

Update on Mission News after February 2018 Visit

In February a team of six people from our Diocese traveled to the Mission with the purpose of visiting programs, interviewing people, and videotaping. The team included Zac Pinney of Cheney who was the videographer, Amanda and Julio Morelos from Walla Walla who served as translators, and Chris Pinney of Walla Walla, and Ron and Donna Connell of Spokane who were the organizers and general support. Video footage from this trip was shown at the Sixth Annual Mission Celebration, and will be available for other gatherings soon.

Fr. Nicasio, Pastor, Santa Catarina, and Ixtahuacan: Fr. Nicasio and Deacon Kevin are native of the Solola diocese. They serve 29 communities – all considered part of the Ixtahuacan area, many of which are far from Ixtahuacan, over mountains and hills! They celebrate Mass as much as possible in each community; however, for many parishes, that is once a month. The Parish Council is active in Ixtahuacan, as well as the Religious Education program, Youth program, and catechist program. Fr. Nicasio and Sebastian (lead catechist) train over 200 catechists once a month for preparation of sacraments. Catechists also hold prayer services several times a week at the various parishes. The people of Santa Catarina Parish in Ixtahuacan proper have replaced the old uneven rock floor in the church with beautiful new tile. Their next projects are to replace the roof of the Marian Center patio, and patch the church roof.

Scholarship Students: Fr. Nicasio and one of the teachers at the Basico School in Ixtahuacan selected 20 students who are receiving scholarships for their monthly tuition. The social/economic situation is very difficult and here are many who need financial assistance but these 20 are in the most need. The students come from many different communities surrounding Ixtahuacan. One boy, Jonathon, walks 2 ½ hrs to and from school each day! Teacher and students expressed their extreme gratitude for the diocese of Spokane and our support. The students on scholarships have said they will do their best to maintain their grades. They are thankful for the computers (ones purchased by St. Joseph's church a few years ago) however they have no money to continue the internet connection. They are working to bring potable water to the school, adding more pipes to carry the water from the stream.

Other: Fr. Nicasio told a story about the community of Palamo. He was walking to the church because his car broke down. It was very hot and he had a backpack. He was about an hour from the community when many people came walking to meet him and walked with him for 2 kilometers, singing until they got to the church. They arrived for 10 am Mass at 1 pm. After Mass they fed him and took him home. **Thank you to all who contributed to purchase a new vehicle for Fr. Nicasio! We were able to send enough funds for Bishop de Villa to arrange a purchase!**

Sr. Marie Tolle, Sr. of Charity of New York, has retired after over 40 years of pastoral and medical work in the mission. She has trained hundreds of catechists through the years and has served as Administrator of the medical clinics most recently. Presently, she is in New York recovering from recent illness. We thank her for her wonderful work and pray for her health and well-being.

Medical Clinics: Dr. Jose Miguel, Director of the four medical clinics, reported that diabetes, hypertension, and cancer are increasing among adults. Education is emphasized at the clinics, including information about prenatal and baby care, vaccines, and nutrition. Dr. Jose Miguel is able to buy medications in Quetzaltenango and thanks Spokane parishioners for their support! Health care promoters, who work at the clinics daily, are studying to complete their nursing degrees. These include Brigita and Francisca at the Nahuala Clinic, and Catarina in New Ixtahuacan. Another Francisca is already a nurse and working at the Novillero clinic along with Gregorio, who works at the clinic as well as caring for the Convent.

Recently the Sisters of Charity of New York celebrated their 200th anniversary in New York. Twenty seven Associates of the Sisters of Charity went to NY with Sr. Marie and 3 Sisters from Santa Cruz for the celebration. The Associates are native Mayan people and it was the first time they traveled outside of Guatemala!

Our Lady of the Highway Preschool: Teacher Elena continues to teach in a spirited manner, engaging all students with learning through music, movement and vocalization. About 15 students were in attendance. These children come from very poor families and could not attend preschool if tuition was charged.

Nawal Estereo – Radio Station: Lourdes, Director, stated that the funds that we send from parishioners in Spokane are a huge help! They use the funds for operating costs and emergencies. Lazaro said that they are happy and proud that Spokane people are supporting the station and have been for many years. One significant happening this year is that they are able to facilitate communication between Guatemalan people in the US and their families in Guatemala.

There are ten on the staff and they broadcast to over 1.5 million people, mostly in Quiche. Listeners have stated that they listen to the station because the broadcasts are in Quiche. Broadcasts include music, women's and youth programs, political news, religious, and recycling.

They still have problems with their very old truck (over 20 years old), and other aging equipment as well as "pirating" of their frequency from other radio stations. They have only the one truck and sometimes need to be in two places at once. They would be happy with a used truck – just newer than what they have. They need two receivers (each about \$2500) and two transmitters (each about \$5000).

Religious Education Program in Ixtahuacan (Formacion program): Catechists (Pablo, Teresa, Manuel, Pascuel and others) continue to conduct religious education classes even though they are no longer able to use their building. (Instead they are meeting in the Marian Center alternating with half of the class meeting outside.) They have begun the stabilization of the old building by digging out around the building, and the process of stabilization will continue – thanks to the support of people in Spokane! They send their prayers and gratitude to all who are helping them with their ministry!

Youth leaders in Ixtahuacan: Victoria and Marina, leaders, reported that youth congregate in Ixtahuacan for events from all 29 communities with about 300-400 youth attending. They will be taking buses to Santiago for the Diocesan Youth Convention the weekend of Palm Sunday. There is a concert on Saturday with a procession on Palm Sunday. Vicky expected about 250 to attend from Ixtahuacan.

Fr. Benjamin, Pastor of Santa Catarina, Nahuala: Fr. Benjamin and 3 other priests serve Nahuala and 55 other small communities! The priests visit the various communities for confessions together so that parishioners have a chance to confess to different priest. They have just completed a small building which is used for candle petitions. There are 4-6 men, called "servientes", who stay at the church all week and work at the church. They just built a new kitchen and showers/bathrooms for those men. **Pastoral in Nahuala:** The support we send pays for a man to translate all prayers into Quiche, the native language. They also hold meetings with families, teaching family members how to be leaders.

Colegio Nahuala: They are very thankful for the support that we send, both monthly and the extra support for the salaries of teachers. Teachers are paid about \$150/month which is less than public school teachers. One teacher told Fr. Benjamin, "Don't worry – we are happy with our jobs and we do our best." They have made some improvements to the school and have new desks and chairs.

There are 10 teachers in the Primary grades and 10 in the Basico with 35-60 students in each class! Classrooms are used for both Primario and Basico as the younger students go to school in the morning and the older students, in the afternoon. They are very thankful for the 10 computers donated by a Spokane individual last year! And they still use the manual typewriters for keyboarding practice.

Bishop de Villa: There are about 120 priests in the diocese although 30 are working in other places, helping out the parishes in other dioceses who have fewer priests.

Instituto Indigena Nuestra Senora del Socorro (the Girls School): There are 107 students at this beautiful school in San Andreas near Panajachel which includes both Basico and Diversidad. Fourteen girls are on scholarship from Our Lady of Fatima Parish in Spokane. They send their sincere thankfulness to all for the support that they have received!

Family to Family: Adela reported that programs include crops; such as coffee, maize, maxon, lemon, and avocado, and animals, sewing, weaving, hand embroidery, weaving, fruit trees, forestation and nursery. FAF is focused on people in the most isolated areas of Ixtahuacan, which, for some involves 6 hours walk.

For more information on this program, please go to their website:

<https://www.familytofamilyguatemala.com/stpries/>

Seminario Menor Señor San José in Sololá: Fr. Ezequel has been Rector for two years. He explained that there are three parts of formation; they have been working on the spiritual and intellectual and now working on human. They cook and clean together on weekends, planning and shopping for groceries. The Rector and leaders work alongside the students. The minor seminary is 25 years old. The seminary focuses on teaching values and living a sacred life in the Catholic Church. Many of the alumni who do not go on to the priesthood have professional jobs and are active in their parishes.

They need to remodel their kitchen as they are now preparing their own meals (they were getting meals from the Major Seminary). Seminarians visit the sick, collect trash on the roads, and go into the City to talk with the poor. There are 22 in the 10th grade and 12 in 11th grade. They also need new closets/cupboards for their students, and mattresses.