



Guatemala, Central America

MENNONITE *Air* MISSIONS

"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy" - Psalm 126:5

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Lester and Martha's Guatemala Experience

We arrived in Guatemala on October 20, 2020, to begin a two-year term. This had been a dream of ours for several decades, but the Lord had other plans for us. We began as houseparents at Headquarters, then as business administrator. In August of 2021, we both became seriously ill with Covid and needed a medical evacuation to the United States. Because of a blood clot in my lung, we were not allowed to travel until December.

When we returned to Guatemala, we lived in a house away from Headquarters because we were no longer houseparents. Martha helped with some baking and cooking at Headquarters while I resumed the office duties of bookkeeping and coordinating between mission outposts. We enjoyed visiting and trying to encourage missionaries on a regular basis in their homes.

During our time in Guatemala, we enjoyed attending and helping the congregation in San Cristobal. We were privileged to help Brother Victor with several Communion services, instruction classes,

two weddings, and the baptism of two converts. We were saddened to see several members terminate their membership but delighted to see several former members reinstated.

The mission board allowed us most of the last month of our term to visit missionaries and to say our goodbyes. We enjoyed visiting most of the MAM outposts and making short trips to visit non-MAM missionaries in El Salvador and Belize.

Because of a lack of a director on the field, it was difficult to leave Guatemala; but with my increasing arthritis problem, it was evident that the time had come for us to leave, and return to our home in Myerstown, Pennsylvania. We pray that those still serving in Guatemala will have the strength to keep things going until more help can be found. They are a wonderful group of workers.

There is still a need for administrative help for the mission and congregational leadership for the congregations. We praise the Lord for granting us the privilege to serve in Guatemala. *Lester Burkholder*

Baptism in Mixcolajá

On January 28, the congregation in Mixcolajá welcomed three new members to their number. Bishop Victor Ovalle delivered the message and officiated the baptism. Three young ladies had completed instruction classes over the previous seven months and were eager to be baptized.

Emilsa Reyes de Cabrera, her youngest sister Brenda, and their cousin Analí Reyes all made decisions to follow Christ within about a month of each other. Emilsa and Brenda are blessed to have a faithful Christian mother, though their father committed suicide some years ago. They also have two sisters who are members of the church and a couple of sisters and a brother who are not. Emilsa

married a young man who is not a Christian about a year before her conversion. Please pray for her as she relates to her ungodly husband.

Analí is privileged to have a godly father, mother, and older sister to support her in her Christian walk. Not many individuals in this congregation are so blessed! Sadly, a young man who began instruction class soon dropped out. Another older man who began instruction class "graduated early" when he passed on to his eternal reward (a saved man, praise the Lord!). God continues to work in the hearts of people in this community; please continue to pray for the salvation of the Guatemalans!



EDITORIAL

Lester Burkholder

The Disgusting Habits of the Crested Caracara

Some time ago, I got a glimpse of a large black and white hawklike bird perched high in a tree. It flew out of sight before I could note any other details. Once or twice in the following year I caught another glimpse of it from a great distance. I would often hear a loud and unfamiliar bird call, usually in the mornings and from a considerable distance.

What was this mystery bird? Not a vulture. Not an eagle. It could have been one of several hawk species, but none seemed right. It was a mystery and would remain a mystery until I got better observation data.

Then one Sunday morning, as we bumped over a dirt road to pick up some people for church, I saw it! It was on the ground, just over 100 feet away! And there was another! There they were stalking about on a freshly plowed field. Long yellow legs. Dark body, white face and neck . . . and red cheeks? I noticed it had a slightly shaggy crest and a curved, heavy beak. Clearly a raptor. When one bird flew from the field to a nearby tree, white patches showed under the tips of its dark wings. The tail was dark above and white beneath. My family and I watched them in the field for several minutes as we continued our route to church.

Black and white, with red cheeks? The skies were overcast, and everything was wet, so the colors were especially vivid. This was a strange bird. But when I finally got to my computer later that evening, it took just a few minutes to identify the mystery bird. It was definitely a crested caracara. I read: "The crested caracara looks like a hawk with its sharp beak and talons, behaves like a vulture, and is technically a large tropical black-and-white falcon. A common subject of folklore and legends throughout Central and South America, the crested caracara is sometimes called the 'Mexican eagle.'"

Well, that made sense! It turns out that we live in perfect caracara habitat. Open country, including pastures, cultivated areas, deserts, scrub, and savannas is the preferred terrain of these hunters. They perch on scattered trees, poles, and fences that offer a good view of the surroundings. These birds will hunt from the air, but unlike most of their kin, they also hunt extensively on the ground, as we had

seen that Sunday morning. I learned that these falcons associate closely with vultures and often follow them to feed on carrion (they have an interesting strategy related to this). So . . . they keep bad company and feed on bad meat.

Now, please understand, the crested caracara fills its niche in God's creation and does just what it was meant to do. But its habit of keeping bad company and feeding on rotten meat made me think of people. I know some people that keep bad company and feed their appetites with alcohol, TV, gambling, pornography, and other "bad meat." One of the most grievous sights in this beautiful country is a man sprawled senseless on the sidewalk just outside of a bar, sleeping off his hangover in the blazing sun of the late morning. There are many who sin less conspicuously too, perhaps in the privacy of their houses. How it must grieve the Creator!

We were not made to consume corrupt and sinful things. God wants so much more for us! I know some people who used to do those things but now soar above, in freedom from these sins. Some of them are members of our local congregation. One of our neighbors, who once nearly drank himself to death, longs to see his old drinking companions come to church and learn about the Saviour. He prays for them and talks to them as the chances arise, but he does not accompany them to the bar. He knows that keeping bad company will drag him back down to the place he was before . . . a place of enslavement and consumption of "rotten meat."

"And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:1-6).

Roof Project in Santa Rosita

Some things have not changed in the little village of Santa Rosita over the last twenty-five years, but one thing that has changed is the way people build their houses, particularly the type of roof they prefer. The mission house is one of the very last structures in Santa Rosita to have a thatch roof—and the mission church is one of the others!

The cost of repairing or replacing the existing thatch roof and the challenge of finding the right kind of palm frond from deep in the jungle made the decision to change to a metal roof quite easy.

However, the actual work of converting the thatch roof to a metal one will not be easy! Many volunteers are helping with the work of tearing down the old roof, laying block to square up the upper story, setting the steel trusses, and putting the metal panels in place.

The Dean Boll family hopes to be under a good roof by March. Thank you to those who donated funds and “sweat equity” (it’s hot and humid in the Petén!) toward this project! Thank you too for praying for the safety of the workers.



Before



After

Wedding in San Cristobal

Brother Victor Ovalle officiated the civil wedding of Francisco Grave and Andrea Cael in the San Cristobal church building on January 26. The religious wedding and reception followed the next

day on January 27 at the same location.

During their courtship of about a year and a half, Francisco and Andrea decided to become Christians and join the Mennonite church. Andrea’s grandfather, Modesto López, had been a deacon in the MAM church in San Bartolomé during the guerrilla warfare and is mentioned in the book *Under His Wings*. Francisco agreed with Andrea’s desire to be a Christian like her Aunt Lidia and have a Christian home.

Francisco and Andrea have been active in helping with services since their baptisms. They are sincere Christians with upright characters and a lot of potential. Francisco owns and operates a bakery store, and Andrea works in a tortillaria. We are greatly encouraged and strengthened by these young people and their wise choices.

Lester Burkholder



Francisco and Andrea were married in San Cristobal on January 27.

Staff Changes

Lester and Martha Burkholder returned to Pennsylvania on January 30, 2023, after completing their time of service at MAM Headquarters. Lester served in various capacities with the mission,

including bookkeeping and administration work, as well as assistant minister at San Cristobal beside Victor Ovalle. Thank you for your service, and God bless you both as you turn to a new chapter in life.

Kelvin Neuenschwander arrived in January to serve for three months in Oratorio, helping with the school construction project there. He is from Leetonia, Ohio, and is a member of Hebron Conservative Mennonite Church in Alliance, Ohio.



Kelvin Neuenschwander

Heidi Weaver arrived in January as well. She is helping with domestic duties at Headquarters for three months. She is from Leola, Pennsylvania, and is a member of Leola Mennonite Church.



Heidi Weaver

Galen and Wendy's Wedding

Galen Miller and Wendy Martin, both of whom served as single workers in Guatemala, were recently married and plan to serve the Lord in Guatemala. For paperwork reasons, their civil wedding was held in Guatemala on December 21, 2022. On February 4, 2023, they entered into holy

matrimony in Virginia, with their families and stateside friends celebrating with them. They held a reception in Galen's home area in Nebraska and plan to hold another in Mixcolajá, Guatemala, where Wendy served from October 2021 to December 2022. They will reside in San Bartolomé, where Galen serves as a missionary. May God richly bless this couple and the work in San Bartolomé!



Galen and Wendy were married on February 4 and will be living in San Bartolomé.

Prayer and Praise Items

- Pray for new staff to serve at headquarters in Guatemala City and in various outposts.
- Pray for God to raise up church leaders from among the Guatemalan brothers.
- Praise God for godly teachers with a vision for Christian education!
- Thank the Lord for His mercy toward sinful men and women!

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