

Mission to Guatemala – an Update

In late October of 2002, members of the Baltimore Presbytery visited our Mayan brothers and sisters in Christ at the Kaqchikel Presbytery in Chimaltenango, Guatemala. The purpose of the five day visit was to strengthen the relationship with our mission partners by accompanying them on visits to several outlying villages, checking on the progress of the *Herb D. Valentine Medical and Psychological Clinic*, and assisting the Kaqchikel Presbytery in its work to provide educational opportunities to underserved Mayans.

Our first village visit was a medical one lead by the Clinic's administrator and psychologist, Ronaldo Similox, and the Clinic's new doctor, Patricia Jimenez Buckley.¹ Dr. Mike Weddle, who accompanied us from First of Cumberland P.C., helped Dr. Patricia examine about 40 women and children from this widow's village of Tecpán.² It was so good to become part of the relationship of trust that exists between the Kaqchikel Presbytery and those who have been marginalized because of their skin color, gender, ethnic affiliation and poverty. We prayed, discussed and shared a simple meal together after several hours of tending to all manner of medical complaints that are generated from the physical/psychological stress of daily living and malnutrition. Dr. Patricia explained the impact of protein deficiency on Mayan children after they are weaned. She intends to study the effects of protein supplementation on this population over the long term by regularly weighing and measuring children who will receive a multigrain protein drink at lunch during the ten-month school year, beginning January, 2003.

The *Herb D. Valentine Clinic* is progressing well in all areas of operation thanks to the cooperation of the Baltimore and Kaqchikel Presbyteries. The clinic is seeing nearly five times as many patients as before because Dr. Patricia is making more visits to the outlying villages. The health promoters (2 literate volunteers from each village) are increasingly able to trouble-shoot minor illnesses or refer more serious cases to the doctor through their continuing education in western medicine, natural medicine, basic hygiene and conflict resolution. The doctor is readying the laboratory equipment for use while training Vilma, the nurse, in basic operations. Malnutrition studies and supplementation will begin in 2003 through the schools as noted above. Record keeping procedures are being streamlined and standardized with the hope of computerizing this process in the future. The doctor's requests for several medical textbooks, instruments, and journals will be met, hopefully, by the Partnership's ability to sustain a more aggressive budget. As always, we anticipate our prayers will be answered by all the churches in the Baltimore Presbytery who hear God's call to participate in global and local mission.

The Kaqchikel Presbytery has been asking for our help in assisting indigenous children to receive some or better education. Although the Guatemalan government pledged to provide Mayans with educational opportunities during the Peace Accords in 1996, the reality is that the poor and powerless remain habitually underserved. The Kaqchikel Presbytery started up a Technical-Theological school for adults last year with the hope of empowering Mayans in basic business practices, management/communication skills, and Christian/Mayan ethics. Accreditation is contingent upon many things which are beyond the school's reach, so we are looking for outside resources to help this dream become a reality. Likewise, we are seeking financial commitments

¹ **Doctor Patricia** comes to the HDV Clinic with one year of internal medicine training, three years in obstetrics and gynecology, and twelve years of public health practice among the Quiché Mayan. She replaced Dr. Lucy in August, '02

² **Tecpan** is a community of widows organized by the Kaqchikel Presbytery in the mid 1980's when so many Mayan men had been kidnapped, murdered or gone missing, by the hand of government death squads. Left homeless and without husbands, the widows made their way to Chimaltenango to seek help from the Kaqchikel Presbytery whose reputation for helping displaced persons was becoming legendary.

from Baltimore Presbyterian families who wish to provide scholarships for elementary school children (\$125.00 per year/child) and middle school aged children (\$150.00 per year/child). Eighteen students have already been identified as not having money for school uniforms, supplies, and books, and there are probably many more. By not charging tuition, the government can say it fulfills its duty to educate all Guatemalans with free public education. However, those who are unable to cover the “incidental charges” can not avail themselves of this “free” service. If your family would like to help a child stay in school, please contact us at home (410) 472-2758 and we will put you in touch with the women from Deer Creek-Harmony church who are coordinating the scholarship program. They are Mille Kreider (410) 734-6441 and Diane Caulkins (410)893-8629.

There are so many issues to consider in this partnership, sometimes it feels overwhelming. As we learn to see God in the smallest details of this partnership, we are able to rise above the tidal wave of need to a place of hope and thanks. I would like to share a few of these “God moments” with you here and perhaps more completely during a church presentation in the future.

*We saw school children put on hysterical skits about preserving the environment.

*Several women who depend on their weaving and embroidery for a living were delighted to accept the reading glasses Julie Jackson of Ashland PC bought for us to bring to Guatemala.

*We worshipped with Kaqchikel Presbyterians in a very Spirit-filled way.

*Upon hearing that a five year old girl had just died, the woman next to me wiped my tears with the corner of her wrap that contained her new born infant.

*Children laughed and gathered around Bill to see their images his digital camera had just captured.

*Two youngsters asked Pastor Steve Tisinger (well over 6 feet tall) to boost them up into a tree so they could pick little *jocote* fruits. They gave him and me the biggest and best fruits.

*Baby Débora, born with a severe cleft lip and palate, is alive today because Dr. Dawn Audi of Ashland PC and the Parent Connection at GBMC found the resources her mother needed to nurse her back from dehydration.

There are many ways you can become involved in this mission. For example, we are looking for someone with basic accounting skills to keep track of scholarship funds received and paid out. Could this be you? Or would you consider accompanying us on the next trip in October 23-29, 2003? We need the help of many different people to continue in partnership with our Presbyterian brothers and sisters in Guatemala. You will be blessed beyond belief.

Bonnie Clarke

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