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COURTESY PHOTO | CHRIS STEWART

'I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly'

Stories of hope from Coeur d'Alene's St. Pius X mission in Honduras

By Deacon Chris Stewart
For the ICR

"Why do you visit us? We're the *bad people*?" Children from Consolación, a small mountain village in Honduras, used to ask this question of the missionaries from St. Pius X in Coeur d'Alene. The children had taken into their hearts an image of themselves as "less than," which kept them from experiencing and expressing the dignity inherently theirs as brothers and sisters in Christ. Today, things are different. The villagers have renamed their home Nueva Consolación (New Consolación) because they now know they are beloved sons and daughters of our Lord. The picture above, with children sitting in front of the Blessed Sacrament, witnesses to the transformation. They know Jesus and trust in Jesus, and not surprisingly, they've come to "have life, and have it more abundantly" (Jn 10:10).

It has been two years since Idaho Catholics have received an update about the St. Pius X parish mission in Honduras called Unión de Amor (Union of Love). The following are a few stories that witness to the resurgence of life among the people of this village.

Building the village Work Center

A team from Coeur d'Alene traveled to Nueva Consolación in January to check on the progress of mission projects. Last year, Lenten almsgiving at St. Pius X was committed to building a "Work Center" for the village. This year, we celebrated its grand opening with the local Bishop, Walter Guillén. Also present were the village community and visitors from nine other communities bordering Nueva Consolación who will benefit from the facility.

In this village, where visiting missionaries used to provide meals to the local people, the locals now

served over 600 meals to their guests when the Work Center opened.

At the celebration, 135 people signed up for sewing, cooking, and music lessons. A small girl went to the store and bought candy for the visitors, demonstrating what one village elder said a few years ago, "we were hate; you have made us into love."

Expressing the "union of love" between Idaho and the Honduran mission, three of Bishop Peter Christensen's Our Lady of Tenderness icons were gifted to the village. One was given to the local bishop, Walter Guillén, another to Project Manager Diana Sanchez, and one to the community that will be hung in the Work Center. Bishop Guillén thanked

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everyone for the incredible works of love happening in Nueva Consolación, recognizing them as iconic examples of God's love in action; a love, he noted, "that can do more than ambition, more than selfishness, more than all that is contained by evil."

The Water Project

The second story of the villager's ability to live life more abundantly concerns the water project completed at the end of 2022. The scale of this project was enormous. Miles of pipeline trenches were hand-dug by the men and women of Nueva Consolación. Phenomenal engineering was needed to identify water sources and learn how to collect, store and forward the water in very steep and unforgiving terrain.

Then, there was the necessary legal process to secure water rights and establish a "Water Board" to manage the ongoing operation, which was also a feat for this small village. Unión de Amor provided the help of an attorney, engineers, financing and a partnership with WorldVision Honduras to help accomplish these projects.

The more impressive feat was their pulling together as a community to do all the work necessary to make this happen. Driving these efforts were several local leaders who stepped forward to organize and direct the community in these initiatives. Their strength, grit, resilience, and God-centered loving leadership are miracles in themselves.

The Coffee Farm

The third and last story concerns Tito Ponce. Five years ago, most of the coffee throughout this area was devastated by a fungal blight. Tito was in his early 20s then, and his choices for making a living were minimal. He considered leaving the village and migrating north to the United States.

Unión de Amor helped Tito and a few other coffee producers travel to another part of Honduras to get mentoring and seeds to replenish their coffee farms.

A successful Honduran man, Don Ovidio Tabora, who had navigated his own "rags to riches" story, gave Tito a vision of what success could look like. Don Tabora gave Tito the confidence and practical wisdom to remain in Nueva Consolación and fight for his future, community, and family.

One piece of advice was not to rely on coffee alone; it is too seasonal and weather-dependent.

On our trip, we were taken to one of Tito's fields to pick the harvest of coffee planted five years ago. He gave us coffee now roasted and packed with "Unión de Amor" and "Un Esfuerzo de Hermanos" ("A work of Brothers") stamped on the label. Tito anticipates leading other coffee growers in the region into a cooperative agreement to market and sell the coffee, which he believes can compete with the high-altitude coffees commonly thought to be of the best quality.

In addition, he and his brother now own three hardware stores supported by 12 regional warehouses. They are not relying entirely on seasonally dependent coffee.

Tito thanks God every day for the graces he received and is paying it forward by inspiring others.

God's 'union of love' makes possible the impossible

There are many stories to tell, and a lot has happened over the years in this village now called Nueva Consolación. But all of it is because Christ is present in new and creative ways. He is present in the Tabernacle,



Top: Children of Nueva Consolación in Honduras pray before the Eucharist during Adoration. Middle: Bishop Walter Guillén offers thanks for the mission work of St. Pius X in Coeur d'Alene, and for three icons of Our Lady of Tenderness, written by Bishop Peter Christensen and gifted to the community. Deacon Chris Stewart (seated left) from Pius X Parish assisted at the Mass. Bottom: Tito Ponce, Deacon Chris and Mary Stewart celebrate the success of Ponce's coffee farm. COURTESY PHOTOS | CHRIS STEWART

“ Love can do more than ambition.
Love can do more than selfishness.
Love can do more than all that is
contained in evil. ”

— Bishop Walter Guillén
Bishop of the Diocese of Gracías

which was installed in their chapel in 2018. He is present in the prayers of the people and through His missionary Church, whether that be U.S. missionaries, Honduran missionaries, or the labors of the people of Nueva Consolación who are now reaching out in solidarity to the neighboring communities, extending His mission, the "Unión de Amor" at the center of these shared lives.

God's union of love makes possible the impossible and can absolutely do more than all that is contained in evil.

Deacon Chris and Mary Stewart serve at St. Pius X Church in Coeur d'Alene. If you'd like to offer alms for the mission in Honduras, visit stpiouscd.org/online-giving and click "Honduran Mission."

