

PRIMERO DIOS (With God's Blessing) News from Guatemala

*Star-Child, earth-Child, go-between of God
Love Child, Christ Child, heaven's lighting rod,
This year, this year, let the day arrive
When Christmas comes for everyone, everyone alive!¹*

SEEMS MORE LIKE A YEAR. We have been in Guatemala since June 17th. 2005. Only 5 months and it seems more like a year! We feel already “at home” – for this blessing we have to give special thanks to people from the IENMPG (Methodist Church). It seems also a longer time because we have had many different, wonderful and challenging experiences to serve and to testify...And we are learning some words and phrases in Ki'che'²

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS. It is impossible to count all the blessings received since we arrived into Quetzaltenango –the 2nd. Guatemalan city, in the highlands, a city surrounded by mountains. One blessing is that we live in a safe and nice and spacious house (with a guest room if you are interested) and that it is already used for Bible Studies, workshops, work luncheons, friendly and pastoral dialogue. We count also as a special blessing our daughter Irene finishing her bachelor degree in Theology (Costa Rica) and our son René “passing” with “good grades” his first experience of “living alone” in Uruguay. When we got sick we've



recovered; when we felt discouraged or we had troubles deciding what to do (or not to do), God always found a way to cheer us, to guide us, to exhort or admonish us, God found a way to strengthen our spirits. Thanks be given to God!

BEGINNING FROM THE BEGINNING. “What does it mean to be a Methodist?” This question is not easy to answer neither in USA nor in Bolivia or Uruguay places where the Methodist Church has a long and rather consistent history. This is a question even more difficult for our fellow Guatemalan Methodists to answer, because the actual “Iglesia Evangélica Nacional Metodista Primitiva de Guatemala” has a long-complex-sometimes-disconcerting history (still waiting to be “discovered”). As leaders and pastors wish to clarify the church's identity in our educational ministry we are beginning from the beginning: as our brother John Wesley said “*A Methodist is someone who loves God and follows Jesus in loving people...*”

People here want to know everything about Methodism, but telling Methodist Movement and Methodist Church's history is not enough for church leaders and pastors to understand what it means to be part of a Methodist Church. Questions arise everywhere, all the time and about all kind of issues: what do Methodists think about...? Is it true Methodists do...? What do you think about using earrings? What do you think about youth playing football? And of course, they want to know what Methodists think about women using pants and being pastors. They want to know many things...they feel they don't know “anything” because they haven't gone to school of high school...they need to realize how much they already know.



¹ The Faith We Sing, 2095

² One of the 23 Mayan languages

WOMEN AND CHILDREN. It is written in almost all statistics and serious documents around the world: women, children and elders are the ones that suffer more the consequences of war, violence, injustice, sin... Sadly Guatemala is country where you find all that and more. It is almost “natural” that women don’t go to school and marry young and have at “least” 8 or more children and are the ones that clean and support the local church but have little or no “decision” at all. Most of the women that attend the Methodist Church speak only their native Mayan languages: ki’che’; ixil or kaqchikel. This year, for the first time and thanks to Judith Feaster’s efforts -previous UMC missionary here-, the spouses of the pastors and leaders studying at the Biblical Mayan Methodist Institute had their own “studying space” and participated in 2 workshops. Some brought their small children with them, some came with their husbands because some roads are not safe to travel alone, most of them traveled between 6 to 10 hours round trip to attend a 4-hours-and-time-for-meals-workshop...But they left thanking God for the opportunity!!



Cooking “classes” are a good time to talk about God’s purposes for women...

EMERGENCIES AND URGENCIES. When we try to discern priorities for our work, we find everything is important, urgent and that “emergency” is almost “a way of living”. During and after the impact of Tropical Storm Stan last October, the Methodist Church, through its Executive Committee and the Projects of VIM and Health and Peace is taking primary assistance –food, clothes, blankets and medical assistance – to some communities. The “new” Methodist Solidarity Emergency Team is working on a long-term-holistic-project in one of the damaged communities.



But training pastors and leaders (many need to learn how to write and read at the same time) for the church and the community with holistic perspective of Jesus Christ Gospel is not only important but also urgent, very urgent because this may help a lot when emergencies arise.

“PRIMERO DIOS”. Speaking Spanish doesn’t guarantee you not to have at least a tiny “cultural shock” when you arrive to live in a new country, a new environment, a new culture. We are trying to adapt to Guatemalan’s Spanish and people is very gracious trying to understand all we say, but sometimes they just smile because for them the way we speak is very funny. **“Primero Dios”** is one of the expressions we have already introduced in our daily vocabulary. Meaning **“with God’s blessing”** it is used to answer you when you greet someone with a “Good morning”, when you part from a person, when you share a plan, when you receive an injection ... It is said in a way that you feel it is not “just an expression”, but that it is truly believed. **“Primero Dios”**, with God’s blessing we hope to get the necessary help to develop the plans and projects we and the church have for the Guatemalan people.

HOW YOU CAN HELP US AND PEOPLE WE SERVE

- **PRAYERS**

- Pray for us; that we may always look for God’s guide; that we be patient and just; that we may be enlightened as to what and how to teach; that we may always be generous and kind.

- Pray for Guatemalan people, that God’s justice and love may prevail in their lives and in the country’s life.
- Pray for the Methodist Church in Guatemala (IENMPG), that it may fulfill God’s call to be part of the Redemption Mission.
- **OFFER TO ADVANCE SPECIALS.** We need **URGENTLY** your support through the ADVANCE SPECIALS. During the year we’ll be explaining you in detail every project.
 - **Biblical and Technical Methodist Mayan Institute, San Sebastian Lemoa**
Leadership education for the church and community.
13241A
 - **Children’s Programs, Santa Cruz del Quiche**
Teaching materials and food for vacation Bible schools, recreational and educational programs, nutrition classes and emergency health care
09679A



To give through the Advance Special: Make your check payable to your local church. Write the name of the project and the Advance code number on the check. You may add our name too. Give your gift to your church treasurer. And please, if it possible send us an email telling us about your gift in order to help us keep track of the donation. If you prefer, ask at your local church for other ways to give through Advance.

- **WRITE TO US.** We are sure that you remember us frequently but it is soooo good to receive a little note by email or by regular post!!! And if you want special information about our ministry, please, don’t write asking for it at the last minute. Remember that we are not always at home nor in Quetzaltenango...
- **EDITORS.** We need some editors: Eunice spends a lot of time trying to express in English all we want to share with you. You may help us finding time to edit our reflections and letters.
- **POST-HELPERS.** As not all the churches have email address and as not all the messages we send this way arrive “safely”, we still need to use the regular post. Sometimes –as in emergency times- it is difficult to send letters by regular mail and the cost is very high for us. We need people ready to help us sending our letters from USA. (It is not a long list).
- **VISIT ONCE A MONTH OUR WEBSITE.** We’ve been trying to update our website once a month. We failed this November (Oops!). There you are going to find information, resources, photos and others that we won’t be sending by regular mail not by email. Send us your opinions and suggestions.

**Hope-for-peace Child, God’s stupendous sign,
Down-to-earth Child, Star of stars that shine,
This year, this year, let the day arrive
When Christmas comes for everyone, everyone alive!**

**¡PRIMERO DIOS!
(with God’s blessings!)**

MAY YOU HAVE A BLESSED AND JOYFUL CHRISTMAS

with love,

Eunice, Luis, René e Irene

EUNICE ARIAS – LUIS ARAMAYO

Participating in God's Mission

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