



# Answering a Call

## International Medical Mission Trip to Honduras

When Dr. Bill Folger began preparing for his first medical mission trip to Honduras, he was asked by another veterinarian if this was his first mission trip. When he replied in the affirmative, the veteran missionary told Bill it wouldn't be his last. "He told me it's something that gets under your skin—that mission work does something for you that nothing else does."

Thirteen years later, it's clear mission work has not only gotten under Bill's skin, but has driven others to get involved as well. "Each year, we seem to pick up one or two more volunteers. We have doctors, nurses, dentists, veterinarians, assistants and translators. They come from all across the U.S. and from all denominations."

### Recognizing the Need

When Bill was originally asked to head up the medical mission trip by Holy Spirit's associate priest, Betsy Ungermann, in 1996, he quickly dismissed the idea. "I knew Betsy from Stephen Ministry. That first call, I told her it sounded great and hung up the phone thinking it wouldn't come to anything. But Betsy is irritating in her determination. She would wait to catch me after church. She said she couldn't do it herself and needed my help."

Today, the mission team consists of between 24 and 30 volunteers who spend seven days in the state of El Paraiso. "Our base camp is 4,000 feet up in Corral Quemado, about 110 miles northeast of the capital of Tegucigalpa." Each day, volunteers travel to a different village. The medical team sees about 1,200 people throughout the week, and the dental team treats about 120 patients, mainly for extractions. "In 2011, the dental team extracted about 500 teeth," Bill relates. Doctors typically treat entire families with up to eight children for triage, common injuries and medical ailments. Since villagers must carry everything on their backs, doctors see many muscular skeletal injuries.



Dr. Bill Folger (center) and his team have been helping the people of Honduras for 13 years.

While the medical and dental teams base their operations out of one village each day, veterinarian teams cover two villages during the day. "Our large-animal team treats working animals like burros, donkeys, horses and cows, and the small-animal team, which I head up, does a lot of neutering and spaying of dogs, some tumor removals and treats smaller animals for typical ailments like eye and ear infections. Between the two vet teams, we see about 1,200 animals during the week."

### Providing Fresh Water

Six years ago, the team added a water tank team to the mix. The team works with local contractors to build one water tank each year. "The water supply in Honduras is rapidly being outstripped by the growing population. The easiest way to save and conserve water is to build a water tank," Bill says. To ensure that no one person controls the water, the village deeds the land under the tank to the Episcopal Church of Honduras. Next year's tank is being funded by the National Order of the Daughters of the King.

During this last trip, Bill was especially touched by the response of the villagers. "The tank we built last year was on the top of a mountainside. It was very hard to get at, even dangerous at points. When we came out for the dedication, we found the

whole village already up on the mountain waiting for us. They had carted tables up the mountainside, were dressed in their Sunday best and had a big dinner waiting for us. It was one of the sweetest things someone has ever done for any of us."

While the local Episcopal priest blessed the tank, Bill stood on top of the tank with the others, taking in the surrounding landscape. "You could see 50 miles in all directions, even the front door of the church in our home village. That was a cool moment."

Although volunteers are not hard to come by, the group is always in need of donations. Each year, the team brings about \$30,000 worth of medicine. "The medicine we bring with us is more than what's found in all the medical facilities within a 200-mile radius."

He says that although most of the veterinarian medicine is donated, team members must pay out of pocket for all other medicine that the medical team relies on, as well as travel expenses. "There is a tremendous need in Honduras. For me, it comes down to the verse *do unto others as you would have them do unto you*. That's really true. And it's what keeps me going year after year."

To make a donation for the summer 2012 trip, contact Bill at 713/461-9257 or email [catdoc323@aol.com](mailto:catdoc323@aol.com).