



MENNONITE *Air* MISSIONS

Guatemala, Central America

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

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Recent Events

Senior Class Trip

The Southeastern Mennonite Conference senior class came to Guatemala for their mission trip on March 5 and returned home on March 12. The group was directed by Laurel and Tara Eby, who made sure everything (and everybody!) stayed together along the way. The young people put their youthful energies to good use in Porvenir, helping Joshua Martin with some projects at his place and at the church. They also got to enjoy the Pacific Ocean before heading back to the City for the weekend. They then spent a couple of days at "The Farm" in Sumpango, breaking ground for the new chapel building. They had the privilege of visiting a traditional open-air market and worked in a few other tourist activities along the way. While their visit was short, our hope is that exposure to mission work and the Guatemalan culture will stay with them for life.



The Southeastern seniors and the Ohio work group broke ground and got a good start on a new chapel building at The Farm.

Work Group From Ohio

March 20th saw the close of the Teachers' Institute and the arrival of fifteen Ohioans ready to get their hands dirty. Their job was to pick up where the Southeastern high schoolers left off, pouring footers and preparing rebar columns for the new chapel building at The Farm. The group stayed in the (now spacious) sleeping quarters and did their own cooking and washing, which was a great relief for various mission staff! Tristan and Bethany Martin served as "houseparents" for the crew (a very necessary and unglamorous job), keeping everybody supplied with sustenance, stories, and smiles. Daniel Meyer directed the work itself, along with the help of Jonny Bear and a couple of VS fellows. Although they had only a week to work, the crew made the most of it and laid a good foundation for following workers to build on!



The Southeastern Conference senior class visited Guatemala in March.



The Hocking Hills Mennonite youth group put in a week of hard work helping on the chapel project at The Farm.

(Events continued on page 2)



EDITORIAL

Justin Zimmerman

Guatemala's Tree of Life

The name "Guatemala" originates from the Nahuatl (Aztec) word *Quauhtlemallan*, which is said to translate to "place of many trees." Indeed, Guatemala does have many trees, and many tree varieties.

The ceiba tree (*Ceiba pentandra*) is one of the most significant and spectacular natural symbols of Guatemala. Recognized as the country's national tree since 1955, it holds historical, cultural, and ecological importance. Towering above other flora with its massive trunk and wide-spreading branches, the ceiba tree was revered by the indigenous Mayan civilization and continues to be an essential part of Guatemalan identity today.

The ceiba tree played a central role in the beliefs and traditions of ancient Mayan civilization. It was considered the "Tree of Life" or *Yaxché* in Mayan mythology, symbolizing the connection between the heavens, earth, and underworld. According to Mayan cosmology, the tree's massive roots extended deep into the underworld (*Xibalba*), its sturdy trunk represented the physical world, and its expansive branches reached the heavens, serving as a bridge between different realms. Even today, many indigenous communities continue to honor the tree in ceremonies and rituals, living out Romans 1:25 ...*worship(ing) and serv(ing) the creature more than the Creator*.

To be sure, the ceiba is a good choice for a national emblem and can be found in many town squares throughout Central and South America. I frequently marvel at the giant ceiba in the central park of San Andres Sajcabajá, which probably measures eight feet thick at its base and easily shades the entire square!

The ceiba tree undergoes distinct growth stages. It begins as a small seed, often dispersed by wind or animals, and germinates in moist, nutrient-rich soil. During the sapling stage, the tree grows rapidly, developing its characteristic buttress roots to provide stability. But what most people notice are the thickly clustered conical thorns on its trunk. As it matures, the trunk thickens, the thorns are absorbed, and its branches expand, reaching heights of up to 70 meters (230 feet). The tree can live for several centuries, allowing it to serve as a long-standing landmark within

forests and communities. The oldest known tree in Guatemala is a ceiba in Escuintla reputed to be over 400 years old!

The ceiba plays a vital ecological role in Latin America's tropical and subtropical regions. As one of the largest tree species in the region, it provides habitat and sustenance for various wildlife species, including birds, insects, and fruit bats (one of its surprising pollinators!). The tree's distinctive buttress roots help stabilize the soil, reducing erosion and maintaining the health of forest ecosystems. Additionally, the ceiba's fluffy, cotton-like fibers, known as kapok, were historically used for stuffing, pillows, mattresses, and life jackets. Although synthetic materials have largely replaced kapok in commercial use, some local artisans still utilize it for traditional crafts. The tree's bark, leaves, and seeds also have medicinal uses in traditional herbal remedies, treating ailments such as fever, inflammation, and skin infections. And the long, straight trunk made it a popular choice for dugout canoes in bygone years. Even now, oil extracted from its seeds is used in various industries (ceibas are grown commercially in various places in the tropics). Although it produces beautiful lumber, most people would not cut down a ceiba, even if it wasn't protected by law. They are beautiful shade trees and are truly majestic.

Although I certainly do not endorse the Mayan beliefs regarding the ceiba, their name for it, "The Tree of Life," is well suited. The name naturally makes me think of the real Tree of Life, which we will view in the New Jerusalem. It too has leaves for the healing of the nations. The thorns on our straggly young ceiba specimen at church remind me of what Jesus suffered on the cross. I find the image of those thorns, which are swallowed up as the tree matures, a beautiful reminder of how the suffering of this life will be swallowed up by the glories of eternity with Christ.

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:1, 2).

Events... continued

Teachers' Institute

Guatemala hosted the annual Central American Teachers' Institute this year. This event was hosted at The Farm in Sumpango on March 18 – 20, 2025. The crowd of teachers (plus speakers and their families) overflowed the dormitories and bedrooms onsite, but food abounded, and laughter resounded.

Some of this year's topics were: "How to Incorporate Bible Teaching in Our Schools" (Caleb Miller), "The Involved School-board" (Andrew Crider), "Organized and Efficient" (Marcos Beachy), and "Inspiring Motivation" (Timoteo Cristal). The afternoons featured workshops such as "Research in the Natural Sciences" (Gabriel Ramirez), music, and art. Each evening featured a service open to the public, with messages about technology, why and how to educate our children, and what visionary men have done to

make Christian schools a reality. Someone commented that they would need more than a few days to digest everything they heard!

Such events are a great boost to the morale of our (often stretched) teachers in the church schools sprinkled across Central America and a good way to retool and recharge. Please pray for these teachers and their students, that the church may flourish and prosper in the coming generations.



Teachers from several Central American countries attended an encouraging Teachers' Institute at The Farm.



Teachers in session.

Ordinations

Double Ordination in Mixcolajá

April 3, 2025, was a notable day for the church in Mixcolajá. A few days earlier an unseasonal rain shower had washed away the dust and cleared the air, so often hazy with smoke this time of year. From the time the sun cleared the mountains to the east, people scurried about the churchyard and kitchen getting ready for the big day.

Not just one, but two brothers were to be ordained, one as minister and the other as deacon. And only God knew which brother would get which office! That detail would be determined by lot. Only God knew why Brother Chalo, still sorely missed by everyone, had died before he could be ordained deacon. Only God knew exactly how many people would show up to this service, but the expectation that many would come was about right. Folks from San Bartolomé, Cobán, Guatemala City, Oratorio, and even Costa Rica and the United States made the effort to attend this service.



Justin Zimmerman and Nick Suarez were ordained in Mixcolajá.

After an opening by Isaías Muñoz, congregational songs led by Andrew Crider, a message by Jimmy Ramirez, and another message by Galen Miller, the time came to have the lot. Two new Bibles were placed on the table. Brother Justin took the one in front of him. Brother Nicholas took the other. Brother Victor opened the book chosen by Justin and found the lot for minister.

After the ministerial charge was given and greetings were extended by other ordained brothers, Brother Victor opened the book chosen by Nicholas. Together with Brother Isaías, Victor charged Brother Nicholas with the responsibility of a deacon.

After the final prayer, everyone headed outside to the new dining hall, where the ladies served a delicious meal of roasted chicken, potatoes, and salad. As the afternoon wore on, people took their leave and began trekking homeward. The church in Mixcolajá now has ordained leaders; pray for them, their families, and the church.

Ordination in Porvenir

The congregation in Porvenir is small and the meeting house somewhat secluded. But they are not overlooked or forgotten, and God has raised up a pastor for this church. On April 9, Brother Joshua Martin was ordained as minister and given the responsibility of this congregation. Most of his immediate family and some of his in-laws were on hand to support him and his wife Melody.

Brother Isaías Muñoz officiated the service, with the support of Victor Ovalle, while Keith Mast shared a devotional meditation and Levi Martin gave the message. Having a pastor committed to the well-



Joshua Martin was ordained in Porvenir.

being of the flock who lives and works beside the members is a great blessing to the church. Being the pastor and having oversight over even a small congregation is a heavy responsibility. Please pray for Brother Joshua and his family as they serve the church in Porvenir.

Staff News



Jamin Yoder is from Floyd, Virginia, and will be serving in Santa Rosita.

Welcome to: Jamin Yoder, of Floyd, Virginia. He is from the Wills Ridge congregation and will be serving in Santa Rosita, Petén.

Farewell to: Quinton Burkholder. He has completed his term of service in Santa Rosita and is returning to Big Pool, Maryland.

Blessings to each of you as you settle into new routines and places of ministry!



Prayer and Praise Items



- ✦ Pray for the new chapel project at The Farm in Sumpango.
- ✦ Pray for more workers for the outposts in Guatemala.
- ✦ Praise God for raising up more ordained men in the Guatemalan churches!
- ✦ Praise God for a successful Teachers' Institute!



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