

San Benito Report

Flores Petén, January 28-February 2, 2009

First, I want to thank the board of the SEWHOPE Foundation for the opportunity to go on this trip to Petén Flores. It was an amazing experience to see the daunting task that you have embarked on in the Flores region. I want to thank Randy and Dr. Ann Ruch for allowing me to accompany them on this trip. Their passion to see the ministry in Flores and the surrounding areas be better developed both spiritually and socially is evident.

With the help of the local missionary Derida, I was able to meet with six different pastors from different denominations. My objectives were to 1) see the community needs, and 2) to see the pastoral needs. The following are the names of the pastors that I met for an interview: 1) Nelson Larios Garcia from *Iglesia del Nazareno*; 2) Alexander Carillo and Gladys Perez Carillo from *a new church plant* (near the clinic); 3) Rolando Ramirez (the owner of the hotel Maya Colonial); 4) Elias Pelaez from *Iglesia del Nazareno*; 5) Norberto Chan from *Primera Iglesia Bautista Monte Zion*; and 6) Heber David Jimenez Recinos from *Familia el Shadai*. These primary churches are in the San Benito area in or near Colonia Tikal. I also met with two pastors in Pueblo Nuevo.

Community Needs

Children, teenagers, and single moms are the focus of community outreach for these churches. They are impacted negatively in many ways: a) moms are the subject of abuse and abandonment from their husbands or boyfriends; b) children and teens are left with broken homes giving room to the gang recruiters. They join gangs as one of the solutions. Some parents, according to Pastor Alexander Carillo, make their children sell things (like pens, socks, etc.) in the street and when they do not sell and come home empty handed, they are scorned by their parents. Instead of selling their items they may choose to steal or join gangs [easy money because they go and rob expensive cell phones and motorcycles etc...]; c) the lack of job opportunities impact negatively both parents and children; and d) housing is a problem for some because they live in shacks.

Possible Solutions

Some of the pastors think the following will help: 1) Create a youth center to help teens with educational programs such as forming computer training classes. Other programs like developing classes and counseling programs that will teach teens how to avoid gang recruitment; 2) Create job opportunities for single moms such as restaurants, panaderias (bakeries), tools for making crafts etc... These job opportunities will create some income for their families and for the church; 3) some homes outside or around San Benito need latrines, water, and some people need homes.

Pastoral Needs

With all the pastors that I met, they all have one thing in common: they lack pastoral academic training. Some have more experiences than others, but they all admit and want more resources to help them in their ministry. Some want books (that deals with theology, Bible, hermeneutics, homiletics, Christian ethics, pastoral and laity training) that will enhance their ministry work. They all want to train their members into leadership but they lack the resources. They also lack resources with Christian children curriculum books and coloring books.

Half of the pastors that I met are financially stable, and the other half are not. They struggle with money because their churches are small and have very limited income. All the pastors have in mind a building project. Either they want to remodel their old sanctuary or have a new project already started. Some pastors asked directly for assistance in their building projects. Over all, I did not sense any marital or other problems with the pastors and their families. I did sense, however, a mild hostility between some pastors with other pastors. Especially with new ministries or new church plants in the area, some pastors do not like that idea because as some say, "they are stealing our sheep."

Personal Reflections

The pastors that I met in those few days were really receptive and open with me. Some of them do not have an outlet to share some of the burdens that they carry in their ministry. Even though they did not know me, as they saw that I was listening to them and not imposing

anything, they were able to open and share their concerns. One obvious positive impact in terms of starting/building relationships with these pastors was that I am a pastor and somehow they felt they I could relate to them. Also, I was to them an “outsider” therefore they could open and trust that whatever they opened up to tell me was safe. I think this is essential for future reference.

Possible Suggestions

In terms of helping with pastoral needs, here are the following suggestions: 1) first, if the board could help gather some pastoral helps Spanish books and send or bring them when you go on your trips that would be great. There are different places where you can acquire these materials here in the United States. Nelson group and Editorial Vida have very good Spanish materials. For me here in Chicago there are several Christian Spanish book stores. Pan de Vida (Bread of Life) [Website: www.pandevidadchicago.com] is a good store here in Chicago. I order books for my church from Pan de Vida.

2) The pastors want to be trained so they can train their members with leadership and spiritual gifts inventory skills. I mentioned to them possibly to do a pastoral conference with a program called NETWORK, and it is already translated in Spanish. It is called LA RED. They all were excited when I mentioned that a/or pastor (s) from the States could come and have a pastoral conference so they be can trained. I ordered 50 workbooks of LA RED for my church from Pan de Vida, but you can check LA RED Website (Zondervan.com).

3) Economic development—in terms of helping out the community economically by creating new jobs or social programs a “long term” relationship needs to be built with pastors and their congregations. Keep in mind that Guatemala still is a third world country, and most of its people are in an existential mode of living. This means that primarily all including community leaders, pastors and people are looking at their interest first. It is not true in all cases; however, some pastors are conscious of not taking advantage of outside help. Still remains the fact they do not carry the same Christian ethos that we value in the USA, therefore, at times in our eyes, a lot of their behavior will seem selfish and advantageous, and in some instances they are, but they are acting to meet their basic needs first or the needs of the institution (churches, schools,

etc...). It is vital that an on-going close relationship be built with pastors and community leaders, because they already thought of ways and have plans or ideas of how to help their people, but lack the outside resources (money and equipment).

4) Helping Mayan Villages. In my observation in Pueblo Nuevo and Los Cerritos [Ketchi Mayans](Camino San Diego)—one way to help these villages economically is by helping to cultivate maiz or their milpa (corn). In both towns I heard the word milpa, and one leader asked pastor Rolando when we went to Los Cerritos if he could borrow 600 Quetzales (about \$80) so he could rent a nice piece of land to plant his corn. Mayan people in nature are an agriculture society. They have corn in their religion and culture. That is one of the reasons why they tend to be more nomadic. They are in search of better lands to grow their crops.

CONCLUSION

There are many needs in the Flores, Petén Region. I hope this report helps to confirm what you already know, and/or sheds light to some things that you did not know. Over all, I believe that SEWHOPE can and will make a difference in this region. Engaging pastors in economic development is essential, and studying the culture and behavior patterns also will enhance your chances to make a difference in the city or *aldeas* (villages) in that Region. May the Lord bless your endeavors.

In Christ,

Rony Reyes