

SAMS Canada & Diocese of Belize Explore Partnership Opportunities

In late March 2007, SAMS Canada and the Church Lads' Brigade (CLB) of Newfoundland undertook an exploratory trip to Belize, to consider the potential of developing a partnership with this diocese and its people.



CLB Colonel Albert Pelley strikes a warm bond with Belizean schoolchildren. There is much opportunity for service and partnership with this welcoming diocese where English is the primary language.

The CLB is the largest Anglican youth organization in North America, having an active membership of approximately 950 youth from the ages of 6 to 19. Extremely active in the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador, the CLB were seeking to enter into some mission work and were looking for a mission partner.

CLB members, Col. Keith Arns and Col. Albert Pelley, along with the Rev'd David Pilling, vice-chair of SAMS and also Chaplain to the CLB, ventured forth from Newfoundland to meet and explore a possible relationship with the Bishop, the Diocese and the people of Belize.

The following article, submitted by David Pilling, highlights just some of many observations that David, Keith and Albert brought back with them.

“On arrival in Belize City, what became immediately apparent is the pride Belizeans have in their country and their culture. Belize still retains much of its British heritage and in many ways is like any of our Provinces or Territories. Although the official language is English, Creole and Spanish are also spoken in various parts.

“After a brief tour of Belize City, we entered into a long conversation with the Bishop, Philip Wright. He is a very engaging gentleman with an extremely keen vision for his Diocese and a strong desire to explore SAMS’ relationship with them. We also reviewed mission possibilities involving the youth of the CLB - exploring short term possibilities for a large Canadian group visiting Belize, the possibility of youth exchange visits, sabbatical opportunities for clergy, as well as the possibility of two-way exchanges. Very exciting!

“The Bishop, a native Belizean, took us on a tour of Belize City, showing us areas that desperately need the attention that only the church can adequately give. Work with youth is definitely a high priority. Of note, all schools in Belize are denominational. As such, the Anglican Church has over 30 schools, and while the Government pays the salaries of the teachers, it is up to the church and each school to fund construction and maintenance of each school building. Through these schools, there exists many opportunities for ministry within Belize, both in urban and rural areas, for the church is truly part of the fabric of the country.

“On Saturday morning, the Bishop took us to parts of rural Belize. We saw a church at Ladyville where work and help was needed, schools where assistance was desired, and a new church where the community is attempting to create a safe space for its children to learn and play. During this tour, we had substantive conversations with Bishop Wright on the needs of his Diocese. We also experienced extremely warm hospitality, dropping in on a family, cutting down some coconuts and drinking the juice and eating the jelly - what an incredible experience and treat! Throughout these travels, we had many glimpses of the poverty, which exist for many parts of the country.

“On the Sunday, we worshipped at All Saints Church in Belize City, and felt totally at home in the worship life. Our faith and our common love of our Lord bound us together in a way that was truly uplifting. After service, we journeyed by boat to the Island of San Pedro. Upon our arrival, we met with a mission partner, Francis Wilson, a group from Yellowknife, including Heather Leslie and Bishop Chris Williams, and toured a school complex that is presently being constructed.

“We had seen poverty throughout many parts of our travels, but nothing had prepared us for what we saw here. There were houses built in a saltwater marsh, along with the school, all on stilts and many in terrible condition. It was many of the residents of this part of the island that the new Anglican School was providing a much-needed ministry to. “On Monday morning we met the staff of the school and the 165 children. We were overwhelmed by their energy (and the heat) and marveled at the wisdom and dedication of the staff, and of all the people we met throughout our travels.

“The Belizeans we met were all friendly and many were aware of the ministry that has been undertaken on the north part of the island at the new Anglican School. Through all who ministered in the Diocese of Belize we saw a strong faith coupled with a strong desire to develop partnerships with Canadians and with SAMS Canada.

“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 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. And please pray for the CLB, that God may direct them in their mission outreach.”



Writer David Pilling comments on the houses and school, all built on stilts in a saltwater marsh. For a better look at what David saw, we have posted a slide show for you to check out on the SAMS Canada website at www.samscanada.ca. Please contact us if you have questions.