



January 17, 2019

TO:           The New Castle Presbytery  
                  Jessica MacMillan, Stated Clerk  
                  Dianne Deming, Moderator  
                  Donna Scully, Administrator

FROM:        The Association of Mam Christian Women for Development  
                  Board of Directors  
                  Rosario Diaz Vicente, Coordinator

RE:            Activities in 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is truly a blessing that New Castle Presbytery (NCP) and the Association of Mam Christian Women for Development (Association) renewed our Covenant for another three years in March 2018. It gives each of us the opportunity to grow together in our faith. We dedicate ourselves to making the Covenant as fruitful as possible and know that it is because of our partnership with you. We hope our joint effort with NCP will last for many years to come.

According to the Covenant, each party is to annually provide the other with a one-page evaluation of the results of our joint activities. This evaluation is submitted by the Association to NCP in accordance with that requirement. Please note we can ordinarily fit our activities on one-page, but this year the number exceeds what can be stated with that limit.

In the year 2018, we concentrated on best health practices for ourselves and our families. We also worked to improve the health of the animals we raise through the microloan program. Healthy bodies strengthen the animals' value in the market place, thereby providing us with more income to help our families.

## Human Health

We will first discuss human health by summarizing: (1) a program to encourage family vegetable gardens; (2) ongoing work in helping Association participants buy safe, fuel efficient stoves as well as Ventilated Improved Pit (VIP) latrines; (3) mental health awareness; and (4) outreach on children's health.

**(1) Family Vegetable Gardens.** Carlos Hernandez, our advisor on crop and animal production, worked with us again this year to ensure more Association participants learn how to raise vegetables, thereby reducing the food insecurity that many face. As in other years, two Presbyteries from Virginia, the Peaks (Lynchburg, VA) and James River (Richmond) provided the seeds. Staff from CEDEPCA (more about the organization below) distributed the seeds. Carlos provided the expert advice on how to improve production of the vegetables, which consisted of radishes, cauliflower, broccoli, cabbage, lettuce, onions, and some vegetables not raised in the U.S. To help ensure success, Carlos made 13 visits to the various groups to observe the gardens and advise them on how to increase their production. (While on the visits, he also inspected poultry operation. See below.) An added benefit was provided by a Guatemalan company that creates organic fertilizer. The company's start up loan requires that distribution of a certain amount of the fertilizer for nonprofit groups, such as the Association. They did so in 2017 and 2018, which was the last year of the program. Twenty-five families from groups supported by NCP received seeds, advice, and the fertilizer:

Number of Families	Group
14	La Cruz
5	Claveles 2
6	Claveles 3

Obviously, ready access to vegetables will improve the nutritional health of the families involved. An important by-product is the income the women realize when they sell surplus vegetables to their neighbors. New Castle Presbytery supported this training by Carlos Hernandez with a grant of \$1,960.

**(2) Safe, fuel efficient stoves, VIP latrines, and water filters.** Another health concern is the need to reduce injury and illness. Thanks to a Canadian group, we were introduced to stoves, latrines, and water filters to address these twin concerns. (a) The stoves eliminate the smoke that injures eyes and lungs by a sturdy chimney that funnels the smoke outside. They reduce burns due to its solid construction. Equally significant, each stove has a well-insulated metal box (the location of the fire) and uses far less wood. Families thus realize large savings. (b) The inadequacy of sanitary facilities is a fact of life for many Guatemalans. The VIP latrines provide a clean facility and a safe place for women and girls. It is designed to trap disease-carrying insects. (c) Obviously, clean water is critical to avoiding gastro-intestinal problems. The filter program began over five years ago and over 500 units have been installed.

During 2018, 60 stoves were installed, of which the majority were funded by the Presbyterian Church of Dover and Westminster Presbyterian Church (Wilmington). Westminster (Wilmington) also provided funds for 21 water filters and 12 VIP latrines.

An important note: these items are not provided free. The women and their families must contribute a portion of the cost with churches and individuals providing the remainder. This policy reflects the Association's principle of helping women with a hand-up, not a hand-out.

**(3) Dealing with crisis.** This year, as many years past, the Association sponsored a series of workshops, known as Resilience in Crisis. The training includes techniques for dealing with stress, women's rights under Guatemalan law, and preparation for natural disasters. CEDEPCA (in English, the Protestant Center for Pastoral Studies in Central America) led the workshops. CEDEPCA is an educational institution that contributes to the transformation of lives and contexts by providing training and accompaniment, and by offering spaces for reflection to women and men from diverse Christian traditions, communities, and contexts. The women attended six workshops and 19 graduated and received diplomas from CEDEPCA. New Castle Presbytery generously provided \$1,260 to pay for this CEDEPCA training.

**(4) Health clinic.** We provided outreach to the children in two communities, Las Barrancas and Las Granadillas. The purpose of the clinic was to assess the nutritional health of children, share preventive medicine practices, and provide primary care. Also offered was a workshop on dental care. (The dental workshop was repeated for children whose mothers attended our year-end assembly.) Without the clinic, the children might not have otherwise received the services. Members of the Nacoochee, Georgia Presbyterian Church helped us coordinate the clinic. Jovita Morales of Las Barrancas managed the entire operation.

### **Animal Health**

Why should we devote time on this topic? First, animal production is one of the most frequent businesses women choose under our microloan program. Second, healthy animals yield good prices. Good prices let the women not only re-pay their loans, but also have money left over to contribute to the family's financial well being. Our agricultural expert, Carlos Hernandez, plays as critical a role in this area as he does with the vegetable gardens. He explained the best practices during his four workshops: the optimal dimensions for a chicken coop; how to keep the coops clean; what preventive measures keep the chickens healthy; a recipe for a syrup to treat respiratory ailments; and another recipe for home-made chicken feed as a way to reduce production costs because purchased feed is far more expensive. As noted above, during his 13 visits to observe the vegetable gardens, Carlos also inspected the poultry production. The Presbyterian Church of Dover provided funds for chicken coops this past year.

### **Formalizing the Association**

In 2018, we began work to formalize our status. In the fall, we submitted an application to the Guatemalan government to obtain non-profit status. Upon the approval of the application, our association will become a “Nongovernmental Organization,” similar to a tax-exempt nonprofit organization in the United States. This legal status will provide our women with a greater sense of empowerment, increase our ability to raise funds, and secure our future as an organization. We are grateful to NCP for helping us pursue this endeavor by providing funds so that we could hire a lawyer (\$1,200), an accountant (\$1,000), and training by an auditor (\$500). We hope to hear from the government soon about our status.

### **Other Activities**

We cannot overlook the importance of our prayer partnerships. They move us as a group from our joint work, to a one-on-one relationship in which a Guatemalan and an American pray for each other daily. The partnerships involve praying only. No other activity is required. It is a pure act of faith and the reaching out to touch another’s heart in prayer.

To provide perspective on our activities in which the NPC likely has an interest, but is not directly involved, we wanted to mention two other programs. First, the two sewing schools continue their successful operation by graduating this year 68 students, 19 from the school in the remote village of Las Barrancas and 49 from the school in San Juan Ostuncalco, where the headquarters of the Association is located. Second, the Association launched a filter monitoring program. Women trained as community health workers (CHW) visit homes with our filters. The CHWs ensure that the filter is operating properly by measuring the flow rate and that the family is using the filter properly. If the family does not regularly re-fill their filter with water from local source, its effectiveness is lost because the filtration will not take place.

### **Conclusion**

It is with great joy that we report these activities to you. We know that each of us brings different resources to the programs and both of us are needed for success. The success shows that, through working together, we are making God’s love visible.