

## Christmas Greetings from Belize

This summer, which feels a long time ago now, I spent four weeks in England and it was really good to see family and friends. I returned to Belize in the middle of September, arriving back just after the Independence Day Celebrations on 21<sup>st</sup> Sept. This year marked 30 years of Independence for Belize, but the occasion was saddened for the whole country by the death a few days earlier, of the architect of that independence, George Price, known as the 'Father of the Nation'. A devout Catholic all his life, he had been the leader of British Honduras before independence and of Belize afterwards. He was given a full State Funeral - the first the country has held.

During October, Wesley College, the Methodist High School in Belize City, holds 'Red Ribbon Week', which highlights its stance against drugs and alcohol. Each class designs a mascot depicting the theme, which this year was 'It's up to me to be drug free', and following the weekly Wednesday morning Church Service, they paraded through the streets taking the long route from Wesley Church back to the school. The photo is of the students preparing for the Monday's assembly which saw the launch of the week's activities. (All school assemblies take place outside).



The Scouts dramatizing the parable of 'The Talents' at one of our youth services.

School devotions and youth services seemed to have been a frequent event for me this term, as I assisted at several of the primary schools on a fairly regular basis, and helped to encourage the school students and church youth groups participate in the monthly Youth Services at Ebenezer Church. We also celebrated 'Youth and Young Adult' Sunday throughout the District in November, with each Church using the same order of service, specially designed for the occasion, and the young people leading worship and in many cases also giving the message.

During my time in Belize the level of violence in Belize City connected to gangs and drugs has been a cause for concern. In September, the Prime Minister held discussions with many of the different gang leaders, and a 'truce' was negotiated, which has held for the past few months, meaning a lot fewer shootings and deaths. We pray that the situation will continue to improve and stabilise, and all the various efforts will continue to bear fruit. Many different organisations and groups have joined together, along with the Government to form 'Restore Belize' which is developing practical initiatives to bring work and hope to people's lives; initiatives such as one of the construction companies employing gang members to assist in road building, and the Government providing funding for jobs for otherwise unemployed youths.

At the end of November we had a short visit from Rev'd Tom Quenet, the Partnership Coordinator for the Caribbean and the Americas, from the World Church Relationships Office of the British Methodist Church. We managed to fit in trips to several of the projects and other circuits, before he was on his way to other parts of the region.

Once again, we are fast approaching the Christmas season, and this will be my fifth Christmas here in Belize. We are busy planning all the usual services and events, and several of our churches have already held their Christmas Bazaars, which not only are for celebration, but also are one of the main fundraising events for the church. However, it still feels strange to me to be celebrating Christmas in such warm temperatures!



Even underwater on a day off last week, I was reminded of Christmas - Christmas tree worms (on a brain coral), Angel (Fish), (spotted juvenile) Drum (fish) and Trumpet (fish) all join in the display of God's creation!



As many people will have heard, the reason for my trip back to England last summer was for more than a holiday and to visit the family! I have been listening to where I feel God is calling and leading me. Over the past couple of years, from the direction my work has taken here in Belize, and through some of the events I have experienced, I am responding by candidating for the ordained ministry, to become a deacon with the British Methodist Church, and the trip home in August/September was part of that process. As we move into 2012, I will again be back in England, for the District and Connexional parts of the Candidating process, most of which will coincide with my furlough, from March to May 2012. I will then return to Belize towards the end of May, by which time it may be a little clearer where I am headed after Spring 2013.



His star still guides for seeking hearts!

Praying for peace and joy for all God's people, this Christmas season and throughout the New Year,

With love and prayers from

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