

April 12, 2010
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Dear friends in Christ,

Christ is risen! We hope that your Easter celebration was a blessed one and that these weeks during which we continue to celebrate our Lord's resurrection may be a time of renewal and new life for you all.

I'm sorry that it's been a little over three months since our last newsletter. However, the reason is that I have been working very hard on a website to share our news, photos, and lots of other information about my work, and I wanted to finish that before sending this newsletter. It's nothing fancy, just a Google site, but I think you will find it very informative. The website is: <http://sites.google.com/site/dbrondos>

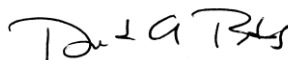
One of the things I wanted to include on the website is something about my students, both past and present. I asked several of them to write a short paragraph that I could share. Among the former students of whom I asked this was Dalia Juárez. Dalia graduated about 5 years ago from the Baptist Seminary, which is part of the Theological Community. Dalia had come to us from a rural area in Puebla, a state east of Mexico City, and is of indigenous background (Náhuatl). A couple of years before Dalia finished her studies, a family tragedy occurred: due to the effects of diabetes, her father was told that they had to amputate his leg from the knee down. Tragically, the doctor amputated the wrong leg. In the U.S., of course, this would have been cause for a huge malpractice suit, but things aren't like that in Mexico; the family received only a very small sum. Fortunately, they were able to save Dalia's father's other leg, so that it was no longer necessary to amputate it.

This was tragic for Dalia not only because of the emotional pain of seeing this happen to her father, but because her entire family now expected her, as a good daughter, to quit her studies and go back home to take care of her father. Part of this was cultural, since many Mexicans (especially in rural areas) continue to insist that "a woman's place is in the home." Dalia's dream, however, was to be a pastor. This was a very difficult struggle for Dalia. Fortunately, it was resolved in a way that made it possible for Dalia to finish her studies and begin work in Chiapas.

I had asked Dalia for just a short paragraph and a few photos, but she was so excited about sharing her work with me that she ended up sending me a two-page letter. It was one of the most wonderful letters I have received, and so I decided to translate all of it and share it with you, even though I know it makes for a very long newsletter! Sorry about that! But I will be putting it on the website as well. At the end of the letter below are some photos of Dalia.

We look forward to seeing many of you this summer on our missionary home assignment. We won't be able to visit all of our sponsoring congregations—we now have 25!!!—but it looks like we will be able to visit all those that did not get a visit two years ago. Thank you again for your prayers and support!

Yours in Christ,



David Brondos
ELCA Missionary in Mexico

April 9, 2010

Dear brother David:

I have been working for 4 years now with the Mayan Indians of the Tsotsil and Tseltal language and during that time I have added a few words and phrases to my vocabulary. One that I would like to mention is in the Tsotsil language, “k’usi a wotan,” “How is your heart?” In the indigenous communities of Chiapas, that’s the first thing they ask you when they greet you, because they believe that if you aren’t experiencing strength, spirit, joy and peace in your heart, it’s not possible to go about your everyday tasks. In response to such a greeting, I must say from the heart that I am very happy because the Intercultural Mayan Seminary (a regional center of the Baptist Seminary of Mexico in Chiapas) has invited me to form part of its team since 2006.

The Mayan Intercultural Seminary (abbreviated SIM in Spanish) is an ecumenical institution that offers indigenous Protestant churches in Chiapas a Biblical formation that is in dialogue with traditional ancestral indigenous wisdom as well as a formation in Christian pastoral work that is incarnated in the reality of the Mayan communities. This seminary seeks to look at the gospel from a native indigenous viewpoint while at the same time helping to develop the skills necessary to promote peace and development in the communities.

Initially I was hired to be the Coordinator of the basic educational programs that allow the students to attain the level necessary to do their seminary studies (involving literacy, primary, secondary and open high school programs). Several months later I was given the task of coordinating the Diploma program in Theology and Intercultural Pastoral Work of which I have now been in charge for three and a half years. The responsibilities include developing, supervising, and teaching in this theological program. Due to the lack of personnel, I carry out a number of tasks such as serving as administrator of the SIM, as counselor and workshop-leader of the Mayan youth, and as a member of the coordinating group of the Economic Solidarity program, which supports the Mayan indigenous women in seeking networks of fair trade for the hand-crafted products they make while also preparing them in the areas of Bible, gender equality, and indigenous rights. Finally, I am also the person in charge of the office.

The greatest impact that I have been able to have during these years is due to the acceptance that people of the Mayan culture have shown me, an indigenous Nahuatl woman, in recognizing me as a pastor and professor of Bible and theology. It is not at all easy to be an example to these women and men since the context is one in which indigenous people are excluded and marginalized. Nevertheless, it is important to note that my having achieved a formation at the Licentiate [University] level as an indigenous woman has inspired many young men and women here to study primary, secondary, and high school and even at the university, and also to study the Diploma program and the Licentiate program in Theological and Intercultural Pastoral Work.

In February of this year, I was surprised by the leader of the Economic Solidarity group when I overheard her say that I am the example that she wants to follow and that she wants to attain the same educational level that I have. That brought me great joy but at the same time reinforced my commitment to my indigenous people. I recognize that there are not a lot of opportunities given to women in the different churches and that there are few who have begun this process of preparation. As part of this seminary, we are working hard to so that young men and women can develop the gifts and talents that God has given them.

The most important mark that we have left on these Mayan lands and the most important thing we have sown is that we are a seminary that seeks to make palpable

what Jesus said in John 10:10, “life in abundance”—lekil kuxlejal. That is why we are working hard by means of the theological and pastoral educational formation programs mentioned above to promote pastoral work among the youth, economic solidarity, water projects, and the creation of a culture of peace. Of course, we would not have developed all of this if we had not first carried out consultations with the people through workshops and community analysis. The indigenous communities are increasingly opening up to us their hearts and their minds because the projects we carry out are developed from their own perspective and their own way of speaking. Thanks to God, we are walking with a firm step, because the “men and women of corn” [as the Mayan people traditionally call themselves] have taught us to be committed, dedicated persons who work in the community without pursuing personal interests.

Brother David, I know that you told me that you just wanted me to write a short paragraph (ha-ha!), but I got carried away, so please take out what you would like. By the way, I can't speak only about myself, since my way of thinking has once again become collective. After having lived so long in the urban world [before coming here], I had left behind that characteristic that is so important for us indigenous peoples.

Before closing, I want to emphasize how we at the SIM have recovered the Mayan cultural roots. When different churches come, they usually destroy those roots, that is, the people's history, traditions, myths, language, and even the collective way of working. They prefer individualism, and that kills the culture. In 2007 we had our first youth camp and one of the main themes was a comparison between the Popul Vuh (the sacred book of the Mayans) and the Bible. Some of the youth know nothing of their own Mayan history, and thus we began in that way to recover their culture. And when I began to give workshops and promote human rights, indigenous rights, and women's rights, it was like dropping a bomb, since all those things were new to them. I have very fond memories of those days because it was an enormous challenge to present those subjects to the women and men. At first I was paralyzed by fear, but in the end I was so grateful to all of the community for having allowed me to present those workshops.

What strikes me most about this culture is that there is a low-intensity war going on against the people, and the government does nothing about it. On the contrary, the government keeps militarizing this southern border. It causes me great pain to see that many churches do not read the Bible from the context of this reality. What hurts me the most is to see a state [Chiapas] that generates running water and electricity for the rest of the country, while the Mayan indigenous communities here still lack these basic services. To watch children die from parasites, simply because there is no way to take them from the communities to the municipalities where there are health services, leaves a deep impression on me and challenges me to proclaim a gospel that promotes wholeness and that is incarnated in my indigenous Mayan sisters and brothers.

I owe a great deal to you, my professors from the Theological Community, since with your work you taught me to see things from a critical perspective, but also because you taught me how to share theological and biblical knowledge with others. So a thousand thanks!

Lic. Dalia Eunice Juárez Fernández

Graduate of the Baptist Seminary of Mexico in Mexico City
An indigenous Nahuatl woman



Dalia on the right



The Economic Solidarity program sought funding to buy sewing machines. This photo was taken when Dalia (at right) took the machines up to Pueblo Nuevo Sitala to deliver them to the women. They are praying. The women have the custom of covering their faces when they pray.



Dalia (on left) with women from the Economic Solidarity program who make hand-crafted art work.



This is the coordinating team of the Mayan youth (Dalia on right). They were wearing typical costumes because they had been invited to attend an intercultural youth gathering in Puerto Rico.



Some of the students of the Diploma Program in Theology and Pastoral Work at the Intercultural Mayan Seminary where Dalia works.