

Guatemalan Partnership Health Ministry

The **Presbytery of Western North Carolina** enjoys a remarkable partnership with **two presbyteries in Southwestern Guatemala -- Suchitepéquez and Sur Occidente**. The partnership has 31 churches in Guatemala paired with churches in PWNC. **This is a newsletter updating you on our partnership's health ministry. Fall 2007**

Executive Summary. The Health Ministry is vital element of our partnership work and is making a difference in daily lives of our Guatemalan sisters and brothers. 2008 will be an important transitional year. The program priority is changing from that of broadly training all health promoters to a more community-driven model. The steering committee is working toward empowering promoters to more effectively teach in their communities and assisting them in identifying community health needs. Through a no-interest loan program more families will be able to purchase and use family water filters, construct composting latrines and stoves, improve their gardens, and in some communities loans will be available to cooperative groups of women so they can build ovens for baking breads which can then be sold for profit. The health promoters have also begun to formulate specific herbal medicines.

All churches continue to participate, though at different levels, with the children's nutrition program. This year with a funding from the WNC Presbytery Nickel a Meal challenge grant we are able to encourage and reward church programs that are working at a higher level in children's nutrition and are combining Christian education and parental nutritional education. The Health Ministry is working to become more systematic in individual project and program accountability and is improving policies for personnel management and financial management.

An opportunity has arisen to partner with the nursing department at Western Carolina University. Nursing students there could visit our partner project during in May 2008 as part of their own training. They could assist with promoter education and develop community health needs assessments. Our Guatemalan partners see substantial value in this opportunity and are enthusiastic in their support.

Our Guatemala partners embrace a definition of health that also includes spiritual health, economic development and social justice that is necessary to achieve healthy individuals, families and communities. 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.

Money given through the Presbytery's Alternative Gift Program is being multiplied to provide for critical needs in Guatemala. Gifts of \$25 or more make a profound difference. This year the Health Ministry is managing a no-interest family loan program multiplying the financial gifts and donations. The no-interest loans help families to build composting latrines, fuel-efficient wood burning stoves, purchases water filters, and improve vegetable and medicinal herb gardens. As the loans are repaid the monies are loaned to other families.

In addition to individual family loans cooperative groups can request loans to construct ovens and start bread-making businesses. The Health Ministry is also beginning to focus on other health related entrepreneurial opportunities to produce medicinal herbs.

The two highest critical needs are for families to have and use water filter and composting toilet. Use of the filter and latrines helps to solve many of the environmental health issues in children and adults.

In rural areas family drinking water is usually taken from a hand dug shallow well. This water is unsafe for drinking as it is polluted by nearby pit toilets and by domestic animals. In towns and cities when municipalities provide water it is usually not safe to drink. Purchasing safe bottled water is not affordable by many families.

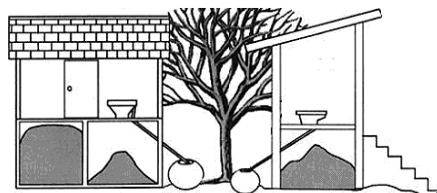
Ceramic water filters made in Guatemala by small Guatemala businesses are readily available and affordable by families. Potters for Peace established the Guatemalan businesses. Potters for Peace is a not for profit organization committed to assisting in the manufacturing of ceramic filters.



The Ecofiltro is a simple, pressed bucket shaped pot 11" wide by 10" deep, made with a mix of local terra-cotta clay and sawdust or other combustible, such as rice husks. The simple press utilizes a hand-operated hydraulic jack and two-piece aluminum mold.

The combustible ingredient, which has been milled and screened, burns out in the firing leaving a network of fine pores. After firing the filter is coated with colloidal silver. This combination of fine pore size and the bactericidal properties of colloidal silver produce an effective ceramic water filter.

Composting dry double vault toilet systems are being constructed in Guatemala. The double vaults are built above ground, and are watertight and require the separation of urine from the solids. Only one compartment of the double vault is used at a time. When it is full, the riser or seat is moved to the



empty side and the full side is closed and allowed to complete the composting process before the humanure is removed for use.

Composting toilets offer a tremendous health and environmental advantage over pit toilets. Ground water and wells are not polluted; flies cannot breed in the toilets; mosquitoes and animals cannot spread diseases; they are relatively odor free when properly used; and the humanure can be used in gardens. Where systems have failed is usually because of wetness (urine) in the vault. Complete information and an educated interest can ensure success of the system.

Acts of Love in Palín, a youth group is reaching out to those living on the fringe. This is not a term, but a reality. The youth of Iglesia Presbiteriana Madian Poqomán, partner church of First Presbyterian Church in Mt. Holly,



NC answered the call to organize themselves and lead a program for children who live in squatter homes along the abandoned railroad on the outskirts of Palín. When we, the Health Team of the Presbytery of WNC visited in August 2007, a group of the youth led the children in song and play to entertain us highlighting their work. Their program centers on bible stories, offers education and nutritional snacks to the children who otherwise are living outside and in plastic tarp houses.

The majority of the children are from broken homes. The program hosts about 50 children, weekly. Some parents do participate in the program but most are absent almost all day as they forage for food and work any work they can find.