

As we settle into 2004, the news from the Partnership is all good. All programs continue to thrive and expand as we saw firsthand during our week long trip to Chimaltenango in the beginning of February.

This year's early trip was by 18 people from the Baltimore Presbytery, about half being new to the relationship. The emphasis for the group was on the educational side of the partnership – highlighting villages where there is an active scholarship program and villages where the school nutrition program is taking hold. We participated in the dedication of the new Technological – Theological school and had a wonderful educational experience ourselves as we toured the ancient Mayan city of Copan in Honduras on our way home. Program updates follow:

Herbert D. Valentine Clinic – the clinic treated 2271 patients during 2003 and is on track to continue increasing that number in 2004. With 2 health promoters in place in each of the 19 villages associated with the Kaqchikel Presbytery, patients can be seen readily and tended to with over the counter or homeopathic medicine if appropriate. Dr. Patricia is able to spend additional time in the villages this year and the health promoters are trained to refer cases they cannot handle to her at the clinic.

My Healthy School Program – the pilot program started last year to provide a more nutritional diet to school children is expanding this year to cover 180 students in 3 villages. A soy and vitamin “milk shake” is provided daily along with helpful parenting advice from a trained clinic staff person. Student weight gain was dramatic during the pilot program and it is our hope to be able to continue to expand the program throughout the Presbytery.

Scholarship Program – scholarships are being provided to 80 elementary and middle school students this year, up from 23 last year. These scholarships provide the student with the basics he or she needs to attend the public schools. We very often see a family having to make the choice as to which *one* of several children will get to go to school due to financial constraints. Basic education is so critical to being able to survive and thrive in Guatemalan society and it even encourages students to continue with higher levels of schooling. Goals this year are to continue to expand the program to 200 students.

Technological – Theological School – learning that is Mayan culturally based happens for 20 adult students each semester at this Presbytery run school. The new two classroom facility should allow the school to become accredited this year and continue its expansion.

Lorena Stoves – Last year the partnership supported the installation of 15 of these little wonders in one village – 75 more are needed in that village alone! These stoves keep the cooking fire contained (away from crawling children), allow the cook to work at waist height, use 1/3 less fuel, and properly vent the smoke out of the home. The gratitude we

saw on the faces of the women as they demonstrated their new stoves was overwhelming! Funds exist for another 10 stoves this year so far but the need is so great.

The Partnership participants were eagerly awaiting a visit in the States from Ronaldo Similox and his wife Noemi over Palm Sunday. Hopes were dashed as we learned that our State Department had capriciously denied Noemi a travel visa. When you know the history of what our country has done to Guatemala over the years and realize that brotherhood and Christian love continue to be thwarted, it is truly sad.

With the Partnership continuing to expand, the small band of stalwarts from Baltimore finds themselves stretched pretty thin. We invite you to join us – both on a trip to Guatemala and also in our work here. Jobs are open for any amount of time or talent. We are especially looking for someone to help maintain the Partnership's new web site – speaking of that – please check it out at www.guatemalapartnership.org.

With His Grace,

Bill Clarke
for the Guatemala Partnership