

“But the Word of God continued to increase and spread.” (Acts 12:24)

Dear friends,

I do know that it's nearly Christmas, but I still wanted to get the November newsletter out after all the practical difficulties I had sending out the last ones.

November was Missions Month in the MCCA, so I led the Mizpah Bible study on Paul's first missionary journey. The second week Linda and I planned for Missions Sunday at Mizpah, on which Linda led the main missions service, and I preached and sang a solo. That afternoon we jointly led Sunday School using mostly Linda's resources, including a relevant video and a rare appearance by Sally the puppet, and an all-age talk about spreading the gospel featuring jars of coloured water. The following week Linda preached at the service at Mizpah, with one very capable teenager leading worship and a dozen or so other youths participating in the service. It was good to have them involved, showing their talents (especially the girls' singing), and growing in confidence, and they felt the presence of the Holy Spirit. Linda had stepped in to assist them instead of helping me at the Missions service at the Cays, to which the trip was rough even in the bay, but I hadn't realized I was supposed to stay over...

As it was Missions Sunday, the main service was an extra evening service, to which the Church of God had been invited, so I had to improvise the morning service. I took the passage and sermon theme from Paul's first missionary journey, chose a related Gospel reading and the last hymn, and got the congregation to choose songs from the pianist's limited repertoire. The only hotel on the island was shut so I stayed elsewhere, in a flat by the sea, with beautiful views, but sadly as I hadn't known I was stopping I hadn't brought my camera, nor my computer or any money. I did have lots of spare time, so I got someone to message Linda to tell her I had to stay over, and prayer walked the Cays. God led me to a Spanish-speaking man in the street, who took me to meet the two Spanish-speaking pastors. I attended the regular open air afternoon service led by Brother Leighton, before leading the main service with my original sermon and hymns. The next morning I was blessed by a beautiful sunrise over the Honduran mountains, and a spotted ray, which swam right past the jetty I was standing on.

One of our Spanish-speaking members died while Rev Hanners was in the US visiting some churches who send a 'missions team' to us each year, to bring resources and support building work at the school and visit fringe members of the church and community. It all happens very quickly here. She died at 1:08 pm, I was told at 2:30, I visited the family at 3pm to start arranging the funeral, and was invited to the wake at 6pm. Linda didn't come, but as I passed our church our steward had just finished tolling the church bell eighty times, one for each year of her age, so I walked there with her. We were given traditional spicy chicken soup, which was delicious, and were shown the body through the clear panel in the casket. We also made further arrangements, approved the family obituary, and chatted to her partner and the family, most of whom speak English. As it was a Saturday, I wrote the order of service and the address, as well as making other arrangements and finishing my sermon, it was a very late night. In the morning I got up early to visit the house to check everyone and everything were OK, before going to the church for the main Sunday service, which I had

moved forward to 8:30 from 9am in order to get her buried in under 24 hours (the body was not embalmed, and it's warm here even in the rainy season). I'd been advised by the Superintendent that it still needed to be a Holy Communion service. Then I led the funeral services at their home, during which we had to wade through floods on the main road, the path to Sandy Bay settlement and their drive, and then wait for the jumbo (motorcycle with large trailer) to take the body to the church, and services in the church and at the graveside. It was the first funeral I've done on my own here, we sang some Spanish songs she enjoyed but it was mostly in English, and the burial was challenging because the wet clay soil was so claggy it stuck to my shoes and made it difficult to move about, and it was hard for the family to shovel into the grave at the end. I also assisted at a funeral the next week, but only the burial as I had been on an online stationing 'visit', though Linda and I had attended the wake.

Linda also helped with the Women's Group Thanksgiving programme; there were three aspects to this. There were food parcels for needy families, put together from dry food donations brought in by Sunday School members. Hot soup was distributed to needy and housebound members, who also received pastoral visits, including prayers, Bible readings and hymn singing, which is always much appreciated. Linda went with Miss Kim, who knew where everyone lived, both church members and community adherents. I had a strategic Zoom meeting with our preachers on the north coast, one from La Ceiba and two from Puerto Cortes, including one on his phone without proper access to Zoom. I also led a 6am (our time not theirs!) prayer meeting for an English Circuit on Jesus' Second Coming, having been asked by friend from MET, and also our own 6am prayer meeting devotions when two potential leaders both thought each other were doing it! Half of the Men's fellowship was led for the first time by a 12-year-old boy, who appeared embarrassed but did well. Some of our church members also suffered serious misfortunes, one was scammed and one evicted, the house of the latter being demolished in one day except for its concrete foundation pillars.

At the start of November a colleague in Roatan informed us that they had planned a youth camp in Utila in early December, based at the school and church on dates which we couldn't change, though they were inconvenient for several reasons, including our intention to use them for a holiday in mainland Honduras. We postponed our holiday to help out, as the mainland was experiencing floods, and had a Zoom meeting to start planning the camp. We promoted it at Teen Tuesday, but the girls shared our main concern- the lack of proper showers. Weeks later the forms to sign up arrived, and we had another Zoom planning meeting. I also had to write several reports for District Committees, which met in Belize. Although it was not my turn to go this year, I was still expected to attend meetings online, the first one of which started 85 minutes late due to issues with the Belize delegates failing to get to the venue due to heavy rain in Belize City. In addition to the District meetings, both of us also attended the first of the annual teacher interviews, which were very late this year.

The school year ended for most students early in November with their exams. Predictions of a big thunderstorm coming in affected the last day of the exams, in which nearly all the Bible class exams came last. I received a message at 7:15am saying the children would start each exam as they finished the previous one, ending by 9am. As each child had

Bible as their third or fourth exam (they start at 7am), I calculated I needed to be in by 8am to supervise. When I arrived I was shocked to find Eighth Grade already coming out, Seventh almost finished, and the lower grades having already started theirs too. I tried to do what I could, and succeeded in collecting all the exam papers from my two classes and Linda's class, but it was a strange end to the school year. We marked our exam papers, I combined mine with classwork marks, and we submitted them to the Director. The very last thing for some students were the Graduations for Kinder (age 4-5), Ninth (13-15) and Eleventh (15-17) Grades, which were at different times on the same day- one teacher had a child in each grade. We were then invited to the graduation meal by a member of my Sunday School adult class whose daughter did confirmation classes with me and whose elder brother also graduated.

Linda presided over more culinary triumphs this month. She created a new recipe when no courgettes were available so she substituted plantain in her chorizo stirfry, which was wonderful. I was given a bag of wahoo (a highly-prized game fish) chunks by a fisherman at Men's Fellowship, which were delicious with chayote squash and carrots. She also made a packet chocolate cake even more delicious by adding choc chips to the mix. I also finally managed to procure a bag of fresh chicharrones (similar to pork scratchings) from a roadside trader we've passed many times coming home from prayer breakfast but they're never ready. The rainy season continued, surrounding the manse with a moat several more times, and we sprang more leaks- we had to move our bed away from the wall as the rain was coming in, and we also had to move the desk in my study. We also had to buy a new tyre for the golf cart, but could only get a wider one, which is rather squeaky.

We also continued with UK stationing, being invited by a Circuit in the north, where folk seemed friendly but we both felt it was not right for us so we said no. We therefore entered the second round of stationing, with fewer options from which to make a second indicative list. I will reveal more next time. We also had an interesting cultural experience, being invited round by Sister Kim's family for our first ever Thanksgiving meal- turkey, ham and many trimmings. On the last day of November we set off on a short break to Pico Bonito, a mountain on the mainland we can see from Utila, where we were greeted on arrival by more species of hummingbirds than have ever been recorded on Utila. I will share more of that next month, though that first night was my final District Zoom meeting with Belize.

Prayer requests for the rest of this month and into January:

We have a big funeral coming up soon whenever the body is released from the US, please pray for the Bodden family

Our Christmas services and we're leading Sunday School on Christmas Eve

The Watchnight service at Mizpah, which we are all sharing in

For those who attended youth camp, for God to continue to move in their lives

Strategic decisions the School Board need to take for next year to increase the Christian ethos

Hopefully the next newsletter won't be as late as this one!

Merry Christmas and Happy new Year to you all,

Love, peace and blessings, Chris & Linda



Young people helping Linda with a service



Sally the puppet's debut in Sunday School



Teaching the adult class



Linda's Jubilee (young teens) class



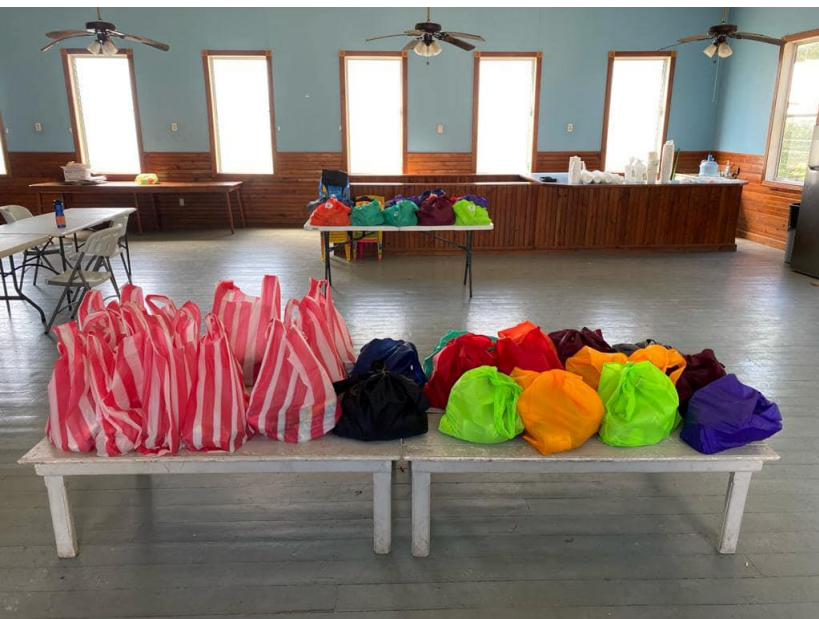
White-winged dove in the garden



Back garden sunset



Preparing for the soup run



Food bags awaiting delivery



The delivery team



Thanksgiving meal



Wahoo steak, also delicious with stirfry & rice



House demolition Utila style



Teachers awaiting the Kinder graduation





Eleventh grade graduation



Graduation meal with the graduates



Pico Bonito from the ferry



Linda relaxing on arrival



Lush tropical greenery



Magnificent? hummingbird



Long-billed hermit

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Violet-crowned woodnymph