

AGC Board Report

Recently the Board approved the job description and search for a husband and wife team to serve in Honduras as consultants for AGC and as a liaison with the Hogar Nazareth Board and staff. The following is part of the search announcement that is being circulated by our search consultant:

Within the country of Honduras thousands of children become orphaned or abandoned each year. AGC champions the cause of these children and is committed to providing a better life for them. AGC partners with indigenous holistic ministries in Honduras to offer these children hope for their future.

AGC has begun the search for a husband and wife team to serve as liaisons between itself and its Honduran partners. As International Ministry Consultants this couple will function in a variety of roles, including ambassador, bridge builder, servant leader, counselor and advisor.

The ideal candidates for this position will be dedicated Christ-followers who love children! They will have cross-cultural ministry experience, be proficient in Spanish, and demonstrate the ability to adapt to Honduran culture. The couple will share competencies in both written and verbal communication, in organizational management, and in leadership with non-profit boards.

Interested candidates should contact Chapter Next at info@chapter-next.com (708 768 6575)

All God's Children

PO Box 5909

Villa Park, IL 60181

(630) 862-1728

e-mail: agcltd@comcast.net

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For sponsorship opportunities, the history of Hogar de Niños and more information about AGC visit our Web site: www.agcltd.org

AJS

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AGC endorses and applauds the efforts of AJS. AJS works to address the root causes of the social problems in Honduras which have contributed to the plight of children such as those we support in our ministries. We are grateful for the tangible results that will improve the lives of our staff and ninos in Honduras. For more information check out the AJS website info@ajs-us.org.



Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez and AJS Honduras President Carlos Hernandez sign the Transparency Agreement in Tegucigalpa on February 2, 2015. Carlos Hernandez is also the Chair of Transparency International Chapter in Honduras.

AGC Board of Directors

Allen Heerema, President & Executive Director

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News of the Niños

Spring 2015

Comayagua, Honduras

Dear sponsors, friends, benefactors, and AGC Board,

The Hogar Nazareth sends a respectful greeting, wishing that God is blessing you all abundantly.

At the Girls' Home: Girls are very healthy. Very soon they will take their Holy Week vacation. They are studying hard because next week they are taking their bimonthly exams, so they are receiving support with their tasks in order to further enhance their learning process. We would also like to inform you that the girls we had from the first entry or re-entry to the Eben-Ezer School were transferred to the Escuela Inmaculada, since they are teaching lessons to 7th graders in the afternoon. The older girls have been attending computer workshops and motivational talks as an additional part of their intellectual training.

In the spiritual area: The youths who belong to the church's Youth Group have taken weekend spiritual retreats in Casa Guadalupe, and they were very happy to receive this spiritual education. All of us at the Home have been praying the Stations of the Cross and preparing ourselves for the Holy Week celebrations, and to take part in the activities scheduled within the church. We have had some behavioral issues with certain girls, but we talked to them and gave them advice, hoping that they will take it into account and decide to change their attitude.

We have two new entries: Génesis Patricia García Acosta : 7 years old and Geydi Areli Vásquez Mejía: 5 years old

The children at the **Escuela Abuelo Jerry** (Grandpa Jerry's School) are very happy because their classroom is being conditioned. So far it looks great, and so we are infinitely grateful to you for all the support you give to us. The boys and girls with special needs will have a nice place to get their lessons.

The **University Boys and Girls** will soon take their Holy Week vacation, and they are studying hard to pass their subjects. Recently, Juan María Mejía, Perla S. Rivas, Nora Huete and Elvia Marina Reyes took their admission test to University, so we hope that they will pass their tests.

At the Boy's Home. They are also helping with some projects, such as: **Carpentry:** there is a group of 6 boys who are helping to carve jewelry boxes. **The Swine House Project:** the youths with special needs are in charge of feeding the pigs. **The Irrigation System Project:** it is where most youths are involved, but we are now waiting to finish the assembly of the project; we are working on the ditch so we can insert the piping and thus carry the water to where it is needed.

The **Hogar Buen Pastor** would like to thank all the AGC sponsors and benefactors for the completed project, consisting in the construction of two side walls and a small kitchenette with a stove in the yard. The girls are doing very well, taking care of their children and studying for the upcoming bimonthly exams. Maribel Gonzalez Allas has exhibited behavior problems. She has been treated at home, and she is also scheduled for an appointment with a psychologist over the next week.

At the Hogar Misericordia we recently had a very special day, as we celebrated the birthday of María Ángela, Mayra Adelina and Belkis Yojari. The celebration was really nice, as was seeing the girls share their cake with all the girls; this family gathering was very emotional. They attend Escuela Jerry. They are highly punctual in their activities and they really enjoy going to school. Although Mayra Adelina, Yolanda, Roxana, María Ángela and Magdalena could not attend school two weeks ago due to health issues, they are now recovering thanks to the medicines and the care they received from their tias. Belkis continues her treatment, and she is gradually getting better.

We want to thank you very much for your support, God bless each and every one of you, all of you who are part of AGC, who never leave us unattended and are always there for each of the beneficiaries.

God bless you! Carmen and the Children

"Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me." Mark 9:37

SPEAK UP FOR THOSE WHO CANNOT SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES, FOR THE RIGHTS OF ALL WHO ARE DESTITUTE. SPEAK UP AND JUDGE FAIRLY; DEFEND THE RIGHTS OF THE POOR AND NEEDY.

Proverbs 31: 8-9

Buried in the travel section of the January 25, 2015 Chicago Tribune was a small blurb concerning crime levels in Honduras. We've seen these before. Many of us have become resigned to the endless cascade of discouraging news of escalating crime and violence in Tegucigalpa, San Pedro, and even those random incidents involving Hogar staff. One would expect this to be more of the same.

But not this time! This article recited a US State Department report announcing dramatic reductions in crime, attributable to drastic government measures to curb drug trafficking and other criminal activity. Only a small and insignificant news item to most people, but to our ministry partners and friends in Honduras who live in the pervasive criminal environment this reduction is surely an unexpected and huge blessing.

These results are likely due in large part to the work of an organization known as the *Association for a More Just Society (AJS)* which has worked for social change in Honduras for 17 years. *AJS Honduras* now focuses primarily on transforming two dire aspects of Honduran society: violence and corruption. In the area of violence AJS provides investigators, legal assistance and programs of psychological aid for victims of crime. Frequently the failure of Honduran officials to confront crime is attributable to the fear of police, prosecutors and judges of becoming victims of retaliation. AJS has filled these gaps by employing trained investigators to work in tandem with the police, by assisting prosecutors in finding witnesses and preparing cases for trial, and by then providing protection for these witnesses.

In its efforts to fight corruption AJS has achieved tremendous success in education reform. The cost of ghost pay rollers in school education once accounted for 26% of the national education budget, but has now been reduced to 1%. The number of actual school days for students has increased from 120 per year to 218. The corrupt practices by which the poorest citizens in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro were stripped of their land titles by large

and wealthy landowners has also been addressed. AJS has provided legal assistance to 60,000 families in getting clear titles to their small plots. AJS has also been active and successful in the Labor Rights Project, protecting workers rights and wages from abusive employment practices in Honduras since 1998.

AJS started as a neighborhood watch group in Nueva Suyapa, one of the most violent neighborhoods of Tegucigalpa, seeking to solve a pattern of armed robberies and murders occurring there. The early organizers hired a retired police officer and ex prosecutor to convince fearful witnesses to come forward and tell their stories. Several convictions followed. The organization has since grown to now employ a staff of 90 Hondurans and 4 North Americans.

AJS-Honduras is supported by its U.S. counterpart AJS-US a sister organization that provides funding, support and awareness in much the same manner as AGC supports the work of Hogar de Niños, CasAyuda and Hogar Amor. All are Christian organizations. Several weeks ago 150 or so guests (many of them AGC supporters) learned of the work on AJS in Honduras from Kurt VerBeek at an AJS fund raising event in Elmhurst, Illinois. Kurt is a Calvin College professor who has lived in Tegucigalpa since 1998 where he and his wife JoAnn run Calvin's Third World Development semester in Honduras. Both are among the founding members of AJS, and were intimately involved in addressing the series of murders in Nueva Suyapa. The theme of the evening centered on the words of Proverbs 31:8-9.

Most recently AJS was instrumental in bringing together the Honduran government with Transparency International to formally execute a Transparency Agreement to combat public corruption. AJS is named in the Agreement as the official watchdog and enforcement mechanism.

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I returned from the annual Father/Child serve trip recently and it presented me with an opportunity to reflect on my visits to Honduras and the Hogar. The first time I visited Honduras was ten years ago. I was eleven years old, and I had just finished the fifth grade. My parents had explained to me that I had an adopted sister living in an orphanage there, but that she could not come home with us, so we were going to see her instead. I loved my first visit to the Hogar. The joy and love of the kids was beautiful to see, and it changed my perspective when I came home. However, it was the first time I had ever truly been exposed to poverty and I remember feeling a range of emotions, from sadness to anger to confusion. I did not understand why it seemed like I had so much more than I needed when many people in Honduras were struggling to survive, but I knew for sure that it wasn't right and it wasn't fair.

Now I am a junior at Rice University studying Hispanic and Latin American Studies. My understanding of the conditions in Honduras has increased greatly. I have spent the past three years taking classes about the issues facing Latin America, including cycles of poverty and violence, systematic corruption, and generally accepted racism and sexism, among many others. However, the more I study Latin America, and Honduras specifically, the more I think that eleven year old me was right about the condition of Honduras: it isn't right and it isn't fair. This is what injustice looks like.

What God thinks about injustice is evident in the Bible. Jeremiah 22:3 says "This is what the Lord says: Do what is just and right." Micah 6:8 says "He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." Finally, Zechariah 7:9 says "This is what the Lord Almighty said: Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another." Clearly, God demands justice from his people. But at the same time, part of me wonders that if God cares so much about justice, why has he allowed so much suffering? Is God still working in Honduras?

During my most recent visit to Honduras, I felt God answering me with a resounding yes. He opened my eyes to how active he has been, even when I'm not looking. Our family sponsors a girl at the Hogar named Jessica. She is thirteen and I have often worried about her during past visits because she is incredibly shy. I

would rarely see her playing with the other children, and she often hid in the background. I learned that she had a very tragic childhood before coming to the Hogar, and I wondered if she could ever recover from that. However, this visit I could see that she had changed since the last time I had seen her. She is still quiet and reserved, but I saw her playing with her friends for the first time. When someone is handing out candy, she waits patiently for her turn, even when other kids are pushing to the front of the line. She is content to just sit with me and hold my hand. There is no doubt that God has been working in her life to bring her out of a terrible situation to a safe place where she can heal and grow. And through her, God has reminded me that he has not forgotten his children in Honduras and his love continues to shine even in what appear to be the most hopeless circumstances.

I intend to return to Honduras many more times in the future and I'm no longer worried about God's plan for Jessica. It may not be obvious to me, but it is to Him. God will care for Jessica, just as He will care for me and all of His children.

