

Guatemala at a Glance

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“Guatemala is a land of many colors, an array of such varied threads and a painful kaleidoscope of great contrasts. We know ourselves to be enriched by its wealth of natural beauty, cultural diversity and giftedness of persons. And yet, it is a country that carries a profound woundedness at the heart of its history.” --from ASC Guatemala Mission Statement

We started the month off by tending to the garden that is behind our house in La Labor...Kris, planting a variety of herbs in different clay pots and Dani, cleaning out a flower bed, replacing old debris with new plants. These activities of ours here in the house are really indicators of how we have tried to live our lives and how we want to continue to be here in the midst of the reality that is Guatemala. Let us explain...Neither of us are gardeners and over the past 15 years living together neither had done much to beautify the area around the outside of the house, but somehow and for some reason, we felt the urge from within and, stepping out into something new, we responded and turned over dirt with the hope of bringing forth new life. And you may not think there is anything too unusual about this -- this hope that springs from planting seeds, this hope of seeing new life, new growth, a budding forth – but we planted these seeds during the driest time of the year in Guatemala. What this means is that we have to be more attentive, give some water each day, be aware of what is happening and not give up hope even though it may seem we are going against the stream, going against the norm, going against the usual order of things.

And so we know the hope of new growth in the garden, and we hold that against the contrast of the continued violence that since January has taken the lives of 64 public transportation bus drivers and helpers, causing fear to invade the spirit of the common person who has no other option but to use public transportation to go to work, to go to the market, to go to school, to seek health care, etc. Living in fear has become a part of life for many in our area as they experience personal tragedies coming from the complex situations of violence and corruption and impunity.

A public case that has again come to life concerns Fernando Garcia, a labor leader who was disappeared 25 years ago. A year later, Kris provided accompaniment for Nineth Montenegro, Fernando's wife, then social activist, now member of congress. Finally, after 25 years of a fruitless struggle against corruption and impunity, two former police officers have been arrested in the case. These arrests were made possible using records found recently among the millions of archives of the former National Police. Several friends of ours have worked on this project of the Human Rights Office and have shared with us the hope of more cases being reopened and resolved now that the archives are opened to the public.

Even as we look for hope in planting and bringing forth new growth in our ministries of education and health care, we continue to experience contrasts and the going against. On March 11, the Ministry of Education changed the secondary school curriculum, even though the school year started 2 ½ months ago and no government funds have yet been received to support school operation. And as families are now feeling the economic crisis even more with less money coming from relatives in the states, visits to the doctor or dentist are being made only when pain or sickness has become completely unbearable.

Walking in solidarity with our co-workers and helping those in each of our projects to call forth hope and a deepening of the value of life has led us to begin preparations, along with Marco Tulio, C.P.P.S, for a start of Holy Week retreat day centered on the spirituality of the Blood of Christ and the living out of this spirituality personally and in ministry. Planting new seeds...waiting and hoping for new growth...

May your garden also be filled with hope, grace and blessing. Dani and Kris