

## LOL Mission Trip 2014 – Guatemala “Sharing the Change”

Hello! For those of you who don't know me, my name is Kristine Parkhurst. I became part of this parish about 15 years ago when my parents, Brad and Melissa Schmidt, and two sisters and I moved to Harrisonville. In that time, we have received many blessings through this community, but I am going to share with you one of the greatest blessings I feel that our family could have ever had the opportunity to be a part of.

Last summer, my family, along with about 20 other parishioners, had the privilege of traveling to Guatemala for an experience that has been, without a doubt, one of the most life changing weeks of my life. The memories that we made with the people we encountered will forever be in my heart, and I could go on endlessly with stories of how I am a different person because of them. I would be more than happy to share each and every story with you any time, but the purpose of today's message is to communicate to you how largely we, as a parish, have been able to impact the people of Guatemala.

In each home in Guatemala, there is typically a lean-to style cook stove, where the meals are prepared for the family. These stoves rarely have much structure to them, as well as no ventilation, so the smoke and dust that comes from its fire is trapped inside, it clings to the walls creating a thick layer of soot and hangs heavily in the air. For a little girl named Jaclyn and her two sisters, the time we spent in their home mostly meant blowing bubbles, jumping rope and having their hair braided, but for her tearful mother, a new stove meant she no longer needed to worry about her little ones being around an unsafe fire, and that their little lungs that blew those bubbles will stay strong and healthy. Eight families were able to feel the relief of having a new, safe stove built in their homes that week.

Another source of worry for those in Guatemala is the quality of water that they drink and cook with. Unclean water leads to serious disease, which can lead to severe dehydration and even death. For 10 families, clean water is a new luxury as we were able to provide them with a simple, bucket water filtration system that they were all educated on, so that they can provide clean water for their families as well as share with their friends and neighbors.

Almost every day on the trip, we took a few hours to travel through the village and visit the sick. The hard work of carrying the heavy bags we delivered full of food, hygiene supplies, and blankets paled in comparison to the extreme gratitude of those we visited. We prayed for them and their families, and they often prayed for us, which was humbling to say the least.

250 little pairs of feet are now running around with brand new boots or sandals, a gift we were able to give the students of a school we visited, along with a jacket to be sure they were able to walk in their villages and play outside without having to worry about the rain or cold. We put on a carnival at there, which was a day filled with laughter, hugs, and a few dance parties. At another school, we painted the outside wall that surrounded it with fun, vibrant colors that would make any student excited to see it every morning. As school let out that day, the number of paint brushes at work quickly multiplied as the sweet students volunteered to help. Their silly laughter and smiles made it seem like anything but work.

At a nearby orphanage for special needs children, we were able to visit with the children; we gave them each special gifts and saw how much joy a simple coloring book and crayons can bring.

We stayed in a convent in San Andres Itzapa, with Madre and the sisters. They were the most gracious hosts, making sure our every need was met. In the evenings and in any extra time, there was work to be done on projects around the convent. I'll give most credit to the guys of the group, who were always busy. They made screens to cover the windows to the dining room, so that meals could be enjoyed without any insect visitors, they hung an awning in the front of the convent to protect the sisters from the rain, they did stucco work on the walls of the convent and replaced plumbing parts. We also provided each of the sisters with a new pair of sandals, which is such a small offering compared to the many things they blessed us with.

As I look back at each of these experiences, I can't help but think about how each individual we encountered just may have a much fuller, healthier life because of the simple improvements we helped them make. But the fact is, none of this would have been possible if it weren't for the generosity of our parish. Those of you who supported us, whether through donations, prayer, or simply encouraging one of us to jump on a plane and travel into the unknown, are the ones who have changed lives in Guatemala.

I ask for your prayers for this year's missionary group that we will travel safely and give our whole selves to those we are serving. I ask you to pray for those we will encounter in our short time there.

I also ask that you consider the ways other than prayer in which you can make a difference in Guatemala. Any small donation you may be able to offer can make such a difference. On this year's trip, we will be incorporating a few new projects, such as providing chicken coops and chickens for families to raise as well as pig pens and pigs, which will hopefully be both a source of food for the families but possibly a way

to bring financial stability. We will be planting family gardens for five families, to provide a renewable source of food, as well as working on a community garden for the village.

For just \$90.00, you are able to purchase a laying hen and its coop, providing a family with valuable nutrition. For just \$150.00, a new stove can be built in a home much like Jacquelyn's, allowing children and families to grow up without having to breath unhealthy air. Any amount of money that you might feel called to give will be used in a way that will change someone's life forever, how incredible is that?!

Thank you so much for your generosity for the trips past, I hope you know how valuable your role has been in what we have done in Guatemala. Please pray about what all of this may mean for you this year, and know that those in Guatemala are eternally grateful for you.