

11/07/04

## **Report from the Guatemala Committee on the State of the Partnership with the Kaqchikel Presbytery**

On October 22<sup>nd</sup> the Baltimore Presbytery sent a delegation of 11 to Chimaltenango, Guatemala to walk with our brothers and sisters from the Kaqchikel Presbytery and catch up first hand on the many initiatives being carried out by the partnership. The word from the field is WOW! Regardless of the project, they are thriving and expanding to fill an incredible void in the lives of a beautiful people. And once again, the group from Baltimore took home more than they brought in terms of who God is asking us to be as citizens and spirits of the world.

Let's take a look at each of the major programs:

**Herbert D. Valentine Clinic:** This is the 6<sup>th</sup> year of operation for the clinic and between the doctor and her staff and the health promoters, over 2500 patients were seen during the year in the 19 villages and at the main clinic. The production of natural medicine by the staff herbalist has proven very popular and a breakthrough was made this year to facilitate the introduction of iron in young people's diet. In the coming year, the clinic would like to affiliate with a new village that comes with 11 trained health promoters but will put some strain on resources. This is an example of the initiative and outreach we are seeing more and more of as the partnership matures and the mutual trust blossoms.

**My Healthy School:** This program of providing a nutritional dietary supplement to school children is still in its infancy but is growing by leaps and bounds. This year almost 400 children were served in 3 villages. In each village the percentage of children who were properly nourished increased by 30% due to this program alone! In 2005 the plan is to drop one village (it will be served by another program) and add 2 new villages, serving all children in the four villages in a more complete manner. In addition to in school nutrition, the specialist employed by the program works with the parents, teachers and children to teach healthier lifestyles and monitor the progress each child is making.

**Technical and Theological School:** By teaching Indigenous adults, this project attempts to bridge the gap between a modern western society and a Mayan cultural heritage. Facilities at the Kaqchikel Presbytery were completed this year and the program is now fully certified by the Minister of Education. Two semesters are offered to approximately 20 students during the school year. Teachers are supplied by various charitable groups making this an incredibly cost efficient way to help a people disenfranchised, by some accounts, for over 600 years. An "Internet Café" operated by the local presbytery trains these students in 21<sup>st</sup> century literacy, information technology and mass communications.

**Scholarship Program:** Eighty students were scholarshipped this year to assure that they were able to attend their appropriate school grade. Although schooling is technically free and public, most families have to decide which one child is chosen to attend because they cannot afford the books, supplies and uniform required for each child to participate in

education. This program, although only two years old, is clearly the partnership's most successful with enough monies raised so far to sponsor 120 children next year. Conservative estimates put the need in our 19 villages to be easily 3 times this number! Most critically, the partnership is trying to emphasize the need to continue education into middle school and beyond.

**Onil Stoves:** The expression of pride and relief on the face of a homemaker as she displays a new Onil stove installed in her house is something to behold. These stoves (formerly called Lorena stoves) vent cooking smoke from the house, contain the fire so young children cannot be hurt, use much less fuel and move the cooking surface to waist height from ground level. The partnership was able to install over 25 stoves this year and thanks to a most generous grant from Towson Presbyterian Church, 50 more are on the way! We can safely say, however, many more are required to help satisfy the basic needs of 19 villages.

One of the most amazing developments in the last year has been the level of trust that has grown between the partners. As an observer and participant for the last 4 years, I can most definitely say the barriers to this partnership are diminishing. Each side, for various reasons, has cause not to trust the other, yet we have truly become brothers and sisters walking together, bearing our souls, and risking mutual vulnerability. This is truly where the hand of God is felt – only through God's guidance is this possible. And it is from this plateau that the partnership will continue to build in the coming years, with redeeming grace.

Please visit the partnership's web site ([www.guatemalapartnership.org](http://www.guatemalapartnership.org)) to learn more, or contact the Presbytery to be directed to a committee member. Currently, three trips to Guatemala are planned for next year (scholarships available!) and each one is guaranteed to be life changing.

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for the Guatemala Partnership