

CHRIS AND LINDA HAINES' MISSION NEWS FROM UTILA

ISSUE 6 JAN 23

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1)

Dear friends,

Linda and I saw the New Year in in the streets of La Ceiba, listening to noisy fireworks we couldn't see- they go for noise over beauty. We nearly missed the boat home due to an enormous queue to pay departure tax, the price of which had gone up 75% overnight! Our quest for Honduran residency acquired new hurdles too- just before I went away we were informed we needed to appoint a lawyer immediately, and send Doctor's certificates, printed on a special form not obtainable on Utila, set up bank accounts (having previously been told we couldn't get one without having residency), obtain letters from our bank, plus passport photos and copies of our passport pages bearing entry and exit stamps. Of course, alongside these irritations came blessings. Our transport issues have been solved by the purchase of a 'new' (to us) golf cart! It's actually quite 'experienced', but was a fraction of the price of the others on offer, from a trustworthy church member. A man also dug a trench to drain our moat and duckpond into the sea (though a slight parking hazard). I was also very relieved to hear that my home-town football team, Scunthorpe Utd, have been rescued from collapse by David Hilton, former Chairman of Ilkeston Town.

The Covenant services were very different this year, celebrating on New Year's Day with English and Spanish-speaking congregations on the mainland. Both services were meaningful, though I don't have the deep relationships I've had with my own churches, but saying the familiar words in an unfamiliar place was moving. We also led our first module for the Local Preachers' training, which brings its own challenges, and were shocked to hear of the death of a baby the night before as a family walked home from the Watchnight service and were hit by a car. A real tragedy.

Sunday School goes from strength to strength. Two new classes were launched, and the number on roll has gone up from 117 to 127. Linda is supposed to be helping with the younger ones, but has covered the preteen/young teenage group, whose teacher is away. I've helped with the adult class. We were honoured to be asked to provide training for the teachers, who were blessed by the fellowship and requested a second session. The teenagers' group was made temporarily homeless by a month-long lease, so spent their time shopping, delivering food and visiting elderly members, going out for chicken wings and having a leaving party for an older boy studying in Roatan. I also began ministerial supervision here- my supervisor is a mission partner in Zambia, and it's going well so far- I've not been here long enough to be subject to the local equivalent.

School has taken up a lot of my time, although lessons don't start until February, because the School Board (our equivalent of the Governing Body) are responsible for appointing not just the Head Teacher but all staff. This year this has meant a Director (Head Teacher), an Administrator, and a number of English-speaking and Spanish-speaking teachers, as well as a Computer studies teacher. This has been a challenge, as in the primary section we are pairing up English and Spanish-speaking teachers to cover two year groups between them, with English, Maths and Science being taught in English and other subjects in Spanish. Not all staff are bilingual, so Spanish is the lingua franca of the school- the Director doesn't speak much English. This has limited Linda's involvement, though she will be continuing to teach Bible class for a mostly English-speaking class. Even when I was away in Belize I was attending online interviews and discussing staff recruitment with Rev Hanners.

Though we missed much of the ministerial retreat with the ministers from Belize, due to a flight-related issue, Rev Hanners and I arrived in good time for District Council, in Corozal in northern Belize. The first evening was quite relaxed, I went for a cultural and bird walk of Corozal and chatted with the ministers I'd stayed with last time. The next morning I preached at Corozal Methodist Church, then attended a trainee minister's trial service, before visiting the Scout leader's house for a delicious chirmole lunch (black spicy soup) with a colleague. As I'd been appointed one of the Journal writers for the ministerial session, there was extra work to do at the end of the twelve-hour working day, but I did manage to videocall Linda every morning and evening. A highlight was Rev Hanners leading a large school assembly about Jesus welcoming children and the varied opportunities for careers in ministry, pointing out an American work team and ministerial colleagues from the UK, Zambia, DR Congo, Haiti and St Vincent, as well as the Connexional Bishop, who'd arrived from Antigua the previous day. The lay people arrived for Representative session the next day. Good food was provided by the school and Circuit- I particularly enjoyed the escabeche (onion & habanero soup). The final ministerial session was on Saturday morning, before the 'District sports' (effectively Belize sports, it was too expensive to fly in teams from Honduras).

The Sunday morning District youth service featured thirteen Belizean Methodist schools, with good worship, drama, singing, and dancing, after which we paraded back to the church. We finished with a closing service, for which we had to wear robes, which I still find very hot. This service was livestreamed, so Linda watched some of it, and it included the reading of the stations for 2023. Last year we heard the names being read in England, but this year those names which had been unknown to me were now the names of my friends. This was one of the most emotional moments of Council, along with the 'statement of character', at which I declared that I believed and preached the doctrines of the MCCA and obeyed and enforced its discipline, after which I spoke and was affirmed by the Bishop. The following day we travelled to Belize City, for lunch (stewed calfsfoot) and shopping, then the airport for flight home to Roatan, where I stayed overnight with a very hospitable baker, who took me to the special bank to get the special papers for our medical certificates, and later to the boat home. It was great to be home with Linda again, so we celebrated with a pollo chuco takeaway and cocoma plums, eaten with salt & vinegar.

Linda, meanwhile, continued with her life here. The Church of God held Youth Revival sessions, with good music, though they were mostly in Spanish, as the Christian Endeavour group she's been helping with on Saturdays has become. She and the teenagers helped make a banner for Council with our neighbour Kim, our Circuit lay rep, who brought it over to Belize with her (I was disappointed it didn't win a prize). Linda also spent a beach day at Neptune's with the youth group, and went for some swims by golf cart, but said it was not as much fun alone.

Our prayer requests for February are:

Please pray for Fanny and Marvin, who lost their baby in the accident, and their injured son

Please pray for the visit on Feb 24-26 of Dr Craig Lee, an American evangelist, who will be leading sessions at Mizpah and the Cays, and hopefully one for our young people, that people of all ages will attend and be blessed, for Dr Lee, for the protection and good health of all concerned, for travelling mercies to get here and to and from the Cays, and for a spiritual harvest

For the school, its teachers, Director and students as we begin a new school year

For a successful conclusion to our residency application

For continuing discernment for Linda and I for God's direction in our mission here

Wishing you all love, peace and joy,

Chris & Linda



Arrival of the theologically-correct Magi



Making Epiphany crowns at Christian Endeavour



Epiphany princes and princesses



West End, Roatan



Coral atolls off Belize



Methodist Guest House, Corozal



Corozal sign



House of Culture



Central Park fountain



Corozal sunset



American coot (new species for me)



Preaching at Corozal Methodist



Corozal Methodist School



Bishops with Utila delegation



Me with the Connexional Bishop, Bishop Galbraith



Welcome (English, Spanish, Garifuna)



The intrepid banner on arrival



District sports sack race



With Bishop Benguche & Rev Hanners



Northern rough-winged swallow



At the youth service



'This little light of mine' (rap version)



Start of the parade



Later in the parade



Trip to Neptune beach with the teenagers



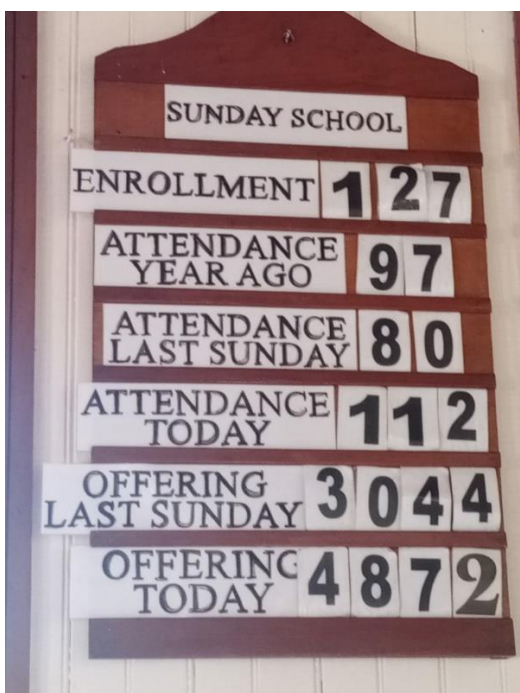
Football at Neptune Beach



Cocomo plums



Move Up Sunday certificates7



Sunday School statistics