

## Glimpses of World Renew's Work in Guatemala

by *Bethany Cok*

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For our World Renew Guatemala team, no two weeks are the same, as there are always new travels, conversations, experiences, and challenges. This month, we want to share three stories that will give you a taste of what our team experiences in a single month.

### The challenges of rural education

"For us, the biggest challenge is that many parents don't understand the importance of education for their children," says Sucely de Leon, a kindergarten teacher in the rural Guatemalan community of El Tineco. She leans forward to explain the most difficult part of her job to our WR Guatemala staff.

"For the past three years, my colleague Mirna and I have gone door to door trying to convince parents to send their children to school. In a few cases, we even offer to pay for all of the school supplies ourselves just so that the child will be able to come to school," she adds.

El Tineco and other communities are so isolated that few organizations choose to work with

them. But World Renew Guatemala seeks to work in the most isolated regions, encouraging agriculture, education, preventative health, and community organization by partnering with a local organization in each area. We seek to listen first, and then work with the communities to come up with a plan to improve their living conditions.

In addition, we connect outside partners who want to offer support to local communities. A church from Minnesota has partnered with World Renew Guatemala for the past six years, providing encouragement and support to El Tineco and the surrounding communities with trips, school supplies, and funding towards a new classroom! The community also provided a significant portion of the funding for the project.



### Partnering with North American teams

World Renew's mission statement says, "Compelled by God's deep passion for justice and mercy, we join communities around the world to renew hope, reconcile lives, and restore creation." Part of joining communities around the world includes inviting churches from North America to partner with World Renew's work in Guatemala: financially, in prayer, and sometimes through visits to the rural communities.



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In March, our team had the joy of hosting a youth team from a Presbyterian church in Ontario, Canada for ten days. These high schoolers, along with their youth leaders and chaperones, traveled with World Renew staff to visit one of our partner organizations in the north of Guatemala.

We spent five days in rural communities learning about the challenges of life and development work in the region, attending meetings and church services, and hosting activities for the kids in the communities. Rowena, their youth leader, told us afterwards, “What the youth loved most was just taking that time to interact with the communities, having opportunities to just sit down and to hang out.”

“They’re pretty excited about finding ways to give back to the communities,” says Rowena. “So our job now is to take what they’ve learned and weave that into both their future experiences and what’s in front of them right now.” This is always our staff’s hope for these trips—that they’re not simply a week in Guatemala, but that they change the perspectives and actions of the participants back in their hometowns as well.



## Training

At the end of April, the entire World Renew Guatemala office, except our dedicated secretary, Micaela, took a trip to Guatemala City to attend a training about good family relationships, gender justice, and abuse prevention. All of our partner organizations in Guatemala sent representatives so it felt like a huge, week-long office and partner staff field trip! We all stayed in the same huge house used to host mission teams, ate all our meals together, and spent every day together at training sessions.

We began the week by looking at the Biblical foundation for family, studying several passages in-depth and discussing what family is. One of the facilitators of the training pointed out that Jesus could have come to earth in any way he wanted, but he chose to come as part of a human family. We spent

the next several days learning about the growth and protection of children, prevention and report of abuse, adolescence and development, and gender justice from a Biblical perspective.

Some of these topics were understandably a bit intense, but it was really valuable to be trained in how to talk about these issues within families, churches, and communities. Our facilitators kept the mood light by assigning us song-writing challenges, having us write dramas, and challenging us to solve puzzles. At the end of the week, each team came up with an action plan for how to implement what we had learned in the communities we serve. Our challenge now is to teach these principles to others and to incorporate what we’ve learned into our own work. We would love your prayers for this endeavor.

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## Prayer Requests

- We give thanks for all the donors who contribute to the work of World Renew Guatemala and our partner agencies. May God bless them abundantly.
- In the following months, several of our local partners are going to be experiencing changes in their boards of directors. Please pray for smooth transitions and wisdom for the new members.
- This May, part of our staff traveled to the Polochic area to make a survey of living conditions. We discovered that many communities remain isolated and unreached. Please pray for those communities.
- Please pray for the learning teams that we will receive in July and August.
- Please pray for the staff of World Renew Guatemala and their families.

Blessings,

World Renew Guatemala