

# Delegation from Needham Congregational Church

## To Santa María Tzejá

February 15-27, 2012 – Trip Report

Brenda Metzler

In collaboration with Co-Leader Mi Herzog and other delegates

**Delegates:** Barbara Cross, Jerry Durbin, Mi Herzog, Beverly Knight, Susan McNeice, Brenda Metzler, Scott Pike, Sunny Robinson, and videographer Judy Jackson. Ali Durbin and Linda McCrae, accompanied by her son Isaac, 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)

Although this February’s delegation lacked the usual presence of church young people on it, we took the anomaly in stride and noted that it made possible the participation of some folks from outside of Needham, who contributed their energy and fresh perspectives. In addition to a number of experienced travelers, we had a few first-timers. Among them was Barbara Cross, who has been writing her partner family in the village for 17 years and finally got to meet them. The participation of Judy Jackson, a documentary filmmaker from Canada, enabled us to get video footage of interviews with young professionals in Santa María Tzejá regarding the impact of education on their lives and the community. We also enjoyed the budding enthusiasm of 8-year-old Isaac McCrae, who was adopted from the village as a baby by Linda McCrae, pastor and long-time friend of the partnership, who served as one of our interpreters. Their family added a whole new dimension to the delegation. It was a real pleasure to have Mi Herzog as my co-leader this year. Her contributions were considerable, not only in co-leading but also in conducting the interviews of young professionals.

Our group worked extremely well together and really enjoyed each other. Our good nature and stamina were occasionally tested with the heat and some short-lived bouts of illness, but everyone stepped up when the need arose, including the last day when I completely lost my voice.

A high point of the delegation was learning that ex-president/dictator Rios Montt, who had presided over the government’s ‘scorched earth’ policy of the 1980’s, had finally been charged with genocide. This represents more than 10 years of hard and dangerous work by the survivors and legal advisors to make this a reality. It was moving to meet with the survivors’ group in the village, as they reflected on this momentous step in their pursuit of justice. Another highlight was getting to witness a Mayan ceremony that included conferring blessing and wisdom on the first woman mayor of the village.

With each delegation, the impact of education in Santa María Tzejá becomes more pronounced. Young professionals who have returned to the village after earning high school or university degrees are taking on leadership roles. They are contributing their thinking, organization, and particular skill sets as they plan for the future of their community and the region. At our meetings with COCODE and AESMAC, I was particularly struck by the earnest and thoughtful approach to each committee’s goals and tasks. We appreciated the excellent set-up and coordination by the Improvement Committee that allowed us to keep up with a very full schedule of activities. We were very glad that they accommodated our request to postpone several meetings until August. Coordination of our visit in general was no doubt facilitated by the surprising omnipresence of cell phones, now that the village has a cell tower. And potable water, which has been 12 years in the making, seems tantalizingly close.

As we enter our 25<sup>th</sup> year of partnership with Santa María Tzejá, it is gratifying to see how many hearts and minds have been touched on both sides. There is no better way to experience this partnership than by living with our friends in the village for a week, sharing in the love and trust that continues to grow with each

delegation. It is a privilege to facilitate these delegations that offer people an opportunity to experience firsthand the depth of our abiding friendship, along with the fruits and challenges of being in partnership.

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

Following the traditional send-off gathering at the Johnson's on Tuesday night, we met at Mi's to carpool to the airport early Wednesday morning. Things went remarkably smoothly since there were only four of us flying down from Boston, with Jerry arriving later that night and Sunny arriving the following day. Our flights to Guatemala City were uneventful, and we proceeded to collect our bags and clear customs. We exchanged virtually all of our group and personal funds at a bank inside the airport at Q7.76 to the dollar. Although this took quite a while, we felt it was time well spent, since it saved us the time and inconvenience of exchanging money at one or more banks the next day. We were met outside by our patient van driver and headed to the Spring Hotel.

### **'Coyuntura' (Briefing)** (Mi Herzog)

Shortly after our arrival at the Spring Hotel, we gathered to hear a briefing or analysis (called a 'coyuntura', which means "bringing together") that provided insights into the current situation in Guatemala. Our speaker, Victor Ayala, was a university student and member of the student movement during the 1980's. He recognizes the importance of dialogue in conflict resolution and has spent the last 15 years "peace building" in Guatemala. To understand the complexity of that challenge, he described the history of indigenous people in Guatemala.

His summary:

- 1524 – 1821: Central America was conquered by the Spanish, and over time indigenous people moved from slavery into a feudal system.
- 1821 – 1871: Independence; Descendants of the Spaniards took power.
- 1871 – 1944: There was a liberal revolution. Coffee cultivation began and with that, the takeover of indigenous lands, and an army was created to protect the interests of coffee growers.
- 1944 – 1954: A democratic and bourgeois 'revolution' created a 10-year "Spring", with a focus on agrarian reform and land redistribution. This was overturned in 1954 by a coup orchestrated by an alliance of national and foreign interests (the United Fruit Company, the Guatemalan military and oligarchy, and the CIA).

The CIA and the Guatemalan government agreed to allow mercenaries into Guatemala for an invasion of Cuba following the Cuban Revolution in 1959. Some young army officers resisted this, but their efforts were squashed. The survivors traveled to Mexico and then on the Cuba where they planned a 'revolution' to change the economic model. Joined by farm workers and unions, they met with State repression in Guatemala. This was the beginning of the military movement and resistance by a group of dissidents, leading to the 'scorched earth' policy and the 36-year civil war.

Now, Guatemala faces a new challenge. The murder rate is twice that of Mexico, and people are so concerned about security that they ignore the participation of their leaders in the atrocities of the 1980's. Why did people elect a military officer as president?

According to Victor, there are three reasons:

- There is no historical memory—the history of war is not taught in schools.
- There is a high level of violence in the country.
- The civic government couldn't stop the violence.

There are a number of ironies. While there is a national reparations movement (to compensate victims of the violence), the director is an intelligence expert, a former 'guerrilla' turned informant. Because there are 14

parties in Guatemala, it is hard to achieve a majority. “People vote against something. They vote for the least worst.”

Victor sees a few things that must be done:

- Guatemala needs to raise the level of citizen participation by broadening school coverage. But this is difficult since illiteracy (second highest in the world) serves the government, allowing manipulation.
- Promote greater spaces for people to participate. Currently to run for office, the political parties require \$10,000, making it prohibitive for most average Guatemalans.
- Focus on resolving conflicts through dialogue.
- Need to focus on youth and children to counter the paternalistic view of education, in which students don't speak up and the teacher is always right. They also need to work at the elementary level to encourage children to have the courage to contradict their parents—something that is not culturally acceptable in Guatemala.
- Need to counter 'machismo' which is ingrained. Children are not taught to question. Instead, they are taught to ask “Qué manda?” (What do you command of me?).
- Need to inspire young leaders to participate politically to make changes, with the support of their communities.

Victor believes that cultural changes need to happen in families, and personally he hopes to make these changes in his own family by treating his daughter and sons with equality and dignity

Victor acknowledges that the Peace Accords have not fulfilled their promise, and yet he has seen some positive change. He hopes that the new president, Otto Pérez Molina, who was both a military commander during the violence in the 1980's and a signer of the Peace Accords in 1996, shows he is capable of leadership more in keeping with the latter.

Following the meeting, we gathered for a relaxing, pre-arranged dinner at the hotel restaurant, glad that we could make it an early evening and get to bed at a reasonable hour. We looked forward to seeing Linda, Bev, and Isaac the next morning, as their plane was to arrive around 9:00 pm.

### **Visit to Visit to Textile Museum (Museo Ixché)** (Mi Herzog)

Following breakfast Thursday morning we headed out by van to the Museo Ixché de Traje Indígena (Ixchel Museum of Indigenous Dress), which focuses on the indigenous textiles of Guatemala. It is located on the campus of a private university, University of Francisco Marroquín. It was a lush, modern campus, first opened in 1971.

The museum collects the textiles of the country, particularly the vibrant colored 'huipiles', which are the traditional blouses worn by indigenous women. The word “huipil” translates to “my covering.” Women in villages continue to weave 'huipils'. They take about 6 months to weave, and because they are made in the smoky kitchens, they sometimes have the scent of smoke.

Different villages have different weaving styles, designs, and colors. For example, a number of women in Santa María Tzejá wear huipils with bands of color bordering a “necklace” of white circles around the neck. This is the traditional huipil of Joyabaj, the original home of a number of early settlers in the village. In Santiago Atitlán, women wear lavender huipils embroidered with birds. And while most Guatemalan men today wear modern western clothing, in some villages we drove through, men wore brightly woven short trousers along with their cowboy hats.

The museum tracked the influence of the Spanish, bringing wool and a more covered look, carding and spinning techniques, and lace. The pleated skirts styles the Spanish brought are still worn on Cobán, a town we drive through on the way to SMT.

The Industrial Revolution affected the textiles of Guatemala, with a factory in Chichicastenango producing thread. Originally, women had used natural dyes to color their weavings. Then the Spanish brought chemical dyes.

Headdresses called “tocado” historically indicated status among the Guatemalans, and even today, some women wear traditional head wrappings, often with metallic touches. (We see these ‘tocado’ on some women in Santa María Tzejá.)

Because the Guatemalan women were creative weavers, they often looked for embellishments to add to their work. Through the years, they sewed on appliqués, first found in France. They incorporated brocades into their designs. They learned to crochet. Some created ‘ikat’ designs, similar to tie dying in Indonesia.

Today, women continue to adapt their huipils. Some weave strands of metallic thread through their huipils. Other women buy more modern huipils, made with shiny fabrics and trimmed with lace. We were told that traditional, hand-woven clothing is much more expensive than modern apparel (tee shirts, skirts and jeans) that is worn by many women.

Another traditional weaving is the ‘su’t’, a flat piece of woven fabric used for many purposes. Small su’ts are used to wrap tortillas, medium-sized ones are the local shopping bags, and large ones are like suitcases or can be used as coats. A young woman will weave a small “falling-in-love” su’t for the man she is going to marry. Like huipil’s, su’ts reflect the regional weaving style of their specific area.

Today, there is a movement back to traditional weaving. Some women still weave on their backstrap looms. Cooperatives have been established to sell their work.

A small number of cooperatives are going back to using traditional dyes, showing which colors are created by natural ingredients: Indigo creates dark blue, lobelia creates lavender, coconut makes beige, peaches makes a soft coral, bougainvillea makes purple, lobelia and mint make a turquoise. We visited such a cooperative in San Juan de Laguna on Lake Atitlán. A number of items offered in our March silent auction were woven in women’s cooperatives.

The museum also had a collection of ‘naieve’ art by Andrés Curruchich (1891-1969). He was untrained, but photographically painted the local scenes of his everyday life. This collection provides documentation of 20<sup>th</sup> century life in rural Guatemalan villages.

We thoroughly enjoyed this tour, thanked our guide, and spent our last few minutes checking out the gift shop, in search of a few items for our annual silent auction.

### **Central Plaza and Lunch at Chikach** (Brenda Metzler)

After returning to the hotel, we walked downtown to the central plaza, where we happened upon a lively demonstration of an ancient Maya ball game, where players in indigenous dress tried to maneuver a flaming, basketball-sized rubber ball into a goal on a high wall, using field-hockey-like sticks. It was a colorful and exciting display, and we managed to snap some brief footage of it before the announcer called the play to a halt and introduced each of the players. We then visited the church whose outside pillars contain the names of the victims who were ‘disappeared’ or massacred in the violence of the 1980’s. Then we walked about five blocks to the restaurant Chikach. Generally the plaza and the surrounding area have seen some improvements and seemed cleaner and perhaps more secure than before. We had a lovely, healthful meal at Chikach, eating in our own private room off a little garden, before doing a little shopping in the market and then heading back to our hotel.

### **Health Overview with Dr. Solis** (Sunny Robinson)

Late Thursday afternoon we were joined at the hotel by Dr. Roselina Solis who talked with us about some of the health-related demographics of Guatemala. While none of this information may be new, some of the information may serve as a statistical overview of the current state of health in Guatemala.

First, regarding Demographics and Economics: The population is now 14,400,000 million, of which 70% are younger than 30. Four million people live in Guatemala City. Of the total population 46.1% are urban and 53% are rural. Only 5% are major landowners, yet 65% work in agriculture. The largest exports are bananas, sugar cane, coffee, broccoli, meat and peas. Economic growth is estimated as 2.5% per year. The population is 60% Maya, with 22 ethnicities and 25 languages.

Remittances from family members living outside the country remain a major source of income...perhaps 7.5%, and some say nearly 10%. Monthly basic costs to sustain a family decently range from Q1200-2700, approximately \$150- \$350. 69% earn their living in the “informal” sector, leaving only 30% with salaries and access to the Social Security system, health care benefits, pensions, etc. 20% of kids aged 7-14 years old work, especially in harvesting coffee. The day before this talk, a new fiscal package was announced. 50% of the population is poor, and 16% live in extreme poverty with no access to health care, education, clean water, or electricity. In the general Central American and Caribbean area, only Haiti ranks as poorer. The 30-year civil war was a major drain on the economy and also a major drain in human terms, both in deaths and people who fled to the US. Dr. Solis’ perspective is that, with each “democratically” elected government, things have gotten worse economically.

While the Constitution says education and health care are free, they are not universally available and the government coffers have been drained in support of corrupt and political goals. In contrast the public hospitals do not even have sheets for the beds or even aspirins. Current literacy is 84%, but of every 5 indigenous children only 3 read and write, with daughters often having to stay home to help with the other children. 93% attend elementary school, but only 60% get to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade and 20% go on to high school. Teaching, accounting, and training in technology are the preferred educational directions. Only 5% go to college. NGO’s are providing a great deal of the education and services that are available.

Second, as a Health Overview: Infectious diseases remain very prevalent, with gastrointestinal (GI) and respiratory illnesses among the most common. 43% suffer chronic malnutrition; 3 of every 5 children suffer malnutrition, and of these, one of every 4 is severe. Increasingly the young (age 14-15) are sexually active; many young mothers (14-19), themselves among the malnourished youth, are having low-birth-weight babies. The death rate for those less than 5 years is 42/1000 and the maternal death rate is 135 per 100,000, with only Haiti and Bolivia having worse maternal deaths. These deaths occur particularly in rural areas with hemorrhage and sepsis as leading causes. Guatemala has the highest fertility rate of all countries in Latin America with 3.6 kids/woman in urban areas and 4.5 in rural areas and 2.4% population growth/year for the country. 32% of youth deaths are from violence, as youth now have guns that are coming via the drug traffickers. Maya people use both western and natural methods of health care. The private medical care system is of high quality but too expensive for most people.

In the public care sector, there are 1,200 health centers with doctors and nurses; 4,652 centers staffed by just nurses; 926 posts with nurses in their final years of training; and 300 clinics run by volunteers. There are 4 centers with integrated services – general medical care, surgery, pediatrics, and maternal care. There is an effort to decentralize care and, for example, there are now 16 labor and delivery centers in rural areas and 3 in Guatemala City. They are trying to use the hospitals for only complicated deliveries, but they still might have 200 births a day. There are 43 hospitals that are able to deal with “hot” issues, such as gun shot wounds and appendicitis. And there are two large referral hospitals, both in Guatemala City where the specialists are concentrated. These are teaching hospitals, as are most of the 43. All medical students spend 6 months in a clinic.

There are also specialty care centers for eye health, cardiology, and oncology. This equates to 6,000 beds for the majority of the population of 14 million. There are 6 public medical schools, with tuition costs of Q90/yr., but the student has to be able to meet their living and book costs. (Dr. Solis mentioned the availability of scholarships for Maya youth, but none of the medical students we spoke with seemed aware of them.) There are 16,400 doctors equaling 9.8 per 10,000 people; 3,000 dentists; and 41 nurses per 10,000. These health professionals are divided between those with elementary school and training, and those who

completed high school and then got training or university education. In the social security sector, there are 139 clinics, 3 specialty clinics, 63 integrated units, and 2,140 beds.

Tuberculosis (TB) is still common and associated with malnutrition and AIDS. Statistics demonstrate 21,000 people who are HIV+, 3,000 of them since 1985, with approximately 6,000 people having AIDS. 5% of the population has chronic Hepatitis B and 1% Hepatitis C. For many years a grant from Spain assisted with HIV care, but it has now run out. Doctors Without Borders provided care for a time, but have also now left.

When asked what her personal health priorities were for the country, Dr. Solis noted: stopping the violence; women's education and nutrition, combined with learning about managing a healthy home; nutrition in general; and encouraging medical students not to be drawn into the corruption.

### **Meeting with AESMAC/University Students** (Brenda Metzler)

Thursday evening we were joined by various members of AESMAC (the Association of Students and Professionals from Santa María Tzejá and Surrounding Communities) who are working or studying in Guatemala City. They were: Regina Pérez, Rogelio Hernández, and Edwin Canil. Later arrivals included Juvencio Chom, Ana López, and Rosaura Canil Hernández.

After introductions Regina told us she studied journalism at the University of San Carlos, completed her degree, and now works at a news agency (CERIGUA). Edwin studied law and is now working in Guatemala City. Rogelio, whose university studies were sponsored by two Needham donors, is finishing his degree in animal husbandry, and he also works as a teaching assistant at the veterinary school.

Regina expressed her gratitude to our church for its support of education in Santa María Tzejá. She mentioned having read part of Clark's book on education and commented that it was interesting that education has been such a high priority and that so many sources have contributed to education in the village over the years. She added that her education had been made possible by scholarship funds from Randall and other sources. Judy, who had had a chance to read Clark's book, liked its thoughts on liberation from poverty and liberation from ignorance.

Edwin then reflected on a birthday celebration that had been held for Padre Luis in the village several years ago. Apparently a woman wrote a beautiful poem that was a kind of retrospective. It imagined that, if things had not happened as they did, all the villagers would still be farmers. It reflected on what would have happened without all the relationships that were formed, imagining that children might still be working on plantations or might have died of malnutrition. I said we'd like a copy of the poem.

One student said that education has played a large role in helping children get ahead. "When I travel for work and see where my parents came from, I see so many problems, with people leaving to work in the U.S. They have no education."

Juvencio Chom and his wife Ana López arrived with their darling 11-month-old son, Itzar Balaam. Juvencio welcomed the delegation, and soon we adjourned to enjoy the pizza that had just arrived. We were also joined by Rosaura Canil Hernández, who is in her second year of university and is studying to become a high school teacher. We learned that she has been awarded the new university scholarship from Needham and congratulated her. We enjoyed casual conversations in small groups until it was time to send the students on their way by taxi.

### **Genocide Case Update** (Jerry Durbin)

We met with a speaker who gave us an update on the genocide case being pursued on behalf of the victims, who are members of the Association for Justice and Reconciliation (AJR).

January 14, 2012. Efraín Rios Montt, the former president-dictator of Guatemala, was panicky. Over the last decade his government had been accused of carrying out a genocide campaign during the early 1980's against the indigenous Maya people of Guatemala. Because he had been elected to Congress during these last ten years he had been immune to prosecution. However, his party had not received enough votes in the

recent election and his term was about to end, and he knew he was vulnerable to being charged with crimes against humanity.

As the senior of the three members of the Guatemalan High Command, he had seen the other two men below him successfully indicted. His military chief of staff, Mr. Lopez Fuentes, had been arrested last June and was in prison awaiting trial. The former Minister of Defense, Mr. Mejía Victores, has also been indicted and was moved to a military hospital awaiting medical clearance before moving towards trial.

Furthermore, two of his generals at the time have also been formally accused of human rights crimes. The Intelligence General, Mr. Rodriguez Sanchez, had been captured and was in prison. The Operations General, Mr. Garcia Mendoza, had escaped and is a fugitive from justice.

Given these events Rios Montt approached the public prosecutors and asked whether there would be a case against him and what it would be. He pleaded that the prosecutors respect his dignity and human rights. He did not want the humiliation of being arrested and handcuffed in public.

After much back and forth discussion a court date was set.

January 26, 2012. A day that lives in history. Hundreds of indigenous Guatemalans came early to the courthouse and filled the plaza outside, demanding justice for their people. There was bedlam in the courthouse building, and security was very tight. The proceedings were shown on a large screen at the plaza and were carried by live Internet stream.

The prosecutor Mr. Vasquez and a legal advisor to the plaintiffs arrived in the midst of the confusion, carrying the volumes of evidence through the crowds. They eventually were able to access the building and the court, which was on the 15th floor. They were let into the court where they sat with Rios Montt and his lawyers and other supporters. Then the doors opened and the crowd and reporters entered. The room was full and the crowd, mostly consisting of prosecution supporters, was fervent.

The proceedings lasted almost 14 hours, from 9:30 AM to 11 PM. The prosecutor read the terms of the accusation against Rios Montt.....and read.....and read. In the Ixil region alone there was forced displacement of 29,000 people, the deaths of 1,171 individuals, sexual acts of violence against 1,485 women, and hundreds of acts of terror.

After hours of testimony Judge Carol Patricia Flores asked Rios Montt for his response. He responded by saying that he would remain silent. His legal team no longer denies that genocide took place but claims that, since he was not on the battlefield, he is not responsible for the atrocities.

Judge Flores, after a full day of testimony, ruled that there was sufficient evidence to formally charge Rios Montt with genocide and to proceed to trial. She stated that there was no justification for his acts and that it is clear that the indiscriminate extermination of the civilian population was the result of military plans executed under his direct knowledge and command.

As the judge read her decision, family members and supporters and human rights activists applauded, cheered, hugged and lit firecrackers to celebrate.

The immediate result of the hearing is that Rios Montt is under house arrest, that his house is under guard, and that he must pay a bond of Q500,000. The trial will take place after further legal activities over the next few months.

Our group was very moved by this account and recognized that this stunning development was brought about through the courageous and determined efforts of the survivors.

### **Off to Cobán** (Brenda Metzler)

Since we had all packed our bags prior to this meeting, we were close to being ready to leave for Cobán. We had decided that, since we knew that we might need to provide identification if we were stopped at any of the military checkpoints along way, we would take our passports with us, rather than just bringing copies. Our treasurer Mi had calculated the amount of group funds we would need for the SMT segment, so we left the



rest of the group funds and people's extra personal funds in the safe deposit box at the hotel. We also checked a large duffel bag containing a clean set of clothes for each traveler for our return. We got both vans loaded up with our luggage and ourselves and were on the road to Cobán by around 11:00 am. With a stop mid-way for lunch and ice cream, we got into Cobán around 5:00 pm.

### **Meeting with Scholarship Students in Cobán** (Brenda Metzler)

Shortly after settling in at the Hostal Monja Blanca, we were joined by some students from SMT who are studying in Cobán. We sat down together, and Mi welcomed the students, saying that it was a pleasure to meet with them since education is an important part of our partnership. We did a round of introductions and learned a little about the students.

Consuelo Ralios Castro is in her final year of a four-year program and will graduate as a home economics teacher. She is doing her practicum in Carchá and five other communities, working with women. When she graduates, she would like to pursue nutrition studies at the university. Consuelo is in the Kistler's partner family, and her twin sister graduated from high school last year on a Needham scholarship.

Paulino Ralios Pacheco is in his second year of high school studies in natural resources. He studies nature, crops, vegetables, and animals. He likes the structure of his program, as 15 days of classes are followed by 15 days of fieldwork. Paulino would like to work and continue his studies after graduating. Consuelo commented that it is very common for students to work and study at the same time, since their parents often aren't able to help them continue their education.

Federico Maquén Hernández, a confident and engaging young man, gave us a brief greeting in English, which he is trying to learn. He is 20 now, and we have known him since he was a Needham-sponsored high school student. He is now in his second year of medical school. He reported that his courses are hard, and they require a lot of patience and dedication. Mi commented that it is very hard to get into medical school in the U.S. and asked if it is the same in Guatemala. Federico said it is hard to get into university in general, and there are a lot of tests you have to go through: a vocational test, then a general knowledge test, followed by a specific test for the school you want to get into. Scott asked about scholarship possibilities, following up on our doctor speaker's comment that scholarships are available for indigenous medical-school students in Cobán. Federico said that some institutions provide scholarships but that they require very high grades. We mentioned the information about indigenous scholarships, just in case.

Aleida Beatríz Quinilla González, who is deaf and mute, was assisted by her roommate Consuelo. Aleida, who is 17, attends a special school for the deaf in Cobán and studies at the third-grade level. This is perhaps the first time we've seen a special-needs young person studying outside the village. It seemed like quite a remarkable undertaking, given financial constraints and the challenges of living away from home. The other students were attentive to her, reflecting a sense of collective responsibility that we observe in the village. We learned that the students go home just twice a year – once at Easter and then at the end of the school year in October.

We were so glad that we gave the students a chance to ask questions of us, since Federico came up with a good one that started a meaningful exchange:

Federico: "Do you feel the same happiness and joy in coming on delegations now, or has it become routine?"

Susan (who has come on 6 delegations): "It's not the same joy as seeing something for the first time, but rather the joy of reconnecting with people you've come to care about." Scott: "I especially enjoy seeing how the students are doing."

Federico: "I appreciate that so many people take the time to come. I admire you because you have a very different attitude than most people. You are willing to put yourself in the place of the poor and find a way to help. I also would like to be able to help however I can."

Sunny: "Your field is very important since there are too few doctors in Guatemala. There is a temptation to go to the capital and not serve in the rural areas."

Federico: “My dream is to go and serve in a small community.”

Natividad Chom then arrived, explaining with refreshing honesty that she had had an exhausting week and had fallen asleep. She is in her third year of medical school, which is a big change in workload, and she is finding it very challenging. She has classes from Monday through Thursday and sees patients in a Cobán hospital on Friday. So far she has run diagnostic tests on patients and taken their medical histories, but she hasn't done any physical exams yet. Her medical school class is small, just about 25 students. She will have a residency in Cobán in her fifth year. In her sixth year she will serve half a year in an urban area and the other half in a rural area. Naty receives some outside scholarship support, as well as some financial help from her uncles and her parents. She explained that January is the most critical financial time, since that is when students have to buy books for the year. Unlike high school, there is no monthly tuition. As for the future, Naty would really like to study genetics after graduating, but that would require five more years of schooling, so she doesn't see how she could do it. Another interesting career that is more in demand in Guatemala and would take just two years after medical school is Ophthalmology. This would be a very useful career in the Ixcán region.

When we were ready to go out for dinner, we were sorry to learn that Jerry was really sick and couldn't join us. We and the students headed up the hill to Rita's for a relaxed but animated visit over dinner. This was just the first of many times that I witnessed Judy's delight and amazement as she met the wonderful people of Santa María Tzejá and learned about our partnership. It's a pleasure to share and reconnect with the many elements that are so special in this longstanding relationship. Toward the end of dinner, Judy learned that Paulino's birthday was coming up and he was feeling a little sad that he wouldn't be with his family to celebrate it, so she arranged for a piece of 'birthday cake' to be delivered to him, and we all sang “Feliz Cumpleaños” to him. After taking some group photos and sharing multiple hugs, we sent the students home in taxis.

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

At 7:00 the next morning our bags stood ready for loading into the vans, and we gathered for a hearty, family-style breakfast. The proprietor of the Monja Blanca, Doña Estela, has learned how much we enjoy the special family-style breakfast we requested some years ago. But it's always a beautiful scene to see the tables all arranged in one long line, laden with a feast of scrambled eggs, toast and jam, orange juice, coffee, cut-up pineapple, papaya, cantaloupe, bananas and watermelon. The only annoyance, following breakfast, was that the drivers arrived later than we asked and we had to wait until they finished their breakfast to depart. But we got on the road by 8:15 or so.

Over the course of the trip we noted that the highway extends further than before, and we were occasionally delayed by construction. As we rode, we enjoyed the changing scenery, chatting with each other, and playing guessing games with Ali's children, Chely and Kayalá. After about 4 hours we arrived at the fruit quarantine station, where inspectors checked the vans for any disallowed fruit. We received several calls to the delegation cell phone from the village, checking about our progress.

### **Visit to Federation of Cooperatives** (Sunny Robinson)

Given that it was Saturday morning, and the Cooperative was closed, we met just briefly with Juan, a lone staff person who is in charge of the farm and of security. At the processing plant he noted that the cooperative is producing hearts of palm, and jams of mango and pineapple. They are all attractively jarred, and stacks were visible for inspection. (Later at a family home some of us got to sample the mango and are delighted to report it is *delicious*, especially on fresh, warm tortillas.) These products are mostly sold in the capitol and some in local markets, as well as at the cooperative itself. Mostly the plant produces for specific orders, so it does not run all the time. While the co-op is doing well, it is still dependent on outside support (from Spain) for success.

The tree and plant nursery, on the other hand, is self-sufficient. We observed the process of preparing the dirt for planting seedlings. They are growing lime, orange, and grapefruit seedlings and many of these are

used for grafting. Other fruit seedlings are mango, aguacate (avocado), mandarin and lichee. This year they have orders for 45,000 hardwood seedlings for forest planting – mahogany, cedar and yellow tree. Juan notes that he hopes the sustainability of the tree nursery remains, but that they hope the farm and processing also become self-sustaining.

They also grow a particular wood used in construction, along with scallions and a dark leafy green veggie, whose name none of us recognized but which appeared to be in the kale family. Last year was the first year for the lichees. After an all-too-brief visit, knowing that our arrival was being eagerly awaited, we headed on to Santa María Tzejá.

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

As our vans pulled up near the center of the village, we saw a crowd of Básico (middle school) students and a number of adults waiting to greet us, up the hill from a huge, colorful arch made of palm branches that welcomed us to the village with its Spanish greeting. One by one, representatives of the village welcomed us, including students from Básico, the Parents' Committee, and finally the community's first woman mayor, Juana Maurilia Pérez. This is always a special moment for first-time and repeat travelers alike to bask in the warm reception of each new delegation. We then unloaded the luggage, figured out room assignments, and joined in a delicious communal lunch.

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

Following our lovely lunch hosted by members of the Improvement Committee, we had our initial meeting with them. Present were:

- Timoteo Ortiz – President
- María Quixán Osorio – Vice President
- Felipe Canil Lares – Treasurer
- César Freddy Noriega Castro – Secretary
- Martín Tiu López – Member-at-Large #1

After a round of introductions, the committee reported on funds expended since the last delegation. We went line by line down the draft spreadsheet and recorded expenditures and current balances. Occasionally we would have a question or need a clarification, and the committee noted these to bring to our next meeting, but generally the reporting was very good.

The committee gave us an updated schedule of activities, saying that it had cut out two meetings in response to our concern that the schedule was too crowded. We thanked them for accommodating our request.

They surprised us by saying that the decisions for this delegation's funds had already been made. Timoteo told us that these decisions are now being made by COCODE, the Community Development Council, which is composed of the presidents of each committee or sector in the village, followed by approval from General Assembly (the whole community). This is the result of a recommendation by the previous Improvement Committee and COCODE, and in consultation with the village. One of the specific decisions was save some of the funds to put toward a larger project in the future, rather than paying committee 'viáticos' or travel expenses. Felipe said that this larger 'common fund' might be used to provide an office space or to add a classroom to a school building, for example. We agreed that this sounded like a good decision.

The committee already knew that Judy was going to be filming interviews of young professionals in the village, but we brought up her hopes of being able to film around the village as well. The committee didn't see any problem with this. Santiago Botón had already agreed to accompany and assist her, and people felt that he would be helpful in smoothing her way. We also arranged for Hugo Quinilla, Director of the Middle School, to introduce Judy and her work as a videographer at the welcoming celebration.

At the end of the meeting I presented the committee with a used computer that we had brought, for use wherever it was most needed. The committee decided on the spot that they would keep it for their office, and we subsequently saw it in use as a second computer when someone else was using their primary one.

At our follow-up meeting Wednesday afternoon, the committee gave us its final report of expenditures since August, followed by the distribution of the current funds. The committee reiterated the decision to apportion part of the money for a large community project. Mi asked who would decide on the project and would interest be earned on the funds. The whole community would decide on the project. Felipe explained that each committee has its own bank account, but it remained to be decided whether COCODE or another committee would hold the project funds, so he couldn't answer the interest question. Susan then asked about the process for turning over funds when the committee leadership changes. Apparently each new committee meets with the old committee, and the new committee confirms that the bank statements and the committee's records agree. Moreover, each outgoing committee delivers a report to the entire community.

Susan had the information she needed to prepare the spreadsheet to go along with the ACTA, but we thought to ask for the cell phone numbers for Felipe and César, just in case. The leap in communication capabilities, with virtually every family now having a cell phone, is definitely a plus.

We complimented the committee on its work around the reporting of expenditures, and congratulated them on how smoothly the schedule had run, especially for meals, where there wasn't a single mix-up. They really did a great job, including getting us the draft schedules of activities and meals two days before we left Needham so that changes could be made. (I think it helped that I requested this information by a specific date.)

Our final brief meeting with the Improvement Committee was Thursday afternoon, just to settle up our expenses for meals (Q12 per person per meal), water, etc. This was followed by a delicious dinner with the committee prior to the farewell celebration ('despedida').

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

Given our fairly late lunch upon our arrival and the short time between our meeting with the Improvement Committee and the welcoming celebration, we were glad that we had requested no dinner that first night. We headed over to the cooperative building to the sound of music, knowing that the community would be gathered to welcome us. Hugo Quinilla, Director of the Básico, emceed the evening, which featured music, songs by middle school students, and words of welcome from various community members. Among them was a warm greeting from Juana Pérez, the new Mayor, and Marta Castro, who warmly noted her appreciation of our church's support and the many delegations that have visited over the years. Hugo also took the opportunity to announce Judy Jackson's presence with the delegation, sharing some of her background, including her connection to Padre Luis, whom she interviewed in the 1980's as part of a documentary she produced on the violence of Guatemala's 'internal armed conflict'. Hugo explained that, in addition to filming interviews with individuals regarding education on Needham's behalf, Judy would like to take footage around the village, assisted by Santiago Botón, while respecting any individual's wish to opt out. This was very helpful in providing Judy with access to many activities and individuals in the village. When the delegation was invited to the stage, I greeted the village on behalf of the church and then individuals introduced themselves, many using whatever Spanish they had. Exhausted as we were from our long day, we were just as glad that the evening ended without music for dancing so that we could head for bed.

### **Commemorative Mass** (Brenda Metzler)

Sunday morning, following our first breakfast with village families, we gathered with the rest of the community at the church to attend a commemorative mass for the victims of the violence. A number of survivors spoke with their recollections, saying that it was important to share this history each year so that it would not be forgotten. The mass was led by a priest from Playa Grande, with supporting music from

singers and musicians from the village. We always feel privileged to attend this commemoration and appreciate Ali's translation in helping us understand what is being shared.

### **Church Attendance and Partner-Family Letter Distribution** (Barbara Cross)

Following the commemoration service and communion mass, the overflowing congregation was invited to the salon next door for refreshments. Alternatively attendees could stay at the church for the distribution of Needham letters and join for refreshments later. Many family members remained to pick up their letters from the 40-pound pile we lifted from the suitcase and placed on the platform. Hugo called out names over the microphone, as Susan, Scott and I greeted the eager recipients. We shook welcoming hands, delivered the large manila envelopes, accepted their "gracias" and replied with "muchas gracias".

Everyone was in their Sunday best and joyous to receive their mail following the service. The 150 brown manila envelopes were virtually gone in 15 minutes. A small, disappointed group who received no letter came forward to inquire about their much anticipated correspondence. Hugo, the middle school principal, kept a few envelopes to be given to students the next day at school.

I was thrilled to meet Rolando when I personally handed over my partner letter to him as emissary for my partner family. We were to have lunch with the family in a short while, and he was picking up three envelopes for his parents and his sisters.

### **Meeting with Scholarship Students** (Mi Herzog)

On Sunday, we met with four high school students, each of whom is studying on a Needham scholarship in nearby Playa Grande. There were:

- Joselito Noriega Tut ( from Santa María Dolores), studying bilingual primary education
- Elvia Lucía Pérez Naz, studying bilingual primary education
- Baltazar Castro Osorio, studying accounting with a specialty in computer skills
- Otto Cano Montenegro, studying accounting with a specialty in computer skills

Joselito is in a three-year program to be an elementary school teacher, studying at the private Maya Quiché School. He speaks Kekchi, one of 22 Mayan languages in Guatemala. It is now required that teaching be done in indigenous languages. Joselito said 90% of the students speak an indigenous language. He is studying three languages—Spanish, K'iche' (Quiché) and English. He would like to find work when he graduates and then get more resources so he can fulfill his ultimate dream: a university teaching degree so that he can teach at the Básico level. Joselito lives on his own, renting a room. "At first I was really lonely and sad and wanted to go home. I missed all my family and friends. But now I have so much work to do, I don't have time to think about."

Elvia is at the Coed Institute of Science and Art, and is also in a three-year teacher program. Her program is also bilingual, training her to teach in K'iché and Spanish. Her goal is to finish high school, then look for work teaching. She said she felt well prepared for her studies by the Básico in Santa María Tzejá. She said the SMT middle school taught her to be respectful. This is Elvia's first time away from home, so she is a little homesick. Even though she lives with an aunt in Playa Grande, she was used to having long chats with her mother, so it's a big change.

Baltazar is in his second year of a three-year program at a high school in Zone 1. He commented that he had a bit of a hard time last year, but he is coming along OK. He notes that there is more homework than last year. After graduating, he would like to find work and then continue on to study auditing at the university. Due to the homework load, he does not come home every weekend.

Otto studies at a cooperatively run high school in Playa Grande. Like Baltazar, he is in the second year of a three-year program. He has completed his preliminary thesis, and will soon work on a practicum (internship). He plans to earn money with his high school degree and would love to continue his studies in auditing. He goes home to SMT every weekend.

Joselito, as a scholarship recipient, is an example of how SMT is helping to spread education in the region. Students from nearby communities (such as Joselito from Dolores) are allowed to attend the Básico in SMT, and they are eligible for a high school scholarship, along with other highly-ranked students from SMT. Joselito spoke to the quality of education in SMT, saying that he attended 7<sup>th</sup> grade in SMT but returned to Dolores for 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Soon his mother saw that he wasn't getting as good an education there. She noted that the teachers in Dolores were young like their students and without much experience, and there wasn't much classroom control. So she transferred him back to SMT. Joselito, who seemed unusually mature and focused, said that "one has to bring one's interest to the work and be dedicated." He concluded by saying, "I'm somewhat bright and I'm glad that I came back to Santa María Tzejá for 9<sup>th</sup> grade."

We thanked the students for sharing with us, wished them the best with their studies, and took photos of them to share with their Needham sponsors.

### Meeting with COCODE (Susan McNeice)

We met with the following members of the Community Development Council (COCODE), representing every committee or group in the village:

- Edwin Canil – President
- Timoteo Ortiz Cos – Secretary/COCODE, representing Improvement Committee
- Juana Pérez Gómez – Vice-President/COCODE, Mayor
- Manuela Tzoc – Widows' Committee
- Cristobalina Quinilla – Health Committee
- Silvano Canil Mendoza – Forestry Association
- Paula Botón – Computer Center
- Benjamin Pérez Gómez – Legal representative/AESMAC
- María Solís – Women's Union
- Pedro Chom – Mayor's office
- Victor Hugo Reyes – Scholarship Committee (CHE)
- Encarnación Ralios Alonso – Cooperative
- Gaspar Quino Guarcas - High School Committee
- Pedro Us – Library Committee
- Ramón Cuz García – Parents' Committee/Basico legal rep.
- Victor Tebalán Tum – Electricity Committee
- Rafael Gonzales Luz – Middle school (Básico) rep.
- Manolo Canil – Secretary, Mayor's office
- Luis Cux Solis – Catholic Church Committee

The meeting began with Brenda presenting the latest draft of the Vision and Mission statement from COCODE and advising that Needham has approved the abbreviated version. Following some discussion, COCODE voted to accept the statement so the version is jointly adopted.

Regarding village projects, Edwin advised that the previous COCODE had identified three priorities – the primary school, an administrative center, and ecotourism. Gaspar commented that he thought that a 'dump' was also one of the priorities. Some of the other projects have been completed and others have been sent to embassies for possible funding. Brenda explained that Needham would like to know their priorities as soon as possible, particularly for the purpose of establishing whether the primary school would be the focus of fundraising for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration in Needham. Edwin said that they would need time to discuss priorities with the new committee and with the community, but they would work to set priorities at their next meeting on March 17th, and then advise us.

Timoteo Ortiz of the Improvement Committee reported that he had done a community consult regarding how Needham funds are distributed, and that his subsequent proposal that funding decisions be made by COCODE (rather than the Improvement Committee) was accepted by the community.

COCODE is currently working to establish rules for community governance, an ‘intellectual piece of work’ that they feel is very important.

The Mayor’s office has coordinated lots of work on the road and they are satisfied with the progress. COCODE members said they would like to have a place for their meetings.

Brenda asked about the Potable Water project, since it was one of the meetings postponed until the August delegation. Pedro Chom reported that the project has once again been delayed. The contractor was hired by INFOM, an organization of the 18 communities needing water, and the work was supposed to be done by February. The engineer reported that due to bad weather, they need a two-month extension to complete the three remaining sections. The work was funded by loans from the Inter-American Development Bank. It is rumored that the company is not paying the workers the money, benefits and vacation that they are due. (Separately I was told that the pipes had to be laid under the Tzejá River and that they had to wait until the dry season in March/April to be able to dig there.)

We noted that COCODE members were meeting intently before we joined them, and they returned to serious deliberations under Edwin’s leadership once our meeting ended. The committee clearly has much that it wants to accomplish.

## **EDUCATION IN THE VILLAGE**

### **Meeting with the Primary** (Barbara Cross)

We met with the following teachers and parents involved with the Primary school:

- Orlando Reyes – President, Parents’ Committee
- Gaspar Quino Guarcas - Parents' Committee
- Marcelino Pérez - director, 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher
- Enma Reyes - 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher
- Isabel Cux Solis - 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher
- Vilma Gutiérrez - 4th grade teacher
- Magdalena Us Chajal - 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher
- Maria Hernández Us - 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher
- Valentin Quinilla - 1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher
- Bertilia Canil Mendoza – preschool teacher

“Buenos Días!” Individual and small clusters of 5-10 year-olds nimbly walking down slick paths or marching lightly on the road with plastic mugs in hand, toting book bags, greeted us each weekday morning. We were off to our family breakfast destinations at 6:45 am, and they were off to the ‘Primaria’, their elementary school. The school began for some primary grade students at 7:30 am.

The Needham delegation met with the Primary school teachers on Monday at 4:00 pm under shade trees to catch the breeze and get some relief from the hot sun. Parents’ Committee members joined the group to stress the value that families placed on educating their children. This public school teacher was delighted to hear that a parents’ group had been formed to support and supplement the government’s funding.

An experienced staff of 9 educators, including 2 who act as principal and assistant principal, explained their student population and school organization. The principal provided student enrollment data. They were bursting at the seams! 231 students in 9 sections representing K- 6 grades were being taught. The girls and boys were equally represented. The staff had decided that 2 sections of 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade would be taught and only one section of grades 2, 3 and 4. Grade 4 was a large class of 43 students equaling the 2 sections of grade 5 combined, but they chose to use limited teaching resources based on the needs of students preparing

for middle school. Their difficulty was in providing the entire curriculum during the 4- 4 ½ hours that they instruct Monday through Friday from January through October.

Changes to the curricula and teaching methods have been implemented as a result of their affiliation with ESEDIR. ESEDIR, with its educational arm PRODESSA, has been working closely with the staff and students. This NGO program works to improve the quality of Guatemalan elementary education through the promotion of the Educational Reform contained in the Peace Accords. It promotes Bilingualism & Interculturality; Gender equality; Human rights & Peace culture; and Logical thinking. Teachers have been provided staff development on content areas, materials and teaching methods. Additionally, the PRODESSA staff has provided books for reading with students before school Monday – Thursday, as well as providing an opportunity for extra report writing tutoring on Fridays. The curriculum has been expanded so that the staff also teach K'iche, Mayan culture and rights.

The success rate of the instruction as measured by exams is that 95% of students pass onto the next grade. Standardized exams are administered in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades. The enrollment rate is 99%, with only one student in the village not presently enrolled. 90% of primary students go on to the middle school. The school does not charge a fee, but parents must provide paper and pencils. The Parents' Committee raises funds for activities and makes certain that all children get notebooks and pens from donated or other sources so as to keep them in school.

The current enrollment and matriculation figures are a huge change from how it was 20 years ago, when many of the current teachers were students. Then enrollment at the Básico level was much lower, with only 3% of students going on to middle school. Committed local educators who speak K'iche have made such a big difference.

On Wednesday morning I got to see this dedicated cadre of professionals in action with some of their students. 2<sup>nd</sup> grader Isaac and I, with Casey O'Mara from Rochester, New York, as our translator, visited the Kindergarten and second-grade classrooms. With the kindergartens we read and acted out Eric Carle's *Can You Do This?* Language was not a barrier as the students guessed the animals from pictures and mimicked our actions. The Kindergarteners also sang and performed finger plays for us that they acted out. We attempted to join in. They were a very lively group and happy to show off their skits.

In the second grade we read *Un Bolsillo Para Corduroy / A Pocket for Corduroy* by Don Freeman. Isaac and I acted out and showed the illustrations of Corduroy's adventures as Casey walked around the classroom reading the Spanish version. All 5 Spanish books that I brought were shown and are now in the Library available for borrowing. Lesson plans were left with the Principal to be used by the teachers. Some students were multi-tasking, completing their math assignment from the whiteboard while also listening to the book. A determined group of learners!

### **Meeting with the Básico** (Barbara Cross)

On Monday morning our first meeting was with the generally young team of educators who are the teachers for the 7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> grade Básico. The group of nearly 20 people also included the new mayor, who is also a counselor/tutor for students and adult women, along with school board officials and parent representatives. Present were:

- Hugo Quinilla - Director of the Básico
- Juan Castro Solis - Parents' Committee
- Rafael González Lux – Parents' Committee
- Ramón Cux García – Legal Representative, Parents' Committee
- Mariano Caal – Parents' Committee
- Juana Pérez Gómez – “Animator”/Counselor (and also the Mayor)
- María Elena Tojín Pérez – teaches math (Gr. 8, 9), home economics (Gr. 9)
- Nazario Ralios – teaches accounting (Gr. 7-9), music (Gr. 7)
- Lucía Guadalupe Toj Botón – teaches natural sciences (Gr. 7) – first-year teacher



- María Caal Solis – Secretary of the Básico, teaches English (Gr. 7-9)
- Pedro Ortiz – teaches Mayan culture (Gr. 9), social studies (Gr. 8), dance (Gr. 8)
- José Díaz Quino – teaches art (Gr. 7-9), dance (Gr. 7), physical education
- Cristina Castro Osorio – teaches social studies (Gr. 7), home economics (Gr. 7)
- Eduardo Manolo Canil – teaches physics (Gr. 9), physical education (Gr. 8)
- Adelina Chom Canil – teaches Math (Gr. 7), theatre (Gr. 7-9)
- José Manuel Tebalán – teaches industrial arts (Gr. 7-9), music (Gr. 8, 9), phys. ed. (Gr. 7)
- Casey O’Mara – teaches English, as volunteer, until mid-June
- Carlos Canil – Member of the Directorate of the Parents’ Board

After introductions, Director Hugo Quinilla presented an agenda to be followed by an open discussion. According to Hugo, change is being embraced and welcomed at the Básico. This is a year for initiating changes that they have discussed for many years, meaning that the parents of students will have a major role in the way the school is organized. They have established a Board with representation from the Básico, the municipality’s education ministry, a legal authority from the Parents’ Committee, and the teachers. Rafael González, who represents the Parents’ Committee, is responsible for overseeing finances and operation of the Básico. He thanked us for our presence and support and emphatically asserted that “children are our future”, so that is their primary mission. Ramón Cux, legal representative of the Parents Association, which oversees the current school operations, has prioritized the most pressing need to be their own school building. Currently the Básico shares the school building with the Primary school and have afternoon classes there from 1-6 p.m. Morning classes occur in the library and computer building.

Enrollment data reported by the Secretary was: 115 total students, with 104 from SMT and 11 from Santa María Dolores. 7<sup>th</sup> grade: 43 students in two sections; 8<sup>th</sup> grade: 38 students in two sections; 9<sup>th</sup> grade: 34 students in one section. Total: 73 boys and 42 girls. The dropout rate is low, and only two of the current group have left. Some students take time off and return the next year due to family or economic reasons. About 50% of students matriculate to high school beyond the village, where they must board.

Plans for this year are to plant fruit trees as part of an environmental emphasis promoted jointly with the Federation of Cooperatives. Last year the environmental effort was to plant lumber trees. They also will provide classes on cooperativism. This includes a history of the Ixcán movement and the development of school models since the 1970’s. Padre Luis has sent materials that they are modifying for young students. This historical information will help guide students in life decisions. Another effort has been in English instruction. Casey O’Mara, a college graduate who majored in Spanish, from Rochester, New York, has been teaching English to all five sections of Básico students since January.

Some of us had the opportunity to visit and join in on some of the classes in the afternoon. I sat in on 3 classrooms briefly and observed the presentation of group projects on Guatemalan products and crops, a chemistry class on metals using the Table of Elements, and an English class on irregular verbs.

On my own, I dropped by the library on Wednesday morning and observed the community- service intern, Roselia Castro Pacheco, and Juana (tutor and Mayor), working with groups of students on assigned research projects. Roselia, who attended high school on a Needham scholarship, is doing her required year of community service, now that she has graduated.

I also trekked into the Computer Center and discovered an accounting class working on Excel sheets at 23 of the 26 computers. I never got to my e-mail but had the opportunity to observe some earnest 8<sup>th</sup> grade students learning basic Excel functions. Education is bursting out all over SMT, demonstrating both that education can occur anywhere and that it takes a village!

### **Meeting with Library Committee** (Sunny Robinson)

We met with the Library Committee, which currently has only three members:

- Pedro Us

- Ventura Bolanos
- Luciano Herrera - treasurer
- Roselia Castro Pacheco, librarian doing year of community service

Last year there were five members, but development of the new library, underway last year, did not move forward to completion, leaving the new building unfinished due to insufficient funds. This was then negatively impacted by part of a retaining wall, just outside the front of the new building, being partially knocked down by heavy rains. Thus the old library is still the one being used. The General Assembly agreed to one more year to see what could be done and called on volunteers to stay with the new library project. The committee hopes to get the rubble cleaned up as soon as the rains are over. They have a request into COCODE for funds to complete the project. They report that the Basque women are not supporting the library at this time, though they were the link to the Q121,000 originally used. The Committee notes with criticism that the original planners apparently did not cost out the whole project carefully enough, as they ran out of money before they were finished.

Pedro Us notes that the library is well used by the primary students in the afternoon and the middle school students in the mornings. They did note that some of the computers are not in good shape and likely ought to be replaced. One falls over and has to be propped up. This one gets used for reports and may get used by the library to catalogue the books. The committee seemed somewhat discouraged, even as they wanted to keep working to find a way to complete the construction of and move into the new building.

(On a later visit to the library I found Roselia deeply engrossed in the Spanish version of “The Silence of the Rooster” (“El Silencio del Gallo”), the book that details the Communities of Populations in Resistance/CPR’s that lived in the mountains for years following the violence. She was studying the section on those who returned to Santa María Tzejá and surrounding communities.)

#### Meeting with AESMAC (Brenda Metzler)

Wednesday afternoon we met with members of AESMAC (Association of Students and Professionals from Santa María Tzjejá and Surrounding Communities), including:

- Rolanda García - Secretary
- Hugo Quinilla Us
- Santiago Botón
- Juan Tomás Pérez, President
- Everilda Canil Botón
- Raúl Castro – visiting from Ohio

My largely represented Needham at this meeting since I had lost my voice entirely. First she shared some of the solidarity actions that Needham has been taking. She gave AESMAC copies that documented our financial support for publication of an appeal for justice for an indigenous artist who was murdered, support for the closure of Goldcorp’s Marlin gold mine in Guatemala, and support for the genocide case against ex-dictator Rios Montt, that has reached the courts through the efforts of the AJR (Association for Justice and Reconciliation) and CALDH (Center for Legal Action on Human Rights). Santiago was really glad to learn that we are doing these things, as he had not known about it. Hugo added that they are glad to meet with us because they know we want to share in their work, and this is an example.

He then went on to give us an update on AESMAC, saying that there have been some very important positive developments that he hoped would not be overshadowed by the recent resignation of some of the group’s members. Eleven members resigned at the latest annual meeting, with all having submitted a virtually identical letter that included various complaints, with the major one being that the leaders are not pursuing the goals for which the organization was formed. AESMAC leadership had already begun a process to drop some of these members because they weren’t contributing or participating in meetings, which made it difficult to achieve a quorum for decision-making.

Although one member expressed sadness that some members' feelings were hurt and some had resigned, the leaders have reflected on the criticism and conclude strongly that the association *is* following appropriate goals. They occasionally consult with Padre Luis or Clark on their decisions. The leaders also feel that some attrition is natural.

A positive development is that, now that the strategic plan has been approved, AESMAC finds itself working with energy and renewed motivation toward its projects and plans. Five committees ('comisiones') have been established, and each has its own plan that is reviewed annually. The committees are:

Local Economic Development – Hugo, Benjamín Pérez, and Santiago are members. They are recommending that a 'savings and credit' program be their first project. The idea is that each member would contribute Q1,000 to create a lending pool so that members can borrow money to purchase equipment for their work. They also would like to promote 'communication in support of development', such as having cable news or a TV magazine for the Ixcán area. Members with particular expertise, such as Juan Tomás in forestry, could share it. Other topics might be culture or education.

- Environment and Climate Change: Juan Tomás serves on this committee.
- Education and History: Rolanda is one of 7 members on this committee.
- Health: Augusta Pérez serves on this committee.
- Institutional Strengthening: Membership consists of the Board of Directors (leadership) of AESMAC. Their focus will be on organizational development.

Juan Tomás then addressed AESMAC's work in the community, noting that members have been very involved for the last four to five years. They have served in such leadership positions as mayor and Coordinator of COCODE (the Community Development Council). Juan Tomás reported that 30 members have given their year of community service to the community, during which they get just a monthly stipend of Q700, whereas their time is valued at Q2,000 per month. This is quite an investment. Also some members are contributing 5% of their salaries, with Q50,000 collected thus far, which has funded 3 high school scholarships. If I understood correctly, some of these scholarships have gone to students outside the community, so other villages are benefiting.

Juan Tomás reported that last year he worked with an ONG on a project to empower women. "We're helping to promote women, and now we have a woman mayor. We're also motivating people around us, working in different places, like little ants, but having an effect in the community and beyond."

Rolanda said that she sees the value in each member's academic preparation and efforts, but that they will be better focused and more secure through the strategic plan. "Maybe we didn't talk about our goals systematically, but we are now, as part of our strategic plan. As leaders, we have confidence that each committee will carry out its goals." She notes that they are getting to know other people and are getting suggestions for supporting other communities, "so that they can have a voice in their future and be masters of their own lives." She also said that AESMAC wants to move in the direction of generating jobs. "We hope we can find our own projects to work on. Right now we're dependent on outside organizations to work for, and we'd like to create our own." Santiago added, "This has held us back a lot. Many people wanted to be at this meeting, but they couldn't get away from their work."

The group is now working to develop by-laws for the community, since as the population gets bigger, things can become more complicated and conflictive. So it is important to put things in order.

Juan Tomás concluded by saying that "we need to dedicate ourselves to the community and not get discouraged. Without financing and the will, nothing will be accomplished. We owe a lot to our community for supporting us. And we thank you for your support and your vision for education. Santa María Tzejá is recognized not just in the region but throughout Guatemala for our dedication to education." He added that he is really anxious to read Clark's new book "Seeds of Freedom".

As we were closing, Ali Durbin, an AESMAC member as well as our translator, returned to the theme of solidarity. She commented that AESMAC's goal of social change and transformation is working. She noted

with satisfaction that Needham's solidarity actions, shared earlier with AESMAC, show that there is mutual support for social change.

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

Wednesday morning we met with the following members of the Scholarship Committee (Comité de Hermanamiento Escolar or CHE):

- Victor Hugo Reyes – President and legal representative
- Francisco Mejía – Vice President
- Felipe Canil Lares – Treasurer
- María Reyes Ramírez – Secretary
- Tomasa Pérez Hernández – Member-at-large #1

Victor Hugo welcomed us, noting that he is new to the committee and is grateful to those who have been doing a good job. The agenda items included a financial report, the prospects for new scholarships, and an update on the new university scholarship.

Felipe Canil as treasurer passed out copies of the CHE accountant's financial report for 2011. We noted with appreciation its clarity and thoroughness. I asked about the recent increases in administrative expenses. We learned that legal expenses are incurred every two years, when the CHE's legalization is renewed. Travel expenses have increased since the treasurer now makes 8 trips/year to the bank, essentially monthly, to deposit scholarship monies into students' accounts. Office expenses have increased due to the added paperwork associated with more frequent trips to the bank, but monthly deposits are viewed as a desirable control on funds for students. Parents are required to sign for each deposit, and Felipe showed us the very professional disbursement/receipts log. I was so impressed that I took a photo. Transportation costs to Cantabal and Cobán have also increased.

We learned that Santos Quinilla, the scholarship accountant who reports to Needham, has asked for an annual salary increase from Q3,600 to Q4,200 (although he will apparently stay on, regardless). We asked if the committee feels he deserves it. The committee has been very happy with his work, so from their point of view, the request is valid. I added that Needham has been very pleased as well. We said we would discuss this and get back to them.

Felipe introduced a discussion of the level of funding each scholarship student receives. The CHE is concerned that it is becoming increasingly hard to maintain the per-student scholarship amounts because the rate of 'quetzales' to the dollar has fallen from Q8.2 in 2009 to Q7.75 in 2011. Recently the committee has been using time deposits (CD's) on the funds we send down in July to earn interest. It is using this interest to supplement the students' scholarships, but the budgeted amount per student for 2012 is still below the 2011 actual amount by Q250 (Q9600 versus Q9850). So the committee is requesting that Needham send down the scholarship funds by June of each year in order to earn more interest. We said that we would discuss this request back in Needham.

Mi asked about the security of their bank. The committee said it recently switched its funds to Banrural, thinking that it is more secure. We asked if the CHE has to pay taxes. As a non-profit, they do not, but there are bank fees associated with earning interest. I asked about the paperwork hassle that occurred with the wire transfer last August, resulting in considerable delay in receiving the funds. The committee said that, due to concerns over money laundering, banks are requiring more documentation. However, they also feel that banks like to delay clearing the funds in order to earn more interest for themselves. Apparently wire transfers in excess of \$6,000 undergo more scrutiny.

Victor Hugo then mentioned that the committee is looking to expand its contacts in search of more scholarships. He says that, although personally it pains him to have to continue to ask for scholarship funds, it is a priority since 'intellectual development is the foundation for moving ahead.' He commented that only about 12% of students in SMT are able to continue on to high school. He also said that competition is

increasing, so some level of university education is often needed as well. In response to a question from Scott, Felipe said that there are some government-funded scholarships, but they are very hard to get. The committee asked for any contact information we might be able to provide, beyond the occasional non-Needham scholarships coming in from Spain, Beatriz Manz and a Costa Rican Foundation.

We asked whether the Needham-funded university scholarship had been awarded yet. Francisco reported that they had asked AESMAC and Randall Shea for advice in awarding this scholarship, and they had posted signs around the community. They only had one candidate for it this year, so it was awarded to Rosaura Canil Hernández, who wants to be a high school teacher. She had studied her first year at university (2011) on the remainder of her high school scholarship from Needham, passing all eleven courses, although she struggled with three hard courses. She takes 5 courses per semester, but took an extra one in the November/December vacation period, since most students do that. Her father, Felipe, gave us her grades to deliver to her Needham sponsor.

We learned that one Needham-sponsored scholarship student (Sergio Ralios Montejo), whose education had gotten sidetracked a few years ago, was 'encouraged' by the CHE to finish his high school degree last year and managed to do so. Coincidentally Sergio is the student that my son Greg had sponsored, so that was wonderful news. Sergio is back in the village and hopes to do his year of community service. And treasurer Felipe went out of his way to not only get me a copy of Sergio's grades and a letter for Greg, but also arranged for us to meet and get a photo.

I asked about one student whose academic progress had been of concern to his Needham sponsor. We learned that the student had struggled with several courses but managed to pass all his courses by the end of his first year. Another student had some low grades but managed to graduate last year. We have learned that there is no such thing as grade inflation in Guatemala, and in fact grading seems to verge on the punitive at times. Consequently, anything above 60 is a passing grade, although scholarship students are required to maintain a 75 average.

We asked the committee to send us photos of the 2011 Needham-sponsored high school graduates so that we could share them with our church in April to celebrate their graduation.

### **Interviews on Education** (Mi Herzog)

I had the pleasure of interviewing about 10 high school and university graduates regarding their educational experience, their thoughts on education, and their hopes for the education of their children. The plan is to use videotaped interviews to bring a sense of the village to the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of our partnership. We really wanted to hear the peoples' thoughts, because education will be the focus of our celebration in October.

We were fortunate to have Judy Jackson, a documentary filmmaker from Canada, join our delegation and volunteer her expertise in this endeavor. She brought her equipment, and found a willing assistant in Santiago Botón, a villager who does TV reports throughout the Ixcán for a national TV station. (Judy had interviewed Padre Luis in exile in the 1980's for a documentary, knew of the destruction of the village, and was thrilled to see it rebuilt and progressing well. She was so impressed with what she saw that she is planning another trip to the village in spring/summer.)

Many of the women and men we interviewed, now in their 30's, had taken refuge in Southern Mexico during the violence. They had started their educations there and then resumed their studies in Guatemala when their families returned in 1994. Most had gone on to attend high school, supported by funds from the Needham Congregational Church and other donors. Some had graduated from university, and one is still at university, teaching and studying.

Every person I interviewed was thoughtful and articulate. They all expressed how grateful they were to receive an education, although sometimes it caused family dissention, as the sons wanted to go away to the city and not follow the traditional role of caring for their aging parents.

Each person I interviewed said their level of education would help them ensure the education of their own children.

A most compelling assessment was done by Santiago, who said regarding the Needham church and other donors, “You did more than support us financially—you **believed** in us. No one had done that before.”

Now, students who have received their educations are teaching the next generation. Many teach in SMT and neighboring villages as part of their year of community service after receiving scholarship support for their studies. And Santa María provides full-time teachers to many villages in the Ixcán.

### **Mayan New Year Ceremony** (Mi Herzog)

One of the highlights of our visit, and something most of us had never seen before, was the celebration of the Mayan New Year.

Ancient Mayas made astounding discoveries in astronomy, architecture, and mathematics, and their 365-day calendar is a reflection of that. 2012 is a particularly significant new year in the Mayan calendar, as some people believe transformative events will occur on December 21, 2012.

This date is regarded as the end-date of a 5,125-year-long cycle in the Mesoamerican calendar. A New Age interpretation of this transition is that this date marks the start of time in which Earth and its inhabitants may undergo a positive physical or spiritual transformation, and that 2012 may mark the beginning of a new era.

The New Year ceremony was conducted for Middle School students and for the village as a whole by a Mayan spiritual guide who gave descriptions of the symbolism as he fanned the flames of the fire he built, fueled by candles of varying colors. The spiritual guide rubbed oils on the foreheads of several people, teachers were asked to blow into the fire four times, and then everyone from elders to middle school teachers and students danced around the fire. There was a special blessing for Juana Pérez, the first woman mayor of Santa María Tzejá.

The traditional Maya world-view is an elaborate set of understandings and philosophies about the world. Some of the Mayan symbols include:

1. East - red - color of sunrise, vitality, childhood - blood - red corn - the Native American people
2. West - purple / black - sunset, silence, rest and reflection, resistance to oppression, healing - hair - black (also called blue) corn - people of African descent
3. North - white - wind, cold, stars, thought - bone - white corn - people of Europe
4. South - yellow - plants and animals, fertility, harvest - skin - yellow corn - people of Asia
5. Center - blue and green – God is the Heart of the Sky, Heart of the earth, the center and essence of everything

### **Meeting with the Survivors** (Sunny Robinson)

While the meetings with the Survivors Group can often be painful, especially for the survivors themselves, this year there was a quiet, but noticeable air of calm hope that emanated from the group as they shared their current perspectives. The meeting was also attended by a larger number of people than in recent years. They opened the meeting by deciding that there was no problem with people taking notes because everything was now public and being worked on in the legal realm!

The survivors noted that they have been working with the Association for Justice and Reconciliation (AJR) and that they had started to work on the legal case in 2000-2001 when the party of Rios Montt, the FRG, was in power and Alfonso Portillo was president. At that time they were hearing the threats that if they kept working in this way the same thing (the violence) could happen to their families again. But they went ahead with their work on the case, though there was not much movement until CALDH – the Center for Legal Action in Human Rights - helped to move things forward. The Center for International Legal Justice has also helped.

The survivors likened the case to a wide river that they have to cross; they've started and now have to get to the other side, even though they do not know what that other side is. They often wondered, "Will we make it across and not get stranded in the middle?" Since there have now been arrests and detentions of key generals and Rios Montt, they now finally believe that they may make it to the other side. A number of the survivors traveled to Guatemala City and were present outside the courthouse during the January 26<sup>th</sup> proceedings, when charges were being brought against Rios Montt. They said they could hardly believe that the person who had ordered the massacres was now in front of the judge. And they were joyful when the judge determined that he should be charged with genocide. They reminded us that Maya spiritual beliefs emphasize keeping hope, and they see 2012 as a chance for the resurrection of all that was lost and the possible beginning of a new era.

They noted that there are those, including some in the media, who say the survivors are seeking vengeance. In response they emphasize they are not; rather they are seeking justice. They feel they must do this for their children, so that such events are never repeated in the future. They note that had people merely wanted revenge, they could have used violence rather than legal means against those responsible. But they emphasized that this is not what they are about, nor is this the way to do things. They wanted and remain committed to being a part of the legal case. They noted that at times they were and are afraid, and they were afraid there were not enough of them. They also worried, "Would there be enough evidence?" Now that Rios Montt has been charged with genocide, they are encouraged. They noted how hard it had been to tell their stories as survivors, and now they feel they have renewed energy to tell these stories so that their children and others know from where they have come. People have remained afraid; but they are going forward. Person after person emphasized that we must help the world understand that they are not seeking revenge, but justice.

Some of the survivors are participating in the case for the first time: "now it's public!" Many of them still worry that "the justice system will not be able to stand strong for us." But they feel it a very important moment; and they will go forward.

They note that it continues to be a large struggle to be able to participate as they want, such as attending the next anticipated court hearings in Guatemala City. The first will be in April, when key evidence is presented. The second will be the public trial phase, which will likely be in the fall or later. So they asked whether we might be able to help them secure the funds to enable 15-20 survivors to go each of these times. Some of the participants might be from other villages that have joined in bringing the case. Although we made no promises, we suggested they submit a detailed proposal for us to take back with us, which they did. Other Guatemalan groups have assisted survivors in this way, but the AJR has no more funds for travel support. In the end the survivors know it is the judge who will decide Rios Montt's guilt and whether he will go to jail. But they request our help in order to attend and support the process.

The group knows that many obstacles will put be placed in the path of the prosecution. They note that Rios Montt defends himself by insisting that he was not the person who ordered the massacres, that he never gave these orders, that it was the generals who did so, and that they are now in jail.

One woman noted that she and another woman from another community have been chosen to serve on the Women's Committee of the AJR and will travel to get training so that they can come back and educate other women about what is occurring. Although it makes the woman nervous to travel to this training, she wants to do it. She also noted that the new government makes her nervous.

It was notable that one male survivor took the opportunity to observe that, in the early years after the violence, women couldn't express themselves about their experience without being overcome with emotion. "What came out was only tears. But I admire the women who attended trainings, since they have learned to express themselves and have contributed a lot." This same survivor, citing President Clinton apology for the CIA's participation in the 1954 coup in Guatemala, asked us to carry back a message for U.S. youth to "be aware of the attitude of your government toward other countries." And the survivors again asked us to carry back the word that *it is justice they are seeking, not revenge.*

The group thanked us for our solidarity through this long process, and one woman wanted to send special greetings to former delegation leader Tina since “she’s always struggled along with us.” Brenda responded by saying that we have always admired the courage and determination of the survivors, and we congratulate them on having achieved a remarkable step toward justice for all of those victimized by the violence.

### **Meeting with the Women’s Union** (Brenda Metzler)

We met with the following representatives of the Women’s Union:

- María Solís – President
- María Pérez Ralios – Vice President
- Cecilia Quinilla – Secretary
- María Chajal Larios – Treasurer
- Juana Gómez – Member-at-Large #1
- Cecilia Imul – Member-at-Large #2

María Chajal brought us up to date on the women’s activities. The cattle project, funded some years ago by the Blossom Fund, continues strong, with many women now having received their third calf. When a calf is born, the woman raises it until it is 8 months old and then turns it over to the woman who is at the top of the rotation list. Some women keep the cows for milk, while others sell them to help pay for their children’s schooling. We learned that a big bull would fetch Q3000, a cow Q2500, and a younger 1.5 year-old cow Q1500. To get a good price the cow has to be at least 2.5 or 3 years old. Milk cows are kept on the family’s house lot (‘lote’), and beef cattle are kept on the ‘parcelas’.

Sunny asked lots of good questions, including “How many cows would it be good for each family to have?” María replied that a few families have 20, but a good number would be 10. She said that cows don’t bring in a monthly income, but they are good for a one-time purpose or emergency. Each woman also works at one of the two corn-grinding mills, which they said were donated to them during the ‘return’ from Mexico.

The women told us about the proposal they had submitted for new water basins (‘pilas’). Since it is a very large proposal, it did not receive funding through the Improvement Committee. We learned that the current ‘pilas’ are about 14 years old, so many are cracked and leak water. If the women run out of water, they have to carry it up from the river, which they say is dirtier than in the past since there are more people.

When we asked about the microlending project, we learned that the loans had just recently been repaid and loaned out again. The women also told us that a vote had been taken by all the members of the Women’s Union under last year’s leadership to ‘use interest’ from the microlending funds to purchase a large stainless steel pot (for boiling water) for each of its 99 members. This effectively reduced the microlending fund from Q30,000 to Q12,000. The women seemed to accept that their decision resulted in fewer loans being available (12 one-year loans of Q1000 each @10% interest). Although we had seen and admired these huge, high-quality pots that allow each woman to have access to a 2-day supply of boiled water, we had to explain that this was not the intent of the microlending fund.

As we discussed this with the women, it became clear that they did not understand that there were restrictions on these funds. They lacked a clear understanding of how microlending works, so Mi did a wonderful job of explaining the concept, and the women definitely ‘got it’. This was evident when one woman likened their decision (to buy the pots) to cutting off the branches of a tree, thus limiting the tree’s growth and ability to produce fruit. We also suggested there should be a reference document on file which established and explains the microlending fund, and added that it is important that each new leadership group briefs the new one on policies, etc.

The women were dismayed and concerned to learn that the pot purchase was not an appropriate use of the funds, and as they pondered what to do, they ultimately offered to require that each woman pay back the cost of her pot over time. Privately we thought that this would be a difficult and complicated endeavor, but we will advise the donor and ask for his feedback. In any event, some further education seems to be in order,



and perhaps the August delegation could invite the membership of the Women's Union to a general discussion of microlending, so that all would understand the concept, and the women could then share their experiences with the loans.

We felt good that, even though the discussion was a little uncomfortable at times, we were able to share our concerns openly, the women responded with concern and interest in correcting their error, and together we looked forward with new understanding. As the meeting ended, María Chajal thanked us for the open discussion and summed up our mutual feeling by observing: "This is what 'solidarity' is all about -- being able to work together to solve problems or differences."

### **Meeting with the Widows** (Sunny Robinson)

The Widows' group met on Thursday morning. Barbara Cross, Brenda Metzler, Sunny Robinson and Heather Dean (Interpreting) were present from the Needham delegation. The widows present were:

- Rosa García – President
- Marta Castro
- Manuela Tzoc
- Juana Juárez
- Petrona Hernández
- Aurelia Ixcoy
- Cristobalina Quinilla - Secretary
- María Solís – Secretary

Much of the conversation in the discussion focused on how the women/widows were doing economically, since they have to manage alone. Rosa García indicated her interest in sharing some of her experiences, saying she had planted cardamom rootstock 3 years ago and, as of 9 months ago, it was ready and producing. She reported that she is always thinking toward the future and, as she gets older, recognizes that she hasn't many options. She has also planted about 70 lemon trees on her 'lote' (house lot), made possible by a grant that she received. This year she earned about Q300 for the harvest of each tree, which is pretty good, but not necessarily sufficient (economically).

Marta Castro reported she also had planted cardamom, some on her 'parcela' and some on her 'lote'. Since she had planted bigger plants, they were ready in two years. She reported that she has to weed really often. She has coffee from planting 6 years ago that sells for about Q300-400 per 100 lbs. She picks and dries it herself.

María Solís reported she has also planted cardamom and offered to take us to her 'parcela' on a future visit, but points out it is far away -- a muddy, 30-minute walk. She reported she also gets a little income from corn, but has to get someone, such as her son, to help her with the heavy work.

Cristobalina Quinilla told us that buyers come to SMT to buy the cardamom, which last year sold for about Q10/lb. but this year is only selling for Q2/lb. She pointed out that most of the widows grow corn, beans and cardamom. Some used to have to buy their corn, but now they have more stored. They seem to be more organized than before. Speaking for Juana Juárez, Rosa said that Juana used funds from Needham to plant two 'cuerdas' (100 square meters) of corn and two of cardamom. Her son lives with her and helps with the cardamom.

We asked the women if they had other dreams/thoughts for other possibilities. Rosa noted she would like to have more than one crop as her income source and she has been thinking about coffee or 'achiote' (annatto), which is used in making tamales and brings Q12/lb. María says she also is interested in the possibilities of coffee, but noted it takes two days of clearing just to get the plot ready for planting. Coffee brings a higher price (Q25/lb.) in the highlands, since prices are governed by supply and demand. For example coffee buyers come to SMT but only pay Q5/lb. Rosa said that some women are also thinking of growing cacao and

papaya. She noted the importance of moving beyond just having grants and then spending all the proceeds, because this leaves you with nothing for the future.

Brenda asked the widows' about their participation in the general assembly in SMT. Rosa observed that they are better heard now than when they first came back from Mexico. At that time they/their needs were not heard, partly because they didn't know how to speak up and men didn't know how to listen. She also noted that women in SMT are better heard than women in some other communities. Rosa said, 'Here men take corn to the corn grinder, along with the women. Men here are more willing to help. People in our community work more in solidarity with each other.' Marta added, "I tell my son that he has two hands just like I do, and he can do the same work."

Marta countered by saying that women continue to experience abuse or discrimination. This led to a good sharing about areas in which there are still problems in the relationship between men and women, notably domestic violence and alcohol consumption. A number of women note that those who suffer domestic violence are often too afraid to say anything. Some have tried to not have alcohol sold in the village, noting that incidents of domestic violence often increase with excessive alcohol consumption, and it also contributes to economic problems, since the money all goes to drink rather than supporting the family or helping the children get educations.

They mentioned one village where some families were forced to leave the community because they were selling alcohol, which was forbidden by village rules. Some noted that currently with electricity, more 'tiendas' (stores) have refrigerators, so now there is more interest in selling cold drinks, including alcohol. So some people oppose enforcement of rules prohibiting alcohol. The women noted with alarm that more public drinking has led to more public fighting. A number of the women expressed their concerns for the youth and wonder about evening curfews for youth. They talked about the importance of both fathers and sons not drinking. In fact one of the widows present said she tells her son not to drink, "because that's why your father died." Another woman said her son was killed due to alcohol consumption. With fewer men in the family, it means that others in the family have to do their work and can't go to school. The woman who had shared that alcohol was the reason for her husband's death said she could do nothing about it because the seller denied selling the alcohol. However, according to one of the widows, in neighboring Dolores when someone drowned due to alcohol consumption, the seller was forced to provide land for the widow to farm

Despite the heaviness and complexity of the issues addressed, the meeting ended with a strong sense of solidarity that arose from the widows sharing the struggles that they face in a village setting and our engagement and understanding as fellow women.

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

We gathered in the church to meet with the following members of the Church Committee:

- María Hernández – Secretary/Church Board, Member/Construction Committee of Church
- Marta Castro Tol – Catechist, Member/Construction Committee
- Magdalena Us Chajal – Member-at-Large/Church Board
- Luis Cux Solis – President/Church Board
- Angel Lux González – Parish representative to SMT, Dolores, and San José la 20
- Nazario Ralios – Treasurer, Church Board
- Jerónimo Canil – Catechist, Member/Construction Committee
- Pedro Us

María Hernández warmly welcomed the delegation, saying how special our visit is to them. The group brought us up to date on some of their activities. The Church Board, that coordinates the activities of the church, works to get funding for church needs, sometimes asking for special offerings, for everything from older or sick church members' needs to new sound equipment. Magdalena said that now that they have a musical group and better sound equipment, church attendance has increased. Music especially helps to draw

young people in, and she hopes this will lead them on a Christian path and deter them from making bad choices.

Regarding the bench (pew) project, Jerónimo reported that 51 benches have been finished, and only 8 more need to be done. They have been combining Needham funds with donations from church members to continue this project. Each family has been asked to contribute Q72 (about \$10) over two years to complete the project. The goal is to have enough seating, even for large celebrations. I said I was happy to see that they are using the wood planks from the old church benches to make some of the new benches, since I had fond memories of entire delegations sleeping on those benches before the guesthouse was built. Jerónimo is especially thankful for the bench project, since it has provided carpentry work for his two sons who are deaf and mute. The next church project will be to buy paint for painting the church interior.

Pedro commented on what is happening at the national level, noting there are some changes afoot with Guatemala's new president in power. Apparently some imports from Mexico have been suspended, so it is harder to get goods from Mexico. And although there is a new law that guns must be registered, there are many weapons in the country and lots of people have them. Pedro observed that the new president is increasing jobs in the military sector. He asks God to help those who are governing to understand that they need to help the people they are elected to serve.

Jerónimo mentioned the community's commemoration of the violence, saying that it is important that it be held each year so that what happened is not forgotten.

Pedro thanked Needham for all the activities it coordinates to fundraise for the community. María added, "We know you do a lot of work for the partnership, and we thank you so much. May God bless and illuminate each one of you, and especially Tina, who has given a lot to support this community. May God give her longer life." María also hopes our solidarity continues because it 'helps us toward a life of peace, justice, and joy. It has motivated us that you support us morally and economically. Guatemala is a place of such violence, but we have hope, and your solidarity helps to keep us moving forward."

Angel, who recently returned to the community after a number of years away, has been struck by the number of young people who have been able to further their education. "We have engineers, an architect, and even a journalist." He thanked Needham for 'putting in their 'grano de arena' (grain of sand). I said that Needham is honored to be in solidarity with Santa María Tzejá and gratified at what the community and many individuals in it have been able to achieve, largely through their own determination and efforts.

## **HEALTH IN THE VILLAGE**

### **Meeting with the Health Promoters and Health Committee** (Sunny Robinson)

Monday we met with the Health Committee. Present were:

- Juana Teresa García Hernández – Pharmacy
- Catarina Tomás - Treasurer
- Nicolás Vásquez – representing daughter, who is member of the Health Committee
- Rigoberto Pacheco - Secretary
- Martina Naz Morales – Member-at- Large
- Cristobalina Quinilla, President
- Pedro Chom Tum - Health Facilitator, also on Mayor's committee

Following some discussion that resolved a small expense discrepancy, the committee noted that funds were used to cover an emergency health trip on January 16<sup>th</sup>. Then they gave an update on overall health in the village. The village has 130 children under the age of 5, for whom the goal is to keep them healthy. This involves working on vaccinations each month; weighing the children each month to assure there are no undernourished children; and providing vitamin A, folic acid, iron and multi-vitamins and, every two months, anti-parasitic meds. The Committee believes most mothers are actively involved with their

children's health, though there are some who reject vaccinations, for example, saying their kids don't like needles, or that they don't believe in vaccinations. The health promoters do go looking for the children if they aren't brought to the clinic on schedule and work to try to get them to accept vaccinations. They also maintain a 'Path of Life' graph to chart each child's development.

The Committee reported that in 2011 there were four deaths in the village in 2011, two of which were of advanced age and none were children. Very sadly in early 2012 a 21-year-old, Natalia Ralios, died after having given birth 5 months earlier. Apparently an infection that had been brewing became systemic, and by the time they got her to the hospital in Cobán, she could not be saved.

The most common illnesses in the village continue to be: pneumonia, GI illnesses, tonsillitis, parasites, conjunctivitis, and urinary infections. They have had suspected cases of Dengue fever, but no cases of malaria in 2011.

Campaigns have been conducted to: end standing water (i.e. reduce mosquito breeding grounds); keep the grass cut back away from houses, again to decrease mosquito breeding; attempt to keep animals moved back from near or inside houses; and check on adequacy of the latrines and maintenance.

As a general overview, the committee noted that the incidence of problems tends to decrease the more they can get more people to participate, and as a committee they are trying to provide more health talks. Sometimes they go door to door, and they think repeat visits pay off, as people accept them more on repeat visits. They believe that use of the health post has improved, but some people still don't come to the clinic soon enough, so assisting them then becomes harder because they are already sicker. The committee noted that some people still want antibiotics all the time, even for illnesses when they aren't indicated. They believe that efforts to clean up the village have helped. They think they have less illness than the neighboring community of Dolores, for example, which still has more contamination and more animals moving around loose.

The committee noted the rather steady, but limited, birth rates of 26 in 2007, 23 in 2008, 25 in 2009, 25 in 2010, 26 in 2011, but already 5 in 2012. They note that Dolores, again for comparison, has an average of 50-60 births a year with a relatively similar population base. Family planning is offered in SMT via natural methods, injections, pills, condoms, and referrals to a clinic in Cantabal for IUD insertion. The government educator provides talks on family planning.

We then asked a question as to whether they had noted any changes in environment, human or animal health that they might associate with potential climate change. One 'campesino' (farmer) believed the climate was hotter and that there seemed to be a new insect, something in the flea family, he would say, that attacked in the fields, biting in such large numbers that people were driven frantic with itching and annoyance; others nodded in agreement. The bites make it hard to sleep at night as they itch so intensely. They have been talking among themselves about global warming and know to work to preserve the trees and to try to keep trees around their houses to help keep the houses cooler. They think people are more aware of trying to stay out of the hot sun and to avoid getting sunburn.

We learned that the government-supported nurse is still only present part-time and even then gets called away for meetings, often coming on Monday and leaving by Thursday and sometimes earlier.

One financial concern was noted. After spending lots of time writing reports, they then have to deliver them to the government or go to get supplies when there is no money allocated for travel. They also noted that the nurse in the schools is only getting paid every three months.

Regarding eye health it was noted that 41 cataract surgeries and 10 eye surgeries of another kind had been performed, although I'm not sure over what time period.

Just before the meeting ended, we talked briefly of the kinds of advantages that technologies such as Skype could bring to the quality of consultations available at the Health Post.

### **Eye Care in the Village: The Reality of Realities** (Scott Pike)

Having just completed my 26<sup>th</sup> trip to Guatemala, I've come to realize that I live in two realities. In years and visits past I remember thinking and saying to people on my return trip, "I'm going back to the real world." That was condescending to my friends in Ixcán, Guatemala.

The first day of this trip I took a public bus to the city of Cobán where Felipe, our eye health promoter (EHP) for Enfoque Ixcán, met me. We had hoped to do some shopping for storage containers for our glasses inventory at our new "office" space in Cantabal. We were unable to find in Cobán what every Office Depot has in abundance, even though we had help from our wonderful Cobán friends, Hoang and Gustavo. Shopping is different here.

The next day we left for Cantabal with my 2 overstuffed bags of eyeglasses, eye drops and testing supplies. This leg of the trip was in a 10-passenger van, re-rigged to hold 20 Guatemalans with baggage on the roof. In spite of 15 new miles of pavement, unseasonable rains kept us on the road for 4 ½ hours. We completed the 96-mile journey only once having to get out and pull the van up a muddy rain-slicked hill with a rope. Felipe told me last fall, that when he took a group of 10 patients to the eye clinic near Cobán for surgeries, the van was so crowded he had to ride on the roof with the luggage. Public transportation is different here.

Arnulfo, our other EHP, met us in Cantabal (Ixcán) and we spent the next 1½ days unpacking and arranging the new inventory items in the "office." (The storage containers would have to wait until I could shop in Guatemala City). We also continued our ongoing eye health care training. I taught them how and when to use a new blood pressure screener and a glucometer, used to screen blood sugar levels, and we examined a couple of patients so I could see how patient flow works at the "office." Before you have too long to form a view of our new office in your mind, you should know this is an 11' x 10' cinderblock room furnished with a desk, chair and a bed (supply your own mattress). Most of the exams are conducted outside under an open roof. Office space is different here.

When the rain had stopped, we went to the local Honda Agency to buy Arnulfo a motorcycle. This is how the EHP's get around to the 175 villages in the Ixcán region from their own villages of Santa María Tzejá and Mayalán. Mud, dirt and rocks rule the roads of Ixcán. In all of the Ixcán there is only a ¼ mile section of pavement, new this year. With both promoters now on bikes, we have increased our range of travel and access to eye care. Commuting is different here.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> day I retraced my path to Guatemala City and spent 2 days visiting the offices of the doctors we refer our eye surgery patients to, picking up stationery supplies from CEGMOSA, the company which does our printing, shopping at Office Depot and re-connecting with the Rotary Club which supports our in-country travels when the Pacific University students have their mission trip with Enfoque Ixcán in August. These errands were made easier, even possible, with the help of Rolando Cabrera, a Guatemalan optometrist who has become an indispensable partner to Enfoque Ixcán. He is my taxi, translator/interpreter, money changer, appointment manager, and professional and personal friend. Rolando makes my Guatemalan reality easier.

For the second half of the trip I joined my friends from Needham, Massachusetts. They are beginning their 25<sup>th</sup> year of partnership with the village of Santa María Tzejá, and this was my 16<sup>th</sup> time joining their February delegation. Their friendship and solidarity with the village has provided much needed opportunities in education and health care, and general community improvements, helping to make Santa María a model community in the Ixcán. Enfoque Ixcán had its start in Santa María with the help of these Needham delegations.

Pedro, our initial EHP, Felipe, Arnulfo and I met one day at the "office" to see patients. Each of the 10 patients we examined became a training exercise for the EHPs, as we continued their education in eye care. On other days in Santa María we saw additional patients and dispensed and prescribed several pairs of glasses, and artificial tears.

A couple of our days were cut short. Arnulfo is the president of his village cooperative and had to attend to other business. Felipe had to help one of his cows deliver a new calf and then provide veterinary aid to the cow. Their lives, like ours, include many other responsibilities. But unlike ours, their lives are carried out in

jungle heat and humidity without air conditioning, paved roads, running water or modern sanitation. Their reality is just as real as mine here in the U.S., and I will never again say, "I'm going back to the real world." Reality in the Ixcán grabs me from every direction possible, making me totally aware of where I am in the world and how I interact with nature and other people. I hope to keep that awareness with me when I return to my home reality.

### **Meeting Our Partner Family** (Barbara Cross)

Our first letter was dated January 1, 1995. We had sent it from Needham, introducing our family to a new partner family in Santa María Tzejá. All we knew of them was from a few pictures and notes that Clark Taylor had written in July, 1994. They were Emeliano Pérez Marroquin and Adela Reyes and they had 4 children living with them; Susana, Ofelia, María and Rolando. The notes said that they had lived in the forest for over 12 years after escaping when the army destroyed the village in February 1982.

Preparing for my first visit to SMT, I re-read the 17-year pile of correspondence that had built up between us. I revisited our letters telling of Christmases, snow, family celebrations and summer camping vacations. Their letters spoke of crops, children and grandchildren, illnesses, departures to the north and finally securing their land ownership. Much had happened during these 17 years. Emeliano's and Adela's letters, no matter the writer, as they both were both illiterate, were full of warmth, faith, blessings and inquiries as to when we were coming.

And now sitting in the plastic chair by our guesthouse door was Adela with Josefina, her granddaughter. I struggled without an interpreter to introduce myself in Spanish as Barbara Cross. I showed her the pictures I had of her. Adela recognized herself and pointed out Ofelia to Josefina, now about the age that Ofelia had been in the photo. We embraced and the ice was broken!

Soon we were walking on the road with Brenda, Linda, Bev and Isaac -- all members of our delegation. We followed Josefina and Adela up the steep, slippery path to their house on the hill. In sharp contrast to their life of carrying water and wood to their homes up this foot trail, stood a recently erected cell phone tower, linking the village residents and greater world.

Emeliano and Rolando greeted us heartily as we ceremoniously rinsed our hands for lunch. We were served a flavorful chicken vegetable soup with tortillas piled high under a cloth in the center of our table. They all joined us for conversation and inquired about my family and our journey. Emeliano asked, "Where is Juan?" I reported that John was home taking care of the dog. Emeliano laughed. He proudly pointed out his female dog that he had bought as a good hunting dog. She was a well-fed, tri-color sport dog who had already provided him with a litter of pups, of which he had kept one and sold the others.

I shared pictures of my family, our old Needham home and our new village of St. George, Maine. They were transfixed by the pictures of snow and the frozen ocean cove where we now live. They wanted copies of the 17-year old photos that I had shown Adela to make our connection. They had returned to Santa María Tzejá just weeks before the picture had been taken. I promised I would send copies of the old and new photos we took of their family on that day.

They recounted for us how they had survived in the forest for 12 years avoiding the Army. They stayed for only short periods (5-15 days) of time in most places and moved around a great deal when the army discovered them. Only once did they go to a camp in Mexico for a short time. One night in 1985, there was very severe shelling and they lost 2 of their children, a son and a daughter, when they scattered. Both children survived their injuries and blessedly resurfaced in the 1990's, after the war ended. He was in Antigua and she was in Huehuetanango. They were both married and parents by then. The son now lives in SMT and the daughter comes to SMT at Christmas and Easter. María and Susana live nearby with their families. Ofelia lives in the U. S. with her husband and 2 young children. Ofelia's oldest 10-year-old daughter Josefina lives with them. They have not seen Ofelia in more than 5 years. They hope we can send word to her that they are all well. Rolando works on their parcela where they, combined with other family members, have 24 head of cattle. They butcher the steer themselves and sell meat for a profit. What they

don't sell goes into the refrigerator for their consumption. Both father and son like to hunt deer, which they learned while living in the forest. Josefina sat on a chair covered with a deerskin from one successful hunt.

As we readied to leave, Emeliano asked, "When will Juan come?" I replied, "Juan will come when the road is paved to the village. "That will be at the Second Coming then," Emeliano joked. Based on the changes that are occurring in the country, it may be just a few years away.

### **Home Visits and Meals with Families** (Brenda Metzler)

Visits and meals with families in the village are always a highlight of each day, as the delegation eats with a different family for virtually every meal. This allows us to meet with many partner families and bring back information to share with their Needham families. At each meal we give the SMT host family a sheet with biographical information in Spanish on each of the delegation members. The following is a sampling of the many visits we enjoyed with families.

#### **Tomás Hernández and María de León (Pike)**

They were among the original settlers of the village, coming here from Quiché with Padre Luis when there was 'nothing here'. Most of the other villagers are also from Quiché originally. The wealthy people had land on the coast, and Tomás didn't want to work for them on their cane and coffee plantations, so when he was able to get land here, he came. When they first arrived, the Capón River prevented them from getting across, so they had to build a hammock bridge. They have a cocoa tree, and María makes chocolate from it, after cracking open the seeds and drying them on a stone. They also grow lemons, limes, and oranges. After the violence, they were in Mexico for 12 years, from 1982-1994. All of their children are currently in SMT. Son Rogelio, age 29, is finishing his animal husbandry/vet tech degree, and his wife Paula Botón works in Cantabal.

#### **Domingo Pastor and María Pop (Ruetenik)**

We had several meals at the house of Justo Pastor, Domingo's father (much of the extended family lives in close proximity). Domingo is a teacher in Saacte #1, which is 75 km from SMT. He stays there during the week and comes home on weekends. He speaks K'iche' but has learned Kekchi so that he can teach young children (1<sup>st</sup> grade). His wife María is from another community and is Kekchi, but she now wears the traditional SMT clothing. She and Domingo have 3 children: Johnny (age 8), Jennifer (age 6), and Juan (age 3). All 3 kids are very smart and social. We sang songs and saw their school notebooks. Johnny loves to talk and told us about the plots of several movies, including *Bambi* and *Tom and Jerry*.

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

We had breakfast with this family. The grandfather was from Joyabac, which was the hometown of many of SMT's original settlers. Juan was away, bringing corn back from the 'parcela' (farming land). Son Saulo is farming the 'parcela' that belonged to his grandmother, who died in 2012 at age 59. Son Pedro farms another 'parcela' with his dad. Son Jamie, is taking time off from school this year, but he will be in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Daughter Adelaida is in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, and Catarina is in 1<sup>st</sup> grade. One of the most interesting things we learned is that their youngest daughter, María Isabel, was named after the two daughters in their Needham partner-family! This family agreed to have their picture taken only if we promised to send them copies (as we are supposed to).

#### **Andrés Juárez and Edna Elizabeth Castro (Weitzel)**

We had dinner with this family. Edna Elizabeth is the daughter of José Quixán and Petronila Solis. Andrés is one of 8 children and all of them live in SMT. He works with his father on his father's 'parcela' (farmlands), which has to feed four families. They grow rice, beans, corn, cardamom, bananas, and pineapples. They don't have any cows. The 'parcela' is near Santo Tomás, about an hour's walk away. Some coffee is grown in the area, but few people grow enough to sell. Andrés cuts men's and boys' hair for Q7 (almost \$1), as a way to earn some money. His son Elder, who is in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, has learned this skill too so now helps his father. Their oldest son, Gregorio, got a high school scholarship from Needham and is in his

third and final year of natural resources study in Uspantán. There is a new baby in the family: Zulmi Oralia, born October 2011.

José Pacheco and Marina Benito (Boyd/Fitzgerald)

We joined Marina and some of her children for dinner. She and José have 2 grown daughters and 3 sons. The daughters are: Dilda who is married with two children and lives in the Petén; and Gladys Leticia who is married to Carlos Juárez and lives in SMT. We got to meet the oldest child who is at home (and whose name was missing from our list of family members) named Humberto. He is in 9<sup>th</sup> grade and was very happy to tell us about a 10-day theatre workshop he had attended in Quetzaltenango with about 10 other Básico (junior high school) students from SMT. Students come from many communities each year, and each school group works to produce a play. Last year the students from SMT came in second in the competition. Humberto brought out his scrapbook from the trip and proudly shared it with us. Two younger siblings were quiet but attentive. Edgar is in 5<sup>th</sup> grade and likes studying Spanish. Keny Xiomara is in 1<sup>st</sup> grade. Another brother, Walter, who is in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, wasn't there.

Pedro Hernández and Soyla Larios (Horton)

We had lunch with this family on our last day in the village. Their oldest daughter, Virgilia (age 18), is married, has a child, and is living in another community. María, who is 17, works in nearby Cantabal for a family that pays her Q400/month (about \$50) plus room and board to care for their children, cook, clean, and do laundry. Magdalena is about to turn 15 and, if we understood correctly, helps María with her job in Cantabal. Tomás is 12 and in 5<sup>th</sup> grade; Hortensia is 9 (3<sup>rd</sup> grade); Pedro is 7 (1<sup>st</sup> grade), and little Filiberto is 4 and is looking forward to starting kindergarten in 2013. Pedro told us about a bridge that needs to be built over a creek in the village. It will cost about Q2000 (\$260), which is just the cost of the cement mix and rebar, with the people providing all the labor needed. Our group suggested he talk with the village Improvement Committee, since it makes the decisions about how funds from Needham are distributed.

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

On our last night in the village we enjoyed a delicious dinner with members of the Improvement Committee. The meal was prepared by Cecilia Tiño, who is quite a good cook. A woman on the committee had kindly assisted me in dressing for the farewell party in the traditional elements of Mayan 'traje' (dress): the 'huipil', 'corte', and 'faja' (hand-woven blouse, skirt, and belt). After dinner we headed to the cooperative salon for the 'despedida' where students from the primary school entertained us with cute songs, the traditional 'convite' dance, and an original poem/song entitled 'Lazos de Amistad' or "Ties of Friendship" about the SMT-Needham friendship. Various community members also spoke in appreciation of our visit.

When our turn came, our group took the stage and gave a skit based on a song about an elephant that was balanced on a spider web. Eight-year-old Isaac, winningly costumed as the spider, complete with 8 black legs, spun an elaborate 'web' around the stage (using clothesline rope). Then the first elephant entered the web, trumpeting in song an invitation to its elephant friends to enter the web, one by one. The adult travelers, gamely portraying the elephants, made some pretty dramatic entrances, with 'trunks' swinging and elephantine sounds. The web ultimately collapsed under their collective weight and everyone tumbled to the floor, which was met with lots of laughter and appreciation by all.

Then each of us expressed our appreciation to the community and shared a few reflections, many in Spanish and all very heartfelt. Unfortunately, given my complete lack of voice, I had to write out my thoughts and have Linda read them, but I got lots of sympathy, along with some ribbing, from people who know how hard it is for me to be unable to speak! Then the ACTA was read and signed by the Improvement Committee members and the delegation. This was followed by some informal conversation and shared goodbyes before we retired to the guesthouse to pack for our early departure Friday morning.



### **Return to Guatemala City and Home** (Brenda Metzler)

The vans arrived promptly at 5:45 am and we were efficient in loading our luggage and getting on the road. We had purchased some snacks and rolls, so we only made a short stop at Edgar's mother's store. Edgar's father surprised us by joining us for the return trip. The drive was fairly uneventful, although both vans were stopped once by the police, who quickly saw that we were tourists, so after asking to see the drivers' documents, they sent us on our way. We had lunch in Cobán at La Estancia Real, which is in a lovely setting with pretty good food, but the service was incredibly slow. After some more time on the road, we made the mandatory stop at Rey Sol for ice cream, arriving back in Guatemala City around 7:00 pm. While some folks showered, others ordered pizza and went out to pick up some beer to celebrate our safe return. Over a relaxed dinner on the patio of the Spring Hotel, we undertook the 'trip evaluation'. The number of positive comments about our time in Santa María Tzejá may have set a record.

Since a number of travelers would be heading back to their various homes in the U.S. the next day, we shared lots of hugs and took a few more photos. Instead of our usual trip to Antigua on Saturday, some of the Needham folks headed out for a delightful overnight trip to Lake Atitlán. The natural beauty of the lake and its shoreline villages, combined with good shopping and very congenial company, made this the perfect side trip before our return to Boston on Monday.

## APPENDICES

### TRIP EVALUATION (Susan McNeice)

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:*

- Review always helpful
- History with Clark very informative
- Links were very helpful: Randall's newsletters, etc.
- Trip reports also very helpful, especially if you read several
- Clark's book and materials were very helpful
- Training is good team-building/way to get to know each other

##### *Negatives:*

- Enlist veterans of the trips to give training?
- "Bathing" in river was not well explained
- Same old, for repeat travelers

#### Guatemala City

##### *Positives:*

- Ali – great in dealing with different traveler arrivals and accommodations, transport, trusted taxis
- Edwin!!!
- Sociological viewpoint of the doctor who spoke
- Good speakers
- Textile museum – traditional dress
- Meeting with students
- Vegetarian restaurant
- "All of it"
- Great transition from Guatemala City to Cobán to village. Good context, breaks up trip
- Interview with Rogelio

##### *Negatives:*

- Tina isn't here
- Air quality/ pollution
- Drivers in the city

#### Cobán

##### *Positives:*

- Breakfast at Monja Blanca – fruit
- Students meeting: listening to Adrian Chom's song on Nati's phone
- Hotel
- Food, walking to the restaurant, the waitress!! (took orders from memory)
- Translation
- Birthday cake for Paulino

*Negatives:*

Jerry being sick  
Van drivers showing up late for breakfast, making us wait to depart

**Santa María Tzejá**

*Positives:*

Family visits: All of them  
Meeting partner family  
Female mayor  
3 meals with parts of same extended family  
Beans and rice  
Families much more engaged, really talked a lot, better sense of their wit  
Travelers' Bio's were great ice-breakers – could we include photos?  
From Judy: Hard to process the positives (after having been in Guatemala when things were so bad in the 1980's); meeting Santiago (Botón); have seen many projects and this one “doesn't have the flaws” of others  
Scholarship Committee meeting  
Meetings: reporting, sharing, organization much better  
Responsiveness of Improvement Committee to our comments, suggestions  
Meetings on time, mostly  
Got missing spreadsheet information promptly  
No meal mix-ups  
We were able to be on time  
Interviews: well organized. People showed up, were articulate and willing to give time.  
Judy and Santiago went above and beyond even though they had no obligation to do so.  
Great time at school – children delightful, cute, funny, earnestness with which they pursued studies even with heat and cramped classrooms  
Committed parents (to education)  
Translation!! And everyone trying out their Spanish  
Overhead fans in some rooms of the guesthouse!  
Meeting with Edwin set the tone – hope ready to burst forth  
Meetings that were discussions: Widows, Survivors, openness and willingness to talk  
Having nurse and doctor on the delegation  
Mutual caring during sickness  
Having a child (Isaac) along  
Love and concern for Tina by villagers  
Hills and mud – for the experience  
Warmth of the people  
Mature relationship with the village  
Acta and 'planilla' (spreadsheet) done by noon!

*Negatives:*

Hills, mud, heat too much  
Walking back from lunch (in heat)  
Meetings without agenda  
Micro-lending problem  
Old committees need to pass info to new committees

Uncooked food offered – made us feel bad not to eat (but we shouldn't have!)  
Missed meetings by sick people  
Handing over the material goods that we bring doesn't feel right  
All the junk food and junk food trash  
Being the delegation treasurer is a tough job – huge responsibility  
Not enough time in the Básico

*Suggestions:*

Youth add to delegation  
Have Siesta break time in SMT  
Bring umbrella for sun or leave some there for delegation use (as with boots)  
Bigger group can split up and cover more meetings  
Show initiative; take things into our own hands  
Bring hand soap for bathrooms  
Use ribbon to identify group luggage  
Ask for seatbelts in the van, especially for children  
Consider early lunch or takeout before leaving for Cobán as alternative to food at midway stop to Cobán. Maybe just get ice cream at stop  
Arrange for dinner at Spring Hotel for Friday dinner (upon return to city)

**Travelers' Actions Upon Return** (Brenda Metzler)

Sunny – Fund-raising, concert recruitment, staff meal to share trip with new people  
Barbara – Bring back info to colleagues, family  
Judy – Leaving camera for Santiago, getting better equipment for him in Canada. Doing a profile of Rios Montt to draw attention to case, will contact friends at International law dept at University of British Columbia  
Linda – Write article for Scott's Enfoque Ixcán newsletter. Bring story to congregation; how can they become involved? Action for legal case  
Bev – Use less water, count her blessings  
Mi – Count her blessings, talk with youth minister about a slide show for 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> grade, plant seeds for future travelers  
Scott – Bring another group of students in August, speak to groups as often as possible, using Needham as a model for other projects, will gladly accept articles for newsletter, will help support med school student Natividad  
Susan – Recruit for concert, share with others at work, help get funds for Nati, translate, etc.  
Brenda – Translate proposal from victims, circulate to committee

# ACTA

*Between the Community of*  
Santa María Tzejá, Ixcán, Quiché, Guatemala and  
The Congregational Church of Needham, Massachusetts, U.S.A.  
February 2012

On February 23, 2012 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, teachers of the Primary and Básico schools, the Library Committee Euskal Herria, 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), high school students (in Cobán and the Ixcán), the Women's Union, the Widows' Committee, the Church Committee, the committee of victims of the armed conflict, and representatives of COCODE. They also visited the Federation of Cooperatives of the Ixcán (FICCI).

One element of the partnership is financial support. The community of Santa María Tzejá has made the decisions on how to distribute the funds donated for general projects of the community. These decisions have likewise been communicated and coordinated via 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. The Needham church sent these funds for the community by wire transfer to the bank account of the Improvement Committee. The wire transfer of five thousand six hundred sixty-five dollars (\$5,665.00), equivalent to forty-three thousand six hundred and five hundredths 'quetzales' (Q43,600.05), which will be divided in the following manner:
  - a. The sum of five thousand five hundred dollars (\$5,500.00), equivalent to forty-two thousand three hundred thirty-one and twenty hundredths 'quetzales' (Q42,331.20), is for general projects of the community, as designated by the community via the Improvement Committee; and
  - b. The sum of one hundred sixty-five dollars (\$165.00), equivalent to one thousand two hundred sixty-eight and eighty-five hundredths 'quetzales' (Q1,268.85), is a partial contribution toward the purchase of a marimba for the Básico. Said donation comes from the young people from the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade classes of the church.
3. An attached worksheet indicates the balances, expenses, amounts received, and total amounts available for the various community projects.
4. FUNDS FOR GENERAL PROJECTS OF THE COMMUNITY: For general projects for the community, the Needham church donated the amount of five thousand five hundred dollars (\$5,500.00), equivalent to forty-two thousand three hundred thirty-one and twenty hundredths 'quetzales' (Q42,331.20). The community of Santa María Tzejá has designated that these funds will be utilized in the following manner:

- a. One thousand 'quetzales' (Q1,000) to the Primary School for equipment maintenance.
  - b. Five hundred 'quetzales' (Q500) to the Primary School for energy and electrical equipment.
  - c. One thousand 'quetzales' (Q1,000) to the Primary School for student materials.
  - d. Five hundred 'quetzales' (Q500) to the Primary School for teaching materials.
  - e. One thousand five hundred 'quetzales' (Q1,500) to the Básico for office expenses and computer maintenance.
  - f. Five hundred 'quetzales' (Q500) to the Básico for the purchase of fuel or electrical system service.
  - g. Two thousand 'quetzales' (Q2,000) to the Básico for teaching materials.
  - h. Two hundred 'quetzales' (Q200) to the Básico for sports equipment or activities.
  - i. Three hundred 'quetzales' (Q300) to the Library Euskal Herria for travel expenses.
  - j. Five hundred 'quetzales' (Q500) to the library for office expenses and the purchase and repair of books.
  - k. Four thousand two hundred 'quetzales' (Q4,200) to the library for the librarian's stipend.
  - l. Five hundred 'quetzales' (Q500) to the Health Committee for travel expenses.
  - m. Two thousand four hundred 'quetzales' (Q2,400) to the Health Committee for health promoter stipends.
  - n. Ten thousand two hundred 'quetzales' (Q10,200) to the Health Committee for the salary of the Community Health Facilitator.
  - o. Five hundred 'quetzales' (Q500) to the Health Committee for the emergency fund.
  - p. Five hundred 'quetzales' (Q500) to the Improvement Committee for administrative expenses.
  - q. Five hundred 'quetzales' (Q500) to the Catholic Church for internal projects.
  - r. Five hundred 'quetzales' (Q500) to the Sports Committee for sports projects.
  - s. One thousand nine hundred fifty 'quetzales' (Q1,950) to the Widows' Committee for a productive project.
  - t. Five hundred 'quetzales' (Q500) to the Women's Union for administrative expenses.
  - u. Twelve thousand five hundred eighty-one and twenty hundredths 'quetzales' (Q12,581.20) as a reserve for a future community project that the community will determine, according to its needs.
5. FUNDS FOR EDUCATION: In February 2012 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.

The Needham Church brought materials for the Primary School and the Básico donated by the children of the Church, medicines and supplies for the health clinic, a used laptop computer for the Improvement Committee, some books for the library, and some sports items that were delivered to the Improvement Committee for the Sports Committee. It also delivered toothbrushes for each of the students in the Primary and Básico schools that were donated by a dentist in Needham.

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. 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 23, 2012, in Santa María Tzejá, Ixcán, Quiché, Guatemala.  
(Followed by signatures of the Improvement Committee and the Needham delegation)