

Belize: Mayans, Pirates and Prayer

What do Mayans, pirates and prayer have in common? Why, Belize of course!

Its History

The Mayan Word for "Muddied Waters" is possibly the origin for the name Belize. Mayan ruins and gravesites dot the countryside witnessing to a culture that reigned in the area from AD 250 to 900. Although, it was seen from the sea, what is now Belize was not settled by Europeans until 1638. A Spanish sailor abandoned by his crew who later adopted the Mayan life helped his new brothers fend off Spanish incursions into Belize.

After the British captured Jamaica, British sailors and privateers settled there. Queen Elizabeth I had licensed ships and their crews to attack the Spanish and relieve them of their booty. These were some of the buccaneers and pirates of the Caribbean. After the treaty of Paris in 1763, Spain relinquished any claim to the area and it became the British Honduras.

Thus, the flavor of this nation was more that of the West Indies than Central American. British Honduras was a crown colony until 1954 and was renamed Belize in 1973. It gained its independence in 1981.

Fact File

Size: 23,000 km (approximately the size of New Hampshire)

Location: East of Guatemala, South of Mexico and North of the Honduran Coastline

Population: 300,000

Cultural Groups: A melting pot of the Mestizos (mixture of Mexican and Mayans), Creoles, Maya, Garifuna (descendants of Afro-Amerindian), Mennonites, East Indian, Chinese and North Americans (U.S.A. and Canadian retirees/investors).

Ecological features: Low lying swampy land, 200 cayes (islands), barrier reef (second only to the Great Barrier Reef), 250 varieties of orchids, exotic birds, Jaguars, Crocodiles and clean water. Land reserves make up 45% of the land area.

Economy: Average Salary (\$2700 U.S. per year), Belizean Dollar Value (\$0.50 U.S.), based on Agriculture, Tourism, Fishing and Forestry, and, Light Manufacturing

Cities: Belize City (largest city -75,000/coastal), Capital: Belmopan (11,000/inland hurricane refuge.)

The Churches

As in most Latin American countries, the Catholic church is predominant in Belize (56%) but here, the Protestant Church is larger (22%) than in most Central American Countries. Anglicans make up about 4.36% of the population. Belize is in the Province of the West Indies.

This year, Bp Phillip Wright was consecrated and Heather Leslie, a short term mission partner with SAMS Canada toured several schools and communities with him. She also met two Canadian Anglican priests at work in Belize.

The Anglican Church in Belize is faced with several challenges.

1. There are presently about 5 churches in need of priests.
2. These are new Christians in need of support so they do not fall away and about 9% of Christians are presently not affiliated with a church.
3. There are the children. This is the 4-14 (yr) window of the future church. Most schools are run by the churches and primary and secondary education is free.
4. There are the societal challenges of poverty, health needs and crime.

Although the Belizean Government is stable and modeled on the British Parliamentary system there are concerns about gang activity, the drug trade and corruption. Yet, it is encouraging to see the Belizean National Prayer on the Government Website (www.belize.gov.bz/ab_prayer.html)

Almighty and Eternal God, who through Jesus Christ has revealed your glory to all nations, please protect and preserve Belize, our beloved country.

God of might wisdom and justice, please assist our Belizean government and people with your Holy Spirit of counsel and fortitude.

Let the light of your divine wisdom direct their plans and endeavours so that with your help we may attain our just objectives.

With your guidance, may all our endeavours tend to peace, social justice, liberty, national happiness, the increase of industry, sobriety and useful knowledge.

We pray, O God of Mercy, for all of us that we may be blessed in the knowledge and sanctified in the observance of your most holy law, that we may be preserved in union and in that peace which the world itself cannot give. And, after enjoying the blessings of this life, please admit us, dear Lord, to that eternal reward that you have prepared for those who love you. Amen.

This prayer brings to mind the dream of Solomon in Gibeon (1 Kings 3). God said to Solomon, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." and Solomon answered, "...So give your servant wisdom to govern your people..." There is hope where there is prayer. May we remain prayerful along with the people of Belize and may we see God act to bring these prayers to fruition in and through His servants.

Sources:

Government of Belize Website (2006), Operation World Website (2003), Heather Leslie's Website (www.heatherinbelize.pizco.com) and Understanding Belize: A Historical Guide, Alan Twigg, Harbour Publishing, 2006.

***This article was submitted by SAMS Canada Board member,
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