

3-2014

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Becky St. Clair

Andrews University, stclair@andrews.edu

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Recommended Citation

St. Clair, Becky, "Short-term Missions, Long-term Partnership" (2014). *Lake Union Herald*. 113.
<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/luh-pubs/113>

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Short-term Missions, Long-term Partnership

BY BECKY ST. CLAIR

In 1990, Glenn Russell, assistant professor of religion, led a group of Andrews University students and Pioneer Memorial Church members in a mission trip to Romania, where they put on a FLAG (Fun Learning About God) camp for children in partnership with REACH International, a local nonprofit that helps children. Twenty-four years later, Glenn is still carrying on the tradition.

During winter break, a group of two dozen students accompanied Glenn to Hogar de Niños, a children's home in Honduras operated by REACH, where they coordinated FLAG camp for more than 150 children, led out in Sabbath school, held evening worship services, and generally assisted the regular staff.

"I always try to make sure it's meaningful for the students," says Glenn, "but this year, more than ever, had a profound effect on me."

The team not only conducted the camp but also put together large Christmas baskets for local families, containing enough food to last a family for close to a month plus toys for the children and more.

"The night we passed out Christmas baskets we all enjoyed a delicious dinner, and we all had seconds," recalls Glenn. "We were full of food and the Christmas spirit."

Glenn drove the truck with the baskets in the back, and while they were delivering them, at least a dozen people came up to the truck and said, "We put our children to bed tonight, and they haven't eaten all day. Please, do you have some food for us?"

"You feel so helpless," says Glenn. "We do what we can, but we can't solve this problem. I sat there thinking about Christmas back home, people giving presents to people who don't need them, and how much we have. It makes you wonder, *Why am I so blessed? Why do I have so much?* And it reminds



Glenn Russell, assistant professor of religion at Andrews University, baptizes a student in Honduras who was introduced to Jesus through the REACH program there.

you that we are part of a global church family — they are our brothers and sisters, and we have a responsibility to help them."

Having coordinated this trip to Honduras for 13 years now, Glenn has watched many of the children in the REACH program grow, both physically and mentally. It's what he calls a "mixed experience," as you see both the joy of one who has graduated from college, and then visit another in jail.

"The choices they make are just like our own children's choices," he says. "Young people make choices as they grow. It's painful when those choices are moving away from God and the good things in life, and it's wonderful when they make positive choices. But they never would have had the opportunity to make the positive choices without the REACH program."

Glenn says he never has to advertise much for these trips. Those who have participated before share their experiences with their friends and family, and he never has trouble finding volunteers.

"Last time we were there, the director came to me and said, 'Do not ask if you can come back; just tell us when you're coming,'" he says. "We're blessed to be able to serve alongside the dedicated staff at REACH, and we hope we're a bit of a blessing, too."

Becky St. Clair is media communications manager in the Department of Integrated Marketing & Communication at Andrews University.