Honduras Mission  
February 21-28, 2009  
Report: 3/14/09  

In mission with Divine Mercy Catholic Community  

The Community in brief…  
• Located in Tegucigalpa, the capitol city of Honduras (about 1 million inhabitants)  
• One of 27 faith communities that together make up one parish of over 250,000  
• Located in a marginal neighborhood that struggles to secure basic municipal services  
• Designated by parish leadership as the very poorest of the communities  
• 65 households and growing!  
• Celebrate the Eucharist once a month, led by a Franciscan Friar  
• Four active lay leaders: Delegates of the Word  
• Four religious sisters, visiting weekly, hoping to ultimately live among the people  

The Mission in brief…  
• What does the presence of a Mission Team mean for this community? The leaders and other members frequently share these thoughts:  
  o The joy and comfort of knowing that they are not alone in their struggle.  
  o The goodness of knowing that the spiritual companionship they offer is priceless  
  o A profound gratitude for the resources we are able to share  
  o A deep commitment to working with us, whether that be in raising funds or working side by side in construction and other projects  
  o The promise of their daily prayer for us  

Part A: Mission Trip Overview  February 21-28, 2009  

Our intentions were to  
• Build relationships  
• Work with Honduran community members to carry out their goals and projects (see part B below for more about these goals and projects).  

In one week of shared energy:  
• Relationships  
• Construction under way for Phase 1 of the Casa Pastoral  
• Women’s Group and Children’s Activities  
• The Living Water Project: water purification  
• Children’s Dental Clinic  
• Eyeglass Clinic  
• Children’s Education Support  

• Relationships: the first and foremost goal—All day, every day!
One to one, we learned each other’s names, worked side by side, shared hugs, smiles and tortillas, taught one another our languages, and shared stories from our lives. As interacting communities, we prayed and worshipped, consulted, developed projects, and discerned future possibilities.

**Activities and Crafts for Women and Children**: Monday – Friday, all day, everyday!
- Supplies: provided by missioners
- Activities:
  - For the kids: Anywhere from 3-7 simple crafts a day: whatever can be made from colored paper, glue, beads, cord and pipe cleaners!
  - For the women: (when they weren’t helping out their kids)—embroidery, simple weaving
- Ongoing Benefit: The women commented “we have nothing at home except cleaning and laundry and cooking—it’s so wonderful to make something beautiful to pass the time”. Excited by the experience and with the promise of future activities taught by the religious sisters, they formed a women’s group and began planning their meetings.
  - Their first collaborative accomplishment: a beautiful altar cloth, designed by the women and embroidered in time for the evening Ash Wednesday service
- Our team members: Coordinated and taught the activities (lots of sign language!)
- Continuing the Project: We can find ways to continue providing craft supplies, which are scarce and expensive in Honduras.

**The Living Water Project**: Monday
- Supplies: Ten systems, (.02 filtration) were purchased from the PointOne organization, and 5-gallon white buckets were purchased in Honduras
- The Process:
  - Ten families with small children were chosen by lottery from among 20 applicants
  - The family mothers attended a day of education, training, assembly and commitment
  - The moms decorated the buckets with multi-colored drawings, prayers and expressions of gratitude; each bucket was marked with their names and project number
  - Each woman signed a contract, and her photo was taken with her system, children and contract
  - All participants will be tracked by a coordinator for 6 months
- The Result:
  - Ten home water purification systems, installed and producing safe drinking water, over 35 gallons per week per system
  - A group of ten women, excited and empowered for their “water ministry”: teaching their neighbors, sharing the water, serving as trainers in the future
- Our team members:
  - provided the education
  - assisted with decorating and assembly
  - drank the first cup of water to demonstrate the reliability of the systems!
- The Future:
  - The other 10 families await our return in August, when we will evaluate the success of the project, and expand to at least 10 additional systems
  - We are exploring the possibility of collaboration with Living Water International, with a goal of significantly great expansion of the project

**The Children’s Dental Clinic**: Thursday, Friday, 1/2 Saturday
o Setup and Supplies: a full mobile dental setup, as developed in past years for previous missions, supplies provided by Good Shepherd Catholic Church, Frankfort and various dentists.

o The Clients: 78 patients: about 25 extractions and 55 cleanings. The clinic was hosted by the Divine Mercy Community (in the church), but open to anyone in the neighborhood.

o The dental assistant with helpers also distributed fluoride treatment, toothpaste and toothbrushes, and did dental care education at the public school (800 students, all of which received services and supplies).

o The Team: One dentist doing extractions, one dental assistant doing cleanings, translators/assistants, a sterilization technician, a fluoride painter, various educators, and intake/crowd control experts

o The Future: The clinic was very well attended, and the community is eager to host it again.

- Distribute Reading Glasses: Thursday, Friday, 1/2 Saturday
  o Supplies: 300 reading glasses and 100 sunglasses (Epiphany), 300 prescription glasses (Frankfort United Methodist) extra supplies went to the Methodist clinic the following week. This clinic was also hosted by the Divine Mercy Community, and open to anyone in the neighborhood.
  o The Clients: 250+, of all ages
  o The Team: One re-trained gynecologist (!) and assistant translator, intake/crowd control experts
  o The Future: The clinic was very well attended, and the community is eager to host it again.

- Parish Development Construction: Monday-Friday
  o Supplies: Tools, sand, gravel, cement, wood, water, rebar and cement block were all purchased in Honduras with funds from Epiphany, Good Shepherd, St. John’s and various donors.
  o The Team: A Honduran mason/supervisor, various community members and missioners, joined by a herd of young boys! We paid for supervision and some labor for two weeks.
  o The Activity: digging, extracting and breaking up rocks, moving sand and gravel from the street by bucket load, water carried on the heads of women, mixing cement on the ground, wiring rebar into columns—an intensive course in Honduran construction!
  o Progress: 40 feet of footing, with an 8 foot high wall added in the second week
  o The Future: We were able to leave funds for another 10 days of construction. The community will continue their fundraising, and we will contribute the balance of our mission funds (about $3000) to continued construction. The entire project consists of three phases, with the first phase (community space/classrooms/restrooms/kitchen) estimated at $60,000. For more information, please review the Construction Goals, under the section headed “Dreams of the Divine Mercy Catholic Community”

- Support for Children’s Education
  o Partnership with “Becas con Bendiciones”
    ▪ An education support program that creates congregation-based scholarship groups
  o Pilot program: after-school supplementary education
  o Divine Mercy Leadership: Notre Dame sisters and Lilian Santos
  o Our part: to sponsor children, $150/year
Part B: Getting to Know Divine Mercy Catholic Community

Dreams and Goals of the Divine Mercy Catholic Community

- The first goal of the community was to build a church home: they began in 1999, and completed the church in 2009. The church was in use as a worship space throughout the entire process.
  - 1999-2006: Site acquisition, foundation and four walls: Mass was held under a simple shelter in a corner of the construction site.
  - 2006-2008: With the help of donors and their own efforts, the structure was completed.
  - June 2009: Dedication!

- Having completed their church, the community now seeks to become the hub of a new parish, to be comprised of 10-12 faith communities. To do so, they must
  - Continue to develop a full program of catechesis and formation, leadership, spiritual and community activities
  - Construct a “casa pastoral”: pastoral house/community center, to provide program space and housing for a pastor

- The community sees the presence of religious sisters as greatly beneficial to meeting their goals, particularly with regards to catechesis and community development, spiritual support and leadership—especially for the many families led by single mothers. The sisters (Congregation of Notre Dame) hope to live in the neighborhood, which they have singled out as being the poorest in the larger parish
  - Construct a convent in the neighborhood.

- Along with the benefit to the spiritual community, the members see benefits to the greater neighborhood, which is burdened by high crime and gang violence. They point out that well-developed institutions bring balance and stability into an area that is struggling to become a true neighborhood with city services.

- Construction Goals, as discerned by the Divine Mercy Community:
  - A community center/pastoral house: With expanded program space, the community can more effectively do formation for children and adults. When they are able to add housing for a priest, they will be ready to become the hub of a separate parish.
  - A Convent: Four sisters are already working once a week with the community. They seek to live there, because they want to live in the poorest neighborhood. The community anticipates the benefit of their stabilizing presence, expertise in catechesis and community development, spiritual support and leadership, especially for the many families led by single mothers.