



## November 2010

### Unintended Consequences

My co-worker Pastor Miguel and I talk regularly about “Unintended Consequences” as we plan and work with short-term teams and partners in Central America. It has become something of a mantra for us to say to one another, “What do you think will be the unintended consequence of the action or decision we are about to take?”

Based on experience, we know that even after many years of working in Latin America, we tend to think differently and sometimes fail to consider how a certain decision might be perceived by a Central American leader and lead to a consequence far different from what we expected.

For example, our short-term teams often assume that our partners in Belize, Guatemala and Panama are too poor to give anything back to God. So the natural response is to offer to do things that the Central Americans can and should do for themselves.

I saw this tendency demonstrated a number of times on my trip to Panama last week. One example will hopefully illustrate the issue. At a congregation with a primarily indigenous membership I noticed during the worship service that the paraments on the altar and pulpit were typical of those used in many congregations in the USA. Sure enough, when I asked about this, I discovered that a US congregation had given the paraments assuming that the Panamanian Christians were unable to provide for this need.

Since the Panama congregation had already been predisposed by missionaries and other US volunteers to think that things made and used in the USA are superior to things from Panama, they gladly received the paraments and began to use them in their church. Sadly, this was all done in good faith without considering the unintended consequences.

Here's the problem as I see it. American Christians have resources and see themselves as rich compared to Central American Christians. Central American Christians have some resources, and don't see themselves as poor--until and unless--they develop a relationship with another outside group which has more and are willing to give something to help them meet their needs.

At this point, unintended consequences come into play. North American Christians sometimes begin to meet needs as they perceive them without asking for advice from reliable cultural helpers. The unintended consequence for Central American Christians is that they begin to see themselves as unable to meet their own needs.

Of course, there are situations which do call for a generous response on the part of North American Christians and where help is much needed. We saw an example in Guatemala this past summer when Tropical Storm Agatha destroyed the homes of hundreds of Guatemalans including those living near Gualan where CALMS is working. Responding to the desperate needs of these people who were forced to move into relief shelters, CALMS' partner congregations in the United States and Guatemala helped finance and send teams to build flood relief homes. As reported in last month's e-letter, thanks to this response, we were able to build 36 houses in three months!

Amazingly, we also discovered that the very poor village of Campanario La Avanzada near La Union, Guatemala that was devastated by a comparable disaster in 2008 also responded without any prompting to this summer's disaster. From their relative poverty, they generously gave what they had—beans, tortillas, and tomatoes to help those who had lost their homes. Compared to other villages in other parts of Guatemala and to our North American partners, this village has very few resources, but they thankfully considered what they could do to help with the resources they had.

Our assumption as richer Christians could easily have led us to think that the people of Campanario La Avanzada could never help anyone else when in fact they had some resources to share. Such an assumption could lead us to make some unfortunate decisions that could in time cause the villagers to see themselves as unable to do anything to help others.

For example, what if instead of working with the villagers to help build a much-needed school annex in their village, CALMS had simply recruited US teams to do it without any involvement by the villagers? Would they have felt a sense of ownership and pride in their new school building? Would they have developed the existing system which involves village parents and older children taking turns to clean "their" building?

Back to the example shared above about the altar paraments in the Indian village in Panama. While the North American donors had very good motives, they did not think about other options and the unintended consequences of the decision they made.

The option that was very obvious is the fact that these same people make beautiful textiles that they sell to make money to support their families. They even make beautiful stoles for pastors that are often purchased as gifts for North American pastors. Why did the North American Christians who gave the paraments not think to ask, "Is this a gift that these people really need? Could they make paraments themselves, and if so, what would have been the result?"

The unintended consequence of giving without thinking about the possible results, in this case produced a village that is struggling to overcome years of dependency. Even though they have no more resources than the villagers in Panama, the villagers in Guatemala mentioned earlier, recognize that they have resources to help themselves and others. Meanwhile, the Panama villagers have a tendency to think of themselves as poor. When they see a need, they tend to look for help from North Americans instead of seeing what they themselves are able to give.

Assumptions often lead to unintended consequences. They tell us something about the condition of our faith. If we believe something can be done with God's help, we will most likely proceed in faith on that basis.

Yours in God's Service,



Rev. B. Steve Hughey, Executive Director



***Members of Divine Shepherd Lutheran Church in Omaha, Nebraska work side by side to construct dividers for the new school annex built in partnership with the Village of Campanario La Avanzada earlier this year. Notice that there are four Guatemalans working with three men from Divine Shepherd in a partnership encouraged by CALMS.***

## Servants in Belize...

### ...Historic Trinity Lutheran Church, St. Louis, MO

For the past three summers, Historic Trinity Church has been sending short-term teams to serve with CALMS in Belize. Their teams have lovingly built relationships and given their time and energy to tell the story of God's love and share His Word. This year, their theme for the two VBS programs they led was "Bible Heroes."

The team led a morning VBS in Lords Bank Village for approximately 70 children. Belizean volunteers worked beside them as they learned from each other and formed strong ties. They showed the children through drama, music, Bible time, games, and crafts, that "Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life."



After a quick lunch the team prepared to serve at another location in Belize City, **Mariah's Ministry**, where the leader, Ms. Suzette, has dedicated herself to serving kids at risk and hungry people. She currently serves approximately 70 children breakfast each day before school, because they have no food in their homes. She also invites kids to shower at her center. Her love for God and His Word inspires her to share with the children, so that they may find the hope that is given through our Risen Lord. Historic Trinity has played an important role in Suzette's ministry. Some 150 children and youth participated in the VBS this summer, and the Trinity team showed their love through their high energy and by sharing their faith with these at-risk children.



*Team leader, Bob Kurtz,  
renews a friendship during  
VBS at Lords Bank  
Community Church.*

## Pray For Us...

Thank God for being with our Belize mission team during the most recent Tropical Storm that hit the country in late October and for protecting them and the country from serious damage.

Ask God to bless the efforts of the Branson Missouri Lutheran Fellowship mission team led by Pastor Dar Karstens and CALMS' missionary-at-large, Miguel Torneire, as they labor with Guatemalan partners in Guatemala to build two houses for needy families.

Thank God for the recent contributions of Pastor Bill Woolsey and Dr. Rick Adams from Cross Point Church in Katy, Texas who generously gave their advice and counsel to Milton Castillo, President of the Lutheran Church of Panama (IELPA) and CALMS' executive director, Pastor B. Steve Hughey. Ask the Lord to guide CALMS and the IELPA leaders as they follow up on the plans that were initiated in the week-long consultation in Panama City in mid-October.

Ask the Lord of the Harvest to bless CALMS' volunteer coordinator for Belize, Peg Wolfram, as she travels to Houston in early November to meet with CALMS board members and staff to evaluate the work and make plans for short-term teams in 2011.

Thank God for the children in CALMS' Sponsor-A-Child program in Panama and for the blessing of the many caring individuals in the United States who faithfully support these children so that they can grow "in wisdom, stature and favor with God and man."

Ask God to use the recent CALMS' board meeting in Wisconsin to give direction to the growing ministry in Central America. Thank him for the dedicated leaders who guide the policies of CALMS in order to help us "link leaders in the USA and Central America for effective mission and service."

Thank God for dedicated volunteers like Denny Noh of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Houston, Texas who gives generously of his time to help CALMS with administrative tasks that are crucial for the expansion of CALMS' ministry!

Thank God for *Thrivent Financial for Lutherans* and their members who are giving financially to support CALMS' through the Thrivent Choice program.



*In recent years, Panama City has become one of the fastest growing cities in Latin America. With the canal and its unique location, Panama is becoming a hub for banking, health care, transportation and business from all over the world. All of this opens doors for sharing the Gospel with people from many cultures and the growing middle class.*

