

# Delegation from Needham Congregational Church

## To Santa María Tzejá

February 10-21, 2010 – Trip Report

Brenda Metzler

In collaboration with Co-Leader Tina Scharback and other delegates

**Delegates:** Jerry Durbin, Theresa Garrett, Madison Garrett, David Libbey, Don Libbey, Sarah Libbey, Brenda Metzler, Charlie Moder, Fred Moder, Scott and Joene Pike, Tina Scharback, Scott Stewart, and Caroline Tegeler. Ali Durbin and Randall Shea served as interpreters.

**Note:** Since many delegates contributed to this report, each section indicates the writer's name in parentheses.

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**Introduction** (Brenda Metzler)

It is both inspiring and humbling that year after year our church’s delegations to Guatemala continue to draw in both seasoned and first-time travelers for a treasured experience/spiritual journey that is never forgotten. The February 2010 delegation was no exception. Our 12-person group from Needham included four high school students, along with various parents and other adults, making for a diverse group that worked remarkably well together.



***February 2010 Delegation***

We were joined by Oregon optometrist Scott Pike and his wife Joene in Guatemala City, along with Jerry Durbin and his daughter Ali, who bravely met the challenge of interpreting for the group while also tending to the needs of her two children. After hearing a very informative update on the current situation in Guatemala, our group focused mainly on learning more about Mayan culture through visits to a Mayan ruins site and museum in Guatemala City. We also enjoyed our customary dinner and lively interchange with university students from Santa María Tzejá, who always challenge us to think in new ways about

how we perceive ourselves and our country in relation to other countries and cultures. Ali led our delegation in an anti-discrimination workshop that furthered this process.

On our overnight stop in Cobán on the way to Santa María Tzejá, we enjoyed dinner with five young women from the village who are studying at the high school level, including two who have graduated and found jobs. This exchange is always a highlight for the Needham youth, who did an amazing job of communicating directly with the students in Spanish. The remainder of our travel to reach the village was punctuated with minor misadventures, the most exciting of which was being forced to cross a stream in our vans, since a bridge was under repair.



*Our arrival in Santa María Tzejá was greeted by marimba music, balloons, palm-branch decorations and the ever-warm welcome.*

Through the next six days our group enjoyed meals and conversations in the homes of 45 families, discovering the simple yet profound human connections that can be made when friendship and trust have been nurtured over many visits. Though exhausting, the full schedule of meetings with village committees helped us to understand the community's priorities and its progress and obstacles in the areas of education and health. We also shared with village leaders our plan for leadership transition on the Needham end, which they welcomed as an assurance of continuity in our relationship.

The difficulty of keeping to the packed schedule, as well as the inevitable glitches, challenged our group to exercise considerable initiative and creative problem-solving skills. This was a hallmark of the group and a real blessing to the delegation leaders. Travelers also did a good job of respecting security recommendations and working as a group. Whether hiking through the jungle to visit caves where villagers hid out during the violence of the 1980's, chatting with people in their homes, teaching English in the middle school, or refreshing themselves at the waterfall, the travelers were fully open to the opportunity to engage with our friends and partners in Santa María Tzejá. And as individual travelers, we are grateful for the bonds we developed with each other along the way.

### **From Needham to Guatemala City** (Brenda Metzler)

Following a Tuesday evening send-off celebration at the Taylor's home, our delegation met up at Tina's at 4:00 am Wednesday for our drive to the airport. Check-in went pretty well, given our volume of luggage to check, and soon we were off. Our layover in Miami gave us time for a relaxed lunch, and we arrived on time in Guatemala City. While most people waited to collect the group's bags, a few of us went in search of a bank to begin changing our money. The renovated airport has currency booths, but the exchange rate was terrible, so we kept walking until we found a small bank office that offered the highly unlikely combination of privacy, efficient and honest personnel, and sufficient 'quetzales' for our large group. Things were really going smoothly! We prevailed upon someone to lend us a cell phone to call our driver Edgar, who knew our arrival time, and soon we were on our way to the Spring Hotel in his van and a private taxi that Ali had arranged for us.

### **'Coyuntura' (Briefing) with Edwin Canil** (Don Libbey)

After check-in at the Spring Hotel, we met with Edwin Canil to learn more about the current situation in Guatemala. Edwin opened with a brief introduction of the various players, including the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (Spanish acronym CICIG), President Alvaro Colóm ("Colóm"), and the elites (the "Elites") made up of the various business interests, both legal and illegal, old and new, as they relate to the indigenous people (the "People") of Guatemala.

Edwin stated that internally, the People, including those affected by past military regimes, remain hopeful that the Colóm government continues to make changes that have and will benefit the People. The concern remains, however, that halfway through his four-year term, Colóm will not have sufficient time to effectuate more change before new elections and a new government. Externally, the international community has also been hopeful with the Colóm presidency.

During Colóm's honeymoon period of the last two years, there has been much discourse and attempt by the government to open a dialogue for those that have not had a voice in the past. However, even with Colóm's openness, civil and social organizations, while hopeful, remain concerned that the government will not come through for them when it counts. At the same time, there remain 'parallel powers' on the fringe of the government, made up of far-right Elites and large segments of the military, that are afraid of Colóm, because he has presented the People with the appearance of legal legitimacy to bring action for past aggressions against them. This has resulted in less polarization of the Elites (military, landowners and others) who have closed ranks and banded together to be a stronger opposition. Also, the large landowner Elites remain afraid that farm workers will get a greater voice and cause problems for them.

The lessening of the usual polarization of the Elites also resulted from the shooting and death of lawyer Rodrigo Rosenberg Marzano ("Rosenberg"), who was a representative of one of the Elite factions. Surprisingly, as a result of Rosenberg's death, the middle and upper classes protested in the streets, while at the same time, independently behind the scenes, Elite groups around the fringe of the government used the various supposed motives for the lawyer's death to try and provoke a coup. The fringe groups were concerned that the government was giving a voice to, and working for, the People, which they felt was not in the Elites' best interests. Edwin believes that the presence and effectiveness of the CICIG in Guatemala at the time helped to prevent a coup.

The CICIG was charged with disbanding various 'criminal' groups in the country. The Commission was established, at Guatemala's request, as a United Nations organ funded through voluntary contributions in order to support, strengthen and assist State institutions responsible for investigating and prosecuting crimes allegedly committed by illegal security forces and clandestine security organizations in the country. It also is charged with making various recommendations to the State concerning public policies aimed at eradicating and preventing the re-emergence of such criminal groups and structures. The CICIG was propelled by citizens to take the power away from the 'parallel powers' existing on the fringe of the government. Those 'parallel powers' emerged during Guatemala's dark past and were not disbanded at

the time of the peace accords. Those groups unfortunately were legitimized through various political parties and continue to commit crimes.

Interestingly, both the People and the Elites asked the CICIG to investigate Rosenberg's death because both trusted that it would be an impartial fact finder. The oligarchy, made up of the various Elites, also applauded the work of the CICIG, because they believed that Colóm was behind the death, and such a finding would mean that Colóm would be ousted and the ouster would have the imprimatur of legitimacy. The People believed that the Elite landowners were behind Rosenberg's death, because the People were receiving benefits and a voice from the Colóm government, and Rosenberg's death would help to oust the President if he were found to be involved.

When the CICIG issued its findings and results (in late January 2010), the People and the Elites were both surprised when it determined that Rosenberg planned his own death. The CICIG arrived at its conclusion after a careful, thorough, and transparent investigation, including forensic and other scientific investigation. Neither group expected the report's conclusion, and so far, no one has stepped forward to objectively disagree with its findings. In fact the report has had a calming effect on the various groups, and many are now trying to reconcile. Of course, many groups continue to maintain animosity against each other, but the transparency of the CICIG's report on the death of Rosenberg has taken tensions down. The government has also come out of the incident as the 'white knight', which has been important for Colóm's stability, especially with the recent coup in Honduras.

The CICIG has continued with its mission in other cases, including drug trafficking and money laundering, and has achieved some good results. The result of all of the Commission's successful endeavors has been to further legitimize its mission. As examples, former Guatemalan president Alfonso Portillo was arrested recently for illegal activities, including money laundering. The country has gone through tough times, but hope remains.

Edwin then spoke about the justice system. The country has recently undergone changes in its Supreme Court. Many social organizations support the new members of the Court and remain hopeful, but continue to wait for results to see how the Court will rule on various issues.

Edwin said that the People have always felt that it was difficult to obtain justice under the Guatemalan legal system. There was never any political will to bring cases against the perpetrators of new crimes, let alone old crimes. The justice system has always been at the bottom of government power in Guatemala. Ninety-eight (98%) percent of crimes have not resulted in any verdict or decision, leaving only two (2%) percent that even make it through the system, so impunity has been the rule.

There is huge pressure now on the judicial system regarding the bringing of cases and the lack of sentencing. The People have a lot of hope and expectations that the new members of the Supreme Court will turn over a new leaf on the justice system. When asked whether the judicial system has been threatened as it has in the past, Edwin indicated that several Justices of the Supreme Court have publicly stated that they have not been threatened. However, several lower court Judges, the ones actually bringing cases against perpetrators, have been threatened.

The political parties will now spend the next two years campaigning for the 2012 elections. This is a key year for the different groups to get their supporters into positions that will assist them in the election. Edwin believes that the role of civil society is to make sure that the people that are put in positions of power do not demonstrate partisanship. This was demonstrated recently when a person was put into a position of power by the Congress. The people believed that he was so biased in favor of his party that they protested and had him removed from office. This came about from a strong conglomerate of civil organizations who publicized issues about the newly appointed person, and forced the Congress to make changes in their decision-making process and who they nominated in the future.

Many types of organizations want to see justice served: not just human rights' groups in Guatemala; and not just the People, but also the middle class, and some of the older Elites of the landowner society that

gained their wealth during the colonial era. The 'new' wealthy, who became wealthy through and during the time of the war, make up most of the 'parallel powers'. It is all about centralized power in the capital.

Issues in the countryside are different. Near-term the problem for the indigenous people is the policy towards the use of natural resources located in indigenous areas. There currently is a fever on foreign capital investment which is exploiting natural resources. A race is taking place between different countries to see who will get concessions to exploit the country's natural resources. Most of the areas that the foreigners wish to exploit are traditional Mayan areas where the People have been living for a very long time. Many of those People never had the need to demonstrate legitimate title to the land where they live. The government is being formalistic and requiring the People to prove they have title. If they are unable to prove title to the land, they lose. Traditionally, the Mayan People have a piece of paper that says that the land is owned by all the people, not by individuals. In many instances, the mayor of a village controls what happens to the land owned by the village collective. In several instances, the mayor of the village, whose campaign has been funded by businessmen, has granted concessions to the business interests. The People do not even know what is happening until the business interests show up to develop the land and tell them they have to move. There has been little support from the Colóm government in these situations. Some of the People have protested and been jailed. As a result, some of the People have taken matters into their own hands and kidnapped business people, and the army is then called in to bring order. This is reminiscent of the past and the way government handled the People. The People in many areas of Guatemala are in despair, because they believe they will lose their land. Edwin said that it might lead to People turning to the gun for justice and to protect themselves. There are laws to help in these situations, but the People do not have the money to assert their rights through the courts.

Edwin explained that the mayors generally are closer to the legalistic state system of government rather than the traditional Mayan justice system. During the war, it was pounded into the People's head that the military was the power, which marginalized the traditional Mayan culture of justice. That marginalization means the People lack the ability to assert themselves today.

In the Ixcán region, the People have deeds for their land, so the foreign investment and business interests are employing different strategies to exploit the People of the region. Two years ago CNN reported on an effort by foreign businesses to plant crops for use in producing bio-fuel. The businesses divided the People, some of whom sold their land while others did not. No one discussed with the People what would happen if they sold out and what exploitation would cost them in the future. Now, environmental groups are going out to raise the consciousness of the People, explaining to them what happens when multi-national corporations come in and purchase the land. They explain that while it is a personal choice of the owner of the land whether to sell or not, much thought should be given to how the sale affects and impacts the larger region, not just the individual.

Edwin is worried about this growing situation in the Ixcán region. He wonders about how families will live now and in the future; will it drive the People back into colonization and force them to work for others? The region has very fertile land, where generally no chemicals are used to assist growth. To date it has been self-sustaining, but how will that change if it is exploited by foreign business and investment?

There is a lot of potential for self-directed development by local farmers so long as they have an understanding of how to do so. That would include cacao, cattle, and growing hardwood trees for construction materials. Diversity thrives in the Ixcán. But large companies want to clear-cut the land and grow a single crop. Will foreign exploitation cause development of large tracts of land and overuse of chemicals, which would affect contiguous areas? Edwin believes that if the Ixcán people were given opportunities, they would not have to sell out to foreigners.

Some in the government are upset that land in the Ixcán was granted to individuals. This has left money as the only incentive to sell. With no large tracts under common ownership, but only smaller individual parcels, the question remains whether the People will take the money? This shows how important it is to make sure the People understand how their individual decisions will affect the whole and the future. Edwin is not opposed to development, if done correctly and well thought out.



Because of illiteracy, the population depends on what it hears, not on what it can read. To many Guatemalans the government is foreign to them. Fifteen years ago, Edwin himself was not interested in the government. People would say then and still say now: the government is there just to steal. When people see fraud, they lose hope for the future.

We learned that there is a growing drug problem in the Ixcán, with some people saying the only solution is to legalize drugs. Edwin believes that legalization would affect all levels of society. Some people see it as a way to make fast money, because so much is available. For example, one can deliver drugs from village to village and get paid big money for a short day's work. This is very tempting where poverty is rampant and opportunities are few. Some drug lords have more money than the government, and they use that money to hire and exploit people. Edwin believes that people need other options than those given by drug traffickers. Given other options, they will take the right road.

We asked about the reopening of the army base in Playa. Thus far there are just 32 soldiers of the 200 anticipated to arrive, nominally for the purpose of countering drug trafficking and providing 'social stability', which translates to protecting national and international business interests as a new mega-highway is completed in the region.

We thanked Edwin for his enlightening briefing and headed to a prearranged dinner in the hotel's cafeteria. As tired as we were, it was such a pleasure to not have to go out for dinner, and everyone enjoyed the good food and the company of Ali and Edwin.

### **Visit to Ruins of Kaminaljuyu and Miraflores Museum** (David Libbey)

Thursday morning, following a good breakfast at the hotel cafe, Ali accompanied us to a Mayan ruins site, a park called Kaminaljuyu (also Kaminaljuyú), located in Zone 7 of Guatemala City. When we arrived, the first thing I noticed was that it is completely surrounded by the city, one of the few natural enclaves that could probably be found. The area was surrounded by a fence and a near-complete line of tall trees, while inside of the ring were grassy hillocks and some more trees and shrubs. Ali had a spiritual guide, Don Antonio, waiting to meet us, and he explained to us what the government posting about the ruins said. He told us that Kaminaljuyu was mostly constructed in the Early Pre-Classical period and that the area was a place for studies. He went on to tell us that when the Spaniards arrived in the country, the Church believed that the ruins were built by devil-worshippers, and so had no qualms about tearing most of them down. Don Antonio also explained that, although the government had dubbed the place "the hill of the dead", it was more correct to call it "the mountain of the spirits" since people nowadays come there to commune with the spirits of their relatives.



*Kaminaljuyu*

He took us around the site and showed us the excavations that were underway. Continuing the tour, we happened upon a 'daykeeper' performing a ritual to commune with the spirits. He allowed us to watch him perform his ritual, and he explained to us what he was doing and some aspects of the Mayan culture, such as its gods, its system of calendars, and its rituals. From there, our group went to the section of ruins that had already been completely excavated. Don Antonio told us of how this section of the ruins had been built, and then rebuilt two more times so that it would be properly aligned with the solar calendar every 7200 years. We then thanked him for his time and left the beautiful site.

From the park, we traveled to the Miraflores Mall, and during the ride Ali explained to us about how large developments had destroyed most of the Kaminaljuyu ruins, but that now builders are required to have an archaeologist examine the building site before anything can be constructed. We arrived at the large mall (it had a merry-go-round on the second floor) and walked through it until coming to an entrance to the Miraflores Museum. Through this entrance we walked outside to a courtyard that had a large, grass-covered mound that was an ancient ruin that the museum had kept from being destroyed. We entered the museum and saw a diorama of what Kaminaljuyu looked like, under a glass floor. Our English-speaking tour guide showed us the exhibits, which were set up to show us what ancient Mayan life looked like. She told us how Kaminaljuyu was built on a large lake and that the soil was good for planting, but that by the Late Pre-Classical period most of the lake had dried up and the area fell into decline. She then explained to us some aspects of the Mayan culture, mainly the spiritual beliefs of the people and their agricultural practices. We continued the tour to a re-creation of a Mayan king's burial plot, and then finished off our tour by climbing to the top of the mound in the courtyard.

We then headed back into the modern mall, where we had lunch in a food court. The setting had very much the feel of a modern mall in the U.S. Ali asked us to consider who might be able to shop at such a place. This plush modern structure stood in great contrast to the crowded jumble of makeshift shacks we saw clinging to steep hillsides as we returned by van to our hotel.

We all took a brief rest, and then many of us headed out to the central plaza where we saw the national palace and a church whose pillars have inscribed on them the names of the victims of the violence. From there we made the short walk to the marketplace to shop for handicrafts before heading back to the hotel.

### **Meeting with University Students** (Tina Scharback)

Our second night in Guatemala City is always a highlight of our city meetings because we meet with the students from Santa María Tzejá who are studying at the University of San Carlos and at some of the area high schools. Around 6:00 pm the students arrived, and we gathered in one of our hotel rooms. Eduardo Juárez Hernández, a university student in agronomy and member of the AESMAC Board of Directors, began the meeting by welcoming the delegation to Guatemala and saying that the village is anxiously waiting for us to arrive. We continued with introductions, including the following students:

Juan Tomás Pérez is an agronomy engineer and is working for CONAP (the National Council for Protected Areas.

Augusta Pérez is studying psychology and doing her practicum. She's on AESMAC's Board of Directors.

Obdulio Abimal Soto is in his first year of high school for pre-med.

Rogelio Hernández said this was his final year in zoology.

Yolanda Canil is studying industrial engineering and will be starting her practicum.

César Canil is studying law.

Amelia Rosaura Canil is in the last year of a 2-year college prep/liberal arts program.

Romelia is studying hotel administration and tourism. She expressed gratitude for the support she is receiving.



Also present was Ashley Williamson, the Needham-sponsored accompanier for NISGUA, who previously and worked in Chimaltenango and SMT and is now working with a mobile team in the capital.

Brenda had previously sent Eduardo a list of possible topics for our gathering. He and Augusta had chosen three of them to discuss. One was communication between the partner families via the letter-writing project. Another was our opinion of the Obama administration. And third was a discussion of the coup in Honduras and its impact on Central America. Augusta began the first topic by explaining that Brenda had written Juvencio Chom regarding some concerns about partner-family communications via letters and how we could improve the connections. Juvencio gave the letter to AESMAC president Aurelio Canil, who took the concern seriously and brought it up with the COCODE Committee, a highly representative council in SMT. He also e-mailed other AESMAC members to see how the communication between partner families could be improved. AESMAC had not known that some families were not writing consistently.

César shared the students' conclusion that it is not that SMT families don't want to correspond, but that sometimes obstacles get in the way. For example, unlike AESMAC members who have had a chance to get an education, many people in the community don't know how to write, and sometimes their school-age children don't help them. Another factor is that some families may have more pressing, immediate needs that take first priority, like working in the fields. But we don't want Needham families to get discouraged by not receiving letters. It may be that we need to provide more motivation for families here or provide a mechanism for them to do it more easily.

Susan said that some families in Needham have a hard time writing too. Sarah and Fred agreed that people shouldn't feel obligated to write. Tina said that she did not want people to feel bad about the situation because it is happening in both communities. Brenda reiterated that "this is not a one-sided problem. Fifteen families in Needham did not write. We have to look at this together."

Augusta said the aim is to strengthen the relationship between families, thus increasing trust between the two communities. With this in mind the students presented three proposals for us to take home and consider:

1. Create a website or web page, with restricted access, which could include visual content, such as photos and even videos. This would not replace the letter exchange.
2. Motivate/encourage the Básico (middle school) students to help their parents write the letters. COCODE (which recently appointed Randall Shea to work to increase the letter yield) could lend its support to this effort.
3. COCODE or another village entity could interview SMT families and write a letter on behalf of the community to the Needham church in general.

It was also suggested that, for SMT families that didn't have anyone to write the letter, they could go to the computer center and dictate their letter to a student there to be sent back to Needham, or a student could go to the family's home to take dictation of the letter.

We shared some thoughts about a possible website. Theresa liked the idea and volunteered to work on creating one. Sarah asked whether writing letters 2 times per year is an outdated concept. César said that sometimes it's hard for people to know what to write, adding that visual language on a website (i.e., a panorama of SMT with photos of buildings, house, streets, and rivers) could help overcome the language barrier. Don concurred that visuals are more inspiring. We agreed to be in touch regarding work on this idea, since AESMAC had previously sent Needham some thoughts about a website.

Sarah, as a representative from Needham's subcommittee on partner-family letters, thanked everyone for the proposals and said now that COCODE has this as a topic, we can communicate back and forth about it. Brenda thanked everyone for their concern and for responding with action and ideas. Fred said that we would take all of the ideas back to Needham. Eduardo remarked that each side of the partnership should do what it takes to carry out the program.

On our second topic of the Obama presidency, Eduardo said that the topic of politics, like religion, brings lots of disagreement, so he thought that each person should state his/her opinion. Juan said that President Obama has done good work, but that there are always behind-the-scenes powers, especially economic ones, that limit what a president can do. He thinks the institutions that were given the bail-out money should pay back the government for that. He also dreams that Latin America will gain more respect. He said that Latin America hoped that Obama would be more receptive to immigrants' rights and that it has been very sad to see immigrant men, women and children rounded up and treated like animals. He states that in Guatemala, President Colóm is likewise at the mercy of the economic elite, so he cannot make his visions come true. After the coup in Honduras, Colóm did not accept the outcome as the economic elite wanted him to do, so they would not accept his tax-reform program.

Rogelio said there was a lot of hope in various countries when Obama took office, because his story is similar to that of many people of color who have faced discrimination. He thought it was sad that Obama's aunt might be deported to another country. Rogelio is concerned about the continuing wars in Iran and Afghanistan. But he said that Obama continues to be a model because he shows that we can be someone in life and do something good, even though there are always other forces at work behind the scenes.

Eduardo believes that President Obama inspires hope but he has not fulfilled a lot of programs because Congress is not letting them through. César said that the U.S. has both domestic and foreign policies, which are two different things. Its foreign policy affects Guatemalans, who rely on outside remittances to provide income. Central Americans were hopeful that a just and dignified treatment of immigrants in the U.S. would happen soon, but it is much the same as it was under Bush. César also talked about how the war in the Middle East is not just affecting the terrorists, but also civilian populations, as happened during the internal armed conflict in Guatemala. He acknowledged that security is an important issue but that it is also important to respect human beings and their rights and dignity.

Don was curious about what the Needham youth might have to say. Maddie said that after she visited Guatemala she became really interested in immigration and she would like to see the immigration situation changed. She thinks there is hope, even though one person can't do it alone. Caesar responded that "the fact that you became aware of people living a different life, that's already a beginning." Tina commented that people have very short memories. She said that Obama has been handed the worst economic mess ever and he has had to prioritize. He has only been office for a year, so he needs time. Obama still believes in his programs, and he wants the corporations/banks to pay back the money that bailed them out.

Fred felt honored that we can have such a frank and honest discussion about various topics. "You remind us that each of us has to work to make change come, not just wait for the government." Fred also mentioned that he, Clark and others in our church are part of a task force on immigration in our area, and some participated in leafleting a neighborhood of an employer who wrote bad checks to immigrant workers. "We are trying to learn to act locally." David reminded us that our country was built on the backs of immigrants and we need to help other countries and other people. Scott (Stewart) added, "We applaud your openness and frankness in speaking about controversial issues which are complex. Making changes will happen with an open and free dialogue, which is a principle of our country. Change may be slow, but it can happen."

Scott Pike generally likes Obama but has been disappointed that Obama ultimately supported the recent coup in Honduras. He thinks Obama was influenced by those who wield wealth and power, as happened in the 1950's, when the C.I.A supported the coup against President Arbenz in Guatemala. Brenda acknowledged that most of the Needham delegation knew very little about the Honduran situation. We humbly invited the students to help educate us. Rogelio observed that for the past 50 years the army has stood side by side with the rich. This economic power still exists in Latin America. But this time, said César, it was the upper class that was responsible for the coup in Honduras. César added that the rich and middle class didn't want to pay taxes to support community development, so they rose up and overthrew

President Zelaya, whose eyes had been opened to needs of the poor. Eduardo said that, for some weeks and months after the coup, social and civil organizations in Honduras spoke out against the coup, but they couldn't sustain themselves. They needed money to overcome the elite. Eduardo noted that the U.S. has a military base in Honduras, and perhaps this was one reason the U.S. supported the new government. César believes that, if the U.S. had not recognized the coup, Zelaya could have been reinstated.

Fred then commented that we have been challenged to think more about these things.

Juan said that, since young people are our future, it is great that we bring our youth to see the reality of the world outside of the U.S. We all acknowledged the privilege it is to get together and have this opportunity for dialogue. We greatly appreciated Ali's translation for our group, while simultaneously handling the needs of her children and her dad's impending arrival at the airport. We are also indebted to Ashley for stepping in to translate when Ali had to leave.

Our pizza had arrived, so we adjourned and spent the rest of the evening in small groups getting to know each other. It's always a special time to chat individually. At the end of the evening we called taxis for the students and then headed to our rooms to pack for our departure the next day.

### **Anti-Discrimination Workshop** (Sarah Libbey)

Following a good breakfast Friday morning of eggs or pancakes, fruit, and coffee, all delegation members retreated to a meeting room at our hotel, where Ali Durbin led the group in an anti-discrimination workshop.

Ali's introduction included these points:

- This training is something that accompaniers receive.
- The object is not for anyone to feel bad, but it is important for people to reflect.

Ali's handout entitled "Allies Workshop" covered these key concepts:

- Prejudice, discrimination, racism
- Target and non-target populations
- Privilege
- Ally

Each of us in the group read aloud 12 statements of privilege. We discussed 'how we feel' and 'what we expect SMT villagers would feel' with regard to each statement. For example, statement #10 says, "I can visit most countries with relative ease and do not have to put myself in grave danger if I decide to cross a border". We remarked how we cross borders by plane, not foot; and that only 10% of Guatemalans are able to get visitor visas to the U.S. In conclusion, we agreed that many of the 12 statements of privilege don't apply to SMT folks.

The questions we then explored were:

1. In what ways is the Needham church an ally to the community of Santa María Tzejá?
2. What elements/dynamics/factors of the Needham-SMT partnership undermine, weaken, or impede our role as allies?
3. What actions can we take to strengthen our relationship as allies with the people of SMT?

Question #1 – Ideas we brainstormed:

- Delegation visits
- Educational support
- Respect decisions about spending funds
- Long relationship
- Visits to homes
- Commitment
- Respect for culture and customs

- Teaching for independence (eye care)
- Giving opportunities (scholarships)
- Interest in history, stories
- Willingness to share about our lives
- Support empowers self-determination
- Honesty and openness on both sides
- Appreciation for what they have/closeness of family, appreciation of nature, land
- Partner families
- Bridging gap between cultures
- Ongoing dialogues – they can call anytime, contact both ways
- Emergency support; visits in crisis
- Support of Accompaniers
- Randall, Ali, Amanda
- Fundraising events in Needham raise consciousness and allows others to participate
- Honesty in discussing sensitive topics

#### Question #2 Responses:

- Imposing our values
- We are privileged when we are in the village (guest house, showers, etc.)
- Big welcome we get
- Imbalance in letter turnaround time
- Behavior of SMT affects US fundraising

Unfortunately, we ran out of time to more thoroughly consider Question #2 and to get into Question #3. As we were wrapping up, Ali provided some cautions to us as a group:

1. Refrain from thinking we know something when we are not experts.
2. Thinking we have answers for issues people in SMT might pose to us.
3. Don't preach – don't be paternalistic.
4. Instead of saying "We're proud of you", say "We are happy for you".
5. Avoid romanticizing people in SMT – they are human.
6. Recognize that people in SMT may not be as confident to be open with us.

We thanked Ali for leading us in reflecting on this important topic, and we hoped to continue the discussion on our van ride to Cobán.

#### **Dinner with High School Students in Cobán** (Caroline Tegeler)

After a long day of about six hours of driving, we arrived in Cobán and went out to dinner at the Cafetería Santa Rita, about a five-minute walk from our hotel. Earlier, we had heard that we would not be joined by high school students from Santa María Tzejá who are studying in Cobán, but fortunately we were misinformed and they were able to join us after all.

The students, Irma (Luz Castro), Magdalena (Pérez Quinilla), Consuela (Ralios Castro), Carmen (Reyes Lopez), and Naty (Natividad Chom), sat with the Needham high schoolers on the trip. During dinner, we talked about our schools, what the students were studying and different traditions for Valentines Day (they get a whole day off of school to celebrate) and birthdays (they wake the birthday boy/girl very early with firecrackers!). The Needham youth spoke in Spanish almost the entire time; we loved to practice. While talking to the girls, we learned that Magdalena and Carmen, who graduated last year, work with computers and Irma is studying to be a teacher. Currently, she is helping teach a class of 36 four-year-olds and will be the head teacher next semester.

Maddy and Theresa Garrett were happy to finally meet their scholarship student Irma.



*We got some good photos before sending the students home in a taxi.*

#### **On the Road to Santa María Tzejá** (Brenda Metzler)

The next morning we were up early for breakfast at 7:00 am. The Monja Blanca staff did a great job of preparing the hearty family-style breakfast we requested, including big bowls of chopped fresh fruit – pineapple, papaya, bananas, and watermelon. Edgar arrived at 7:30 with the vans, so we started loading our luggage for the trip to the village. Our only miscue was to put Q20 tips in some of our rooms, only to observe that one maid began going around to collect them all. We managed to retrieve a few of the tips and gave them to the hotel owner, Doña Estela, to distribute to the rest of the staff, which we now know we should have done in the first place. We generally haven't left tips before, but we did so to make up for a bit of awkwardness when the staff jumped to handle our bags on both ends of our stay to earn tips, something we hadn't experienced before and did not reward with a tip. For next time we'll insist on handling our own bags.

Our generally pleasant and scenic ride to Santa María Tzejá was punctuated by several unexpected stops, including a flat tire and a case of car sickness. Our third delay was far more entertaining. As we approached a river crossing, we saw that crews were working on the bridge so our vans could not use it. One van was motioned down to the edge of the water, where got out and waited to see how (and if!) the crossing could be accomplished. Although the water was not deep and the river was not wide, the 'road' out the other side was somewhat inclined and deep in mud.



*River Crossing*

Fred took some video and others took photos of our intriguing situation. We watched as a jeep-type vehicle, filled with young non-Guatemalans cheering their encouragement of the driver, approached from the other side of the river, gunning the engine to make its way through the mud, into the water, and up the other side. Then we watched our vans, disencumbered of passengers, make their attempts to cross. The van with a more powerful engine made it, while the other one got stuck in the deep mud and had to be roped to a larger truck and pulled out. As we travelers carefully made our way across the intact part of the bridge, we marveled at the skill and cooperation needed to operate on the rural roads of Guatemala.

#### **Visit to Federation of Cooperatives of the Ixcán** (Theresa Garrett)

After our rather eventful drive from Cobán, we arrived at the Federation of Cooperatives of the Ixcán, which was founded by cooperatives from three communities, including Santa María Tzejá. We were greeted by Emiliano Panjoj, a former scholarship student with a university degree in agronomy. Pamela Velásquez, the plant manager, offered us samples of some of the first processed hearts of palm that had been made on the premises. The Coop believes "everything takes place in a holistic manner" so its products are 100% natural (and also delicious!). There are 10 people working at the production facility with support from two non-government Spanish agencies.

The plant was in operation on this Saturday, in honor of our visit. We were introduced to the following workers:

- Margarita Botón Lux (SMT)
- Catalina Ortiz Castro (SMT)
- Mario Ramírez Pedro
- Angelina Gómez Pérez
- Nicolás Calmo Ramírez

Commercial operation for the hearts of palm started this past November. The Coop is also processing honey which is available for retail sale along with locally made jewelry. They plan to sell the hearts of palm locally but indicated the majority of consumers for this product are in US and Europe. Pamela said future plans may include fruit production such as producing pineapple jam. The Coop also includes a nursery in response to rising concerns of deforestation. They sell the plants at a fair market value and have developed a reputation of quality. The nursery is the only one in the Ixcán region accredited by the Guatemalan Forest, Food and Agriculture agency. Three people are employed full-time and others help as needed. They are also growing cacao and lime trees, and other activities include a cattle project and a pig farm. The pigs' offspring will be distributed to families as part of the Coop's "Food Security"



initiative. In keeping with the Coop's theme of holistic and natural production, the Coop planted its own soybeans and corn, combining it with fish protein to produce its own animal feed.



### ***Coop Greenhouse***

Emiliano shared with us that it has been a long journey for them. He said on this same day of February 13<sup>th</sup>, 28 years ago, they slept in the rain to escape the violence. He expressed they are proud of what they have achieved. He also commented that while the building foundation and irrigation system were donated, the Coop has done the rest: "it shows what can happen when you are given some help".

The goal of the Cooperative Federation is to improve the lives of the 302 families that make up the cooperative. The Coop stands for gender equality, nature and human rights. They have two important dates coming up:

- February 28, 2010: Official Inauguration of the Plant
- March 13, 2010: Butcher Shop Opens

Fun Facts: Heart of palm plants take 12 to 18 months to grow and reach about 3 meters in height. They produce a single tall 'candela' covered with spines. Each plant can be harvested multiple times and will keep regenerating for approximately 20 years. Hearts of palm can be harvested throughout the year except for the dry season: March - May.

Before heading off for Santa María Tzejá, a number of delegation members bought honey, hearts of palm, or jewelry to take home.

### **Arrival and Welcome in the Village** (Brenda Metzler)

About 45 minutes later, we reached the outskirts of the village, marked by a sign in K'iche' welcoming visitors to Santa María Tzejá. As we arrived in the village center, we were greeted by a crowd of middle school students with their school banner and three young 'marimbistas' playing music for us. The guesthouse was festively decorated with palm branches and brightly colored balloons. As we got out of the vans, we were warmly welcomed by various officials in the community and stood there for a while, enjoying the music and acknowledging familiar faces.



*Our arrival into the village*

Then we headed to a delicious lunch, which we shared with members of the Improvement Committee, Randall Shea, and others. We got our first glimpse at our agenda for the week and then, while many of the travelers headed back to the guesthouse to unpack, some of us met with the Improvement Committee.

### **Meeting with the Improvement Committee** (Brenda Metzler)

The following Improvement Committee members were present at the meeting:

Juan Reyes Arévalo, President  
Pedro Ortíz, Secretary  
Rómulo Tebalán, Treasurer  
Manuel Canil Saquic, Member-at-Large  
María Pérez (absent)

After a round of introductions, the Committee explained that they are all new to the Committee, so they asked for our understanding of any shortcomings that might result from their inexperience. They gave us two copies of the delegation's schedule of meals, meetings, and activities. We requested additional copies for the interpreters (Ali and Randall Shea) and the daily schedule coordinator.

We then asked Pedro for a report of expenditures from the various village committees since last August. It was somewhat laborious since he was searching out the figures from each individual committee's report rather than having a summary page from which he could just read off the expenditures. We also noted that some of their balances differed from our records, often by just a few cents. Another problem was that some committees had overspent their funds, again sometimes by very little, but as Susan pointed out, our accounting can't reflect negative balances, so we talked about how we might handle that. Between these challenges and encroaching darkness, we ended up giving Pedro a copy of our draft spreadsheet and asked him to fill in the expenditures and balances for our meeting later in the week. We also gave him a copy of the wire transfer of Needham funds to the Committee's account, a practice that each delegation should adopt since it can be helpful in accessing the funds.

Subsequently, as we reviewed the agenda that the Committee had prepared, we realized that several requested meetings had not been scheduled and some of the travelers had not been scheduled to visit their partner families. As we went about fitting in these meetings and visits, we realized that the inexperience of the Committee combined with the enormity of the task of scheduling 16 meetings in addition to meals with 45 different families (to accommodate our unusually large group) simply overwhelmed the Committee's resources. This fact was noted by other committees during the week, particularly the Association of Students and Professionals from Santa María Tzejá and Surrounding Communities (AESMAC), who subsequently offered their help with delegation coordination. Hopefully this offer will be accepted by the village governing body COCODE.

Before we met with the Improvement Committee again, Hugo Quinilla, Director of the Básico (middle school), approached us to discuss his allocation of school expenditures since last August. He explained that he would be out of town for our meeting with the Básico. As we understood it, previously Básico funds had been handled by Randall Shea, and Hugo wanted to tell us that he had spent more funds than allocated in some categories and less in others. Randall has now made it clear to him that future expenditures need to match the allotments in each category. Hugo let us know that he will adhere to this in the future, and we thanked him for his candor. He lent Susan his copies of reports that he had submitted to the Improvement Committee so that she could review them. Since we were unable to make copies in the village, we took the reports with us and will ask the August delegation to return them to Hugo.

During our second meeting with the Improvement Committee, we learned that they had confirmed receipt of the wire transfer and that the \$5,500 we sent yielded Q45,553.55 (net after a \$5 bank charge) at a stated rate of Q8.29.

The Committee also confirmed that a \$500 wire transfer had arrived from Kristin Dame for the Lynn Dame Pharmacy, yielding a net Q4,078.80. Although these are not part of Needham funds, Brenda serves as the intermediary and promised to report the information to Kristin. The Committee reported that the previous fund balance of Q11,670 now stands at Q104.75, subsequent to painting the pharmacy (and prior to the arrival of the latest wire transfer). Apparently a bathroom once contemplated has not been built due to logistical complications and concern over its unsupervised use. We wondered who oversees the pharmacy funds and who recommends how the funds will be used. The Committee agreed to talk with the Health Committee regarding these issues. We told the Committee that Kristin will be coming with the August delegation so they can have a direct dialogue with her.

In discussing the expense reporting with the Improvement Committee, both they and we felt that any difference, however small, between their figures and ours should be resolved. We also agreed that the accounting spreadsheet could not reflect any negative balances that result from a committee overspending its allotment. To enable Susan to prepare the spreadsheet, it was agreed that she would include footnotes with any such committees or line items. Pedro committed to following up with the committees to clarify the issues/figures. We agreed that this should be done as soon as possible, so that it is resolved before the August delegation begins preparing its spreadsheet. Brenda and Susan will reiterate this need via e-mail with the Improvement Committee. However, it should be noted that no one on the Improvement Committee has an e-mail account, so communication is not direct. Pedro did tell us that he hopes to get an e-mail account.

We met again with the Improvement Committee Thursday morning to record their funding decisions for community priorities and projects. We reimbursed them for the Q897 replacement cost of a bathroom sink broken during the previous delegation. We also paid for the meals and purified water consumed during the week.

Even though things went less smoothly than usual with the coordination, we persevered together until things got done and even shared some lighter moments. We especially enjoyed the first-time trek to the 'parcela' (farmlands) of Juan Lux, led by Improvement Committee member Juan Reyes Arévalo.

### **Welcoming Celebration ('Bienvenida')** (Brenda Metzler)

Following our first meeting with the Improvement Committee, we divided into three groups and headed to dinner in various families' homes. Although the company was much enjoyed, we later decided, since the inevitable delays in arriving in SMT make our lunch very late, it would be better for future delegations to request a late lunch on the day of our arrival, and no dinner. Following dinner we soon heard marimba music coming from the cooperative salon, so we made our way over for the welcoming celebration ('bienvenida'). The building was packed with adults and children, as we made our way to the front where empty seats awaited us. After some words of welcome from village representatives, we were entertained by various 'actos culturales' (cultural performances) from the Básico (middle school)

students. This included some traditional Mayan dances, poems, songs and a skit. Brenda then delivered a greeting on behalf of the church, and all the delegates introduced themselves, many in Spanish. The marimba music started up again and people were invited to dance. Travelers joined both kids and adults from the village on the dance floor for a lively time before everyone finally headed to bed.

### **Meeting with Scholarship Students Studying in Playa Grande** (Caroline Tegeler)

On Sunday we had the opportunity to meet with nine Needham-sponsored scholarship students from Santa María Tzejá who are studying in Playa Grande, a town about an hour outside of SMT. Everyone at the meeting (almost the whole delegation and the students) went around the room and introduced ourselves. A number of members of the Scholarship Committee were present: Francisco Quinilla Taperio, Felipe Canil Lares, Andrés Juárez Juárez (also father of one of the students), and Sebastián Castro. We learned that the students are studying a number of different careers:

Lucía Guadalupe Toj Botón and Roselia Castro Pacheco (Hillback): 3<sup>rd</sup> year of studies, Bilingual/intercultural primary education, doing practice teaching. She feels prepared and is confident with the students.

Margarita Pérez Hernández (Kirk): 1<sup>st</sup> year, Accounting with computer specialization.

Gregorio Alberto Juárez Castro (Moder); Elías Danilo Noriega Morales (Davis); Eder Darinel Hernández Ralios (Johnson); and Domingo Alejandro Benito Pérez (Clayton-Matthews): All are in 1<sup>st</sup> year, Renewable natural resources.

Santos Gabriel Panjoj Vicente (Benzie): 1<sup>st</sup> year, Computer science (2-year program).

The students said they were taking many courses, between 9 and 14! They mentioned that in their high schools, the quality of education is high. Exams for each class are conducted every two months and count for 40-50% of their final grade. Homework, behavior and attendance account for the rest. The Needham students also contributed our opinions on extra-curricular activities and our exam system.

We then learned about how the scholarship process works. Students with the highest GPA's and highest parent participation in the community are considered. The students choose their location of high school based on their subject and the cost of the schooling. A Needham scholarship provides \$1,200 per year (around Q9,700), but families have to make up the difference, with private school costs ranging up to Q20,000 per year. Studying in Playa Grande is less expensive, but still requires additional funds from the family. Occasionally a family is not able to accept a scholarship because it cannot come up with the additional funds.

We thanked the students for coming and sharing their experiences.

### **Commemorative Mass and Partner-Family Letter Distribution** (Theresa Garrett)

At 3:30 Sunday afternoon the sounds of music began to call the community to the church service. Usually the church service is in the morning, but today was a special service, including a full mass to commemorate the anniversary of the 1982 massacre in the village. Several members of the community spoke of that fateful day and why it is so important that we, and future generations, never forget what happened. Each victim's name was read aloud and it was visible to see the grief still on many people's faces as some quietly wept for those lost. The priest suggested the best way to honor the victims was to lead a virtuous and honorable life.

Following the mass the priest baptized several babies, which changed to tone of the service to one of joy and celebration. The babies were all dressed up, and their godparents were there, alongside the parents. The prior evening, some of the delegation had dinner with Juan Castro and María Marroquín where we had the opportunity to meet their fourth child, Victor, who is two months old. For us, it made it all the more special to see Victor among the babies being baptized. Following the baptism, everyone then went

outside and gathered around the monument that is a memorial to the victims of the violence. The priest concluded his remarks with a final blessing.

At this point most people had been at the church for several hours, so I was concerned it would be a rather small group that went back inside the church to receive the letters from Needham. But the opposite was true - you could actually "feel" the excitement and anticipation. After our introductions and brief remarks, a member of the community began to read out the names on the envelopes as the youth from our delegation passed them out.



It was special to see Sarah meet the daughter in her partner family for the first time. It began to turn dark so we used flashlights to read the names on the envelopes until the generator was turned on. It was a privilege to participate in such a unique experience.

## **EDUCATION IN THE VILLAGE**

### **Meeting with Primary School Teachers** (Theresa Garrett)

Sunday after breakfast we met with three teachers from the primary school on the shaded front porch of the pharmacy:

Marcelino Perez – 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, 23 students (14 boys and 9 girls). Also works as secretary and accountant in the Básico (middle school).

Isabel (Chabelo) Cux Solis – 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher, 40 students (20 boys and 20 girls). Also teaches Mayan classes in the middle school to 40 9<sup>th</sup> grade students. He is continuing his studies at the university, completing his 3-year program this year, and has enrolled in an additional two years to complete a 5-year degree program.

María Hernández Us – 1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher, 32 students (17 boys and 15 girls) and teaches 2 middle school classes – 8<sup>th</sup> grade Spanish and Mayan language/culture (32 8<sup>th</sup> grade students). Like Chabelo she is finishing her 3-year program and starting her full 5-year program.

One new feature the Ministry of Education has included is the Mayan language program where certificates are given. The school has been officially recognized as bilingual, and as a result it has to put more focus on teaching Mayan K'iche'. María teaches almost exclusively in K'iche'. The government has also recently added a third language requirement (English). The goal of teaching a Mayan language and English is to begin basic understanding and ability to talk a little bit so that students have a better start in middle school. Last year an American named Eddie was in the village and taught English for a year in the middle school. This year there are teachers from the Basque region who are teaching physical

education, but they don't speak English. Chabelo indicated they need to find someone to teach English or one of the school's current teachers will have to take on this responsibility. We were glad that our young people were planning to teach English in the schools.

School started later this year, on January 29 vs. January 15 in prior years. The delay was at the national level due to records being converted to digital format. This gave the teachers additional time to work on their teaching plans. The school is still waiting to receive textbooks and the morning snack (soy drink) from the government. The money received from Needham was used to purchase notebooks and pencils for the students. The government only provides two textbooks (Spanish and math) for the teachers and students, but with Needham funds the teachers were able to purchase Science and Social Study teaching texts to enhance the students' education. The teachers photocopy pages from their texts for the students.

Chabelo was happy to report that the educational training organization PRODESSA is working with students on reading and comprehension and has provided books for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders. The students like it. Teachers Lucía Us, Vilma Gutiérrez, and Valentín Quinilla are working with students in this area. Diagnostic results will be available April 1.

The teachers concluded the meeting by discussing the challenges and benefits of continuing their studies in the 3-year and 5-year university program. Chabelo commented that they had been anticipating finishing their 3-year program this year by doing an educational project on teaching methodology. However, the University of San Carlos has changed its policy and may require them to research a topic and do a thesis instead. Not all teachers in the 3-year program are continuing on for the additional two years to obtain their 5-year degree or 'licenciatura'. Teacher Enma Reyes is not. Chabelo and Vilma weren't going to continue, but the director of the program encouraged them, and Randall gave all those continuing a little financial support, which was very helpful.

María, one of those who is undertaking on the additional two years of study, says it is very hard, since she attends those classes on Saturdays and then works every other Sunday to finish her 3-year degree. She explained, "We're doing this for the children – to improve their education. We want them to be the beneficiaries, since they need to be able to analyze and see what's happening." Chabelo added, "We know we won't earn a lot of money as teachers. We've all agreed to put forth our own money toward getting this education so that we can benefit the community. We see the students doing good work in the community and elsewhere. That's where our satisfaction comes from."

The delegation then presented three suitcases of primary school supplies to the teachers from the Needham church school children and other donors. This was a very enjoyable moment for all.

### **Meeting with the Básico (Middle School)** (Fred Moder)

Toward the end of the week we met with the Básico. This meeting was immediately impressive by the number of people assembled – 35 in all! Included were several student representatives of the committee, teachers, and members of the student council and parent advisory committee. Básico Principal Hugo Quinilla was out of town at a meeting, because this year he is serving as the coordinator of a regional body called the Mayan Alliance for Popular (non-traditional and indigenous) Education.

There are some new positions this year. Isabel Cux Solis ("Chabelo") and María Hernández Us are teaching a course in Mayan language and culture (this is the 2<sup>nd</sup> year – and new this year are courses in theater and dance, taught by Adelina Chom Canil and Cristobalina Quinilla), in addition to Spanish language teaching duties. Valentín Quinilla is the Primary School director this year. Juana Pérez Gómez is in a new position this year as "Student Animator", acting as a counselor to students showing a need for academic support, and working closely with teachers.

There are 123 students in the Básico, all from SMT this year, since neighboring Santa María Dolores has just completed its middle school. Enrollment by grade and gender (total, boys, girls) is 7<sup>th</sup> (51, 33, 18), 8<sup>th</sup> (32, 11, 21), and 9<sup>th</sup> (40, 23, 17). 99% of enrolled students are attending class. Their school year began a bit late this year, just 3 weeks before we arrived. The Guatemalan Education Ministry provides enough



books for the study of K'iche, and many textbooks must be shared by students. The teachers used money from our church and another Needham fund to buy a social studies book for each teacher, and general student supplies. Physical education/exercise has been increased from 30 to 60 minutes per week because students like it so much.

Needham funds cover 35.5% of the salaries of the Básico teachers, who gave us “thanks from the bottom of our hearts – it helps motivate us and works to make responsible students”. In the Ixcán there are 13 cooperative middle schools, and SMT is the only one with this kind of outside financial support to schools. Tina responded and accepted this gratitude by saying how much this relationship enriches us too. She also described our change-in-leadership process that will ensure continuation of our relationship and support.

The Básico is providing financial aid to 3 students this year, consisting of the monthly fee of Q20 and the cost of school supplies. This is the second year of scholarship funding for these 3 students, who were selected in part based on their qualities. They are unsure how many students would like scholarships, but one student who dropped out last year has also received financial support.

Earlier in the week I had the opportunity to speak with Juana Pérez Gómez, along with Randall Shea, about her new position as Student Animator (Animadora Estudiantil). Her position was created to respond to the problem of student dropouts the previous year, and Hugo's unavailability to address student discipline matters due to his out-of-town commitments with the Mayan Alliance for Popular Education. Juana meets with each student who fails to turn in assigned work, not to scold, but to explain the importance of homework to the student's learning. Thus far, all students have turned in their work the day after such a talk, which often includes the student's teacher (students give their late work to Juana, so they know they are accountable to her). If they do not, Juana plans to involve parents. On the day we talked, she had the names of 5 students who did not turn in homework for an accounting class with 25 students enrolled.

Juana explained that last year a number of students fell behind in their work, became discouraged, and stopped trying. They became noisy, and the distraction discouraged other students interested in learning. She likes being in communication with the students: “I am always there and available to talk. On the surface, this looks like an easy job, just talking, but I do know that when the day ends I am tired.” Juana's philosophy and approach sound to me very nicely attuned to the needs of the students, and I told her I know quite well she is working hard!

### **Meeting with the Computer Committee** (Charlie Moder)

Monday afternoon we met with staff and recently elected members of the Computer Committee, who each represent an educational sector in the village:

Rodolfo Javier Urizar Reyes—Director, Computer Center  
Lucía Us Chajal—Secretary (represents primary school)  
Adelina Chom—Treasurer (represents middle school)  
Santa Ralios—Vice-President (represents middle school parents)  
Martina Quinilla—Member-at-Large (represents primary school parents)  
Abelardo Romero Canil Botón— Computer Teacher  
Mayde Cano Montenegro—Scholarship student/H.S. grad, doing year of community service

The meeting started off with a report on Computer Center attendance over the past year. The total number of students enrolled is 231: 58 from the primary school (5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades), 120 from the Básico (middle school), and 53 from the middle school in neighboring Santa María Dolores. Due to the fact that they are teaching 27 more middle school students than last year, they have had to drop 4<sup>th</sup> graders from the program. This is likely the last year that they will have students from Santa María Dolores, however, since that community is now constructing its own private computer center.

The staff and Computer Committee are very happy and grateful to have such a facility, since most communities don't have a computer center. They noted that the teaching has improved significantly because they now have the use of a projector. They have had some trouble, however, with some computers due to aging, as they are more than four years old. They also had generator troubles earlier this year, and are currently having problems that caused them to run the generator at only half capacity, limiting the number of computers that can be used. However, this is only a temporary problem. The Internet was also temporarily down, as they are now switching to a new plan with more bandwidth. With the yearly and monthly fees they charge to students and users, as well as some support from Jeff Taylor, they have been able to replace 11 monitors and 3 computers. Apparently Nazario Gutiérrez suggested that when the Computer Center is able to replace all its computers, perhaps the village library could use the old computers to digitalize the database and have the books available on line.

Computer Center fees from 2009 were Q5 annually and Q3 monthly, but these have increased for 2010. They now have a onetime registration fee of Q8 (\$1.00), a monthly fee of Q5, an Internet user fee for students outside of class of Q3 per hour, and an Internet user fee for adults and non-students of Q5 per hour. With electricity anticipated to arrive in March, there will be a significant reduction in energy costs, since they won't need to buy diesel fuel or pay for maintenance and repairs on the generator. Also with electricity, some people will have computers in their homes, so more people will probably want to enroll in the computer classes offered by the computer center, including lessons on computer care and maintenance. Randall shared that, when the Computer Center offered some special courses in late 2009, he and three members of his family signed up to take a Powerpoint course. He also said that he had had a meeting with the parents of all student users of the Computer Center, and when he told them how much Jeff Taylor had contributed to support the center over the last four years, they were all very impressed and grateful.

The hope is that the computer center can become more and more self-sustaining over time, and that is the motivation behind the increasing user fees. The loss of some Santa María Dolores students is going to hurt their income however. But since the center in Dolores is privately owned, it will charge more, and not all of the Dolores students may leave.

Tina asked if any regulations had been imposed on computer users. Rodolfo said they had had some problems last year, so they had someone come in and set up regulations that apply to everyone, including the teachers and Randall and family. The middle school has a network that comes from the Computer Center; and the primary school office and Randall's computers are all connected to the Internet.

### **Meeting with the Library Committee** (Charlie Moder)

We met with the following members of the Library Committee:

Felix de la Cruz—President  
Francisco Castro—Vice-President  
Felipe Ixcoy Castro—Treasurer  
Micaela Ramos—Secretary  
Marta Castro Vásquez—Member-at-Large

Felix told us that this is a newly elected committee. He began by giving a report brief report on the library, saying that the books were being well cared for and were a great resource for the children to come and research. They were hoping, however, to be able to add to their inventory of books, and he specifically mentioned the need for a book called "El Gallo del Silencio" ('The Silence of the Rooster'), which contains a history of the village. Felix hoped that they could create a more systematic way of asking teachers what books were needed, and then ask for a small book fund to be approved by the Improvement Committee (from Needham funds). Brenda encouraged the committee to provide Needham with a 'wish list' of books, since perhaps some could be found and brought down to the community.

The project to build the new library was suspended for a short while last year during the rainy season, and it is scheduled to be resumed soon during the dry season. Since it hasn't been possible to bring in any

heavy machinery yet, villagers have been working with only picks and shovels to clear the site for the new library. The hope is that sometime between late February and early April they will be able to start making some progress with cement, steel, and Rebar to create the foundation. Funding to build the new library has come from the Basque Country, although there is now some concern as to whether the funds will be enough. When the new library is finished, the community will decide how the old library is to be used.

Regarding the details of running the library, librarian Candelaria Osorio works every day except Monday and Friday. She keeps a list of the books that can be taken out (for periods of one week), and the rest of the books are limited to use at the library only. There is currently no penalty for not returning books on time. Someone simply goes to talk to the family to sort out the issue, sometimes having to ask the family to pay for a book if it is never returned. This led into the next issue, and we shared some of our thoughts. There was discussion of a possible idea of instituting a fine on overdue books, as well as a potential user fee for the library. The purpose of this would be to collect some income—as the library has no income currently, other than the librarian’s salary—to pay for some of the expenses. The downside, however, is that this could make people less likely to use the library. In the end a fine for overdue books sounded better.

Treasurer Felipe told us that library expenses include coverings for the books, the librarian’s salary, monthly travel costs to access funds to pay the librarian, cleaning supplies, and perhaps funds for the new library if there aren’t enough for its completion. Last August the committee received Q4,900 in Needham funds, and they spent Q4,200 on the librarian’s salary and Q840 for monthly travel to the bank. This gave them a deficit of Q140, so they want something closer to Q6,000 per 6 months so they have enough money for expenses and also so they can increase the librarian’s salary from 600 Q per month to 700 Q per month, as was originally intended. At this point Brenda checked with Felipe to make sure that the committee’s proposal for funds in August 2010 was for 6 months, not the 7 that had been requested in the last two proposals. Fortunately this had been corrected for the upcoming request, so we left it at that.

The committee is also looking into formal legalization of the committee. Although this would be an additional expense, approximately Q400, it would allow them to put all their funds in one bank account, give them a stronger basis for requesting outside funding, and make things more official in general.

### **Meeting with AESMAC** (Scott Stewart)

Late Tuesday afternoon we met with the following members of AESMAC (the Association of Students and Professionals of Santa María Tzejá and Surrounding Communities):

Aurelio Canil Botón, President, Civil engineer, and representative to COCODE

Estela García Hernández, Member-at-Large, 2007 high school graduate, Kindergarten teacher in Santa María Dolores, enrolled 2009 in three-year PEM program at the University of San Carlos/Cantabal campus, AESMAC Executive Committee member.

Nazarío Gutiérrez Osorio, AESMAC Executive Committee member, AESMAC Scholarship Committee member, Architecture graduate (2009).

Silvano Canil – Natural Resource Management studies at university, has completed his classroom work.

Santos Panjoj – completed education in Law, passed public and private practice exams, past president of AESMAC.

Also present was Hector Tiu López. Following introductions, Aurelio said that he had hoped to present a Power Point presentation. However, since the generator currently was not functioning, there was no power. Instead Aurelio gave a verbal report. (He suggested that we bring down a USB drive so that he could copy the presentation for us.)

The committee updated us on the AESMAC repayment program from former scholarship students. AESMAC is developing and approving consistent policies for scholarship repayment and scholarship disbursement. Current AESMAC policy requires former scholarship recipients to effectively return

nearly 2/3 of their scholarship support (by repaying 1/3 of the funds received and doing one year of community service). Once employed, the members have 5% of their monthly salary deducted and repaid to AESMAC until repayment is complete. In 2007, Q2,543 was collected from one former student. In 2008, Q13,117 was collected from seven former students. In 2009, Q16,461 was collected from nine former students. So for the 3-year period from 2007 to 2009, Q32,121 (\$4,015) was collected in total from former students.

This money is put toward new scholarships. In 2009, the Executive Committee of AESMAC decided that repaid money could also be used for health care expenses. The Executive Committee adopted a policy where 90% of repaid scholarship money will be used for future scholarships, and up to 10% will be used to support health care. Of the Q32,121 collected from 2007-2009, none was distributed in 2007, Q800 was distributed in 2008 for health care (for two women), Q10,500 was distributed in 2009 for its first scholarship, and Q1,100 was distributed in 2009 for health care (to four women). AESMAC had a balance of Q19,721 at 2009 year end. The first scholarship recipient, Rosa Isabel Quixán Solis, has completed her first year of a two-year high school program in Cantabal as an administrative assistant.

In November 2009, the AESMAC General Council approved consistent guidelines for future scholarship distributions. A subcommittee of 5 individuals, including Nazario, was appointed to manage the scholarship program. In 2010, the AESMAC subcommittee awarded their second scholarship to Mario Cifuentes, who is studying Renewable Natural Resources in a 3-year high school program in Cantabal. All AESMAC scholarship students are required to sign a binding contract with AESMAC regarding their obligations.

AESMAC scholarship criteria differ from those of CHE, the community's Scholarship Committee (that distributes Needham scholarship funds). CHE places 80% of the selection weight on the student's Basico (middle school) academic record and 10% on the student's parents' community participation. AESMAC respects CHE selection criteria, but does not agree with it. AESMAC instead does not weigh grades as heavily, but looks for students from lower socioeconomic circumstances who exemplify a high level of social conscience and awareness. In addition, AESMAC does not consider a student's parents' community contribution in their selection. AESMAC states that a student should not be deprived of a high school opportunity because of parents' (lack of) community activities and involvement. AESMAC awards their scholarships after CHE has made their selections, so AESMAC scholarship students are ones that did not receive a CHE scholarship.

An update on recipients of AESMAC funding as of February 2010 shows two students received high school scholarships and 8 people were assisted with health care issues. Of the two scholarship students, one receives a scholarship for 100% of expenses; the other receives a scholarship for 80% of expenses.

In 2010, AESMAC leadership is looking to develop a process to maximize the community benefit of its scholarship program. The committee is looking to identify community needs and align them with student interests. Those students whose interests most closely align with the community's needs would be AESMAC-scholarship eligible.

It was decided that this criteria should apply for both high school scholarships and for a proposed university scholarship. AESMAC is working with the community scholarship program (CHE) and Randall Shea sources to develop a three-way-sponsored university scholarship program. Preliminary meetings have occurred amongst Randall Shea, CHE and AESMAC as possible sponsors. The Congregational Church of Needham has also expressed interest in supporting such a university scholarship. The joint committees would be looking to award university scholarships to graduating high school students who wished to pursue an education in community-needed areas, such as: Teaching (Basico Math, Básico Spanish language, and Primary Bilingual Spanish/K'iche'); Agriculture Production (aquaculture/fish and shrimp); and Veterinary Medicine. The proposed university scholarship recipients would also need to repay a portion of the scholarship support and spend one year working in the community, similar to the AESMAC high school scholarship recipients.

AESMAC is now expanding their community involvement in Santa María Tzejá. The group has people joining who never received scholarship money, but rather are joining to be socially committed community members. AESMAC members are encouraged to take active roles in other village committees and activities. Twenty-nine members have done their year of community service, serving in the schools, the Computer Center, the cooperative store, and the Federation of Cooperatives. Currently AESMAC members are active in community development plans, including the water project, the electricity project, and a road-surveying and urbanization project. In one instance, the community asked Aurelio to consult when the water company wanted to change the design of the community's water tank and build it with cheaper materials so as to pocket more profit. Aurelio as a civil engineer knew to dispute the changes and was able to protect the community's interest.

AESMAC leadership is confident that 2010 will be another successful year with increasing membership, expanding community involvement, and further scholarship awards.

Although we were running out of daylight, we asked for an update on AESMAC's strategic planning, including the need for an Executive Director. They advised us that a strategic plan subcommittee has been formed and is working together. Once the strategic plan is finished, they can begin looking for an Executive Director to implement the plan.

Brenda took the opportunity to mention that Needham too is working on a strategic plan and would like input from the village on parts of it. She also advised AESMAC of the leadership transition that is taking place on the Needham side of the partnership. She mentioned the four members of the new leadership team that will be in place, come September. AESMAC was glad to know of the plans to provide continuity for the project.

As we concluded the meeting, AESMAC offered its help to coordinate the delegation's schedule in the future, noting that their education and experience have given them the necessary computer and organizational skills. This idea was enthusiastically received, presuming that it is approved by the community.

#### **Meeting with the High School Project Committee** (Scott Stewart)

Wednesday afternoon we met with the following members of the High School Project Committee:

Aurelio Botón - Project Manager  
María Hernández – Committee member  
Randall Shea – Committee member and interpreter

The project remains in the feasibility and planning process. Much of the funding for the feasibility study has been provided by the Congregational Church of Needham. Before proceeding with securing funding and construction plans, the committee continues to assess the need for a new high school in the area, and if needed, the concentrations (careers) for study. A sample market survey has been completed by surveying 8 communities of the 32 communities with a Básico (middle school) in the Ixcán. There are a total of 176 communities in the Ixcán, but only 32 with Basicos, and the latter are considered the most likely schools to provide students for a high school in Santa María Tzejá. Currently 3,114 students attend the 32 Ixcán Básicos. From the 8 communities sampled, 357 surveys were completed.

The surveys demonstrated a high demand for another high school in the Ixcán. Students and parents are seeking a high quality high-school alternative that is closer to home and family, and more affordable than distant high schools. In order to be successful, the committee has set their goal of developing a high quality/affordable regional high school.

He has observed that outlying communities, such as Pueblo Nuevo and Xalbal, offer better high schools than those in the municipality, which are more in the business to make money.

The survey also queried students about their areas of academic interest. Renewable Natural Resources, Forestry Education, and Agricultural Production are the three most sought after areas of study. With this information, the High School Committee is proposing establishing the following programs:

1. A three-year Renewable Natural Resource curriculum;
2. A two-year accelerated pre-university Forestry Education curriculum; and
3. A two-year accelerated pre-university Agriculture Production curriculum.

Pre-university classes would be taught in the afternoons for the Forestry and Agriculture programs.

Although the first option is already offered in Playa Grande and other places, an SMT program would draw students due to its being of better quality and more economical. The two pre-university curriculum proposals offer Santa María Tzejá recruiting advantages over other high schools. The two proposed areas of pre-university study are popular choices for high school students, are highly relevant to the growing Ixcán economy, and offer students opportunities for good career potentials with good income. Moreover, the third option is unique, i.e. not offered elsewhere.

Now that the market and feasibility study is nearing completion, the committee is beginning the engineering and technical design phase. Different class sizes and three different school sizes are under consideration. The committee would like to have classes of 20 to 30 students each. The proposals under consideration call for:

1. An enrollment of 246 students with 15 classrooms (11 high school; 5 pre-university);
2. An enrollment of 372 students with 19 classrooms (14 H.S.; 5 pre-university); or
3. An enrollment of 431 students with 22 classrooms (16 H.S.; 6 pre-university).

Construction cost and funding availability will be determining factors in the final decision of the school size. At the time of our meeting, the committee had not yet done a cost or funding analysis. School size will determine the construction cost, and funding capability will determine the school size. They did state they will be looking for private donors for construction. At this time, two parcels of land are under consideration in the village, each with a willing seller. One is owned by the cooperative near the Pajuil River, and the other belongs to Juan Lux. Included in the construction cost and site plans will be the need for dormitories to house students from farther away, the number or size still to be determined. It is anticipated that approximately 50 percent of students will want to board, since boarding is perceived to be cheaper and offers supervision and scheduling. The committee believes dormitory housing is safer and more affordable than community housing, which would not be sufficient in number anyway.

However, the committee has done some operational cost analysis (tuition, teachers' salaries, supplies costs, etc). These numbers were not shared with us during the meeting. Their goal is to have tuition and monthly fees cover all operating expenses by the third year of operation. At an enrollment of 431 students, this income should cover all operational expenses and create a balanced operational budget.

Ultimately, or possibly even simultaneously, the committee would like to see the Rural University of Guatemala establish a satellite campus in Santa María Tzejá, offering three- year technical university degrees in Forestry Education and Agriculture Production, the two pre-university high school programs selected. Graduating students from these proposed pre-university programs at Santa María Tzejá High School could enroll in the university for another two years and graduate with a three-year university technical degree. Or an additional two years of study could yield a full 5-6 year 'licenciado' degree. Aurelio notes that a university degree would enable graduates to make a greater contribution to society, to be involved in more interesting work, and to make a better salary.

The Santa María Tzejá High School Project Committee has decided that now is the opportune time to develop a high quality, cost-effective high school in the village. Santa María is already known as the leader in education in the Ixcán, which will enhance the recruitment of highly qualified students to a new high school. Aurelio commented that many young people are hoping that the education that Santa María Tzejá has achieved by sending its youth away to high school and university can soon be available locally.



With the feasibility study done, the committee is aggressively but methodically moving forward to establish their goal.

**Meeting with the Scholarship Committee** (Brenda Metzler)

Wednesday afternoon we met with the Scholarship Committee (CHE) in their office. Present were:

Francisco Quinilla Taperio, President  
Felipe Canil Lares, Treasurer  
Santa Quinilla, Secretary  
Andrés Juárez, Member-at-Large  
Sebastián Castro, Member-at-Large (Absent)  
Santos Quinilla, Accountant

The Committee presented its agenda, which was to include a financial report, a report on current scholarship students, discussion of funds in reserve, and a proposal for an additional scholarship.



We were very impressed that each of us was given a folder with the complete financial presentation in it (prepared by the accountant Santos Quinilla). Treasurer Felipe Canil very meticulously went through the 2009 financial report with us and presented the proposed 2010 budget. They are budgeting an increase for travel expenses in 2010 since trips are required to Playa Grande and Cobán to submit paperwork.

Francisco noted that he will be rotating off the Committee in March after two years of service. He said that the Committee now understands that it needs to check with Needham regarding any leftover funds that are not used by the designated student. This might happen, for example, when a student receives a

three-year scholarship but only does a two-year program, or also in the case that a student does not complete his/her program, etc. Needham will then obtain the donor's approval for the funds to be assigned to another student.

Along these lines the accountant Santos presented the case of Lourdes Us Tiño, who failed her first year and then changed her course of study to a two-year program. The Scholarship Committee decided that, since she would only graduate with a two-year degree, it would fund only two years (her failed year in 2008 and the first year of her new program in 2009). Francisco commented on how important it is in Guatemala for students to complete their degree. Thus in order to enable Lourdes to complete her program in 2010, the Committee offered (and her family accepted) the third year of her original scholarship as an interest-free loan. When it is repaid, presumably in 2011, the funds will be put into the 'funds in reserve' until the Committee consults with Needham about its use for another student.

From a complete listing of 2010 scholarship students that the Committee provided us, we noted that a few scholarship students are funded by the Strachan Foundation in Costa Rica. We asked how the Committee decides whether a student receives funds from Needham or Strachan. Apparently since Strachan funds aren't received until March (while the school year begins in January), the Committee looks for students who have already begun studies on their own. It then ranks them and gives out scholarships accordingly. The Committee still restricts each family to a maximum of two scholarships, and based on that regulation one qualifying student did not receive a scholarship this year.

We congratulated the Committee on its thorough financial presentation. Brenda particularly acknowledged the very professional accounting work of Santos Quinilla, as well as his excellent communication skills as the liaison between Needham and the Scholarship Committee. Francisco went on to say that, after the August delegation asked if the scholarship funds from Needham were earning any interest, the Committee decided to switch some of the funds from its checking account to a time-deposit (CD-type) account at BanRural. They put Q190,000 into a 6-month CD in August at a 4.6% rate of interest and earned Q4,023.41 (nearly half a scholarship!). They subsequently reinvested Q100,000 into a 5-month CD at 4.5% and will get Q1,664.39 in interest when it matures July 3, 2010. This was exciting news, and perhaps the August 2010 delegation might ask how the Committee is planning to use the interest.

The Committee noted that the Needham-funded students who graduated in 2009 were:

- Hector Armando Grijalva (from Dolores) – doing his year of service in Dolores in 2010 (auto mechanics)
- María Magdalena Quinilla – working in Cobán (delegation had dinner with her)
- Sergio Ralios Montejo – living in Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, pending receipt of his certificate
- Vilma Maribel Pérez took an extra year (which she will pay for) and will graduate in 2010.

Felipe noted that three Strachan-funded students graduated in 2009. He has submitted a new request for \$6,000 and is hopeful. The fact that the Committee is legalized makes it easier to obtain funding.

Francisco then presented the Committee's proposal for the 'funds in reserve'. The Committee has met with AESMAC and Randall Shea to discuss sponsoring a university student in a career needed by the community. The committee is thinking that it could either:

1. Spend Q33,700 of the Reserve Funds on a university scholarship in one of the following professions: veterinarian, dentist, math teacher, or aquaculture specialist; or
2. Fund a complete three-year high school scholarship.

Francisco also asked if Needham might be able to increase the amount of each scholarship. Brenda thought that, given the state of the U.S. economy, it would be difficult. Tina asked what percentage of a student's costs are covered by the \$1,200/year currently provided. Felipe said that it might cover 70-80% in the first two years and 60% in the third year. However, Felipe reported that private school is more expensive (around Q20,000/year in Guatemala City, where his daughter is studying), so the scholarship covers just about 50% of the costs. A scholarship would cover about 80% for a student studying in

nearby Cantabal. Francisco told us of his son Jeremias who wanted to go to music school in Guatemala City. He had to get to Guatemala City for any interview with virtually no notice and then see a doctor to undergo a throat study and an ear test, which added Q5,000 to the cost. Randall advised that students in need could apply to his donor network for a small amount of assistance.

Before closing, we thanked the Committee for its good work and exchanged packets of letters for scholarship students and their donors.

## **DELEGATION PARTICIPATION IN THE BASICO**

### **Teaching English Classes** (Caroline Tegeler)

While in the village, the four high schoolers, Charlie, Maddy, David and I went to the Básico (the middle school) to teach English classes. David and Charlie taught a ninth-grade class that had studied English for two years. They taught the class some basic conversations such as introducing yourself with your name. Afterwards, Maddy and I taught a seventh-grade class of students who were in their first year of learning English. We wrote on the whiteboard and helped the kids with pronunciation of months, days of the week, numbers, colors, and animals (which David drew on the board).



***Teaching English***

### **Observing the Mayan Dance Class and the K'iché Class** (David Libbey)

While in the village, the youth visited the Mayan Dance class that was being held for Básico (middle school) students. When we arrived, the teacher Carmelina Quinilla was talking about some of the traditional Mayan instruments that were used, such as the marimba and flute. Soon after that she had the students line up in two rows to practice their dance, which was a traditional Mayan dance. The boys and girls were very shy about dancing with each other, but the teacher still kept them at it. After about ten

minutes, the class was due to wrap up (we arrived late), so the teacher had the kids do some stretches before they left.

Later that day we attended a Maya K'iche' class. K'iche' is the Mayan language traditionally spoken by most people who live in Santa María Tzejá. That day, the teacher seemed to be talking less about the language and Mayan culture, and more about the responsibilities of the students and how they should be good people. She did speak in K'iche' for some of the time, but had most of her class in Spanish. She told the kids about their duties to God, nature, their family, and to themselves. We had the chance to speak with the teacher after the class was let out, and she told us about how many of the kids had stopped doing their homework and didn't speak K'iche' with their families, where they would be able to practice it most of the time. She also told us of her fears that, if the younger generation did not continue learning and speaking the K'iche' language, maybe one day that part of their Mayan heritage would be lost.

### **Trip to the Waterfall** (David Libbey)

There are two waterfalls in Santa María Tzejá. Although I was not able to go to the little waterfall, I did hear that Maddie, Caroline, and Charlie had a very fun time, especially when they met a large group of young kids on the way there. They had fun together, and I believe there might be a video clip of all of them there.

However, I was on the trip to the big waterfall, the first time. I believe that we went to the big waterfall on the second or third full day in the village. The entrance to the big waterfall is marked by a sign that, according to Ali, says, among other things, "Stay on the path. Don't even think about going off it!" We started along the path to the waterfall, which was pretty muddy, though tolerable. This quickly changed as we went farther along, and the mud became unavoidable. It was also difficult to walk along the path since, at some points, it passed beside the edges of people's lands, and they had put barbed wire up. We took one wrong turn at one point; we quickly realized our mistake, but not before Caroline ended up falling and getting mud all over herself. But that's the good thing about the waterfall: you get really dirty getting there, but then you get to clean up! We reached the waterfall, although the path to the bottom was a little steep, and then checked to see how deep the water was. Unfortunately, the water was not deep enough for us to jump off the top of the waterfall, but we still had fun swimming and bathing beneath the jet of water. Maddie became worried, however, since one of the little boys she had met the day before at the little waterfall had told her that a large snake came out at 4:00 to bathe in the water; and it was close to 4:00. As far as I know, no large snake came out to the river, so I wouldn't count that story as being true. On the trip back, most of us ended up just as muddy as we had been on the way there, except Maddie, who took a nosedive like Caroline earlier. Maddie, Caroline, and Charlie returned to the big waterfall another time during our stay, and I surmise that there was a little less mud since they came back a little less dirty.

### **Playing with the Children** (David Libbey)

The youth on the trip had many encounters with the children of the village. They were often waiting around the guesthouse for something to happen, and I think it was by our second or third full day in the village that we decided to set up games that all the kids could play. We had been playing card games outside earlier, but most of the children were a bit afraid of how hard we would slap the cards. Caroline and I got out a picture Bingo game that Theresa had brought and gave out the cards to the kids who were hanging out around our house. We sat in a large circle and played numerous rounds, the circle growing bigger with each round.





Caroline and I had fun trying to remember the Spanish word for each of the Bingo pictures, and we eventually began saying the English word to the kids so that they could learn some. After the Bingo play, we decided to try and teach them a favorite game we have called "Wa" (or "Wah"), which we thought was so simple that it would be easy to teach. As it turns out, it really wasn't so easy to teach, and the kids decided to just take the general part that we had taught them and use it in a rather violent manner (though of course nobody got hurt). We decided that maybe "Wa" was getting a little too intense, so we decided to play "Pato, Pato, Ganso!" (Duck, Duck, Goose!). We played that until the kids started heading home for dinner, at which point Caroline and I threw around a frisbee with some of the older 'muchachos' who had shown up.

Later in the week, the kids asked us to play again, and so we played '500', with a frisbee, and again "Wa", which had the same results as previously. There was also an impromptu game of "Pato, Pato, Ganso!" at María Pop's house during dinner, which was very enjoyable for everyone involved. The last time we youth played with the children in the village, as I recollect, was on our last full day in the village, before dinner. Maddie and Caroline got out some coloring books and markers and the kids drew pictures. They did this for awhile, and then brought out some beads and elastic string out so that the kids could make necklaces and bracelets. Maddie and Caroline walked away with several bracelets from that fun time.

### **The 'Parcela' Trip** (Charlie Moder)

Following breakfast Tuesday morning, our group gathered to head to the 'parcela' (farmlands) of Juan Lux. This began with a 45-minute walk to the outskirts of the village. We left the dirt and gravel road to enter the 'jungle' of the 'parcela'. Soon we came across a small cave where a family of 'tepesquintle' lived. They are a large, tailless, nocturnal, burrowing rodent that is increasingly rare, due to being hunted as a food delicacy.



Hunters typically put food outside the cave and then quickly run up a nearby tree with a flashlight and hide. This is all done at night, and around 10 or 11 pm the animal comes out and hunters kill them. This produces about 15-20 pounds of meat.

We then made our way to another cave, this time one we could enter. In fact, it had been used by villagers during the war to hide from the army, although they wouldn't have stayed there long as it was too close to the center of town and the army would have been able to hear the crying children. We then entered the cave, having to crawl on hands and knees due to the very low ceiling. We saw some bats and animal dwellings in the offshoots of the cave. Some of us made our way out through the cave exit, but not without a struggle, and it gave a good perspective of what the villagers had to go through when hiding from the army.

The third and final cave we went to was the biggest of them all and had an inactive animal trap in it, set up so that when an animal pulled at a piece of corn, a cage would be released on top of it. It was also said that hunters would send dogs down into the cave to scare out the animals, and wait outside with rifles to shoot the prey. Also, when going inside the cave, the hunters would bring two flashlights, just in case one burned out, as it is very dark even during the daytime, as we found out. Also apparently a river flows through this third cave during the rainy season, but in February all that we could see was a dry rock bed running through the cave.

This cave was also used by Santa María families from Sector One to hide in when the army burned the village. One man remembered coming to this cave two days after the army came. He found 20 families staying there and living off of two spoonfuls of a mush-type drink for each person, as they only had one pitcher for the whole group. He also remembered a boy who had been separated from his family and hid from the army, eating the remains of the corn the army had burned. We heard about a pilot, as well, who was flying people out of Guatemala, but he was killed by the guerrillas who liked the support of the people against the army.

We learned that, after staying in the caves, a group of people (about 65 in total) formed a camp farther away from the village where one cow was slaughtered to feed them all for three days. The families would only make fires at night because the army would be able to see the smoke during the daytime. The people then went north to Mexico to get as far away from the army as possible.

To get to the field of crops, we had to continue walking through the thick jungle, with our guide cutting a path with his machete. This gave a great sense of what the settlers went through when creating the village. The jungle was filled with roots that would grab at your feet, thorny trees and vines that would poke you, and thick brush that would envelop you and block out much of the sunlight. This is how the entire village was when it was first settled and cleared out with machetes.

Our guides also showed a very in-depth knowledge that they shared with us through our walk. They could point out exactly which trees had the best fruit and which made the best lumber, as well as which vines made the best baskets. We also saw a large ant hive, swarming with ants, that had previously been a termite nest. Also, when just entering the field of crops, we saw some banana leaves. Since their white-



powdery undersides can be written on, they were used by villagers to leave messages for each other when families were separated during the violence.

The plants that we saw were some young purple pineapples (there were about 2,000 planted there), beans, and heart-of-palm. A fact about heart-of-palm is that it grows back after you cut it down, and one plant can live for over 20 years. We also saw some papayas and got to taste some sugar cane, which was very good and sweet. We learned that the pineapple sells for about Q2-3 in season and for about Q5 Q when not in the harvest season.

On the side of the field there was a corn storage hut called a 'troja'. When the army came, villagers would retreat to the 'parcelas' where they could survive by eating corn from these storage huts, until the army burned them too.

### **Meeting with the Survivors** (Madison Garrett)

On Tuesday afternoon, we were fortunate to meet with a group of five villagers who were willing to talk to us as survivors of the armed conflict. They began by telling us a little about the process of seeking justice since the year 2000. A series of meetings were held in Santa María Tzejá when they decided that they needed to bring their testimonies to an attorney general's office. They believed that after doing this, changes would come quickly. What they didn't realize would happen is that the government did not care to move the cases forward. The corrupt government, including Congressman Rios Montt, did not help the survivors get any further in the process.

The group then began to tell us about more recent progress with the cases. When a new political party came into power in Guatemala, Rios Montt lost a lot of power. The Association of Justice and Reconciliation (AJR) used this time to pressure the government and military into handing over military papers. This was in no way easy, but the military was forced to hand over two documents: Victory 1982 and Strength 1983. This gave hope to everyone striving to convict military officials involved in the violence, but there was still one important document called Plan Sofía that would not be handed over because it was a "state secret". Luckily, someone brought the document to the US where it was then sent to Spain, recognized as a military document, and handed over to Guatemala. When they realized it was all written in code, CALDH (the Center for Human Rights Legal Action) in Guatemala hired a military general from Peru to decode the document. This was successful because almost all members of Latin American militaries were trained in counter-insurgency techniques at the School of the Americas in Georgia, so they had learned the same code. The Plan Sofia document proved to be extremely helpful in moving the cases forward because it included detailed accounts of who was killed, where, and when and was signed by military officers. When talking about the military documents, one man said, "military agents are brilliant, but they are also fools. They wrote down their orders and signed their own arrest warrants".

As the survivors began telling us about the effects of finding Plan Sofia, their attitudes began to change. You could see smiles on their faces as they were talking, a much different expression than in past years. These smiles reflected the hope that accompanied the progress with the cases. They told us of how one man, a former general named Otto Pérez Molina who had been involved in the violence, was interested in running for President next year, but they now had this to hold against him. They commented on the three military commissioners and one colonel who are already in jail. With the help of the AJR, another military commissioner was also placed in jail for his participation in forced disappearances. There was also the arrest of an army major and four police officers associated with organized crime. The group then mentioned how they hoped that the U.S. authorities would follow up on their promise of prosecuting the past president, Alfonso Portillo, for embezzling. They believe that if he goes through the Guatemala justice system, Portillo can pay people off and go free. One of the survivors commented that if the U.S. prosecuted Portillo, then he would "congratulate those in the U.S. for following laws".

As our meeting began to close, one man said "last time you came, we didn't have this type of news". He is absolutely right. For the first time, the survivors meeting sat on a basis of progress and hope. Seeing

the smiles on their faces was amazing, but we wanted to know the risks that were still involved with the cases. The group told us that the lawyers and judges are the ones at risk, but that “we have to trust God to protect them, and that is what we will do.”

### **Meeting with the Women’s Union** (Sarah Libbey)

Monday afternoon Brenda, Tina, Sarah, Theresa, and Ali (interpreter) met with the following members of the Women’s Union:

Juana de la Cruz – President  
Amanda Lopez Alvarado – Secretary  
Juana Canil Quino – Treasurer  
Petrona Hernández de la Cruz  
Lucía Itzep – Member-at-Large (son in the US, married Jessica in Kansas)  
María Perez – Member-at-Large  
Isabel Larios – Member-at-Large

The meeting took place outside of the church, sitting in a circle. Tina started the meeting as we all introduced ourselves. We asked what topics they wished to discuss and what updates they had about various projects.

1. The cattle project. Contrary to last year when there were cases of bovine rabies, things are going well, with no cows dying in the past 6 months or so. In total the women now have 59 head of cattle. Since December (when this group of women leaders started), 13 calves have been passed on to other women, and 4 more cows are pregnant. When a cow has offspring, its calf gets passed on to another woman. Before, women were paired up to get/have cows, but now the allocation of cows is done by list, by number. The women thanked us for providing cattle fencing, which we clarified was provided by the Blossom Fund. We told them that their beautiful banner to the Blossom Fund from last February was very much appreciated.
2. Micro-lending program. This fund, which began with an initial donation of Q8,000, has grown to Q26,000. The loan terms are for one year at 10% interest. All women have been able to pay back the loan with interest. Juana, the president, spoke of having received one of the loans. She bought chickens and pigs to raise and then sold them. She seemed to say that although she was able to do this, and pay back the loan, she didn’t necessarily make a profit, so I got the feeling that she wasn’t going to ask for another loan but that it was a good learning experience.
3. Membership. The Women’s Union currently has 100 members, including attrition. Women of any age can join, although there is a fee. The duties of members are: taking turns to operate the Corn Grinder – one to operate it, weigh, and one to collect payment. The Treasurer reported that in a year they make Q10,000 net from the corn grinder operation. Each month they cover expenses like fuel and repairs. If there is more than Q10,000 in the bank by Mothers’ Day, they give each member a little to buy something extra. Competition does exist for their corn grinder – a family operates one in Sector 2 of the village; they charge the same price. The women believe that even when electricity comes to the village, their grinder will still be useful since it doesn’t just grind but also blends, to make dough.
4. The mosquito netting (that had been donated by the Blossom Fund) has worn out.

We asked about the women’s wishes, to which they responded: Improved stoves “but the government is not providing”. The choices are: improved wood-burning stoves, electric stoves (but those will probably be too expensive due to the electric bill,) and gas stoves cost Q1000 (there are a few in the village).

We asked their views on the electricity and water projects in the village. They seem enthusiastic about electricity, even though they don’t know exactly how much it will cost. It will mean they don’t have to spend money on candles and that some can do work (like carpentry work) at night. As for the water project, they do not know a lot about it, and some are not planning to participate since they cannot afford the cost of it. In addition to the cost of piping, there will be a monthly usage fee. The women will

certainly be happy when there is running water “but who knows when that will be”. Looking for water can be hard during the dry season.

As follow-up to the August delegation, we asked about the parachute donated to families in February 2004, but this leadership group didn’t know anything about it.

We then asked the women what their meetings are usually about. They said they meet mostly to resolve problems having to do with their projects. A current topic is that for families who have a member in the North, many have returned to farming their ‘parcelas’ since it is now hard to find jobs in the North. Lucía shared that her son Alfonso has married a North American (Jessica) and they now live in the States.

We asked about other problems that they face, and they said that their husbands don’t always support them. For example, women feel empowered to have meetings and activities outside the home, and the men aren’t always happy about that. When Brenda asked if the women share their concerns with each other, they said that sometimes they are embarrassed and don’t feel comfortable sharing such things. We shared our experiences of how helpful it can be to share and talk about problems with women friends – and that, unlike therapy, it’s free! They couldn’t believe that in the U.S. women (and others) spend money on ‘therapy’! We all laughed about that.

We then asked what they thought of the Mayan language teaching in the schools. Amanda commented that it is hard, since her family speaks nothing but Spanish.

Brenda asked if the whole membership of the Women’s Union would like to meet with the delegation sometime, as we have done several times. Amanda replied, “Very much so.” We suggested that the women come up with a topic for such a meeting and advise the next August or February delegation. Or the delegation planners could take the initiative.

#### **Meeting with the Widow’s Group** (Susan McNeice)

Members of our delegation set up chairs in the shade of some trees to meet with the following women from the widows’ group:

Marta Castro Tol, President  
Cristobalina Quinilla – new representative to COCODE  
Aurelia Ixcoy - last year’s representative to COCODE  
Marta Chajal  
Rosa García Rodríguez  
María Solís – representative to the cooperative

Other members not present: Catalina Solís, Juana Juárez, Juana Cos were all sick

Also present at the meeting were the two international accompaniers, Ali and Martina

The widow’s group reported on their livestock project, which was funded from Needham monies (provided to the Improvement Committee) for community projects. Cristobalina gave Brenda a copy of the minutes from the group’s last meeting. This included a list of people whose cows have calved and which members received the calves. The widows are on their second round of the project and nearly everyone has received a calf, although at least one cow died from the outbreak of cow rabies, so its owner was allowed to keep her calf. There are 13 women in the group.

We asked about the vaccine for cow rabies and the women replied that they pay Q150 for a vial of vaccine good for 10-12 cows. They use the same needle for all, assuming that the cows are healthy to begin with. Some buy the vaccine from Mexico because it is cheaper. It arrives on ice but there is no guarantee that it has been properly stored for the entire journey.

The women have heard about an organization based in Cobán that helps widows and would like to go there to investigate, but don’t have the travel money. It was suggested that they apply to the Improvement

Committee for travel funds or ask someone who is already planning to go to Cobán to research the organization on their behalf.

Many of the women have taken advantage of the loans available from the Women's Union microlending project. They mentioned that Sandra Torres, the wife of President Colóm, has set up three projects: microlending, bread-making and water purification. Many women from the village have signed up to participate.

The women have been taught to make all natural soap, shampoo, body wash, perfume, vapo-rub and chocolate through a program run by the Women's Association of Progress of the Ixcán. Rosa invited us to watch a shampoo-making demonstration the next day, but it conflicted with other meetings, so the women suggested that a future delegation could request that a demonstration be worked into the schedule.

María was pleased to tell us that one of her children, Florencia Ramos, is in her third year of bilingual secretarial school in Cantabal. She also expressed her gratitude to Needham for supporting the cow project.

The women appeared more empowered and hopeful than in past years. They are glad to be able to count on the assistance of Juana Maurilia Pérez, a teacher and Randall's wife, in putting together their proposals. We were glad to note subsequently that their proposal for purchasing chickens and wire for chicken pens was partially funded through the Improvement Committee's distribution of community project monies.

#### **Meeting with the Church Committee** (Tina Scharback)

We met with the following representatives of the church:

- Salvador Castro - President, Church Construction Committee
- Nicolás Noriega - President, Church Council
- Luis Ralios - Secretary, Church Construction Committee
- Marta Castro Tol - Treasurer, Church Construction Committee

Marta said she would like to focus on the construction project since they have made a lot of progress since last year. Luis noted that last August they were awarded Q4,000 from the Improvement Committee for 15 new benches with backs for the church. Five are completed and delivered, and 10 more are in the shop almost ready to deliver. The carpenter will be finished in 10 days.



***Church Committee Meeting***

There is still a lot more work left to do on the church. They are thinking of ways to encourage the congregation members to give more with this bench project. "It's such a visual way to contribute to the project. Everyone can see that their money is going to good use. We need 60 of these pews altogether. We are very pleased that some money to start the bench construction was allocated from the money the Needham Church sent down." Nicolás said that he is coordinating everything that is going on in the church. The church has many needs, but the government does not fund any projects. He said that they rely on solidarity agencies to help out with projects.

Another area of need is a permanent speaker system. Then they wouldn't be plugging and unplugging the system all of the time and carting it away to storage when not in use. They have also started discussing the repair and remodeling of the old church. It was not burned down during the violence like all the other structures in the center of town. It's an historical site and they would like to use it partly as a community museum. Only two beams are burned, and they would have to be replaced. If they restored the church, they could hold historical documents there and record a lot about the founding of Santa María Tzejá. They could also hold Sunday school classes there for the children. I reminded people of how I had reached out to our two Catholic churches in Needham, requesting help to rebuild the church in SMT. I had sent them the signed letter that the elders of SMT church had written and signed about needing help to rebuild after the violence. Neither church phoned me nor wrote back.

The church representatives were grateful for the meeting and wished us well on our trip back.

## **HEALTH IN THE VILLAGE**

### **Meeting with the Health Promoters and Health Committee** (Fred Moder)

Members of our group gathered with the following members of the Health Committee on the shaded porch of the pharmacy:

José Pacheco López – President  
Micaela Quixán - Secretary  
Evalarda Ortíz – Member-at-Large  
María Florinda Toj Botón - Treasurer  
Juana Teresa García Hernández –Pharmacy assistant, also attending high school in Cantabal  
Pedro Chom Tum – Health Supervisor/Health promoter

The Committee reported that according to a recent health survey there are 231 families in the village, totaling 1,162 people (607 male and 555 female).

There are 125 children under age 5, with 25 births in 2009. The emphasis remains on preventive care; keeping immunizations current and educating women on their importance; and giving vitamins, iron, and folic acid. Children receive immunizations up through age 4. They are weighed monthly up until age 2 and then every 3 months thereafter. Every six months children receive parasite medicine, beginning at age 2, and vitamins (including vitamin A) to improve their immune systems and ready them for school. Health promoters also provide prenatal care.

In 2009 there were 2 cases of malaria, 3 adult deaths (elderly adults: Tomás Canil, Magdalena de la Cruz, and María Juárez), and 2 child deaths (one born ill, and one drowning). There were 2007 consultations (sick visits). 280 dogs (90%) were vaccinated for rabies.

Pipes are in place for water – "we've been dreaming of this!" – and it's hoped this will improve health. The water may be chlorinated, but people dislike the taste of chlorine, and the water will still need to be boiled. It will be cleaner than water from the two current wells, which are bacterially contaminated. People have worked very hard to dig trenches for the water pipes. The previous Health Committee got money to purchase 3 trash barrels, as a way to prevent disease and help educate people. An effort is underway to encourage use of the barrels, and a hole is ready for burying the trash.

Rotavirus has hit the Ixcán pretty hard, but so far only one case has been diagnosed in SMT. It is dangerous only for children and frail adults. Vaccine has been promised, but there is no medicine for the illness. The usual illnesses remain amoebas, diarrhea, and respiratory illness.

There has been an economic setback in the village with the death of at least 196 cows from bovine rabies in 2009. Some people lost 5-10 cows. Each cow is valued at more than Q3000 (\$375), so the cost of this loss so far is Q588,000 (\$73,500). The last case was 3 months ago, thanks to a vaccination campaign and 3 educational talks by veterinarians to teach people how to handle the cattle, so as to not spread the disease. People learned that the disease can be spread through cattle saliva, and dead cattle must be buried. Neighboring Santa María Dolores has suffered worse losses that continue now, even though their cattle have been vaccinated. It was suggested that the vaccine might have gotten too warm before it was administered, so it lost its potency. In SMT they have learned how to 'maintain the cold chain' for the vaccine.

Pap tests are done in SMT, and no cases of uterine cancer have been detected, although 14 cases were detected in the Ixcán region. There is a screening program called "My Family Progresses" to screen for AIDS and malaria. However, data on the incidence of AIDS is kept secret by the government Health Ministry, presumably because the lack of education and fear around AIDS could result in people being marginalized in their communities.

A delegation member asked how many gay people live in SMT, and the committee could not answer this. The committee felt gay people would not be easily accepted, but Ali believed there are gay members of the village who are in fact accepted and valued members of the community.

Pedro talked about the village voting to reduce his work to half-time, thinking they could save money and rely more on the government nurses, and perhaps feeling he had a generous salary. After a 3-month trial period and analysis, the community voted unanimously to restore him to full-time. They almost had to close the pharmacy because Juana wanted to continue her studies, but she was persuaded to do weekend studies, while Pedro covers for her. There are nurses of various skill levels that come to the village, and one holds educational meetings on 40 different topics, some of which require a high level of comfort/trust. Pedro's attendance is important for this, and for translating to K'iche. Behavioral health topics are included in this series, but in a cursory way, for the speakers are young, and "it requires maturity and a respect for the facilitator (Pedro) for people to share their experiences". Pedro, for example, gives the 'family planning' talk.

In previous years, the Health Ministry invited the health promoters to some training programs, but not this year. Jerry Durbin said that if the Health Committee had goals for continuing education, they should let him know and he would strive to help. Pedro said "what we also need are psychological talks and education, because there are still a lot of psychological problems, such as domestic violence". He has gone to talks on this, and sees people at the health post for this problem. Brenda asked the Health Committee to provide Needham with a list of needed medicines and supplies well before each delegation.

I later met alone with Pedro and one of the nurses. He estimates he sees a domestic violence sufferer once a month on average. Alcoholism and sexism ("machismo") are things people need more awareness of. He estimates problem drinking affects 10 – 15% of the population and contributes to family conflict. My sense was that Pedro is the village doctor in the traditional sense of the term, as his advice or support is sought also for concerns about disobedience in children and sadness at missing their fathers, who are working at a distance.

I had obtained some Spanish language pamphlets to give to Pedro on anxiety, depression, and men's/women's behavioral health issues published by the US National Institute of Mental Health. I also brought a leader's guide and client-workbook for a 12 week anger-management course, and Pedro was very appreciative of these.

### **Eye Care in Santa María Tzejá** (Scott Pike)

This year Joene and I spent every day in the village with eye health promoters Felipe Panjoj and Pedro Chom at the Health Post. The first 2 days were spent doing our annual inventory (including the addition of 150 pairs of glasses, sunglasses and eye drops), talking over questions and concerns, and seeing 11 patients. As usual, each patient provided a learning experience for Pedro and Felipe, and as such was an additional part of their training. Our first patient was an 8-month-old baby. Thank goodness for the help of Dr. Jerry Durbin who was able to put his finger on the problem and, although it wasn't a happy diagnosis, at least the mother has some answers.

On Tuesday and Wednesday the four of us traveled to Mayalán, on the western edge of the Ixcán, to visit our newest eye health promoter, Arnulfo Mejía. In Mayalán we saw 12 patients and had a good training day with Arnulfo. He is now equipped to provide eye care just like Felipe and Pedro. They will continue to help Arnulfo as he becomes familiar with the tests and equipment.

On the way back from Mayalán we stopped to visit the Ministry of Health office in Cantabal. The doctor there gave us contact information for a church group from Raleigh, North Carolina. This church has had a partnership with the village of Las Margaritas, south of Cantabal, for 15 years. This year they had planned a medical mission trip for February 27<sup>th</sup> through March 2<sup>nd</sup>, but didn't have an optometrist to do the eye care part of their mission. They were bringing about 300 pairs of glasses and needed help. Through several phone calls (thanks to Don Libbey for the use of his satellite phone) we were able to make arrangements for Felipe and Pedro to join this group in Las Margaritas and conduct the eye care part of the team's medical mission. This medical team included 4-5 MDs from the U.S. I'm so proud of our guys for taking on this responsibility. I have talked with Felipe since then, and they spent four days in Las Margaritas. They saw about 120 people, and everyone was happy with the help they provided. The North Carolina mission team paid Felipe and Pedro for their work and will donate to Enfoque Ixcán to pay for any needed eye surgeries. There is a possibility that this will become a yearly event for them.

Once again the eye care portion of the February delegation was a great success. Many thanks to Needham for its ongoing support. Enfoque Ixcán's next newsletter will have an article about the Needham Congregational UCC. Our success has a great deal to do with your advice and support over the years. Joene and I look forward to many more trips with you.

### **Home Visits and Meals with Families** (Theresa Garrett)

Visiting with families in their homes and sharing conversations over a meal provide some of the best experiences for travelers. Over the course of 6 days in SMT we had 45 meal visits (some families hosted multiple meals) and 4 additional partner-family visits (non-meal visits). Below is a small sampling of the home visits we enjoyed during our stay.

#### **Juana Tol (Sally Powers)**

Her son Tomás is married to Santa Canil and they have six children: José, Castro, María Concepción, Geraldo, Yolanda, and Juana (named after his mother). Her deceased husband (José Plácido Castro) was an original settler. The 'parcela' was split among 6 siblings. They grow heart of palm, rice, corn and beans. The rice grows the best in the low wetlands. They have written their partner family. María Concepción wrote the letter for Juana. Juana is a member of the Women's Union and received a cow from the project but does not yet have a calf and no milk yet. Tomás did most of the talking and explained about the palm-frond roof over the dining area and how the smoke helps make it more waterproof. The roof lasts about 5 years. It's tightly woven but still allows the kitchen to cool. The elementary school is thinking of building new classrooms with palm-frond roofs to keep the classrooms cooler. Juan indicated they have had much cooler and rainier weather this year.

#### **Juan Ortiz Solis and Magdalena Benito (Connors/Libby)**

Son Pedro is now in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and Benedicto is in the 7<sup>th</sup>. Catalina is 5 years old and the youngest is Maria (born 2007). Pedro likes school and wants to go to high school someday. Benedicto likes math the

best. They like the Mayan traditional classes now being taught in the school, as they find them easy. Juan Ortiz was working on his 'parcela' when we visited. We discussed the "unusual history" of how Magdalena came to SMT. Her father lived on the south coast of Guatemala when she was born. He worked on a plantation taking care of his boss' cattle, which he tired of. So when he heard that no one was left in SMT after the army destroyed the village in 1982, he decided to come to SMT to get land. However, when the villagers returned from refuge in Mexico, her father had to give his land back to the original owners, so now he now lives in the village of Israel. Magdalena was able to stay in SMT because she had married Juan, who had his own land. She has two siblings here in SMT (one brother is Miguel Benito) and 1 sibling in Israel. However, further back in generations, her family came from the Ixcán region, so she knows the customs and speaks the language.

Andrés Juárez and Edna Elizabeth Castro (Weitzel)

Son Gregorio is 17 and in January began studies in Playa Grande on a scholarship from Needham. He is studying renewable natural resources. The delegation got to meet with him and other high school students and took photos. Elder is in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and is now 14; Ricardo is 12 and in 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

Valerio Quinilla and Petronila de la Cruz (Metzler/Castanon)

Petronila had a bad cough and was not well enough to prepare a meal, but she and Valerio were glad to have Brenda visit briefly several times. On both occasions Petronila was weaving at her loom on the front porch. She was making a 'morrall' (shoulder bag) for someone. She loves to weave, even though she is in her late 70's and her health is fragile. Although she speaks mostly K'iche', she understands a lot of Spanish and reacts very warmly to Brenda's presence. Valerio told of having had cataract surgery on both eyes in Guatemala City in 2009 through Scott Pike's eye care program, which makes the procedure affordable. Valerio is happy with the results, and his painful shoulder is also somewhat better. He still is not able to work very much on his 'parcela'. Valerio always enjoys learning more about world events, so he was very interested to see newspaper articles that Brenda had brought regarding Mayan ruins and the earthquake in Haiti. He thinks that the Guatemalan government has done a few good things for the rural communities.

**The 'Despedida' (Farewell Party)** (Brenda Metzler)

On our last night in the village we enjoyed a communal dinner at the cooperative salon, followed by the always anticipated 'despedida' farewell celebration. Soon chairs had been set up, the sound equipment was ready, and the marimba players began warming up. Happy, excited children contributed to the lively scene. Several village representatives thanked us for our visit and sent back greetings to our church community, and to Clark and Kay in particular. Then the primary school children began the main entertainment with singing, dancing, and cute skits.





### *Farewell Party*

Some were in traditional dress and totally endearing. When it was our turn, our group headed up on stage. David introduced our song, ‘Me gustas tú’ (“I like you”) and began strumming the first few notes on guitar. We weren’t quite as well rehearsed as we would have liked, so we singers failed to come in on time, but eventually we caught the rhythm and came in. We had some antics to accompany the singing, so it was fun, and our last line, adapted to Santa María Tzejá, brought rousing applause. Then each person shared a few thoughts about their visit, many in Spanish! Then the ACTA was read and signed by the Improvement Committee members and the delegation. Marimba music and dancing followed, until the lights of the building shut off, and we retired to our quarters to pack and get to bed.

### **Return to Guatemala City and Trip to Antigua** (Brenda Metzler)

We arose early Friday morning to have our bags packed and ready to load into the vans by 6:00 am. Our driver Edgar showed up on time, so we got on the road shortly. A few villagers came by to wish us a safe trip home. We had purchased snacks and rolls for breakfast, but we also stopped at Edgar’s mother’s roadside store along the way. People chatted or dozed which helped the time pass until we reached Cobán, where we tried out a restaurant recommended by Edgar’s father. It was a lovely setting and the food was good. Then we got back on the road and made it into Guatemala City around nightfall. Everyone was exhausted by the 12-hour drive and happy to retrieve the bag of clean clothes we had left stored at the Spring Hotel. After a quick shower or rest, we happily ordered pizza and gathered up on the second floor landing to eat and relax.

The next morning Edgar met us at 8:30 am with one van for our trip to Antigua. It was fun to travel in a single vehicle, unencumbered by luggage. Edgar dropped us off at the lovely central plaza, and we agreed to meet him at 6:30 pm to have dinner in Antigua. This was much later than our usual arrangement, but Tina had a lot of shopping to do for the silent auction, and other folks wanted to shop and explore. We all met for lunch at the Condesa and got two prime tables outside, having thought to make a ‘reservation’ for our group when we first arrived that morning. After lunch some folks went shopping or sightseeing, while a few enjoyed the tranquility of reading on a park bench. When Edgar arrived, his sister was with him and we invited them to join us for dinner. They took us to a pretty noisy restaurant/sports bar that made conversation challenging, but everyone had a good time. Then we headed back to Guatemala City to pack away all our purchases and clothes for our departure the next morning.

### **Home to Boston** (Brenda Metzler)

Edgar picked us up at 5:15 am and dropped us at the airport, where we waited through a line to check in our luggage, pay the airport exit tax, and then search out a place for breakfast. Since we had quite a bit of time to kill, we were happy that the renovated airport has added back some of the handicrafts shops that we always frequented at the old airport. During our layover at the Dallas-Ft. Worth airport, Sarah had

time to marvel at the outstanding yield of partner-family letters from the village. By the time we reached Boston, we were definitely ready for the smiles and enthusiastic hugs of family members and friends. We looked forward to sharing with them the many highlights of our trip.

## APPENDICES

### TRIP EVALUATION (Tina Scharback)

We always ask for participants' feedback at the end of our trip. We simply record people's comments for future reflection, rather than discussing their merits.

#### Training Sessions

##### *Positives:*

- Well organized and prepared.
- Kay and Clark's presentation was very helpful.
- The movie was serious and important.
- The SMT student poem was meaningful.
- The sessions asked for volunteers and delegated assignments.

##### *Negatives:*

- Meetings ran later than expected.
- Would have been helpful to know what we were to accomplish in the meetings.
- Would have been helpful to explain the 'Acta' and 'Planilla' (financial spreadsheet).
- Would be helpful to know what the group would talk about ahead of time.
- Should have talked more about security in the first session.
- We could have done the current social and political information on our own.
- Would have been good to 'skype' with Scott and Joene to 'meet' them before trip.
- Better not to have a training session on a long weekend.
- Ask Ali's thoughts on Skype.

#### Guatemala City

##### *Positives:*

- Much needed transition time to adjust gradually to Guatemala.
- Money changing at the airport in private.
- Hotel was good.
- The market felt safe.
- Mall, Ali's 'contrast' tour – good that it had a time limit on it, museum, Mayan ruins.
- Anti-oppression workshop.

##### *Negatives:*

- Not enough mingling at the end of the AESMAC meeting.
- Structure meeting to get out of it what you want. Focus on one topic.
- Not enough interpreting over pizza dinner for everyone to feel engaged.
- Too much concern by university students over letter-writing issue.
- Packed more stuff into that meeting than necessary.

#### Cobán

##### *Positives:*

- Taking two vans.
- More comfortable spending the night in Cobán.
- Having cell phones in each car.
- Lunch and ice cream.
- Edgar Jr. (the driver) and Susan.
- Van drivers were approachable and knew what they were doing.

*Negatives:*

Market was claustrophobic.  
Not everyone could talk with the students or sit together for dinner.  
At our hotel one maid tried to collect all the room tips. In future give any tips to hotel owner to distribute.

**Santa María Tzejá**

*Positives:*

The welcome – visiting and eating with families.  
The fact that it was OK to miss a meeting.  
The guesthouse had sheets, towels and pillowcases.  
People were assigned to take notes, with other people to remind them to take notes.  
Flexibility to switch meal groups.  
Mayan dances.  
Planning time to play with students.  
Partner family visits.  
The cleanliness of the bathrooms and showers.  
How everyone stepped up and kept the home quarters swept.  
People stepping up to fill in for leadership if they couldn't make the meeting on time.  
Non-Spanish speakers trying out their limited Spanish vocabulary.  
Our young people were great ambassadors to the young people in the village.  
The 'parcela' trip.  
Planning for participation in schools.  
Put keys on different-colored lanyards.  
Translators knew the village well, which helped them to do a good job.

*Negatives:*

When a delegate was trying out their Spanish, translator had to translate into English.  
One time Randall stopped a speaker and editorialized some while translating.  
On 'parcela' trip, we left packs at entrance to cave and others had to carry them around.  
Partner family cards - delegates were uncomfortable with asking about them.  
We needed a small bucket and mop.

*Suggestions:*

No dinner on Saturday night when we get there, just a late lunch.  
Coach the group through a successful home visit.  
Do more conversations during family visits.  
Reevaluate family cards. Why do we need names, dates and ages? Clarify info for cards.  
Write on cards if SMT family hasn't been writing.  
Have more structure to meetings in the village.  
Clarify reporting expectations for committees.  
Introduce meetings with: "We're so happy to meet with you but we only have one hour."  
Two leaders should split up if meetings are running late.  
Give others the information so they can carry on.  
Make progress for future – prescribed format that we were looking for.  
What are our priorities/activities instead of meetings?

**Travelers' Actions Upon Return** (Tina Scharback)

Travelers individually committed to actions they planned to take upon returning to Needham.

Caroline plans to talk about her trip in Spanish class and wants to keep up on current events in Guatemala.

Maddie will also talk about her trip in Spanish class and try to keep up with the Rights Action alerts. She also wants to read more about NISGUA (Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala).

David will share the events of the trip with his friends. He also said he will keep a Spanish diary. He will also volunteer to work on a joint web site in the future.

Brenda will keep in touch by e-mail with some of the young professionals in the village to hear more of their ideas. She is willing to be an intermediary between Needham and SMT to help facilitate the web page. She wants to be more mindful of the goal of equal partners in the relationship.

Sarah will still stay very involved in the project, especially with the partner family letters. She wants to help the August delegation with the partner-family letter effort.

Theresa will be thinking of interesting ways to present information, like a web page.

Susan will work with Alan on the spreadsheet. She will also talk about the project to others outside the church.

Tina will respond to more Rights Action alerts and also pursue someone she knows as a possible letter translator.

Scott has his Caritas Connection medical staff to talk to about the project. He also mentioned MD's International and the Brockton Enterprise.

Fred wants to work with Pedro Chom and Juana Pérez about training students in a mental health and behavioral program.

Don will talk with anyone who has not traveled to SMT about his experience.

## *ACTA*

### *Between the Community of*

Santa María Tzejá, Ixcán, Quiché, Guatemala and

The Congregational Church of Needham, Massachusetts, U.S.A.

February 2010

On February 18, 2010 in the community of Santa María Tzejá, Ixcán, Quiché, Guatemala, the members of the Congregational Church of Needham, Massachusetts who are present in the community dedicate ourselves to continue in our relationship of friendship and solidarity with Santa María Tzejá.

The friendship began with a public act in August of 1987 and will continue today with the signing of this ACTA. The purposes of this friendship include the following: mutual understanding, solidarity, peace, mutual support, cultural exchange, the exchange of letters by families, and projects determined by, and in benefit of, the community of Santa María Tzejá.

Representatives of the Needham church have met with: the Improvement Committee, the teachers in the Primary and Básico schools, the High School Project Committee, the Library Committee (Biblioteca Euskal Herria), the Computer Center Committee, the Scholarship Committee, the health promoters and the Health Committee, the members of AESMAC Kemb'al No'j (in Santa María Tzejá as well as in Guatemala City), the Women's Union, the Widows' Committee, the Church Committee, representatives of COCODE, and some of the students studying in Cantabal and Cobán. The Needham delegation also visited the Federation of Cooperatives of the Ixcán.

The representatives of the Needham church respect the democratic decision-making process and therefore have understood that the Improvement Committee in its work represents the entire community. Consequently, decisions regarding the use of funds for general projects of the community are in the hands of the Improvement Committee.

The Needham church representatives and the Improvement Committee have reached agreement on the following points:

1. The Church brings funds to benefit general projects of the community.
2. An attached worksheet indicates the balances, expenses, amounts received, and total amounts available for the various community projects.
3. **FUNDS FOR GENERAL PROJECTS OF THE COMMUNITY:** The Needham church sent these funds for the community by wire transfer to the bank account of the Improvement Committee. The wire transfer was for five thousand five hundred dollars (\$5,500.00), from which a bank commission of five dollars (\$5.00) was charged, leaving available the sum of five thousand four hundred ninety-five dollars (\$5,495.00), equivalent to forty-five thousand five hundred fifty-three and fifty-five hundredths 'quetzales' (Q45,553.55). The Improvement Committee has designated that these funds will be utilized in the following manner:
  - a. Eight hundred 'quetzales' (Q800) is assigned to the Primary School teachers for travel expenses.
  - b. One thousand 'quetzales' (Q1,000) is assigned to the Primary School Parents' Committee for travel expenses.
  - c. Two thousand 'quetzales' (Q2,000) is assigned to the Primary School for equipment maintenance, accessories, and fuel for the generator.
  - d. Two thousand four hundred 'quetzales' (Q2,400) is assigned to the Primary School for student materials.
  - e. Two thousand one hundred 'quetzales' (Q2,100) is assigned to the Primary School for teaching materials.

- f. Five hundred ‘quetzales’ (Q500) is assigned to the Básico for office expenses and computer maintenance.
  - g. Two thousand five hundred ‘quetzales’ (Q2,500) is assigned to the Básico for fuel.
  - h. Two thousand five hundred ‘quetzales’ (Q2,500) is assigned to the Básico for teaching materials.
  - i. Five hundred ‘quetzales’ (Q500) is assigned to the Básico for graduation.
  - j. Four thousand nine hundred ‘quetzales’ (Q4,900) is assigned to the Library Euskal Herria for salary support.
  - k. One thousand ‘quetzales’ (Q1,000) is assigned to the Health Committee for travel expenses.
  - l. Two thousand four hundred ‘quetzales’ (Q2,400) is assigned to the Health Committee for salary support for the health promoters.
  - m. Eight thousand ‘quetzales’ (Q8,000) is assigned to the Health Committee for the salary of the Community Health Facilitator.
  - n. One thousand five hundred ‘quetzales’ (Q1,500) is assigned to the Health Committee for emergency funds.
  - o. Three thousand five hundred ‘quetzales’ (Q3,500) is assigned to the Church Construction Committee for benches.
  - p. Eight hundred ‘quetzales’ (Q800) is assigned to the Improvement Committee for travel expenses.
  - q. Eight hundred ‘quetzales’ (Q800) is assigned to the Improvement Committee for office expenses and fuel.
  - r. Five hundred ‘quetzales’ (Q500) is assigned to the Mayor’s office for travel expenses.
  - s. One thousand ‘quetzales’ (Q1,000) is assigned to COCODE for travel expenses.
  - t. Eight hundred ‘quetzales’ (Q800) is assigned to the Women’s Union for travel expenses.
  - u. Four thousand five hundred (Q4,500) is assigned to the Widows’ Group for wire fencing and chickens.
  - v. One thousand five hundred fifty-three and fifty-five one hundredths ‘quetzales’ (Q1,553.55) is assigned to the Potable Water Committee for travel expenses.
4. **FUNDS FOR EDUCATION:** In January 2010 the Needham Church sent eleven thousand dollars (\$11,000.00) to a bank account managed by Randall Shea to support education in Santa María Tzejá. These funds will be distributed in the following manner:
- a. Eight thousand dollars (\$8,000.00) to pay teacher salaries in the Básico.
  - b. Three thousand dollars (\$3,000.00) to support the High School Project.
5. The Needham church gave eight hundred ninety-seven ‘quetzales’ (Q897.00) to the Improvement Committee to reimburse the cost of repairing the lavatory that was broken during the visit of the August 2009 delegation.

The Needham Church brought materials for the Primary School and the Básico donated by the children of the Church, medicines and supplies for the clinic, and a variety of books for the library, and they gave the Improvement Committee some sports items for the young people of the community.

Once more, we want to express our profound thanks to the community of Santa María Tzejá for the hospitality and friendship that you have offered us during these days. We want to assure you that you will continue to be present in our thoughts and prayers. We ask the God of love to accompany you in all your efforts to improve the wellbeing of this community, and thus contribute to the construction of the Kingdom of God.

Signed this day, February 18, 2010, in Santa María Tzejá, Ixcán, Quiché, Guatemala.

(Followed by signatures of the Improvement Committee and the Needham delegation)