



VOLUNTEER COORDINATORS CONFERENCE: BELIZE

At the beginning of November, I had the great privilege of traveling to Belize to attend their FORO. A FORO is a partnership. In Spanish, FORO means forum, and it is a forum of districts, congregations, individuals, organizations, and more that come together to form a system of support for LCMS missions and sister churches in Latin America and the Caribbean to further the work of the Gospel. The day before my 6 am flight, there was some question as to whether there'd even be a FORO as Hurricane Lisa passed through Belize Wednesday night into Thursday morning. Two days post hurricane is not the ideal time to host visitors for a FORO, but the Belize team rallied together to host something that would have been easier to cancel and with that I am grateful because I was able to learn so much more about the mission work happening in Belize.

There was one transitional day between the FORO and the 3rd annual Volunteer Coordinators' Conference that was being held in Belize this year. Fellow missionaries Johanna, Erin, and I mostly relaxed round beautiful Camp Concordia while we waited for guests from St. Louis, the Czech Republic, Congo, and South Korea to arrive, but we snuck in a few cultural moments by going to an outdoor market. We also had the joy of accompanying Alliance missionary pastor Benjamin Flores on two home visits in Valley of Peace, the community where one of their churches is located. One visit was to an extended family compound for their regular weekly devotion and book discussion and the other was to check on post-hurricane roof repairs at the home of a single mom with a son with disabilities. She ALSO cares for a friend's son with disabilities.

The Volunteer Coordinators' Conference begin that evening with a welcome dinner with the entire Belize mission team and all the coordinators. Our goal in meeting together - annually in person and 2x/month on Zoom - is to analyze and improve upon the Office of International Missions (OIM) volunteer experience through streamlined processes, innovative new ideas, and industry best practices. Each day of the conference the sessions were lead by each of the volunteer coordinators. Gary (Belize), Steph (regional, Africa), Me (Puerto Rico), Courtney (STL operations), Erin (regional, LAC), Chelsea (regional, Eurasia), Erin (STL operations), and Matt (regional, Asia).

Having our conference in different regions of the world gives us the opportunity to see our missionary colleagues in action and learn about the cultures and people they are living amongst. This is so important as each coordinator plans and hosts short term volunteers in each of these cultures.



PLEASE PRAY FOR:

- *Sylvia (a church member) who has a bad leg.*
- *My Parents trip to Puerto Rico for Christmas.*
- *The visitors we had at church this month that they continue to grow in their faith.*
- *Preparation for my reconnect next September and October. The time I have to visit churches in the United States and share about God's work here in Puerto Rico and raise support again.*
- *My trip to the Dominican Republic after Christmas.*

GIVE THANKS FOR:

- *A safe and educational trip to Belize for the Conference.*
- *The Short-Term Team from Esko MN and the work they accomplished.*

SHORT TERM TEAM SPOTLIGHT:

I had to leave the Volunteer Coordinators' Conference in Belize a day early ironically, so I could prepare for a short-term team of volunteers from Esko Minnesota that were arriving in Puerto Rico the next day to help serve in so many unique ways. What a beautiful week it was with 13 volunteers here in PR. By day they painted, poured cement, fixed various things, and by night taught English as a second language classes! It was wonderful to have half this team returning after serving here in 2019. Both the missionaries and church members love continuing to build those relationships with fellow Lutherans from the United States. Many thanks to St. Matthews Lutheran Church of Esko, MN for their great work at both churches!



THANKSGIVING 2022:

This year for thanksgiving we celebrated as a church on Wednesday during our fellowship night with the congregation, Principe de Paz here in Mayaguez. On Thursday we celebrated as a missionary family in Ponce.



Both days had a mix of American menu staples with a touch of Puerto Rico. I am thankful to not have been in covid quarantine this year, so we were able to celebrate as a missionary team. The picture to the left is the only one I have of our team thanksgiving: the guy celebrating a goal during a Brazil game of the World Cup. It was fútbol (soccer) on this thanksgiving instead of Football.

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