

### **Guatemala Mission Report 2023**

- In June of 2023, Thomasville First Church sent a team of 27 on the inaugural mission trip to the newly adopted village in Guatemala. The team was able to visit the village as well as work in the various ministries on the Hope Of Life campus in Zacapa. Team members visited homes, played with children, gifted families with multi-tools, work gloves, plus hygiene and first aid items. They talked with teachers and village leaders to determine the most pressing needs for the community. The immediate needs to be addressed are a clean water system and child sponsorship. A dedication ceremony was held for the new school classroom building and playground provided by Advent Revolution and the Hamp Nicholson Memorial Fund. The team members included: Floyd White, Stephanie Nicholson, Beck Nicholson, Wil Nicholson, Max Nicholson, April Fletcher, Ava Fletcher, Mallory Fletcher, Mandy Cochran, David Cochran, Emory Cochran, Jennifer Dunn, Charlie Dunn, Erik von Hellens, Kate von Hellens, Jake von Hellens, Stephane Ughetto, Michele Ughetto, Meta Ughetto, Lenin Ughetto, Wendy Evans, Matthew Evans, Ceci Dennard, Steven Hayes, Shawn Stape, Marnee Stone, Elli Stone

### **Hope Of Life**

**\*To hear inspiring stories and to learn more, visit [www.hopeoflifeintl.org](http://www.hopeoflifeintl.org)**

### **Beginnings**

- Carlos Vargas grew up in the village of Llano Verde in Guatemala but moved to work in the US.
- In 1987, Carlos had returned to Llano Verde, Guatemala to live out what he thought were his final days. But it was in a deathbed deal with God, as he began helping the sick and needy who came to him for help, he dedicated his remaining days to fulfill this very mission. The ministry started at the bottom of the mountain, on one acre of land, meeting the needs of elderly individuals who were homeless, abused, abandoned, and desperate. Just 2 years later in 1989, Jose came to live on the mountain. A child who had no hope, heard crying in a small home, with a family that could not care for him—he was the beginning of the child rescue program, which has since seen over 25,000 children come through the treatment facilities. And now, 30 years later this ministry which calls a 3,000 acre mountain home, is serving hundreds of thousands of people each year through physical and spiritual programs with one continuing goal: to save lives.
- There are 600 people currently employed by HOL, down from the 800 who were working there before Covid.
- A pre-school has been built on campus where the children of workers can attend school.
- The campus has housing available for visiting missionary teams in hotel-like buildings, an open-air multi-purpose dining facility, a pool, beautiful landscaped areas, and a gift shop as well as a coffee shop.
- We were blessed to be able to meet Carlos while we were at the HOL campus. He said, "What we do is the fruit of who is inside us"
- We were supposed to be serving in Tasharte the day Carlos came to campus but we changed our plans in order to rest our team and take care of our health, choosing instead to do ministry on campus. If we had not changed our plans, we would not have been able to meet Carlos. Cyrus said, "God is aware and in control of everything in our lives, even the disruptions. Like Joseph, if he had not been sold into slavery, he would have missed out on being an important leader in Egypt, able to help his people. If we reject the pain and the mess, we will miss out on the blessing that God brings with it. Divine interruptions are the work of God. Solomon said to trust in the Lord with all of your heart and lean not on your own understanding. We can miss the work of God when we are focuses on our own agenda and checklist."

### **Oasis De Eden - Elderly and Mentally Disabled Care**

- A home for over 50 individuals in the later stages of life is located on the campus. Many live here because they do not have family to care for them and their needs during this stage of life, others were homeless with no place to go, and many of them have medical and therapeutic needs that they cannot afford. Hope of Life believes what Scripture says about the aging, that they are honorable, wise, and deserve dignity. This is why they bring them here and give them the opportunity to live out their days in a loving environment. A recently established sponsorship program for these special individuals ensures that not only are the physical and medical needs of each person being met, but their spiritual needs as well.

### **Kelly's House and Ryan's House**

- When Kelly Loveland passed away from cancer at age 38, her parents wanted to use her legacy to help others. They built a house on the HOL campus that houses 25 mentally and physically disabled children. The disabled are valuable to God. Many of these children have been abandoned, abused and neglected at the very least. A revolving staff of 40 workers care for these children 24 hours a day. They have the necessary equipment to provide therapy and mobility to residents as well as the hearts to give the loving care they deserve. The need is great and there is a waiting list to get a bed in Kelly's House. Another family has donated a new building in memory of their son, Ryan. Ryan's House will also be able to serve 25 children when it is finished.
- After touring the home, many of the team members were visibly moved. Cyrus said, "One of the most important verses of scripture is 'Jesus wept'. We need to allow ourselves to express pain. Through pain we can see how much He loves us. Tears wash the perception of pain. To let God heal, you have to bear the pain before."
- **God Sighting:** Three members of our team are speech therapists and one is a special education major. They found one of the purposes God had for them on their team by serving the disabled at Kelly's House and the Oasis de Eden.

### **Homes Of Hope**

- A village of homes provide safe housing to families displaced by a hurricane in 2020 just as the pandemic hit Guatemala. There is a vocational school located nearby where trades can be learned in the culinary school as well as tailoring and jewelry making. The textiles and jewelry are sold in the HOL gift shop as well as in an online store. There is also a motor pool repair shop where residents can learn the skills to be an auto mechanic.
- A basketball court is located behind that homes that was donated by the creator of the video game, FortNite.

### **Youth Camp**

- The Rawlings Foundation ([www.rawlingsfoundation.com](http://www.rawlingsfoundation.com)) has donated millions of dollars to create a beautiful camp for the youth of the villages near HOL. Students from the villages are identified and brought in two weekends a month to participate in the spiritual camp. The hope is that these students will grow to be the spiritual leaders in their villages.
- The beautifully landscaped camp has a lake with a water slide, dorms, a multi-purpose open air chapel, groomed soccer fields, sports courts, and a camp house kitchen.
- A couple from Lynchburg, VA serve as both directors of the youth camp and the HOL pre-school.

### **The Village of Transformation**

Finding a new loving home for an orphan can be an impossible task in impoverished communities in Guatemala. A child without parents needs protection, healthy meals, education, a place to sleep—but most of all love. These children can find an endless supply of this love at the Village of Transformation. This incredible project unites up to eight orphaned children with a loving family, all doing life together in the same home. Adoptive moms and dads are offering inexhaustible encouragement and care—sharing laughter, tears, and the important life lessons only a parent can teach. Many of the children who live in the Village of Transformation were abused and abandoned with no place to call home. The vision of this project is to give these children a place to belong- a place in which they would no longer be called orphans.

- The village is a quaint neighborhood with individual homes, a school building, a chapel, and a beautiful playground complete with a soccer/basketball court.
- There are 100 children living in the village ranging in ages from 2-15 years old. These children may have been orphaned or removed from the home and come from all over the country.
- There is currently a moratorium on adoptions that means children cannot be adopted from the country of Guatemala.

### **St. Luke's Hospital**

- St. Luke's Hospital is on the HOL campus where we were able to visit some severely malnourished babies who have been brought there through the Baby Rescue Program. In 2022 malnutrition rates tripled in Eastern Guatemala. When a child is identified in the remote villages, HOL sends the Baby Rescue Team to transfer the baby to the hospital where he or she will receive life-saving care.
- The Smile Train program uses the hospital to perform Cleft palate repair surgeries as well.
- There are plans to expand St. Luke's with an outpatient wing to offer additional services including gynecology, dental, ultrasound, X-ray, and laboratory.

### **Food Packaging Facility**

- The food packing facility is located on campus and has storage for the staple items such as rice, beans, porridge, and other nutrient filled items. A bag costs \$35 and can feed a family for a month. Ministry teams are able to use the facility to package food for their adopted villages.

### **Church**

- The team attended church on Sunday in the village next to the HOL campus. Many of the kids from the orphanage and others we had met were there. Kate found a child she had played with the day before at

the orphanage and they gave each other a high five when they saw each other at church. The relationships had already begun, one day in.

### The Dump

- A few miles from the HOL campus there is a garbage dump where many families live in make-shift shacks. As trucks pull into the dump to offload trash, the people (many small children) use sticks to dig through in order to find food to eat.
- Our team took sandwiches, drinks and chips to the dump and handed food out to the families who live there. We were able to visit with them, show them the love of Jesus and pray over them while were there.
- **Needs:** Many if not all of the children were barefooted and walking around the broken glass, rusty metal and refuse of the dump. Shoes are a huge need for the people living there.

### The Village of Tasharte: Our Adopted Village

- The village of Tasharte sits about 15 miles from the HOL campus, but due to road conditions, it takes an hour and a half to travel there. A bus is used to make the first half up the mountain to the last village on the paved road. From there, "cattle trucks," or pick up trucks with rails installed in the bed, are used to transport the team the remainder of the trip up the mountain on a dirt road. While an unusual way to travel, the cool breeze, the vistas and friendly neighbors along the way make it an enjoyable ride. Cyrus said that nobody, including politicians, have bothered with helping the people of Tasharte. We are the only church working to enrich the lives of the people in this village.
- The village has 146 families living in primitive mud wall huts with dirt floors and metal or thatched roofs. Most use indoor cook fires for cooking, carry water from mountain streams in buckets, and share the home with their livestock. Few have electricity and they sleep in hammocks, but all were very proud to welcome visitors into their homes.
- Our teams were able to gift work gloves and multi-tools to the men of the village. The men enjoyed showing off their crops and talking with the visitors. Erik said they were very grateful for the gifts and it was powerful and moving to be able to pray over the fathers of the families. He said they saw men as old as 60 as well as women and children working the fields. Beck noted that he saw elderly men, some as old as 70 walking up the mountain roads with loads of sticks on their backs for firewood.
- **Home Visits & Prayer Requests:** With the help of our interpreters, team members visited the homes in Tasharte, they recored names, ages and needs for each. Below are some of our families.

Rogelina Vasquez - age 69 - 6 kids: 4 boys/2 girls- Please pray for us.

Maria Carbjal - age 27 - 3 kids: 2 boys/1 girl - Pray for her kids and their studies

Eucebia Ramirez - age 52 - 1 son age 20 - 2 families in the house - 2 grandkids - Pray for family.

Santos Perez- age 42- 6 kids - Prayers for the home, overcoming sickness and for the family.

Carlos Caderon - age 50 - 9 kids (1 passed away) - Pray for needs in the family and his work in the field.

Luvia Ramirez- age 37 - 6 kids - Pray for the family.

- The school in Tasharte has 150 elementary school (ages 6-10) students as well as 40 pre-school and kindergarten students. The elementary students are housed in a four classroom building at the entrance to the village. Pre-k and kindergarten are in a stand alone classroom at a separate site.
- **Hamp's School** - The TFC team was able to participate in the dedication of a new school classroom building, complete with brand new desks and a white board, donated in memory of Hamp Nicholson. This building will house an additional 25 students, ages 11 and 12 years old. Formerly these students were housed in a wood and sheet metal lean-to that was destroyed by a storm. Advent Revolution funds were used to add bathroom facilities as well as a brand new playground next to the building. This is the only playground in the village.
- A classroom building is around \$15,000 and the government provides teachers as classrooms are added.
- Most village students leave school at age 12 in order to work in the fields, helping their families. Some are able to attend high school in the nearest town which is a 45 minute cattle truck or motorcycle ride from the village and requires tuition. Most have to pay for transportation as well.
- Lester, one of our HOL interpreters, encouraged us by saying that if we plant a seed with just one child, it is worth it!
- Members of the team spoke at the dedication celebration sharing the gospel, emphasizing the importance of education, and describing the special person who the school is named after. Cyrus said, "We are just blips in the universe. Hamp was a tiny blip in Thomasville, Georgia and now his impact, his name, will be spoken daily in Tasharte. God can use a tiny blip to make a huge impact!"
- William, the school principal, thanked TFC for the new classroom and said he hopes to have us there for a long time to come.

- Cyrus described the “elasticity of love” that goes beyond our families and Thomasville. We show the love of Jesus through outreach.
- Members of the team who are teachers by trade, met with the teachers from the school in Tasharte to explain the teaching materials being donated. They make most of their teaching aids and use found items such as bottle caps for counters in math.
- **Teacher Needs:** The teachers expressed needs such as new desks (most all are splintered and falling apart), individual white boards and markers because paper is scarce, text books, and composition notebooks. They also expressed a need for water to be piped to the school. Now they have to carry water in buckets to use for flushing toilets, washing hands, and drinking.
- The women of the village gathered for a meeting with team members in a school classroom. More than 40 women were given hygiene and first aid kits. With the aid of a translator, directions were given for the items in the kit. Mirrors and emery boards were gifted to the young women and teens.
- Activities for the children such as crafts and games went on the entire time the team visited the village. Through playing soccer, face painting, doing manicures, dancing, singing and making bracelets, the members of our team began building relationships with the children and their families.
- Noticing the need for oral hygiene, the team gave out toothbrushes and toothpaste along with a whole-group lesson on teeth brushing and the importance of caring for teeth from April.
- The last day in the village, we were racing against approaching weather. Our prayers were answered and the rain held off until we made it back to the bus!
- **Needs:** Eye drops, eye glasses, sun glasses. Cyrus said there is an organization called National Vision that will provide free eye wear so we can provide help in this area when we return.

The most important needs to be addressed first are a clean water system and child sponsorship. The children in Tasharte need sponsorship to help them attend school and have the necessary supplies, etc. A clean water system, piping water from a spring at the top of the mountain, would be a great help to the people and would help to improve their overall health. The Global Missions and Outreach Committee will be meeting to discuss the next steps we need to take as a church to help the people of Tasharte and the Hope Of Life ministries. If you would like to be a part of this discussion, we would welcome your voice. Contact Stephanie Nicholson at (229)224-4747 or [wsnicholson@me.com](mailto:wsnicholson@me.com) for more information and watch the bulletin for the upcoming meeting date.

We greatly appreciate your prayers and support of this ministry and we invite you join us in caring for the people of Guatemala.

In Christ,  
The 2023 TFC Guatemala Ministry Team