



Volume 12, Issue 3

June 2012

“Tell the rich in the present age not to be proud and not to rely on so uncertain a thing as wealth but rather on God, who richly provides us with all things for our enjoyment. Tell them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous, ready to share, thus accumulating as treasure a good foundation for the future, so as to win the life that is true life.” James 6:17-19

Dear Friends,

In May my family celebrated the High School graduation of my nephew, Aaron David Butler. Aaron, bright and ambitious, along with most other U.S. High School graduates, will enroll this Fall in University to prepare for some career that will propel him into hopefully a future full of meaning and financial security.

In Guatemala, however, a graduation of any sort is rare. Most families cannot afford to send their children to school beyond the 6th grade, as the costs of supplies and tuition, in addition to room and board, are too expensive. You see, when a child dreams of a career beyond the family *parcelas* (land), this child must relocate to a bigger city in order to continue studying if he/she is to leave behind his/her family's subsistence farming for a better paying job.

God knew all this when in the year 2000 we finished construction of a junior high school in Santiago Ixcán, financed through a generous benefactor--Thanks Mr. Glennon! Since then, students within the community and from the surrounding area have streamed through our school doors in a constant wave. This year's enrollment for 7th grade is at an all time high with 54 students! These young people and their teacher were stuffed into one classroom in the stifling Ixcán heat. Again, thanks to an outstanding donation from a generous benefactor we were able to build an additional classroom to meet this need--Thanks Fr. Tom!



In addition to building a junior high school, we also established a scholarship program to help families in need with the cost of educating their son or daughter. This year we were able to give almost full scholarships to eighteen junior high students and partial scholarships to thirteen high school students and three university students.

One of this year's scholarship recipients is Juana Guzman. Juana learned about us through one of our committee members and arrived at my house during a Scholarship committee meeting asking for help. She came from Primavera del Ixcán, a village outside of our immediate area. The daughter of a mother whose money had run out, she was desperately seeking funds to finish her last year of studies, in hopes of becoming an elementary school teacher.

In our program, we partner closely with the parents of our scholarship recipients. Parents are required to attend the selection interview with their children and both parent and child sign a scholarship agreement contract. Since Juana's situation was urgent, we ended up helping her without her mother's presence, but Juana promised that her mother would come at a later time. And a month later, she did.



Marta Guzman Perez, dressed in full Ixil *traje* (dress), showed up at my doorstep with her 2-year-old daughter wrapped tightly in a shawl on her back. We chatted a bit, and then went over Juana's contract. Like many people from her generation, she cannot read or write, and signed the contract with her ink thumb print on the dotted line. After dealing with scholarship formalities I asked about her life. What she shared was unforgettable...

During the early 1980's the Guatemalan Military implemented a *scorched earth* policy in which 440 villages were razed to the ground. This was done to undermine civilian support in rural communities for the guerilla army. The Maya Ixil Triangle(Chajul, Nebaj, Cotzal) along with the Ixcán region of El Quiché were targeted and hit especially hard.

At the time, Marta was only 7-years-old when the Guatemalan Army entered her village of Chajul. The soldiers broke into homes and systematically forced all the people to stand lined up in single files in the town center. She and her mother stood in one of those lines. However, Marta broke away and ran to her home for a shawl. When she returned her mother was not in the place where Marta had left her! She wandered crying through the throngs of people desperately searching, shouting her mother's name. But, no mother. She had lost her mother, so she fled.

Two soldiers pursued Marta as she ran away. She evaded them by hiding in a river behind a curtain of water cascading from a small waterfall. She left her wet hiding place at sundown and spent the night shivering and cold at the river's edge. At daybreak she returned to where her mother and people had been. Everything was burned. Her mother, her people, and the soldiers were gone.

Disoriented and inconsolable she wandered alone in the mountains for days until she came to the edge of a village and was found by a man living there. He took her into his home where she lived for 4 years. Unfortunately, he and his family treated her poorly. Abused and deprived, at age eleven, she decided to flee again. This time she returned to the mountains looking for the other soldiers, those from the revolutionary army--the guerillas. These soldiers took her into their care and treated her well. She grew up in their midst and eventually became one of them--a *combatiente*--a revolutionary combatant.

Marta did not go into detail with me about her time as a guerilla soldier except to say at age 16 she fell in love with one of her companions and became pregnant. When the guerilla army decided to divide their forces and send some troops to the Ixcán, they sent Marta with them. This time not to fight, but to take refuge during her pregnancy with the Communities of Population in Resistance (CPR) of the Ixcán.

The CPR were internally displaced unarmed civilian populations who fled from the Guatemalan Army to the mountains and forests to save their lives.

In 1990, Marta gave birth to Juana, in the rain forest and among the CPR community of the Ixcán. Three years later, after the birth of their son, Marta and the father of her children separated. He later abandoned them.

In 1991 the CPR of the Ixcán was officially recognized as an unarmed civilian population giving the people some semblance of protection. In February of 1995, the CPR of the Ixcán founded the community of Primavera. It is here that Marta settled with her two small children and where she still lives today with the man she later married. They have seven children.

Before leaving my home, Marta graciously thanked me for the financial assistance Ixcán Ministries was giving to Juana.

“Thanks to you all for the effort that you are doing to help us. It is not easy to find the money for Juana to continue studying. I want to deeply thank you,” she said. “You are the child of Ixcán Ministries, here to watch over us.” Those were her words.

Thank you for helping Ixcán Ministries reach out to struggling young people and their families. As you can imagine I am greatly enriched by the people I live with and serve. Marta and her daughter, Juana, are an example of these amazing people.

Sincerely,



Kathy Snider



P.S. If you feel led to give a donation toward helping young people like Marta study, please indicate *scholarship fund* on your gift and we will use accordingly.

Mission Update: Kathy arrived back to the U.S. on June 7th. She was granted a scholarship to participate at one of Collegeville Institute’s summer writing workshops the week of June 17th -23rd in Collegeville, MN and will remain in the U.S. for some months to do reverse mission work.

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.

Ixcán Ministries is a 501(c) 3 organization. Your contributions are tax deductible. You may contact us at:

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