REFLECTION AND SUMMARY

Guatemala Community Health Work Team
Providence Health International
Medical Teams International
Sehaquiba, San Juan Chamelco, Guatemala
May 11 – 19, 2012

Submitted to Celia Chappell, SP
Provincial Councilor/Leadership Team Member

by

Kathryn Rutan, SP
May 27, 2013

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We have heard our names called.
Back home, our name is not said in the same way.
How are we being called?
Aimee Knuu, PHI, Cobán, *Guatemala,*
May 17, 2013

Introduction

Medical Teams International in partnership with *Providence Health International* sponsored a Guatemala Community Health Work team in Sehaquiba, near San Juan Chamelco, Guatemala, from May 11-19, 2013. The purpose of this health work team was:

a) to contribute financially and with on-the-ground work in the construction and installation of improved ventilation stoves for forty families and
b) to participate in home visits with the families and to build relationships with the people of the Sehaquiba community.

Background

On my return to Mother Joseph Province in December, 2012, I had an initial interview with Sister Judith Desmarais, Provincial Superior/Leadership Team Coordinator. During our conversation, Sister Judith shared with me a letter she had received from Aimee Knuu of Providence Health International. In her letter, Aimee gave information about the Providence Health International mission teams in Guatemala and asked if any sisters from Mother Joseph Providence would be able to participate as members of the PHI medical and/or work mission teams.

In January 2013, I wrote to Sister Judith and the members of the provincial council, expressing my interest in participating as a member of the MTI/PHI Guatemala work project scheduled for May 2013. In March, I received the application forms from MTI and PHI and information regarding the mission. Subsequently, I received additional information, some very good articles on mission, solidarity and "serving or helping," as well as reflection booklets with information, prayers and reflection guides for our use before, during and after our time in Guatemala.

During March and April, I completed the application forms, requested the funds required for my membership on the mission team, completed the personal security background check and participated in two team conference calls. By the end of the second week of May, I had assembled the required items from the lists we received and had read, more than once, the background information and the articles.

On Saturday morning, May 11th, I put on the bright red *Medical Teams International* tee shirt (we had been asked to wear this tee shirt for easy recognition among ourselves and for our arrival in Guatemala City) and flew to Portland and to Houston. In Houston, Mark Thomas gathered the PH&S team together to pray for ourselves, for each other and for the people we would be serving just before we boarded the plane for Guatemala City.

We were met in Guatemala City by West Livaudais of Medical Teams International and Aimee Knuu from Providence Health International. We stayed that night at the Radisson Hotel and, early the following morning, after breakfast at a nearby restaurant, we loaded our bags and ourselves into a large van for the four hour drive north to the city of Cobán

We checked into Posada Don Antonio in Cobán which was our home base from Sunday evening until Friday morning. Each day, we made the hour long trip to the community of Sehaquiba, traveling on narrow and twisting mountain roads, some paved and some surfaced with gravel.

The Mission in Sehaquiba

The work team

In a short period of time, our mission work team bonded easily and deeply. Led by Mark Thomas and Aimee Knuu, we prayed and reflected together often for more than an hour in the evenings. In these reflections, we shared our concerns and our questions, our affection for the people we had met that day, our awareness of their creativity, strength and dignity and the joy and warmth that we had received in being with them. We reflected that, as we encountered the physical poverty in which these families live, we also experienced the value that they place on family and community and the strength and beauty of their culture,

As a team, living and working together for seven days, we came to know and appreciate each other and to experience ourselves in new ways in the midst of these families and the community of Sehaquiba. As was expressed often in these shared reflection times, their gift to us was so much more than anything we gave or brought to them.

Orientation by the Guatemalan MTI staff

On Sunday evening, after our arrival in Cobán, we met with the members of the MTI team who would be working with us and received valuable information and orientation from them about the area where we would be working and the communities and the families we would be meeting and serving. We learned of the on-going work of *Medical Teams International* and their partner groups; for example, the recent installation of latrines for the families in Sehaquiba.

The welcome by the Sehaquiba Community

On Monday morning, after a drive of about an hour, we were welcomed warmly by the families of Sehaquiba. We gathered with them outside the small building for speeches, music, gestures of welcome and broad smiles. The people speak Q'eqchi' and most of us had memorized the greeting in their language: *Ma sa' ch'ool* (good morning, how are you?). We had been told earlier that this greeting means, *How is your soul*?

The music, played by men and boys of the community on a hand-made xylophone and drums, was lively. Before, during and after the speeches, members of our team, swamped by the children, played with them, shared sun glasses with them, took their pictures and, to the delight of the children, then showed them the photos. (The sharing of sunglasses and taking of photos continued all week!) We greeted the women seated around the meeting space, many of whom were nursing babies, and shook hands with men who were standing close by. Then, the leader of the community invited everyone to dance and we joined the people of the Sehaquiba in celebrating what was to be a wonderful week of warm relationships, working together and learning from each other.

The construction and installation of the stoves

Our team separated into three groups and each group, accompanied by MTI Guatemalan staff members, some of whom are from the area, began to visit the homes, meet the families and help to install the stoves. Interpretation (English, Spanish, Q'EQCHI') was provided by the MTI persons on our teams and others among us who speak Spanish.

The families had already carried the materials for the construction and installation of the stoves to their respective homes. These included ten cement blocks (heavy) and the sections of the stove (very heavy). Each team had a tool box which we carried from house to house.

On arriving at a home, we visited with the family, asking for the names of the persons living in that house and invited family members to tell us about themselves and their families. Not accustomed to having strangers (which we certainly were!) in their homes, some family members were a bit shy. After about a half an hour, the mother and father were invited to show us where they wanted the stove installed. In some families, they had already done the preliminary work of leveling the earthen floor to receive the cement blocks. And, in a couple of families, they had begun the construction themselves.

At the conclusion of the construction and installation, the wife/mother was invited to light the fire in her new stove. This was, in each instance, a holy and sacred moment. She brought the kindling and some wood, placed this in the fire box of the stove and dropped the lighted match. The fire ignited, began to burn, the stove top was placed over the fire and the smoke made its way outside through the newly installed stove pipe. One member of the team then blessed the new stove and prayed for the family, asking God to bless them with good health.

At this point, the father, mother and others in the family offered expressions of gratitude, thanking us for being with them, for helping them. It was humbling indeed for us to receive such gentle and sincere expressions of *B'antiox* (thank you) coupled with their words of feeling inadequate, their need to have more help and their desire to use the stove correctly and well for the benefit of their families and the community.

After a stove was installed in one family home, often the mother and/or the father went with us to the next home to help with the installation there. And the children of different

families followed us and stayed with us as we made our way up and down the steep and rocky trails from one family to the next.

Our team groups, with the invaluable assistance of the Guatemalan MTI staff, installed two stoves each morning and two stoves each afternoon with a break for lunch (packed in Cobán in the morning) at the Sehaquiba health center.

Madres Monitoras (Mother Monitors) and a very ill child
On Wednesday at noon, we were hosted by the *"Madres Monitoras"* (the mother monitors) who are each in contact with ten families and who help to monitor the health of the families and to provide some health information and training. They themselves are being trained to recognize signs of malnutrition, respiratory illnesses and infections.

Toward the end of this gathering, various persons noticed that a mother was having difficulty nursing her baby. After a brief discussion among the doctor and nurses on the team, it was decided to take the mother and her very sick child to the regional clinic for a referral to the hospital in Cobán. Another PHS team member and I accompanied an MTI team member and the driver, first to the clinic and then to the hospital where the child was admitted and treated. We learned the next day that he was responding to treatment. (This is an entire story in itself, including the situation of the mother, and requires more space than I can give in this report.) As a side note, we noticed that the nebulizer used in the clinic to treat the baby had a blue label on it: *Providence Health Service*)

The concluding celebration and good-byes
On Thursday morning, after climbing up the trail to visit our last two families and install their stoves, we walked back to the health center for the closing celebration. The women were cooking a kind of stew in a huge pot in an adjacent building and were passing bowls of stew, tortillas, beans and a hot milk/sugar/cinnamon drink to the children and adults gathered inside and seated on the ground outside.

As people visited and ate, the team leaders from MTI and PHS presented gifts for the community school (soccer balls, jump ropes and a large water filter.) This was followed by speeches from the community leaders and mothers who once again expressed their gratitude. The children played, wore the dark glasses of various team members and had their photos taken again and gifts were given by families to various members of the team.

Around 3 PM, we slowly made our way down the trail to the road and the van as the families of Sehaquiba followed us and waved us on our way. It was an emotional leave-taking for the team members and for many of the mothers, fathers and children,

Visits to Clinics and the Regional Hospital

On our way back to Cobán on Thursday afternoon, we stopped to visit two regional clinics. Earlier in the week, two team members and an MTI staff member had spent the morning at the regional hospital in Cobán where they talked with Director of the hospital and were given a tour.

These visits provided the PH&S members of the team the opportunity to learn more about how the health system functions in Guatemala and to appreciate the challenges of delivering health care to the many families who are living this region of the country.

The office of *Medical Teams International* in Cobán

On Friday morning, before leaving Cobán for the trip to Antigua, we went to the offices of *Medical Teams International* to meet the staff and to reflect briefly with them on our experience in Sehaquiba. They shared with us an Icon of Blessed Emilie Gamelin that they have in their meeting room and together we prayed, *Providencia de Dios, yo creo en ti…* We thanked them for their invaluable assistance and their warm welcome and promised to pray for them as they continue their community health service among the families of rural Guatemala.

Antigua

We arrived in the city of Antigua on Friday afternoon, checked into the hotel and walked together to a restaurant for supper and our evening reflection.

Las Obras Sociales del Santo Hermano Pedro
(The Social Works of St. Brother Pedro) www.obrashermanopedro.org
On Saturday morning, we met for a brief prayer and orientation to prepare ourselves for the visit to *Las Obras Sociales del Hermano Pedro,* a large facility for infants, children, adults and seniors who are suffering from serious physical and mental limitations and illnesses. Mark Thomas, our team leader, reminded us of the words from Mt 25: 31-46 *"Lord, when did we see you sick…?* and asked us to keep these words in our hearts as we visited *Las Obras.*

We toured this facility and received information on the care that is given as well as being able to meet and visit with a number of staff persons and patients. Sponsored by the Franciscan Province of Central America and Panama, *Las Obras* is an institution that offers "loving, attentive and integrated care in the Franciscan spirit in order to improve the quality of life of persons with very limited physical and mental capabilities. This mission is carried out in coordination with health professionals and with the collaboration of national and international organizations and groups." (Adapted from the Las Obras brochure we received.)

Final meal, reflection and departure
Our last afternoon together was spent enjoying the sights, sounds and shops of Antigua. In the evening, we gathered for our last time of reflection and prayer. The sharing was deep and personal, reflective and challenging. "*What was it like for you?" "How are you now?" What will you say about this experience when you are back home?"*

Following our reflection time, we gathered for a last Guatemalan meal and celebrated the powerful experience of our seven days together. Aimee Knuu asked each member of the team to share what we have come to know about each other. Each of us was invited to speak to the person on our left and to place a small woven "rosary bracelet" on their wrist. We will always remember the people we met and with whom we have shared and worked and we know we are leaving Guatemala having received so much more than we were able to give.

"When the heart is touched by direct experience,
the mind may be challenged to change.
Personal involvement with the innocent suffering, with the injustice others suffer,
is the catalyst for solidarity which then gives rise
to intellectual inquiry and moral reflection.
Fr. Peter Hans-Kolvenbach, SJ PHI Guide for Reflection

"It is possible to become discouraged about the injustices we see everywhere.

But God did not promise that the world would be humane and just.
He gives us the gift of life and
allows us to choose the way we will use our limited time on earth.
It is an awesome opportunity."
Cesar Chavez PHI Guide for Reflection.

My flight left Guatemala early on Sunday morning and I arrived in Spokane, after stops in Houston and Seattle, that same evening. As I traveled, I celebrated the Feast of Pentecost with a full heart: the children, women and men, the sights and sounds of Guatemala and the special Providence and MTI persons with whom I had lived and served for the past seven days.

Kathryn Rutan, SP (Kitsy)
May 27, 2013

"*As people of Providence,*
we reveal God's love for all,
especially for the poor and vulnerable
*through our compassionate service****."***
Mission – Providence Health and Services

"Our intent is to channel our material and human resources
within a specific geographic area of the world,
for a prolonged period of time and done in such a way
as to create greater capacity and positively impact the delivery of health care."
Mark Koenig - Providence Health International Guide for Reflection and Discussion

*"Ou**r** mission is to demonstrate the love of Christ*
to people affected by disaster, conflict and poverty
around the world."
Mission - Medical Teams International

Our vision is to help build a faith-based global health movement
to save lives and transform people through
the power of God's love.
Vision – Medical Teams International

"God has called an united us
as Sisters of Providence in the Church
to proclaim the mysteries of Providence and Our Mother of Sorrows
to the society of our time
by our compassionate love and
creative prophetic solidarity
with the poor."
Mission of the Sisters of Providence