

Ixcán Ministries



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"We know what we are, but we know not what we may be."

- Shakespeare

Dear Friends,

I arrived in the United States in time for the wave of high school graduations which ushered in rites of passage and new beginnings for hopeful, relieved, and perhaps nervous, young men and women now thrust into finding and making their way in a big world. For most the possibilities are endless. My nephew, 18 year old Michael, is one of them and I watched as he wrote thanking well wishers amidst the pile of congratulatory graduation cards filled with words of encouragement and money. The above saying was quoted in one of them.

Education is a door opening to opportunity for meaningful employment and financial security. That's the hope anyway. For most young people in the United States a high school education is considered a given and might I venture, taken for granted. From a position of poverty, I see that education is a privilege that not all have access to especially those in developing countries such as Guatemala.

In my village of Santiago Ixcán achieving an education beyond the sixth grade is a major accomplishment, especially for women. The cultural norm confines most in their formative teenage years to having children, making tortillas, and washing clothes – worthy and necessary tasks - but a limitation for some who have hopes for more. In addition, for



Classroom at the Junior High School

the majority of indigenous families in rural areas it is a financial hardship and a sacrifice for a child to study. Scarce money needed for basic necessities such as food must be relinquished to buy school supplies, shoes, uniforms and other school-related costs throughout the year. In addition, the parents lose invaluable help with the labor intensive work in the fields, kitchen, home and river which sustains their big families.

Ixcán Ministries has been empowering young men and women in education since 2001 from helping to build a junior high school to developing a scholarship program. I am often humbled and moved by the young people who come asking for financial assistance to study because there is always economic hardship and always such great desire. Susanna is one of those.

Seventeen year old Susanna Simon's father died of cancer about seven years ago. She was ten and her younger brother, Pedro was only seven. To make matters worse their mother is almost completely deaf and mute. In the wake of this tragedy, the little, struggling family was left to fend for themselves.

Before his death, I had promised Susanna's father to "keep an eye on his children and help them." Thus, when Susanna approached me three years ago expressing a desire to enter 7th grade Basico we made sure that it happened. Presently, she is one of our scholarship students, in her third year of junior high school– 9th grade – getting good grades and is looking forward to graduating this year! Her hopes are to *continue* her education and become a nurse!



Henri, Susanna and Pedro

I admire Susanna for her drive and commitment to study while, as most students do, juggling family responsibilities. A normal school day for her will begin at 5:00 a.m. and by the time classes start at 1:00 p.m. she will have made a fire and hand - slapped 50 tortillas for breakfast and lunch, carried on her head and hand washed clothes in a nearby *poso* – underground water hole– and on some days have gone to the fields and back having picked cardamom. In addition she may have picked up the house, washed dishes and readied herself for school. Classes last until 5:30p.m. and upon returning home she repeats the above tortilla ritual with a drop in number to 25 instead of 50 for supper, clean-up and *then* homework before dropping into bed.

When word got out that Ixcan Ministries was offering scholarships, I was inundated with distressed youth and parents seeking financial assistance for education. This surge of need pushed me to seek help and I prayerfully formed a local scholarship committee of two women and three men. With me our team of housewives (Carmen and Antonia), sustenance farmers (Eulalio and Javier), and one teacher with a college degree and director of our junior high school (Profesor Samuel) got to work. We developed a scholarship program with an application, selection, and award process, plus on-going follow-up throughout the year to monitor students' progress and grades. Moreover, the recipients are asked to commit to some form of service within the community during the year when they are in the area and available.



Back Row: Eulalio, Samuel, Javier Front Row: Carmen and Antonia

It costs about \$120.00 a year to educate a student at the junior high level in Santiago Ixcan, and anywhere from \$1000.00 - \$2000.00 a year for education at the high school/university level depending on the school and area of study. Costs rise considerably when students have to leave their homes to travel to school, room and board in addition to tuition and supplies. This year Ixcan Ministries provided partial scholarships for one student at the university level, eight students at the high school /career level and full scholarships for nine students at the Basico/junior high school level.

The fact is there is less money than 'Susannas' who have a desire to be better equipped to meet the challenges of an ever-changing world and dream of a future free of poverty. Our hope is that we can empower more and more of these amazing young people and who, like Michael, can one day be reading graduation cards that end saying,

"Congratulations! May each new day that dawns for you be an opportunity to reach the goals you've set... to be the best that you can be!"

Might that every child in the world has the opportunity to reach to his/her full God-given potential!

If you feel led to help educate Ixcan youth via our ministry, donations can be sent to: Ixcan Ministries, P.O. Box 51, Mandan, ND 58554, earmarked specifically for education and it will be placed in our scholarship fund.

Thank you for your continuing prayers and financial support. We are so grateful. May God bless you and happy summer!



OUR MISSION STATEMENT

Ixcan Ministries provides a prayerful, pastoral presence through lay missionaries living in solidarity with the poor of the remote Ixcan 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.

Ixcan Ministries is a 501(c) 3 organization. Your contributions are tax deductible. You may contact us at:
Kathy Snider
Ixcan Ministries
PO Box 51
Mandan, ND 58554
ixcan_ministries@yahoo.com
Marlane Peterson
(701) 663-3798
(701) 426-9276