

# Semi-annual missions earn trust in Honduras

written by Special to Arkansas Catholic |

Many missionaries on Christ the King Church's twice-a-year medical mission are very comfortable with their ministry in Honduras.

"Going back to Honduras is like going home," said mission director Sandee Haslauer.

Some people have been "going home" for 20 years now. This year the parish is observing its 20th anniversary of opening clinics, building schools, evangelizing and educating teachers.

Msgr. Gaston Hebert, former pastor of the Little Rock church, expressed to Dr. Don Greenway in 1996 that he was interested in the church beginning a medical mission. Planning began, including exploring possible locations for the mission. One of the planning team members, Tim Dolan, found out at his father's funeral that his father was on the board of a Catholic orphanage in Trujillo called Finca del Niño (Farm of the Child). Greenway and Dolan visited the orphanage and met with Trujillo Bishop Virgilio Lopez Irias and others in the area.

Located on the Caribbean coast, Trujillo is six hours by bus from the closest major airport in San Pedro Sula. The 50-bed hospital provides basic care, but the people in the small villages often cannot get there or afford basic care.

Every year but one since March 1997 a team of 90 or more missionaries has spent a week providing medical care, as well as evangelization, construction and education for and with Hondurans. In 2005 the trip was cancelled because of security concerns, but 17 missionaries went for the installation of Bishop Luis Felipe Solé Fa and also sent a container of supplies. In 2010 a second mission trip was added, so now a small group of about 25 goes in January and the larger group goes in June.

Haslauer said that it took at least five years to earn the trust of the people that the missionaries were coming back.

Hurricane Mitch brought devastation to Honduras in October 1998. The orphanage was evacuated, as were many of the homes. Trujillo was totally cut off. Christ the King parishioners contributed \$50,000 in one weekend, plus food and supplies. C130s from the Little Rock Air Force Base transported the aid to Trujillo. No other relief organizations had been able to reach the isolated area.

The missionaries range in age from 16 to about 80. They staff clinics in three villages around Trujillo. At each clinic they teach hygiene, distribute rosaries and religious articles, discuss Catholicism and pray with patients waiting to see the doctors and receive prescribed medications. The medical professionals treat patients, conduct surgeries and consult with the Honduran doctors in the hospital. There also are dental, eye and hearing clinics. According to Haslauer, there is a great need for prosthetics in the area because accidents involving machetes, trains, traffic and bicycles.

Construction teams provide renovation and construction of the hospital, churches and schools.

An evangelization team trains church leaders through events called “encuentros” in the surrounding villages, led by both Honduran and missionary priests. A school team supports 11 schools by providing teacher workshops and school supplies.

Parishioners who don't attend the trips also contribute. They pray in the adoration chapel, count and package pills, calibrate and sort eye glasses, work in the warehouse where the equipment and supplies are stored until the next shipment and translate documents. Some even host Hondurans who come to Little Rock for complicated surgeries.

Parishioners donate at least \$75,000 a year for the mission budget, but missionaries pay their own travel, lodging and food. Dole brings bananas to the U.S. from Honduras in its container ships and donates an empty container and ocean transportation back to Honduras for the one or two containers of supplies sent each year. This year an extra container was shipped full of 200 donated student desks and chairs for the schools supported by the mission.

The past mission directors include Dr. Don Greenway, 1996; Dr. Bruce Schratz, 1997, Jerry Heil, 1998, and Lisa Nagel, 1999-2004. Haslauer has led it since the 2005 mission.

Hector Mendoza has been the director in Honduras for more than 15 years.

“He works for the people,” Haslauer said. “He makes things happen.”

In Honduras, Mendoza takes care of customs, arranges unloading of the containers and distributing the supplies to schools or storage and makes local arrangements for transportation and lodging.

During the Christ the King parish Masses Jan. 23-24, a 20th anniversary celebration was held.

While they were a waiting list for the mission June 11-19, there are still a few spots open for doctors, Haslauer said. For more information, call Haslauer at (501) 225-6774, ext. 282, or visit [ctkhondurasmission.org](http://ctkhondurasmission.org).