

Belize . . . its Opportunities and Challenges

In March 2007, SAMS Canada and the CLB of Newfoundland participated in an exploratory trip to Belize to explore the possibility of developing a partnership with this diocese and its people. The following is a synopsis of the observations that David Pilling had recorded at that time.

What became immediately apparent to us was the pride Belizeans have in their country and in their culture. As a former British Colony, (it gained its independence in 1981), Belize still retains much of the British heritage and in many ways is culturally akin to ourselves. Although the official language is English, Creole and Spanish are also spoken in various parts.

Bishop Wright showed us a number of areas that desperately need the attention that only the church can adequately give. Work with youth is a high priority. All the schools in Belize are denominational, and as such the Anglican Church operates over 30 schools. While the government pays the salaries of the teachers, it is up to the church and each school to find funding to construct and maintain each school building. These schools present many opportunities for ministry within Belize, for through them, the church is truly part of the fabric of the country.

Both in the city and throughout rural Belize we had many glimpses of the poverty which exists for many parts of the country. Yet always we experienced extremely warm hospitality, and felt totally at home.

We saw churches where work was badly needed, schools where assistance was desired. We visited one parish where the community was attempting to create a safe space for its children to both learn and play. We saw houses

and a school built in a saltwater marsh, all on stilts and many in terrible condition. We met the staff of one school and its 165 children, and were overwhelmed by their energy (and the heat) and marveled again at the wisdom and dedication that we experienced repeatedly in all the people we met throughout our travels.

The Diocesan website outlines the reality and the challenges in a message from Bishop Wright. "In a country which is struggling with poverty (according to statistics, about 33% of the population, some 88,400 persons, live below the poverty line), health issues, the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, the increase in crime, and many other such issues, the church in Belize is challenged to achieve its spiritual objectives which is its primary mission, within an environment of enormous social ills.

"Our church's spiritual message is of God's love for all of us, but there are many needs which we have to address along with this spiritual message. Our spiritual message to the Belizean society is that all of us, rich and poor, Creole, Mestizo, Garifuna, Maya, adult and child, Christian and non-Christian, Anglican and non-Anglican are children of God and deserving of spiritual, physical and mental nourishment. And all have to be assisted where there is a genuine need."

Please keep this Diocese in your prayers, as we seek how best to respond to the needs we heard and saw. Pray that God may guide some people to consider a long-term ministry amongst the Belizeans - a ministry that is very much needed. Pray that God will inspire teams to go into various parts of Belize, at the Bishop's guidance, to work amongst the people of this proud and faithful country.

