

Randall Shea Mini-Newsletter. February 2018

Education Project Update from Santa Maria Tzejá, Guatemala

Dear Friends,

It is a great pleasure to write again to all of you. My family and I send our warmest greetings, along with our hope you are all doing well and enjoying life. I have been in Guatemala since January 12, where I'm greatly enjoying being with my wife and our two youngest, Aida Abigail and Rolandito. I have been very busy teaching English to our 8th and 9th grade students. Quincy Ponvert, the grandson of my good friend, Phyllis Ponvert in Ann Arbor, is staying with us and is teaching our 7th grade students along with assisting me with my two classes. He is a delight to have in our home, and doing a wonderful job working with the students, along with significantly lessening my workload!

In my mini-update today, I'd like to focus on a different topic, however. On January 31st we were delighted to receive two very special guests in our community: Padre Luis Gurriarán and Padre Ricardo Falla. Luis was in town to celebrate his 84th birthday, and padre Ricardo

returned once again to Santa María Tzejá to present the latest in his series of his books. A third priest, Padre Francisco, came along to join the festivities. Our middle school teachers and students prepared a lively and heart-felt welcome, which included a number of rally cheers they had prepared and practiced.



Photos, left to right: Padre Luis Gurriarán with red jacket / Padre Francisco / Padre Ricardo Falla.

Padre Luis' relationship with our community dates to the 1960's, when he led the efforts of essentially landless *campesinos* (small scale farmers) in the Quiché highlands to organize



and obtain land in the Ixcán jungle in what would become the community of Santa María Tzejá. Padre Luis has led an amazing life (no overstatement here!) which has been documented in the book, *Guatemala: The Silence of the Rooster, A Spanish Missionary in the Bloodiest War in the Americas*, which we include as part of our social studies curriculum. Our community loves Padre Luis, and he holds a very special place in his heart for Santa María Tzejá, which he eloquently expressed in his discourse before our students and community members.

"When I came here today there was a moment when tears came to my eyes. My tears of hope and of love flowed out towards you. I do not care if my tears fall again for the same reason, because you are the community to which I come to nourish once again my spirit, my mind and my heart to find strength and to keep walking."

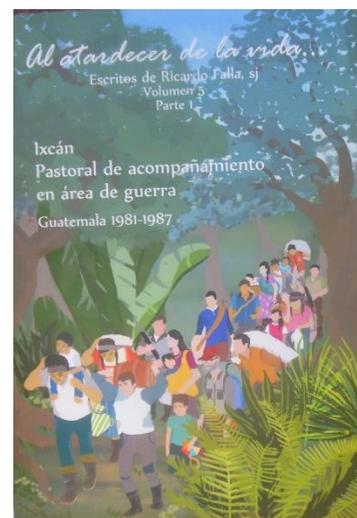
Jesuit priest Ricardo Falla presented his latest book *Ixcán: Pastoral Accompaniment in a War Zone. Guatemala 1981 - 1987*. The work recounts Padre Ricardo's experience

accompanying Guatemala's internal war refugees, living in the Ixcán jungle *Communities of Population in Resistance*. Quoting Ricardo's words, written in August of 1984, he explains,

"Pastoral accompaniment, as we see it, consists in its final essence of accompanying the people, as we would say in



Christian terms, in their life, death and resurrection. Our primary task is not to say a mass or to celebrate some baptisms. Rather, what is most fundamental is that in our attitude and in all our actions we show we are willing to accompany the people to their death, if necessary. That we are not going to be shepherds working for a salary, that when the coyote comes they leave their sheep and their lambs and they run away."



Accompaniment of the dispossessed and endangered is something I was privileged to engage in during my years as an International Team member with Witness for Peace (1989 – 1994). For two years I lived in Nicaragua’s war zones in Jinotega, accompanying the rural



population which was suffering the direct effect of the United States created, trained and funded terrorist organization, the Nicaraguan contras. And from late 1991 to May of 1994, I lived with Guatemalan *campesinos*, first during the final years of their time as war refugees in Mexico, and then back in Guatemala, after their return from exile, in a country still at war. *Photo: a younger Randall, far*

right, and dear friend Dr. Jeff Sloan, in Nicaragua in 1991.

It was very satisfying to have the entire middle school student body present to participate in and witness Luis’ and Ricardo’s presentations. As you know, our middle school does not view the war experience in Guatemala as a long ago occurrence in a distant land. Rather, we see the war as an event that directly and irrevocably impacted our community in a horrific way, but also as a time that called forth a strength, faith and spirit of resistance that few imagined themselves to possess. Like the Jewish people after the Holocaust in Europe during World War II, the villagers strive to keep the war memories alive in their children and grandchildren. As the saying goes, a people who do not remember and learn from their past are destined to repeat it.

Using the funding support you provide, we were able to purchase 20 copies of the Padre Ricardo’s book and my wife Juana will be using it as a resource in her 9th grade social studies class this year. Thank you, once again, for your much appreciated support!

To finalize the day’s activities, Padres Luis and Ricardo celebrated mass in the church. Middle school teachers and staff had prepared the sanctuary with a flower carpet and hung



palm leave branches. After the service, the church youth group sang a couple of songs, accompanied by movement / dance, for the priests, and they were delighted. *Photos follow below*

I look forward to being in ongoing communication with all of you.

Many blessings,

Randall Shea



Our daughter Aida at right, accompanied by Quincy Ponvert.

