

ON A MISSION FROM GOD

Photographs from the 2005 and 2006 Mary Queen of Peace Parish Mission Trips to Honduras

Howard S. Muscott, Ed.D.*
Professor of Education, Rivier College

The photographs in this journal were taken on two consecutive Mary Queen of Peace Parish mission trips to Juticalpa, Honduras in 2005 and 2006. Honduras is the 2nd poorest country in Central America and one of the poorest in the Western hemisphere. Two-thirds of Hondurans live in poverty and almost half live on under \$2 a day. The unemployment rate is 27.5%. Conditions are worse in the rural communities surrounding Juticalpa where 80% of the homes have no running water or electricity and only 40% of the people have access to any health care. These dreadful conditions are further exacerbated by the fact the Honduran education system is in shambles. As many as 65,000 children fail to receive schooling each year and the ones who do are only slightly better off. Mandatory public education is only available to age 13 and most classrooms have no books or educational resources beyond composition notebooks and pencils. Most teachers are untrained and unsupported. These conditions contribute to a dreadful adult literacy rate of only 20%.

Despite these appalling conditions, the people of Honduras have eternal faith in God and a powerful sense of family and community. Fifteen years ago, that faith brought Massachusetts native and God's servant, Padre Ricardo Donahue to Juticalpa. In a short period of time, Padre has created an educational *Oasis of Hope* in and around the communities surrounding Juticalpa. Padre's *Oasis of Hope* includes Escuelita Nazareth, the only special education school in the entire country. The Nazareth, which celebrates its 10th Anniversary this year, serves students with learning disabilities, autism, Down syndrome and those who are deaf. Padre's *Oasis of Hope* also extends to four other schools – a primary bi-lingual school called *Centro Escuela Santa Clara*, a middle school, a high school named *Instituto de Cardinal Rodriguez*, and the *Universidad de Catolica* – where children, adolescents, and young adults get a high quality education unavailable to the typical Honduran family.

The 2006 Honduran Mission Team was lead by Mary Roy, pastoral minister for the Mary Queen of Peace Parish in Salem, New Hampshire. Over the years, Mary has led 14 spiritual missions to bring medical and educational teams to Honduras. These trips continue to be aimed at helping the Hondurans with their challenges of extreme poverty and powerless. Our team of 25 professors, teachers, nurses, therapists, students and an artist, social worker, Vista worker and postal worker included people of many faiths and walks of life. We traveled in faith to Honduras to work with Padre in his schools and churches. We brought our talents and our fears, our love and our prejudices. We left, changed forever, by a beautiful, grateful people who gave us friendship and God's love in return. I hope these photographs do justice to the dignity of the Honduran people and our experiences walking by their side on these missions. I offer my heartfelt thanks and gratitude to the people of Honduras whom I met on these trips as well as to my fellow Americans who joined me in solidarity and made this experience possible. My participation would not have been possible without the loving support of my wife Amy Jo and son Nathan.



The Final Day for Mission Team 2 in 2006. Photograph by Howard S. Muscott.

Each year just prior to departing Juticalpa for the airport in Tegucigalpa, the Mary Queen of Peace Team always poses for a picture with Padre Ricardo. Mission Team 2 is seen here prior to departure on March 13, 2006.

Note: The Mary Queen of Peace Church in Salem, New Hampshire has sponsored 14 spiritual missions to bring medical and educational teams to Honduras. These trips continue to be aimed at helping the Hondurans with their challenges of extreme poverty and powerless. These mission trips are not sponsored, endorsed, supported, or affiliated in any way with Rivier College.

* **Dr. HOWARD S. MUSCOTT** is Professor of Education and director of undergraduate special education programs and graduate programs in emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) in the department of education at Rivier College. Dr. Muscott currently co-directs the New Hampshire Center for Effective Behavioral Interventions and Supports, a statewide technical assistance and training network aimed at promoting positive and preventive school discipline systems and improving the emotional well-being of all children including those with emotional/behavioral disorders. Muscott received his doctorate in educating students with EBD from Teachers College, Columbia University and joined the Rivier faculty in 1992. He has more than 30 years of experience in education ranging from preschool through high school and higher education. He has been a special education teacher and principal of three different schools for students with disabilities. He has been nominated for two national awards, United States Professor of the Year and the Thomas Ehrlich Faculty Award for Service-Learning, and was honored with an Excellence in Education Award by the New Hampshire College and University Council as the New Hampshire Professor of the Year in 2000. Muscott was named Distinguished Alumnae from the State University College at Buffalo, New York in 2003 for his lifelong commitment to special education. In 2004, the New Hampshire Chapter of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI-NH) honored him with their Outstanding Special Educator of the Year Award. Dr. Muscott is nationally known for his work and publications in the fields of educating students with emotional/behavioral disorders, schoolwide discipline, and service-learning. A frequent keynote speaker and consultant to schools, he has delivered more than 250 presentations to educators and families in both New Hampshire and across the country.