



Mark and Rosalie Balfour

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Contact details:
revmbalfour@gmail.com
r_balfour@sky.com



Location: Guatemala



What we do: Providing pastoral support for workers in urban ministries, especially Street Kids Direct and partner projects in Guatemala and Honduras.

Dear Friends,

It was great to see so many of you as we travelled around the UK this summer. We love the opportunity to visit our supporting churches and realised that because of the interruption of the pandemic, we'd not been able to make any visits for three years. For those churches and friends we weren't able to see this time, we hope to be able to see you in person next summer.

Soon after our return to Guatemala in August, we received a request from the Street Kids Direct-supported team in Honduras (Proyecto Alas) and CMS mission partners Lindsey and Steve Poulson, asking if we could visit them immediately as those involved in the project had faced some traumatic situations.

Threats of extortion had been made against two members of the team running the project and cafe, and they had had to go into hiding. Furthermore, a fight outside the front door of the project at 5pm had got out of hand and a man had been killed, witnessed by another member of the team, who happened to be walking by (praise God, the team had felt they should close early that afternoon and there were no children present at the time). After asking for police protection it was discovered that the extortion threats were not from one of the large gangs as purported, but by people imitating them, who were also extorting other businesses in the town. By the time we arrived the gang who were being imitated had discovered the situation and taken matters into their own hands and killed two of those making the threats. So although the threats had been removed, the team were understandably very shaken. It was such a privilege to be able to spend time with them and listen and pray as well as have some fun times and meals together. Thank you to those who give – your generosity means that we are able to respond and make this kind of journey “at a moment's notice”.

This incident has made us think about our understanding of the Old Testament and the way in which people such as David asked God to remove their enemies. Coming from the UK in the 21st century, this aspect of the Old Testament can make uncomfortable reading at times: it's hard to think of a loving God as someone who might actually allow the violent removal of those who would harm his people. We'd much rather be able to reason with people and pray that they come to know Jesus and turn away from violence. But for so much of the world the threat of violence at the hands of enemies is as real today as



Celebrating five years of Proyecto Alas

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**With Jesus
With each other
To the edges**



it was in the Old Testament and they can read the Bible from a very different perspective.

We were able to stay a bit longer than originally planned and visit a new school working with children who live around the rubbish dump in Tegucigalpa. We were also there for the fifth anniversary event of Proyecto Alas. Huge congratulations to Steve, Lorena, Chris and all the others who have worked so hard to establish the amazing work happening there with high-risk children and their families. Mark and I really appreciated the opportunity to meet the pastor of the local church and his wife, who supply so many of the young volunteers to the project.

It is a time of great change for the SKD Guatemala team, including a decision to close the school which was set up to educate the children during the pandemic. The children will return to the public school system, and the two teachers, who have served them

so well, will look for new jobs. The vision of SKD has always been about mentoring the children and their families and supporting their education though not necessarily supplying it. Do pray for the team as they look to the future and plan the next steps. We will be helping with a retreat for them and continue to meet with team members individually.

Mark has started a part-time MA in staff care and well-being, with a particular emphasis on those working in mission. He's studying online with All Nations college in the UK. Monday lectures start at 10am in the UK, which means getting up at 2.30am! Do pray as we adjust to this new routine.

This year the Guatemalan rainy season has been particularly challenging. Climate change is making a big impact on the country. The past few years have seen much less rain than in the past and many areas have had droughts, which have devastated the harvests. However, this year the seemingly almost endless rain has been washing away the crops, while causing a huge number of landslides and sink holes. Many people have died or been injured while others have lost their homes. It can be quite a challenge for us just to drive around our area due to the number of landslides blocking the roads and being aware that one could happen at any moment down the steep mountainsides from which the roads are cut.

It was wonderful to be able to celebrate Guatemala's Independence Day (15 September) in person this year. We were invited to the celebrations at the Treasures of God home for disabled girls, of which we are trustees. The staff had taken such care to enable the girls to take part in a pageant celebrating the history and culture of the country of which they are understandably all so proud.

Thank you so much for your support and prayers for us. As we always ask, please pray for us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus so that we don't get distracted, and focus on what's needed.

With love, Rosalie and Mark



Photos from top to bottom: Rosalie with Owen, a young man in Honduras whom we have known for 11 years – now connected to Proyecto Alas; visit to the school near the rubbish dump in Honduras; SKD Guatemala goodbye barbecue for Ben Soden, leaving after five and a half years of amazing work with the street team; Treasures of God celebrating Independence Day



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