

GSP: THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Meeting our Family

A warm welcome by Sacred Family Parish in Oratorio



In late September, a delegation of five represented St. Charles as they travelled throughout the Diocese of Santa Rosa, Guatemala. Their mission? To begin a relationship based on love, faith, and the desire to see both communities grow and strengthen in the months and years ahead.

As a response to our Gospel call to be one human family,

the delegates were charged to “get to know” our family members in Guatemala. Their reflections this month offer glimpses into life in Guatemala: where people live, what they eat, what they do for work, what their education is like, etc. As you read, we hope you recognize both the differences and the similarities in our unique cultures. Enjoy!

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For more information about the history of GSP at St. Charles, please visit www.borromeo.org, and look under the Service & Justice tab.

God calls all Christians to a life of service and justice. The Catholic Community of St. Charles Borromeo strives to live its faith in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Santa Rosa in Guatemala, as we collaborate in creating just communities through long-term sustainable relationships.

Breaking Bread Together

When we break bread we do more than fulfill our need for calories and nutrients. In preparing a meal we express customs and traditions. It is in serving a meal that we nurture those around us and share our love. Sharing it makes us family.

We were family at breakfast with our hosts Freddie and Luiz as we enjoyed Huevos Rancheros. This traditional Guatemalan breakfast consists of fried eggs served with tomato and onion salsa, accompanied by fresh, warm tortillas. Often refried beans, queso fresco (a soft, crumbly cheese) and fried plantains were served on the plate as well.

We were nurtured when we dined as guests at the home of another of our hosts, Roel. His mother and wife prepared and served us fresh pork, rice, and delicious empanadas (folded tortillas filled and then fried) they cooked over a wood fire. A basket of fresh corn flour tortillas was on the table.

We were blessed to be served a traditional Guatemalan lunch of soup, rice and chicken in a poor village by local woman. The generosity bestowed on us by these people was humbling.

We shared local customs one evening when we met seven of our hosts at a pupuseria in their home town of Chiquimulilla. It



Women making pupusas in the market

was a wonderful evening with all thirteen of us, around a table, eating pupusas (a corn tortilla filled with cheese and beans), laughing and enjoying each other like old friends.

Each meal began with a prayer. We gave thanks to God, and prayed with and for each other. We held hands and prayed in Spanish or in English, knowing we were richly blessed with so much more than the food we were about to share.

Laura Heil

Interested in trying something we ate in Guatemala? Visit www.borromeo.org and look under the Service & Justice tab. You'll find the recipe for the delicious harina de avena (oatmeal) we enjoyed at breakfasts.



"They see the future of their people through a vision of education and higher learning."

A Hope for the Future: Education

A few key people we met during our recent Guatemala visit emphasized that change and the power to manifest their well-being can be realized through the future of their children's education.

Here are some of the facts that we learned during the visit:

- The government provides basic education for children 7 - 12 years old at the primary level. From 13 - 15 years old, they attend the 2nd level of education. These schools are free, though the cost of uniforms, books, supplies, and transportation makes them less accessible to the poor segments of society. Significant numbers of poor children do not attend school. This is especially true of many areas in Santa Rosa.
- Those families who live farther out of the regions of Santa Rosa cannot make it down to the municipalities to attend school.

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Town of Oratorio

Somewhere in Central America

Being from the Northeast, I frequently hear the term “*somewhere in the Midwest.*” “I have to change planes *somewhere in the Midwest.*” “Her accent sounded like she was from *somewhere in the Midwest.*” Or, just the other day, I heard: “Where is Marquette University?” The answer: “*Somewhere in the Midwest.*” Now, granted, these statements might be 100% factual. The problem, of course, is that when we lump all of these states together as one large body, we ignore the distinguishing and unique qualities that make each of them special.

Yes, Guatemala is somewhere in Central America. And the Diocese of Santa Rosa is somewhere in Guatemala. But let’s not stop there!

Guatemala – Country Overview

Located in Central America at the southern tip of Mexico, Guatemala has a total area of 24,042 square miles, slightly smaller than that of Tennessee.

Guatemala is a country of stark contrasts. While home to some of the wealthiest families in Latin

America, 40% of Guatemala’s 13 million citizens are primarily of Mayan ethnicity and live in abject poverty. For centuries, they have been marginalized by central governments run by non-Mayan leaders.

Guatemala has been at peace since 1996, when the government signed accords with a rebel group to end a 36-year conflict that killed over 200,000 people and decimated entire villages. Despite an official finding that 93% of all atrocities carried out during the war had been committed by the security forces, moves to bring those responsible to account started only after a long delay.

Despite the end of the conflict, a culture of violence continues to plague the country; there are as many deaths per year caused by violent acts linked to gangs, drug trafficking, robberies, etc. as there were on average during the civil conflict.

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Although Guatemala is trying to expand its manufacturing activities to reduce economic dependence on agriculture, the agricultural sector is crucial, employing 50 percent of the labor force (1.7 million workers).

The Diocese of Santa Rosa

Created in 1996, the Diocese of Santa Rosa is the most recent diocese to be formed in Guatemala (similar to how the Diocese of Metuchen is the most recent in New Jersey). Their Bishop, Bishop Bernabé Sagastume is also fairly new, beginning his role as Bishop in July 2007. A map of the Diocese can be found on the next page.

There are 18 main Roman Catholic parishes in Santa Rosa, each parish made up of a main church, typically in the larger towns, and several smaller churches in surrounding communities. The Church in Santa Rosa is typically the center of spiritual life, as well as social life and provides the majority of the social services needed by the population. In addition to the 22 priests, the Diocese of Santa Rosa is served by over 700 lay ministers serving a very faith-filled but vulnerable population. We were fortunate

enough to meet many of these lay men and women who work in the Diocese as Caritas Pastoral Staff members. They work to provide many of the social services for the Diocese, and they were actually our guides throughout our week. Over the next few months, we hope their names and faces become familiar to you!

The Parish of Oratorio

The Parish of Oratorio consists of 16 churches and 22 other communities without churches. Fr. David Dónis is the pastor of the parish and he lives and works primarily out of the main church, Sacred Family.

While we were there, we visited four different churches in the parish of Oratorio. Each church has its own Pastoral Council and its own traditions that make it unique. Unfortunately, due to a priest shortage and the abundance of churches, most churches do not have Mass each week. In fact, it took Fr. David five months to offer Mass for all of his communities.

Katie Onka



**GUATEMALA
BY THE NUMBERS**

THE COUNTRY:

Population: 12,987,829

Currency: US \$1 = Q 7.79

Life Expectancy: 68 years

Infant Chronic Malnutrition: 49% nationally and 68% among indigenous people

People living in poverty: 57% of which 21% live in extreme poverty (less than \$1 US/day)

THE DIOCESE OF SANTA ROSA:

76% of the population lives in rural areas.

33% has no access to water or sanitation.

18.3% is illiterate (this figure doubles for women).

The infant mortality rate is 43.2 per 1,000 births (compared to 6 per 1,000 births here in Central NJ).

There is only one 174-bed public hospital serving the 314,151 residents of the Diocese.

90% of the population is Roman Catholic.

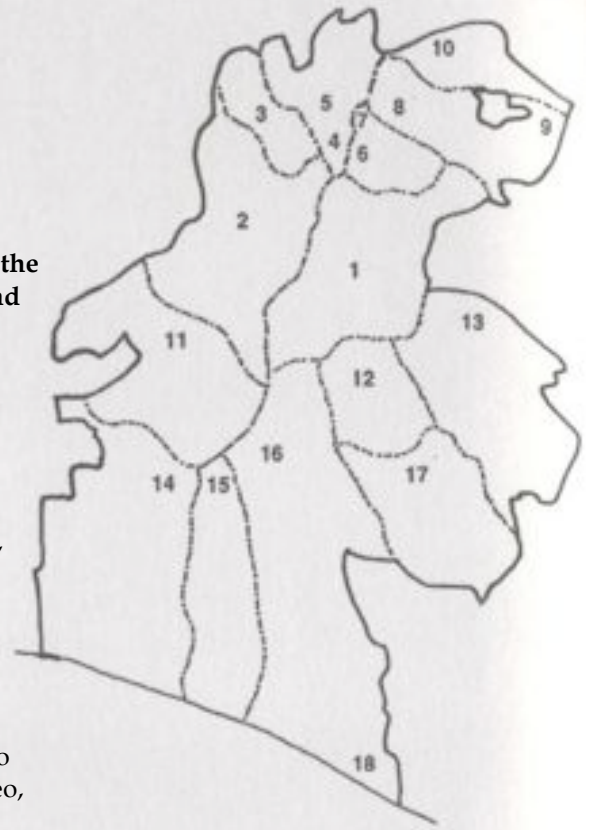
There is 1 priest per 12,864 Catholics (compared to 1 priest per 2,750 Catholics in the Diocese of Metuchen).

Some of the people, places, and parishes in the Diocese of Santa Rosa.

PARROQUIAS DE LA DIÓCESIS DE SANTA ROSA DE LIMA

Parish-to-Parish Partnerships between the Diocese of Santa Rosa, Guatemala, and the Diocese of Metuchen.

- 1. Parish of the Child of God, Cuilapa (partnered with St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Bridgewater)
- 16. Parish of Santa Cruz, Chiquimulilla (partnered with Queenship of Mary, Plainsboro)
- 17. Saint John the Evangelist, San Juan Tecuaco (partnered with St. Joseph, Hillsborough)
- 13. Parish of the Sacred Family, Oratorio (partnered with St. Charles Borromeo, Skillman)



The picture above shows where the Diocese of Santa Rosa is located within the country. The top right picture shows Bishop Sagastume (left) with Fr. Raúl Monterroso, Diocesan Commission of Solidarity. The Bishop and Fr. Raúl live and work out of the Cathedral in Cuilapa, pictured to the right.

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- Oftentimes children have to walk up to two hours to attend school. Due to other costs associated with schooling, families may not be able to have the financial resources to give their children food for the day or breakfast before they go to school.

Through education, the children will create for themselves, their families, and their communities a life that builds its way out of the poverty that continues to perpetuate through lack of resources – both natural and manmade. The education resource is clearly a long-view in creating a “better” life for the people- but one that allows them to transform their dreams into a reality.

There is no golden star for these people- only the dreams and wishes for a better life. Education, both primary and secondary, is one of the key factors in lifting this country out of its continuous cycle of poverty and governmental corruption.

Kathie DeChirico



A Different Way of Life

In Guatemala, there is no rush. Instead there is a hopeful presence to the moment that is uncommon in our American culture. When asked to prepare a reflection on Guatemalan living conditions, I found I couldn't help but compare the way they live to the season of Advent we are entering soon, this time of patient waiting.

So many Guatemalans have no access to what we consider daily necessities, like potable water, sanitation, and healthcare. Historically they have known decades of government corruption and political unrest that leave them unable to get a foothold on economic stability. Seasonally they endure flooding that is disruptive, if not deadly. Many live in small shacks built from scrap material; but despite the harsh conditions, never did I feel a sense of hopelessness or envy among them. In fact it was quite the opposite. Priorities for the parishioners of Santa Rosa are not of a material nature, but rather are faith, family and community. They take the time to carefully listen and understand one another in a way that clearly takes priority over following a schedule and being on time. Their presence to each other in every moment was palpable in all our interactions.

As I reflect on the people we met, and their hopeful presence to me even in the midst of such uncertainty and instability, I am humbled by their faith, conviction and patient waiting.

Mike Connolly



What is the Goal?

Why Guatemala? Why travel to another country?
What is the goal?

I used to think the answer to these questions was "perspective". "Perspective" allows one to see a different way of life, a different culture and a different land. For instance, there is so much to learn from the Guatemalans. Their lives are simple. There is a strong focus on family and an exceptional focus on faith. Even though they don't have much (from our perspective), they are cheerful and friendly (and from their perspective, have plenty). Although this is a beneficial reason for the trip, it is a somewhat selfish reason. It benefits the person that travels the most. The real reason for going to Guatemala is "solidarity". This is not an easy concept to define so I will try with 3 explanations.

1. Recently, we all heard about the Chilean miners and their dramatic rescue. The whole world was following their story and pulling for their safe return to the surface. We didn't know the miners personally but there was certainly a sense of exuberance when they were rescued. What if we could have that sense of connection without a tragedy or crisis involved? This is solidarity.
2. During our visit we attended a meeting held by the Bishop of Santa Rosa. He invited all the priests in his diocese to attend and we had the honor of

being introduced at the meeting. Each of the priests spoke to us, welcomed us, and had their own unique message. The message from Father Raul stood out. He said, "You can't have a passion for something you don't understand". This is solidarity.

3. I recently came across a meditation on the Stations of the Cross by Fr. Richard Rento. What I felt was different about Fr. Rento's meditation was his modern interpretation of the stations. Specifically, for Station V, Simon Helps Jesus, he provided the following reflection: "Foreigners. They trouble us, Lord, because they are different. Who is our neighbor, who is our brother, our sister? Perhaps it has to be some outside pressure that forces us to get involved in the lives of others – to give, to share, to help, to welcome. Convert us, Lord, to true and loving friendship with those who are different, here and far away. Make use see that we are one in You." This is solidarity.

The relationship with our new friends from Guatemala is just beginning. It's the beginning of a journey, a long one that will be challenging at times but also very rewarding. Give it a chance. Be open to the possibilities. Be open with your heart. Join the effort and walk with us one step at a time.

John Sudol

Our Journey ...

Our newsletters, pictures, and stories over the next few months will be centered on the following themes:

December: Family

January: Gifts and Gratitude

February: The Mass

March: Solidarity

WE NEED YOUR HELP!

Seeking Creative Writers and/or Editors: Do you enjoy writing and would like to contribute to the Guatemala partnership? If so, we could use your help. There are many experiences and messages to convey and sometimes it helps to have a

new perspective to formulate those experiences into stories. This task would involve interviewing delegates or others involved with GSP about specific topics and then formulating a "story" for distribution to the St. Charles community. If you think you can help, please contact Katie Onka at konka@borromeo.org.

THE GSP CHALLENGE

This month's newsletter is all about the country of Guatemala – the people, food, culture, living conditions, etc. Our articles give an overview of various subjects, but there is so much more!

This month's GSP Challenge is to learn about current events in Guatemala. Try to find at least one story this month that affects the people of Guatemala. Email stories to konka@borromeo.org.