

Guatemalan Partnership

The **Presbytery of Western North Carolina** enjoys a remarkable partnership with two presbyteries in Guatemala -- **Suchitepéquez and Sur Occidente**. The partnership began in 1992. The partnership has 30 churches in Guatemala paired with 32 churches in PWNC. This is a newsletter updating you on our **partnership's health ministry**.

February 2006

The health ministry started over 10 years ago. It began with health promoter training. Two people from each of our partner churches were selected for training in basic preventive health care and education, and the churches began working together on health issues. With time, interest has grown, and more promoters have become involved. Eventually, the promoters realized that certain specific initiatives had to be undertaken in order to encourage healthy lifestyles within their communities. As the work in health has proceeded, our partners have begun working closely with each other and with other institutions, leaders have been trained, and communities have become empowered and more hopeful.

Your prayers for the partnership, our Guatemala brothers and sisters and their work, and for the individuals who support the program are appreciated and needed. In Guatemala the ministry is led by health coordinator Flor de Maria Alvarez, board members Dina Vela, José Asencio, Cipriano Chan, and Samuel Merida.

Fuel-efficient wood stoves will save money and conserve scarce firewood; in the process, forests are spared and less smoke decreases respiratory illness for adults and children.



The stove project has expanded to include **ovens**. The ovens are built in communities that have few bakers. Women bake breads for sale as a source of family income. A portion of



the cost of the oven is repaid over time.

Gardens are being grown in a number of communities and homes. Fruits and vegetables are produced, offering families a nutritional bonus and financial savings.



Health promoters are also re-establishing a knowledge base about medicinal herbs to foster better home health. As an example, one church has a goal of propagating sufficient aloe plants so that every home has a plant to treat burns from cooking.

Children's nutrition continues to be a strong program in many of our partner churches. Youngsters are fed a nutritious meal and parents are taught principles of nutrition and growth.



Sources of clean water and water treatment are significant problems for many Guatemala communities. As labor of love, Jackie Kitchen and Luke Harkey with their partner churches will begin **drilling water wells** in Guatemala this year. Jackie has spearheaded this project for over two years and the first two wells will be drilled in San Rafael and Las Animas.

Living Waters for the World is offering to help with clean drinking water in the Guatemala presbyteries. They will install a water purification system in Santa Ana Mixtan this June. Discussions on other projects are underway. The water purification system is designed to provide water for drinking, cooking and hygiene purposes.

Composting latrines offer a cost-effective, hygienic method of improving public health through sanitation. Because of the alternative gift giving programs in 2004 and 05 the construction of family latrines can be sustained. As latrines are constructed training on the maintenance of the latrines and the composting process are provided to ensure health and sanitation objectives are met.

Hurricane Stan took its toll in Guatemala. The flooding and landslides from the saturated soils was horrific. The resources to assist many of our partner communities with flood recovery are needed.



Others help with Guatemala as well.

Students in Señor Beasley's Spanish classes at Enka Middle School in Asheville raised \$700 for Hurricane Stan relief by selling hand-woven Guatemalan bracelets outside the cafeteria. All 500 bracelets sold in 3 days!



The support that so many of you offer is gratefully appreciated. The health ministry is supported by WNC Health Partner Churches, the 2 cents a meal program, and other programs. Churches are encouraged to become a Health Program Partner and contribute \$300 or more a year. Mills River Church has been a health partner for several years. The week after Easter, Pastor Randall Boggs and members of the congregation are going to Guatemala to learn about the country and build stoves for a community. If you are interested in learning more about the health partner program, contact Randall at 828-891-7101.

Every year during the Christmas season, many people vow to change how they shop for holidays and special occasions. Without some help, most people can't alter such deeply ingrained habits. Your presbytery has been trying to provide that assistance with ideas on how to "reclaim Christmas." In 2005 members of 20 churches gave around \$25,000 to ten gift options in Guatemala and Malawi in honor of friends and family. In Guatemala, \$2446 was raised to help with children's nutrition, \$482 for improved stoves, and \$900 to help build composting latrines.

Year-round there are birthday, congratulations, and sympathy cards available from the Presbytery office. Contact Sheila Young or Ginnie Stevens at 828.438-4217.

For additional information on the **Guatemala Partnership** contact **Ginnie Stevens** vestevens2@aol.com or regarding **Health Ministry**, **Doug Michael** dougmichael@charter.net