



On March 15, 2014, three families from Zebulon, consisting of six adults and eight children aged 4-13, boarded a plane and left for a week-long mission trip to Belize to participate in the missions and ministries of CBF missionaries Eric and Julie Maas. Although all three families are members of Zebulon Baptist Church, the church did not finance this trip. This was a trip organized and put together by the families, with help along the way from Eric and Julie.

One of our goals was for our kids to see the world outside of eastern North Carolina. We wanted our children to see that the same God that we love and worship in Zebulon is present and active in the country of Belize. We wanted our kids to see that there is a simpler way of living and being happy. We wanted them to see that they can survive without iPhones, iPads, TV and other technology. They were skeptical of this at first, but quickly caught on that what we were saying was true.

We were greeted at the airport by the Maas family, and as we traveled on the shuttle bus from the airport to a local restaurant for lunch, the kids quickly saw how different Belize looked from the United States. While the roads near the airport were paved, the majority of the roads were not paved, there were large potholes everywhere, and there were no traffic signals or stop signs. This was very different from what they were accustomed to seeing.

The Maas kids formed an immediate bond with our kids. They all played together as though they had known each other their whole lives. We knew this was the beginning of something good. We stayed at the Baptist Training Center – adults in three rooms downstairs and kids in two rooms upstairs. The kids felt like they were at summer camp, and, truth be known, I think the adults felt this way as well. While the accommodations were modest, all of our needs were met. We all had to be conservative about water and electricity usage, something we were not accustomed to doing back home. We brought breakfast items

## a world away

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and snacks with us from home and hired a wonderful local lady to cook all of our dinners for us. Each family took turns doing the dishes afterwards. When the kids finished eating every evening, they would all race out to the playground where sounds of laughing, talking, and squeals of delight were heard. No one even thought to ask about TV or their electronic device that takes up so much of their time back at home. Later in the evening, we

would all gather in the open-air chapel area, sit in a circle, and tell what our high and what our low was for the day. It was a wonderful time of open and honest sharing for both the kids and for the adults.

Our schedule for the week was a day of missions followed by a day of “fun.” Our mission work at the Belize Christian Academy included: construction work; painting picnic benches; setting up and cleaning a playground set; crafts and stories with the kids; and some gardening. In the afternoons, the ladies and younger kids went to a local children’s home, where we played with the kids and helped the older girls with their homework. The men and some of the older kids went to the local church to work on building a stage and other light construction projects. Our “fun-day activities” included a visit to the Mayan Ruins, cave tubing, zip lining, and a day of snorkeling and swimming with stingrays. This combination of mission work and fun-day activities worked perfectly for our group.

While it was easy to get to Belize – a one-hour flight to Atlanta and then a three-hour flight to Belize City – it was hard to leave Belize. Belize is a beautiful country. Life in Belize is simple and peaceful. And, it was apparent that Jesus Christ is alive and well in Belize and that Eric and Julie Maas are doing their part to move the Kingdom forward. We were grateful that our families got to witness all of this and be a small part of this effort. As we were leaving, my son asked me if all of our trips could be like this one from now on. My answer was a resounding, “Yes!”

*The families who went on this trip were: Matt and Susan Ellington, Noah and Taylor Grace; Todd and Wendy Faulkner, Emma, Isaiah and Luke; and Greg and Michelle Pait, Ryan, Matthew and Macy.*