



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

Family to Family

Familia-A-Familia Newsletter

October 2007

After Hurricane Mitch: Life is Changing in Ixtahuacan

It's 5:00 am, and the bells of Santa Catarina church echo throughout the mountains surrounding the remote village of Ixtahuacan. Soon after that, a horn beeps loudly and incessantly, signaling workers to get aboard the pickup if they want a dusty ride toward their fields. Or, for 50 cents, they might even bump all the way to the Pan American Highway --- where they can catch a "Chicken" bus to a more distant location.

After Hurricane Mitch (1998) the survival of Ixtahuacan was open to question. About 600 families had fled the centuries-old village, and there was even talk of bulldozing the area to prompt the remaining natives to move. Little thought was given to the thousands of others who lived in the surrounding mountains. Schools closed and the market stopped functioning. The only large structure was Santa Catarina Church, which paradoxically, was being rebuilt around massive steel girders.

However, life is returning to Ixtahuacan. The church construction nears completion, and work is well underway on a rectory building. Market stalls have been constructed in the town square, and a large parish community center is nearly complete. Schools have been reopened. Dr. Jose Miguel and Sr. Immaculata Burke make regular visits to provide health care. The FAF trout-raising ponds and reforestation projects continue to thrive, and several families have begun self-supportive activities, such as raising chickens. Some of the women are learning advanced weaving; others are learning to make chocolates. The bakery/training center, that will hopefully provide both food and training to locals, is under construction. The thousands of residents in the surrounding area can again begin to look to Ixtahuacan as a center for their economic, social, and other needs.

Guatemala Connection: Activities, Travels, & Needs

When an opportunity arises to help the poor in Guatemala, our FAF and local community members don't hesitate to respond. FAF has helped connect many people and things --- from school supplies and sewing machines to fish eggs, medical equipment, and hurricane relief. Here's a sampling of some current mission-related activities/travels/needs:

- 1) **Bakery/Training Center** is being built in Ixtahuacan by Dave Dodroe (Spokane).
- 2) Lucy Carlson (Spokane) is in Ixtahuacan for **chocolate-making & other projects**.
- 3) Dr. Jose Miguel, **Clinic Director in Novillero**, will visit Spokane this month. A reception for him will be at St. Thomas More Center at 5:30 on Oct. 22nd.
- 4) Ron & Donna Connell (St. Mary, Spokane) will visit **families/mission projects** in Nov., & will take **medical supplies** that are being collected by nurse Maureen O'Keefe.
- 5) Gary Franz & others (Pasco) are traveling to **work on the clinic** in Nahuala in Nov.
- 6) **Fish eggs** (SPO hatchery) need to be taken to Guatemala in Dec. **(Need a Volunteer !)**
- 7) John Davis (Pasco) is going to Ixtahuacan to do **electrical work** on Bakery/TC in Jan.

Why do we Help Others in Guatemala?

How fortunate we are! We have enough food, clean water, comfortable houses, cars, access to education and first rate medical care, etc. Plus we have security and a voice in our democratic governance. We enjoy so many blessings. What did we do to deserve this?

Actually, we have probably done very little. Our birth time and place --- and nationality --- are basically accidental. We had no control over the most determining conditions of our existence. By the grace of God, we happen to be alive at this moment in history, and in this, "our" country.

To whom are we indebted for the society and democracy that we take for granted? To *others*. We have benefitted significantly from the creativity, hard work, sacrifice, and philanthropy of those who have preceded us. Thanks to them, we can get a shot to avoid polio, speed to vacation spots in jumbo jets, and keep in touch with friends via the internet. Much of our "good life" (probably most of it) is really a gift from others. If life style were based upon fairness, we would have to admit that we have done very little to deserve what we enjoy.

So what is our responsibility? The biblical parable of the rich man (Abraham) and the beggar (Lazarus) offers us a clue. Lazarus was so poor that he longed to eat the scraps that fell from Abraham's table. But he got none. After they both died, Abraham was in a hot place, and begged that Lazarus be permitted to give him a few drops of water to relieve his thirst and sufferings. But the gap between the two was too large for anyone to cross.

Abraham is not depicted as a cruel or evil person. He had simply failed to respond to the plight of another in his earthly life. But now, after death, it was too late.

We strive to develop and preserve many admirable virtues, like happiness and freedom. But, as Christians one of the most essential virtues is a concern/generosity toward others who are in need. It is too easy for us to overlook the poverty of some, especially when we have access to the same goods and services as others in our social groups. Unlike Abraham, we must respond to an inequality that is not always so obvious in our own social settings.

How might we best respond? The immediate needs of food and shelter are certainly critical. In the longer term, however, benefits will increase if we can change the conditions that cause the poverty. FAF programs help by improving the ability of the people to become more self-sufficient. The bakery/training center in Ixtahuacan is an example of this. In addition, people who learn skills to support themselves, also pass those skills on to others.

Memorials

Dan Lorang has been honored with memorial donations to FAF from his wife, Janet. Dan was a baker, and Janet said he would be very pleased that FAF is starting the bakery & training center project in Ixtahuacan. Please remember Dan Lorang in your prayers.

Reception for Dr. Jose Miguel

All FAF sponsors, as well as others interested in work with the poor, are urged to attend the potluck reception being held for Dr. Jose Miguel at the St. Thomas More Parish Activity Center on Monday, October 22nd at 5:30 pm. If you can attend, please phone Clara Monks at 466-3995 or email at JMSpin@aol.com to tell her whether you would like to bring a main dish, salad, or desert.