

Reflections on Guatemala Medical STM 2017

ep•ic { `e-pik } : very great or large and usually difficult or impressive; extending beyond the usual or ordinary especially in size or scope.

Epic comes to mind as I continue to process through the story of our week on the ground in Guatemala. Epic because it was above and beyond in unparalleled depth, unity and fellowship and epic in total length. This story starts well before we ever stepped on or off an airplane.

Preparation

Over the course of the last several months, our team engaged in a process of intent learning and discovery that was challenging, convicting and even confusing at times - yet inspiring and hopeful. We learned about the roots of poverty and what effective poverty alleviation looks like through a Biblical worldview. God was doing something new undoubtedly.



Back Row: Gene, Miguel, Bill, Christine, Carol, Suzanna, Lizzie, Lindsay, Dena, Eddie
Front Row: Rubenia, Carlos, Paola, Miriam, Mireya, Mari, Anna Rosa, Sherry, Scott, Milissa

Throughout this process, we walked together through some incredibly challenging relational concepts and truths related to poverty and brokenness. We were unraveled to different degrees and learned much about ourselves as well as those that we were hoping and seeking to serve in Guatemala. There were times that we questioned our motives and whether or not it was even right and appropriate for us to be traveling across the miles to engage in short-term missions. Was it possible to “help” and serve without getting in the

way or causing undue harm? How could we best be an encouragement? What hope and credibility would we really have to offer coming from the United States? Our day-to-day lives look so different in comparison. All this to say, it was as if we were being turned upside down, in order to take the next step forward.

Hope for Wholistic Health through CHE & Community Development

Beyond all of these questions, we heard the repeated emphasis that the brokenness seen and experienced throughout all of God's creation can only be restored by the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. Jesus came to make all things new, breaking the hold of sin and death "far as the curse is found." From this, we learned and gained a deeper understanding that this process of reconciling relationships in response to our poverty (in all forms) - near and far - is complex, complicated and most of all long-term. This long-term and transformative work is what is known as community development and is modeled and exemplified through one of our global partners in Guatemala, Global CHE Enterprises.

Contrary to how you might think about the word "epic," the story that we found ourselves seeking to be apart of this year was one that we hoped would be humble, unimposing and under the radar. Easier said than done. This would be and will continue to be our greatest challenge as a team traveling from the North American Church as we know that we are afforded a sense of power and authority out the sheer fact of being from the USA. We know that we are quick to turn on the paternalism when we enter a foreign culture especially when amidst a contrasting poverty of material resources.

We have learned that even the best of intentions do not necessarily prove or translate to being helpful or effective in the workings for those that we purpose to serve. This we had to work out and work through each day while on the ground - what it looks like "to get out of the way" and to put our agendas and our own interests aside. From past trips, we knew how easy it was to get ahead of ourselves with big and opportunistic ideas that do not necessarily fit into the reality of the world, the culture or the capacity within the rural highlands of Guatemala.

Unity

Over the course of this year, much through prayer, the Lord has continued to grow a deeper sense of respect, honor, love and favor within our hearts for our fellow servants in Guatemala whom are grounded in the year round ministry of CHE and wholistic development. From this, we wanted to learn to work in new ways to better partner, serve and understand more fully what it means to come alongside. We were eager to join together to see what the Lord has and would purpose through their ongoing ministry.

It was through ongoing prayer in the months leading up to and then throughout our week

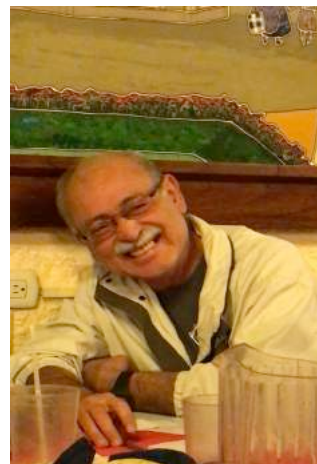
in Guatemala that, I believe, God caused us to slow down, wait, and listen. He caused us to listen to each other and even more so to Him. Our prayers changed and deepened over time. Walls were broken down. Near and far, He tuned our hearts together as they seemed to open wide during times of prayer collectively as well as times that we prayed with hands on individuals in Guatemala in need of God's power, wisdom, safety, encouragement and healing. Prayers were voiced sometimes one by one and sometimes with people praying all at the same time in 3 different languages.



♪ Los Cantantes ♪

“I Left My Heart in San Francisco”
-Gene and Eddie-

“Luna de Xelaju”
-Hugo Gomez-



We moved more freely in unison within both our home team and the greater CHE team. We had fun together. We fellowshiped and worshipped together in 3 different languages and showed love to each other in unexpected ways. We found ways to sing and dance through aching and strained backs as well as the threat of biting ants on bare feet. Shared laughing could be heard throughout each day. We truly enjoyed being in the best of company with one another!



Growing in Relationships

On our first full day, we had the opportunity to meet with the local key stakeholders in the CHE program within the community of Tacajalve. We arrived by school bus at Maria Huinac's home. Maria, president of the local CHE committee, had offered her home as a space to meet and also for our 3 medical clinics held the following week. All furniture had been moved out of the 2 rooms that we would eventually use for a pharmacy and medical exams.

As we got off the bus, we were welcomed by a group of women, men and children. They lined up and as we entered the home we were graced with a hug from each. Their abundant affection was a gift to us everyday and especially experienced with the children. There seemed to always be a little hand reaching up into ours.



Women on the CHE committee, others from the community and our team circled up together in one of the rooms. There must have been 30-40 people all together. Dr. Hugo Gomez (Regional Director), Marquitos (Team Coordinator among the Quiche people) and Marcos, Mariano, and Micaela (CHE Trainers) led us in our time together. It was an exciting time to get to know one another and to hear stories about the challenges and celebrations of life in their community and especially in how they have grown in their faith and experienced improved health through the ministry of CHE. One of the primary health concerns that they emphasized was the need for clean water.

Common themes included prayer, changed lives and hope found. They spoke specific words of gratitude, hope and prayer into our lives and many of us could not help but to overflow in tears. This time with them was a gift and a blessing of fellowship.



Teaching and Equipping

We then had the opportunity to observe Marcos Gomez conduct a “training of the trainer” session to this same group of women. Using the LePSAS participatory teaching approach, Marcos facilitated health education, sharing and discussion specific to the prevention of parasites. He took his time to walk through a modest black and white picture booklet, one page at a time. Questions, answers and group discussion were drawn out to understand what parasites are (amebas and worms), how we get infected with them and easy ways to prevent this from happening. He was not only equipping them to teach health improving steps in their own homes but also in the homes of others.



Marcos (on left with hand raised) training CHE committee and community CHEs on "Las Lombrices (worms)" using a small picture booklet.

The BEST surprise yet to come would be to see 2 of the CHE committee leaders, Maria and Rubia, take to this teaching and reproduce it within small groups during each of the medical clinics. Each woman sat in the front of a ½ circle of ready participants. As I stood by and watched, I saw people lean in with focus and intent - seemingly drawn, intrigued and interested. We saw this best practice model come into play with the leadership of Maria and Rubia—disease prevention and health promotion taught by those that live in the same context, speak the same language, and share the same concerns.



Rubia (left) and Maria (Right) teaching about "las lombrices (worms)" using a small picture booklet.

It's important to understand what **LePSAS** stands for, as this is foundational to the CHE model of wholistic health and disciple making:

- **L**e stands for **learner-centered** (It's important to start where the learners are),
- **P** stands for **problem-posing** (This involves presenting a problem through a short story that is simple and clear to get people thinking and talking)
- **S** stands for **self-discovery** (We emphasize self-worth by building on what they already know. The learner discovers within her/his own thinking a good part of the answer to the problem. "Ahah! I see!"),
- **A** stands for **action-oriented** (Good teaching is helping people to learn to do something - to solve the specific problem posed in the lesson.)
- **S** stands for **Spirit-guided** (Without guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can fall into humanistic teaching. The Holy Spirit changes lives. He alone can produce the change of heart (inward) which results in a permanent change of behavior (outward).)

Sunday Worship at the CHE Training Center Property

On Sunday, we took a road trip towards the Pacific Coast to spend a portion of the day at the CHE Training Center property currently under construction. We worshipped together with leaders from the CHE community including Dr. Gomez, his wife Miriam, his 3rd son Gabe and Gabe's girlfriend Andrea. There we were gathered under a shaded tarp in the openness of the jungle - all of creation, especially the birds, loudly praising His name!

Dr. Gomez led worship and Gabe assisted in translation to English. They were a dynamic duo! Dr. Gomez pointed out that the women in our worship circle that morning outnumbered the men. This was fitting for the message that he gave to us in his sermon later. Gene & Dr. Gomez served communion to us as. This was humbling and unifying in

knowing that we are all equally and utterly dependent on Christ's blood shed on the cross and His triumph over death into life everlasting - One for all. Nothing was to separate us or distinguish us in that very moment - one from another - Guatemalecos o Americanos. Gracias a Dios.



Here (left) we sing together "Verás De Gloria De Dios." Dr. Gomez (right) teaching on Luke 23:55-24:10. He said, "Pay attention to the 3 action verbs in Luke 23:55. The women 1) who had come to & with Him, 2) followed along after Him, 3) and saw His body in the tomb. These were women who had faithfully followed Jesus and served Him out of their pockets." In Luke 24, the women go back to the tomb a few days later but this time, the body of Jesus is not there! The women remembered Jesus' words about His death & resurrection, and then they returned and told the 11 (men). We were reminded of these truths: He who follows me will not be in darkness but in the light of Jesus. The women believed even though it would not be easy. He who comes to Him, He will not abandon. If you believe, you will see - ALL the grace & ALL the glory! Aleluya! We come to Him, we follow Him, we see and know Him to be risen...and we have the certain hope to see one day His Glory in full!"



Dr. Hugo, Miriam, Gabe & Andrea



Medical and Eye Clinics in Focus

Throughout the past decade + of engaging in short term medical missions, we seemingly ask the same questions every year, “Is it possible to make a difference in the health of those that we serve in one short week?” “Are we really doing any good by giving people medications for the short term?” “Is it right to treat the symptoms without the ability to address the bigger problems?” Working with Dr. Gomez and CHE has helped us to sift out and confirm that there is both a need and a place for short-term medical missions, if it is done with proper perspective, parameters, and in partnership. Basic health needs are great and access to care and medications is scarce.



Doing short-term medical missions at best takes ongoing commitment to learn, evaluate and adjust from one year to the next. We learn from our own experiences but even more so from our global partners that are engaged in the work of development year round; the work of development and transformation that includes health promotion and disease prevention. For this is where the greatest impact is made.



The Pharmacy (left) with translators Miriam and Paola. Christine (right) reading to a group of children.

When we hit the ground as a medical team, it is always undoubtedly hard to shake off our engrained ideals and expectations of healthcare delivery that come from the schooling and experiences of being a doctor, nurse or other health care professional in the USA. It takes such focused intent and conscious effort to adjust and even more so align with the greater example and commission of Jesus; a powerful directive that is intended for our everyday work both near and far. In the fall, I stumbled across the following devotional that our team shared in together before our first clinic:

“At sunset, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them.” Luke 4:40

Therefore go...At the end of Jesus’ earthly ministry, there was a clear passing of the baton from Jesus to His disciples – including to those of us who bear His name in today’s hurt and broken world. Jesus has entrusted us to work on His behalf, and He promised that He would be with us every step of the way.



Our Response—a greater impact...We live in a broken world where hope is hard to find. Yesterday’s tragedy is nearly forgotten in the wake of today’s headlines. No, we are not God, and no we can’t simply fix everything. But we *can* allow the power and love of Jesus to transform us from within so that we can make a greater impact in the lives of everyone we influence. This is your calling. This is how we become like Jesus. *This is how He heals the world.*

Follow His example:

- Dwell among the sick and hurting. That’s where Jesus is so you can expect to find Him there.
- Show love and compassion unconditionally. It’s not really our job to uncover all the reasons why a person is hurting, so much as it is to

address the fact that they are.

- Touch lives one at a time. Shift your attention from the mass of people gathered up and waiting and be present one on one no matter how brief the encounter. God's grace and love will transcend spoken word.
- Rely on Jesus to bring the complete and permanent healing that only He can provide. At the end of the day, we can show compassion and provide resources – but we are merely conduits to the true Source of unconditional love and healing. Never underestimate the power of prayer as you ask for God's wisdom, strength and intervention.



International Women's Day

Wednesday, March 8th, was a particularly special day for our team collectively. This day on the calendar is celebrated as International Women's Day. This is not a day formally recognized or celebrated in the United States. Many of us were not even aware of its existence. It was Miriam Gomez, the night prior that had called it to our attention. I will never forget her bright smile, fervor and good humor at dinner with her hand raised in the air rallying a spirit of unity amongst our small clan of women. I can still hear her resounding words, "Dia de las Mujeres—Dia de las Mujeres!" Which means, "Day of the Women!"



Our day at the clinic began with Bill teaching from Genesis about how we are all created in God's image—both male and female. God made man and woman different as well making different cultures throughout the world and His image is made complete in all of these differences.

As the community of 50+ (mostly women) listened intently for the translation to Spanish and Quiche, the countenance of the courtyard seemed to change. There were wide eyes, smiles and clapping in agreement. Bill encouraged and charged us with loving, caring for and supporting one another whether same or different.

During our lunch break, the team gathered to eat on the school bus. Unexpectedly, Gene climbed on the bus with a large bouquet of red roses and proceeded to grace each woman on the bus with their very own. And then on cue was Dr. Gomez, who stood poised at the front of the school bus and proceeded to serenade the women in solo a cappella with the song, "Rosas Rojas a Ti." As an aside, Dr. Gomez told us that after delivering a bouquet of roses to his wife, Miriam, earlier that day, he first asked permission to sing this song to us; a song that he sings to her every year for their anniversary. Shortly thereafter, a few of the CHE leading men then proceeded to hand out red carnations to all of the women and girls gathered waiting within the clinic courtyard.



It's hard to put into words what these gestures from beginning to end signified to the greater community of women including us. We definitely felt loved, respected and honored on many levels and our smiling faces were an expression of the joy and appreciation in our heart. More than that, it was another example of realizing and experiencing the unity and harmony that only God can bring as well as His intended shalom that can only truly be worked out and experienced through the saving grace of Jesus.

We know women and girls are vulnerable and at risk for violence can be disproportionately affected by extreme poverty. According to USAID, "Women and girls face greater burdens of unpaid work, have fewer assets and productive resources than men, are exposed to gender-based violence, and are more likely to be forced into early marriage... This reality is

not limited to those in extreme poverty; globally, women are disproportionately affected by war, disease, and slavery.” This is the reality faced by many of the women in rural Guatemala. It was a joy for us to be able to celebrate these women on this International Women’s Day. They exude unparalleled strength, fortitude, endurance and resilience amidst the reality of ongoing life challenges and cultural and gender disparities. They encourage and inspire us beyond words.

What does Shalom mean?

During devotions, one morning, Scott shared a conversation he had with Dr. Gomez the day prior. It was a deeper message about the concept of Shalom in the Old Testament. Shalom means peace, wholeness, abundance and lack of relational conflict in all aspects of creation. All of creation was designed to live in harmony and unison with one another and then the fall changed everything. We’ve seen this play out in our partnership with Dr. Gomez and CHE, and the people of Guatemala- God’s reconciling and redeeming works. This quote from Lisa Sharon Harper captures the hope and vision from our fellow servants, *“Shalom is when the image of God is recognized, protected and cultivated in every single human. It is our personal calling as followers of Jesus’ Gospel. It is the vision God set forth in the garden and the restoration God desires for every broken relationship. Shalom is the “very good” in the Gospel. Despite our anxious minds, despite threats of violence and despite division, God’s vision remains: peace for a hurting soul and wholeness for a fragmented world.”*



Dena Mitchell
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