



## Chair's message

### **WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER**

By Shari Zamarra

As I write this our world is upside down. First, prayers go out to all of you for any hardship and/or anxiety you may be experiencing. Second, Covid-19 is impacting our **TEACH** world in two ways.

Our fundraising has been affected by current restrictions. The annual Bingo/Silent Auction, which was scheduled for March 28<sup>th</sup> was cancelled; it usually nets \$4000. And a major source of income — our Mission Appeals planned for this summer in Miami and Minneapolis/St. Paul — is uncertain. We are concerned that we may not be able to cover our expenses. We understand that there are many pressing needs at this time, but if you can help us and perhaps also share the good news of **TEACH** with others, we would be most grateful.

In Guatemala, schools and businesses have been closed. No one can work and food is running low, especially since people are more vulnerable due to the high poverty rates and the fact that they live from one day to the next. The Xol family and the Association that Luis Xol founded are busy bringing food to others in remote villages.

This is in the midst of their ongoing grief for Luis and his sister Olga, killed in August. Attending a memorial service for them was a sad highlight of our February trip.

Distance learning is happening at only two of our schools since the government is not taking responsibility. Hopefully our students will be back soon, but they have missed a good bit of school in a system that that has few resources.

I sent all our partners a Lenten/Easter message expressing our solidarity with them and our hope for the new beginnings of spring, even though they do not experience the season with nature as we do.

The responses were very spiritual – touching and heart-warming. Our partners are concerned about us,



*The Xol family, and the Association that Luis Xol founded, bring food to others in remote villages.*

#### **DONATIONS DOUBLED DUE TO DISTANCING**

**(June 15 through 30) Keep our Mission Strong.**  
Anonymous donor will match any non-sponsor donation,  
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TEACH, P.O. Box 188, Burke VA 22009

given what they hear about the United States in the news. Their affection for us is considerable and points to the strength of our relationships, which are at the core of **TEACH**.

They suggested that being isolated in our homes is a time to reflect upon our duty to do good to all and to stay close to God. Also mentioned was a hope that the Easter season will cause each of us to be eager to love and be of service to others. As Bishop Buezo says, we will wait for the new day. Meanwhile, the sense of being united in prayer is very strong.

Our hope, prayer, and intention is to keep our mission strong. You are part of that mission. Thank you.

## DAY IN DOS ZAPOTILLOS WAS EASILY ONE OF THE MOST MEANINGFUL DAYS OF MY LIFE

By Sharon Kourtz

We left the rustic hotel in Rio Dulce at 8 a.m. that February day. Father Abel drove the **TEACH** delegation about an hour to a small parking area at the base of an extremely steep, difficult path of a washed-out creek bed. Near the top of a mountain is the small village of Dos Zapotillos. The whole path was likely less than 1000 feet, but I would say it was easily a 65-degree angle.

As we ascended, we were told to stop so the children could come down and greet us half way. Six girls came with smoldering incense in pottery, with wire handles. This was to purify the visitors before we arrived in the village. The rest of the children walked behind the girls. Some of our delegation held hands with the children as we ascended. Music played on a boom box, and gentlemen were standing ready at a marimba for their turn to play. We stood at attention while three boys carried the Guatemalan flag. They sang the national anthem, and the village elders and leaders welcomed us. Fr. Abel spoke, then the girls with the incense danced to the marimba music.

Next they performed a harvest dance with squash, potatoes, onions and other vegetables in mesh back packs on their backs. Another group danced around four lit candles with a small lit candle in the center. They tossed flower buds toward us for spiritual cleaning; this dance is called “limpia.” The music and dance was enthusiastic and abundant. I danced with both Fr. Abel and the village elders. Music and dancing share a common bond among all cultures.

We introduced ourselves: I said I was a professional dancer, and they all laughed. The pavilion where we were entertained has a metal roof, relatively new wooden beams and a very parched, cracked dirt floor. The youngest children don't wear shoes. I'd say almost all of the village's 200 people were there to greet us, well-groomed and, most importantly, all seemed **HAPPY**. The roaming dogs looked a bit thin, chickens of all ages were strutting their stuff, and a turkey acted like he owns the place.

After the ceremony we went to the new cinderblock, one-room school which was dedicated last year. The desk chairs arrived just yesterday, and children and adults enjoyed sitting and squeezing into them. Each child was proud to hold the letter they wrote to their sponsor. A picture was taken with their handiwork.



*Students hold incense pots and greet visitors.*

We tried to discuss things of importance, but the room was very crowded. Everyone was either in the classroom with us, blocking the door, or peering through the openings from outside. The village leader shared that he never went to school, and he is so happy that his children have a chance for an education. There are 26 students in grades 1 to 6. The

teacher said he didn't have the curriculum for the 4th grade yet — it has to be provided by the government.

There are 16 preschoolers who were in school, but the government stopped funding their teacher.

The **TEACH** members were treated to free-range chicken stew for lunch which had spicy broth, a whole potato, and a type of squash with heavy skin. We were also served tamales and corn tortillas. The people grow and grind the corn themselves. The villagers only ate the tamales and corn tortillas. I was a bit sad about that, but I know we were being honored.

When it was time to leave, the ember delegation of children walked with us halfway down the mountain. When we got to the 2 four-door trucks, about 15 people of all ages were waiting for us. I incorrectly assumed they wanted to say goodbye, but instead they rode in the truck beds until the mothers knocked on the back window to be dropped off at their one room, thatched-roof cinderblock homes.

We then went to the rectory to meet seven scholarship students **TEACH** supports. That's another story for another time — a success story in progress nonetheless.

We can't change the world, but we can help educate those who can. We can witness and share joys. Wow, this was a day I will always remember.

*Sharon Kourtz is Board secretary for **TEACH**.*

# GUATEMALAN PARENTS ARE THE VOICE FOR THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

By Sandy Chisholm

Traveling from one **TEACH** school to another in the winter of 2020 was a master class in Guatemalan culture, sociology, economy, and humanity. But what stood out at each **TEACH**-supported village school was the parents' hope for their children's success through education.

It was the parents, the village leaders, individual community members, the priests, and the children themselves who not only spoke of the importance of education but openly advocated to make their schools better and provide education opportunities beyond the primary or middle (basico) school grades. Scholarship students spoke about the importance of their diversificado (high school) and university education and how this opportunity would improve the lives of their families and communities.

Each village and school visited always provided **TEACH** representatives with abundant hospitality, meals that villagers could probably not afford themselves, and generous words of thanks for **TEACH**'s support. But following each **TEACH** arrival celebration, community members and teachers discussed how the education of their children could be better and what was needed to secure a stronger future for their children. Most of the community members had not been afforded an education, could not read or write, or even speak Spanish, since



*Guatemalan parents advocate for their children.*

Q'eqchi' is their indigenous native language. But none of this stopped the parents from speaking up.

These advocacy discussions came up in the **TEACH** community visits in different ways but always with facts and a respectful tenacity for making their children's educational needs known. The Guatemalan parents and leaders know that **TEACH** is not the only answer to advancing their children's education but wanted to use this time with **TEACH** to voice their schools' educational deficiencies and obstacles to be overcome.

At one meeting, **TEACH** leaders were engulfed by a large group of parents simultaneously explaining in their native Q'eqchi', then translated into Spanish and then translated again into English, that the government is not providing grade level textbooks. Parents asked how best this could be resolved. At other villages, parents and leaders gave formal presentations in their one-room schools about the educational resources and support needed.

**TEACH** scholarship students met with **TEACH** leaders to share education experiences and progress but also advocated for others who could benefit from the same. To emphasize the importance of their opportunity, the students shared how they planned to give back to their communities by returning to be their villages as teachers, nurses and entrepreneurs.

Guatemalan parents, just as U.S. parents do, want a good education for their children. Not just any education, but a solid and well-resourced education that will prepare their children for a strong and stable future. Guatemalan parents have found their voice and are speaking up if this education is not being provided. There is a brighter future for Guatemala, because Guatemalan parents will make it happen.

*Sandy Chisholm is a friend of **TEACH**.*



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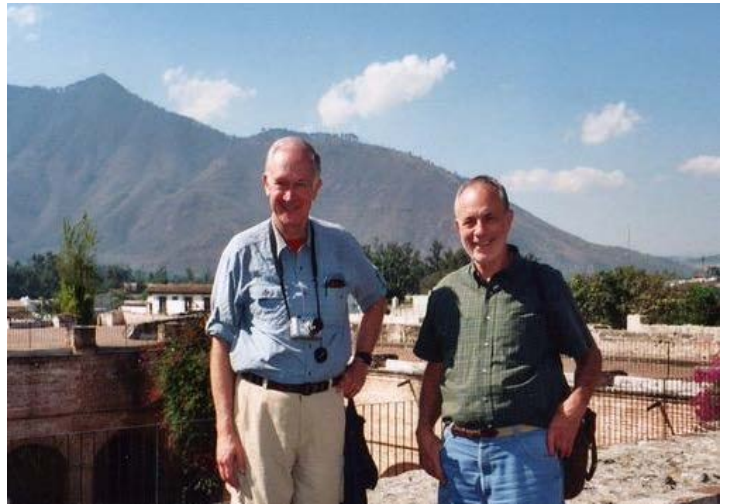
# REMEMBERING TOM KULLMAN

By David Megel

What words can better characterize the greatness of a man like Tom Kullman than magnanimity and greatness of soul? It's what Aristotle called "the crowning virtue." How else to describe the generosity in the heart of a man who volunteers to help you paint your four-bedroom home and then completes the job while you and your wife and kids go off on vacation? Oh, and then he cleans your garage, too! That was Tom.

If you are looking for someone to help you start a demanding nonprofit charitable organization, he'd be the first guy to lean on. And that's what happened.

In 2002 when Anne and I began thinking about **TEACH**, Linda and Tom Kullman were the first friends from whom we sought help. We often thought that Tom's great height was the sacrament of his spirit. Tom served as vice-chair of **TEACH** and Linda as secretary. Linda also edited the newsletter. Linda was the teacher, Tom was the disciplinarian, a tender giant disciplinarian of the



The first vice president of **TEACH**, Tom Kullman, left, was a gentle giant. He is pictured in Guatemala with David Megel.

then kindergarten nonprofit we called "Toward Educating America's CHildren."

Tom traveled to Guatemala to meet the people we sought to serve. He brought ideas of how the United States culture of efficiency might join with the Latino culture of patience, often asking those we wished to serve how we might meet their needs before offering suggestions of how to respond to those needs. How often strength is manifest in meekness. Tom was a gentle giant both physically and psychologically. Tom Kullman died on April 16, 2020.

We thank you Tom, from all of those who witnessed the generosity of your soul and the gentleness of your spirit.

David Megel is cofounder of **TEACH**.

## OUR MISSION

The mission of **TEACH** is to actively respond to the schooling needs of underserved children, in Maya communities in Guatemala.

## 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:

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