

GUATEMALA at a Glance

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Did you know the school year here ends in October? Alleluia! Most of the students and teachers look for “summer” jobs, given the state of the economy. A recent U.N. publication states that 50% of Guatemalan children suffer from chronic malnutrition, one million Guatemalans live below the poverty level and 20% of the population live in extreme poverty, earning less than \$1 a day. Inflation is seriously felt in the U.S. at 8%. In Guatemala it is 12.5%. Some of this provokes immigration to the U.S. In Guatemala, over 30% of the population benefits from money sent back and over 50% are women living in rural areas. Remember that this money coming from outside the country accounts for 12% of the GNP and is, in fact, the #1 source of income for the country.

Deportations continue and people return to a very uncertain future. There has been a significant drop in the funds coming to families. Added to that, the country itself has suffered its worst rainy season in 30 years and a State of Emergency exists in four of the 22 states where over 45,000 are homeless and many communities are now isolated.

One of the most interesting news items is the return of Alfonso Portillo, ex-President living in self-imposed exile in Mexico for the last five years. He has been accused of stealing massive sums of government funds and money laundering. Efforts to extradite him never succeeded and he voluntarily returned so he could “clear the air, restore his good name and be a candidate for public office.” He was freed on bond the same day he returned. We figure he ran out of money and came back to the well!

Unfortunately, the environment of violence continues. Today as we write, there is no bus service as other drivers were murdered, bringing the number of drivers, helpers and passengers who have been killed this year to almost 200, not to mention the numerous instances of robberies. If service is cut nation wide, there will be devastating consequences for the family and national economies.

While this is a real backdrop to everyday life, there are graces as well. Our mission statement affirms that “we are impelled to be of service in a way that reflects God’s desire for us and for the people to style a way of being with and for that reverences individual gifts, fosters the dignity and value of each person, encourages initiative-taking, invites dreaming together and walking in solidarity.”

And so we return again to education, a very real road to a better future. There are 30 people who work in the Sangre de Cristo Health Care Project. This year 74% are making the choice to do some kind of study, and half of the staff receives direct support — People like Amayda , single mom, mother of two, who has worked with the project for 12 years, beginning with less than a 6th grade education and yesterday took entrance exams for the University. The light in her eyes and excitement in her voice can’t help but make us smile. There are 12 on the teaching staff of the Institute. Half are doing continuing studies at the University, two are attending English language academies and our new librarian-in-training just finished her first course at the Jesuit University.

What a joy it is for us to partner with the men and women of these two projects and to know that the Blood of Christ which continues to be shed in this land is, at the same time, transforming the lives of many. As ASCs we continue to look for ways that create a climate where the “new way” might be discovered and thus contribute to the “beautiful order of things.” May it be so for each of you in your own living and choosing!

Blessings as we look forward to the celebration of Saints, those among us and those who have gone ahead.

Kris and Dani