

June 2017

Dear Friends,

Just because you have not heard from us in a while does not mean we have not been busy. Things are going very well with the Merida Foundation. We will get into the news in a minute but we do want to apologize for not being in touch sooner.

Our custom has been to contact you after every trip to Merida, but there was a big gap between trips. Rudy and Dorothy would go three times a year, but with many of us on the board still working, we had only two trips last year. However, we are going to try to make it three times again this year. We had one trip last month and have scheduled two more for August and November.

Before we get into the May visit, we want to remind you that, while the glasses are an important part of our ministry and the number of people we reach depends on the number of trips, this does not affect the children we feed every school day. Thanks to the dedication of Luis Franco, our project manager in Merida, our nutrition assistance continues to thrive and grow.



The great thing about the program is that those children are going to eat whether we visit or not. We give Luis the money he needs each month to purchase the food for the various sites. Each week he makes deliveries to the school. He takes care of most problems as they arise. If need be, he will call us and we resolve the situation together.

Thanks to you, we are currently supporting eight nutrition sites in Merida and surrounding villages. We are located in Nolo, Yaxkukul, Xcanchakan, Eknakán, Telchaquillo, Escuela Hogar (aka “the orphanage” in Merida), Emmanuel (in Merida) and St. Vincent (aka Maryknoll, in Merida). The respective sizes of these programs vary but in all we are feeding about 750 children every school day.



Seven hundred fifty a day does not compare to numbers for Food for the Poor or World Vision, but they are 750 children who were not reached by these large organization. They are 750 children whose hunger was affecting their growth, their health, and their education before our Merida Foundation started to collaborate with their schools and their parents. They are 750 children who are now energetic in the classroom and on the playground because of you.

That is great news, but it gets better. After reviewing our financial support, we have determined that we can expand our nutrition assistance. We think that we can safely handle up to 100 more children. By “safely,” we mean that we can add a site with the assurance that it will not close in a year or two because of lack of funds.

The team for the May trip consisted of board members Anne Durbin Scott, Larry Lewis, and Greg Mihalevich. The very first day they met with Luis to discuss where we might expand. Luis had done his research and recommended adding the school in Pixyah (pronounced Pishah) which is located near Telchaquillo where we have one of our earliest nutrition sites. The team traveled to Pixyah and according to their trip notes:



Today we met with the Principal of the school and one of the two teachers for the kindergarten. Those teachers are pretty busy teaching 53 children (ages 3-6). We visited one of the classrooms while the children were having recess. They have a display of numbers on the classroom wall in both Spanish and Mayan. The children come to kindergarten speaking mostly Mayan, requiring the school to teach both languages. The older generation of the people in Pixyah appear to speak only Mayan. We learned that when later we were at the village square dispensing glasses.

The team's recommendation was approved by the board and we have already started providing

meals to the 53 students in Pixyah last. We are still entertaining the possibility of beginning yet another school in the fall, depending on how donations come in.

Judy Lewis and Lois Mihalevich accompanied their husbands on the trip, the first visit for both of them. While both were taken by the beauty of the Yucatan and its people, they didn't have much time to think about it as they joined the rest of the team in dispensing glasses in Cuzamá on their first day.

Cuzamá has a lot of history with the Foundation. This is one of the first villages that Dorothy encountered. In fact Cuzamá is where Dorothy first decided to start bring down glasses and passing the out to those in need. Cuzamá is also the home of our friend Genny. We worked for 3 hours dispensing glasses and when we were ready to pack up and go visit with Genny, here she came. She came to ask us to come to her family's home for lunch.

Genny, you may remember, is a Mayan girl that Dorothy more or less "adopted" when she was six. Lois explained the result of Genny's relationship with Rudy and Dorothy in an email she sent to family and friends:

They took care of her education, and she grew up to be a clothing designer and seamstress for a clothing store at one of the huge international hotels in the new part of Merida. She supports her entire extended family.

After three or four hours of dispensing glasses in Cuzamá, Genny invited the team to lunch. Traditional Mayan food is always tasty, but good cooks can make it exquisite. According to the team notes Genny, her Mom and sister qualify:

They made us a wonderful lunch. Puchero is the name of the soup she served us along with some delicious tortillas. Buchero is a soup made with chicken, squash, plantains, chayote, noodles and rice. She had a condiment for the soup made of radishes, cilantro and bitter orange juice. It was awesome.

After the lunch, the team met with Genny to help her fill out another application for a tourist visa that would allow her to travel to the United States. She desperately wants to come to Missouri to visit Rudy and Dorothy

one more time and we hoped to get her here while Dorothy might still remember her. She had applied last year and was denied a visa.

Unfortunately, despite an intervention from Sen. McCaskill's office, she was again denied a few weeks ago. She has a good job, owns property, and supports her family, but as a young Mexican woman with no children of her own, she is looked upon as one who might not return to Mexico. At \$160 for each application, we don't know if she will apply again.

On Monday, their second full day in Merida, the team returned to Cuzamá with their glasses. As Lois describes it, one has to wonder if it was the glasses that drew them back:

We had had to cut off the giveaway the day before with people still waiting in line. We worked for about 3 hours and then returned to Genny's home for lunch. Again, her Mom and sister had prepared a meal for us. This time it was lime soup---hot chicken broth with onion, a tiny bit of tomato, and a little bit of cilantro. She also made panuchos, a crisp tortilla topped with bean paste thinner than refried beans, cabbage, a lettuce leaf, pickled beet, avocado, shredded chicken, pickled red onion, and cucumber. I noticed that Yucatecan food doesn't have much cheese on it like Tex-Mex food does and it's not very spicy.



On Wednesday and Thursday, the team went to the villages of Kopoma and Ixil. They were busy days, giving out hundreds of glasses. It seemed like most of the "customers" were grade school-age kids or people 55 and up. Many of the women sew, and there were many requests for strong reading glasses. The older women wear the traditional Yucatecan dress, white with beautiful embroidery round the collar and the bottom of the skirt. This woman showed up to get glasses in her embroidered dress with her tortilla mix in a bowl on her head.

While in Merida, the team introduced a new financial tool we will be using for greater ease and accountability. They performed trial runs on the new debit card for Luis. The Foundation has opened an account at Hawthorne Bank and Luis now has a debit card for the account. This is a better way for the Foundation to transfer money to Mexico to purchase the food for the nutrition sites. The trial run was successful both at the bank ATM and Sam's Club. We are still working on the card to work at the gas station.

Back at home, the Merida Foundation has a new website, created by Kasey Wright of Meetings Northwest. We have tried to make it colorful and interesting with photos and information about us as well as our eyeglasses and nutrition programs. Visitors can read the latest newsletter or an article about our work in the Yucatan. They can even make a tax-deductible contribution on line now using PayPal, which also accepts all major credit cards. Please check us out at www.meridafoundation.org

Once again, we are so grateful for your contributions. This generous support allows us to feed hungry children and improve the eyesight of the poor and elderly. We go to Merida and see, first hand, the profound effects of your gifts. You do not have that opportunity, but through an incredible faith and love, you continue in your kindness. We can only thank God for the goodness of your hearts.

We'll leave you with one final thought from Lois:

One last thing. I've always thought Cole County has a rock problem. Where we live, there's about an inch of topsoil, and then comes good old limestone, possibly all the way down to the core of the earth.



Well, the Yucatan Peninsula has Cole County beat all to pieces in the rock business. The Yucatecans make good use of their rocks. They build lots and lots and lots of rock walls, but they could probably build rock walls until the end of time and still not make a dent in all the rocks they have. Made me appreciate my one inch of topsoil.

Anyway, we're back now. I enjoyed the trip. It was fun to see people who were thrilled to get a simple pair of reading glasses, something that we take so much for granted.

Please keep Dorothy and Rudy in your prayers. We would not be doing any of this if it were not for them.

Sincerely,
Mark

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For the Merida Board

Anne Durbin Scott

Larry Lewis

Greg Mihalevich

Patricia Joyce

