



**Guatemala Solidarity, May 2023, v.3**  
**A University of the Incarnate Word Trip**

No! The volcano is not exploding again, that is a cloud behind it. The UIW travelers are crossing the lake to learn!

Service, reaching to help someone is good, but too often it can be reaching down leaving one with the feeling “I am superior.” Solidarity is realizing that we are united as humanity, each having dignity, each needing each other. The earth belongs to the Creator, and we are part of the circle of God’s global family. Two UIW Nutrition majors, Shania Salinas and Vallery Roberts, and three UIW Elementary Education majors, Amil Bettencourt, Carley Petru, Aislinn Villarreal, and two faculty Sister Martha Ann Kirk and Dr. Beth Senne-Duff, assisted by Mr. Mark Duff who is fluent in Spanish and has expertise in nature work, worked with Edwin Mendoza and Darlene Jasso, the two founders of the Little Angels of Mary [www.littleangelsofmary.org](http://www.littleangelsofmary.org) who are former UIW students, in the Chimaltenango district and are now learning in some other parts of Guatemala.



Where did your chocolate come from? Are you in solidarity with the people who picked and processed it? Now the UIW travelers know some of the people who produced their chocolate.

Not only have the UIW travelers been having opportunities to plant gardens side by side with the families, but Edwin, a native Guatemalan and Darlene, his wife who has lived there for seven years, have been educating them about other things. They are seeing the spectacular beauty of God’s creation, such as Lake Atitlan, and are learning about

the growing seeds of hope. While a dozen elite families have controlled the country generation after generation blocking progress towards real democracy, local people more and more have been uniting in development for the common good. The UIW group visited and learned from four local cooperatives, and they learned from three individuals who are respected internationally: Penny Rambacher, a social entrepreneur, Amanda Flayer, an educator, and Andrea Guzman, a nutrition consultant.



Amil is learning to spin cotton. Along the shore of Lake Atitlan, which was formed by volcanos and has fertile soil, the travelers visited San Juan La Laguna with four cooperatives and learned how families work together in business: the Honey Bee cooperative, the Chocolate Cooperative, the Coffee Cooperative, and the Textile Cooperative. That is the largest and the oldest having about 50 women participating and having lasted for over 50 years. Guatemala is internationally respected for fine weaving, embroidery, and the development of natural dyes. Many shades were on display.



The smallest and youngest is the Honey Bee cooperative, but much wisdom can be gained as one reflects on these tiny creatures who work together to bring sweetness. Could that be a global goal, “work together to bring sweetness”?

The next day the group again took a boat across beautiful Lake Atitlan and visited Amanda Flayer, a graduate of UC Berkely, who entered the Peace Corps 20 years ago and feel in love with the children of Guatemala. She and a man from Belgium, now her husband, decided this was the place to live and to have a family. When Emma, their first daughter was old enough to go to school, Amanda realized, “What I want for my own daughter, I want for every child all over the world.” That is how the “Puerta Abierta Atitlan” <https://atitlanabierta.com/es/>, the “Open Door” on Lake Atitlan a center for early education began and it has grown to a library and education through sixth grade. While Guatemala does have public education to sixth grade, lack of economic resources restrains the quality of learning.



Shania thoughtfully commented as Amanda explained their philosophy of teaching encouraging creativity, critical thinking, and diversity. They want to help children read, but more than that to appreciate reading. The American Library Association awarded La Puerta for “Innovative International Library Projects.” “They recognized the economic and geographical barriers that individuals in distant communities face in traveling to a centralized library,” and in response created the Traveling Library Program. They have been promoting excitement about reading and making stories more meaningful for children.

<https://atitlanabierta.com/es/about/>

The preschool started by the Little Angels of Mary and Puerta Abierta are both committed to affirming people of indigenous cultures. One should not have to lose one's language and customs to get an education or work. While the children of Little Angels speak Kaqchikel, the children of Puerta Abierta speak Tzotujil. Then in both schools they grow in confidence and in a sense of the goodness of their cultures and they grow to learn Spanish.



Proud and grateful teachers Sister Martha Ann with her former students Darlene, Edwin, Amanda with her former student Juanita celebrated. Amanda introduced Juanita, the Director of the school, who is from that town. Amanda explained that 20 years ago when she was a Peace Corps volunteer Juanita excelled in her fifth grade class and now is a respected community leader.

Amanda was invited to teach at the Quaker School in Ramallah, north of Jerusalem, for a month to share some of the good methods they had developed in Guatemala. Sr. Martha Ann has had good experiences at the Quaker School within her 12 trips to the Holy Land. Amanda has Jewish roots and said that Palestine was broadening her perspectives. Hopefully, the UIW Solidarity trip, each friendship, and each experience can unite people in global solidarity for the common good. People move beyond stereotypes as they come to know each other.





Juanita's mother had made the group a delicious dinner of a favorite local food, meat or egg in tomatoes steamed in large leaves. Delicious with lots of corn tortillas!



A main person whom Darlene and Edwin have learned from and a main person who could be a good partner for future learning for the UIW community is Andrea Guzmán, mentioned in the first newsletter. Andrea is a Guatemalan dietitian who graduated from Del Valle University of Guatemala (UVG). She has focused her work in community nutrition and has experience on implementation, monitoring and evaluation of nutritional interventions to prevent and treat stunting at the community level <https://proyectocan.org/>

She was awarded as a “Young Leader of the Americas” by the U.S. Department of State and participated at the YLAI Fellowship Program in Washington DC. She worked in Wuqu’Kawoq Maya Health

Alliance <https://www.wuqukawoq.org> as the Nutrition Program Manager and the Garden Research Coordinator to study the effects of family gardens on maternal and child dietary diversity, child growth and household food insecurity family gardens. She is also the co-founder of Proyecto CAN (Cooking, Agriculture, Nutrition), <https://proyectocan.org/> a project that promotes nutrition education through cooking and nutrition workshops, the design of education materials such as recipe books, posters, video, etc. and an online resource center with more than 100 materials.

Eat “the rainbow” for good health. <https://proyectocan.org/afiche-arco-iris-alimenticio/>



Andrea has done valuable research with other nutritionists [https://www.jandonline.org/article/S2212-2672\(22\)00134-4/fulltext](https://www.jandonline.org/article/S2212-2672(22)00134-4/fulltext). She was a part of a news report from Al Jazeera. Here is a link to a 2-minute video where she talks about malnutrition in the main village the UIW group has worked in, Tecpán <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mUthYEly8Xo>

In another village, Chiquex the Little Angels are working to build a new group of “Healthy Mothers, Healthy Children,” the mothers who have come to learn in Tecpán for the past year. Carolina, the pre-school teacher, Andrea, Dr. Beth Senne-Duff, respected for her teaching of international nutrition, were all a part of the workshop for the mothers of Chiquex. Then in the following days the eight gardens were built. The mothers are learning about growing and “eating the rainbow” for family nutrition.



While the mothers were in the workshop, their children were playing and learning with the Education students on the basketball court.





Darlene spoke about being with the children while the mothers were in the in workshop. She said, "Karina was a little girl who can't walk, so we carried her the whole time. I met Brandon and Esiquillas and we played soccer. Claidy was so sweet and was showing me around the school. All of these three instances helped our relationships when we got to their homes to build the gardens. I feel so blessed and grateful to know these families in Chiquex. I'm so glad that I'm living and working here to cherish these moments forever. Thank you, God, for this gift."



Andrea, Shania, and Beth shared a nutritious snack that they had made for the mothers and children.

On another day at the preschool, the UIW Nutrition people made a delicious snack with protein for children and mothers to enjoy and learn. "Pancakes" were made of eggs and mashed bananas then cooked over the woodburning stoves. One can't just turn on a burner at the last minute to cook, but one needs to start the wooden logs well ahead of time.

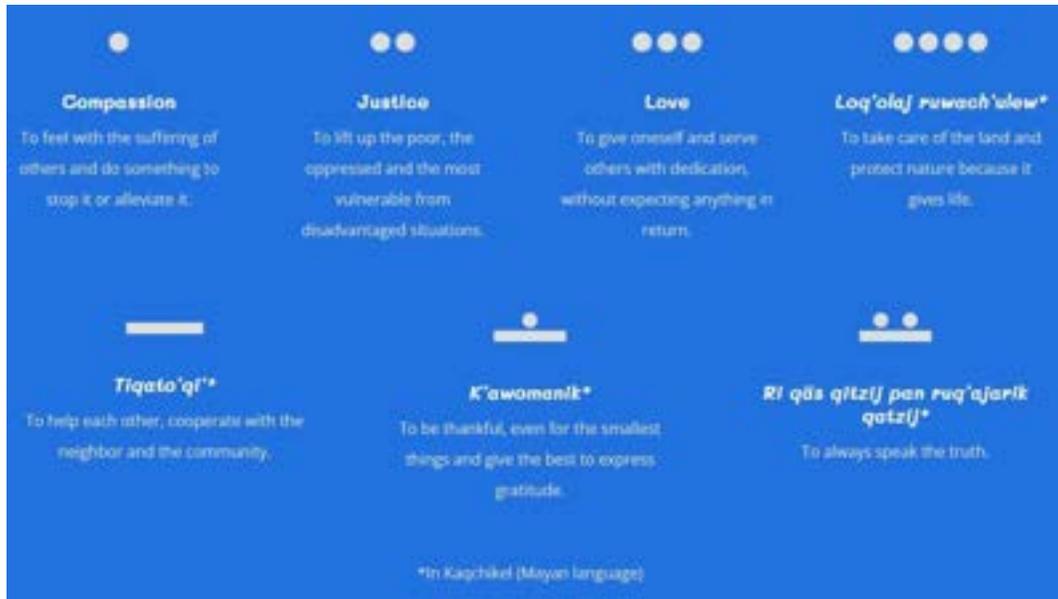


When the nutrition workshop was held in Chiquex with the mothers, at the end all the children under 5 years old were weighed and measured.

When Vallery and Shania were measuring the children from one family they noticed that they had blisters on their feet from shoes that were too small. These young women have large hearts! They knew that they would be going to the family's home the next day to build a garden.



They went to a shoe store and bought new shoes to take as gifts for each child.



From <https://littleangelsmary.org/site/about-us/>

How are you doing learning Mayan numbers? Could you read them above 1 to 7? How are your gospel values and Mayan values? The UIW group is learning from the people who speak Kaqchikel here their Mayan values: “Loq’olaj ruwach’alew,” to take care of the land and protect nature because it gives life. “Tiqato’qi,” to help each other, cooperate with the neighbor and the community. “K’awomanik,” to be thankful, even for the smallest things and give the best to express gratitude.



With much gratitude, the Lares Xicay and Lores Tepaz families, gave each traveler a pottery cup and a woven napkin. Mark gave each family a pen covered with fine woodwork which he carved. The women would be interested in exploring the possibility of selling their embroidery in the US. The sister in the family spent one month making the huipil and offered it to Sr. Martha Ann for \$360, which would be about \$12 a day for her fine needle work. The women said that previously the people in the middle have taken most of the profit from sales of the handicrafts they have made. Anyone interested in setting up a fairtrade partnership with them?

Penny who lives in Antigua, the last place on the trip, founded Miracles in Action <https://miraclesinaction.org/> which includes many types of social entrepreneurship including helping 135 artisans working from their homes to earn income to feed and educate their families. Not only does Miracles promote fair trade, but they provide workshops, solar lamps, and water filters. Since UIW students have been exploring solar energy perhaps they could bring some of their knowledge to Guatemala. Penny had been working for an airline and while in Latin America had seen people living in a garbage dump. Knowing that we are one human family, she began speaking on what she saw and inviting people to help. One thing led to another. She has led efforts to build dozens of schools in Guatemala and developed multiple projects.



Andrea (center) and Penny on the right were preparing materials to be given to about a hundred mothers who will be in their upcoming nutrition programs in Sololá and Quiché. Andrea and Penny will give a one-week intensive on good nutrition to four “promotoras,” whom they have identified as leaders who can teach their people in their native languages.

They invited the UIW people to be partners with <https://proyectocan.org/> Spread the learning, translate the resources, use the recipes, share the rainbow food charts. They urged us to be proactive creating healthy societies rather than struggling with problems that come from poor eating whether in the US or Guatemala.

Sr. Martha Ann suggests, “Let’s be proactive in the face of blindness, not recognizing all of God’s global family. Let’s be proactive in light of the ‘heart disease’ that plagues our society. Let’s open our hearts so that love can flow in and flow out.” The trip ends May 26, but things have just begun because new friendships have been formed. That is growing in solidarity.



News compiled and shared by Incarnate Word Sister Martha Ann Kirk, Th.D. <https://www.uiw.edu/chass/directory/faculty-and-staff/kirk-martha-ann.html> who has had the privilege of taking students and community members on solidarity trips since 1979. Assisted by Darlene Jasso, a UIW Communication Arts Graduate now serving as Vice-President for Communications for the Little Angels of Mary. Contact: [kirk@uiwtx.edu](mailto:kirk@uiwtx.edu)

See the Little Angels of Mary YouTube page to enjoy the stories of the children and the families and to learn more [www.youtube.com/littleangelsofmary](http://www.youtube.com/littleangelsofmary) See the film to promote the UIW trip <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ieFwkX4y4o> that won a [www.GivePulse.com](http://www.GivePulse.com) award for encouraging service.

Sister Martha Ann Kirk, Th.D.  
University of the Incarnate Word  
4301 Broadway  
San Antonio, Texas 78209  
Phone 210-883-5934  
[kirk@uiwtx.edu](mailto:kirk@uiwtx.edu)