

Safety of Volunteers in Honduras

Parents, family and those contemplating coming to Honduras are asking us about the issue of security. Many report an unfavorable portrait after scanning the State Department's web site, others alarmed by reports of Peace Corp workers being pulled out and accounts of violence caused by drug trafficking, poverty and crime. While I am writing to people interested in Honduras and the Olancho Aid Foundation, what I have described could apply to most of the world. I can never remember the State Department's site being inviting, not have I heard specific reasons, political or otherwise for the Peace Corp decision and if our country was drug free and if this country had better schools than there would be less crime and less poverty. It is all connected. Sadly!

The Foundation takes very seriously the safety and health concerns of our volunteers, in fact there are some who have suggested we are a bit "*too strict*" in our rules and regulations. We do it for the security of volunteers and we do it for ourselves. Our reputation is at stake! Behavior which is appropriate stateside is not always acceptable in Latin culture. Volunteers are part of the OAF and need to reflect its values.

We would like volunteers to embrace a simple life style that rejects a mall culture of consumerism and be recognized as people anxious to help one another. We have had very few instances of crime among the hundreds of people who come yearly from churches, schools, universities and other organizations. Regrettably one isolated incidence of a robbery took place recently but has served to remind everyone not to forget basic rules of safety. Life in rural America might allow open doors and windows so that the smells of the kitchen pass to the veranda. I don't believe that happens in NY, LA or other urban areas.

Often people are afraid of what they do not know or have not experienced. Violence is a part of the world today. However I have never seen in Honduras what is commonplace elsewhere: security scanners in schools, high school students killing their classmates, teachers or university students attacked by a sniper. That sadness has not stopped families from sending their children to Columbine or Virginia Tech.

I have worked here in Olancho for 20 years and we would never ask people to come or have people stay if we thought their lives were in danger. We realize that we must be more selective in the candidates we accept and will be asking former volunteers for more participation in the selection process. Service is imperative for all, but not all are cut out to work in Latin America.

We look forward to engaging in a conversation with perspective volunteers so that together we can sort out if you are what we need and secondly would Olancho be a good fit for you? God Bless!

Sincerely

Padre Ricardo T. Donahue