

Guatemala at a Glance
Informe #7 February 2009

In the dark time, the eye begins to see. –Theodore Roethke

So often when we sit down at the end of the month to prepare our reflection, we are struck by the “dark time” that defines Guatemala’s reality. Often we share some of the facts about what is currently happening. And in it all, we hope that we do begin to see... those spaces and places where the grace of God breaks through, where **“hope is called forth and a deepening of the value of life.”** (Guatemala mission statement 2008-9).

The WEF (World Economic Forum) just published statistics relating to economy, public security and national confidence vis-à-vis government services of 134 countries. They ranked Guatemala 132nd as a country which lacks guarantees for personal security. The ranking for lack of trust in police forces is 128. The judicial system not only does not work, it is practically non-existent. Only 2% of all homicide cases taken to court are subject to sentencing. This climate of impunity favors an explosion of criminal behavior. Also, the financial crisis which is critical in the U.S. is felt here as well. In the month of January, monies sent back by immigrant workers to support their families dropped \$24 million. The majority of this money is used for basic needs– food, rent, medicines and schooling. The estimate is that we will see a 50% increase of those living at or below the poverty level. How do we **call forth hope and a deepening of the value of life?**

We begin the season of Lent mindful of the road Jesus walked, of the choices made for life even when that meant shedding blood. With you we pray that we continue to make choices for life, even in the midst of so much darkness and death.

And there are many choices to celebrate. Last weekend we were in Ft. Recovery, Ohio, where friends of our projects from several of the area churches held an appreciation dinner for those who took part in their fund-raising activities. These folks call forth hope in us, and we know ourselves blessed to have such a life-giving connection with them. We have two fourth-year medical students from Wichita, Kansas with us for a month. They are friends of our friends from Newman University who looked for a way to connect them with the health care project. Their willingness to stretch the boundaries of comfort and security to offer service speaks to a desire to value the lives of these global neighbors.

The library project continues to grow, and little donations from here and abroad are helping to make this dream a reality. A program of outreach to area grade schools is up and running as we work to promote literacy, and beyond that, to provide an opportunity to have access to the tools which can help individuals give birth to larger hopes. With the beginning of the new school year in late January, the health care project launched anew the school outreach programs–Healthy Habits, dental care and Ecology awareness. These programs are concrete examples of deepening the value and quality of life and are impacting thousands of grade school children and their parents.

We just came back from Ash Wednesday services and were struck by the weathered faces of so many. Looking around at everyone, marked by the sign of the cross, I couldn’t help but think that the cross is so real to these folks. Life for them, in so many ways, is an on-going Lenten journey. Our hope, our very real hope, is that our presence here is a word of the Easter promise, and that, together, we are fashioning in this corner of our world a place where all are valued, where medical and educational services are better than good and that each of us and all of us together can make a difference.

We pray that you are connected with others in that kind of meaningful and life-giving adventure wherever you find yourselves.

Blessings.
Kris and Dani