

## Guatemala at a Glance

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September 15...Independence Day here in Guatemala...There are marching parades, school band drum beats, reina de independenciam, smiles and firecrackers exploding all around us and in the midst of this celebration, we Adorers pause a minute for introspection and in this moment of reflection we are compelled to ask:

*What does independence really mean here in this place of Guatemala...and independence for whom?*

As we look at events that have happened here in Guatemala over the last month the underlying theme that has emerged is corruption:

- The theft of \$300,000 from the social security system. 5 government employees have been arrested, the leader of which participated in a course last year with Dani and received a certificate in socially conscious public management.
- Without consent from the legislatures, \$12.1 million of Congressional funds had been transferred into an investment account and now transferred into thin air (or someone's unknown personal bank account).
- For the last 5 years Guatemala has been the top recipient of anti-drug trafficking funds from the US and yet 90% of drugs traveling north to the United States pass through Guatemala. The US Accountability Office says Guatemalan government corruption has impeded investigations and DEA intelligence has been used for personal benefit.
- Hidden cameras and microphones were discovered in the office and home of President Colom and Vice President Espada, causing the dismissal of the directors of presidential security and raising questions about state information.
- There are indications of economic growth in the country, but the recently published UN report lists Guatemala as having one of the lowest levels of human development, showing once again that the vast wealth here does not benefit the majority of the population.
- One congress member just stated on a television news program that more than 30% of the government's budget is lost due to rampant and unpunished corruption.

From this larger general view we look at our local area where over this past month we have seen the impact of these movements and events:

- Two families of students at the Maria De Mattias Institute have lost their fathers in violent deaths, both while struggling to support their families, one as a storekeeper and the other as a taxi driver.
- Several poorly constructed homes sitting precariously on a hillside in Altos de Santa Maria, where we have a clinic, are now on the brink of being washed down the ravine due to continued rains.
- Collaborators in both the education and health care project have been personally touched by these times, Hector has lost his job as the bus driver as we had to stop service for security reasons and Silvia has fled the area with her family due to threats against her son.
- This morning we had the funeral mass for 2 local young men who drowned in Mexico while trying to immigrate north with visions of better opportunities. Now all that is left is shattered dreams and heartbroken families.

The increasing corruption that we have experienced has continued to hold the population captive in poverty and insecurity, with lack of adequate basic services such as health and education, all of which continue to contribute to insufficient opportunities, limited possibilities, unreachable dreams and an increasing gap between rich and poor. This corruption speaks to us of an

overriding individualism and personal greed that has invaded many sectors where the mentality has become...what's in this for me?...what can I gain from this? This mentality is at the expense of others and it contradicts the concern and respect for the common good that has been an important element of Guatemalan society and culture.

And so our reflection leads us to the questions – What can we, as Adorers here, do for the good of the whole? How can we, as Adorers in the midst of this corruption and individualism, speak out against it and be a voice for the collective? How can we, as Adorers seeking to live our mission here, be an impetus for bringing about that “beautiful order of things”? What can we, as Adorers with conviction, do to be a channel of transforming corruption in the name of ME into the beautiful order which reflects and benefits the WE? Sometimes we feel like we don't have the answers but reflecting on the questions helps to take us one step further on the journey. And this leads us to remember and rejoice in the things in our midst that speak of hope in a future:

- Kris, Dani, and Margo (who was visiting for a few weeks), made a site visit to a successful lending library in Nicaragua that helped generate new and interesting ideas for the library project and has provided many valuable connections.
- Dani has met with several architects as the health care project is moving full steam ahead with plans for developing and constructing a permanent administrative and training center.
- Once thought an impossible feat, Internet Service has been installed at the Maria De Mattias Education Center and is working great! It even includes wireless connection.
- And speaking of computers, 9 members of the health care project just completed a computer course and are now using their newly acquired skills in reports and program presentations. They were so proud to receive their certificates.

We thank you for sharing in our reflection during this month of independence and for being part of our ASC presence here in Guatemala. Until next month, un abrazo fuerte, Kris and Dani