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## “HURRY MOM! I CAN’T BE LATE FOR SCHOOL”

By David Megel

Pacco Char is standing at the door of his house, shouting to his mother who is reaching for the shirt she had washed last evening, the one she wants him to wear to school. Pacco is also instructing his brother Dominic (8) and sister Maria (5) to drag their dugout canoe, a shallow hallowed-out log that is the family transportation, toward the river. Pacco is 14. This is his first day of school. The first day ever for anyone in his family to attend school.

Seconds later, dressed in a T-shirt with a fading “The Bulls” inscription across the chest, he is standing at the back of the canoe. Marie sits cross-legged, Dominic drags his hand in the water, and Pacco the “gondolier” poles the canoe toward the new school. On the way he will pick up two of his friends. Pacco is a sort of community boat-man or, if you will, now one of the “school bus drivers.”

The school year in Guatemala runs from January through October. This year TEACH opened two new schools. One is in the village the Santa Isabel, the village where Pacco and his family live. It is a community of about 80 people supporting itself by producing charcoal. It lies

along the shores of the Bay of Honduras, accessible only by water.

The other school is in the village of Quineles, surrounded by banana and palm oil plantations. To get to Quineles you travel by truck, launch, and finally horseback. Neither village has ever had a school. It is wonderful to see the excitement of the children from ages 5 to 16 arriving at their one-room schoolhouse. They will all begin in “first grade”, but within a few days will be arranged at the level of their ability to learn.

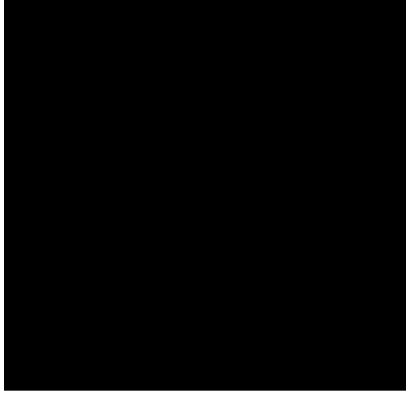
Villagers choose a three-member panel to act as the local school board. They sign an agreement with TEACH that they will provide food and lodging for the teacher while school is in session. Because of the remoteness of the villages, school is conducted on a 22 days on - 8 days off cycle. In that way, during the off cycle the children can help with family chores, and the teacher is able to return to his home in a town some two hours distant.

On behalf of Pacco, his parents, and all his friends, TEACH says thank you for making it possible for children to go to school.

# OUR FRIEND IN GUATEMALA

By David Megel

His name is Olger Guillermo Pop, and he is a *Q'eqchi'* Maya native of Guatemala. Thirty-one years old and a graduate of San Carlos University in Guatemala City, he speaks fluent Spanish in addition to his own *Q'eqchi'* dialect of the Mayan language. We met Olger working at San Pedro the Apostle parish in El Estor.



Olger began working part time with TEACH in January 2008, overseeing operations at four of the TEACH schools. A man of many talents, he is also employed by "Earth Ministry," a non-profit organization working for land reform. "Earth Ministry" works with Maya communities in agricultural development, water resources, human rights training, family life, women's rights, and forest conservation.

Olger is married to Hortencia Amparo Castaneda Mejia Pop. They have two young boys: Alejandro, who is three years old, and Andre, who is one. Olger and Hortencia met one another four years ago while Hortencia was attending business school. Her schooling was interrupted by their marriage, but she has returned to school on weekends while Olger takes over as "Mr. Mom."

In a letter to us about his family Olger wrote: "We are a small galaxy centered on my wife. She is the sun. Our children are the stars. My wife provides me with steady support. She is very understanding. She is willing to support any of the crazy endeavors I undertake. We love to serve God by serving our fellow human beings."

Olger and Hortencia are passionate about education. He believes it is the surest, perhaps the only, way to provide his people with an opportunity to prosper. To listen to Olger speak in *Q'eqchi'*, is to hear a natural orator. We know nothing of the language, but because of the passion with which he speaks, we seem to understand every word. As he travels with us to each of the TEACH schools, encouraging children to devote themselves to their studies and congratulating parents for their support of the school and the teachers, he fills the hearts of his people with hope for the future.

Olger is indeed a man of compassion. The closing words of his letter were, "Thanks to all at TEACH for providing me with the opportunity to be part of the TEACH family and to serve our brothers and sisters."

# Travel with TEACH to Guatemala!

Have you ever wanted to meet the children and see the places you read about here? We are looking for 12 hardy travelers for our next delegation July 17-29. You will discover the beauty of the country and the people and see TEACH in action. To sign up or just ask some questions, contact Shari Zamarra, 703-323-9367 or sharizamarra@yahoo.com.

- What:** Visit Guatemala with TEACH (Toward Educating America's CHildren)
- When:** Friday, July 17, through Wednesday, July 29, 2009
- Where:** See Guatemala City, Antigua (the colonial capital), Maya ruins, Lake Atitlan, El Estor, Livingston, Rio Dulce, and several small villages.
- Why:** Experience a mission organization in action. Visit **TEACH** schools and projects. See the beauty of Guatemala and its people. Learn about the Maya culture.
- How:** Fly in and out of Guatemala City. Travel by mini-van, bus, pick-up truck and boat. Cruise down the Rio Dulce River.
- Who:** You! Invite a friend or family member. School age children and Spanish speakers are welcome. Group is limited to 12 people.
- Cost:** \$1200 includes airfare, lodging and meals. Accommodations are simple but comfortable.
- Deadline:** The first 12 persons who respond will make up the group.

For more information on **TEACH**, check our website at [www.teacham.org](http://www.teacham.org).

## The Aldea Editor: Linda Kullman

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# A NETWORK OF CARING RELATIONSHIPS – TEACH AND FRIENDS

By Shari Zamarra



How does this wonderful organization of TEACH work? How is its mission of educating Mayan children accomplished? Only through a Network of Caring Relationships in which a great variety of people use their unique gifts. Our Board of Directors and Committee Members steer the ship, contributing countless volunteer hours. In the United States, you are part of this Network. There are friends of TEACH in Virginia, Maryland, Michigan, Illinois, New Jersey, Florida, Wisconsin, North Carolina, Nevada, Missouri, Minnesota, Pennsylvania (did we miss your state?) and the District of Columbia. That circle widens as friends tell friends about a good thing.

In Guatemala, the Network is also considerable, probably more that we can count. Warm hospitality is the hallmark. We have people who feed us, house us, transport us and help us to understand. Our most frequent contact is with our staff (see article about Olger Pop). On our visits, the interaction with the children and their families, and with our principals, directors, and teachers is touching and lively. From our beginnings with the Claretian priests, local clergy have been solid supporters, particularly Bishop Penate of the Diocese of Izabal.

Other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) are partners who teach us and help get our work done. Kids to Kids, Ak'tenamt and Fundary are primary supports. Our contacts with the Guatemalan Embassy in Washington have led us to new friends at the Guatemalan Ministry of Education, who help us navigate the system. Proprietors of hotels where we stay become like family; owners of restaurants nourish us; drivers and boatmen carry us safely to places of adventure.

Tony Avila (pictured) and his wife Julia, who live in Livingston, Guatemala, and Brooklyn, USA, help us to understand both worlds. We know young adults who believe in TEACH and contribute their labor and their professional expertise for projects.

Although TEACH is not a religious organization, this is a network of faith.

Knowing so many TEACH friends is a great privilege. We are never sure how the circle will widen. Each trip brings new friends and connects with existing ones. New sponsors who will come this year will help us to continue this basic work of education.

The children thank you. Their parents' gratitude is deep, and so is ours. How blessed we are! Thanks for caring!

## MORE DOLLARS FOR MAYAN SCHOLARS

By the TEACH Board of Directors

This year TEACH opened two new primary schools in the villages of Los Quineles and Santa Isabel. We also added a second level to the middle school in the village of Semuy, which TEACH opened with level one (7th grade) in 2008. Still there are so many villages without schools. TEACH receives constant requests for help. The prayers of parents press upon us. If you listen, I am sure you can hear them. To meet these needs, TEACH is starting a drive to solicit 100 new sponsors during 2009.

Are we dreaming? Are we asking for a miracle? We realize that we are experiencing perhaps the worst economic period in our lifetime, but we also know that we cannot allow the prayers of Mayan parents and children to go unanswered. As "Friends of TEACH" you are our best ambassadors, so we are inviting you to enter our contest. There will be a 1st & 2nd prizes for the ones who raise the most, and there will also be prizes for all who solicit new sponsors or obtain contributions in any amount between May 1 and August 31, 2009.

*We are calling our contest:*

### "MORE DOLLARS FOR MAYAN SCHOLARS"

- 1<sup>st</sup> Prize:** *A dinner party for six catered to your home, prepared and served by members of the TEACH Board of Directors.*
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Prize:** *A woman's authentic Mayan costume with headdress and sash.*
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Prize:** *For everyone who enlists even one new sponsor and also for each new sponsor or donor, a DVD program of song and dance performed especially for you by the children who benefit from your generosity.*

# 2009 TEACH PROJECTS

Among the Q'eqchi' Maya people in northeast Guatemala, TEACH helps poor children go to school. TEACH Projects in 2009 include 6 primary schools (grades 1 to 6), a middle school (grades 7 to 9; called a basico school in Guatemala), and 4 boarding facilities for basico students. They are located in towns and small villages between Lake Izabal and the Gulf of Honduras.



Primary Schools	Community	Students
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Escuela Maya LaSalle	El Estor	186
El Quetzal	Elquetzal	30
Lagunita Salvador	Lagunita Salvador	37
Las Brisas	Las Brisas	82
Los Quineles	Los Quineles	32
Santa Isabel	Santa Isabel	20

Middle School (Basico)	Community	Students
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Instituto San Antonio		
Maria Claret	Semuy	47

Boarding Facilities for Basico Students	Community	Students
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Casa Indigena for boys	El Estor	38
Convento Santa Catalina for girls	El Estor	16
Centro Kateri Tekakwitha for girls and boys	Livingston	82
Instituto San Pablo for girls and boys	Tamagas	42

*The vision of TEACH is to help empower Maya communities to achieve greater social and economic self-sufficiency through opportunities for education while respecting their cultural norms.*

## Yes, I would like to be a TEACH Sponsor

**Please Ask a Friend To Be a Sponsor of TEACH. \$30 a Month (\$360 a Year) Will Keep a Child in School.**

I'll sponsor:

- Boy    Girl in primary grades  
 Boy    Girl in middle school  
 The Semuy Basico Middle School

Make all checks payable to **TEACH**

Mail to: Toward Educating America's Children  
509 Rosier Rd.  
Ft. Washington, MD 20744

I have enclosed a check in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

I cannot be a sponsor now, but I am enclosing a donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone(H) \_\_\_\_\_ (Other) \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

*TEACH will never share your name or personal information with other organizations.*

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