



"There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens. A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to uproot the plant."

Ecclesiastes 3:1-2

Dear Friends,

I arrived back to Guatemala on September 9th after four months in the U.S. following in the wake of hurricane Agatha and a succession of tropical storms. Debris and mud on rain soaked roads hinted of the destruction that had transpired only a few weeks prior as I traveled back to the Ixcán from Antigua, under the threat of yet more rain. Unbeknown to me storms of other sorts were brewing in my village.

Shortly after my arrival in Santiago Ixcán a friend said, "I don't want to scare you, but Carmen's mother is dying." Carmen is a close friend of mine. Her mother, 65 year old Petrona, was diabetic, malnourished and in poor health. A widow for 13 years, she was a true rock to her family especially to her three daughters - Carmen, Demasia -and in particular her youngest with whom she lived, 28-year old Cristina – who was pregnant with her fourth child.

As I entered the yard of Carmen's house a shaken neighbor informed, "Cristina was taken to Playa Grande in the back of a truck!" She had been in difficult labor for hours. "What more can happen to this family?" I muttered, making my way to the small cement house adjacent to Carmen's where Dona Petrona lived. Hesitantly, I entered the room. There lies Dona Petrona in a coma on a wooden slab bed, her gaunt face and thin body laboring with each breath. My heart broke. Gone was her wide, toothless smile welcoming me! I tearfully hugged Carmen consoling her and the rest of the family. Then I sat near Dona Petrona speaking to her and praying softly.

No one knows exactly what happened but Cristina had found her passed out on the floor after being alerted by her 4 year old daughter, Chavela, screaming, "Mama, come quick! Abuela (grandmother) has died!" I asked Carmen if they wanted to get her to a hospital. She explained that they had called a trusted, neighboring nurse who concluded that there was no hope. The family opted to not try and transport her on washed out muddy roads to the nearest critical care hospital seven hours away in Cobán. In addition Carmen expounded, "She had told us that she did

not want to go to a hospital. She had wanted to die at home.” Thus they were simply trying to make their mother as comfortable as possible and “waiting for the hour.”

A short time after my arrival, shouts echoed from outside. We all scrambled out into the yard and I saw a red, four wheel drive truck parked at a slant.



Demasia, first on the scene, emerged carrying a small wrapped bundle from behind the truck. Then I saw Cristina draped in a blanket being carried into Carmen’s house. As her mother lay dying, Cristina had given birth to a baby in the back of the truck an hour outside of the village! Thank God the midwife had been with her! Demasia rushed toward me holding the baby for me to take. “No,” I shook my head. I was in too much shock at that point to hold the baby! I gently lifted the lightweight blanket from the baby’s face held in her arms. “It’s a boy!” Demasia beamed.

On the 23rd of September I was graced to be present when Dona Petrona took her last breath. She was surrounded by her four children and preceded in death by her teenage daughter, Victorina , who had been killed at the height of the violence in the early 80’s. She was grieved during a 24 hour vigil of praises, scripture readings and prayers in the room where she died attended by her family and the majority of the village community. Finally, she was placed in a simple wooden coffin with all of her personal belongings and carried on the shoulders of four men to the Catholic Church and to the cemetery in a solemn procession of loved ones, flowers and candles. The church bell tolled in measured succession, its sobering peal echoing throughout the village seeming to carry the heaviness and sorrow felt in the hearts of all.

For six consecutive days following Dona Petrona’s burial a short prayer service was held for the family in her home. On the 8th day following her death another overnight prayer vigil was celebrated ending on the morning of the 9th day with a simple, cement cross placed on her tomb. The traditional Mayan grieving process thus ended.

The drama of both a birth and a death initiated my re-entry process to mission here and the most I could offer at the moment was simply being present to the people trusting that somehow God was in it all. In the face of so much *hard* - adverse



road conditions , poor health care services, poverty and death -life continues, as evidenced by the birth of little Yonell, Cristina’s newborn son. I remain humbled and grateful to be called to this place and these people in mission. May Dona Petrona rest in peace.

Love,

Kathy



U.S. Mission Update:

The four months of reverse mission in the U.S. was rich and fruitful. I was able to attend the retreat for returning missionaries hosted by Franciscan Mission Service at the end of May in Denver, Colorado, as well as the 100th Year Celebration of the Diocese of Bismarck, ND in early June. I traveled to the Twin Cities, South Dakota and Washington, D.C. to visit family, friends and benefactors. This included special visits with Mr. Tom and Ellen Glennon on Cape Cod, Franciscan Mission Service and Madonna House both in D.C. I enjoyed meeting and promoting the sale of Ixcan Creations’, the mico-business formed to sell handcrafted products made by the women’s of Santiago, Ixcan, with a wonderful group of lively, prayerful women hosted by Judith Tyrrell in Maryland. I had the honor of visiting my Carmelite friend’s gravesite – Sr. Mary Margaret Cass- who had died of a terminal brain tumor in March and meet her parents Tom and Jean Cass at the Carmelite Monastery of Port Tobacco.

It had been a while since I was able to spend a summer in ND and it was wonderful time for me to be home. My time there was varied and involved continued development of the Board of Directors, Ixcan Creations and our website. We also conducted an “El Camino” (The Path) retreat with a group of women which involved an overnight campout at Ft. Lincoln State Park in Mandan. I prayed with my Benedictine Community at Annunciation Monastery in Bismarck, enjoyed my mom’s neighbors and hospitality. I was able to get some swimming at the Heart River with my nephews and niece, and go fishing with my dad. He even taught me how to clean a fish! I always leave N.D with a deep appreciation for the goodness of people there and deep gratitude for the support they give to this ministry through service and prayer. To each and everyone one of you, know that we continually pray for you and appreciate your walking in this ministry together. God Bless You.

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:
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Ecclesiastes

Chapter 3

There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens. A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to uproot the plant.

A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to tear down, and a time to build.

A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.

A time to scatter stones, and a time to gather them; a time to embrace, and a time to be far from embraces.

A time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away.

A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to be silent, and a time to speak.

A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

What advantage has the worker from his toil?

I have considered the task which God has appointed for men to be busied about.

He has made everything appropriate to its time, and has put the timeless into their hearts, without men's ever discovering, from beginning to end, the work which God has done.

I recognized that there is nothing better than to be glad and to do well during life. For every man, moreover, to eat and drink and enjoy the fruit of all his labor is a gift of God.

I recognized that whatever God does will endure forever; there is no adding to it, or taking from it. Thus has God done that he may be revered.