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Dear Friends,

Almost every morning someone (usually 4 year old Demetrio) comes to my door with freshly made corn tortillas wrapped tightly in traditional cloth steaming hot ready to eat. Here corn is at the heart of the people's diet and lifestyle from planting, weeding and harvesting to transforming it into the round patties that grace every table in the village at mealtime.



The Maya relationship to corn is deep. The original Mayan creation story is based on corn. They call themselves '*hombres de maiz*' - People of corn. "Our ancestors considered the corn sacred. It is by this we live. Without corn we would die," explained Jacinto Perez a friend and local *campesino*-farmer.

Some believe that the corn has soul or *alma*.

I remember a story that Lazaro, another friend and farmer once told me. He was guarding his corn field from the usual predators of *cochemontes* (wild boars) among other animals. During his vigil he fell asleep and dreamed of three beautiful young women crying and begging him for help. "Help us!" they implored. "Then I realized I was sleeping and the three young women were the corn plants crying for my help. A *cochemonte* was in the field and I woke in time to kill it and save the corn!"

Times are especially hard here this year. The area was hit by three strong storms in November, December and March flooding rivers that partially or totally wiped out corn crops in varying stages of growth. In addition the low price of cardamom (their cash crop) and high prices of basic goods makes for very little cash flow. When crops fail the people have to buy corn. In short, some of the poorest and most affected families had no money to buy corn and were hungry.

Thus our corn project began.

When I discussed the needs of the people with Javier Gonzalez, our local administrator, he affirmed the idea of helping the poorest of the poor in our village who had little or no corn. He

recruited Nicolas Perez, a trusted man in the village and catechist and the two began to discern how to discreetly distribute 100 lb bags of maiz/corn. They did it anonymously and to date they have gotten to the tables of 22 families and individuals 36 quintales (1 quintal=100lbs) of corn. Thus, even if there isn't other 'food' the tortillas are eaten with crushed tomatoes or salsa or in extreme cases simply with salt. But stomachs are filled.

This triggers a memory. Years ago before I was leaving for the United States, a young boy came to me with a going away gift. It was haphazardly wrapped in used, stained and crushed wrapping paper. As I slowly opened the unknown treasure within I was surprised and touched to find a cob of uncooked corn! I knew this corn represented the heart of the people – their lives. Tears welled and I hugged the boy thanking him.

Today as I write the people are in another struggle threatening their corn and way of life -not brought on by natural storms but greed and corruption of multinational corporations and government. The integrity of their seed – of their corn is being threatened by governmental control imposing laws (Law Monsanto) that would force them to buy and use corn seed that is genetically altered – rather than use their own seed that is higher in nutrition and production. The people are organizing and protesting this unjust law that would have a devastating effect on their lives – their sacred corn and food source. The people barricade and close roads as a way of non-violent protest and to put pressure on the government for dialogue and change. Please pray that their efforts are respected and justice given.

Thank you for your prayers and support of our ministry. We are grateful and hold you in our prayers.

May God bless you and yours.

Sincerely,



Kathy Snider



**OUR MISSION STATEMENT**

Ixcán Ministries provides a prayerful, pastoral presence through lay missionaries living in solidarity with the poor of the remote Ixcán jungle of Guatemala to learn from as well as to assist both spiritually and materially the people with whom life and ministry are shared. The organization strives to be a bridge between two cultures and nations allowing for the exchange of varying gifts between the rich and poor for the ultimate purpose of empowerment and transformation of lives and society.

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