

REPORT ON MY TRIP TO BAXTER—BOARD MEETING AND GRADUATION

By Bob Young
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I traveled to Honduras for the specific purpose of attending the Baxter board meeting and graduation. In comparison to most of my international trips, this was a very short trip of only four days.

Note: To understand some of the details included in the report below, you must know that Honduras had conducted a presidential election on the Sunday before I arrived as part of a group of about 40 North American visitors. The normal expectation in the Honduras election, as in our own country, is that results will be available late on the day of the election. Finally, on Monday some preliminary partial results were published, showing that the challenger was ahead by about five percentage points and his lead was declared to be insurmountable. Then, a mysterious and unexplainable “glitch” occurred, and no more results were available. When reporting resumed the following day, the incumbent began to make up ground rapidly. The result was suspicions of fraud and dishonesty that were coming to a head on Wednesday and on Thursday, the day most of the group arrived.

Thursday, Day One

When our group arrived in Honduras shortly after noon, the first order of business was a long delay in immigration. There was only one clerk to handle all of the foreigners who were arriving simultaneously on three incoming flights from the US—on United, American, and Delta. Unfortunately, the United flight I was on was the last of the three to arrive. The line was incredibly long, extending up the stairs to the departure and arrival hallway. It took over two hours before everyone in the group cleared immigration and customs and was ready to leave the airport for Baxter.



Arriving on campus at Baxter is always a wonderful opportunity to renew friendships and acquaintances. It is a time of hugs and greetings and catching up. A special blessing for me was the opportunity to greet and visit with Manuel Aquino, an elder from Neyba in the Dominican Republic. He was on campus for his son's graduation from Baxter's four-year program (*picture left, with Manuel and his granddaughter*).

On campus, we shared a festive afternoon and early evening.

Activities included a concert by the choir director and two Cuban students, a children's program (*picture right*), a report on 2017 clinic activities, great fellowship, renewed friendships, and a delicious dinner prepared by Baxter's excellent cooks.

After the scheduled events concluded, we visitors returned to hotel and checked in, ready to fall into bed since most of us had been up since 3:00 or 4:00 AM and had had a very long travel day, followed by the events on campus.





Friday, Day Two

Friday morning, we went from the hotel to the campus of Baxter. The first activity on the schedule was the dedication of fourth-floor chapel in memory of Frank Edward Price, long-time member of the board of directors of Baxter. Brother Price was from Huntsville, Texas. He served as an elder and was also an accomplished song leader. He loved leading singing at Baxter graduations. His son, Wade, member of the Memorial church in Houston, Texas, was able to be present to represent the Price family for the dedication (*picture right*).



The next activity was a tour of the new “Hope to Walk” facility (*picture left*). A building that had formerly served primarily as a storage area has been renovated into a center for making and fitting prosthetic legs. The cost of a prosthesis at the Baxter Clinic in Honduras is \$88, and dozens have now received limbs and are able to walk again.

The tour was followed by a graduation ceremony for mothers in nutrition program.

As the morning concluded with lunch, word came of demonstrations with multiple fires being set to rubbish, branches, and other combustible materials in the streets. Demonstrations were restricting traffic flow in various places. During the morning, many in the US group received emails from their airlines warning of the possibility of travel delays and cancellations due to the unrest in Honduras.

Friday afternoon, the board decided to meet on campus rather than trying to return to the hotel at midday. The off-campus activities for the rest of the group were cancelled and everyone stayed on campus for the afternoon.

It was necessary to return to the hotel about 5:00 PM, so the buses were loaded and left campus. The hotel is only about a mile from campus, but there were attempted blockades of the streets and the Honduran military was out in full force prohibiting traffic flow into conflicted areas. Our bus drivers succeeded in getting our group to the hotel by going the wrong way down an up-ramp and dropping the group off on the wrong side of a divided avenue. Fortunately, we were able to cross the six traffic lanes with no problem because there was no traffic.

The US guests were safely in the hotel, but the idea that the Baxter family—students, faculty, and employees—would come to the hotel for the scheduled evening devotional was impossible. Fortunately, the buses were able to return to Baxter without encountering any severe problems. One of the bus drivers had to walk 2 ½ hours to get home, since he could not travel on the streets in his personal vehicle.

There is a restaurant in the hotel, so we ate at the hotel. We noted that the mall behind the hotel was closed and that the mall entrances with lots of glass were being boarded up. A sure sign of difficulties—even the McDonald’s next door to the hotel was closed!

The hotel has a ninth-floor observation deck with a 360-degree view of Tegucigalpa. From the deck that evening we could see street fires and emergency vehicles responding in various parts of the city. There were very few people out and about. We were under military law, with constitutional rights suspended, and 6 PM to 6 AM curfew was imposed in an attempt to restrict nighttime movement and to maintain peace.

Saturday, Day Three

We awoke to calm, and the traffic on the streets seemed fairly normal. A couple of panels (not all) were removed from the mall entrances to allow foot traffic, and things appeared pretty normal. However, we learned that the US airlines were not operating into and out of Honduras on Saturday. For many in our group, that cast doubt on what would happen on Sunday.



On Saturday morning, the board was scheduled to meet in a conference room at the hotel, which we did. The morning activity for the rest of the US group was cancelled.

Because of the curfew, the original graduation schedule had to be altered. The original plan was for graduation at 3pm and the graduation banquet at 7 PM at an area banquet center. The changed schedule called for graduation at 1 PM and the banquet on campus at 3PM, to be concluded by 5PM so guests could return to the hotel and all others could return to their homes.

Despite the changed schedule, graduation was a wonderful event with a grand spirit of celebration (*picture left, graduates of the four-year program*). The meal was excellent, especially considering that it was prepared on short notice, and the awards for the graduates were distributed with recognition given. Unfortunately, about

half of the 32 graduates from the fifth-year program were unable to get to Tegucigalpa for graduation due to the unrest. (The fifth-year counseling program is focused in marriage and family interventions.) (*picture right, the Baxter chorus*)

Many among the North American visitors were especially excited during the banquet when we were able to check in for our Sunday afternoon flights. There was at least some hope that the airlines would be operating and that we would be able to leave on schedule. When we returned to the hotel, the mall was already closed. The changed schedule made for a long evening.





Sunday, Day Four

On this trip, I get up early every day to allow myself plenty of time to enjoy the excellent buffet breakfast at the hotel. After check out, it was time to go to campus for the morning worship service at 9 AM.

One would hardly have known that there were any problems in Tegucigalpa. McDonald's was open, and the mall was getting ready for a typical Sunday afternoon.

The morning was calm and sunny. Sharing the united worship in two languages with about 1000 brothers and sisters in Christ from multiple nations is always a special memory (*picture left*).

We arrived at the airport a little before noon to work through check in, to pass through exit immigration and security, and bid final goodbyes to the group that had shared four very interesting days.