

Never To Be The Same

If you follow these blogs you will know that the last blog featured MAHEC's five person brigade in the small community of Camasca. They did excellent work, but their presence was subtle. Shortly after they left, Dr. Brent Burkey and the brigade he put together from Cleveland Clinic and Christ Church arrived in the same community of Camasca. This brigade was anything but subtle. When they agreed to add seven pharmacy students from the University of Michigan, the brigade totaled 34 persons. In this little town of Camasca, the presence of 35 North Americans speaking English does not go unnoticed. The 34 managed to stay at a church in the center of town, but the translators they hired needed to be housed in local homes. For the ten days they were here, Laura and I had a lot of fun just walking into the town and seeing them. They were all over the place, walking about in small groups, hanging out in the central plaza, and engaging the townspeople. For that short period of time it seemed as if Camasca had become Main Street, USA.



Of course they did so much more than just walk around and hang out. The medical teams went out in two groups every day to the smaller surrounding communities. They saw and treated patients, held health fairs, and established empowering relationships. The community service folks spent time every day at our bilingual school offering a day camp with music, storytelling, and art projects. They also involved themselves with projects in the town, the most prominent of which was the mural painting of the walls to the town's sport center. For all of the brigade members, there was a spirit of joy and celebration that imbued their time with the people of Camasca. The town sponsored a welcome party. At the going away party everyone took part. The brigade members witnessed traditional Honduran music and dance while the town enjoyed some folk and perhaps a little rock and roll.



This celebratory spirit seemed to grow and transform the town. Perhaps the symbolic metaphor of that was the painting of the sport's center wall. Bright colors replaced the chipped and faded paint and icons

of faith, peace, service, and community were prominently displayed; a permanent gift of remembrance and hope. One particular project on the wall seemed particularly poignant. One late morning the children at the bilingual school were bussed down to the wall in small groups of four. Each child from the school and other children from the town got to dunk his or her hand into a can of paint and leave his or her impression against the wall. The hands formed a snaky trail along the wall. It expressed the wonder of the journey of life.



When people come to know one another, when they move beyond differences and fear, something truly wonderful occurs. Things get built, people get served, celebrations erupt, but most importantly the beauty of life is revealed. One of the young women on the brigade, a student at the University of Michigan, wrote a thank you note to the mayor Julio and his wife Iris. Iris and Julio have long been faithful and committed partners with the work of Shoulder to Shoulder. Iris shared with us the thank you note. The young woman writes, "It was an honor to have been able to come to your town and serve your people. I hope and pray that I can one day return to Camasca and see its beauty again." Camasca is indeed beautiful, even more so now for having enjoyed the experience of finding new friends.

