

Pacific Yearly Meeting Latin American Concerns Committee Report to Annual Session 2020

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 with special attention to Casa de los Amigos in Mexico City, El Salvador Project and Guatemala Friends Scholarship Program (Progresia). The intention is to support rather than replace spirit-led projects already supported by Monthly Meetings, Worship Groups and individual Friends. In 2017, the Undocumented Student Program of Sacramento Meeting became the fourth project in LACC.

Brief updates from LACC programs:

Casa de los Amigos The oldest peace and social justice organization in Mexico, has experienced a hostile takeover. In December 2018, the outgoing executive director falsified board documents to name himself the president of the organization. Along with three other board members, he formed a new board, excluding over half of the members (including local Friends and former volunteers) without their awareness.

The group hired a new director with no experience with Friends or Quaker work. The current administration has refused communication with the excluded board members even though the government of Mexico has ruled that the excluded group is the legitimate board with legal control. Nearly all of the Casa's partners have suspended their support in response to serious concerns about the current administration's direction and financial management. Friends across the USA have previously sent donations to the Casa via Orange Grove Friends Meeting. This past winter those collected funds were returned to donors. The current administration is unable to pay the Casa cleaning staff or respond to any of these serious charges. Recently, for several months, the Mexico City Monthly Meeting was prohibited from meeting in the Casa, its spiritual home for nearly 60 years.

What does the Board of the Casa need? During 2019, the legal Board has tried to resolve this issue through dialogue, and the support of allies. In 2020 the Board seeks **Mexican legal aid**, preferably pro-bono, to reclaim the assets and administration. **Financial support** is needed for paying the Casa cleaning staff's misappropriated wages, and labor lawyers to rectify their legal situation. At the March 2020 Representative Committee Enrique Esqueda, co-clerk of Mexico City Monthly Meeting, member of the legal board, and representative to PYM, explained our situation. The Board needs Casa supporters to **connect by emailing us**. We welcome the opportunity to **arrange a phone call** to share more, generate ideas, and activate connections. We believe in spiritual power and justice. Please, **hold us in the Light** as we return a historic peace organization to its rightful stewards and enable the witness and legacy of Quaker social action in Mexico to continue.

In Peace and Hope, Rogelio Bellamy Roque, Chair of the Board of Directors of the Casa de los Amigos asamblea@casadelosamigos.org.mx

El Salvador Projects Although El Salvador acted quickly and before any reported COVID-19 cases, the pandemic continues to expand. The government's strict Stay Sheltered quarantine, which initially was enforced by detaining those, found on the street had increased already tense disputes between the Executive and legislative branches of the government. We have 28

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university students this year thanks to increased donations in 2019. As the country was completely shut down many people are struggling with basic needs and now with Tropical Storm Amanda, thousands of acres of corn and other crops have been lost. Our students continue to receive their monthly stipends and our youth group in El Barrio has put together basic need packages for elders in the village. Lack of internet in many parts of the country has made the effectiveness of virtual studies evident at every level. Several of our university students have not received more than pdf files since March, and unstable data and internet connections for virtual exams has caused some to be unable to complete.

Our normal social work programs by students have in several cases been adapted to help with COVID-19 education and sanitation within the villages.

We decided in May to postpone the service-learning trip scheduled in July, to July of 2021. As Tropical Storm Amanda continues to drop hurricane quantities of rain, it is now projected that a new Tropical depression #2E h, likely to gain strength and become Tropical Storm Beatriz as it moves into the area affecting El Salvador, Guatemala and Mexico.

Please hold El Salvador in the Light as it once again suffers nationwide flooding and crop losses. Robert Broz, Program Director, rpbroz@gmail.com, <https://www.facebook.com/pafmelsalprojects/>, www.elsalvadorprojects.org

Guatemala Friends Scholarship Program-Progresa Despite early stringent measures, COVID-19 cases continue to spike. The pandemic has been exacerbated by positive cases deported from the US. We have had to reassess the needs of our 87 students in light of distance learning demands. Gov't restrictions have taken away almost all sources of income from Guatemalans. We have increased stipends so that each of our students and their families will continue to have a sustainable amount of food. Through Zoom, we have implemented 3 weekly activities for Motivation, Connection and Inspiration. We continue to have Quarterly Workshops offering anxiety and stress management and another with a former student, now an MD, educating about the coronavirus. Our students usually perform annual community service projects that relate to their studies. This year they are choosing services to address the pandemic: making masks, tutoring young children, COVID-19 prevention campaigns, etc. And each student has a "monthly companionship session" with a staff member for emotional support. We are truly blessed with exceptional staff: Miguel, Jaime and Yessi. Please hold them in the Light.

Numerous fundraising events have been cancelled and we may not have our Teaching English and Highlands Tour in Dec. We remain hopeful that we might be able to add new students next January if this year's donations permit.

Donna Smith, dforestvil@aol.com, Facebook - Progresa Quakers, www.guatemalafriends.org

Sacramento Friends Meeting Undocumented Scholarship Project The Sacramento Friends Meeting Undocumented Student Scholarship Project that supports undocumented students at Sacramento State University is its 10th year of service. We are currently supporting seven students and are waiting for new applicants for the 2020-2021 academic year. After students moved to online classes on March 13, we reached out to them to see if they needed additional

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services. We are grateful for the continuous support of meetings and individuals that make it possible for us to continue.

Patricia Portillo, pportill@temple.edu,

<http://quakerundocumentedstudentscholarship.org/index.html>

The Committee consists of Patricia Portillo (Sacramento), Graciela Martinez (Visalia), Patricia Constantino (Mexico City), Hulda Muaka (Palo Alto), and Linda Rowell, (Chico) and Donna Smith (Redwood Foresst) Co-clerks.