

Holy Week

April 3, 2015

Every brigade arriving here brings particular gifts as individuals and a particular dynamic as a group. Baylor College of Medicine has been here during this Holy Week under the direction of Dr. Sandra Williams. Laura and I present ourselves to brigade groups as advocates, both for their time here as well as for their continuing relationship with Shoulder to Shoulder. We attempt to discern why they've come to Honduras, what they want to achieve, and what are their reactions to being in an unfamiliar world. The Baylor brigade presented a great challenge to answering those questions.



Sometimes the discernment is easy. We meet an eighteen year old pre-med student with that deer-in-the-headlights sort of look and immediately know to give support and guide her experience. On the other side of the coin is the veteran brigade member who comes with great passion and energy. With him, we celebrate his sense of commitment and service. No one from the Baylor brigade fits either type. It is not that they present as distant or defended. On the contrary, they've been very engaging. But, their experience and background has well seasoned them. They are grateful to be here, and though the experience here is a new one, it is not something to either frighten or astound them.

They specialize in emergency medicine and work the emergency department in a Houston Hospital. They are familiar with tragedy and trauma. At the lunch table, they get along so well that I ask if they met with one another prior to coming to Honduras. Dr. Morriscal answers me, "No, we didn't do any team building. We just know one another because we work together." From there the ER stories begin, punctuated with gallows humor that offers them a refuge and a sense of community. They know how to be kind to one another and how to be compassionate towards those in crisis.



They bring this with them to Honduras and the persons they see and treat. Still, there is even more reason for the aura of ease and familiarity that surrounds them. No one is from Texas, all of them imported there from other parts of the country and the world. Different backgrounds, races, and cultures have formed and honed their personal values of human dignity and respect. Theron, the Medical Resident from Arizona, and Rachel, the soon-to-be Yale Medical Resident from Maryland, are from mixed-race backgrounds. Gursaran's gift is her Indian culture and she jokes of Western medicine and its insistence that there be a pill for every ailment. Angel is from the Dominican Republic, but wittingly comments that he is the only Dominican that spent a great portion of his life in Wisconsin (he has a weakness for cheese curds). I watch Angel giving a consult to a pregnant woman that has just had an ultrasound. His Spanish is excellent, of course, but rings with Caribbean flavor. He is poised, confident, and competent. He is accepted and accepting. They bring all of this also to Honduras and the persons they see and treat.



It is Holy Week in Honduras. Almost everything closes down and patients are not lined up at the clinic doors. They see patients, however, and they are likely seeing the patients in the greatest need. It is important work, specialized work in ultrasound screenings and emergency medicine. Still, they have some free time. They walk down to the waterfall and the river. Not a long walk, but a steep hill under tremendous heat. On vacation, the families have gathered there for picnics and fun. The brigade group must seem out of place among them. They are probably aware of how different they are. But then again, they are not here because they are the same. They are here because they are different; knowing, as many of us still have yet to

learn, that diversity is not something to be feared and shunned, but rather, something to be embraced and celebrated.



They're only here for a week, this Holy Week, and that's too bad because any one of them, or all of them, could just as well live and work here. Their openness and respect to the diversity of human life and experience is a gift to the persons they are present to here in Honduras. Then again, it will be a gift to whomever they meet and serve wherever they may be.