

Chalice Reflection

Margie Brown

February 25, 2007

Sometimes I get discouraged because I know that the tiny bit I give will never really solve any problem. Our daughter is a doctor, and at least she can occasionally say, "I saved that person's life." I don't have special skills like that, so can I make any difference?

As my husband Steve and I and our good friends Jack and Linda considered where we wanted to focus some of our "retired" energy, we thought about joining a Common Hope work team. (As many of you know, our church has sponsored a Guatemalan child, Salomon, through Common Hope for many years now.) But I wondered what a work team in Guatemala for 10 days could accomplish. It takes so much time and energy for Common Hope just to figure out how to put these volunteers to work, and we are well aware of the fact that the US has done a lot to make life harder for the indigenous Guatemalan people. In their 36-year civil war, when the *companeros* struggled for land rights and human rights, the US backed the military and the large land holders like US Fruit Company. What difference could a small group of Americans make? Then Kay Mixon's sister, Sally, who spent five years in Guatemala with Common Hope, wrote to us and said,

"There's no way to overstate the importance to the Guatemalans of seeing the Vision Teams coming down over and over. They really understand then that they are not alone in their moments of misery and hopelessness. They really get that there are people they have never seen who care about them, pray for them, and think about them and want to help. I think it's the most important reason to go – a sort of "being with" ministry that brings hope and caring into the communities."

Well, a "being with" ministry – that's something I can do. I was encouraged.

The founder of Common Hope, Dave Huebsch, tells a story of one of the many Guatemalan families he has helped. He taught Carlos how to raise chickens. Carlos learned how to breed them and sell them and build special cages out of bamboo. Carlos' business grew as he began selling to restaurants. He even was successful enough to buy a pickup truck. Carlos showed up unexpectedly one day on a grassy hillside where Dave was training some other villagers. Carlos proclaimed, "Whoever makes the most profit on your first cage of chickens will get this cage that I have built." Dave wrote, "I knew by his joy in giving this gift that Carlos had discovered something beautiful about the meaning of life – the meaning of life is discovering one's gifts and the purpose of life is giving them away."

This story reminded me of a card that Steve once gave to me. It had a quote from George Eliot, and it read, "What do we live for if it is not to make life less difficult for one another?" That, too, gives me encouragement. If we can each do one little thing, no matter how small, to make life easier for someone else, then we WILL make a difference.