

Guatemala at a Glance
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As we are all well aware (after months of being saturated with campaign information), the month of November started off with the election of Barack Obama as the 41st president of the United States. And here in Guatemala, where so many policies and actions of the US have a significant impact, the election of a US president does not go by unnoticed. And even though Obama made no definite references during his campaign to potential Latin American policy, his election has brought about a sense of positiveness and possibilities among the people of Guatemala.

This sense of hopeful possibilities is especially related to expectations and hope of change in immigration policies. With over 1 million Guatemalans in the US who send money back home and help sustain the Guatemalan economy, the deportation of over 25,500 persons so far this year and the way in which undocumented immigrants have been treated, has been disconcerting. This month the Jesuit Landivar University in Guatemala City held the Fifth International Migration and Development Congress where the keynote speaker, Jorge Bustamante of the United Nations Office for Immigrants Human Rights, compared the roundups of undocumented immigrants in the US to the roundups of Jews by the German Gestapo over 60 years ago.

And so we ask all of us, in the United States and here in Guatemala, what can and what are we doing so that history does not continue to repeat its worst moment? And what can and what are we doing that reflects justice for all and brings about that beautiful order of things?

This challenge to own one's own story and to continue to ask questions without imposing answers was the center of the talk that Kris shared this month with the Woodbridge Honors Program at Northern Virginia Community College in Annandale, Virginia. In her talk -- "What is an illegal alien, anyway?" -- she shared about her own life's experiences encouraging others to do the same in order to touch in with the lessons learned and hopefully to the questions that lead us to more. She encouraged the participants (and thus each of us) to reflect on what messages we send with the choices we make and to consider at a deeper level the consequences of the choices we make and the consequences of the choices we don't make.

We came to know some of the effects choices have made on a national scale when we attended last week the presentation of the 2007-2008 Guatemalan National Human Development Report prepared by the United Nations Development Program and presented to President Colom and the public who filled the National Theatre. The question asked in the title of the study was "Is the economy at the service of human development?" And the answer shared was a resounding NO...Guatemala has the greatest economic inequality in all of Latin America. The economic model used since 1980 has failed tremendously in this country where 20% of the population possesses 60% of the resources. This concentration of wealth has produced an economy at the service of the elite while at the same time the majority of families have less than \$2.00 a day for basic food, let alone income for other necessities. This inequality has thwarted development, affected health and life expectancy and has perpetuated poverty. The study also showed that even though the number of families living in poverty has not increased over the past few years, this has been due to the money sent by family members living and working in the United States. Without this flow of income, poverty in Guatemala would reach over 62%.

Again, we ask, what can and what are we doing so that history does not continue to repeat its worse moment? And what can and what are we doing that reflects justice for all and brings about that beautiful order of things? Our choices have consequences much larger than just us.

Going from the large picture to the local level...this month more than 280 6th grade graduates participated in the language arts and math classes held at the Maria De Mattias Institute. At the end of the course the students took the entrance exam and now the hard decisions are being made concerning who will be the 140 that will have the opportunity to start their secondary school studies next year at the Institute. The health care project has spent this past month doing program planning for this upcoming year and in light of the Adorers mission here, Dani, along with Adela, the medical director, have set forth in 2009 to promote among the staff a better understanding of the spirituality of the Blood and the connection with our everyday service in a project that carries the name Sangre de Cristo.

And so, with grateful hearts, during this season of Thanksgiving, for the privilege and grace of serving in Guatemala in the name of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, we ask God's blessing of each of you and all those whose lives are connected with yours. Until next month...

Dani and Kris