEH) which she founded in 1982 after her husband was kidnapped and disappeared. In 2005 she was one of six Honduran women nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for her peace-promoting work. Because of the events of recent days and the gravity of the current political situation in Honduras, she had forgotten about our meeting but agreed to talk with us. She began in a quiet, somewhat defeated tone saying, "We are in the same place that we were 30 years ago" when we began this organization. The government is currently targeting areas that educate people. The teachers are protesting the government's looting of the teacher's pension fund. The military has taken over the University and has terrorized the student body even though it is illegal for the military to enter the university property without express permission of university officials. Teachers and schools are the first targets of repression.

There have been 463 assassinations, but no legal action has been taken. With the remilitarization of the government Hondurans are defenseless. The COFADEH has documented hundreds of cases in court, but no one is being prosecuted. The government continues to suppress opposition with impunity. Berta said, "The government is good at creating reports and evidence to accuse innocent people".

The U.S. Embassy says that they are concerned about the situation but does nothing. The U.S. should cut off all aid to the Honduran military. COFADEH has possession of the tear gas canister that was shot at the teacher and killed her on March 18, 2011. It was packaged in the US. The Honduran government divides and conquers the Honduran people.

Berta asked that our team from the states encourage the U.S. government to:

- Remove U.S. military bases and stop the construction of new bases
- Cut-off all military aid to Honduras
- Take on a single case of human rights violations (e.g., the son of Hermilo Soto who is currently in exile for his own safety because of his work to improve conditions for youth)
- Pressure the foreign embassies in Honduras

When asked what she would do if put in prison, Berta quietly responded that she would be put in the woman's prison and, "There is plenty to do there!"

This information was presented all in one day! It was nearly 6:00 p.m. by the time we left COFADEH. We were drained mentally and physically. We relaxed for a moment and enjoyed dinner together. We were able to talk and laugh and put aside the problems that surrounded us.

Back at Hotel Linda Vista we reviewed the events of the day. A few points stood out:

- Both the church and the country are fragile.
- Lay leaders must speak out.
- The church is historically for human rights.
- The Honduran government is slow to act to free the innocent but fast to act against them.
- We need to work in alliance with other churches and groups to make changes.
- Honduras is becoming a “failed state”.

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Day 3 – March 22, 2011

Don Sabastian took us to the first stop of the day in San Francisco, which is a community where many of the health volunteers of Pastoral de la Mujer live. It began as a squatter community, but the people eventually were granted ownership of the land that they occupied.

John Fox commented on the events of the day. Today “was a fun day of sorts. We spent the morning and early afternoon in the barrio of San Francisco. Three times a year the church in San Francisco puts on a domestic violence awareness program. They set up an awning in the street with posters and handouts. (It’s a winding, hilly street with cobblestone pavers, and we were right on a curve!) They advertise free blood pressure screenings which drew in a lot of men who are the primary target audience. After the blood pressure check, there’s a five minute discussion on domestic violence and a survey.

I was impressed that almost everyone stayed for the discussion on domestic violence and accepted the pamphlets. The egg truck driver parked his truck on the curve right in front of the tent and participated. The two water truck drivers parked down the hill a bit but hiked up the hill. There was a guy with a wheelbarrow full of fruit who set down his load, too.

Everyone was laid back. No hurries. The women of the church, both young and old (my age!) were very professional presenting their message. Lunch was Honduran chop suey—a mixture of noodles, chopped vegetables and shredded chicken. A first for drinks – Banana-flavored Fanta.”

Forty plus people had their blood pressure checked this morning. The volunteers have had as many as 70 people attend, but sometimes when the people learn that there will be a discussion about domestic violence, they do not return. Mike had his blood pressure taken by Melissa but mistranslated the recording as 520/80 which turned out to be the optimal 120/80. He said, “Fortunately my head didn’t explode from the excess pressure.”

Rubi conceived the idea of health volunteers and, with the help of Lindsay Mack, designed the project. Josefina commented that since this is a faith-based project they try to include scripture in their literature. She also felt that it was time for the health volunteers to train others in their community. They have two sayings, “Learn in order to give” and “Learn by doing”. Some of the volunteers have gone on to study nursing at the University. There are also children of original volunteers involved.

John Fox continued: “Other members of our group spent the morning with a development agency from Sweden. Although it was a development agency, it was also focused on the government’s structure and

corruption. They have documented the country's oligarchy and how it really runs a puppet government here in Honduras. An 87 year old man is the central figure in the economics of the country and through him about ten families control the oil and gas, agricultural, transportation, restaurant, electricity, water, and food industries. One of the primary reasons—and in fact the only reason—the former president Zelaya was ousted in a coup 2 summers ago was that he threatened the oligarchy by putting contracts out for open bid. Apparently the only institutions, according to the Swedish development group, that are not controlled by the oligarchy are the education and healthcare industries. And right now there are massive teacher strikes to protest the gutting of the teachers' pension fund by the government and the attempted privatization of the schools. Privatization would allow the oligarchy to gain control of school funding.

Later in the afternoon we went to the La Divana barrio to do home visits with HIV patients. The youth group at the church started this ministry years ago and continues it. We spent time in the home of Leticia, a health volunteer, to hear about the project and then went on the home visits. As it turns out neither of the people we visited had HIV. The first was a healthy young man who a year ago was doing street construction and hit a sewer pipe. The contents sprayed him in the face and eyes and he subsequently developed an eye infection that has left him blind. He showed me the medicine that he had been taking, but these aren't used to treat infections.

The other person we visited was a lady in her 50's who had been on dialysis for ten years. Remarkably she has never had any infections. Her only problem is that her fistulas, which they use for removing and then re-infusing her blood during dialysis, keep failing. Since both arms and both legs are unusable, they're now using her neck.

Her daughters make and sell tortillas and they worked away while we spoke to the woman. The living room had about six 50 kg bags of corn in the front corner while in the back corner of the same room, which was probably 12 feet by 20 feet, was an open wood stove with a 30" diameter flat pan atop it. Along the entire length of the room were piles of 30" lengths of wood which the women would feed into the oven a few inches at a time. The women would make corn tortilla dough, flatten it by hand, and cook them on the pan. Fortunately, there was a good breeze, but even so the room was pretty smoky.

Everyone was very accommodating in all the homes we visited. Somehow, even when we had 20 people in the room, they could always find enough chairs to accommodate everyone!

The wrist watches purchased for this trip have been a hit with the health volunteers. We gave out thirteen today and probably another seven or eight tomorrow when we go to the Nueva Suyapa neighborhood to build and distribute water filters. "

The second group stopped at a home where a young girl was cooking tortillas which she sold. Some time ago, Josefina talked with her about the importance of cleanliness when cooking. Josefina was concerned because the room where she was cooking had a dirt floor. The health volunteers put in a cement floor for her.

The group also visited Jose Alberto "who wanted to run". He lived with his mother in a small room (approximately 8' x 15') with a dirt floor and a tin roof. The only visible furniture was a narrow bench where Jose sat and a crate. He was given 3 different medicines but took only 2 of them because the third was not available where he got his medicine. His mother stated that he quit taking the medicines because they didn't do any good. Rubi took the prescription with her and would get the medicine for him.

Bishop John's words and prayer had an amazing effect on the entire group. The mother and son were overwhelmed by the fact that such an important person as a Bishop had chosen to visit their home. With the whole world ignoring these people, the Bishop and Michigan delegation were warmly received wherever we went.

As we were leaving Alberto's home which was near the end of the street, we could see the river which was presently a deep ditch with very little water. We heard later that the gangs would kill people and dump their bodies in this ditch.

Our third stop was the home of a young woman who had been very ill the last time a group from Michigan had visited but was doing well now. There were three generations of the family in the home. Visible was a room with a couch and TV. A bedroom and probably second bedroom were off the living room. One door opened to the outside and the side of the hill. A small kitchen with a hotplate was at the front of the home. This woman was also grateful for the concrete floor that the health volunteers made because she could now wash her floor.

Our final visit was to the home of Carlos and Linda. Carlos is suffering from kidney failure and has to undergo dialysis treatments, and Linda is blind and not able to speak. Bishop John offered prayers for both of them and anointed Linda with oil. Their home was bigger than the first home we visited. They sat on bunk beds and there was a TV and some food and clothing items on a shelf.

When we returned to the home of the volunteer she asked that Bishop John say a prayer for her three year old granddaughter, Sury, who had a cast on her leg. She wanted Bishop John to touch her, so we went upstairs where she and her brother were sleeping. It was a special moment as Bishop John laid his hand on the child and prayed for her.

Although the team saw pain and despair, the overall feeling for the day was of gratefulness for the health volunteer program and amazement at all that the women are able to do. They are both passionate and compassionate. There was a lot of touching and hugging. Josefina commented how important touch was in their work. She said when they give to others, they themselves are inspired.

Dinner was at a restaurant called Tacontento and was delicious! Once again we enjoyed being with our Honduran friends as we talked about their work, their lives and their faith. When Josefina was asked how she could remain so positive considering the political climate surrounding her she replied, "A mal tiempo, buena cara" or in English, "When times are bad have a happy face (smile)."

Sometimes God calls you to go!

Day 4 – March 23, 2011

On the way to Nueva Suyapa and the water project we passed the building where the teacher's pension fund is managed. There were fences around the building because the military had taken over the building after taking money from the teacher's retirement fund and moving it to the military fund to make up for a shortage. On the fences was a lot of graffiti. Josefina said, "When mouths are closed, walls talk." The walls said, "Don't be afraid." and "Long live the resistance movement."

We got to Nueva Suyapa where the man who produces the water filters was waiting with a truckload of water filter parts. Inside the door was a small sign that said, "Cuida el agua es fuente de vida" or "The care

of water is the fountain of life." We put together 24 water filters while we waited for the local people to come for the presentation and training.

Bishop John welcomed everyone and read the text from Exodus 15 about the bitter water that was made sweet. He talked about how Jesus takes on the bitter in our lives and makes it good. He said, "If we drink from the living water we will never die." He reminded us that with the spirit and water in baptism we are made pure and clean.

Josefina led a discussion with the families about the uses of water. They talked about what happens to water in a river and what health problems bad water causes. She showed them how to make a latrine. They talked about ways to clean water, and then began the discussion about the water filter. The filter is made from clay mixed with saw dust. The saw dust burns off when the pot is fired making the pot porous. The water filter cleans about five liters of drinking water an hour and will last 1-2 years.

Two sisters from the community were introduced; they were available in the neighborhood to help with any questions or problems with the filters. The sisters demonstrated how to care for and clean the filter and then how to use it. Pastor Suyapa read the story from John 4 about the woman at the well. She told us that water is important, and that God is the living water. She said, "With water Jesus makes us healthy, and the water from the water filter will also make us healthy."

The water filters were given to 19 families. They had to attend the presentation before they could get a filter.

John and Linnea Fox met their "adopted" daughter and sister and spent the afternoon with her and her mother. The Michigan delegation along with many Honduran friends had a pizza lunch.

The afternoon was spent at the Parque Naciones Unidas where we were able to see the entire city of Tegucigalpa. We also saw the Jesus statue up close. We had seen the statue many times over the last few days especially as it glowed at night as we sat on the patio of Hotel Linda Vista reviewing the day's events.

We were invited to Pastor Martin's (President of the ICLH) home for dinner. We finally got to meet Pastor Hernan who is the pastor from San Pedro Sula and the General Secretary of the ICLH. Bishop John realized that he and Pastor Hernan both had a background in chemistry. Bishop John said, "Chemistry is neat and orderly; ministry is not." Hernan agreed and said it would have been easier to stay in chemistry or even go into a neighborhood where there was no violence, but he is proud to be in a setting where there is great need. He talked about a shoot-out in front of the church last week, but even with such events the parishioners want to continue. The entire community helps the congregation. They once had 140 active members but are now down to 86 members. The congregation gets their courage from God. Hernan has assigned a task to every member of the congregation which they are doing. The congregation feels that it is their church. The pastors would like all congregations to feel this ownership. Other churches offered their buildings, but they were either too large or small or too distant from the community. The church is about the people and not the building. Hernan said, "The church exists in the heart of people. Our congregation may not be big but the quality is good."

When discussing what might be done to make the situation better Hernan suggested that there needs to be better communication within their church and the larger church. They also must identify what has to be done, and information should be dispersed in a timely manner. Because society is unpredictable, Rubi

suggested that we must know our human rights and talk about these. Pastor Suyapa said that we (our group from Michigan) could be a voice for them in the world by sharing our experiences.

Finally, dinner was ready. It was a joyous time of talking, laughing and sharing stories. In a short time we had become very impressed with the dedication and abilities of these leaders in the Honduran Lutheran Church. It was a blessing for us to be able to listen to them and hear their plans and hopes for the future.

All too soon it was time to go back to Hotel Linda Vista. Traveling the streets of Tegucigalpa we witnessed the recycling system in action. An obviously poor man was standing at the top of a pile of trash in an overflowing dumpster by the side of the street. Stephen explained that the poor people know what trash is recyclable and where they can sell those items to earn possibly their only income.

We reviewed plans for the morning and then said good night.

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Day 5 – March 24, 2011

Our time in Tegucigalpa was almost over. Bishop John and Lindsay met with Martin and Hernan concerning the ordination of Berta, Coordinator of the Communities of Faith of the ICLH. At the same time the rest of us worked with Stephen to revise a letter written by Bishop John to send to various people back home explaining the problems in Honduras. We need to tell the story, and the letter would serve as an overview and a starting place for discussion.

Soon it was time to go. The good-byes started. We loaded the bus and trusted don Sebastian to get us to the airport. Once again there were good-byes. We had time to eat and do a little shopping at the airport before we had to go through security and board the plane. The hardest good-byes of all were to Josefina and Rubi. We had been with them just four days but already considered them life-long friends.

John Fox continued to revise the letter on the plane, and then Bishop John and Lindsay worked on the revision until we reached Atlanta. In Atlanta our small group parted. Lindsay and John had different flights. Bishop John, Linnea, Connie and Mike continued on to Grand Rapids. Our physical journey was over, but the thinking about and sharing of our time in Honduras was just beginning.

Sometimes God calls you to go – and ACT!

Mike and Connie Lenkowski

