

# Guatemala Solidarity Trip, May 12 – 26, 2023, Vol. 1

## University of the Incarnate Word



### Guatemala Solidarity, May 2023, v.1

This May two University of the Incarnate Word Nutrition majors, Shania Salinas and Vallery Roberts, and three Elementary Education majors Amil Bettencourt, Carley Petru, and Aislinn Villarreal, and two faculty Sr. Martha Ann Kirk, Religious Studies, and Dr. Beth Senne-Duff, Nutrition, assisted by Mr. Mark Duff who is fluent in Spanish and has expertise in nature work, have been working in solidarity with former UIW students Edwin Mendoza Hipp and Darlene Jasso Mendoza, the founders of the Little Angels of Mary [www.littleangelsofmary.org](http://www.littleangelsofmary.org) who are in the Santa Apolonia area of Chimaltenango, Guatemala. They work with Carolina pictured on the left of the UIW students.



The social structures of the country since the time of the Spanish invasion have not given descendant of the original people, the Mayans, equal opportunity. The UIW group began their service in Guatemala visiting the Casa de la memoria, the House of Memory museum in Guatemala City <https://casadelamemoria.org.gt/> learning of the lack of equity and current efforts towards healing and justice. "We firmly believe that recognizing the truth helps to heal the wounds of the past and the application of justice, is a right that assists the victims, which also contributes to strengthening the rule of law in our country." The museum is "Raising awareness that these types of events should not return to be repeated because the people of Guatemala want to live in peace, recognizing our identity, our multi-cultural wealth, multilingual and respect for free expression."

In the area where Edwin and Darlene are building relationships, sixty-nine percent of the children are malnourished and there is a high level of illiteracy because the people speak Kaqchikel and the schools have been in Spanish. The UIW travelers are assisting in nutrition and literacy efforts.



Carley Petru, an Elementary Education major, seems to be gaining some deep wisdom in this travel, she frankly shared, "Being here has made me realize how selfish we can be. The kids and mothers I've met don't have even half of what I have, yet they seem so happy and kind. The families share and go out of their way to share love and kindness. This is something I can do, and maybe just maybe, I can feel the joy of the people of Guatemala. The children are full of joy, they show compassion and love to all they meet."



Darlene Jasso Mendoza, a co-founder of the Little Angels of Mary [www.littleangelsmary.org](http://www.littleangelsmary.org) said, “It has been such a pleasure working with all of you here in Guatemala. We have dreamt of having a group from UIW come with us to Guatemala. I’ve been here for seven years and not many people understand why I’m still here. It’s always been such a complicated situation for me because my life has changed so much since I’ve come here. My mind and my heart have opened up a whole lot, and I have found the true meaning of life since coming here. Life is about relationships, it’s about caring for people, loving them and seeing God through them. Nobody understands me, but having a group of people come from Texas has been so great because they get a glimpse of what I feel every single day. So thank you for coming and sharing these wonderful days with us in Santa Apolonia. I’m glad to share a little bit of what I see with working with these communities.” Darlene graduated from UIW in Communication Arts in 2015 and is certainly using her education well as Vice-president for Communications for the Little Angels.



Shania Salinas, a Nutrition major who graduated in May, said, “I noticed the malnutrition in the children by their height and weight. The mothers wanted to work in community so that their children can benefit from the nutrition program.” The mothers pledge to come every month for training on getting and preparing healthy foods for their families. Their children under five are weighed and measured. This gives a family an

opportunity to get a garden plot with many types of vegetables and information on how to care for the seedlings. The nutrition students, Dr. Senne-Duff and Andrea Guzman, a Guatemalan nutrition consultant, graph the growth charts of the children.



Mothers from the village area brought their children and waited for their turn for their children to be weighed and measured. Darlene and Edwin are grateful that the group brought a scale and a measure so that they will now have these to consistently follow the size and progress of the children.



Vallery Roberts, a Nutrition major who just graduated exclaimed, "I am super grateful that I came on this mission trip and have been super humbled by it thus far. Working with the mothers and children that are malnourished has been really eye-opening. They are very wonderful people and are doing what they can to move forward and get better. Even though they don't have much and could be feeling bad about themselves and complaining, they're not. They are extremely happy and loving. They have taken us in and welcomed us with open arms. I am so grateful that I have been able to build a friendship with some of the children and women."



Vallery and Shania, guided by Dr. Senne-Duff, gently worked with each child. After they measured and weighed each child, they went over the chart with the mothers and gave them suggestions if needed. Suggestions were about what kinds of food to give the children, how to help children have good hygiene, and reminding the mother about using clean water in cooking and drinking.





Dr. Beth C. Senne-Duff leads the UIW Nutrition Department guiding the B.S. and M.S. programs and the Dietetic Internship. She has focused extensively on global nutrition. Over two decades ago she visited Peru and the Incarnate Word Sisters pointed out high rates of malnutrition in the area where they worked. Working with Women's Global Connection, Dr. Senne-Duff has researched ways to help and gone to those areas in Peru and has also made it possible for her students to go there. See stories of some of this work on the WGC Travel Blog, for example <https://wgctravelblogue.wordpress.com/2016/06/02/a-serving-of-health/> She is now willing to consider the needs in the area where the Little Angels are working. She has enjoyed getting to know Andrea Guzman, the Guatemalan Nutrition consultant working with them. Andrea is the leader of ProyectoCAN <https://proyectocan.org/>.



The Little Angels of Mary Nonprofit is supporting a pre-school teacher in Santa Apolonia because there was nothing for the little ones. They furnished the classroom and hired Carolina Ajozal, who is from Ojer Coc, a village close to where the school is located, and speaks Kaqchikel and Spanish. She is one of the few people in the area who have a university education. Please check out the Little Angels of Mary YouTube page to watch their videos about their history and the programs they run [www.youtube.com/littleangelsfmary](http://www.youtube.com/littleangelsfmary)



Amil Bettencourt, an Elementary Education major, said, "Watching Carolina as a teacher was an incredible experience, especially on the first day. Seeing how she did not have the exact same education as I did but she ran her classroom exactly how we are trained to. In the community Carolina has a lot of respect and it is well deserved. She puts her all into her teaching and helping out everyone. She has only begun teaching and I can tell she will only get better and better."



Aislinn Villarreal, an Elementary Education major, described the preschool, "The students are so loving, they are just children excited to learn and it warms my heart. They again warmed up to us quickly and they look to us for answers to questions they have. Carolina Ajozal does an amazing job teaching the students both education and hygiene. They brush their teeth after their snack time and they each have a place to put their toothbrush. This is something that was made from toilet paper rolls that were painted to look like bumblebees. The children take care of each other when the moms are busy they know to look out for each other."



Edwin Mendoza Hipp, a founder of the Little Angels of Mary [www.littleangelsofmary.org](http://www.littleangelsofmary.org) shared, "It makes me happy seeing people helping others and caring for each other. I saw a UIW student giving one of the most authentic smiles I've ever seen, and I also saw mothers and children expressing a lot of gratitude with a smile, a laugh, a joke, and some delicious bread that they had shared with us. I feel happy being an instrument of God's love, but I also feel that the people I have met have been instruments of God's love for me. Every child, mom, dad or volunteer that has smiled at me today has made me experience God's presence in my life, and for that, I am very grateful."



Carolina, the teacher, and the students are grateful for new books from Dr. Stephanie Grote-Garcia at UIW.

As the eight from UIW and Darlene and Edwin founders of the Little Angels of Mary unite around the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals

<https://sdgs.un.org/goals> they help co-create a better future for themselves and their descendants. “We begin to know more deeply the tender and infinite love of the Creator of the whole human family” Sister Martha Ann reflects.

See more of the Guatemala Solidarity Tour on the UIW Lewis Center of the Americas web page feature “Border Crossings

<https://www.uiw.edu/lewiscenter/> The Lewis Center invites all October 4, 2023, to hear the first indigenous person in the world to win the Nobel Peace Prize, the Guatemalan woman Rigoberta Menchú Tum

<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1992/tum/biographical/>

She is not only a voice for her people, but works for justice and peace throughout the world.

*News compiled and shared by Incarnate Word Sister Martha Ann Kirk, Th.D. <https://www.uiw.edu/chass/directory/faculty-and-staff/kirk-martha-ann.html> who has had the privilege of taking students and community members on solidarity trips since 1979. Assisted by Darlene Jasso, a UIW Communication Arts Graduate now serving as Vice-President for Communications for the Little Angels of Mary.*

Contact: [kirk@uiwtx.edu](mailto:kirk@uiwtx.edu)

---