

Dear
Sister Afke,
Brother Chris,
Members of the Mennonites of Bussum-Naarden

Thank you so much for your letter and for your continuing interest in our project with the girls of Los Laureles. I had mentioned before and once more, and it's that all this beautiful things are possible thanks to you.

Please thank on my behalf the congregation of Bussum-Naarden for their support this past years; it brings me much happiness to have the opportunity to share with you all that I've been doing in my work with the children on Laureles.

Before, sharing with you the activities that we're doing I will answer the questions that you posed from the member's meeting:

Are the boys also getting sexual education and do they learn something about their own responsibility before and after pregnancies?

- In Honduras there persist legacies of prejudice and erroneous readings on the body, sex, morality, and ultimately human behavior, the largest problem in in the community in terms of ideology is the problem of machismo. An attitude that is present not only in the behavior and thinking of the men themselves, but also among women. This affects different areas but in

terms of sex education, little boys are the most distorted and also the most difficult to reach. They are encouraged to early sexual initiation, and are invited to set aside the emotional part and responsibility that should exist between a man and a woman. Currently the boys are not getting any sex education, but I'm working on motivating related organizations to engage in the sexual education of children of this community.

How about contraceptives? Are there possibilities for using them or are moral and financial problems too high?

- Many people in the community are unaware of its existence or its correct use. Personally, I have been working on sexual education workshops where adult women from the community have participated and have been shown different methods of contraception and they have been well accepted. About the costs, the government has a program of Family Planning where people can go for contraception and they are delivered to very low cost or even free.

I hope that can answer your questions, but as other questions arise they are surely welcome.

Now, how both projects are going this year?

Since the building that we had been using to meet with the children was unexpectedly gifted by the President of the community to a family that didn't have a place to live. It has been a little difficult to arrive in the community and not have a place to meet. After that, I made several attempts but I have not found an effective way to meet my children. For now, I occasionally bring them clothes, gifts, toys and supplies. Owing to that I decided to focus just on the teenage girls of the community and from there was born Laureles Buds.

Our project, Laureles Buds, has been working intensely this year with young girls from the "Garbage Dump" community of Los Laureles in La Ceiba, Honduras. Our mission is to transform the lives of these children so that through their own initiative and abilities, they might be able to leave behind a life of grinding and cyclical poverty. To that end we've worked with the girls as holistically as possible; seeking to transform the whole child. We believe that education is the number one key to offering these girls a chance at a better life and so all that we've done and in every way that we've worked with them, educational formation has been the basis for our work.

- This year we've offered various workshops staffed by local organizations on various topics meant to teach to the whole child. We've focused on Christian formation, sexual education, self-esteem, and non-violent conflict resolution. Our rationale has been that poverty and misogyny affects the whole girl and thus, so must our work.



We want to give appropriate information and training according to the physical and spiritual need of each of our girls. I have personally been trained in the issues mentioned and am thus able to address them at every opportunity.



- An educated girl is a girl with a future; for every year a child stays in school her earning power increases by 10%. For us at Laureles Buds education and educational success are primary and foundational. This year we offered full scholarships (uniforms, supplies, enrollment, etc.) to 4 girls so that they could continue their studies in elementary school; our long-term goal is for them to finish high school and university, thus becoming examples and pillars of their community.

- We've also seen that developing their natural talents and an awakening an appreciation for art, creativity and working with their hands has the double effect of teaching a life skill and strengthening their sense of self worth. This year we offered various classes to the girls in the art of decorative card-making and sewing. We hope to continue these and like-minded classes so that they can become self-sustainable. Currently we are working on our first order of invitations for a birthday party.



Samples of some of our cards.

- Another thing that Laureles Buds seeks to present to the young girls are models of successful women in our society. Specifically with the following profile: young, single, childless, professional college and a steady job.

The girls have already had the opportunity to meet a couple of successful women, they have been received by them in the workplace, getting a little tour of the place, held talks about the decisions they made to achieve their dreams.

This has especially impacted the lives of girls, before this had you asked them what they wanted to do when they were grown, their aspirations or their replies were nil, or work as a maid. Now when asked who they want to be, their answers are: they want to be bankers, doctors or nurses, and only this little change of mind fills me with such happiness.



The girls met Wendy Graugnard, Industrial Engineer and head of one of the largest stores in the country.



The girls gathered with Dayana, Civil Engineer and Travel Agent.

- Eventually we left a space for recreation, where we visited a place in town that girls had not seen before. The girls never go out of their community other than to go to a river a few meters away to wash clothes. Any place we visit is a new place for them, regardless of where or what it is, a supermarket, a shopping center, a bank, etc. Then we try to get a little education out of each place we visit. For example: If you visit a bank, we play a game to see how many young women work in the bank, and we say that to work in a place like a bank you must follow a certain order, first to study in university, then marry and finally children. They are very convinced they can become whatever they want to be.



Future classes and plans that we hope to achieve include:

- Registering them in the National Registry of Persons as most of them don't have Birth Certificates.
- Give them classes in agriculture and horticulture so that they become skilled in growing and raising their food.
- Offering computer classes so that they can catch up to other, more privileged you their age in the area of technology.
- And learn how turn trash into striking recycled art pieces.

With all of this, our principal goal is to influence the spiritual life of the teenage girls in Los Laureles, as well as assist them in their social development. To mark a difference in the community there; to promote the integral development and hopefully helping them access more opportunities in life and a future filled with hope.

I am profoundly grateful for your vote of confidence in our project.

Blessings,

Maureen Velásquez

