

Can't travel? Take a virtual journey!

After the pandemic halted travel to Guatemala, how could CEDEPCA's Intercultural Encounters team carry out their mission to lead and facilitate encounters, reflection, dialog, and service?

Judith Castaneda, the General Coordinator, asked, "Could CEDEPCA create a virtual experience for the groups who had planned to come?" The Intercultural Encounters team met and imagined a "Virtual Journey" using Zoom, which could include not only those who were planning to come, but also those who had visited Guatemala previously and especially those have not been able to come because of health or mobility limitations.

The planning sessions themselves were a "virtual journey" for the newest member of the Encounters team, the Rev. Betsey Moe, who is serving as a PC(USA) mission co-worker with CEDEPCA. Because all mission co-workers were recalled to the US during the pandemic, and most



CEDEPCA staff are working from home until it's safe to return to the building, all planning is being done via videoconferencing, Skype and email.

The brainstorming began as the team developed two different types of visual outreach. Groups whose summer and fall visits were canceled would receive individualized videos from the staff, Betsey explained.

The second type became a series of three "virtual journeys" on the internet, evolving as the group learned more about Zoom. "We discovered breakout rooms," said Betsey, which let them include small group discussions. The journeys also have music and a mix of pre-recorded and live presentations.

The first virtual journey offered an introduction to Guatemala and the work of CEDEPCA. The Rev. Dr. Hector Castaneda who provided a historical perspective. (cont. Page 2)

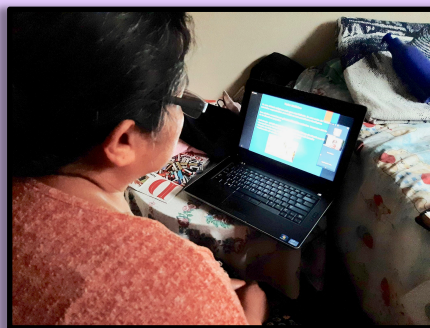
How do you do mission long-distance?

When the Rev. Betsey Moe brought a group from her church to Guatemala in January, she had a chance to meet members of CEDEPCA's Intercultural Encounters team, who were going to be her partners in her three-year commitment to mission. That work was scheduled to start after she and her husband Eric went through training in Louisville, Kentucky, in mid-February. But before they could pack up their family and move to Guatemala City, COVID-19 hit.

How do you get to know co-workers and how do you share in mission work when you're in different countries? By doing big projects together. Betsey said the virtual journeys and the personal videos for travel groups have really helped them as a team, despite being thousands of miles apart, in different time zones. "When you create something together, you bond together," she said. (cont. Page 3)

'I'm so proud of my mom!'

"My mother is one of those persons who never learned to use a computer," said Hugo Cucul. "She began studying theology at CEDEPCA because of her relentless desire to learn. They gave her a scholarship to continue her studies and then CEDEPCA offered her a laptop. With much effort and determination, she learned how to use it. After the coronavirus struck, all of her classes were online."



"I went into her room and she was concentrating so hard and was so focused on her class, I couldn't resist the urge to take this photo. I am so proud of my mom! In spite of being older, she still wants to keep on learning. She keeps overcoming barriers because above all, she wants to

grow in her faith and to know God, which she gains from these courses."

How did Hugo's mom get a laptop? In addition to being a pastor in South Carolina, Charlie Pratt refurbishes computers and sells them, and he donates a tithe of what he sells. When Mary Jane Winter, a Board member, told Charlie about CEDEPCA's Biblical program, he gladly set aside laptops for them. The donated laptops are carried in by people in groups traveling to Guatemala with CEDEPCA.

Virtual journey cont. from Page 1

Immigration, the theme of the second one, included personal testimony from CEDEPCA staff member Esvin Sirin, a "plane ride" to Oakland, CA, to hear from Oswaldo Martin, a Mam immigrant, and a PowerPoint presentation by Guatemalan university professor Lizbeth Gramajo, diving into Guatemala's complex history of migration. Her presentation was translated to English by the Rev. Leslie Vogel, the mission co-worker serving as the regional liaison for Mexico and Guatemala.

The third journey, "Vulnerable, Resilient, and Empowered," focused on exploring women's experiences in Central America. A variety of women spoke and shared their personal experiences and theological learnings as women who had been touched by CEDEPCA's transformational ministry.

In their reviews, participants praised the virtual journeys: "I learned so much that I didn't know before." "The testimonies really touched my heart." "Beautifully done." "Very powerful." "The time flew by." "Inspiring."

Each time the number who "traveled" with CEDEPCA grew. The last one, with 91 registered, more than doubled the first. A fourth journey, focusing on education, will be Oct. 28. (*See related article at right "Are you ready to travel and learn?"*)



Are you ready to travel —and learn?

The next virtual journey, Oct. 28 at 1 p.m. EST, focuses on "Education in Guatemala," as the Intercultural Encounters team presents the challenges and changes in the wake of COVID-19.

Sign up now via Facebook, the October e-newsletter, or contact Nancy Carrera for the sign-up link: nancyc@cedepca.org

Pastor Ormelindo Cal preaches hope in a pandemic

How does one preach in a pandemic? Or pray? Where is God in this terrible crisis? In Guatemala many see everything as God's will, and many sermons stress that the pandemic is a punishment or judgement from God. Those sermons offer fear and condemnation to people struggling to survive.

But Pastor Ormelindo Cal, who has studied in CEDEPCA's Biblical classes, offers something different. Because of CEDEPCA, he says, "My preaching has taken a different approach. Before, I too, scared people a lot because this is the only theology we know. Now I give a word of hope and encouragement."

"We are called," Pastor Cal preaches, "to put our trust in



God, to live with confidence that God is not the cause of the pandemic and God will help us in the midst of it."

Pastor Cal emphasizes ways his congregation can care for each other, sharing what they have, and helping each other.

Ormelindo Cal is the pastor of Camino de Santidad (Way of Holiness) Church in San Cristobal, Verapaz. In addition to his congregation, he hosts a radio program that reaches thousands of people in the region of Alto Verapaz.

Pastor Cal draws on his studies at CEDEPCA, and in contrast to the other preachers in Alta Verapaz, he says, "I preach hope, caring for ourselves and for one another, caring for the earth, and putting our faith in God that we will make it through."

The education that CEDEPCA provides in its Biblical and Theological Program changes the lives of pastors, and through them, reaches countless others who need a life-giving word of hope, grounded in the gospel of Christ.

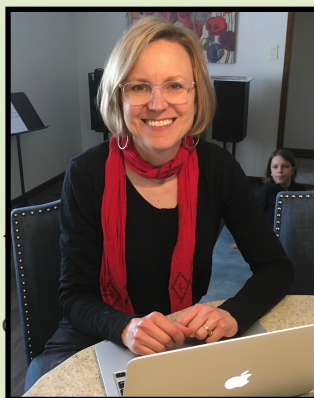
Even in this crisis, CEDEPCA's classes have not stopped but have continued online, offering hope, justice, inclusivity and solidarity.

Long distance mission

Continued from Page 1

In addition to the virtual journeys, Betsey said the team is also providing content for bimonthly e-newsletters. Betsey writes the theological reflection and the staff takes turns writing about people it impacts. All of the team speak and write in English for the e-newsletters. "We trade writing the introduction to each newsletter," Betsey said.

The Intercultural Encounters team also posts positive and inspirational messages to the CEDEPCA USA Facebook page (@cedepcaUsa). Follow the team on Facebook, sign up for the e-newsletter and, when travel is again permitted, be sure to visit. Meanwhile, travel via Zoom on Oct. 28 for our "Education in Guatemala" virtual journey. (See related story on Page 2.)



Does virtual chocolate have calories?

You can find out! Join us for CEDEPCA's event "Taste of Guatemala" Virtual Chocolate Tasting and Celebration."

Mark your calendars for Thursday, Nov. 19, 7:30-9 p.m. EST, and register with Carrie Saathoff at:

carriesaathoff@hotmail.com to join us in this delicious "virtual" experience.

A message from Judith Castañeda, General Coordinator

Greetings to all of you from CEDEPCA. It continues to be very difficult in Guatemala with the pandemic and no end in sight. We are grateful for the heroic efforts of our Disaster Ministry, and we know we could not have done this without you, your prayers and your financial support. Many of you gave an extra donation to help us in this crisis. Thank you!

Responding to vulnerable communities in the pandemic is still a priority. Faith and hope are what drive us, encourage us, and motivate us to act and to believe that we will make it through this COVID-19 emergency.

With your donations and a grant from Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, we are pleased to have provided:



- 1,455 bags of food staples, feeding 7,275 persons for a month
- 1,665 hygiene kits
- 194 seed kits to plant vegetable gardens
- 319 individuals with psychological support and emotional care

Food deliveries and hygiene kits were also given to many migrants in our city's shelters. We buy our food locally, which lets us support the local economy. It is packed by our staff and then delivered to

distribution points. It is making a difference.

A father thanked CEDEPCA saying, "Today I woke up and prayed to God. I asked God for food for my family. God surprised us when people from CEDEPCA brought us a bag of food. Thank you so much."

At Corazón de Mujer, a weaving cooperative, the women have no income since there is no one to buy their textiles. When a food basket from CEDEPCA came, one of the women said, "I am very thankful for this food. We are in a very difficult situation right now. This food will allow us to have something to eat."

Psychological support is critical, too. One woman said, "I haven't been out of my house for three months. I have felt frustrated, scared of contracting COVID-19. I am stressed and fearful." After the workshop that was offered online, she said, "I am motivated to make changes and to help my family and community. I want to manage my emotions and take preventative measures."

As we face this major crisis, we reaffirm CEDEPCA's commitment to work on behalf of vulnerable and marginalized communities where we serve. We pray that the situations that we are facing, not only here, but in the U.S. and around the world, will make us more united than ever, standing together against injustice and for peace, hope and love.

How can you help?

Make a gift! Your tax-deductible gifts make CEDEPCA's ministry possible. Use the enclosed envelope or go to www.cedepca.us/donate. Every gift makes a difference.

Participate in CEDEPCA's "Taste of Guatemala" Virtual Chocolate Tasting and Celebration Thursday, Nov. 19, 7:30-9 p.m. EST. Register with Carrie Saathoff at: carriesaathoff@hotmail.com.

Offer "alternate Christmas giving" or a virtual bazaar at your church to benefit CEDEPCA. For a list of items and more information, email Mary Jane Winter at: mjwinter@comcast.net.

Pray for CEDEPCA's staff, for health, creativity, and resilience to extend CEDEPCA's transformational ministries during these difficult times.

Build relationships and connections. Interact on CEDEPCA's Facebook page. Read and share CEDEPCA's newsletters. Come to Guatemala, when it is possible to travel again.