

## Christmas Greetings from Belize



Once again, Christmas is here before I have managed to get myself organised! With only 2 weeks to go, I have suddenly realised that I have not even started sending cards - and when you are in Belize and the post takes so long back to England, this is not good planning! Praise God for the internet! It's not that I haven't been thinking and preparing for Christmas; I was privileged to attend a leadership training conference in Houston, Texas, last weekend, and as well as very unexpected snow (Yes SNOW in Houston in December), I also attended a carol service and visited Bethlehem - The Woodlands United Methodist Church were re-enacting the Christmas Story, including having a real live donkey and camel (well Llama actually) outside the church! Rev'd Papouloute and I had been invited to attend an

International Leadership Institute conference to see if this is training we can bring back to Belize, not only for our potential Youth and Children's leaders, but for church leadership in general; we also hope to invite other denominations here to attend, and are planning on running the training by May 2010. A special thanks to everyone who made this trip possible for us, looked after us and made us feel so welcome.

The November meetings I mentioned in my last letter proceeded as planned, but my visitors from Honduras had an extra 2 days stay in Belize due to bad weather delaying their return flight. The plans for the Wesley School development got the go-ahead; there may be some changes in detail, but we are now able to try and attract further funding for the project. The Children and Youth Strategy, the main area of my work, was also discussed and we are now starting to work out the details of making it a reality. There will be a lot of work involved, not only for myself, but for all the members of the Children's, Youth and Young Adults Commissions, as we motivate, recruit and train our leaders and potential leaders. Another aspect of the work is to carry out consultation with the young people, to look at their needs and desires for their church; our Conference theme for the year 2010-2011 will be 'Young for Christ'; very fitting, with the emphasis on youth. The highlight of the week's meetings? The ordination of Rev Kofia Nials, originally from Guyana, but serving here in Belize.

Also in November, Marlene from YES and I spoke to the Rotarians in Cayo - in the West of Belize at their breakfast meeting, about trafficking and sexual exploitation of young women here in Belize. YES were also part of several demonstrations which took place in Belize City, during the international '16 Days of Activism' against gender based violence. One 'march' was entitled 'Ena fi She Shooz' (In Her Shoes), when men were asked to walk literally in the

shoes of women, to show their solidarity with them in fighting domestic violence. Meanwhile, the girls at the training centre are just completing their first upholstery projects, as part of our non-traditional skills training, funding by UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund).



The funding deadlines are nearly all completed - only 1 proposal still to be submitted before Christmas. But the round of planning meetings seems relentless, with another 2- day planning for Women's Issues Network of Belize tomorrow, and YES next week. Also planned for next week is a seminar to disseminate the findings of research recently done on male social participation and violence in urban Belize, which has been facilitated by an expert in the field from Jamaica. And in-between these meetings are all the usual end of term Christmas festivities for the children, and for the rest of us too!

Time for relaxation?

Well, on Garifuna Settlement Day this year, while others watched the dawn re-enactment of the Garifuna people arriving in Belize, I headed off to join some cruise ship passengers for a day's scuba diving out on the cayes; I'm



planning to find time for more over Christmas! That's the advantage of Christmas in the warm and sunny country of Belize (but I do miss the cold sometimes)!

Please don't think that just because this comes to you in a 'bulk emailing' I haven't thought of you individually. I had to re-do my mailing lists recently and so each person on the list has been in my thoughts and prayers. Please keep in your prayers all the people and projects mentioned above, as you go into the New Year. May you receive God's richest blessings this Christmas, enjoy a peaceful New Year, and be invigorated for what God has in store for us all in 2010.

With love and prayers,  
Maggie.