

**He just wanted prayer;  
New missionaries disciple church in rural Honduras**

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LAM News Service

San Pedro Sula, Honduras (LAMNS)-  
Novice missionaries Zeke and  
Rebecca Nelson are finding that the  
Lord is using them even in the early  
months of their missionary career.



"One of the first nights we were here, after I had shared my testimony, a guy came to me," Zeke remembers. "He said that he had never told his story to anyone because he had been afraid to. He said he had been involved in witchcraft, stolen cows from neighbors, been in gangs and had used drugs."

Zeke feels that the man's openness was prompted in part because Zeke and Rebecca were new to the town, not gossipy as others in the town are, and would be confidential listeners. "He just wanted prayer," Zeke says.

The couple has been working in the rural farming community of Florida de Copán, several hours by bus from the city of San Pedro Sula. The town boasts a population of around 10,000 and at one time was a thriving center of tobacco farms. Now, with most of the country's tobacco imported, Florida has fallen on hard times where today most residents eke out a living growing subsistence vegetable crops and working at odd jobs such as carpentry.

"We do feel accepted here," says Zeke who grew up in Kirkland, Washington, and attended Whitworth College in Spokane, Washington. "Even those who are not Christians welcome us and give us gifts. We can't walk through the streets without being stopped. An errand can take hours because of the people that you see."

Rebecca says that church members are already seeking them out for counseling and advice. "A woman in the church had a problem with her children in the school, so she came to us looking for advice about what she should do with her son. I let her talk then gave her a Bible verse that she hadn't seen before. It was a very common verse for me, but because she is new in the faith, she hadn't seen it. That was a special moment for me."

The Florida congregation is a new start, having been formed as a mission church by the 3,000 member Evangelical and Reformed church in San Pedro Sula. That church has planted 13 new churches in the past five or six years.

"The Evangelical and Reformed church in the United States (now part of the United Church of Christ) sent a missionary to Honduras in the 1920s who planted the mother congregation," Zeke explains.



"About 20 or 25 years ago a revival broke out in the church and they held meetings every night until 3 a.m.," explains Rebecca who was raised in Clovis, California, and met her husband while both were students at Whitworth College. She says that the Honduran denomination no longer maintains ties with the U.S. church. "The churches here are more evangelical than their parent denomination in the States."

"What fascinates me is the story of this church here, having planted so many churches," Zeke says. "The San Pedro Sula church was small for so many years, then all of a sudden they started to grow. Then, the pastor's son took over the church five years ago and the missionary growth is exploding. It's a model of what a church should be doing--planting other churches."

Now, with the development of over a dozen new churches and more on the way, opportunities for ministry are springing up all over the country.

In the 60-member Florida church, services and activities are held every night of the week. One night the emphasis is on evangelism, another on prayer, another on youth, yet another on training. "When they heard that I worked with children, they put me in charge of a children's program four nights a week," Rebecca says. "Now, I'm doing it two nights a week and another teacher does it the other two nights."

"We are teaching them Bible stories one night a week and another night we have an evangelistic emphasis, while on other evenings we emphasize prayer and another we learn songs," she says. "Many of the kids don't understand that they have to be saved through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They think they just have to go to church, then they are saved."

With all of the activities, the couple says that they try to keep focused on discipleship that they see at the heart of their ministry. "The pastor, José Zavalo, is really an evangelist, that's what he has a heart for," says Zeke. As with most of the pastors who are serving the mother church's startups, José left a profitable business as a salesman to go into ministry

"The people are receptive to evangelism, but any kind of deepening is not nearly as easy," Rebecca adds. "There are people who want to grow in the faith, but they are not used to

studying the Bible for themselves. One man explained to us that the people just want the Bible poured into their heads but they don't want to study it."

Zeke and Rebecca are serving in Honduras through LAM's YearOut Program, an opportunity for fledgling missionaries to test the waters of service in Latin America or Spain for one year. We like the flexibility of it," Zeke affirms. "We can stay here or go somewhere else after a year."

"What interested me was church planting," Zeke says, explaining how he and Rebecca were called to Honduras. "We didn't know what it would involve so we called the pastor. He talked about having us serve in three or four places during the year, but when we saw the need in Florida, we decided to stay here for the full year."

Latin America Mission is accepting applications for the YearOut Program. Initial applications can be found at LAM's web site ([www.lam.org](http://www.lam.org)) by writing to [mobilization@lam.org](mailto:mobilization@lam.org), or by calling 1-800-275-8410.

Latin America Mission works in partnership with churches and Christian agencies throughout Latin America and supports missionaries and projects in many Latin countries as well as in Spain. LAM is seeking to place new missionaries throughout the region. The U.S. headquarters can be reached at Latin America Mission, Box 52-7900, Miami, FL 33152, by e-mail at [info@lam.org](mailto:info@lam.org), or by calling 1-800-275-8410. The mission's web site may be found at <http://www.lam.org>. LAM's Canadian office is at 3075 Ridgeway Drive, Unit 14, Mississauga, ON L5L 5M6.

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