

## CHRIS AND LINDA HAINES' MISSION NEWS FROM UTILA

### ISSUE 4 NOV 22

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;” (Ps 46:1-2. NRSV)

November began with a near miss. Though we were told that the likelihood of our being affected on Utila was low, this is hurricane season, and one had already caused considerable flooding on the mainland, when we were warned that Tropical Storm Lisa was about to reach the 75mph wind speed to qualify her as a hurricane, and the models predicted a direct hit on Utila. We prepared an evacuation plan and prayed, along with other islanders, only for Lisa to veer to the north, and hit Belize City instead, flooding our Bishop's house, church and school, and leaving a four-inch carpet of mud in her wake. The main impact in Utila was the precautionary postponement of school exams. Though the sea forms our 'back garden', it stayed within its appointed limits and caused no damage.

Our replacement golf cart kept losing power on a day off, so we stopped off at the hire place, where they changed the spark plug. Later the cart broke down, and I was helped by a stranger, who happened to be a relative of the hire company owner, so I ended up driving off with her cart (also hired). We have also been given jackfish and beef recently, people here are very generous.

We are now getting used to the 5:30am grackle alarm clock- their roost tree is close to the house. Nature continues to delight me- discounting the insects, we share the house with geckos, the porch with anoles and crabs, and the garden with Muscovy ducks, grackles, doves, hummingbirds, and sometimes an Amazon kingfisher. I'm still seeing new birds here, mostly smaller birds like migratory warblers from North America, and possibly some blown in from Central America. There seems to be few birders in Utila- nobody else seems to have seen the kingfisher here, for example, despite lots of non-governmental organisations locally focussing on conservation in various forms.

We have also become aware of people finding our English accents and phrases difficult to understand. Many church folk have relatives in the US, and the local accent is hard to describe, a mixture of American, Honduran and something else. For fast food we have 'pollo chuca' or 'dirty chicken', fried chicken with fried plantain covered in sauce- not the healthiest but tasty. The Ladies' group have sold delicious cakes to raise funds, and delivered soup and dry food packages to the needy as social outreach for Thanksgiving, both to church folk and the wider community.

The first two Sundays of November were designated Missions Sundays at the Cays and Mizpah, so Linda and I as mission partners shared both services. The one at the Cays was preceded by their new prayer meeting, and followed by an Open Air service, then an evening service, though numbers were depleted owing to a virus (which we didn't catch). We had discussed visiting the school the next morning, but couldn't as they had exams. At Mizpah Robbie the puppet made his debut, and went down very well, and much money was raised for mission work. Rev Esther and I also put together the Circuit Plan, which was challenging owing to a lack of information, and the template being a paper size our printer can't deal with, though I have since made new contacts with new preachers at the outlying congregations on the mainland, and developed a training strategy.

The school year here ends in November and restarts in February, so the Christian Endeavour group had an end-of-school party which was packed out with over forty children instead of the usual ten. There were a lot of school (Governor's) Board meetings, some of which were rather challenging, and some of which continued without us. The reason for this is that after three months in Honduras,

we had to leave before we overstayed our visas. The only logical destination was Belize, as I had to attend District meetings there at the end of the month, so off we went, via an overnight stay in Roatan with a delicious crab lunch, hummingbirds and no electricity for a couple of hours after dark.

The next morning we took a scenic flight over the Mesoamerican barrier reef, with its cays and atolls, to Belize City, where Horace from the District Office took us to our apartment in the suburbs, to house-sit for a very kind District employee. We went for a quick tour of the city and the local supermarket, then back to the apartment for our visit from Bishop Benguche (District Chair). The next morning he'd invited me to a breakfast staff meeting (Linda stayed in for her regular call with her mum), for which he collected me at 10:30, having been delayed at school by an unexpected Garifuna festival (celebrating a local black community who had rebelled against slavery).

This community's contribution to local cuisine featured among dishes at a local restaurant we discovered, where we tried calf's foot soup, pigtail, boil-up, chimole and cassava cake- we love local delicacies. We visited Belize museum, in a former jail, with exhibitions featuring a local artist and stuffed birds. Though it rained every day, we got out and about too. Unfortunately the zoo was closed after hurricane damage, but we saw plenty of wild animals, starting with jacanas, iguanas, frogs, and herons near the apartment. Our first trip was to the 'baboon (howler monkey) sanctuary', where our expert guide pointed out various tanagers, manakins, aracaris, a Yucatan squirrel, and the monkeys. Then we visited Altun Ha, a Mayan pyramid site, where we visited the museum, climbed a pyramid, saw a trogon, and I saw a small snake. We also visited Caye Caulker, where we swam, saw a huge stingray, and had a delicious meal, and the Crooked tree reserve, where we saw a lot more birds, including chachalacas, though the entrance road was flooded.

We struggled with technology in the apartment, losing our TV signal (during the World Cup!) and struggling to speak with Linda's mum, though she managed to ring us unaided for the first time. Then Linda travelled home alone, staying with a lady from the church in Roatan. I preached twice at two of the Bishop's churches, the first of which (while Linda was there) was a liturgical Connexional youth service, and the second another liturgical service I had at least had input into. This was followed by assisting in a confirmation service in the first church on the second Sunday.

The District Committees began on Saturday. I joined the Children & Youth commission, which also had issues with Zoom, before helping to drop off some hurricane relief aid from Corozal in the north, delivered by its Superintendent, who stayed in the apartment with me and another minister, giving me lifts to meetings in their cars. There were only three of us present from Honduras, so it seemed somewhat Belize-focussed, but I was placed on many committees so got a good overall view of what was happening in the District. These comprised the Primary, General and Christian Education, Pastoral, Resources & Development, Mission, Evangelism & Church Growth, Ministerial Training and General Purposes Committees. I spoke to Linda several times, to hear she had been enthusiastically welcomed back and had got involved in things that were happening here while I was away, including assisting the Sunday school as they started practising for their Christmas event.

Our prayer requests for December:

Continuing to discern what God is calling us to get more involved with in the New Year  
Wisdom and creativity as we work on Christmas and New Year services and events

Wisdom and discernment for the School Board in redefining its role and recruiting staff

Interesting and safe activities for families and children during the long school holidays

Dealing with the emotional side of a warm non-traditional Christmas with family far away

Wishing you all peace, love, and joy this Christmas,

Chris and Linda



Food delivery bags from Mizpah church



Our view as Hurricane Lisa passed



Amazon kingfisher in our garden



Black & white warbler, Utila



Mission Point, Pigeon Cay, where Methodism arrived in Honduras



Gathering for open air worship



Sunset on the Cays



Utila from Pigeon Cay



Royal tern, Utila town



Kanahau NGO headquarters



Relief map of Utila



Replacement replacement golf cart



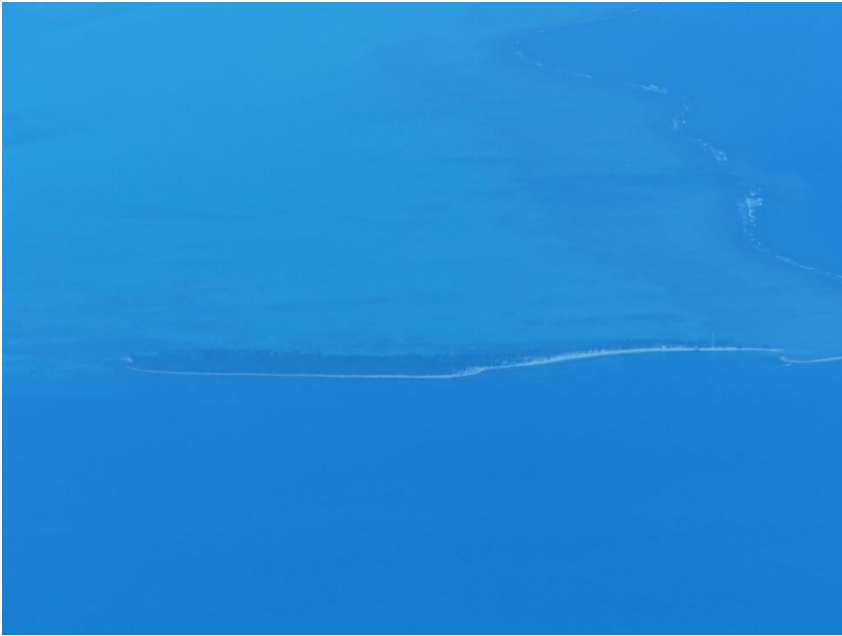
Crab lunch, Roatan



Possible vagrant hummingbird



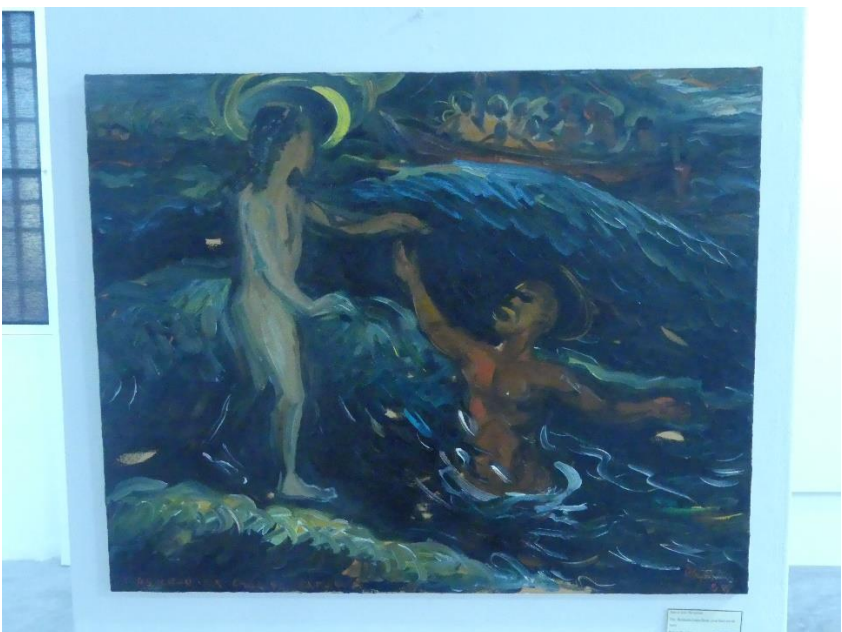
Our flight leaving Roatan



Long Cay, Belize



Swing bridge, Belize City



Jesus saving Peter (Pen Cayetano)





'Our' apartment in Belama



Hurricane damage, Belize City



Green iguana, Belama



Female white-collared manakins



Yucatan squirrel



Male Guatemalan black howler



Howler monkey family



Mayan temple, Altun Ha



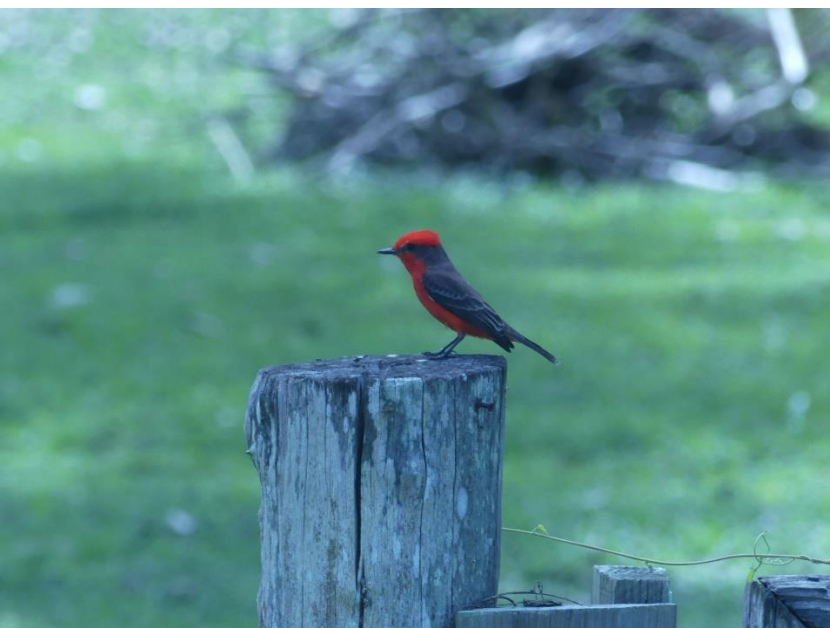
Linda and I on top of main temple



Female black-headed trogon



Flooded road to Crooked Tree wildlife reserve



Vermilion flycatcher



Yellow-bellied? slider terrapin



Plain chachalaca



Northern jacana father & chick



Hurricane relief aid from Corozal



Ebenezer Methodist Church



Confirmands at Trinity MC



Ministers leaving a meeting



Ministers at Wesley MC



Wesley Lower school



Ministers having lunch



Bromeliad? tree frog



Sunset above the clouds