

Latin American Concerns Committee
Report to Pacific Yearly Meeting, August 2012

The Latin American Concerns Committee (LACC) continues to focus on its primary mission of increasing awareness among Friends in PYM of the meetings and projects in Latin America that are related to our yearly meeting. In addition, we work to make this knowledge available to others, and include information about other Friends projects in Latin America, especially those related to unprogrammed meetings. Finally, we are deeply aware of how the policies of the United States (on economics, drugs, and immigration) interact with conditions in Latin America.

Our two primary means of increasing awareness throughout PYM continue to be via our bilingual website (<http://www.latinamerica.pacificyearlymeeting.org/>) and by sponsoring interest groups at our Annual Session. This year Miguel Angel Costop, Director of Progresa, the Guatemala Friends Scholarship/Loan Program, will be presenting information and insights on their current activities. That program is jointly sponsored by Guatemala Friends Meeting and Redwood Forest Friends Meeting. In addition, we are joining the Peace and Social Order Committee in sponsoring the interest group on Undocumented Students.

Our committee discussed and began to make plans for a blog that would include more current information on happenings in Latin America and within our related programs, but we discovered that despite our enthusiasm we did not have the resources of time and energy to make this happen. Instead, we have decided to prepare reports such as this for PYM at least annually, and continue to maintain and update the website.

We encourage you to visit the website for information on Mexico City Monthly Meeting, the Casa de los Amigos in Mexico City, the Guatemala Friends Meeting, Progresa – Guatemala Friends Scholarship/Loan Program, and the El Salvador Programs of Palo Alto Friends Meeting. Information on volunteer or service opportunities with these projects can be found by following links to individual sites. The website also contains information on other Quaker-related projects, as well as contact information for several unprogrammed meetings, worship groups, and individual Friends in Latin America.

Reports on our three primary projects are below.

Casa de Los Amigos, Mexico City

Casa de los Amigos continues to thrive in Mexico City. The Casa's guesthouse has been full all year, and the peace programs have been very active. At the Casa's annual board meeting in February, seven new members were received. A few highlights include:

- Hosting a Friend in Residence for three months, who received Pickett Fund support for her stay.
- The Casa 2012 summer internship: six students for 10 weeks.
- Providing temporary housing to migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers, and victims of human trafficking.
- Entering into a formal arrangement of support for AVP Mexico, offering publicity and space for workshops.
- Running the third Casa de los Amigos Migration Field Study, an intensive one-week program for 10 students from Haverford College
- Opening up the Casa to APOFAM, the Asamblea Popular de Familias Migrantes, an organization dedicated to supporting return migrants and families of Mexican immigrants to the US.
- The long-awaited inauguration of TOCHAN, a migrant shelter in the western part of Mexico City. The Casa has worked in coalition on this project for the last three years.

Guatemala Friends Scholarship Loan Program.

In 2012, we have 35 new students and 62 continuing students for a total of 97. This is a reduction in our total number of students due to less income in 2011. At the university level, the most popular majors are law, nursing and secondary education, and at the secondary level they are primary education and agriculture. In 2011, we had 12 graduate at the secondary level and 22 from university.

We are in the third year of our service program where students perform a project in their community. In this way the help offered by the Scholarship Program is multiplied and reaches hundreds of people through training workshops and other services. Students are encouraged to do a project relating to their major and any student may do a project related to earth care. A welcome additional benefit from this program is that upon seeing the talents of our students, many have been offered jobs in their communities. 2011 was also the third year of Teaching English Experience where North Americans spend a week in Antigua, Guatemala giving one-to-one English instruction (curriculum provided, no prior experience needed). This opportunity to get to know our students has been such a rewarding experience that instructors keep returning. The next work tour is December 3-12, 2012. We continue to offer tours of Guatemala Highlands to groups of 6 or more. See www.guatemalafriends.org for details.

We are grateful to LACC for sponsoring the attendance of our director, Miguel Angel Costop, at PYM this summer. He will present an Interest Group and be available throughout the week. It has been a number of years since Miguel has attended PYM and we look forward to this opportunity. Next year will be the 40th anniversary of Guatemala Friends Scholarship Loan Program.

Donna Smith, Co-clerk, Guatemala Scholarship Program
Redwood Forest Friends Meeting

El Salvador Projects, Palo Alto Friends Meeting

"Education is the quickest way to lift people out of poverty." --Carmen Broz, who founded the El Salvador Projects 23 years ago. She is still remembered with great love among the communities, says her son, Robert Broz, who is the field director living in El Salvador.

We offer loans to bright high school graduates from peasant families to attend university or technical school. Support for a single student for one year is \$1200. Through an exchange of letters, the sponsors and the recipients become friends.

We work in several communities. El Barío school offers K-12 education to the region, with credentialed teachers. In nearby Suchitoto, Robert Broz collaborates with others to stage a "University Fair" to inform all high school seniors about college options. In two communities near Perquín, we provide scholarships to students to attend area schools. Our Project AGE helps seniors become self-supporting. We send them donated reading glasses.

The fifth Service-Learning trip that we have conducted since 2006 has given adolescents and adults the chance to travel to this developing country, meet with people in the communities we support and learn about the issues in their lives. They have the chance to see for themselves the impact of our support on the lives of individuals. The service element allows Salvadoreans and Americans to become friends while working together. Service projects have included road construction to allow better access to a village school, assisting in building a wheelchair ramp, building a bathroom in a community center, and digging the septic pool, and painting various community buildings. The 2012 trip, underway as we write this, includes teaching English classes in a village school and several painting projects.

This work is made possible entirely by the support of 125 generous contributors and Monthly Meetings. The income in 2011 totaled \$38,850. Expenses were approximately \$21,600 for our university loan program, \$4,600 for general projects, \$8,400 for Field Director compensation, \$2,500 for newsletters, and about \$2,000 for other expenses.

Please feel free to contact committee members or projects directly for more information.

LACC Report Submitted by Dottie Vura-Weis, Clerk
Latin American Concerns Committee