

12-2007

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Valdez, Norma Linda, "Spiritual Growth in Mission Trips" (2007). *Pastoral Institute*. 10.
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SPIRITUAL GROWTH IN MISSION TRIPS

A Pastoral Project
Presented to the Pastoral Institute,
University of the Incarnate Word,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in Religious Studies

By

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Date: Dec. 1, 2007

Church and Ministry

“Being a person in the image and likeness of God involves existing in a relationship, in relation to the other I,” Pope John Paul II states in his Apostolic Letter Mulieris Dignities (1988) this best describes my approach not only to my ministry but to my way of life.

It is my strong belief that as Catholics we must be familiar with the theological foundations of the teachings of the church we must also be informed citizens, familiar with our own community, nation and world.

Catholic social teaching begins with each individual through the messages of Jesus. Although Jesus offered no specific economic message, he proclaimed the kingdom of God and the redemption of people from sin.

The unassailable dignity of the human person, whose roots and guarantee are found as God’s creation, and the constitutive social nature of human beings are clear foundations of a Christian anthropological life which are found in the Book of Genesis. The initial relationship between man and woman, the union of whom “constitutes the first form of communion between persons” (Gaudium et Spes, 1966) is connected to the respect of the laws of nature that God has inscribed in the universe for man to care for and live in. In accordance with God’s will the union is seen more clearly when his plan of salvation becomes a reality. Man has in his heart a law written by God, to obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged.

Church is not only the building we worship in. Church is our community, nation and world. When we try to teach our teens what church is, they sit there looking at us, not really comprehending. For a lot of people they must see it, feel it and touch it before they can understand it. Most teens have only experienced their school, neighborhood and community. Some may have been lucky enough to travel to another town or state. Very few have gone on a mission trip to a developing country, to see and help the marginalized the poor or the oppressed.

Yet, as stated in the work of Psalms the fundamental message of Sacred Scripture proclaims that the human person is a creature of God (139:14-18). Pope John Paul II tells us in his Encyclical Letter, Centesimus Annus, "Men and women, in the concrete circumstances of history, represent the heart and soul of Catholic social thought" (807).

So why are so many of our younger generation self centered and materialistic? When and how did they learn that it was alright to walk by someone in need? For far too many people the concept of giving has become putting a few coins or dollars in the collection plate a few times a year.

In Romans 10:17 we read, "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through preaching Christ." Through our baptism we have a contractual obligation to spread the good news. As stated in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, "lay Christians have the right and duty, to work so the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by all" (900). The apostle's ministry is the continuation of his mission, so too is my calling. In the book of James 15:9,30 we are told "as the Son can do nothing of his own accord" continuing in the book of James 15:5 we are also told "so those whom Jesus sends can do nothing apart from him."

Ministry is spreading the good news! Finding a balance has been difficult, as we must strive to cover all facets of “church” as stated in Renewing the Vision by the USCCB (1).

Accepted the call to be a “youth minister” is both exciting and challenging. Inherently connected to the sacramental character of ecclesial ministry the Catechism of the Catholic Church goes on to say “its character as service” (876) as the apostles before us tell us in 1 Cor 9:19, we too are called to “freely become the slaves of all.”

As Youth Ministers, we have the capability to make learning and loving Christ fun and exciting. Arousing the hearts and minds of the teens and developing a passion for the church and Jesus in all his great glory and mystery takes creativity. But first we must introduce them to him, help the teens to develop a relationship with him, so that in the course of that relationship they come to know him and trust him.

As Renewing the Vision has pointed out, “a comprehensive approach is needed to utilize each of the Church’s ministries (19).

Through the activities as a mission trip the teens have the opportunity to learn and understand they are the church, and they too have a responsibility to spread the good news. The potential is there to focus on the three important goals of Renewing the Vision, to helping empower our young people so that they may faithfully live as disciples of Christ, teaching our young people to accept responsibility and to fully participate in the life, mission, and work of the faith community and to foster a personal and spiritual growth.

Setting

This project will take place in Juticalpa, Honduras, which is in the state of Olancho. The Diocese of Fort Worth which is in Texas adopted the Diocese of Juticalpa shortly after hurricane Mitch.

There are five parishes in the Diocese of Juticalpa and this mission trip is partnered with San Francisco de Asis in Catacamas. Catacamas is geographically in the center of the state of Olancho.

In the early 1975 all priest and religious were expelled from Olancho following the murder of two priests and 14 Delegates.

In the early 1980's Pope John Paul II visited Honduras and asked the government to allow him to send a new bishop. Bishop Muldoon volunteered and recruited three Franciscan priests and one Jesuit priest.

The state of Olancho is about 8,000 square miles and is predominately mountainous with only 72 miles of paved roads.

Very few people in the Diocese of Juticalpa have access to basic human needs, such as portable water, education and primary medical care.

The objective of this project is to determine if mission trips contribute to the spiritual growth of its participants. I will attend and participate in a 7 day mission trip with a team in rural Honduras with the Diocese of Fort Worth. The goal of this mission trip is to give medical and dental care and distribute the necessary medications to the people.

A list of questions will be given to the team on the plane as we are flying down there to help establish where they are in reference to their spiritual life. Some similar questions will be given the last two days of the trip and I will conduct individual interviews with at least 50% of the participants serving on the mission trip and ask them an open ended guided set of questions. The responses will be summarized and typed. I will analyze all responses looking for common themes to determine if there was indeed any spiritual growth.

Project Proposal Format

1. The pastoral setting in which this project will take place is in Juticalpa which is in the department or state of Olancho, Honduras. The Diocese of Fort Worth partnered with the Diocese of Juticalpa shortly after hurricane Mitch struck there. As a developing country the devastation of hurricane Mitch made a depressed situation even worse. Olancho is approximately 8,000 square miles of predominantly mountainous terrain, with approximately only 72 miles of paved roads. In comparison, the Fort Worth Dioceses encompasses 23,950 square miles.

This community is particularly appropriate for this project since we have ties with the Diocese of Juticalpa, which makes it easier to travel and volunteer in Honduras. We will be working with the people from the Diocese of Olancho and based out of Juticalpa.

While most of Honduras is poor the community of Juticalpa is an extremely poorer part of Honduras. According to the 2007 CIA World Factbook (3) the median age in Honduras is 19.7 for males and 20.1 for females.

Aside from language being an obstacle since Spanish is the native language there and most of our teens do not speak Spanish, another obstacle may be the socioeconomic difference between the two groups.

Basketball is played in both countries, soccer is the national sport here in Honduras and softball is more or less the national sport of the United States. An activity such as anyone

or all of these sports would break the ice and help both sides come out of their comfort zone.

2. The activity I propose for this project is more of an immersion program than a mission trip as this is a good way to show our teens that their entire world is not full of malls, money and possessions. With the capitalistic way of life here in the United States our teens can not grasp that "their world" extends beyond their comfort zone. The teens will be meeting with local teens for a friendly game of sports, teaching basic hygiene, and visiting the only senior citizens home in the country, visiting a technical school for abandoned children and doing repairs and yard work at a convent. On a previous mission trip to Honduras I was able to see first hand that there is a real need and our teens can fill a part of this need while learning about our global responsibilities.

3. I selected an English teacher, since my writing is not where it should be, a coordinator of RCIA at a different parish, he is able to give constructive criticism with honesty and a parishioner who holds varies degrees in Religion and English, who is active at our parish. She recently lost her husband of many years and was extremely happy to have something to do for someone else.

4. Having gone to Honduras before with our then Bishop, Joseph Delaney to survey the needs and possibility of teens going to Honduras, I was able to visit the places and see first hand what the needs were. I spoke with the department heads and discussed the possibility of our teens visiting. They were excited about the games and felt the 3 games would be good. It was felt that in soccer Honduras would have the lead, in softball our Texas teens would have the lead and both teams would be on an even plan with basketball.

5. In the planning stage of the project I met with each one of my focus group people several times, gave them my ideas and we brain stormed.

6. Some of the goals of my project is to show that although some mission trips are expensive and may not be “working mission trips” they are important and have the possibility to change the lives of many. I will be able to evaluate everyone on the mission trip through the pre survey, after survey and interview each member of the mission trip which will help me to determine any change in the thoughts and feelings of those in attendance. The entire team will be involved in the evaluation which will be completed before we each go our separate ways. I will also have contact numbers of each in case there is any additional questions or clarifications needed.

7. Some of my objectives are increasing teen spirituality, teaching the teens the difference between a real need and a felt need, motivating the teens to want to be fully functioning Catholics, and to help the teens learn what Church really is. By the end of the mission trip the teens should have a good grasp of the above. My role in the accomplishment of each of the objectives is to help the teen build the bridge between the intellect and the heart.

8. The knowledge needed to accomplish this project is that of what is church and how to convey it to our teens. I feel I have a good insight of what church is in accordance to our Catholic doctrine. I need to find a way to relate the intellect of what church is to the heart side of the teens. In my opinion a good way to move intellect to the heart side is through experience and the understanding and acknowledging of the information. The teens need to read some of our doctrines and help them more fully understand why we are doing what we do.

9. The skills need to accomplish this project are organizational skills and flexibility.

Honduras runs on its own time, they are more relaxed about time than we are in the United States. I feel that I possess both skills; however I need to learn to be a bit more organized. Discipline is the only way I know of that will help me to become more organized.

10. Attitudes of happiness and caring are needed for this project. These attitudes were well-established in me during my formative years. My father was a very happy and caring person which he passed on to his children.

11. Involvement of our adult volunteers is important in order for this project to continue. I will have each staff member take a prayer service and take a reading from the bible for the prayer service that is related to giving and from the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church to read and discuss with the teens each night. It is my hope that our church can make this mission trip a once a year activity, if the adult are able to gain a sense of ownership the mission trips could possible continue. With enough adult volunteers this trip could be possible without too much hardship on the adult volunteers, especially if go on a rotation bases.

12. My personal learning goals of this project are to develop my ability to see God in the eyes of all. As for my professional goals they are to employ the understanding and utilize the aptitude I developed through my course work to plan, organize, implement and facilitate a mission trip with emphasis on teaching the six major principles of the Church's social teaching to our teens. In addition I hope that the teens will continue the work which Jesus has called us to do.

13. I would like my resource person to share her expertise of writing. I know that I have good ideas and a solid base as far as our doctrine goes, I emphatically need help with my lack of writing skills.

APPENDIX A
PRE-SURVERY

Name _____

How old are you?

- A. 20-30
- B. 31-40
- C. 41-50
- D. 51-60
- E. 61 or over

Gender

- A. Male
- B. Female

How often do you attend church service?

- A. Daily
- B. A few times a week
- C. Weekly
- D. Monthly
- E. Only on special occasions
- F. Rarely
- G. Never

Have you ever been on a mission trip before?

- A. Yes. Location(s) _____
- B. No

How would you rate your current level of spirituality?

- A. Very spiritual
- B. Moderately spiritual
- C. Hardly spiritual
- D. Not spiritual
- E. Unsure

Do you feel participating in this mission trip will help you grow spiritually?

- A. Yes
- B. No
- C. Unsure

What do you hope to gain if anything from participating in this mission trip?

APPENDIX B
POST - SURVERY

Name _____

How would you rate your current level of spirituality?

- A. Very spiritual
- B. Moderately spiritual
- C. Hardly spiritual
- D. Not spiritual
- E. Unsure

Do you feel participating in this mission trip helped you grow spiritually?

- A. Yes
- B. No
- C. Unsure

Describe how you grew spiritually during this mission trip.

Describe in your own words your most spiritual moments during the trip.

How do you feel that participating in a mission trip contributes to an individual's spiritual growth?

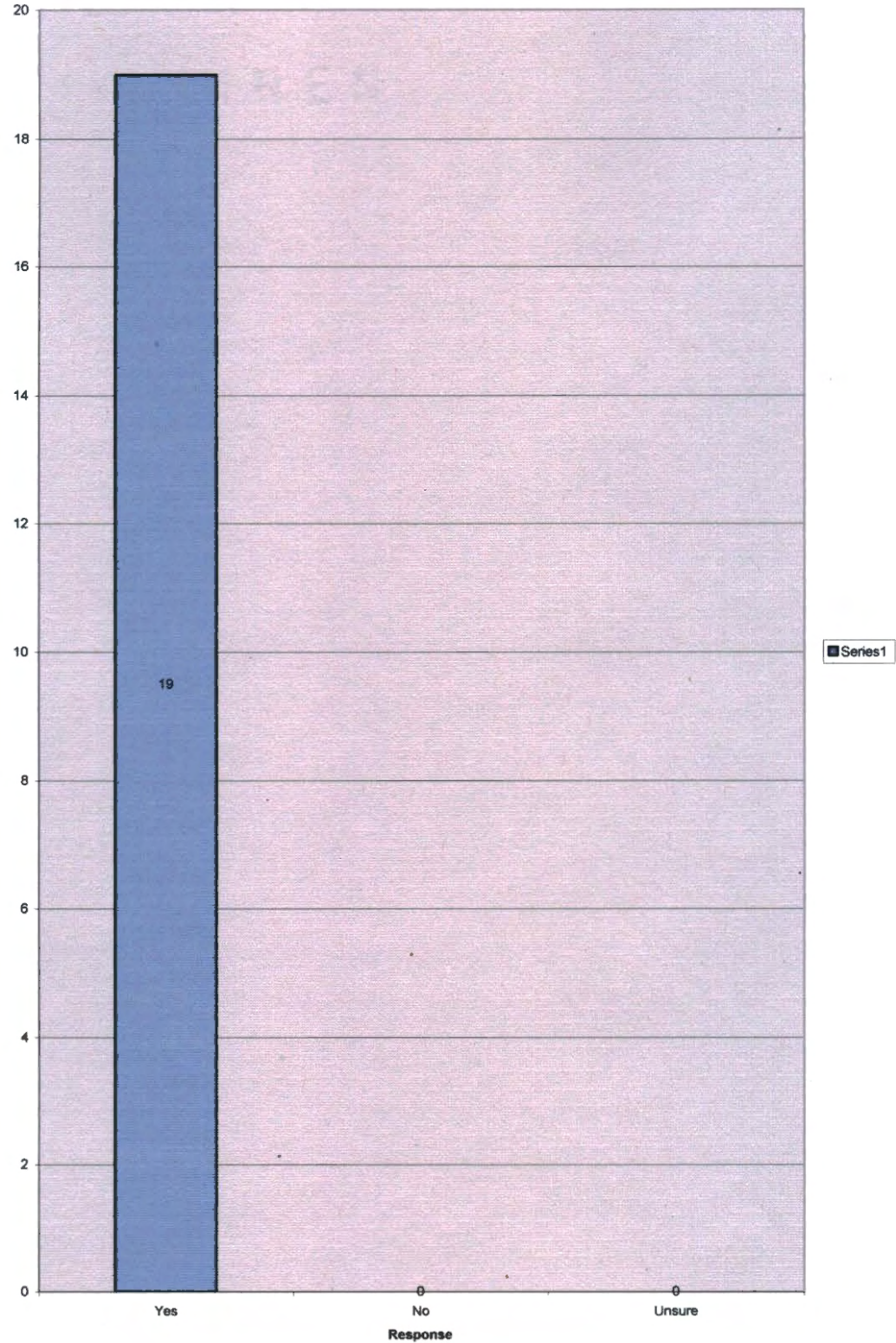
Would you recommend youth participate in a mission trip as part of their spiritual learning process?

APPENDIX C

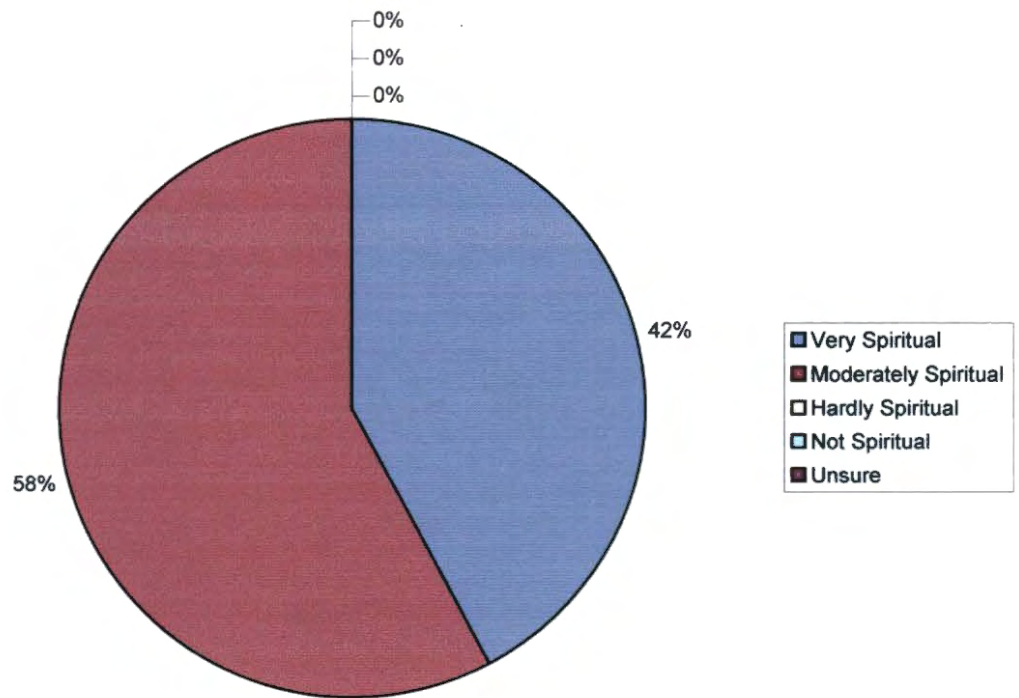
DATA

GENDER	
Male	8
Female	11
AGE	
21-30	2
31-40	4
41-50	4
51-60	6
61 and over	3
Been on A Mission Trip Before?	
Yes	12
No	7
How Often Do You Attend Church Service	
Daily	2
A few time a week	2
Weekly	12
Monthly	2
Only on special occasions	0
Rarely	1
Never	0
Level of Spirituality-Prior to trip	
Very Spiritual	6
Moderately Spiritual	10
Hardly Spiritual	1
Not Spiritual	1
Unsure	1
Do you feel participating in a mission trip will help you grow spiritually?	
Yes	18
No	0
Unsure	1
POST TRIP QUESTIONS	
How would you rate your current level of spirituality? -Post trip	
Very Spiritual	8
Moderately Spiritual	11
Hardly Spiritual	0
Not Spiritual	0
Unsure	0
Did participating in the mission trip help you grow spiritually?	
Yes	19
No	0
Unsure	0

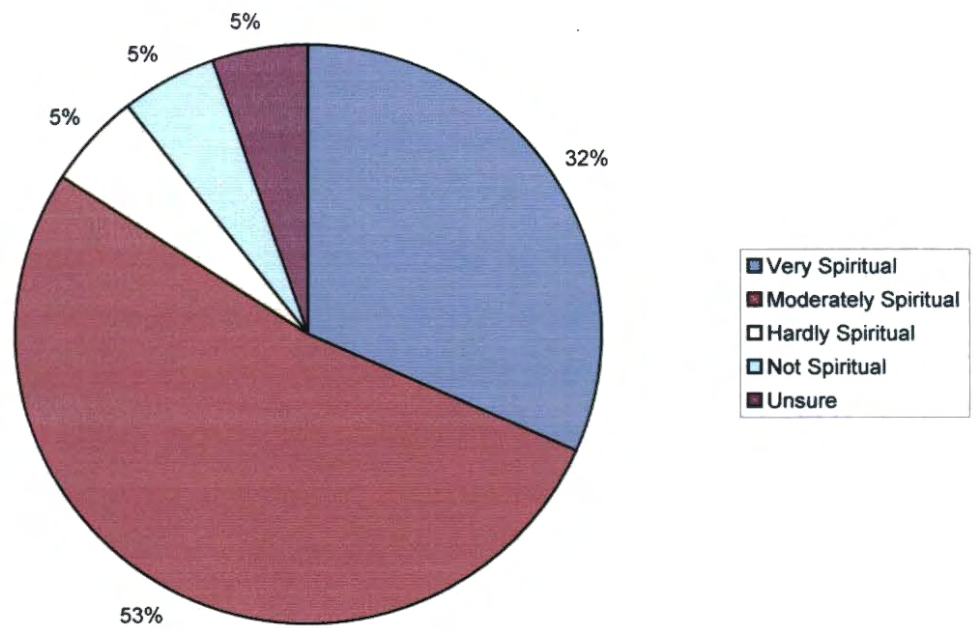
DID PARTICIPATING IN THE MISSION TRIP HELP YOU GROW SPIRITUALLY?



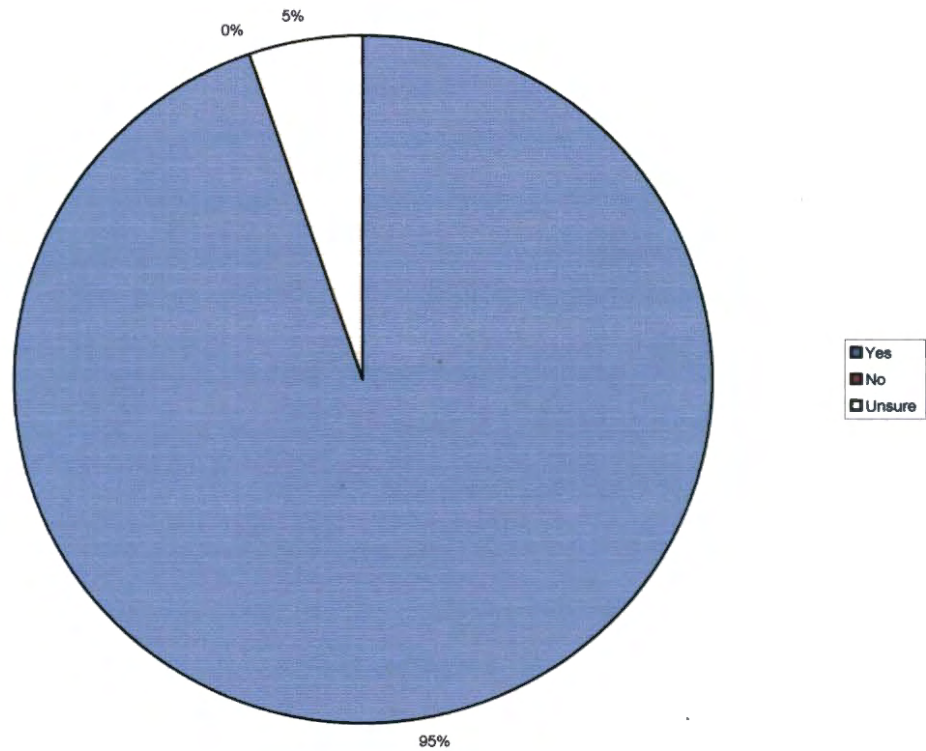
LEVEL OF SPIRITUALITY-POST TRIP



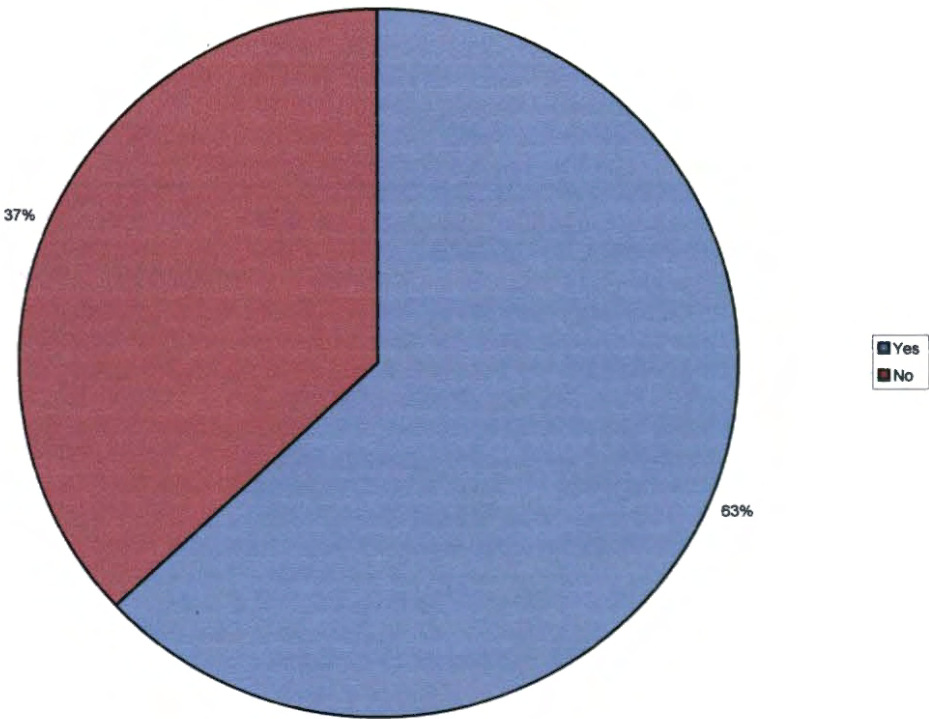
LEVEL OF SPIRITUALITY PRIOR TO THE TRIP



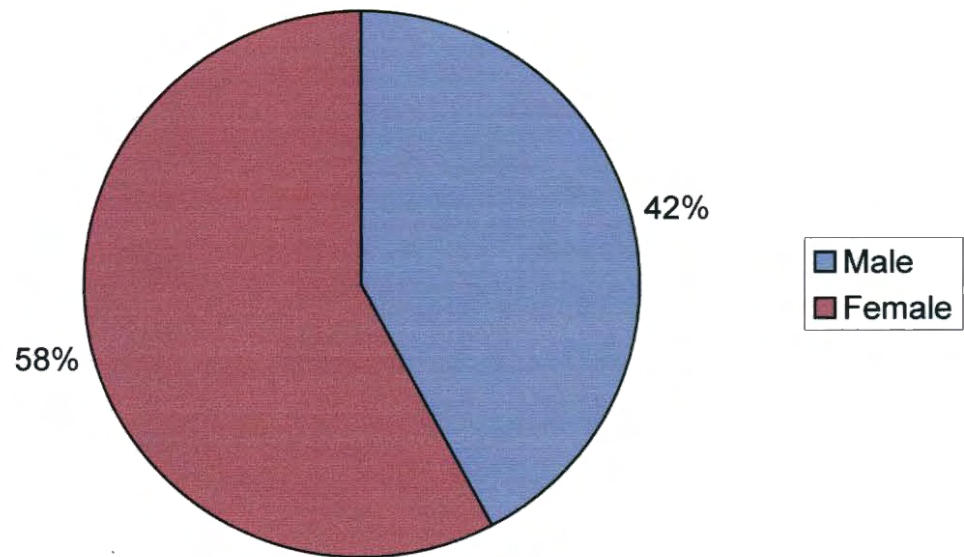
DO YOU FEEL PARTICIPATING IN A MISSION TRIP WILL HELP YOU GROW SPIRITUALLY?



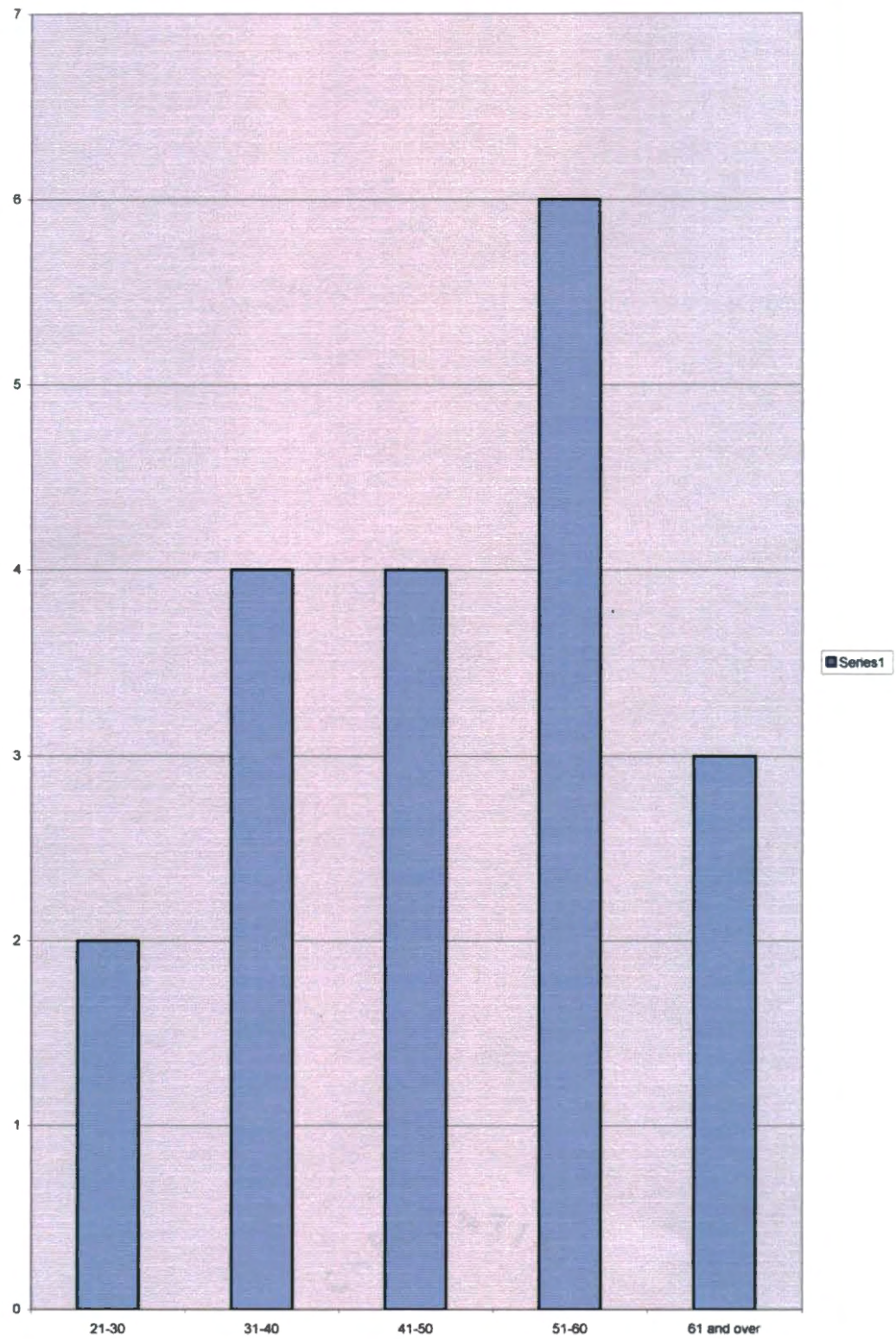
PREVIOUS MISSION TRIP



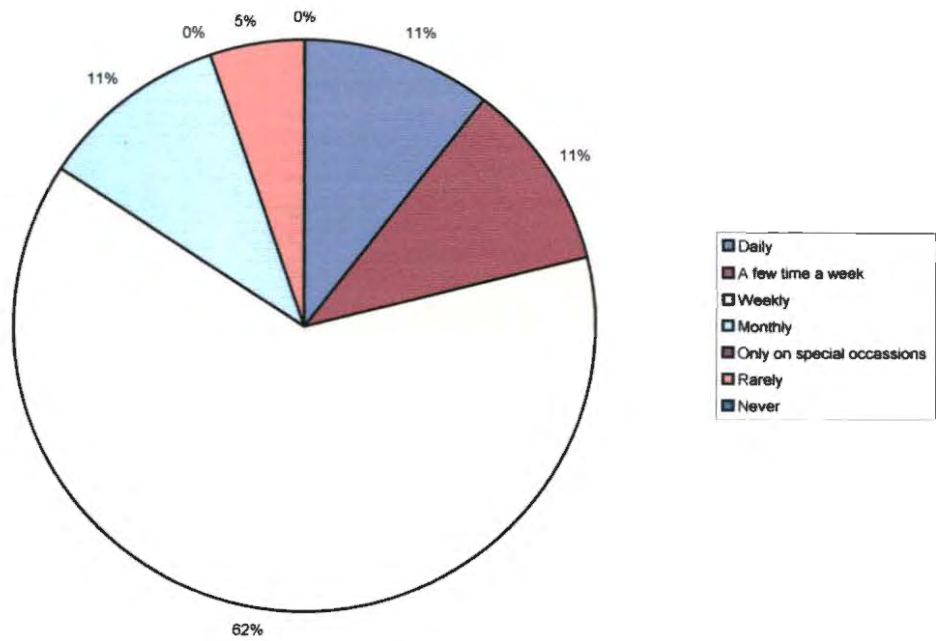
Gender Pie Chart



AGE OF PARTICIPANTS



FREQUENCY OF CHURCH SERVICE ATTENDANCE



How Often Do You Attend Church Service

Daily	2
A few time a week	2
Weekly	12
Monthly	2
Only on special occassior	0
Rarely	1
Never	0

Project Evaluation

1. My Focus Group helped with the getting the surveys written so they were easily understood and helped in editing the surveys. However, they slowed me down in editing and in with meeting with them. At times they would change the time and date, which made for a much longer process.
2. My original goals for my project were to show that although some mission trips are expensive and may not be “working mission trips” they are important and have the possibility to change the lives of many, and to show our teens that “church” is larger than the “parish” they attend. Yes, I feel that a mission trip that is not a “working mission trip” can and will change the lives of many who participate.
3. The knowledge I gained as described in my proposal was through participating on a mission trip. There was other knowledge that I needed that I did not recognize in advance, which was that not everyone would react in the same way. One or two participants were actually disgusted with the poor. They would not touch them or even come close to the poor people. They stayed at a distance, not just with their hearts and minds but also with their bodies. I needed this knowledge so as not to judge the people that could not find the room in their hearts.
4. I was able to gain the skills I expected toned by praying for continued guidance. I will need the skill of patience in the future so as not to be judgmental.
5. The attitudes that I was able to develop that I expected to need was compassion and tolerance with the local adults. These were attitudes I did not recognize in advance that

I would need. The local adults were the ones that were constantly asking for the small gifts and items that we had. Even though we shared them with the teens the adults wanted some or wanted more. I will need to develop a kind way of conveying that the gifts are for the children and teens. I feel if we bring the adults gifts, they will still ask for more.

6. I was able to minimize the obstacles we encountered because I knew that we were only going to be there for a few days. The obstacle I encountered that was not expected was not having hot water to shower. I was able to minimize it by thinking of the poor children having to bathe in cold water also or having to bathe in the contaminated river. If they can handle it I certainly could for a few days.

7. I perceived the work I did as contributing to the leadership capacity of other by teaching them the difference of a real need and a felt need. Many came away with the understanding of our Catholic social teaching through our encyclicals and documents. The mission team was taking home with them the importance of participating in mission trip. They will be the eyes and ears of the poor in developing programs to give to the youth and people in Juticalpa.

8. My personal learning goals as outlined in the project proposal was to gain a knowledge of what "church" really means according to our doctrine. I feel this goal was obtained through participation in various mission trips. As for my professional goal, I feel that I need a better knowledge of the type of prayer service that we will have at the end of each day with time for questions and reflection and to answer any questions of the day's events and any spiritual feelings, acknowledgements or fear that the mission team may be experiencing.

9. My project resource person was most helpful by helping me stay on task. I tend to be like a butterfly, going from one project to another before finishing the first project. She was least helpful with the amount of time that she needed to finish a task. Even though I am a butterfly, I get the task completed, she would take twice as long as I would and many times it was frustrating.

10. I do not feel my project deviated from the theology of church I originally articulated. Through my courses and studies, I deem I have a good awareness of our social doctrine of the Church. From my own experience with this project I feel my own theology of church and ministry has been re-affirmed. However I must admit I was challenged with the behavior of a few of our team members that appeared to be appalled by the poor. I was judging them just as they were judging the poor. I was appalled by them just as they were appalled by the poor. The incongruity of the realization that my behavior was no better than theirs was an awakening moment for me. At first I tried to justify it in my own mind, but as I explored in my heart my feelings I came to a consciousness level that both behaviors were indeed the same. This experience brought a higher level of awareness of the humanness of Jesus and His divinity.

The practice of ministry as experienced in this project did not differ from the theory of which I articulated.