



Dear Friends,

I arrived back in Guatemala from the U.S. on December 10th. My re-entry adaptation and integration occurred in the throes of Christmas preparations and activities up to the New Year. Now, in Ordinary Time and at a less hectic pace, I am thinking about the mission and the bridging that happens between Guatemala and the United States.

While in Sebastian, Florida this past October, five people (two couples and a small child) originally from Santiago Ixcán, visited me. Manuel and Mariola drove 3 hours to Sebastian picking up his cousin and her husband and toddler along the way in West Palm Beach. We met for lunch right before forecasted Hurricane Mitch hit! What a blessed reunion!



I sat across from Manuel at the long table of the Mexican Restaurant. He shared how he had left the village and has never been back. "I left Guatemala the 20th of February 2007. I have 18 years without seeing my parents, hermana." I didn't remember him, but smiled looking at his face and features that resembled his family back home. I knew I represented 'home' for all of my friends around that table. When folks left to use the restroom and we were alone, I felt led to extend my hands across the table and motioned him to take mine. "Manuel, I bring you the love of your family and of Santiago Ixcán, your home in Guatemala." His eyes brimmed with tears.

Before parting, Manuel's kind girlfriend said to me as we hugged good-bye, "Please give Manuel's mom a deep hug from him and me when you return." I promised that I would.

Shortly after returning to Santiago Ixcán, I went to the small store owned by Manuel's parents located at its edge along the main road. Maria, Manuel's mom, was working there alone. After the usual greetings and small talk I said, "I have a promise to keep I made to your son Manuel while I was in Florida." Her eyes widened. Then I asked her to step out from behind the counter and hugged her long saying, "This is from your son." Her eyes filled with tears as I shared about my visit with him. I felt that I was bridging years of separation from a son and a mother who longed to see each other and couldn't.

Kara Scharff, a friend of mine from Bismarck, North Dakota, had lived in Argentina for many years before moving back to the U.S. She speaks Spanish fluently. Kara works with the immigrant and refugee population in the Bismarck school system. During one of our conversations, I felt led to invite her to Santiago Ixcán for Christmas. And she came! Kara adapted to the life here effortlessly and fell in love with the place and the people. During her 10- day visit I watched God work in and through her life. I knew I was the bridge facilitating her experience to come. When I asked her to share a bit about her time here she wrote:



"There is so much I want to say but words often feel so small compared to the overwhelming sense of awe of what I experienced during my visit to Santiago Ixcán. God poured out so freely and beyond measure graces over every activity, visit, and conversation. The quiet strength of each person left an everlasting mark on my heart and when faced with life's challenges, I will look back and draw strength from them. The experience strengthened my faith in ways I never expected and brought me closer to God. It led me into a deeper understanding of Him, and challenged me to trust God in every corner of my life. My heart is forever thankful for what I saw and experienced so abundantly."



Kara and Sylvia at the communal fields.

Every January, our on-site scholarship committee: Javier, Carmen, Professor Samuel, and I, review applications of young people who are requesting financial assistance to study. Ixcán Ministries provides partial scholarships to local students from grade levels of Junior High School to University. The applicants need to maintain a 70 grade point average, have good conduct and attend classes in order to qualify. The scholarship is disbursed in two payouts for Junior High and three payouts for High School and University students. In return, they are asked to do some community service depending on the amount.

The money designated for scholarships (along with all of our other outreach programs) comes directly from our donors in the U.S. We act as bridge between you and them to empower young people here to grow academically and socially.

This year we are helping 16 students to attend school: 5 in Junior High, 4 in High School, and 7 at the University level.

These young people are the future of Guatemala and education is vitally important. We are grateful for your donations that allow us to do this work.

Thank you for your financial and prayer support of our ministry that brings hope and help to many here. We appreciate you. Know that you and yours are in our prayers. May God bless you!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive that reads "Kathy".

Kathy Snider



Kevin and Zulmi scholarship recipients

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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