

Trip to Madre---October 2017

Delegates: John and Libby Herring, Jan Fakoury, Amy Foley, Sam and Jane Otto, Carol Ann Aylward, Joe and Pat Herring, Peg Ekerdt

The delegation was a success –plain and simple. 469 patients were seen by the doctors and physical therapist in the five days of clinic; the walls were painted and shelves purchased and installed at Padre Luis’ request. The delegation met each night to reflect on the day in light of the day’s psalms—and to share insights and experiences from the day.

There were productive meetings with the Sponsorship staff and the CAPI leadership. The delegation visited the craft market and purchased \$500 worth of crafts to bring back and sell at Vis. The delegation visited the pilgrimage sites –Divine Providencia where Monsenor Romero lived—and the chapel where he was murdered; the Cathedral where Monsenor Romero is entombed; the University of Central America, where the Jesuit martyrs and two women were killed in November 1989.

In all, the delegation was a faithful, joyful, generous group of Visitation parishioners who expressed solidarity with our sisters and brothers at Santa Maria Madre de los pobres-sharing the skills and the compassion that are theirs alone to give. It was a privilege to be among them—and it was as always, an experience of receiving far more than anything we give.

### **Notes from the Sponsorship Meeting—attended by John Herring, Jan Fakoury and Peg**

#### ***Staffing:***

Sr. Regina (community of the Sacred Heart of Jesus from Mexico) is the new director of the program—ably assisted by Myra, Reina and a young man whose name eludes me.

Myra chairs the communication with sponsors and provided an update excel sheet with all sponsors and corresponding children. Gloria who was not at the meeting since she was helping with the clinic, is a social worker who does the initial home visits with sponsored families. Reina does the shopping for supplies, shoes etc.

#### ***Participants and Process:***

There are 281 children in the program; Visitation people sponsor 90 of that number. There are a total of 11 parish groups who sponsor Madre children. They said they do not at this time have a waiting list.

When a family wants to join the sponsorship program, they family applies and then there is a home visit to evaluate. The children sign a commitment paper—which is then laminated and kept in the family home. The commitment paper has the monthly schedule of Sponsorship events on it as well. Each sector within the parish has a coordinator.

Teenagers in the program must attend Saturday sessions every Saturday. There is fear to travel sometimes even within the same sector because of gangs—boys and girls are threatened—even at times mother and grandmothers are threatened. The Sponsorship staff has not been threatened. At times the parish provides transportation to attend these Saturday sessions. This is where the flexibility Sister mentioned comes in to play.

***Threat of Violence and Flexibility of Staff:***

All staff members spoke of problem of violence –and families, particularly families with adolescent sons, being afraid to come to the Saturday sessions at the parish that focus on life skills and are led by parent facilitators. Families are afraid to cross the gang boundaries that exist within the parish. Sr. Regina said that flexibility is the mode of operation—holding up the standards of participation in the program yet working with families who are struggling with fear. We said that we totally support that approach of flexibility.

They said they appreciated the good communication with Jude and Pauline Dolan. They also asked that when we send our translated letters that both the name of the sponsored child and the name of the sponsor be on the envelope.

***Important Question:***

They asked: Will Vis parish sponsors want to continue to sponsor as the children complete grammar school and go on to middle and high school where the fee increases to \$360 from \$300 and to college for \$500?

We said we would bring this question back—but we felt there is a way to do continue to support.

(As an aside—the sister parish of St Thomas More in Kalamazoo has a separate high school scholarship program through Rosibel.)

**Finally they asked us to send their gratitude and regard to all Visitation parishioners who support them in this work.**

During the week we participated in **eight home visits** to homes of sponsored children:--Marvin (Eileen Johnson), Jacqueline (Cathy Francis, Kevin Sweeney, Tim and Rosie McNamara, Tim McCray, Earl and Joan Adams)--Jacqueline has cerebral palsy-and we spent nearly an hour discussing her situation with her aunt—and with Jacqueline herself; Maybelline(John and Trish Dorsey); Natalia (Mary and Jack Baker); Rubenia (Jill Bechtel); Edwin (Diana and John Blanck); Jose Manuel (Edward Farley); Salvador (Mike and Kathy Dodd.)

**Notes from the meeting with CAPI staff—Thursday morning attended by Libby, Jan and Peg-Suyapa, CAPI director and Luc (formally Candida), 2<sup>nd</sup>/ 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher.**

Suyapa began by saying with your help and God's help, we continue.

- A. Suyapa is the new director, replacing the longtime director, Don Fernando. She says she has new ideas, like improving conditions of the class rooms but needs resources. She would also like to offer more teacher training.
- B. These are changes making a difference in the CAPI
  - 1. Just started English classes and computer classes. Ivette is teaching English, K3-6. (Ivette also translated some of the time for Amy Foley in PT—when Wendy attended meetings with Sponsorship and CAPI)
  - 2. “The wall has helped our safety.” Our teachers and students feel so much safer.
  - 3. The psychologist has improved our work with the children—this is very important because the reality that our children live with is very difficult. They are surrounded by violence and there are many dysfunctional families.
  - 4. The slide has been repaired!
- C. There are 120 children in the CAPI –enrollment is down because of violence.
- D. Supaya received \$7000 every three months to pay teachers and staff and to buy food
- E. Supaya was unaware of the amount of the Visitation tithe to the parish/CAPI—We told her the tithe amount that we sent this past June was \$30,000.
- F. We toured each classroom.