



505 W. St. Thomas More Way
Spokane, WA 99208

Family-to-Family

Familia-A-Familia Newsletter

August 2010

Tropical Storms Impact Many FTF Families

One might think that the people of Guatemala have already had enough disasters to last a lifetime. But they do keep coming! Tropical Storm Agatha, along with continuing heavy rains that followed, has dealt a disabling blow to many Guatemalans living in the Highlands, including several of the poorest families --- ones that are on the FTF program.

The recent storms followed a volcanic eruption of the Pacaya volcano which spewed out sand and ash that shut down Guatemala City (and the airport) at the end of May. Heavy rains then created floods that washed out the Inter American Highway in several places. They also swept many homes down the steep mountainsides. Our program manager, Adela Tambriz, made a special effort to determine the damage to families on the FTF program. She forwarded us an assessment of 14 families that had been most affected. We then sent out letters to the sponsors of each of those families telling them how their sponsored family was affected. We also advanced Adela \$3,800 in emergency relief funds.

Srs Immaculata Burke and Marie Tolle were some of the first people to arrive in one of the battered areas where several families were washed out of their homes. It was near the Novillero clinic, and not far from where they live. Sr. Immaculata phoned to tell us about 150 families that are being fed at Our Lady of the Highway School, which is not far from their convent home. These are not sponsored families, but FTF has sent her \$5,000 to help with food, housing, and medical aid for families in that area. Sr. Immaculata is very grateful to the sponsors of our FTF Health and Clinics Fund for that help in this emergency.

In addition to damaging homes, where many families kept their food supply of corn from last year's harvest, the rushing waters washed out much of this year's corn crop. The corn was only a few inches high at the time of the heavy rains. Insofar as corn is the main source of food for nearly all families of the area, the recent storms have been especially damaging. Families that were already having difficulty growing enough corn and beans to feed themselves are now in a very precarious situation. Please keep them all those families of the poor in your prayers.

Special thanks to our sponsors who have sent in extra help for their families, and for unrestricted donations that help in emergencies like this storm. The Guatemala Commission of the Diocese of Spokane has also asked parishes and individuals who can help to send their donations to the Guatemala Commission Relief Effort at the Diocese (P.O. Box 1453).

FTF Prayers

Please say a prayer for Susan, the daughter of Terry Coombes, who handled all of our FTF billing until last May. Susan had a difficult time in labor, and her baby has a genetic condition of great concern. Terry has gone to Virginia to be with them during this trying time.

Thanks again to Arleen Shrader, who had the computer skills to take over the accounting and banking duties so that we have been able to keep everything on track without missing a step.

Trout Ponds Damage

Tropical Storm Agatha inflicted major damage to the trout ponds, which have been one of the most successful FTF projects. The heavy rains caused a huge bolder to tumble down the mountainside, breaking up five of the fish ponds and causing the loss of about half of the fish.

Two of the ponds at the Ixtahuacan (Tejen) site are still functioning. The project manager, Marcos, is moving one of his workers (Manuel) to another location (Xecaquiscan).

Our staff is now considering what steps might be taken to resume operations. We will be evaluating the possibilities of (a) making repairs to the existing site, and (b) identifying some new locations, and estimating the costs of acquiring the land and constructing more up-to-date trout raising facilities.

Mayan Justice

Some thieves learned "a hard lesson" in Mayan justice after they robbed Diego Agpacaja, the shoe maker who works in the village of Ixtahuacan. Diego's shoe shop is just a few yards away from the new FTF Bakery & Training Center that was dedicated by Bishop's de Villa (Solola) and Skylstad (Spokane) last November.

Diego has been making shoes for residents of the area for over 15 years. He navigates four miles of mountain trails on an artificial leg to get to his shop in Ixtahuacan. It has become the spot where residents of the region share news and trade gossip about local events. Although his shop is tiny, cluttered, and ill-equipped by commercial standards, it is one of the small number of business ventures in the village. That made it a good target for robbery a few months ago when four strangers slipped into Ixtahuacan at night. The young men sought out anything that might be of value in the outside world. Their "take" was the money from Diego's shop, plus his grinder, and 7 or 8 pair of the shoes he had finished.

Most everyone knows everyone else in Ixtahuacan, and visitors seldom go unnoticed. So it was not unusual that someone noticed the young men and questioned what was going on. With no law enforcement official in the area, local residents took it upon themselves to apprehend the thieves. They caught two of them and brought them to community leaders for judgment and punishment.

After an all-day meeting, the community leaders decided upon an appropriate sentence. The two thieves were to spend a day in public view in front of Diego's shop, guarded by local residents. Their punishment was to pay some restitution, and kneel on dried kernels of corn for two hours.

The sentence was carried out as directed. One of the thieves nearly passed out before completing his two hours on the hard corn. But for residents of the village, justice was done. And for the young men, "Xc' aj nuwach" (I learned a hard lesson.)

Sr. Immaculata's Replacement

In 1971, Sr. Immaculata Burke traveled to the Spokane Mission in Guatemala to take over the direction of three remote clinics and medical care to families scattered over a vast area of the Highlands. After nearly 40 years of delivering babies, giving vaccinations, and training health promoters in hygiene, nutrition, and midwifery, she is ready to retire. At 93 years of age, she is seeking a replacement. The candidate must be a registered nurse who can communicate in Spanish and is willing to make a 3-year commitment to serve the poor. He or she will be working with Dr. Miguel, and will receive the small stipend that is currently provided by the Diocese of Spokane. Housing is available on-site near one of the clinics. If you know of anyone who might be interested, please let us know, and we will contact them.