

Guatemala at a Glance

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“María De Mattias ... Make us women and men who are strong yet gentle, sensitive and open to the voice of Christ and through him, to every voice and every silence of human anguish.”

Prayer for Adorers of the Blood of Christ

We started our time of reflection for these months using this prayer, opening our ears and hearts to hear not only that which is spoken out loud, but also that which is not spoken but still felt and suffered by so many in their human anguish. This led us to pause and reflect again on the reality of the ministry areas where we share our gifts, knowledge and capabilities — that of education and health care. The most recent reports of the United Nations gave us some information about Guatemala for this consideration:

- *the average number of school years completed in Latin America is 8, while in Guatemala the average number of years is 4.1*
- *only 41 percent of births in Guatemala are attended by trained persons, resulting in the highest mortality rates in the region, with 290 deaths for every 100,000 live births*
- *just 16 percent of females and 21 percent of males in Guatemala finish secondary school*
- *Guatemala has the highest rate in all of Latin America of adolescent (ages 10 – 19) pregnancies*
- *compared to nearby countries, Guatemala has the greatest percentage of adults who do not know how to read or write*
- *Guatemala has the lowest life expectancy in Central America*

In the local area surrounding La Labor, we continue our ministries of education and health with openness, energy and commitment in response to this ever-present, at times overwhelming, reality. And signs of hope over these past two months have included:

- *the wonderful community celebration on Oct. 1st of the 15th anniversary of the start of the Sangre de Cristo Health Care Project (see pictures at www.health-care-project-guatemala.org)*
- *120 new graduates finished their secondary school studies at the Maria De Mattias Institute and participated on Oct. 24th in the 20th graduation ceremony of the Institute*
- *there were 260 young students who had just finished sixth grade taking the preparation course for entrance into the Institute next year and on Nov. 23, 140 of them rejoiced with their families at being accepted into next year's class*

Being open to the voice and to the silence, especially during this time of Thanksgiving, we find ourselves filled with gratitude for the gifts that we are able to bring to these two projects, including vision awakening, mission development, teacher formation, team organization and fiscal responsibility with transparent management. God has been very generous with us!

But still, we have had to struggle with local difficulties, as well. Faced with some hard questions concerning continuation of the Health Care Project in 2011 due to lack of financial resources, we listened to the silence of all those who depend on these services and together launched an ambitious “Miracles Do Happen” campaign to search for 100 individuals who would partner with us and each help find \$1,000 by Christmas. And miracles do happen, as we now have reached the 50 percent mark! But even more so, miracles do happen, as shown by the countless connections, signs of goodness, messages of encouragement from so many who listen to the voice and to the silence of human anguish and in sharing so, have widened the circle to help make this corner of the world a better place for others.

And now, we give thanks for each of you, sharing your gifts and grace in your way, in your part of the world. May each of us, with a renewed sense of hope, continue this heart-and-spirit journey to which we have been called.

Dani and Kris