

Women in International Mission

LINDA HANSON: CALLED TO HONDURAS BY GLOBAL MINISTRIES

by Ana Gobledale

**Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my
chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon her; she will
bring forth justice to the nations.**
— Isaiah 42:1



Linda Hanson had always dreamed of living overseas. Yet it was on a mission trip to Jamaica in 1989 with her church, the First Christian Church of Mason City, Iowa, that the Spirit dramatically touched Linda and changed her life. She reflects, “I met families

who couldn’t send their children to school because they couldn’t afford uniforms. I had a mother ask me to take her baby to the United States. I visited an orphanage where two attendants watched 40 preschoolers in cribs. I felt overwhelmed as these children, starved for attention, cried and reached out their arms for us as we passed. I went home and tried to make sense of what I had seen: the extreme level of poverty, the desperation of parents attempting to care for their children, and the horror of caged, attention-starved children in the orphanage. I began to understand how US policies negatively impact the ‘third’ world, and how my lifestyle was contributing to the problems in Jamaica. I believe this experience was instrumental in my decision to study theology and in my call to our ministry in Honduras.”

Some missionaries feel called early in life. For others, like Linda, a dramatic encounter with Christ in the suffering of our world steers them toward international mission work through Global Ministries, the mission arm of the UCC and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). But whenever in life the nudge comes, international missionaries experience a sense of God’s accompaniment and support. A verse from one of Linda’s favourite Bible passages, Isaiah 42:1-9, highlights this conscious relationship between servant missionary and God: “I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness. I have taken you by the hand and kept you.” (Is 42:6)

Ten years after her Jamaican encounter, Linda enrolled in United Theological Seminary in Minnesota. She explains, “While I didn’t enter seminary with the certainty of a call to be a missionary, over the course of my studies, I began to feel this was my call. And, when we [Linda and her husband Bruce] applied to Global Ministries, ‘just to see what would happen’ and were offered the opportunity to go to Honduras, we both jumped at the chance.”

Today Linda lives and works in Honduras where she is Dean of the Theological Community of Honduras in Tegucigalpa. She teaches theology and Bible classes “at popular level (primary school), diploma level (high school) and Bachelor’s degree level” both at the campus and “traveling to villages to provide classes in the community.”

*From the past will come the future; what it holds,
a mystery, unrevealed until its season, something
God alone can see.* (From Hymn of Promise, Hope
Publishing, one of Linda’s favourite hymns)



LINDA WHO?...Whenever I meet an international missionary, I always wonder who they were before they headed off to live and work in a different country.

EARLY YEARS....Linda grew up in Ames, Iowa, active (and baptized) in the First Baptist Church (American Baptist). Her father, a professor of food technology at Iowa State University, “has a passion for housing projects and founded a project to renovate housing for low-income people.” Her mother “worked helping moms on welfare, in an adult day care, and was always involved in politics.” As a state representative and senator, Linda’s mother modeled for her “a strong female role, and was an advocate for racial justice and gender equality.” Linda explains, “It was clear that my parents’ community involvement, concern for the poor, and desire to work in politics arose as a response to their Christian faith.” Linda was “introduced to different cultures, dress, food, and people” through international students at ISU, foreign exchange students her family hosted, and living in Scotland when she was 15 during her father’s sabbatical.

ADULT YEARS... Before joining the mission staff of Global Ministries, Linda worked as a physical therapist and director of rehabilitation for more than 20 years. Linda and Bruce have five children, two of which live with them in Honduras, and one grandchild. She is a member of the Belmond United Church of Christ in Belmond, Iowa.

See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare...Isaiah 42:9



IN HONDURAS TODAY...As Dean of the Theological Community of Honduras in Tegucigalpa, Linda enthusiastically teaches and counsels students. In her words, “I love to teach. I often come home marveling at the experiences I have had, the insights my students have given me, or the enjoyment I experience from seeing a student grasp something in a new way. I am awed by the resilience the students of the Theological Community demonstrate in overcoming financial, personal and emotional obstacles to their studies. I am inspired by the stories of how theological education has changed their lives. For example, one woman attributes her study of a module called “Ser Mujer es Maravilloso” (“To Be a Woman is Marvelous”) to saving her life when she was on the point of suicide.”

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES... Part of home schooling for the Hansons is starting each school day with family devotions. Linda explains, “We read and discuss a Bible verse and pray together. I also do lectio divino alone once a week. I read a Psalm and sit with the words of scripture in silence, seeking to find where God is speaking to me, and what God is calling me to do.” Her family attends La Primera Iglesia Reformada de Honduras (The First Reformed Church of Honduras).

MEETING CHRIST FACE-TO-FACE

He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth. —Isaiah 42:5

When asked to share a time when she has met Christ face-to-face, Linda tells of meeting Dr. Giovanni on a class field trip to a nursing home. Dr. Giovanni left private practice to devote himself to geriatrics, especially the elderly people living in the street. He opened a nursing home where he now lives with and cares for 26 people. Dr. Giovanni “spoke with passion about the importance of caring for the elderly, and told us of the abuse they had suffered on

the streets of Tegucigalpa, a place not safe for the able-bodied young much less the disabled elderly. Dr. Giovanni walked through the home, asking about a man's arthritis, telling a woman her dress looks pretty and settling an Alzheimer patient's anxiety. A devout Roman Catholic, he speaks of seeing the Christ in the faces of each of the elderly. But, in his care, concern and love I see the face of Christ in him as well."

Surely, God has taken Linda's hand and kept her (Isaiah 42:6), in both her life leading up to this day and in her current ministry in Honduras.



Ana Gobledale has served our church through Global Ministries in South Africa, Zimbabwe, the USA and most recently in Australia where she and her husband, Tod, were chaplains and lecturers at Churches of Christ Theological College 2003-2007. They are currently seeking a settled pastorate in the USA.

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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How in your life, has God "taken you by the hand and kept you"? (Isaiah 42:6)
2. Linda concludes that some US policies encumber the lives of our neighbours around the world. What can you do to proclaim the Good News in the face of these policies?
3. Like Linda's parents, how has your Christian faith influenced your activities in your community?

PRAYER POINTS:

- Linda, her husband Bruce, and their children: Rachel, Eric, and Joe, who are grown, and Seth (14) and Kesia (12) who home-school in Honduras.
- Students, faculty and staff at the Theological Community of Honduras in Tegucigalpa
- The development of needed scholarships for theological students in Honduras
- The development of US foreign policies that bring abundant life to people of other nations
- Global Ministries missionaries serving the UCC and the Disciples of Christ

Isaiah 42:1-9

¹Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. ² He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; ³ a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. ⁴ He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching. ⁵ Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: ⁶ "I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, ⁷ to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. ⁸ I am the LORD, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols. ⁹ See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them."