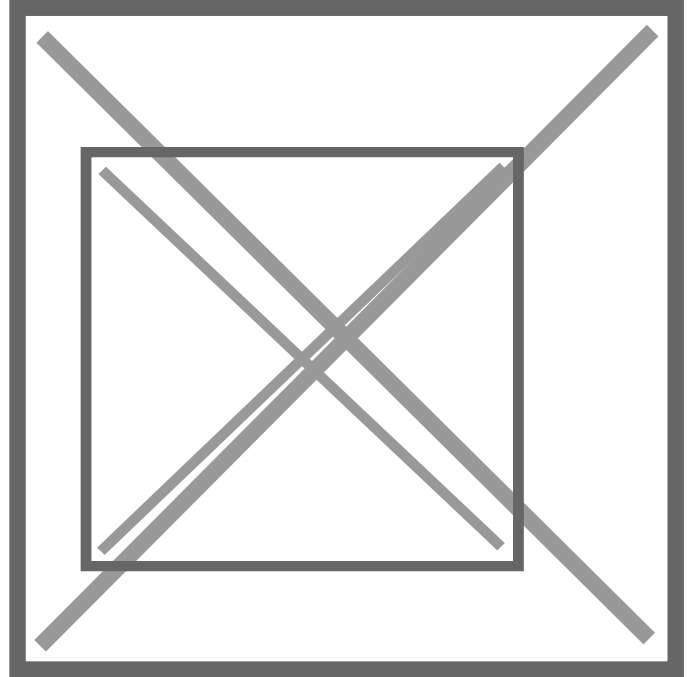


Costa Rica: Connecting with God's grace

by Laura Robinson –



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In August, a team of seven Salvationists from the Tustin Ranch and Santa Ana Temple corps (Calif.) took a short-term mission trip to the Centro Modelo Center for Adolescent Drug Abuse in San José, Costa Rica. Led by Laura Robinson and Sarah Lamkin, the group also included Ashley Cappucci, Sergio Cantu, Bramwell Freeman, Ashley Harper and Shawn Phillips. Below Robinson shares insights from the trip.

The pigs in Costa Rica are massive, some of the biggest I have ever seen—not that that is saying much, since I am a city girl by nature—and the smell, oh, wow, the smell was unbelievable. I took one look at the pigpens and knew this is where I was going to spend my week—washing, feeding, caring for over 50 huge pigs. People often wonder what happens on a mission trip; there you have it—the dirtiest, smelliest chore, that's what you do. But what most people miss is that these trips aren't about doing missions; they're about being a mission.

Our natural inclination as “Westerners” is to want to fix things, make things better, bigger, faster, more efficient. We look for schools to repair and buildings to build. We start up vacation Bible schools and spend our time busily running around making sure programs are in place and construction is on schedule. Often, we take for granted the work that the local people have already begun; we

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immediately look to improve things and without meaning to we negate the work that has already taken place.

In my experience, developing countries don't value bigger and better—sure, they appreciate nice things, but they would much rather spend their time, money and efforts on one another. They value relationships, friendships and people.

When we go on a mission trip we set out to connect with God's grace, already at work in the world. We do not bring God to the nations; he is already there—he has been and will remain there for all time. Missions expert and author Tim Dearborn in his book *From Mission Tourists to Global Citizens* says, "In the treasure hunt for [God's] grace, our encouragement and affirmation may be our most significant ministry."

For the first few days our mission team struggled to understand that we were in Costa Rica not to build something or start a new ministry, but to offer our friendship and encouragement to the young men living at San José's Centro Modelo, a rehabilitation center for drug addicted teenage boys. By simply living with the boys we were able to witness to them and see how God's hand has been moving in their lives since long before we arrived. We lived life as they did. When they were washing pigs, so were we; when they played a game of soccer or basketball, we did too. We ate, drank, worked and played together. By sharing in their everyday lives, we were able to build friendships quickly, and on our last night there seeing the tears in their eyes helped us to realize that we had done more than make friends, we had truly shared in the love of God.

"How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It's like precious oil poured on the head...for there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore." (Psalm 133)