

LATIN AMERICAN CONCERNS COMMITTEE REPORT TO REPRESENTATIVE COMMITTEE 2017

In 1997, PYM annual session established a standing Latin America Concerns Committee to gather and disseminate information to Pacific and other Yearly Meetings regarding Friends groups and service projects in Latin America. The intention is to support rather than replace spirit-led projects already supported by Monthly Meetings, Worship Groups and individual Friends.

LACC has met once since last annual session. LACC is proposing three Interest Groups for Annual Session. We will be inviting Rev. Deborah Lee of the Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity to speak about work with immigrants in the Bay Area and her pilgrimage to Honduras in December 2016. Her Interest Group last Annual session was well received and helpful to meetings concerned about the plight of immigrants. Antonio Lopez, director of Casa de los Amigos, will present an Interest Group on migration and the Casa's work with the United Nations and the Mennonite Central Committee on behalf of immigrants in Mexico, as well as other programs at the Casa. Antonio will also offer an Interest Group on the needs of those dealing with terminal illness, making final arrangements, spirituality from the view of a Christian thanatologist.

CASA DE LOS AMIGOS

In October 2016, Casa celebrated 60 years of peace and social justice work in Mexico. As clerk of LACC, I attended along with the director of Progreso, Miguel Costop. It was a great event and demonstrated how important the Casa programs are to many people.
D. Smith

In 1956, the Religious Society of Friends, the "Quakers" and some Mexicans in good faith founded Casa de los Amigos seeking to foster understanding and peace based on the testimonies, Quaker spirituality, human rights and a culture of peace. Casa initiated a series of programs to support communities, generated an

international volunteer program, began caring for the environment and providing support for migrants and refugees.

Today Casa de los Amigos is an organization with an international character partnering with the United Nations to support migrants, recognized refugees and asylum seekers. As we continue to help the vulnerable, we continue to witness care of the Earth through water conservation, solar and green technologies, and nonviolent conflict resolution. Differences and diversity coexist as a reality at the Casa.

In February, Casa received 28 refugee and asylum seekers. This number is a challenge given that in the year 2015, we received a total of 23 migrants. This appears to be because of political changes especially in the USA. With divine inspiration and the prayers and support of friends and people of good will, we will do our best.

During 2016, we received a total of into our solidarity accommodations. 42 were asylum seekers and 18 were migrants in need of humanitarian aid.

There is a more detailed report that will be submitted to PYM for the LACC Annual Session report after it has been reviewed and approved by the Casa Board.

I plan to attend PYM Annual Session and look forward to answering any questions you might have. I do hope that you will be able to attend the Interest groups that we will be offering.

Marco Antonio Lopéz Galicia, Director

EL SALVADOR PROJECTS

The El Salvador projects continue to function as in the past years with Robert Broz Moran as the in country director working under the direction of our committee in the US. Our committee currently meets every third Wednesday at 7:00 pm PDT with active participation of

several members in Palo Alto (Trudy Reagan, Bill Bauriedel, Hulda Muaka, Dave Hinson and Tim Huntley) via Skype with participation of Nate Secrest (Pigeon Point Nature Center), Jamie Newton and Marion Bowers Newton (Silver City, New Mexico), Bren Darrow (Berkeley) and project director Robert Broz (Suchitoto, El Salvador).

In 2017 we will be providing financial support for 17 young men and women from rural Suchitoto so they can continue their post high school studies. Ten students continue on and 7 students are new in our program. Study programs vary from medicine to law, English to education, industrial engineering to nursing and social work to International Relations. Eight of our students are men and nine are women, they come from 13 different communities and have graduated from six different high schools with the only thing in common being that they all come from rural communities in Suchitoto and all qualified to our programs application process. Our seventeen students are paired up to sponsors from the US and each student writes two letters annually to the person, meeting or group that they are assigned. Over the years we have found that this exchange between sponsors and students makes our work all the more meaningful for all involved helping to breach language differences, distance, borders and culture.

The El Salvador projects in 2017 are also providing

funding for one half scholarship, managed through the local Santa Lucia parish and its scholarship committee. We do this in a way to provide continuance to a separate program started by Frank Cummings an attendee of Atlanta Friends Meeting who passed away in 2016. Atlanta Friends Meeting is providing for another new student and the local parish has increased its support for yet one more, so there are three new students in the program in 2017. Although managed through the Catholic parish the program is open to everyone and has students from several different religious backgrounds with the general requirement that they be from and live in Suchitoto. Our program continues to share the expenses of a coed university student house in San Salvador where this year there are 22 students from 5 different programs who like Palo Alto provide financial support for post high school education. As in the past three years the house is financed with funds received from the municipality of Suchitoto, Santa Cruz al Salvador, Cummings Family, Dignity Seed Foundation and of course Palo Alto Friends Meeting El Salvador Projects. Our in country director is responsible for all aspects of the student house. Beside our university student loan program mentioned above we continue to work with some schools and local communities. In 2017 we will provide support for the installation of a water system into the science lab at the school in El Barrio. We also will provide aid for the purchase of some basic science

reactants and equipment in hopes of improving the conditions for the middle and high school teachers and the quality of education for their students. We also provide some continued support for elders and youth.

In July of 2017 Palo Alto Friends Meeting will be sponsoring another Service-Learning trip to El Salvador. Since 2006 we have provided the opportunity for youth and young at heart adults to visit the communities where we work, get to know and work alongside the people from each village, learn about El Salvador's history and see firsthand how our programs are helping to make El Salvador a better place. Service-Learning trips over the years have been from 1-3 weeks, always include homestay and contact with the people from the villages where we have worked.

This year our US coordinator is Nate Secrest who has been to El Salvador several times over the past years including 3 times on our trips. This year's trip, as in 2015 will be based in Suchitoto with home stays in the village of El Barrio. Service work will include teaching English, Science and some labor painting, digging and mixing concrete. This year's trip will start on July 23rd and finish on the morning of Aug 2nd. As of today we have nine participants signed up. Nate Secrest and Sarah Ludwig will be coming as delegation leaders and our director Robert as well as a local youth will fill out the group. We

do hope to have a few others sign up for the trip which should bring our final number of paying participants up to around 14. I hope this brief update about our work in 2017 helps the members on the LACC to know more about our work. For past work dating back top 1989 please visit our web page at www.pafmelsalvadorprojects.org



Project Director and 2017 students-In Peace Robert Broz

GUATEMALA FRIENDS SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM (PROGRESA)

In August of 2016, 10 Junior Friends and 3 adult members of North Pacific Yearly Meeting traveled to Guatemala to perform service projects and experience first-hand what life is like in a rural Guatemalan community. They planted 500 trees, taught English, and participated in a environmental clean up along a small river led by one of Progresas's university students. Of course there was plenty of time to play soccer and visit ancient and scenic areas.

In October, we participated in the 60th anniversary celebration at Casa del los Amigos in Mexico City. Miguel Costop, director of Progresá, informed the gathering of a joint project in 1997. When Casa laid down its Central American Refugee program, several thousand dollars was given to Progresá for scholarships to refugees resettling in Guatemala. These scholarships were given to young people in the Ixcán an area that suffered greatly during the war. Progresá was invited to the 20th anniversary of Primavera del Ixcán, a CPR (Peoples Cooperative in Resistance). It was a long and difficult journey, but well worth it to meet with our graduates and hear about the excellent educational system they founded. We appreciated the opportunity to share with Casa the fruits of their donation.

Nate Secret of Redwood Forest and LACC was Progresá's first short term volunteer. He followed up with one of our graduates and wrote an article for our Fall 2016 Update.

In January 2017, the 7th Teaching English Experience was held in Antigua, Guatemala with 19 North Americans participating with 19 of our students. This has become a very popular event with about half of the teachers returning multiple times. We will be offering this soul-satisfying, fun-filled event again in January 2018.



In 2016, we had 16 graduate at the university level (3-Medicine, 3-Law, 4-Nursing, 3-Education, 2-Social Work, 1-International Relations) and 3 at the secondary level (Aux. Nurse, Natural Resources, Primary Education).

There are 52 students returning in 2017 and we have accepted 25 new students. To receive our biannual newsletter and more information about Progresa, please send your email information to Donna Smith at dforestvil@aol.com.

Submitted by,

Donna Smith, Clerk LACC