Helping Hands Medical Missions: El Salvador

By Christine Hunter

Every year a group of missionaries from all walks of life head to rural El Salvador. For this one week we are transformed. Having been given many gifts including that of faith, following what our Holy Father has taught us to do, we set out to share that faith. Along the way we provide medical care, education and love with those we encounter. This journey is one of joy, pain, sorrow, faith and hope as we meet those who have endured great hardships in their sometimes short lives. Sometimes though we are blessed to meet an “ancianos” who have lived long lives (102 or so) and provide us with great wisdom. Though we are strangers in their land, we are met with open arms, welcoming us as Christ would have done.

The biggest issue is the access to healthcare. While it may be available, provided by the government, there are still barriers to access. Often transportation to these clinics is very difficult and may take hours and multiple modes, walking great distances and traveling by bus, truck and so on. The other primary barrier is cost. Many people work the fields and can barely provide food for the family much less a trip to a clinic and then to have to purchase medications. There is just not enough money to go around and so they prioritize. We are their primary care clinics. We come once a year, and so once a year they wait in long lines just for access to see the clinicians and be provided with medication. As missionaries, we can offer a touch, a prayer and our time. Our caring and sharing means a great deal to the Salvadorans but also to each of us as Catholic missionaries. Our faith is bolstered, our daily aches and pains cannot compare to the daily hardships these people endure and our faith in each other as human beings is also restored.

“All things are possible for God.”
~Mark 10:27

Healing & Hope

Maria, of rural El Salvador, had been neglected and cast off as a burden after she suffered a stroke years ago, leaving her physically impaired and experiencing frequent seizures. Recently, Maria sought help at the Helping Hands Medical Missions clinic. Doctors gave her medicine for alarmingly high blood pressure and for the seizures. Throughout the years with no support from family and in failing health, Maria felt she was somehow to blame for her ailment.

Helping Hands medical missionaries prayed with Maria, demonstrating patience and kindness. They also ensured she had the medicines she so desperately needed as well as help from relatives at home. Thanks to Helping Hands missionaries and her faith in the Lord, Maria is not alone.

Spiritual & Physical Transformation

Anna was first seen by Helping Hands Medical missions in 2002 and has been seen on each each successive HHMM mission. This woman was afflicted with Filariasis, a parasitic disease caused by roundworm and typically transmitted by black flies and mosquitoes. A woman of about 37 or 38 years of age, her spirit and will has had a profound affect on the HHMM team.

Due to damage to her lymph system, Anna developed elephantiasis. Over the years she barely managed on her own. She took care to avoid infections and had her leg drained on several occasions. Missionaries were not only Anna’s source of comfort throughout her pain, but they eventually helped change her life. When Anna made the decision to have her leg amputated, a Helping Hands Medical Missions orthopedic surgeon took on the task. He successfully completed surgery, helped facilitate her rehabilitation and fitting with a prosthesis. Anna came to clinic this year wearing jeans and a size two shoe for the first time in many years. Using a cane and a wearing a “beaming” smile, her transformation and joy was overwhelming. She and countless others are why we work on mission.

These women are our heroes and reminders of faith in God and in each other.