

Dear Friends,

Last night I attended a birthday party celebrating the lives of Flor and Elvia, identical twins. I couldn't help but remember my first encounter with them eleven years ago in Cobán's regional hospital where they were born one month premature.

Their mother, Vilia, and I stood together looking at them through the glass window. They lay in an incubator side by side, like little birds, with their arms sprawled spread eagle at their sides. Tubes sent liquid nutrition through their nose and their tiny bodies wore only a diaper.

What alarmed me was the skin color of one of them. While 5 pound Elvia's color was pinkish brown, littler 4.5 pound Flor's was a chalky gray. I turned to Vilia, "Is Flor going to make it? Look at her color?" Vilia's eyes filled with tears. "I don't know. She's been struggling." Our hearts sank in unison. I placed my hand on her back. Then, knowing she is Catholic, I asked her, "Should we baptize her?"

The Catholic faith believes in and practices infant baptism, which generally only a priest or deacon can perform. Under circumstances of near death, however, any person can perform the rite if they have the required intention and use the Trinitarian baptismal formula. "Yes, I want her to be baptized," she whispered. So, we went to the Nurses' station and asked. The nurse quickly responded, "Babies don't die here." "But the mother wants one of her babies baptized. She doesn't look good." I replied. "I want my baby baptized," Vilia insisted. The nurse relented. She went to a drawer in the room and pulled out gowns and caps. "Here, put these on," she instructed. We draped the gowns over our clothes and put on the caps. "We will need some water," I said. "There is blessed water there," she pointed to the small plastic bottle perched on a shelf above the babies' incubator. "Just in case," she added.

We entered the room and stood there silently. I reached for the plastic bottle and asked Vilia, "Do you want to do it?" And she said, "You do it." We prayed. Then, according to the baptismal rite I baptized Flor Maria, sprinkling the water on her forehead in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The babies remained in the hospital for a month, while Vilia commuted daily from a friend's home in Cobán to the hospital to visit. (Guatemala's maternity and visiting rules are very different from those in the United States.) Along with the rest of the family, we continued to pray for them, especially for Flor. And they lived!

I look at Flor now, and her sister, Elvia, transformed into healthy, beautiful girls. Their long black hair, tall, strong bodies, and sparkle in their big brown eyes defy their early struggle for survival!

Vilia has struggled, not only in saving their lives as infants but also in raising them without their father. Vilia had left the village to try to form a life with a man who promised her a future with him. Unfortunately, after about six months, his abusive behavior pushed her to leave him even though she was three months pregnant. He swore he



would never help her or the children in any way if she left. She did leave and he hasn't helped.

But she is not alone.

Flor and Elvia were raised by Vilia and her family at her father's home in Santiago Ixcán. In addition, she participates in our outreach programs. She is a jeweler in our Ixcán Creations microbusiness and also participates in our *Luchadora* Program for women who have been abandoned by the father of their children. Vilia shared, "The sales of my jewelry helped me a lot. I bought milk with it when I didn't have enough breast milk. In addition, the Luchadora group has helped me *mucho* also."

Vilia is a Luchadora – a fighter for herself and her daughters. They are a testimony to the power of prayer, resilience, community, and outside help.

Thank you for making it possible for us to continue to empower Vilia and others like her to support themselves and their families. And to be able to watch Flor and Elvia grow and flourish.

Sincerely,



Kathy Snider



Mission Update:

Kathy arrived back to Santiago Ixcán on the 21st of December in time for Christmas and to give out the traditional bolsas navideñas on Christmas day. Approximately 150 children came to the mission house to receive their very simple gift of a small paper bag filled with peanuts and candy that always brings a smile to their faces.

Our educational ministries of the library and scholarships continue. Scholarships were awarded to 6 students in primary grades, 6 students in Junior High, 3 in High School/career, and 2 at the University levels. We will open the library with a fun activity following Christmas break on January 22nd. Our outreach ministry with the women's *Luchadoras* group, and provision of medical, nutrition, food and housing assistance is active and helping people. The Ixcán Creations women will be selling their jewelry and weavings at the Women's Lenten Retreat at Corpus Christi Church in Bismarck on Saturday, February 17th from 8a.m. – 2:00p.m.

President elect Bernardo Arévalo took office under constant resistance from the corrupt powers that exist but democracy prevailed. He was sworn in, not as planned at 4p.m. on January 14th, but in the early morning hours of January 15th. The majority of Guatemalans are hopeful that his administration will bring change and an end to the long-standing corruption that has plagued the country, which he has promised to address and try to end.

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.

Our programs include- Scholarships, Community Library, Women's Micro-business, Medical, Housing, and Food Assistance, Spiritual and Pastoral Accompaniment, and Promotion of Peace and Justice.

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

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