

Ambiance

Oh, Honduras' ubiquitous, intensely blue mountains and blue-green foothills! They stand with every community that I visited this month: ringing San Pedro Sula comfortingly; rearing up dramatically behind La Ceiba, to sandwich the city between Chinese-painting peaks and the sea; off on the horizon around San Nicolás and La Cañada; or intimately cradling the communities of Santa Cruz, El Olvido, and Bacadia in coffee-growing heights and chilly mist.



Like in London, where one gets called "Luv" by complete strangers, here the preferred pet name from merchants is "*Amor*". Walk through the public market and vendors from nearly every stall will reach out and lay a hand on your arm, murmuring, "*Amor*, what are you looking for? What is it that you want?"



There is nothing like washing for months by hand to make me thrill at the authorization for the purchase of a semi-automatic washing machine! Now I can wash in the tub on one side, spin in the centrifuge on the other side, drain, refill the wash tub with rinse water from a garden hose, and repeat the process. Luxury! Plus, there is the added benefit of ecological soundness: I can get two or three loads of laundry out of the same tub of wash water.



Equally enthralling: being able to graduate from a wonky, 2-burner hot-plate to a Spartan, apartment-sized but authentic stove-cum-oven. Now hosting meals is a delight instead of an ordeal.



Travel conditions are "adventuresome": "Chicken buses" to outlying areas, painfully jarring "*pailas*" (back of pickup trucks) over roads with far more "*baches*" (potholes) than road; motion sickness; heat/cold; bugs; violent communities; nowhere to get something to eat or go to the bathroom; a constant demand for patience, flexibility... and trust that unknown people will get you to where you need to go. Pray for all church workers traveling in Honduras!

november

in Honduras

-- Janet Alcántara

Matthew 9.35-38

Did you know that in the *whole country* of Honduras there is only **one** full-time Lutheran pastor (Brazilian Armino Schmechel, who functions as President of the Christian Lutheran Church of Honduras)? Three serve us from other denominations, plus one pastor splits his time between El Salvador and Honduras. There are three students in seminary in El Salvador and Costa Rica...and that's it.

So, many of the Lutheran congregations are either leaderless or depend on lay leaders, who long for support.

This month I visited 14 congregations (3 mission points still pending) to explore regular accompaniment and to begin work with the women and the pastoral teams. After seeing the eager eyes and feeling the tight hugs full of hope, I ache with Jesus' compassion for these sheep without a shepherd.

So it was heartbreaking to realize that it is too much work for me to do alone. Instead of visiting all the congregations every month, as was proposed, Pastor Armino asks that I choose the five neediest congregations to work with, so that I will also be able to participate in trainings and retreats, to develop materials, and to serve as a liaison to the many foreign groups planning to visit ICLH in the coming year.

As I got to know the women on this trip, I inquired, "How would you describe yourself?" Almost all replied, "Humble; and although poor, I would bend over backwards to give to others." When invited to answer, "Have you ever felt God in your life—or not? Have you ever felt God's presence or heard God's voice? Give a specific, concrete example." In many of the groups, women wept as they shared their deep and moving stories of faith, and their certainty of God's faithful presence.

How would you answer those questions for yourself? They bear Advent pondering, don't they?

In faith and service in Christ, *--janet*

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