



Above, a newly remodeled chapel, at left with red roof, and a kindergarten, to the right of chapel, dot the landscape in the center of Consolación, Honduras. Top left, Father Flores and Deacon Chris Stewart with First Communion recipients. Middle, a woman prays in the newly remodeled chapel. Bottom, Andy Finney makes a Rosary with a young girl. (Courtesy photos/St. Pius X Parish)

## Spanning 4,000 miles: a ‘Unión de Amor’

For second year, a ‘Union of Love’ is strengthened between Idaho parish, Honduran village

By Mary Stewart

The elderly woman walked up to Father Francisco Flores and asked, “When will you come to our village, we have needs, too?” “What do you need?” Father Flores asked her. Fully expecting her response to be water or food or other life essentials, she simply responded, “We need spiritual help.”

This woman, from a community near Consolación, Honduras, the small village we visited, asks a variation of a larger question we’ve asked ourselves for some time: “Why here, in this tiny village 4,000 miles away from Coeur d’Alene? Why now?” Through this woman and others, we witnessed a people who were thirsting and hungering for not only water and food, but for that Living Water given to us in Christ. Our mission, named “Unión de Amor,” was clearly there to be just that – a union of love; sharing the love of Christ and working together to remove whatever poverty that stands in the way of living a fully dignified Christian life.

For two years, Unión de Amor has been celebrating together in Consolación in early July, during the week of their village Feast Day of St. Thomas. This year, 15 people from Coeur d’Alene,

including Father Flores, Deacon Chris Stewart, and other adults and youths from Pope St. Pius X and Andy Finney, a candidate for the diaconate from St. Thomas the Apostle in Coeur d’Alene), ventured to Honduras, joining Honduran Unión de Amor team members for a week of celebration, strategic meetings, celebrating sacraments and sharing the love of Christ with one another.

Our week in Consolación began with a welcome and celebration at the school. In support of education, the U.S. Unión de Amor team, which includes Holy Family Catholic School in Coeur d’Alene, brought supplies donated by them and a host of other donors in the U.S. and Honduras. This year, parish missionaries carried with them 700 pounds of extra luggage in support of the school and people of the village. We spent time meeting with local volunteers and paid artisans who, over the last two years, built a kindergarten classroom and remodeled the chapel.

A high point of our time together was the following day, the Feast Day of St. Thomas, when there was a procession, Mass and celebration of sacraments. We were met with villagers lined up along the dusty roads donning umbrellas guarding them from the warm sun.

The procession included the blessing of two statues, one of their patron saint, St. Thomas the Apostle, and a second of Our Lady of Fatima, the namesake and patroness of their chapel. (The statues were gifts from St. Thomas the Apostle in Coeur d’Alene and a Honduran team member’s prayer group). The Mass and

celebration also included the blessing of a donated tabernacle and liturgical vessels including a new chalice gifted by St. George Parish in Post Falls.

As part of the Mass, Father Flores and I celebrated 20 baptisms and 21 First Holy Communions, while Father Luis Gonzales of Honduras, heard confessions. We were in awe as we witnessed a gratitude beyond words for the graces received through the sacraments. A yearning for the gift of the Eucharist was evident knowing many walked the dusty and treacherous roads from surrounding villages.

With the gift of the tabernacle, the Blessed Sacrament will now be available for communion services in Consolación, and surrounding communities. It is nearly impossible for Father Luis, who has pastoral oversight of about 55 villages separated by these same treacherous road-miles, to be regularly present in the community.

Despite various environmental, economic and physical constraints, the people of Consolación share with us the universal desire to be loved and affirmed, as well provide for our families’ basic needs. Many flee their homes out of desperation. When asked if he ever thought about fleeing Honduras to go to the United States, one young man sheepishly responded, “Yes, because I have no choice.” Part of our mission is to strengthen partnerships so that no one feels left without a choice.

Over the last year, the families of Consolación faced a three-prong assault on their quality of life: collapsed coffee

prices, a blight on their coffee crops that killing many of the plants, and a drought that reduced the corn and bean yields from their subsistence farms. For this reason, water and food became the priorities for Unión de Amor along with meeting Father Luis’ request to help develop a medical dispensary.

Through Unión de Amor’s relationship with GEPROCA (a national lay Catholic organization of Honduran professionals), a hydrologist and a surveyor identified a water source. Unión de Amor is working with the municipal leadership to install a water system this year. The medical dispensary will be a cooperative effort with the parish in Lepaera and a religious order that manages a similar facility in another town 45 minutes away. A coffee cooperative of about 50 local coffee producers is being developed to see how the community can strengthen coffee production. We are helping them purchase seedlings to replenish their lost crops.

In addition to the economic and physical obstacles to a full life, there have been emotional barriers. We learned the esteem

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of the people has been tarnished by a long-standing history of violence stemming from a family feud that left seven people dead over the years. “Why are you here; we are the bad people,” one child asked us. Hope is beginning to build. One woman, whose face had the lines of a hard life lived during this difficult history, said, “We were filled with hate, and you filled us with love.”

Because many team members did not speak Spanish, the love of Christ exchanged came in ways that surpassed words: playing soccer with the village youth, sitting together on the classroom floor to help students make beaded rosaries, piling in the back of a pickup truck and singing songs, or simply sharing a loving gaze while placing hands on our hearts.

God’s providence is evident in the way these two communities, so far apart and with so many cultural and social differences, came together.

Six years ago, a Honduran physician, Dr. Rene Fiallos, asked a fellow countryman and relative to take him to “the poorest of the poor” in his country.

Shortly after this initial encounter with the people of Consolación his friend, a consecrated lay Catholic, Diana Sanchez, joined him.

Three years ago, Diana’s friend, Luisa Becker, a parishioner at Pope St. Pius X Parish in Coeur d’Alene and a native of Honduras, and her family went with Diana Sanchez on a visit to Consolación.

Two years ago, Father Flores, a Spanish-speaking priest and then new pastor at Pope St. Pius X, was leading the parish in discernment of how the parish could live out God’s command to love Him and love our neighbors. Luisa felt convicted that God wanted our parish to work with this village.

A year ago, members of the parish made their first visit to the village.

As we closed out our visit with a concert given by Unión de Amor in front of the parish church, we were filled with gratitude that God carefully crafted all this so that this “Unión de Amor” could happen in this place with a difficult past.

This would be not just a mission of building new buildings or infrastructure, or just delivering goods and services – all important – but as a mission focused primarily on building up people; not just the Hondurans but our people as well. This is and will continue to be a mission where Christ is experienced and shared.

Through His carefully crafted plan, we are crossing boundaries and going beyond borders – praying, sacrificing and bringing Christ to one another in this small, mountainous village 4,000 miles away but always close to our hearts.

‘But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have become near ...’ – Eph. 2:13



Father Flores baptizes one of 20 on the Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle, the patron saint of Consolación, Honduras. (Courtesy photo/St. Pius X Parish)



Father Flores and Father Luis Gonzales of Lepaera anoint parishioners during a healing service. (Courtesy photo/St. Pius X Parish)



Kids sing and pray during a concert sponsored by the Unión de Amor team in Lepaera. (Courtesy photo St. Pius X Parish)