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Lilly Grant: *Hallelujah Honduras*
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Simplicity in Service

Now five months after my experiences in Honduras, I came to a conclusion (at least one that is still open for flexibility). Sitting in my American studies class, we were discussing a reading and drawing connections with other literature from the course and thinking with a connecting mind, understanding the complexity in processes and products, as we often do in the class. Meanwhile, the discussion unfolded and one concept in particular hit me—simplicity.

Last April when I was applying for *Hallelujah Honduras: Vocation and International Service Organizations*, I was motivated for more international travel and the prospect of spending three weeks of my summer in a more worthwhile context than the summer job that would afford my books for first semester. The application required me to write an essay explaining why I was interested in the program and what had I hoped to get out of it. Naturally I came forth with lofty goals. My essay began with a paragraph full of shocking statistics gleaned from my travels to other countries and the prospect of complicating these statistics and using my liberal arts tools excited me. My intent was stated as such that, “I hope[d] to incorporate interdisciplinary perspectives as I [would] continue to understand the interconnectedness of the world in which we live and our relationships with other cultures.”

I spent three weeks in Honduras, learning about solidarity and accompaniment with Hondurans and the importance of walking with them in their social location, attempting to understand their worth in the world and not selfishly serving to fulfill my

philanthropic duties as a St. Olaf student. We attended church services, planned classroom activities, toured civic organizations, sang songs and played games with handfuls of energetic kids. Still, amidst the simplicity of understanding my neighbor in Honduras, I felt like I needed to complicate things, understand why systems in Honduras work the way they do, become fluent in Spanish and return home with a complete resume and outline of my future vocation, having understood my *true* calling for humanity.

Despite only returning home with bits-and-pieces of those things and memories with my group that cannot be duplicated, it took me five months, several attempts to write, several drafts of a never quite complete essay and a single moment in class to understand that the purpose of the trip for me was simplicity—simplicity in conversation, simplicity in helping someone who is walking on the same path as me and simplicity in doing what I feel needs to be done for a common good.

Upon returning to campus for my senior year, I felt energized from my interesting travels over the summer. I went to chapel on the first Sunday back and ironically, the closing hymn was “The Spirit Sends Us Forth to Serve”—a perfect theme to kick off the year. The second verse gave me both a nostalgic memory of my time in Honduras, as well as a motto in which to accompany others and live in solidarity.

*We go to comfort those who mourn and set
the burdened free; where hope is dim, to
share a dream and help the blind to see.*

Suddenly, the lessons of the summer materialized in a hymn that Sunday and I can return to my journal, where I had a chance to synthesize much of the information that I gathered during a typical day in Honduras.

Our next stop was to meet a woman whose husband and son recently die and she had just undergone surgery. Again, we sang our staple songs, “Um Yah Yah,”

*“Beautiful Savior,” and “Amazing Grace,” and listened to the prayer in Spanish. One powerful phrase that Josephina’s companion said was, “God won’t give you baggage too heavy to carry” (according to Lindsay’s translation).
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This simple “take-home-message” not only gave this woman hope to carry on during the rough days ahead, but proved the importance of faith in the Christian culture of Honduras. All of the pressures associated with these complex burdens might be lifted with simple faith in God and the solidarity of others to walk along-side the ailing or even joyous individual.

In his book *Callings* Gregg Levoy states, “The purpose of calls is to summon adherents away from their daily grinds to a new level of awareness, into a sacred frame of mind, into communion with that which is bigger than themselves.”¹ The philosophy behind the Lilly program enabled me to step out of the day-to-day monotony and bring me to a place that needs recognition. This concept of “communion with that which is bigger than [myself]” is the great drive toward solidarity and finding the simple, inherent values that make all human beings tick. Solidarity in itself may be a form of service to others, while across borders, visitors like us have the opportunity to bridge the cultural divides that separate us from Hondurans and embrace those differences to bring something positive back to the U.S.

But if you’re willing to sit with ambiguity, to accept uncertain and contradictory meanings, then your unconscious will always be a step ahead of your conscious mind in the right direction. You’ll therefore do the right thing, although you won’t know it at the time.²

¹ Levoy, Gregg. *Callings: Finding and Following an Authentic Life*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 1997, 2.

² *Ibid.*, 37.

These quiet ruminations solidify many of those omnipresent complex thoughts that resonate with vocational calling and its connection to service and the wonderment of a concrete duty finding its way to me.

At this point, my objective calls me to “let my life speak,” as coined by Parker J. Palmer. I have the opportunity to play an integral role in society and must act on that gift (whatever it may be) for the good of all people. The goal of solidarity and my personal mission of complexity, has been reduced to a product of simplicity—one where my life is slightly more authentic and an understanding that all the complex parts make a more significant whole.

Works Cited

Levoy, Gregg. *Callings: Finding and Following an Authentic Life*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 1997.