

El Salvador Trip Journal – David Haley

Friday July 28, 2006

We arrived in El Salvador only about 8 hours behind schedule. Got to our lodging about midnight. What a long day. Spent the first night in a little hotel in Ahuachapan, a town in western El Salvador.

Saturday July 29, 2006

Up early and traveled by bus to Juayua, a beautiful town, to shop in the markets. It was cool, about 80 degrees due to altitude. We had a nice lunch and returned to Ahuachapan to rest. Late afternoon, we went to a special youth service at Iglesia Metodista Nueva Jerusalem (New Jerusalem Methodist Church). It was very enthusiastic with about 75 youth complete with praise band. Turns out one of the young men in my group is a Christian rapper, and he's from Guatemala. So he did a Christian rap song which the young people really enjoyed. Afterwards we went to a nice pupuseria to eat dinner, pupusas (stuffed tortillas). We were joined by two families I've been ministering to. I helped them start a little grocery store. They told me they are earning about \$10 per day. This is a vast improvement over the \$60 per month they previously had to feed and care for 11 children. We sang happy birthday to the children who had birthdays recently.

Sunday July 30 2006

Up early and toured some ministry sites. Delievered 6 containers of various medicines and medical supplies to the Methodist medical clinic. Visited the facilities of the Methodist High School. Visited the new church building for the New Jerusalem Methodst Church. It will seat about 350 persons and is almost complete. Had lunch at a nice restaurant by a huge lake. In the afternoon went to the church service at Iglesia Metodista Roca Eterna (Eternal Rock methodist Church). They have a large youth group, nearly 100 persons). Afterwards we loaded up the bus, along with 30 Salvadoran Methodist young persons and headed off to where we will stay for the work project. Arrived at FUSAI, a conference center run by the govt. It is a nice place. Tomorrow we start on our Habitat for Humanity project.

Monday July 31 2006

We were up early and left by bus for the worksites about 7:45 AM. It is a 35 minute bus ride to the town where the worksites are located, San Julian. The buses are old US school buses, very noisy and bumpy. But we visit, make new friends, and share fellowship and laughter during the bus rides. We arrived at San Julian and disembarked at a small restaurant called Pollo Indio, sort of a KFC. This is where we will have breakfast every morning. It is right on the town square. After breakfast (beans, eggs, bread, and fried plantains) we moved in front of the city hall for the opening ceremony. We have a musical praise group from a local Roman Catholic Church. They are pretty good. I am invited to sit at the head table along with the National Director of Habitat for Humanity El Salvador, the Board President, the mayor

of the town, and Juan de Dios Peña, the Volunteers in Mission Coordinator for the Methodist Church of El Salvador. During the opening ceremony, I have been asked to give the devotional reflection. The scripture I have been assigned is from Matthew 5, salt and light. I talk about the qualities of salt and light and how we are to live out some of those qualities this week. We can't solve all the problems of poverty in El Salvador this week. But we can bring light and hope to the people with whom we are building these houses. I concluded by sharing about a 17 year old young man who came from a poor family. I told how he was prejudiced and selfish, and how he had little compassion for people in need. He ran with the wrong crowd and used drugs. Then some folks were salt and light for him. He repented and his life was transformed. Now he has dedicated his life to serving God and helping those in need. I concluded by saying, "That young man stands before you now. That young man is me." I then encouraged all the volunteers to be salt and light to others this week.

After the conclusion of the ceremony, we were assigned to our houses and were led there by the families. The house I'm working on is for a woman and her mother and another older relative. The young woman will make the payments. Presently they are living in a shack made of pieces of corrugated metal tide together. The kitchen is outside under a shed. The bathroom is a pit toilet in front of the house! I will be working with 5 other NC volunteers, 4 Salvadoran Methodists volunteers, 2 masons and 2 helpers. The house is already started. The new house will be concrete block, steel rebar reinforced for earthquakes, with a toilet attached on the back.

The first day I had to do an interview in the morning and attend a leader meeting in the afternoon. This interfered with my work But I helped in a variety of ways including filling the blocks with concrete called "chispa", handing blocks to the mason, dumping wheelbarrow loads of dirt, and carrying blocks. We walked back to the Pollo Indio for lunch. In the afternoon at 4 PM, we walked back to the town square to get our bus ride back to the conference center. Everyone was hot and dirty and very happy to be here. The cold shower felt very good when we returned. After a good dinner, we played games with the Salvadoran young people. Language is no barrier! I, of course, had another leader's meeting also in the evening. After such a busy day the bed felt good when we turned in around 11:00 PM.

Tuesday August 1 2006

We were up early as the bus left for the worksite at 7 AM. I sent four persons today to work in the Methodist medical clinic in Ahuachapan: two nurses, a pre dental student from UNC (fluent in Spanish), and the Baptist pastor from Littleton. The rest of us rode the 35 minutes to San Julian and had our breakfast in the Pollo Indio restaurant. Breakfast today was beans and rice and fried plantains and coffee. As soon as we arrived, I was told that I was needed for an interview, also a lay person from my church. So we caught a ride after breakfast to the house site where the interviews were being filmed. "Casa A" is at the end of a long road that goes nearly straight up for about 1/4 mile. The house itself is even farther up a hillside. These poor volunteers have to hand carry all the building materials up the hillside. The folks who will live in this house will have a wonderful scenic view. On one side rock cliffs towering into the

sky. On the other side, off in the distance the volcano, Izalco, the most perfect volcanic cone in the world. What a beautiful place. The interviews are being filmed by the Duke Endowment to promote a project involving sending seminary interns down here for 10 weeks to learn Spanish and Central American culture, and to work with Methodist churches in El Salvador. We have the first 3 Duke Divinity School interns this summer, and they are working with us on the project this week as their last hurrah before returning to North Carolina. After my interview (because I helped set up the Duke program and because I have led my church to be involved in these mission efforts) the lay person from my church was interviewed. So I went over and helped the poor volunteers on this house haul buckets of sand up the hill. Talk about grueling work!

When our interviews were done, we couldn't find a ride back to town. So we decided to walk. We made it back to the restaurant, then started off to our work sites. I circled several blocks and couldn't find where I was working. Finally I went back to the restaurant and waited for them to come to lunch. How embarrassing!

After lunch I made arrangements for a couple of volunteers with upset stomachs to return to the conference center where we are lodged. It could be the heat or traveler's diarrhea. They don't have fever but we will watch them to make certain they are OK. Then I went to my work site and worked on the house all afternoon.

At the end of the workday, we returned to the conference center. That cold shower felt great! After dinner, I called a team meeting. In the meeting I asked my folks to share any problems or concerns. Then I asked the first-timers how the experience is comparing with their expectations. The consensus is that everyone is having a great time, far beyond their expectation. Then I asked where they are seeing God in this experience. Several persons shared from the heart how God is touching their lives this week. At the end of the meeting we formed a circular embrace and prayed together. Following the meeting we played more games with the Salvadoran young people volunteers. I'm so proud of my folks for making a special effort to include the Salvadorans. God is good and has blessed me with a great team.

Wednesday August 2 2006

Up early again with the bus leaving at 7:00 AM. The ride to San Julian is so beautiful. The volcanos off in the distance are majestic, fog rolling off a large lake, and many interesting sights along the way. We arrived at the Pollo Indio restaurant for our usual breakfast including plantains and beans. The group from Apex United Methodist Church in Apex, NC, led the devotional. During the devotional, I felt a tap on my shoulder. Imagine my surprise to turn around and see Estefany, my 10 yr old friend from Coatepeque where I worked last year. I mentioned in the Saturday journal about having the

two families join us for dinner. Anyway, she and her mother and 12 yr old sister, Elizabeth, had left early in the morning by bus to come and work with me for the day. I was so glad to see them. After the devotional we walked to the house I am working on (I know how to find it now). I was absolutely

amazed at how hard those two little girls were working. They sifted sand, filled in blocks with concrete, helped mix concrete, and generally did anything they were asked to do. Communication is challenging because they speak no English. But they tell me my Spanish is getting better. I think that maybe they are just being kind, but they seem to understand me. The mother showed me at one point that Elizabeth has a cavity on one of her teeth beside the front teeth. Later I asked our pre-dental student from UNC to take a look. He did and advised her about the care of her teeth and also that the cavity needs to be filled to save the tooth. I asked the mother how much that would cost. She replied that it would cost about \$50. I told her that Elizabeth has a wonderful smile and is too pretty to lose a tooth. I told her that I would give her the money tomorrow for the dentist. They seemed very thankful. We had a lot of work to do, but also found time to visit other house sites where my team is working. At one site there were puppies, which the girls really enjoyed. Everybody is pretty healthy today. I am thankful that my stomach is holding up well.

Estefany's mother told me that Estefany plays everyday with the Barbie doll I gave her for her birthday. These kids are so smart and beautiful and engaging. They have really touched my heart. At the end of the workday, as we walked back to the town center to catch our buses, Estefany came up beside me and took my hand. I told her what a good worker she is and how much she had helped.

And I told her how happy I am that they came today to work with me. We walked hand in hand the several blocks to our destination.

Back at the conference center I am exhausted, but it is a good kind of tired. But the night is young and there is ministry still to be done. I come to the conference center to email my journal. Then a nice cold shower. After a couple of days I don't really miss hot water...well, maybe just a little. After a good dinner, Greg announces he will give salsa lessons in the meeting room. It was a lot of fun, even for someone like me with two left feet. I couldn't dance in high school and haven't improved since. But it is a good opportunity to build relationships with Salvadoran volunteers.

After dance lessons I ended up in some conversations about God. It is amazing how these experiences make our hearts sensitive to the work of Christ in our lives. I have planned to go to bed each night at 10 PM, but this night it is almost 1 AM before I'm finally able to turn in.

Thursday August 3 2006

As I ponder waking up I'm thinking that another couple of hours sleep will make me a new man. But duty calls. Today, I don't go to the work site. But I still have to make certain that all my folks are on the bus. Today Juan de Dios and I are taking the Duke folks and one of my team members to the

airport. We don't leave until 8 AM. On the way we stop at a restaurant called Biggest for breakfast. It is sort of a cross between a MacDonalds and a Shoney's. As we are walking into the restaurant, some Salvadorans are holding the door for us. I said, "Gracias" which means "Thank you." Juan de Dios told me that one of the women said, "He knows how to say Gracias!" We thought it was really funny.

After breakfast we stopped in San Salvador at an Artisan's Market so the Duke guys

could purchase some crafts. Then we went on to the airport. We got everyone checked in and through security. Then Juan de Dios and I left.

There is a small town near the airport called San Luis Talpa. I worked on a project there several years ago. I asked Juan to take me by there so I could speak to the family. Only a couple of the kids were home, but they remembered me and we had a nice visit. By now it is 1 PM, so we go to a place called

Olacuilta where they make the special pupusas with rice flour. We had stopped there also the night we arrived in El Salvador. We had lunch and continued our journey. As we went past San Salvador, we passed Santa Tecla where a landslide killed more than 500 persons during the earthquakes of early 2001. It is always a somber moment for me to go there or even drive past as I think of all the families whose lives were swept away and buried and remain buried there to this day. We continued past the conference center to Coatepeque. I want to see this micro-economic development project I have raised funds for. We arrive in Coatepeque and the families greet us and proudly show off their little tienda (grocery store) in their home. They are doing quite well and should make close to \$300 per month. In this way they can adequately feed and provide for these 11 children. They actually have two business in one. Nora sells grocery and snack items. They have fresh bread everyday, eggs, instant soup, cold drinks, cheese, etc. Armida sells herbal and over the counter medicines. They can be sold with a higher profit margin and she has the most children to care for. They told me that the day before while three of them were in Coatepeque, the store had sold \$75 worth of goods, giving them a profit of nearly \$20. They can support themselves with this money. We advised them not to let the children eat all the snacks and candy as they would be eating up the profits. They said they give each child a little piece of money in the morning to buy a snack at school. But now the children save the money so they can spend it in their own store when they return home!

We return to the conference center in time for dinner. After dinner I have called a team meeting. We discuss a few problems and issues and share experiences. Then I ask again where they are seeing God this week. Again several people share from their hearts how this experience is impacting their lives spiritually. Following the meeting, I am involved in conversations and spiritual guidance until almost midnight. When my head hits the pillow, I don't move all night!

I am writing this on Friday night. Saturday we will dedicate the houses and then move to Centro Gabriel in San Salvador for our last two nights. There is no more computer access after we leave her. So I may have to complete this journal next week after I return to NC.

Friday August 4 2006

This is our last official workday. We get going early by bus to San Julian, as usual. After breakfast, the devotional is led by the group of young people from the Methodist churches in Ahuachapan. They are wonderful and do a great job. As we are leaving the restaurant, I see that more of my friends have arrived from Coatepeque to work with me again, including 10-yr old Estefany. She has brought along sister Keny (age 15), sister Iris (early 20's), aunt Nora, and cousins Wilfredo (age 13), Karin (age 4),

and Yennifer (age 2). The youngest two came along for the ride, but the others all work very hard. At break time we decide to walk over to nearby houses C and D to see some puppies. Natalie, a 15 yr old from Ahuachapan goes with us. While the children play with the puppies I go check on my workers at these sites. Suddenly I become aware that something is wrong. Natalie is coughing and crying, apparent from an allergic reaction to the puppies. We try to get her calmed down and we give her Benadryl. But the reaction worsens and she is having difficulty breathing. As we have no communication we decide to take her back to the restaurant in hopes of finding Juan de Dios or Carlos. Runners are dispatched to bring our nurse, Brenda, and a doctor (with another team) from other sites. We begin walking and then flag down a three-wheeler taxi. When we arrive at the restaurant, we find none of our folks there. She seems a little better but still distressed and panicked. One of the runners brings an Epi-Pen, but I'm hesitant to use it except as a last resort. We used to have to carry them for my son, and I know you must use them carefully. Brenda arrives and confirms my decision not to use the Epi-Pen. Then Juan de Dios arrives and takes Natalie to the local clinic in his pick-up. Later we learn that she is OK and the reaction has passed. Whew! I'm getting too old for all this excitement.

By now it is nearly lunch time so we wait at the restaurant for the others to come. My friends from Coatepeque make their way back to the restaurant for lunch. After lunch we return to the work site and work through the afternoon. My friends speak no English (though they try a few words in English). So by the end of the day I'm brain dead from speaking mostly Spanish. But at least I can carry on conversations with them. They say I'm doing much better. Our house is nearly ready for the roof to go on, farther along than the other houses. We also received more sand for the floor. It was dumped street-side and we have to bring it closer to the house one wheelbarrow load at a time. I also mixed mortar and concrete, and dismantled some forms and scaffolding no longer needed.

A little after 4 PM we headed to the town square to meet our buses. My friends from Coatepeque also had a 4:30 bus to catch for home. We said our tearful goodbyes. Estefany held on tight but we finally had to go.

Back at the conference center, after dinner, we had a meeting of all the teams. Juan de Dios had prepared a funny presentation of videos he had secretly made all week. It was hilarious. Then several folks shared testimonies about their experiences during the week. Next we played some games which were a lot of fun. Graduation gifts were presented to two American girls who recently graduated high school. Then we all adjourned outside for pinnatas and ice cream. What a nice celebration!

Saturday August 5 2006

When we arrived at San Julian, during breakfast, we received our schedule for the day. No work this morning, just visit with the families and then come together for a celebration of the completion of the project. The ladies at my house had gifts for us. Handmade ID bracelets for all, a ceramic plaque for me and hand-made purses for the women and girls. At the celebration my team led the devotional time. Two guys read the scripture, one in English and the other in Spanish. Then two of the girls (18 & 13) interpreted a recorded Christian song in sign language. Next a 17 yr old girl shared a

testimony/reflection on the scripture which was interpreted into Spanish by one of our college students. Finally one of the men closed in prayer. I was so proud of our team, especially our teens and young adults!

All the teams were recognized and given certificates. A beneficiary family member shared words of appreciation. After lunch during our return to the center, we stopped briefly in Armenia, a nearby town, to see some completed Habitat for Humanity houses. When we returned to the center, we had a brief period of time to pack up our stuff and load it on the bus. We are traveling now to San Salvador. On the way, we tried to stop and look at some pre-Colombian ruins and pyramids, but it was too close to closing time. We did have to make an emergency bathroom stop at a mall. While there one of the volunteers found a Mr. Donut and bought a couple of dozen donuts which we all enjoyed.

We pass Santa Tecla. During the 2001 earthquakes, landslide here wiped out an entire neighborhood killing many hundreds of persons. You can still see where the area of hillside slid down. It is now a memorial park. These people have suffered so much between poverty, civil war, and natural disasters.

We arrive at Centro Gabriel, a retreat center operated by the Emmanuel Baptist Church in San Salvador. During the civil war it was an orphanage operated by that church which cared for 400 war orphans. I have many friends who were raised there. We arrive at the same time as 40 Canadians and 20 attorneys who have been also building with Habitat at other sites. I am happy to see some old friends from Canada. After dinner, I have a brief meeting with my team. I distribute sheets of paper with everyone's name printed on them. Next I ask each person to write a few words about each person emphasizing something positive about that person that they have experienced during this trip. When they are done, we collect them and prepare an envelope for each person containing their slips of paper written by the others.

I also advise everyone to spray their beds with insect repellent for bed bugs! The rest of our evening is R&R time, as we have a busy day tomorrow.

Sunday August 6 2006

It actually got a little cool during the night. Some of our folks were cold after becoming accustomed to warmer nights at the conference center where we previously stayed. Following breakfast early this morning we board the bus and head off to church. We are going to a Methodist church in Zacamil, a suburb of San Salvador. The church is located in a poor neighborhood. I've visited this church before. The pastor's name is Wilfredo, and he was formerly a pentecostal pastor. He and his wife are so dedicated. During the week they are involved in ministry to the poor children through food distribution, educational programs, etc. The church also runs a half-way house for recovering drug addicts. The service is very lively with praise music and a wonderful sermon about friendship, based on the Bible story of David and Jonathan. There is also a presentation by Mark Taylor from St. Andrews United Methodist Church in Garner, NC. The children of that church have made the image of a large cross with hand prints on a large sheet. It is proudly displayed at the front of the church. Then about 30 children are brought in to sing two songs and present individual papers (with hand prints, name and ages) to Mark to take back to St. Andrews. The children are

just too cute.

After the service we invite the pastor and wife to join us for lunch at Pizza Hut. The team is really excited about this lunch! They are not disappointed. We had bread sticks, salad bar, and 5 gigantic pizzas. It was a sort of reward for a job well-done during the previous week. We did have one surprise. I told the waiter that it was the birthday of the 17 yr old (her birthday is actually in December). They put a silly hat on her head and sang Happy Birthday in Spanish, much to everyone's delight. She was thoroughly embarrassed! It was great.

Next we did a little shopping at the Artisan's Market buying mostly craft items. Then we went to a large modern shopping mall. Some of the young folks just needed a little "mall time." And then we went to Emmanuel Baptist Church for the late afternoon service. They also had a praise band, probably the best we've heard on this trip. Pastor Miguel Tomas Castro, a long-time friend of mine preached a really good sermon. We concluded the service with Holy Communion. He invited Pastor Mike Currin and I to assist with the Communion Service. It was very meaningful to me. Following the service we headed back toward Centro Gabriel and went up to the top of the mountain where there are several always-crowded pupusarias or pupusa restaurants. We had dinner at my favorite, "Pupusaria Paty." We were joined there by a number of my friends including two of the war orphans who had been raised at Centro Gabriel when it was an orphanage. It is nice to see them as adults with families of their own now.

Back at Centro Gabriel, I have one last meeting to attend before I can turn in, which I eventually do about 1 AM.

Monday August 7 2006

After breakfast, we bring our baggage out to be moved by truck to the top of the hill. Most of the folks will walk up the 125 steps, but it's too steep to carry the baggage up. The bus arrives and it's the 25 seat touring bus we used all day Sunday. I am concerned about getting all the luggage in, but we manage to do so and only three persons have to stand. So we head off to the airport.

Check-in goes pretty smoothly so we have a little time to say good-bye to Juan de Dios before we go through security. Once through security folks do a little last-minute shopping and several get some early lunch. I decide to wait and eat in Miami. Big mistake!

Our flight is late arriving at Miami and then sits on the tarmac for awhile waiting for the gate to clear. When we begin unloading we have less than one hour to make our next flight. The lines at Passport Control are backed up, then we have to wait for our luggage. We finally get the luggage and some folks head on through Customs. We realize we are missing our team member traveling on a Guatemala Passport. As the time grows short I send everyone else on to our flight. I have no idea if we can make it now or not. About 15 minutes before our flight is scheduled to leave the other team member finally comes through. We go through Customs, and he gets snagged for an agriculture inspection. I'm sure now we won't make the flight.

He comes through about 5 minutes before our scheduled departure time. We go to recheck our luggage and the guy tells us they've already stopped taking luggage for

our flight, but he will try to get it on. I called on the cell phone to another group member and she tells me they have agreed to hold the flight for us, but no more than 20 minutes. We have to run almost a mile, but make it with less than 10 minutes to spare! PTL

As I sit down on the plane, one of the team members asks me if I want something to eat? I said I did. Someone else called out that they had 5 loaves and 2 fishes, could I do anything with that? I replied, "You'll have to talk to the guy I work for...He can do miracles!" The whole plane erupted in laughter, but it was also a witness. A lady sitting behind me said she had only eaten half of the sandwich she had just bought, did I want the rest? I gladly told her I did. God provides!

We arrived in Raleigh and so did our luggage. We have grown so close during this entire experience, it's difficult to say goodbye. But folks are already talking about next year in El Salvador...