

“We challenge ourselves to make choices which can take us deeper to the heart of the matter...” -- *ASC Guatemala Mission Statement*

September has been the month of remembering and celebrating the independence of Guatemala from Spanish rule 188 years ago. During this month we challenged ourselves to go beyond the usual sounds of beating drums and firecrackers, beyond the carrying of the symbolic torch from one town to another, beyond the chattering rhetoric of what independence means, to take a deeper look at the current and real situation in which we find ourselves in Guatemala.

**On the national Guatemalan level:**

▶ Although we are in the rainy season there are parts of Guatemala that are experiencing the driest period in the last 30 years. This drought has brought to the forefront once again the serious malnutrition problems suffered by many Guatemalans, and the government has requested and been granted large donations from the international community to combat these problems. If this aid is able to reach those most in need (which is doubtful due to the high level of corruption in Guatemala), it will help with the immediate needs but does not solve the long standing problems of poverty, inequality in land distribution, lack of environmental concern, etc which have contributed to this situation of drought, hunger, minimal quality of life and death. As one newspaper editor noted, if handouts continue to be given and the root of the problems are not resolved, Guatemalans will sink deeper into dependency and she asked, “Is it 188 years of independence...or of codependency?”

▶ Violence continues to touch the lives of many as every 90 minutes another person dies a violent death. A recent mental health study shows that as a coping mechanism to the reality in which they live, Guatemalans have become desensitized and indifferent to the violence around them. Again, we hear the cry of the Blood and we seek to promote life and hope among those whose lives touch ours.

▶ Social services were once again influenced by the highly politicized nature in which they are conducted, as the secretaries of education and health were both changed again this month for the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> time since this government took office 21 months ago. We don't expect these new appointments to affect our projects except for the additional bureaucratic requirements that come with each change in secretary and their new program.

▶ We continue to keep a close watch on the changing and volatile situation of our neighbors in Honduras where an overthrow of the democratically elected government took place last June. Guatemala shares a long border with Honduras, as well as a common history and a strong economic relationship. We are concerned about the lack of respect for legitimate constitutional laws and the overwhelming human rights violations that have occurred to those who have spoken out in opposition to the coup d'état.

▶ An amusing note but sad commentary on the Guatemalan justice system was the news that after an 18-month investigation, Taiwan's ex-president received a life sentence for corruption and misappropriation of his country's funds, while Alfonso Portillo, Guatemalan's ex-president and personal recipient of these funds, remains free in Guatemala. Without signs of further investigation, he has started his campaign for congress in the next elections.

**On the local La Labor level:**

▶ We were saddened by the death of Don Dario Oliva, a humble carpenter in La Labor who also fashioned musical instruments out of wood and string and for these many years helped to

teach and form those who make music come from these instruments. We were inspired by the legacy left by Dario as each choir group from the 14 communities of our parish came to the wake held at his house and sang in honor of the man who taught and moved them to share their music in worship and community. Dario will be missed by many but the legacy of his spirit and music continues.

► This month we also commemorated two “coming of age” dates as on September 27<sup>th</sup> Kris completed 21 years of ministry in Guatemala and on September 11<sup>th</sup> Dani reached 15 years of service. In our celebration of these special moments in time, we asked ourselves the question...”What legacy do I want to leave?” And so once again...

“We challenge ourselves to make choices which can take us deeper to the heart of the matter...”

We invite each of you to also remember, be challenged and celebrate the special moments of your lives.

*Dani and Kris*