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Dear Friends,

Before leaving Guatemala in May 2019, Juana, a friend in Santiago Ixcán informed me, "Francisco (her eldest son working in Guatemala City) wants to help the poor. He'd like to talk with you." "Really? Have him call or come and see me." I replied.

Francisco and I never had that conversation because a few days after speaking with his mom, I raced out of the Ixcán to return to North Dakota. My friend and Board President, Marlane Peterson, had been diagnosed with terminal cancer. Sadly, Marlane died in January 2020 and COVID-19 hit in March. I've been in the United States ever since.

Early in the pandemic, I read online an article entitled- *Las Banderas Blancas de Guatemala*. (The White Flags of Guatemala). The news struck me- "Now Guatemalans are not only threatened by a new disease, but also by hunger. Some have started waving white flags as a warning that they have nothing to eat." Is this true? I called Javier Gonzalez, our on-site administrator in Santiago Ixcán and asked, "Can you verify with Benjamin (his son who works in Guatemala City) if this is true?" Javier called me later and said, "It's true, hermana. The people are waving white flags. Ben said, 'It's like a parade along the city street curbs!'" The Guatemalan government had shut down the country. With no income and no option to leave, people grew desperate. The white flags waved from windows, doors, and curbs of streets.

*Is there something we can do?* I wondered.

Although our ministry is to the people of the Ixcán, I wondered if God was calling us to extend our outreach beyond the jungle? In the Ixcán the land produces corn, beans, and tropical fruits. I know the people have food. Those locked down in the urban areas suffered more, I thought. I asked Javier, "Who do we know in Guatemala City that could represent us to help the poor?"

Javier's son, Benjamin, was eager to help but worked odd night hours. He wasn't free. Is there anyone else? "Isn't Francisco in the Capital?" I asked Javier. "Yes, he is," Javier said. "I'll call him."

Twenty-four-year-old Francisco had studied at our Junior High School and was a beneficiary of our scholarship program. After graduating, he left the village (as many young people do from rural areas) to find employment in the cities. He found a job in Guatemala City, married a young woman from Santiago, and started a family. They have a two-year-old daughter.

When Javier asked if he could help us, Francisco said, "*Cómo No. Con gusto. A sus ordenes!*" (Of course. With enthusiasm. At your orders!) With U.S. board approval, the white flag ministry began.

We found a secure way to transfer money to Francisco. To not jeopardize his safety, we asked that he discreetly distribute small amounts of money, enough to make a difference for the recipients, but not too much to draw attention to himself. We wanted the ministry to be unassuming and hidden.

After Guatemala reopened its businesses, Francisco returned to work. But now, as he walks to and from his job, like a St. Francis, he places money into the hands of some of the poorest of the poor he encounters. He sends reports to Javier the amount of money he gives and a description (without using names) of the people who received: unemployed family with four children, a street person, three persons living in a park, an unemployed widow with two children... It is a ministry of the Little Way. It is doing a small thing with love that makes a difference for just one person in need. And then another.

I asked Francisco how he heard the call to help the poor. He responded:

“When I walk from home to work, I meet people who often wake up on the street. Like a woman who paints her face to earn a living and even older adults or children who live life one day at a time, not knowing if they will have something to put in their mouths to eat during the day. Seeing all of this, it moves me deeply, and that is where the desire to share some joy is born. I thank God for what I have. I have experienced happiness in the act of sharing. Because the moment that we give, we experience the feeling of happiness when we see the joy of a happy face in the person we have helped.”

The White Flag Ministry speaks to me the words of Jesus when He said- I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me... Whatever you did for one of these least of mine, you did it for me.” (Matt 25: 35-36, 40).

I cannot help but think of Jesus’s words as Francisco walks the streets of Guatemala City and stops to give a homeless person enough money to buy food for the week. The ‘Encounter’ happens for both of them – the giver and the receiver.

It is the WAY of Christmas- Jesus coming in his many disguises. Not only as a small infant in a manger in Bethlehem but on the streets of a crowded City.

And maybe, just around the corner in our lives.

Sincerely,



Kathy Snider



Mother and Child • Guatemala City

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*The Board of Directors of Ixcán Ministries,  
and I wish you a very blessed and safe  
Christmas Season and a New Year filled with  
peace and love.*

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Thank you for your prayers and  
support of our mission to the people  
of Ixcán and Guatemala City.

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**Mission Update:** Kathy is hoping to return to Guatemala in January 2021. After two hurricanes, the roads between Cobán and Playa Grande have been flooded making travel more difficult.

### **OUR MISSION STATEMENT**

Ixcán Ministries is a Christian lay mission serving as a ministry of presence with the Maya people in the Ixcán jungle of Guatemala. We act as a bridge between cultures for the exchange of gifts to transform lives and society.

Ixcán Ministries is a 501(c) 3 organization. Your contributions are tax deductible.

Contact us or send a donation to:  
Ixcán Ministries  
PO Box 51  
Mandan, ND 58554

[www.ixcanministries.org](http://www.ixcanministries.org)  
[ixcan\\_ministries@yahoo.com](mailto:ixcan_ministries@yahoo.com)  
Judy Van Lishout, President  
(701) 527-4858

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