



# Latin America Ministry Team

December 2007

CRWRC

Living Justice, Loving Mercy

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.* John 1:14a

Dear Friends:

Fitting in. Have you ever felt the need to fit in? I sometimes wonder if Christ dealt with that need when he "dwelt among us." If ever there was someone who didn't fit in, it must have been him. He was perfect and he had to spend time with, well, some pretty imperfect people like me.

Often, when I visit communities in Latin America, I wish I could fit in better. I don't have the problem of perfection but I know I stand out because so many kids stare at me, some with looks of great fear. (Am I that scary?) When I see a group photo after a visit, I realize that yes, I am a giant in their midst and who wouldn't be afraid of someone that big?

Sometimes my visits with communities are part of a training program, but other times I'm there to evaluate the work that's being done. When I'm evaluating, I look for signs of transformation. Some are quite visible, like better crops,

latrines, or a well with a pump. But we've learned that transformation takes a lot more than physical change. Things like community organization, levels of cooperation, and willingness to contribute are key parts of genuine transformation, but they're just as difficult to assess as they are to put in place. Interestingly, the sense of "fitting in" is something that helps me get a sense of a community's progress in transformation.



Carranza church members in the church's kitchen

for deacons and their churches so they can facilitate a process of integrated transformation in their communities. The evaluation team visited five communities that Diaconía works with, including Carranza, where I felt hope and harmony, so "fitting in" wasn't really an issue.



The giant with women & children in Zaragoza

And I felt that recently in southern Mexico, where I participated in an evaluation of Diaconía Chiapas, the only organization we partner with in Mexico. Diaconía, a ministry of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, is a training program

Diaconía has worked with the church in Carranza for almost three years. The work started with studies of the Biblical foundations for service ministry, involving deacons and the whole church. With this foundation, it was decided to move on to agriculture, since nearly 70% of the members are farmers. A farmers' group was organized and meets monthly for training.

The day before, in Villa Flores, we heard about amazing increases in production.



Squash, a welcome addition to the diet!

Previously they harvested only three or four "costales" of corn per hectare, but in their last harvest they produced 15 to 20! The farmers have stopped burning the fields before planting and have begun using velvet bean and other organic fertilizers. In Carranza, their increase was not as great because of a recent drought. But people had seen improvements in the previous year and looked forward to something greater. And despite the drought, they were excited about the new ability to produce squash, which they included in the soup they prepared for our visit.

We enjoyed the shared meal, celebrating the advances in the community and talking about future plans for planting vegetables, raising chickens and organizing a literacy group. Even a foreigner like me was not concerned about "fitting in" and so we were able to share some concerns. How were they relating to the other churches in the community? How could they share their knowledge with the broader community? How could they make Carranza a community where ALL fit in together, practicing and enjoying the values of the kingdom?

The community of Carranza is advancing, but there is room for growth. Please pray with me that they are able to reach out so the transformation enjoyed by some becomes community-wide.

*Shalom, Leanne*

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