

## Guatemala at a Glance

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Today is the last day of the year. T.S. Eliot wrote "...last year's words belong to last year's language. And next year's words await another voice. And to make an end is to make a beginning." So we offer the last words of our reflection on Guatemala's reality 2008 and our place in it.

There were 2 photos that appeared in the news recently: One of a smiling, early campaigning ex-President Portillo (the man who "voluntarily exiled himself to Mexico" after bankrupting the country and has recently returned, now freed on bail as the courts consider the case against him) and a young Guatemalan mother in Iowa sitting on the curb with her 2 young children, her immigration leg bracelet prominently showing. Her husband is not out on bail but still "being held" in prison for being in the U.S. without proper documentation. Why is there such confusion in our societies about who the real criminals are? We in Guatemala choose to have a communal ASC presence as we seek to bring about what our foundress Maria De Mattias called the "beautiful order of things."

**What is that beautiful order here in Guatemala and in the U.S. and how do we make concrete choices to promote that?** That is a huge question we carry with us in to the New Year. The Peace & Justice Committee of our community's U.S. Region has decided to make the plight of immigrants and immigration reform the focus for 2009 because it is a time sensitive issue. We recognize that living south of the border offers another perspective on that reality. The responsibility of living and working here includes looking for ways to make the connections that promote the truth that we are a global community.

The Guatemala Human Rights Commission update states:

*The U.S. has embraced unregulated free market policies that have led to the loss of over 200,000 jobs in Guatemala over the past two years and caused the price of basic food items to soar, in a country where 50% of the children are chronically malnourished. The implementation of the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) in 2006 has fueled migration to the North, by allowing multinational corporations to flood local markets with cheap agricultural goods. Meanwhile the profits from Guatemalan exports do not compensate for the loss of jobs and income affecting the majority of citizens. The destruction of the rural sector forces migration to cities, where workers often end up employed at foreign-owned factories, working under terrible conditions and earning very low wages. With few options in Guatemala, many turn to the U.S., where even the worst jobs offer higher pay and the opportunities to send money home. This cycle of migration, remittances, and dependence will continue until the Guatemalan economy offers real job opportunities with benefits.*

### **The beautiful order of things: What choices can we make?**

Traffic in Guatemala is reaching the limits of unbearable. For a country the size of the state of Ohio, the number of cars is more appropriate for California! Trafficking is much bigger here than just buying wrecks in the States and shipping them down. Trafficking arms, drugs and persons, has become the new big business. President Colom's

response is to increase the military and use them for patrolling cities and towns. The Peace Accords which were signed over 12 years ago were very clear on the need to reduce military by one-third. Colom's plan calls for an increase of over 10,000.

**The beautiful order: What choices do we make to support that?**

We do want to end this reflection and this year with a word of hope, *"the end we hope will be a beginning."* Our health care and education projects are contributing to the building of **a beautiful order of things**. There are strong connections with support coming from many corners of the U.S. And because celebration is good, both projects ended the year with wonderful parties and plans to *"do something concrete that reflects our charism and calls forth hope and a deepening of the value of life."* (mission statement Guatemala 2008-9) Our prayer for each of you is that you find ways to seed the dream of a beautiful order and celebrate the ways it is already evident. Blessings.

*Kris and Dani*