"The Challenge Before Us Is Mammoth"
~ by Fr. Greg Schaffer ~

Julio Morales has worked with the Parish Programs for many years. His primary responsibility has been to manage the Construction Office. Record keeping of all the construction projects; costs, materials purchased and put on site, freight costs as well as workers involved in the building have made him an important person in our efforts. He has taken a special interest in young people who have run into problems with marijuana, alcohol abuse, and gangs. He has developed and directs a program that gives these young men an opportunity to leave these problems behind in their lives and move forward. The young men have an opportunity to learn construction skills by actually working with master masons, stone cutters, carpenters, welders, plumbers and electricians. At the same time they develop discipline in their lives that can lead them to scholarships in any area of formal study they might like to pursue. Julio’s encouragement and sometimes “firm hand” makes this a viable program that benefits the community as a whole. Groups of these young men as well as Parish Workers in general have been called upon to reach out to victims of the terrible mudslides right from the beginning. Their care and concern for those in such need has been much appreciated.

We stand looking at the devastation of Tropical Storm Agatha where whole communities – Nueva Amencen, La Union, La Esperanza, and El Relleno – were inundated, where 285 acres of coffee land have been lost and countless coffee trees can no longer produce. Families, who rely on crops such as corn and beans, will suffer for years as they attempt to replant.

It may seem curious that little more than a day’s worth of rain caused such widespread devastation. The damage was overwhelming, both because of the strength of the rains and the lack of infrastructure and institutions equipped to manage the -- click to continue on page 2
Parish Fútbol Championship ~ by Chris Mitchell

As the World Cup comes to a close, Parish workers have a different tournament in mind. The world has been watching Spain, Uruguay, Germany and the like perform on the globe’s largest stage, but the Parish Fútbol tournament has been gaining a great deal of attention in the San Lucas community over the last few years.

After an inaugural season in 2008, the Parish has hosted a total of four tournaments between any Parish employees ready to play. The farm workers play construction workers, the electricians are pitched against the clinic, the carpenters holding their own against the coffee processors. Similar to softball tournaments in the US, the Parish Fútbol Championship is an effort to unite workers in a culture of sport. The Parish funds half of the money necessary to cover the cost for renting the field, and workers contribute a reasonable amount to make this fun and rewarding opportunity available to many.

For approximately 10 weeks, the Parish rents one of the synthetic soccer fields in town from 4-6pm, three days a week and schedules a league-based tournament. Every team gets to play games for 8 weeks, after which the knockout stages begin. Each afternoon, Parish workers and some hopeful, younger boys look on as every game counts. Some scope out future opponents, some come to talk about the day and enjoy the entertainment, while others come to root for their co-workers. Either way, the tournament is a way of bringing together friends in something almost everybody in Guatemala can agree upon: fútbol. Anybody can play in the street using rocks or backpacks as a goal, but taking the world’s greatest game to the greatest stage in San Lucas is a joy only few can share.

After weeks of competition, players take a much needed break and watched their idols in South Africa. But here in Guatemala, more Parish workers are asking each other: “chamusca?” Using the slang word for fútbol, they ask, “When do we start again?”

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situation. Urban planning, natural resource management, drainage systems, control of deforestation, and emergency response and relief institutions are simply not at the same level as in the United States.

For a people living the process of poverty, the cleanup and rebuilding process is particularly daunting. Peoples’ ability to ‘bounce back’ is stunted because disaster insurance does not exist, and personal savings are modest. Land is extremely hard to come by, and ‘affordable’ land is essentially nonexistent. The government, promising land for all those without homes, is unlikely to be able to provide succor for the thousands in need. Although NGO’s initially on the scene provided immediate relief, most have now left.

After initially offering emergency relief supplies (food, clothing, household items, medicines) and restoring water to communities, the Parish is beginning to look forward. The Parish has loaned an area of land to the municipality for the construction of temporary housing. This project is already underway, and the Parish has also offered technical assistance in the form of engineers and architects. The local government is working to construct temporary homes and provide certain services, while the Parish expects to complement the municipality’s services.

In the long-term, the Parish will revisit the water systems for the outlying communities to ensure continued access to water. Additionally, reforestation efforts will be increased to avoid future mudslides. Finally, the centerpiece of the Parish’s recovery effort will hopefully be the purchase and distribution of land for about 325 families - a herculean task in and of itself.

The Parish is in a unique position to respond because it is not a relief or even a purely development-oriented organization. Its presence is not transient. The Parish seeks to walk with the people both in times of disaster and heartache, and in times of great triumph and joy. It is comprised of community members: it belongs to the people. It has a level of trust other institutions do not. With this trust comes a great deal of responsibility; the people will surely look to the Mission for answers. We hope to respond in a compassionate, sensitive, and appropriate manner, and to continue to walk with the people in this most difficult of times.
Harvesting Honey ~ by Michael Siegenthaler & Mark Blanke

For 24 years, beekeeping has played a role in the Mission’s agricultural projects. Though the production of honey is perhaps less well known than the Parish’s famous coffee, it is no less loved by those who have tried it around the world. Harvest from the 22 bee colonies takes place every January and February, and the flavour varies according to the time of harvest. The season starts with a light colour, delicately flavoured honey as the bees feast on tree blossoms, including coffee and avocado. It becomes darker and more intensely flavoured, even with a hint of molasses, as other vegetation starts to bloom. Careful concern for the apiary – the area in which the bees forage – ensures fruitful production and refined flavours.

Honey has long been a prized delicacy of the Maya, and bee husbandry has been practiced in Mesoamerica for thousands of years. The ancient Maya used honey as a sweetener and an antibiotic, and even worshipped a god of bee and honey: Ah-Muzen-Cab. Traditionally a stingless bee, or meloponines, were domesticated and used for honey production, and were regarded as sacred. Today, African “killer bees” are prevalent in Guatemala and have mixed with the gentle domestic bees. Although more aggressive, the Africanized bees are better honey producers than the native bees.

San Lucas beekeepers break up the combs and use a hand-cranked machine to churn the honey out. They then press the waxy remains of the comb into a hexagonal patterned mould to form a sheet. This sheet is reinstalled into the hive and the bees build their comb on it, following the pattern of the mould, and fill the holes with fresh honey. The honey is then cooked in large pots, bottled, and sent to the Parish – the only place the delectable confection is available for purchase, so you have to visit to try it!

The honey project is yet another example of the Parish’s efforts to create space for the people of San Lucas to work creatively and innovatively, to develop expertise, and to practice their culture as they deem fit.

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been lost. People now refer to several of the areas once filled with coffee trees but now devastated by the slides as “the desert.” All that remains are the tallest of trees, huge boulders swept down from the mountain, and piles and piles of slippery mud. This land, predominantly belonging to small farmers, represented a major source of income. Because coffee trees require 5 years before they can be harvested, the effects of this event will be felt long after this year’s coffee harvest, if groves can ever be replanted. Many families also saw their milpa – corn, squash, and beans – eviscerated as well. Knowing of the work put into these agricultural crops, and the hope these same crops held out to those who have so carefully cared for these fields, one can understand the worry and pain now on the faces of the people.

In assessing the damage, many NGO’s have conducted studies analyzing the scope of the disaster, and are quick to point fingers: farming on steep hillsides, deforestation, overcrowding on the outskirts of town. But not as many are prepared to carry out solutions targeted at the root causes of the disaster.

Several of Julio Morales’ workers – still young men – have been called upon to help in gathering information for reports on the damage done in the fields surrounding San Lucas. As we compare the analyses, the work of these youth trained by Julio is among the finest and most trustworthy. Already part of the assessment, they will soon be part of the solution as we attempt to support the town’s recovery.

The challenge before us is mammoth; it will take a long time to recuperate. We struggle together. We want to do all we can to help.
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