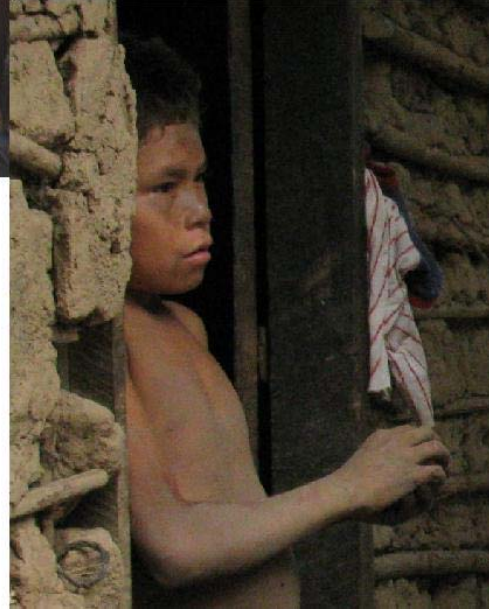




"Team Belaire - 2011" has just completed its mission trip to the Clinica de Los Angeles in Belaire, Honduras. The team consisted of Gregg Rushton (team leader), Sharon Bentley, Ellen Storey, Carlos Mayfield, Peggy and Russ Polhemus, and Mary and Guf Guffey. We were joined by Dr. Delmer Montoya, a Honduran physician, Sonia Barabas, a local pastor and nurse, and Patty Calderon, a Cruzadas interpreter. This is the team's second mission to the clinic. Our hosts were Evelyn and Jose Castellar.



Evelyn is the founder of *Clinica de Los Angeles*. She and her husband split their year, six months in Honduras (in 3 month intervals) and six months in their US home in Federal Way, Washington. Evelyn is tireless in her efforts to help her neighbors and is especially passionate toward the impoverished people of the Cloud Forest.

The people of the Cloud Forest live in the very worst conditions. The terrain is difficult and conditions are exceptionally harsh. The rainy season swells the rivers making travel nearly impossible. Potable water is nonexistent. Parasites, fungus and disease weaken everyone. The most vulnerable are the children. Infant death is common. The boy standing in the doorway above attests to the utter despair that is their existence.



The objectives for our mission were to provide medical aid, to examine eyes and fit glasses, to distribute food, and to evangelize. We conducted clinics for five full days plus two half days. The numbers of people who came were overwhelming. Many of our patients travelled (many walking) for 4-6 hours and some stayed for days, waiting to be treated. Our medical team served 977 patients to include 12 minor surgeries. Our eye-care team fitted 64 pairs of RX glasses, 145 pairs of readers and distributed 325 pairs of sunglasses. In total 222 eye examinations were completed.

Russ Polhemus who was in charge of our devotionals and evangelism had 168 requests for prayer and commitments, to include first time professions of faith and rededications. He also established numerous relationships with members of the community.



One unique feature of this year's trip was the distribution of food packets to the many children that were identified as being at risk due to malnutrition. The recent heavy rains and local crop failures had severely limited food supplies all over Honduras. This situation put the people of the Cloud Forest in crisis.

Fortunately we were able to establish a partnership with the "Stop Hunger Now" organization and with Leonarda's Home of Hope and were able to acquire enough packets of fortified rice/soy meal to feed 300 starving children for four months. SHN (www.StopHungerNow.org) is a humanitarian relief organization operating out of Raleigh, North Carolina. They purchase and package a completely balanced food supplement into bags which serve up to six children.

LHOH (<http://www.leonardashomeofhope.org/>) is an orphanage that is supported by a consortium of contributors that is headquartered in Norge, Virginia. They arranged the distribution of the SHN food packets to the Cruzadas compound in La Ceiba, Honduras and were kind enough to share their allocation of packets with the Clinica de Los Angeles.



The clinic in Belaire serves approximately twenty small hamlets and villages that dot the surrounding country side. This is a substantial catchment area. Most importantly, however, Clinica de Los Angeles is positioned at the gateway to an area of the virgin Cloud Forest that is the home for many of the neediest people in Honduras. These people are extremely isolated and are best characterized as marginalized by both the government and the population at large.

We were unable to visit the Cloud Forest on this trip, but two of our group were able to make house calls to a couple of the more remote patients living close by.

We were blessed with good weather during our trip and this helped in the distribution of the food packets. Peggy and Delmer took food with them as they conducted house calls on disabled and critically ill patients across the river.

Many of the rural homes around Belaire are accessible only by steep footpaths. Sometimes keeping up with the locals is a little challenging for Gringos and flatlanders.



In the clinic our nurses and doctor not only treated a wide range of ailments but they oversaw the pharmacy and dispensed medications. Considering the sheer volume of traffic through the clinic, this is no small task.



As we did last year, we setup the eye clinic on Evelyn's back porch. Carlos conducted the primary eye exams and tested each person coming to the clinic for their far vision acuity. Mary did the near vision exams, measured near vision acuity, and fitted readers. Gregg used the Retinomax 3 to determine the prescriptions needed to correct far vision and guf used the computer to match these prescriptions with the "best fit" glasses that we had in our inventory.

In total we carry 4840 pairs of cleaned, used eye glasses with us. These glasses are all stored in specially designed trays and matched by prescription and id number within a specially designed computer program. We are indebted to Holland Kendall of Kendall Optometry Ministry, Inc (<http://kendall-optometry-ministry.com/kendall-optometry/>) for his equipment and software support.



Kids, kids and more kids. Whenever we setup our eye clinic, we become something of an attraction for the kids in the community. After all, with equipment that looks like a radar gun to "shoot" eyes, computers and DVD screens, we are the best show in town. And of course, there are always the sunglasses. What could be cooler than sporting a new pair of shades.

By the time the average rural Honduran is forty years old, his/her eyesight has become limited due to cataracts and pterygia. If we can only get these kids into the habit of protecting their eyes from the sun, we wouldn't have the need for so many referrals for surgery.



For four of our clinic days we were joined by girls from Shalom, the girls' dorm at the Cruzadas compound. The first two days Maribel, Fannie and Magdalena came and observed and helped out. The second two days Yormani and Jenny joined us and assisted in the medical clinic and pharmacy.

Jenny is studying to become an English teacher and was a wonderful interpreter, but all of the girls understood enough English to be of great assistance. Since the girls had to be transported to and from the dorm in La Ceiba each day, it made for some long, long days for both the girls and for Gregg who chauffeured them.



The eye glass clinic utilized several of Evelyn's "girls" to help with registration and crowd control. These young ladies participate in the clinic's scholarship program and volunteer at the clinic whenever medical brigades are not at the clinic.

Mariela, Cindy, Heidi, Cami, Vera and Janire were extremely pleasant and worked very hard. At times it got more than a little difficult for the girls when tempers flared amongst patients who had waited many hours to be seen.



Our days were spent working hard. But we also had time to relax and have some fun. One evening we spent in the Castellars' living room being serenaded by Jose and Sherlock. Jose is Evelyn's husband and can even remember the song that he wrote for Evelyn so many years ago when he first met her in Columbia.

Sherlock is the young man in the green shirt. He lives in La Ceiba and heard about our eye clinic and came to have his eyes checked. He stayed the rest of the day to help translate in the eye clinic and then joined us for our sing-along.



One evening, Evelyn arranged for us to join many of the local young people for a dance demonstration and Honduran sock hop. It was fun watching some of our group strut their stuff to the salsa beat.



The highlight of any trip to Belaire is a visit to the Casa Cielo (<http://casaderoc.org/www.casaderoc.org/Home.html>). Casa Cielo houses 24 foster children all 6 years old or younger. It is truly amazing to witness so much energy, love and discipline. The home is run by Papa (Leonard) and Mama (Marie) Jones. Mama and Papa are ably assisted by their daughter Joy and their daughter and son-in-law, Jeanette and Del Sambucetti.



After we visited the current location for Casa Cielo, Del took us to the site of their new home. At this point it is simply an enclosed plot of land but within two years it will be a modern orphanage that will offer hope and sanctuary for 40-45 children. While we were at the site I asked Del to tell the others about little Jose's vision and prayers for a reliable bus for the home. If you ever visit Casa Cielo, be sure to ask about it.



While part of the team went to Casa Cielo, part elected to visit Evelyn and Jose's beach house at Balfate. They spent much of the day exploring the stream that runs through the Castellars' property where local miners pan for gold. Carlos had brought his metal detector from Alabama and he and Jose scanned the creek bottom for heavy ore.



Before lunch on our last day in Belaire the team went by the Hospital Loma de Luz (<http://www.crstone.org/>) where we met with old friends and left medical supplies. Loma de Luz is unique within Honduras as it is one of the very few fully licensed private hospitals. It is a wonderful place of healing. More importantly, it is a tremendous testament to Christ's love.

We then visited the hospital's children's home. This is a semi-autonomous facility where critically ill children can stay while receiving care at the hospital. In addition to the central facility, there are several small bungalows where family can come and stay while visiting the children. We got to meet the two little girls from the Cloud Forest that Evelyn had brought to the center for treatment.



Before making the five and a half hours journey back to San Pedro Sula, we dropped by Dr. Marion Dodson's agriculture research center called the Fundacion Agricola Vid (www.funavid.com). We had met Dr. "Buddy" and his wife Dee and toured his complex on our trip in 2010. The focal point of the center is a large metal hanger that houses several apartments, men and women's dormitories and classroom space for two hundred people. It is always a pleasure to stop by, especially around lunch time. Dee makes a fantastic coconut cake.