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Dear Friend,

During a meeting with women weavers, member Josefina Mendez tapped my shoulder and said, “Hermana, can I speak with you in private?”

We stepped aside and she confided, “Would it be possible to receive an advance of earnings for my weavings?”

“What do you need?” I inquired.

“We have no corn,” she confided. The desperate tone in her voice confirmed what I already knew; without corn to make tortillas, the main food staple here, her family would go hungry. Josefina is a young mother of a toddler and infant, and her husband is Rueben. They are a poor farming family.



“Yes, of course you may have an advance! You have product in the United States. When it is sold you can pay the money back. How much do you need?”

This exchange with Josefina had triggered my memory. In 2004, a fledgling group of 6 women in Santiago Ixcán began to create jewelry from the natural seeds of the surrounding rainforest. Shortly thereafter, with materials used up and no market for their product, the project ended. Consequently, in 2007 I helped the women to reorganize. I provided starter materials for them to begin once again. Within a year the number of women artisans grew from 6 to 30 jewelers and 7 back strap weavers! In a short time we were inundated with beautiful, handmade products but still had no viable market for our handiwork in Guatemala.

We discussed this dilemma at an Ixcán Ministries Board meeting. We realized that a U.S. market was needed in order to empower the women and help them earn money to help support their families. This in turn would boost the

women’s creativity and enthusiasm for their jewelry making and weaving. But we needed a committee to organize and run this aspect of Ixcán Ministries!

Rhonda Schafer, an office manager and bookkeeper, had served on the Board of Ixcán Ministries and in 2006 she had visited Santiago Ixcán. She loves and appreciates the people of Guatemala and she “gets things done.” I asked if she would help form and coordinate a committee for the purpose of developing a market for the women’s product. She responded, “Yes!” but insisted, “not alone.” Enter Sue Hoffman, bookkeeper and self-made entrepreneur

in craft and home sales. She generously offered her expertise, and her home became the base of operations where all the jewelry and weavings are now inventoried, priced, tagged and stored. Sharon Nelson (former Board member of Ixcán Ministries, and nurse educator), Karmen Siirtola (information specialist), and Sr. Kathleen Atkinson (Catholic Benedictine sister) completed the team! These women are our Product Sales Committee, a branch of Ixcán Ministries and an integral part of the Ixcán women's micro business, *Ixcán Creations*.

The Product Sales Committee's activities are mostly behind the scenes, and their activities include hours of work counting, recording and tagging hundreds of items, making contacts, and running the selling events with the help of other volunteers. It is important that every item purchased is accounted for and that the earnings are credited to each artisan as all the profits of sales goes directly to the women.

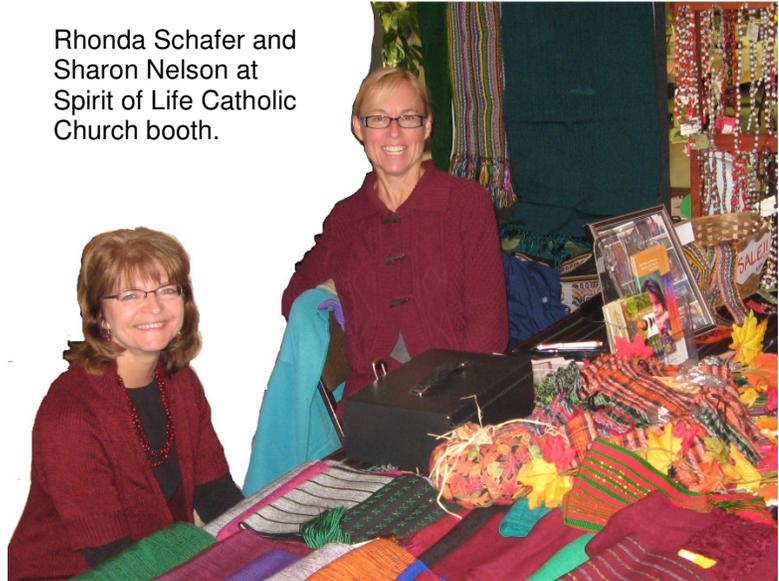
On occasion, committee members speak in churches and schools, where they share the stories of the Ixcán women and touch the hearts of listeners.

During one presentation Rhonda Schafer gave at a local Catholic church, a woman seated in the pews heard the message. She knew it was a message not only of purchasing handmade Guatemala items but also a message of empowering the lives of poor women and children. After the service, she came to the table where the products were displayed.

"I have been saving money to give to the poor but didn't know where to give it. I prayed to God to show me and now I know. I want my money to go to Ixcán Ministries," this dear woman told a helper at the product table.

Our Baptism is a call to missionary activity. While most of you are not called to work directly with the poor in a foreign land, I am blessed to have received that call and to work directly with the people of the Ixcán. And as I do so, I think of the Product Sales Committee, those unseen

Rhonda Schafer and Sharon Nelson at Spirit of Life Catholic Church booth.



servants who never leave their hometowns but are nonetheless doing the work of empowering the materially poor, humble, hardworking women in Guatemala. Their hard work makes all the difference...

... the difference of a young family being fed, of a diabetic having medicine, of a young person continuing their education, of a cement floor to reduce disease, of a pair of shoes for a child, of a tin roof to keep out the rain, of a pig to feed and provide for a family, of a flock of chickens to produce meat and eggs, of a piece of land to farm and of a shared meal between loved ones and friends.



Back in the Ixcan, when payday came I deducted the advance money from Josefina Mendez's earnings and handed her the remaining sum which she had earned. She received the money with pride and smiling as always, she thanked me and all of the workers behind the scenes in the U.S. she has never met. But she prays for them and is connected to each one of them. On behalf of all the women, children and men who benefit from this mission, and on behalf of myself, I extend a heartfelt thanks to all of you who are part of the hidden force behind Ixcan Ministries, from the Board of Directors, to the women of the Product Sales Committee. And most importantly, I want to thank **you**, our benefactors who are the people who really make all of this work--God's work--possible!
Happy Thanksgiving!

Peace and All Good,

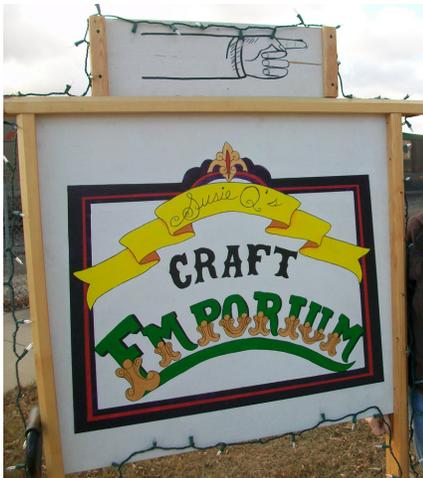
Kathy

Mission Update:

Kathy is presently at St. Scholastica Monastery in Duluth, MN writing. She is slowly recovering from plantar fasciitis and Achilles tendonitis but still is not able to do long periods of walking or standing. Thank you for your prayers for her full recovery in order to return to Guatemala!

Ixcan Creations News:

Ixcan Creations product now has a storefront! Sue Hoffman has opened a lovely store filled with all sorts of wonderful items including our women's product from Guatemala! Please stop in and shop- **Susie Q's Emporium** located in the Mandan Beanery Building – 411 West Main Street, Mandan, ND (701) 400-0708 phone.



Also visit our website at: www.ixcanministries.weebly.com to view a video of our women artisans of Ixcan Creations making their jewelry and backstrap weavings in Santiago Ixcan. The website also informs of upcoming events. Product can be purchased via website as well.



