

Mission Guatemala 2016 with First United Methodist
Church Cheyenne, Wyoming and the Stovebuilders of Guatemala
by David M. Weaver

A team from the First United Methodist Church Cheyenne, Wyoming (CUMC) recently partnered with the Stovebuilders of Guatemala building stoves in Chichicastenango, Guatemala from August 1-4, 2016. I was privileged to accompany the CUMC team and work with them in Guatemala as a representative of the Stovebuilders of Guatemala (SBG). I met the CUMC team in Houston so I could visit with them before the trip and go with them on the same flights to and from Guatemala. I wore the bright turquoise t-shirt that says "ESTUFAS DE GUATEMALA" (Stove Builders of Guatemala), and indeed I was the only man at the Houston airport ticket counter in a bright turquoise t-shirt when I met the Wyoming team!

Partnerships, like many things in life, can be troublesome or full of harmony. God was with us throughout and blessed our trip with harmony, respect and a binding commitment to help the local people in Guatemala as we built stoves. During this time a total of thirteen (13) stoves were built, and much fellowship was enjoyed with the church in Patalup, Iglesia Metodista, Fuente de Vida in Chichicastenango, Guatemala.

Beginnings can often also be challenging. There were several challenges, some bigger than others, but none of the challenges stopped this team. A fierce hail storm struck as the team traveled to the airport in Cheyenne enroute to Guatemala. One team member had just bought a new pickup truck, and hail broke the windshield. Another team member's vehicle sustained broken windows from the hail. But hail did not stop them in their journey to Guatemala!

We traveled together to Chichicastenango arriving late on a Saturday night after a long delay due to two serious accidents on the highway that stopped traffic. We counted thirteen ambulances and almost as many police cars for the two wrecks, but even that did not stop this team.

In teaming up with SBG, the Wyoming team had agreed to build stoves using the SBG fuel efficient model. They had never built this kind of stove! But that did not stop them. Although they had been going to Patalup for many years, this was not a stove they had ever built. After a first evening of fellowship and prayer, we had an orientation that included details of how to build a SBG stove. As we finished the orientation, several people uttered sighs of relief. "None of us are stone masons," said one. "I was so concerned because we have never built this type of stove," he added. In the back of my mind, I knew that because of their open spirits and willing hearts, this SBG stove building process, which was new to them, would not stop them.

Pastor Juan of the Patalup Church met us at Hotel Santo Tomas for breakfast on Sunday morning to welcome us, pray with us and give thanks for our mission work. Travel to the homes where stoves were built generally took about 1 ½ to 2 hours over a very rough, rocky, oftentimes steep and winding road. There were work sites that were a long distance up small narrow trails on steep mountainous terrain.

None of these challenges stopped this team in its mission. Each day the team worked together to build stoves and share fellowship with the Mayan people and church members. Each stove was blessed upon its completion in a ceremony which included team members and the family for which the stove was built. As a part of the stove blessing ceremony, a wooden spoon, a potholder, and a kitchen towel were given to each family receiving a stove.

There were many who helped make this a success, and I cannot name them all in this short article. We were accompanied throughout our time in Guatemala by Calley Piland, the United Methodist Global Ministries Missionary. Calley was so helpful to us all along the way and back. She prepared a budget and orientation, and her presence and daily input on the work sites were invaluable. Doris Flores, the Volunteers in Mission (VIM) contact with the Guatemalan Methodist Church, came one day along with Bishop Tomas who came to Patalup to meet with the team. Doris also helped on the itinerary and budget planning. Mario De Leon, a local who has long accompanied the Wyoming team in their trips in Guatemala, speaks Spanish. He served as a translator. Each work group was accompanied by someone locally who spoke both Spanish and the local Mayan dialect. Mario, Pastor Juan and the local church members helped translate from English to Spanish to the local Mayan dialect. Pedro Flores, drove the team's bus to everywhere needed, to the hotel, to the church in Patalup, to the homes in the villages where stoves were built, and back to the hotel after work was finished. Pedro and Mario both also worked with the team building stoves.

God genuinely blessed our time together in Guatemala. I was blessed and privileged to be a part of such a wonderful group, sharing our time together. It was a blessing for me to witness such love for the Patalup church and the Mayan people we were serving. All of the team members enthusiastically worked together in mission.

There are many stove building opportunities in Guatemala. The Wyoming team illustrated how churches can partner with SBG to build stoves in Guatemala. No matter the challenges, partnerships can prove to be fruitful to all involved.



Stovebuilders in
front of Patalup Church