

ETBU, Buckner work together to show Christ's love in Honduras

July 29, 2009

SAN PEDRO SULA, Honduras—While world leaders focused their attention on a Summit of the Americas meeting here that attracted top officials from the Organization of American States, a group of [East Texas Baptist University](#) students quietly served two orphanages just outside the city.

East Texas Baptist University student Brittany Walters is all smiles with her new friend. (PHOTO/ETBU Public Relations)

The 15 students and a sponsor worked daily at Casitas Adolescente Home and the Heart of Mercy. And while their activity didn't draw widespread media attention, participants believed they experienced God's loving attention as they served the less fortunate.

"The most important thing God revealed to me was that it is not about us or what we did in Honduras; it's what he did," said junior Brittany Walters of Longview.

"God did not need us to accomplish his will in Honduras, but he allowed us to have the amazing privilege to be a part of his plan in sharing his word and his love with the people there."

Working in cooperation with [Buckner International](#), the ETBU group went to Casitas, an orphanage for sexually abused teenage girls, during the morning hours. The afternoons were spent at the Heart of Mercy

orphanage for HIV-positive children.

Despite having a language barrier to overcome the group was able to communicate.



East Texas Baptist University student Kristen Cole (left) plays jacks with two teenage girls. A group of 15 from ETBU spent a week in Honduras ministering to children and teenagers in two separate orphanages. (PHOTO/ETBU Public Relations)

“God showed me that I did not have to be able to speak their language to build relationships with them,” said junior Mallory Harrell of Houston. “All I had to do was show God’s love as well as mine.”

“God did amazing things and took all of our plans, and turned them into something completely different,” said junior Christina Southard of Hallsville. As the week unfolded, the group came to the understanding that their mission was to express love to the ones they came to serve.

“We did some Vacation Bible School activities with both homes, but we mainly just played, hugged, and talked with the kids,” said Rena McDaniel, a senior from Monroe, La. “It is truly amazing what God can do when you just love on people. Love speaks loudly in every language.”



Dane Fowkles, East Texas Baptist University director of major gifts, works with children on a Vacation Bible School project. (PHOTO/ETBU Public Relations)

"I saw the Lord reach these kids in a way that they may not have been reached before," said Kenna Luttrell, a sophomore from Boise, Idaho. "Our group was able to give them more attention than they normally receive."

"Every day we spent with the girls at Casitas and the children at Heart of Mercy, we did our best to smile and bring a little sunshine into their day," Walters said.

"I have never been so proud of our ETBU students," said Dane Fowlkes, ETBU director of major gifts, who accompanied the students to Honduras.

"Without exception, all 15 students pulled their weight and displayed sacrificial and cooperative spirit throughout the experience."

Susan Williams, a graduate of ETBU and an office manager at Buckner International, also accompanied the group to Honduras.

"I loved working with this team because they were so willing, so eager to get to know the kids we were working with," said Williams, who leads two or three mission trips a year. "I never saw anyone act like they were there to be an observer."



A group of 15 students and one sponsor from East Texas Baptist University spent a week in Honduras this summer. The group worked in two orphanages that have a relationship with Buckner International.
(PHOTO/ETBU Public Relations)

"The students ministered in heart-breaking circumstances, yet did so with love and compassion. They held children that many would have been afraid to touch," Fowlkes said. "Most important was the hope they communicated with the adolescent girls as they developed meaningful relationships with them."

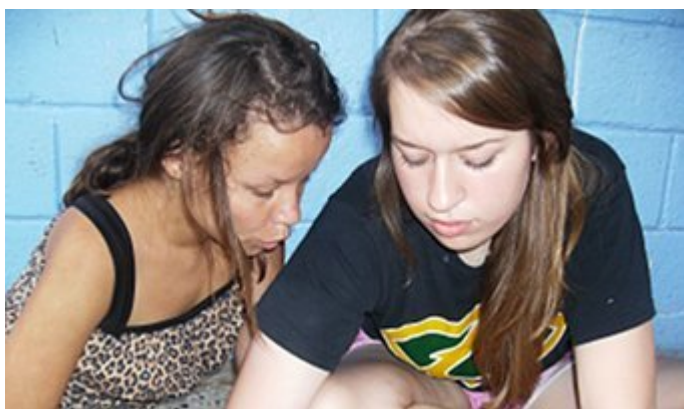
The orphanages were located in a poverty-stricken area. "Poverty is everywhere," Walters said. "Even on the streets where you see nice cars just like home, you could look to your right or left and see children driving horses and buggies trying to make money for their family."

"I can tell you that the things we saw and experienced in Honduras were awful. And yet, at the same time, they were beautiful," said senior Krystle Renfrow of New Caney. "It was heart-wrenching to see some rather severe living conditions and to have come to terms knowing that we were leaving soon to escape back to our lives of comfort in Texas."

"It was so hard to leave those teenage girls, but I had to remember that his plans for them are better than any of mine could ever be," Southard said.

The ETBU students decided to collect an offering among them to meet a need in the girl's home they discovered. Casitas Adolescente Home has a budget for 40 girls but had 92 in residence the week the students visited. The students collected enough money to buy chicken feed for five weeks.

"This offering was critical because they raise chickens to provide the eggs they need," Fowlkes noted. "The offering also provided several weeks worth of powdered milk, processed meat, beans, and other food items."



Hope Hodel, East Texas Baptist University student from Shreveport, La., teaches Sarahi some English. A group of 15 students from ETBU in cooperation with Buckner International spent a week in Honduras ministering to children and teenagers in two orphanages.

Not only was God at work during the groups time in Honduras, his activity also was seen in how the mission trip was formed and funded.

"Our group is the first college aged group to do a mission trip to Honduras for Buckner," said ETBU Great Commission Center Allan Thompson. "Dane in his work for the University was introduced to Lee and Susan Bush of Athens, who provided a major portion of the funds for the trip."

Lee Bush serves as a trustee of Buckner International. The Bushes, owners

of Red Dot Building Systems, provided half the costs for each student to go.

“Initially we were planning to send 10 students and a sponsor,” said Thompson. “I thought it would be difficult for the Great Commission Center to even find enough students willing to go to Honduras. By the time plans were finalized for this trip, many of our students were committed to travel study abroad opportunities, the Concert Choir European tour, as well as other mission endeavors.”

“Lee and Susan became keenly interested in the vision and work of our Great Commission Center,” Fowlkes said. “They came up with the idea of providing seed money for 10 of our students to do a pioneer partnership mission trip with Buckner.”

“Honduras was chosen because it is a new venue for Buckner’s work internationally. A team from Red Dot Buildings preceded us in Honduras,” Fowlkes added.

“Our applications to go and serve in Honduras were more than we expected.” Thompson said. “The Bushes responded by providing additional funds to take 15 students to Honduras instead of 10.”

After the student group returned East Texas, several expressed hope it only marked the beginning of many trips to Honduras.

“This new relationship with Casitas is an opportunity for ETBU to get involved in changing the world in a very specific, tangible way,” McDaniel said.

“We came back having been blessed beyond measure,” said junior Hope Hodel, of Shreveport, La. “No one wanted to leave, but now that we are back, all we want to do is continue to help them.”

Renfrow summed up the trip for many of the participants, saying, “We had the privilege to be the hands and feet of Jesus serving beautiful people who needed to be loved.”