



**Christmas 2017**

*"Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,"  
which means "God is with us." - Matthew 1:23*



One by one, they came at different times asking for help; wood for cooking, corn for food, medicine for a sick child, soap to wash clothes, education costs, even land to build a house on. Except for the land petition, Ixcán Ministries responded to these basic needs. They are the five women I call Las Luchadoras – The Fighters - women abandoned by the fathers of their children, who struggle daily to provide for themselves and their children.

It isn't hard for me to purchase 100 lbs. of corn that will transform into tortillas feeding a small family for a month and in return ask the recipient for a simple act of service. But it occurred to me one day that these women needed more than just material assistance; that a deeper listening to their lives was required. So, I invited all five (Carmen, Teresa, Cristina, Maria and Candelaria) to the mission house and proposed the idea of meeting together twice a month creating a safe place for deep sharing, prayer, and scripture reading and reflection. This is what happened...

They came and began to unload the pain, heartbreak and struggle that their lives as single mothers entail in a culture that ostracizes women who find themselves alone without a man to support and protect them regardless of the man's behavior, i.e. lack of responsibility, drunkenness and infidelity.

They shared about the hardship of walking long distances in search of wood and then carrying it bundled on their backs to keep the fires burning in order to cook the daily meals; the hardship of not having food and filling empty stomachs with tortillas and salt; the hardship of the gossip and criticism they endure simply because they are alone; the hardship of picking cardamom with a baby strapped on their backs with the mosquitos biting and the unseen insects that leave welts and itching after sitting on the jungle floor; the emotional hardship of seeing their ex in the same village with the 'other woman'.

I listened and was thrust into their worlds that bordered on the unbelievable.

Like the one, who at age twelve, was given by her parents to a man twice her age who asked them for her to be his 'woman'. A child herself, she survived the long journey of womanhood living with a man she didn't love and who she ended up basically supporting. Three children later, and at the age of 22, she left him concluding it better to survive on her own with her children rather than supporting him as well. After telling her story she broke down covering her face with her hands sobbing repeatedly saying, "Why is this my destiny? Why is this my destiny?" There was no dry eye in the room.



Or the woman who was abandoned by the father of her five children; the youngest just a 2 month old infant. She was malnourished, her breasts empty of milk. She ended up feeding her little one boiled water and used small plastic grocery bags for diapers. Crying she shared, "I prayed to Dioscito (God), if this little boy is for me, save him, if not, take him to Yourself. I am in agreement with Your Will." The boy miraculously survived and will celebrate his twentieth birthday on the 23rd of December. He was and is her Christmas gift.

In this circle of sharing, we always read a passage from scripture then after a short moment of silence reflect on what we hear. I am moved by how God speaks to them through the Word and then through their words to each other.

We always end our time together in prayer. With tears streaming down their faces and voices pleading and crying to God for help, I kneel in their midst humbled by such faith that gives them the grace and strength to continue to luchar - to fight on.



On November 23rd we came together to share a meal to give thanks to God. The ministry provided the food, the women cooked and together with their fourteen children we feasted and laughed; a motley community of women and children with Jesus in our midst.

It is Jesus - Emmanuel - who hears the cries of the poor, our God who is indeed With Us.

The women - Las Luchadoras - thank Ixcán Ministries and benefactors for walking with and helping them in their needs.

*The Board of Directors, the people we live with and touch here in the Ixcán, and I wish all of you and yours a very Blessed Christmas Season and a New Year filled with Love, Joy and Peace.*

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive that reads "Kathy".

Kathy Snider



#### **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.

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