

## LATEST NEWS FROM OUR HONDURAS PROGRAMME



*New students being tested for Covid-19*

Despite the numerous challenges that have faced the Sisters of Mary since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, they were delighted to welcome new girls to our secondary school earlier this year in Tegucigalpa, Honduras.

Cases of the virus are still very high in the country and restrictions for internal travel remain. As a result, the Sisters haven't been able to undertake their routine community work to meet children living in desperate poverty who would benefit from their interventions.

Last November, through the help of local parish priests and former graduates, around 500 extremely vulnerable girls

were identified and put forward for a virtual interview and entrance exam.

In January, 181 girls were enrolled at the school and were rigorously tested for the virus on arrival and were required to be quarantined for two weeks before joining their other class-mates.

The Sisters tell us that many of the girls were very thin and malnourished and some were experiencing anxiety as a result of the pandemic. They have now settled in well and are very pleased to be in the safety of the school environment and the care of the Sisters.

They also tell us that they had to adapt quickly to remote learning methods. For the first time, they used Zoom to bring the teachers into the classroom. This has meant investing in new laptops, a sound system, projectors and cabling to enable the education programme to continue un-interrupted.

This new type of learning has enabled the girls to keep up with their studies and sit their annual exams, which graduates helped supervise along with a teacher on Zoom.

The pandemic continues to have a financial impact on the Sisters of Mary programmes with the price of staple foods such as, wheatflour, vegetables, milk, rice and beans doubling. Supplies are often hard to come by as many of the markets have been forced to close. Despite these challenges, the Sisters have maintained three nutritious meals a day for all the children.

At the time of writing, the vaccination programme hasn't yet got underway in Honduras, but we were delighted to learn that Israel has recently donated five million vaccines so hopefully this situation will change very soon.

One of the best ways to understand the transformational impact the Sisters of Mary's humanitarian programmes have on the beneficiaries is to hear their personal stories.



*Happy and safe new students, Honduras*

## Meet Eva, a recent graduate



*Eva at school in Tegucigulpa, Honduras*

Eva was the youngest in a family of eight children living in the slums of Honduras.

Her father was a construction worker but work was unreliable and the family struggled to survive. Living in poverty, begging and scavenging on the rubbish dumps, life was harsh for them all. Instead of attending school the children were working long hours in danger to support themselves.

In 2013, the Sisters of Mary met Eva and, with the generosity of our donors, they were able to provide a place for her at school in Tegucigalpa in January 2014. Eva studied hard at school and in the care of the Sisters she excelled in her subjects. In June 2018, she was awarded the Gold Award for Academic Excellence by President Juan Orlando Hernández, an award for only 12 students in Honduras each year. In July 2018 she represented the school in the regional Maths Olympiad. She went on to win this and then the National Math and Physics Olympiad. Later in 2018 she represented Honduras at the Ibero-American Physics Competition held in Porto Rico.

When Eva first started school she wanted to become a teacher. Now aged 18 and with her new skills in Maths and Science she wants to help her family and 'bring food for all the poor people in Honduras' and she has won a full scholarship to Zamorano Agricultural University in Honduras, centre of excellence for agricultural studies in Latin America. She is a shining light at the University and destined for a future professional career that will be 'of benefit to the most needy communities.'

*May 2021*