



Queenship of Mary parishioners share gratitude, thanksgiving with Guatemalan parish

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The solidarity between Queenship of Mary Parish and Santa Cruz Parish in Guatemala was strengthened late last year through the Plainsboro parish's latest visit. Msgr. Robert W. Medley, pastor of Queenship of Mary, led a delegation on a one-week visit to the village of La Morena and its surrounding parish of Santa Cruz in November. He was joined by parishioners Connie Persico, Bindu Joseph, Cheryl Peebles, Miguel Ferrera, and Tim Lockwood.

The parish's visit was part of an ongoing, mutually enriching partnership between the people of the two sister parishes. While prior visits by delegations over the past seven years have focused on the formation and operation

of a microfinance loan program in La Morena, the latest delegation focused on joining the people of La Morena in celebrating themes of thanksgiving and gratitude. As a reflection of the solidarity between the two communities, events held at Queenship of Mary Parish reflected similar events held in La Morena during the delegation's visit.

Upon the delegation's arrival in Guatemala, Msgr. Medley celebrated a Mass on Sunday in the outdoor public plaza of La Morena, with the entire community being welcomed. A community-wide outdoor lunch followed the Liturgy. During the Mass, Msgr. Medley, speaking in Spanish, gave a Blessing in Thanksgiving — *Benediccion de Accion Gracias* — which included giving thanks for the harvesting of the crops in

At left is one of three posters that were filled with prayers of gratitude written on index cards and exchanged between Queenship of Mary parishioners and the people of La Morena. It was a sign of the solidarity that the two communities have grown to experience through their partnership.

Photos courtesy of Queenship of Mary

Above Msgr. Robert W. Medley and a delegation from his parish, Queenship of Mary Parish, pose in La Morena with recipients of a microfinance loan program, *Amistad y Fe*, which means Friendship and Faith. The program was made possible by the parishioners of the Plainsboro parish.

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the area. To continue the themes of gratitude and thanksgiving upon the delegation's return, Monsignor gave the same blessing at all Masses at Queenship of Mary on the following weekend.

Another sign of the solidarity the two parishes have grown to experience through their partnership came when Queenship of Mary parishioners and the people of La

Morena exchanged prayers of gratitude. They were written on index cards and exchanged during the delegation's visit to La Morena.

To celebrate and give thanks for the coffee harvest taking place in La Morena, the Knights of Columbus of Queenship of Mary distributed hot cups of fairly traded coffee to parishioners outside the church following all Masses on the weekend of Nov. 15-16.

After returning from Guatemala, the delegates shared reflections on their

Continued on page 11



Continued from page 3

experiences with parishioners through bulletins, speaking at Masses, and the parish website, with many acknowledging the increased solidarity felt with the people of La Morena.

In his reflection, Lockwood said, "I am eternally grateful for the opportunity to travel to Guatemala. It has changed the way I think about our community, the community of La Morena and the way in which our communities have become forever intertwined. It has given me the opportunity to realize how incredibly fortunate we are as Americans and reminded me of the immense responsibility we have to our brothers and sisters around the world."

The microfinance loan program, *Amistad y Fe*, which means "Friendship and Faith," was developed through a process of discernment with the people of La Morena, and made possible by the investment by Queenship of Mary parishioners in Share Certificates in *Amistad y Fe* over the past several years. Many of the loans have been made to individual farmers for agricultural purposes, so as to enhance their ability to produce coffee, corn, and beans. Recently, more loans are being used to start a variety of small non-agricultural businesses, thereby expanding the health and diversity of the local economy.

For example, one of the loan recipients used the money she received to help grow her business selling Avon products. In a short period of time, she was able to purchase her own home in La Morena. She is now adding an indoor bathroom, a "luxury only a handful of people have."

In addition to the most recent delegations, many more members of the Queenship of Mary have participated in developing and supporting the partnership. Thirty-one parishioners have traveled in delegations to La Morena. A Guatemala Partnership Committee and several subcommittees have actively

involved many more parishioners through various activities focused on building fellowship with the people of La Morena and increasing awareness of the history and culture of Guatemala.

Queenship of Mary Parish began efforts to develop a partnership through visits to the parish of Santa Cruz beginning in 2008. Santa Cruz is part of the Diocese of Santa Rosa de Lima and is based in the city of Chiquimulilla, which is located in the southernmost part of Guatemala, about 20 miles from the Pacific coast.

The people of La Morena, a farming community composed of 230 families (about 1,000 individuals), face substantial issues relating to health care availability, inadequate and interrupted access to education, and limited employment opportunities. As a result of the thriving partnership that led to the formation of *Amistad y Fe*, the people of La Morena have access to a significant new resource which empowers them to improve their standard of living.

Msgr. Medley noted, "The people of La Morena have become good friends and wonderful partners. Together we are growing in friendship and faith and making a difference in the lives of our communities. It is a blessing that we have been able to travel so frequently to this community and to bring so many of our parishioners with us, and to be beneficiaries of the love and gratitude of the community of La Morena."