

San Lucas Mission

Fall 2010

Parish News



“We are humble outsiders”

~ by Fr. Greg Schaffer ~

Responding to the “expressed felt need” of the people is and always will be a challenge. Since we come from another culture, another nation, we are really “listening in” from the outside. We have to “listen hard” so we can really hear what is being said.



In those early years, we were offered a fine week-long course about Maya culture and customs. This conference, offered by Maryknoll

and the Diocese of Sololá, was excellent. Two anthropologists, a Mexican and a North American, presented us with five and a half days of enlightening insights into the ways Mayan people act, react and interact. The insights included the why and wherefore of these interactions and relationships. On that last morning of class, after a brief summary of the previous days’ classes, the two anthropologists asked each of us for comments on what we thought of the teachings. Each of us spoke up loudly and clearly of how we appreciated what they taught us, how it was taught and how much we learned about the people we wanted to serve. All of us present, except one, were foreigners to Guatemala. We were in the middle of the part of the world where Maya had lived its last Golden Age as a culture between 700 and 900 AD. We were living and serving in a nation that is predominantly Maya in population, and yet we did not have a Mayan person speak with us until the very end of the whole course...actually the last person to speak! When he opened his mouth, he spoke worlds...

Anticipating the Women’s Center

~ by Madeline Snider ~

“Women are always working,” explains Sandra Teresa Lec, “we are always doing the same thing. But when we get together, it’s different. With others, you can share your experiences and your problems.” The other women in the Parish kitchen nod in agreement as they scurry about preparing lunch. All view the Parish Women’s Center as a welcome addition to the community. “The women will have many good experiences,” adds Gina Ajcot.

The vast majority of women in San Lucas are mothers who must care for children, wash clothes by hand, and prepare meals. Many women rise in the wee hours before their husbands, venture out to grind the ixtamal for the breakfast tortillas, and toil until the rest of the family has retired for the evening. Dilma Coché Ajuuac and her daughter-in-law Marina Tereta Jacinto describe long days working for the family, constant pressure to make ends meet, and difficulty in leaving the house to relax or socialize.



The idea for the Women’s Center originated about a decade ago; it became apparent that while the Parish had done much to improve the quality of life in San Lucas, opportunities for women remained scarce. Though women’s participation in society has grown, opportunities for higher education and participation in economic and political life remain limited throughout Guatemala.

Inside



Guatemalan Independence Day ~ by Lily Coleman

As San Lucas Tolimán awaits Independence Day, the noise of drumming echoes throughout town. For weeks, excited youngsters run about practicing their marching steps and the drumbeats they are itching to play in the community's parades.

Every school, as a part of their *actos cívicos* (civic acts), participates in the celebration of Guatemala's independence, achieved on September 15, 1821. The anticipation for this three-day celebration is almost palpable. For San Lucas' students, aged five to twenty, they have spent the previous month in a near constant state of preparation. They practice daily for the important roles they are to play in the parades.

The festivities start on the 13th of September when the youngest children takes to the streets, dressed in all manners. Some wear classic baton twirling and drumming outfits while others wear the colorful

traditional *traje* of San Lucas and nearby pueblos. For many children this is the once-a-year opportunity to show off to family and friends. On the 14th it is the middle school aged children's turn to carry signs with

such slogans as *paz, libertad, solidaridad,* and *responsabilidad* as a display of citizenship and goodwill. They can also be seen carrying carefully drawn handmade pictures that represent national symbols such as the country's bird, the Quetzal.

On the 15th, dancing, acrobatics, and the musical talent of the pueblo's

teenagers usher Independence Day in with a bang. As night falls on San Lucas, the three-day celebration quietly draws to a close. Families return home and the sound of an occasional firecracker splitting the night is the only reminder of the week's festivities. The drummers put away their sticks, excited for next incredible celebration of Guatemalan culture.



Women's Center ~ cont'd from pg. 1

The paradoxical reality is that while women are indeed revered as bearers of culture, they are also marginalized members of society. Andrés Chajíl, a long-time member of the Parish community, notes that the women of San Lucas have long suffered from "triple discrimination": for being poor, for being indigenous, and for being female.

While all women interviewed seemed optimistic about the future of the Women's Center, most were unable to pinpoint what precisely will go on there. The center, nearing completion and hopefully set to open for operation in early 2011, will boast a fully equipped kitchen, bathrooms with showers, washing machines, extensive green space, a playground area, and a multi-purpose room where women will be able to read, weave, relax, or attend informational talks. While many cite the possibility of making different dishes in the well-appointed kitchen – breads, cookies, and jams – there has been little concrete discussion of further programming.

Though this ambiguity may be a bit frustrating for, say, the author of an article on the Women's Center, this *tabula rasa* approach is actually spot-on. The space and programming of the Women's Center will be defined by those who use it. It is still a blank slate because the women have not yet begun to inhabit it and make it their own. This approach embodies the Parish philosophy of responding to the expressed-felt need of the people: programming is designed according to the needs and wishes of the community itself.

The Parish Women's Center will exist to support women and their families, and work with and within the culture. Rather than seeking to change women's lives or opinions, the Parish will facilitate what the women themselves want to learn and do, allowing them better share their talents and knowledge and contribute to their families and the community at large. "It is not that women are not capable," concludes Señora Coché, "it is just that they need a guide. And when you get a group of women together, each has her own ideas, her own perspective."

Taking Steps Forward ~ Gustave Gaggioli

San Lucas Tolimán was left with much recovery work in the wake of Tropical Storm Agatha. Relief efforts range from distribution of supplies to the acquisition of land for the displaced. The first step was to collect information about those affected – a task undertaken by a group of young men working for Julio Morales.

These young men went around to all of the colonias (neighborhoods) within San Lucas to conduct interviews with various families, gathering information about family size, personal items lost, crops destroyed. This information was combined with data collected by the municipality; through this collaboration, relief was mobilized rapidly.



Various agencies then began relief efforts in San Lucas: Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the UN's World Food Program (WFP), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The Parish provided coordination and contributed the local knowledge and support to devise

programs for those most affected. 250 needy families were chosen to receive a variety of necessities – food, clothing, and household items – every two weeks. A careful selection of families, based on an in-depth assessment of the initial interviews, was crucial to ensuring fair distribution of goods. Parish workers then took the responsibility of preparing individual relief packages with the variety of goods donated. These packages were then distributed within San Lucas and delivered to some of the surrounding communities.

This distribution continued through late September helping those in need to take steps forward. With this program coming to an end, the Parish is looking to the next phase of relief: land acquisition and housing development. A small plot of land has already been cleared and the construction of *temporary* houses will begin soon, but much more land must be bought needed to relocate all those who have lost their homes and more.

We Are Humble Outsiders ~ con't from pg. 1

The person was Jesús Ajú. “Chus,” as we called him, was a Quiché Mayan and a Brother of the Benedictine community serving so very well in Sololá and around. They had, among other programs, a fine Christian Education Boarding School and were much appreciated by all – local people and we other foreigners. He spoke very clearly but ever so slowly. “Chus” never did anything fast in his life! Often he had some points to get across, but it seemed to take him forever to get said what he wanted to say! Well, as the last person to make some comments about the course, offering all of us insights into his own people, it seemed to take “Chus” a long time even to get out of his chair and stand up. “I appreciate you as anthropologists speaking to me about my people. Thank you. I want to thank all of you here for coming to participate in this seminar about my people. You are welcome to come and live among us. We are pleased to know you have learned to enjoy our food. You are welcome to even learn our language, if you wish. However, there is one thing I want each of you to understand. You are NOT and never will be a Mayan (person) because you have not nursed at a Mayan mother’s breast!”

The whole room was blanketed in silence...and...it took a long time for Chus to sit down. He made his point. His point was clear (and I think taken well by most present). We outsiders could come into his culture, live with him and serve his people. However, we indeed are humble outsiders and must always remember this fact while we act, react, and interact within our limits as outsiders.

It is an ongoing effort to learn and continue to listen and learn. It is also encouraging and energizing.

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To Purchase Coffee

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Ways to Give

After the devastation of Tropical Storm Agatha, the Parish needs your collaboration. There are a number of ways to give to support our ongoing efforts. At the moment, we are faced with the tremendous task of distributing land to displaced families.

Find out how to support us at www.sanlucasmision.org/give.php



One-time online donations

You can donate online using your credit-card:

www.securedserver.net/sanlucasmision/donation.php

Monthly donations

Set up a recurring payment:

www.securedserver.net/sanlucasmision/donations.php

Donate by mail

You can send a cheque made out to "San Lucas Mission" to the address at the bottom of this page.

Thank you for your support and prayers during these trying times.

~ www.sanlucasmision.org ~

Expressed-Felt Need ~ by Christopher Mitchell

Expressed-felt needs are those which a community or individual both experiences and makes known to those around them. The San Lucas Parish strives, as Jesus did, to carefully listen and respond to the expressed-felt needs of the community. We, as an integral human development organization, do what the people ask us to.

The people of San Lucas suffer through the process of poverty. It is a process because of the ever-present cyclical factors that contribute to a life of hardship and strife: little opportunity for higher education, few available jobs, and constant struggle to improve life for one's family. As we collaborate with the community to move forward, how do we decide what to do? What concrete steps must we take to improve the infrastructure and opportunities available to the community? For the Parish, the answers to these questions must come from the people themselves.

The idea of honoring expressed-felt need posits that those suffering are in the best position to identify their needs. In the process of development in San Lucas, we as North Americans are facilitators not saviours, collaborators not directors. The people of San Lucas, both participants in and heads of programs, have more ownership of and agency in their own development. We are active accompaniers committed to walking with the people.

It is certainly a difficult concept to pin down: to whom exactly do we listen? Given our limited resources which needs do we prioritize? What if the needs are not always directly conveyed? The idea of expressed-felt need is intertwined with that of subsidiarity: allowing people to exercise their own freedom and development. Having program directors who are San Lucans in turn helps us to constantly listen and respect the local culture and the community's aspirations; this listening is at the heart of our work for social justice. As such, expressed-felt needs are a crucial part of our role as a Church and an integral human development organization.

"Go to the people.

Live with them, learn from them, love them.

Start with what they know, build with what they have.

But of the best leaders, when the work is done, the task accomplished,

The people will say, "We have done this ourselves."

-Lao-Tzu, 700.BC.



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