

November 2, 2009, Pastor Dago Irias of La Ceiba, Honduras had no idea that in one instant, in one tiny misstep that the work he had spent his entire life so selflessly giving to the people around him would come back to serve him, in his time of need, in a very powerful way.

La Ceiba, Honduras is home to approximately two hundred thousand and is where Dago Irias has spent the last twenty years of his life. In his younger years he had aspirations of becoming a doctor to help those in need, but due to economical issues in his home that dream couldn't come true. He worked as a forester in the region and because of his work was able to travel throughout all 18 Departments (Provinces) of his home country of Honduras, and see with his own eyes what he described as "rampant misery" all over the place. During those years, he developed what he calls "a sensible heart for those in need." Finding his faith in Christ, he felt a calling to do something for those who had nothing, for those who suffer. The poor in that region by today's standards are *very poor* with average families earning between \$500-\$1000 per year. "We only need to look around to know that there is something we can do for these people," says Dago who attributes "God's grace and mercy" to allowing him to serve as a pastor for the last 17 years at the Iglesia Gran Comision of La Ceiba and thereby opening the door to organize formal efforts to address the very real needs of his fellow Hondurans.

In 1998 Honduras was severely hit by the hurricane Mitch. Pastor Irias says "That was like a slap on my face, a wakeup call to see the need of hundreds of thousands of fellow Hondurans who lost all their possessions and were brutally injured physically emotionally and spiritually. Somebody had to do something." With that, and with help from fellow Hondurans, a recruitment effort began to organize medical teams to serve those that the Honduran health system couldn't properly assist. This would be the birthplace for a new clinic "**Salud Total**" which would primarily serve as headquarters for the medical teams and with future hopes for a hospital. It was here at Salud Total where Pastor Dago Irias would cross paths with Dr. Jay Martin, a primary care physician from Columbus Ohio. Dr. Martin came as a member of one the medical teams in 2001. Pastor Irias adds that "somehow our hearts shared the same vision; a FIRE which was to serve and help the underserved people in a more consistent way." It was that "Fire" that served as the catalyst for Dr. Jay Martin to organize an international solution for Salud Total to do their work that was so desperately needed.



Salud Total LaCeiba, Honduras

Dr. Jay Martin started doing medical missions work through his church in 1999. He says "I wanted a way to share my faith in a practical way." Over the course of many short term trips, several in particular to La Ceiba and Salud Total, Dr. Martin observed something interesting. He found that in returning to the same area that he was able to follow up on his previous work there. He found that short term medical care was usually not effective at all in changing the health status of those they served. Each time he returned the people had the same health problems and were no better off than the last trip. After studying the problem he realized the necessity of reliable care and medicines. It was this realization that launched a parallel non-for-profit organization in the USA to help recruit doctors and nurses and find medicine for those in need. 2004 was the start of "Total Health", a **501c3** organization based in Columbus, Ohio whose mission is to provide quality, consistent, and reliable care for a region. Dr. Martin adds "In doing this we are able to dramatically affect the health of those we serve. For example, we have many patients with chronic diseases that we are able to manage and allow them to work and provide for their family where without having the full time care we simply couldn't help them. When a father has diabetes (very common in Latin America), if it is untreated he will be chronically dehydrated, develop foot ulcers, kidney and eye failure, and eventually be disabled. When that happens, an entire family moves from poverty to starvation. By providing regular care we can control his diabetes which not only improves his health; it also improves the health of his children who have a better chance at a healthier diet if he is working. His children also have a better chance of obtaining some level of education if they are not expected to work to support the family. It is only by developing a true health care system for that region that we can improve lives for generations".

At this point Total Health has 5 full time employees (including a full time administrator, doctor, nurse and a full time dentist) and sees over 12,000 patients/year. They provide medical care (including all medicines), dental care, and some limited eye care. This staff enables Salud Total to provide appropriate health care year round. The care is supplemented significantly by the medical mission teams that travel to La Ceiba. This combined approach leverages the generous care of American medical personnel, yet still provides the *follow up* care year round that is so crucial. They find this also extremely cost effective. For about \$50,000 per year Total Health can provide complete care (office visits, medicines, glasses, dental care, etc.) to thousands of people. Since the inception of Total Health, some "sister" organizations have been built including Total Home (building homes for the poor) and CNI (a children's nutrition clinic that also helps to educate the children). "I know that we can't resolve every problem that the people have, but we cannot just sit and do nothing or close our eyes to the reality in which these people live in," says Pastor Irias.

On November 4th 2009 around 3:30 PM, Pastor Irias and his two co-pastors were leaving a local fast-food restaurant after a meeting when upon walking on the uneven sidewalk Pastor Irias twisted his ankle and fell parking lot curb face down on his right arm with all his weight over the elbow which shattered completely. Pastor Irias describes his experience...."The pain was so high that I passed out several times before arriving to ER of local Dole-Company hospital (the best private hospital in town). The doctor ordered X-Rays and the orthopedic doctor immobilized my arm and scheduled surgery for the next morning. I was immobilized with a half cast for three weeks. When the cast was removed the pain was so severe that I vomited and passed out twice. Two days later I began physical therapy, which

became a daily torture due to the excessive pain. By the end of December another Orthopedic doctor from San Pedro said my elbow was fully dislocated, and that there were residual bones on the Olecranean cavity. He said that my case was an emergency which there was no Doctor in the whole country with such specialty. The local Doctor that conducted the surgery said he knew my elbow was dislocated and that nothing could be done to resolve the problem. As the days passed my arm became more and more swollen and the pain stronger and we did not have the meaning to do something about it.” Not one to lose faith, Pastor Irias, his family and his entire church began praying for an answer to save his arm. Being right handed, and with the right elbow affected, the physical and emotional damage was enough to tear him away from his work. “God works in miraculous ways and one of those ways is that you know somebody that knows somebody that knows somebody,” Pastor Irias adds.

Because of the close relationship with his American colleagues, Dr. Jay Martin was fully informed of Dago’s situation from the very beginning. Upon learning of the devastating outcome of the care he received, Dr. Martin ordered the X Rays to be sent to him in the U.S. Dr. Martin immediately called his personal friend Dr. David Robie of Ohio Orthopedic Center of Excellence who in reviewing the damage



explained that there was only “One surgeon I know that would even try this procedure.” With that, he was referred to Dr. Joseph Mileti, fellowship trained board certified orthopedic surgeon with a specialty in shoulder and elbow reconstruction also of The Ohio Orthopedic Center of Excellence. Dr. Mileti in consulting with his partner, Dr. James Latshaw, another fellowship trained board certified orthopedic surgeon specializing in reconstruction planned for a tag team surgery approach for Pastor Irias. Dr. Joseph Mileti adds “It was the worst of all things: bone fracture, complete dislocation,

improper healing, and a lot of bone loss as a result.” In understanding the nature of this case, Dr. Mileti and Latshaw developed an appreciation for the care available in the United States. “We only wish we could have intervened earlier,” say both orthopedic surgeons who did not hesitate to offer their help to this man who has given his entire life to helping others around him. With that decision, Dr. Jay Martin personally arranged for Pastor Irias and his family to travel to the United States and the surgery was completed **SUCCESSFULLY** at no charge by either Dr. Mileti or Dr. Latshaw as well as Riverside Methodist Hospital.

Now, according to Pastor Dago Irias, “I am doing great! The arm pain nearly disappeared and day-by-day my arm recovers the normal movement little by little and its usage: able to eat, clean up and dress myself.” He further explains that this physical healing has also removed the emotional suffering of those his family and his church body. Pastor Irias immediately



resumed his duties as a pastor and social worker. “Every weekend that I step on the stage to give the message I can feel and see my arm moving naturally; it is awesome to enjoy those thing that we normally take for granted.”

“My Family and I, as well as our local church congregation and many other congregations that we partner with; are so grateful to God, Dr. Jay Martin and his whole family (who shared their home with three of us for 12 full weeks!), Dr. Robie, Dr. Schuda, and especially to Dr. Joe Mileti for every demonstration of kindness and love. There was neither a single day nor a single person that did not show us a smile in both the Riverside Hospital and the Ohio Orthopedic Center of Excellence. We could see God’s love in each of them. We will never forget every visit to the clinic nor to the Therapy Center where Erika was treating us not as patients but as a family. Thanks you all for being there for those in need of a warm, human, sensible heart treatment. God bless you all!”

You can find more information on the missions work at www.totalhealth.org and www.totalserving.org



Pastor Dago Irias and Dr. Joseph Mileti of Ohio Orthopedic Center of Excellence