



Guatemala, Central America

MENNONITE *Air* MISSIONS

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

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Funeral Marches to the Grave

The past seven days have been eventful. So, while the rain drums on the roof like it has all afternoon, I will fill you in.

Wednesday, September 11, 2025

After school, I went downtown to shop for supplies for the cooking class planned for the sixth and seventh grade classes on Friday. When I got home, Nora asked, "Have you looked at your phone lately?"

"No."

"Hermana Chayo died."

"Oh!"

Hermana Chayo had been suffering a lot, and her death was expected anytime. Of course, it was a relief that she was able to be released from this world, but we also knew that her daughter Leonor would need the support of the church and the people who knew her mother.

We discussed what would be the best thing to do. Most certainly they would have an all-night vigil up at the house. Should we go right away? Or should we wait until Hermano Isaías (the bishop) was back from the city? Or should we see if Dustin could give us a ride?

We decided to go right then. The extended family would come the next day, but those we knew best were already there. We called a tuk-tuk, a red three-wheeled public transport, to take us to the top of the first climb and walked the rest of the way. Almost three kilometers. We flew up those hills as fast as we could in the growing darkness. We didn't talk much, just focused on getting there. From the top of Pineda to Hermana Chayo's house, we made it in forty-five minutes. A record for us!

We were there to watch the undertakers set up the curtains and bring flowers. The body was already in the casket, dressed in white. We greeted the family and stood around the casket, letting reality sink in. The doña of this mountain was really gone to be with the Lord. All her trials are over and her glowing testimony of God's faithfulness will stay with us as a church. She had chosen to love instead of becoming bitter many times in her life. She had experienced pain and hardship to the point that it was uncommon for her to let her feelings show. Praise God, it was over.

The night became a blur in my memory as men with sombreros and women with toddlers and colorful clothes came and went. Dogs dodged around feet and got into fights, and we shoed them off the porch. I counted five in the house at one time. Coffee and bread were served to everyone several times. We sang for a while. Hermano

Isaías came around 11:30 p.m. Adults sat on chairs: inside the house, out on the porch, under the tents. Children romped and made noise, and at last the very young ones found their moms, snuggled down, and went to sleep. Still the people sat and visited.

A little after 1:00 a.m., those of us from down the mountain decided it was time to go. The plan was to have a wake the next night as well. We piled on the back of the very full truck. As the truck lumbered up the hill, a number walked to reduce its weight. At the top the last men had one leg over the tailgate, and a couple jokes were made about grabbing a braid if they started to fall.

Standing on the back of the full truck with the scent of ripening corn on the breeze blowing past my face, I shivered in the cold of early morning and pondered the brevity of life. We truly are here for a little, then we leave.

Funerals are different here. A message is usually preached at the *vela* (wake), and the burial simply consists of removing the body from the building, taking it to the church for a short devotional, and then a long procession down through town to the cemetery.

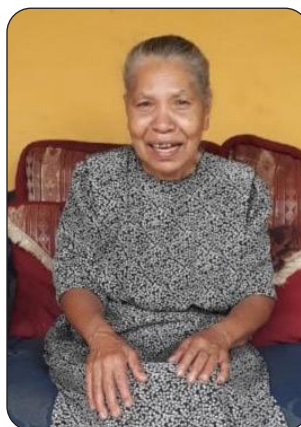
Three days later, Sunday, September 14th . . .

Another older lady down in El Cacao was struggling for her life. I never knew her before dementia took her mind. Early Monday morning, she, too, joined Hermana Chayo in Heaven.

The viewing was at the church. I went over Monday afternoon to help cut vegetables and chicken for supper. The whole church was there.



Hermana Chayo



Hermana Casimira

(Continued on page 4)



EDITORIAL

Don Heatwole

Who Is My Neighbor?

“Who is my neighbor?” Is it the wealthy man who lives in a luxurious home across the street? Is it the lady who sells produce at the market or the man who comes to the door for food or the man who needs a little money? Do we reason that giving money will only enable them in their bad choices? Are we the judge? Do we give in good faith knowing that God is the judge of all. “There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?” (James 4:12).

Many Christians speak of the importance of loving God and loving others. Jesus declares these to be the greatest commandments. The command to love one’s neighbor as oneself comes from Leviticus 19:18, which teaches us to not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. The Jews of that day understood their neighbor to be one of their fellow Israelites, but God’s definition was broader. It was more than simply loving those who are like us or who love us in return.

Luke 10 records an incident in which a scribe who was expert in Jewish law was seeking to justify himself. He asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbour?” Jesus replied with the parable of the Good Samaritan. In this parable a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho was attacked and left for dead along the road. A priest and a Levite both passed by and ignore the injured man. These two men were both from the priestly line and should have known God’s law but failed to show love to their needy fellow Israelite. Then came a Samaritan who was generally despised by the Jews because of religious and cultural differences. It was he who stopped to help the injured man. He bandaged the man’s wounds and paid for him to stay at an inn. This man, who was outside of God’s covenant, demonstrated compassion for one who could have been considered an enemy.

Jesus asked the lawyer which of these was a neighbor to the injured man. The lawyer answered, “The one who showed mercy on him.” Verse 37 records Jesus’ words: “Go, and do thou

likewise.” Our neighbor, then, is anyone in our proximity with whom we can share God’s love.

It is important to understand what true love is. We love people by genuinely seeking what is best for them. That does not mean that we agree with everything they say or do. Neither does it mean acting in ways that gain their approval. Loving our neighbors means showing compassion and attending to both physical and spiritual needs as we are able. We love our neighbors best when we share God’s truth with them. Jesus alone can save, and He alone can meet every need.

It is easy to love family and friends, but it is more difficult to love the unlovely or those who would harm us. Jesus calls us to be neighbors to our enemies and pray for those who would persecute us. This is what Jesus’ love is like. We are at times tempted to take revenge on our enemies. The Good Samaritan knew the dying man may still have hated him after his recovery, but he had the love of Jesus in his heart.

Everyone is our neighbor, even those with different beliefs, cultural backgrounds, or social and economic status. The parable of the Good Samaritan shows us that relationships in our society and communities are not permanently broken. We can reach out to others whatever state they are in.

God’s wisdom does not follow the world’s rules. It reminds us that God can do all things, even things that seem impossible. This lesson from the Good Samaritan reminds us of God’s generosity.

God, who owed us nothing, sent His Son to this sin-cursed world and provided for our salvation.

We were broken and could do nothing on our own, so He did it all for us. He paid the full cost. “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness, but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).



Baptismal Class

October 18, Saturday, saw growth in the church at Lirio de los Valles. That evening was a baptismal service for those who had been in instruction class for the past couple of months.

Those in the instruction class and baptized were Blanca Raashel Vásquez Segura, Sheily Raquel Lemus Linares, Keisi Rubí Lemus Linares, Cherie Kay Crider, Lía Abigail de la Rosa Bean, Sebastián Andrés Lemus Linares, Luis Fernández Escobar Pinzón, Natán David Rosales Rivas, and Gabriel Rodrigo de la Rosa Bean. Besides these nine baptized on Saturday, four others were received into the church membership the next day—Sunday, and one additional member was transferred from another MAM church.

It was a good service, with many visitors and family members of those being baptized attending. A few vans transported people from the mission to the church.

Some visitors did not understand Spanish, so someone provided a running translation in the balcony during the service, which they appreciated. Brother Andrew Crider (pastor) opened with a few songs. Brother Byron de la Rosa (lead pastor) brought a meditation about baptism: its importance, how Jesus gave us an example by being baptized, and how it is a step of obedience.

After the devotional, Brother Victor Ovalle (bishop) performed the ceremony. Before doing so, however, he shared some thoughts and exhorted



Nine people were baptized at Lirio de los Valles.

the class. Then he read the vows to each person in turn, explaining that this commitment was a personal thing.

After going over the vows with each of them, he proceeded to baptize each person by pouring a little water on each one's head. After the ceremony, the ministry and their wives came forward to greet the class. The service ended with a closing prayer.

After the service, the baptism class stood at the front of the church while the congregation filed past to greet them.

The supper afterward included tamales (chicken wrapped in corn dough, steamed in banana leaves), *tortas* (Guatemalan specialty bread), and *ponche* (a hot, chunky, mixed-fruit drink). The church

enjoyed the time of fellowship over food.

After supper, people started trickling home to their beds, and some of us had the pleasure of ferrying them home. All in all, it was a good time of fellowship and growth for the church, and we were thankful for the opportunity to be there.

Anson Crider



Ministry team and five people taken in as members.

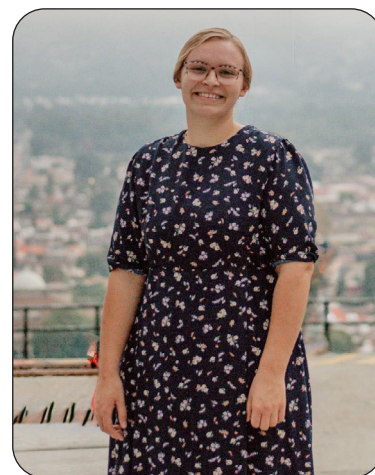
Staff News

Welcome to: **Andy and Betsi Wolfer** and their two children, from John Day, Oregon. They are members of the John Day Valley Mennonite Church congregation. They will be serving as houseparents at Headquarters in Guatemala City for six months.



Andy and Betsi Wolfer are serving as houseparents.

Leah Hoover is from Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, and is a member of St. Thomas Christian Fellowship. She will be working in Santa Rosita, El Petén, as domestics aide and personal worker.



Leah Hoover is serving in Santa Rosita.

Farewell to: **Don and Betty Heatwole**, who have returned to South Carolina after serving as houseparents at Headquarters for the second time.

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

Funerals... continued

The men were setting up a makeshift cook shack outside to keep the fires dry, and the ladies were making coffee and *recado* (tomato sauce for chicken) in large amounts.

That night was the *vela*, and Hermano Isaías shared the message. We youth sang for a while and I went home early, at 11:30 p.m. The majority stayed until around 4:00 a.m., while others never went home. The next morning again found us at the church and following the truck with a casket down through the town to the cemetery. God is speaking. Are we listening? Many of the same people were at both *velas* and funerals.

Henry Longfellow's poem, "A Psalm of Life," has gone through my mind many times when I watch a funeral procession here in Guatemala. Often there are drums.

*Dust thou art, to dust returnest Still like muffled drums are beating
Was not spoken of the soul . . . Art is long and time is fleeting
And our hearts though strong Funeral marches to the grave . . .
and brave*

Faith Pletcher

Prayer and Praise Items

- ◆ Pray for the new members at the Lirio de los Valles congregation in Guatemala City, that they may grow spiritually.
- ◆ Pray for wisdom for Isaías Muñoz and Victor Ovalle, the bishops of MAM.
- ◆ Praise God for the safe arrival of five babies born to MAM staff families this year!
- ◆ Praise God for His promise of future, eternal rest!

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