

# Mark and Rosalie Balfour

Link Letter no. 17 | December 2021

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## The call in action

Dear friends,

We are writing this towards the end of November and Christmas decorations have been up in shops and public places in Guatemala since the beginning of the month. We have even put up our tree – the earliest that we have ever done so – and Rosalie has been busy making mincemeat and Christmas cake with the ingredients she can find here, including crystallized papaya.

All the projects with which we work are getting ready for Christmas. People are hungry for hope and for light in the darkness and confusion of this world, suffering from not only the continuing effects of the pandemic, but also the ongoing poverty and violence that is so much a part of life in Central America. People need the hope that only Jesus gives.

Very sadly, Jorge, the pastor who has cared for the garden here for many years, died from COVID-19 and other complications in October. He was a great friend and help to us, and Mark will especially miss their regular Monday morning coffee and conversation. His family, including one of his adult sons who was hospitalised with COVID, are thankfully recovered and doing ok. They share Jorge's faith in Jesus and, even in their grief, know that they will see him again.

One of the recent highlights here was the official opening of Centro Opp, the new SKD mentoring centre in Guatemala City, which includes arts and music rooms, kitchen, cafe area and gym. It occupies the ground floor of a house and the short-term protection home, Casa Alexis, is on the first floor. Centro Opp has a particular focus on youth and is being run by fellow CMS mission partner Azaria Spencer.

When we first came to work in Guatemala almost five years ago we lived for a short time in that house. Duncan was renting it, with a view to buying it when SKD could raise the money. It was a very different building then. It had been a very loved family home in the past, but had been empty for some time and was very run down. The rooms were dark and uncomfortable and the kitchen very basic, but we could see that it had a lot of potential. Now it really is a very special place, which has come about through a huge amount of prayer, hard work and people's generosity. We have seen how Jesus has been using it and are really excited about what he's going to do here in the coming years.

Rosalie is giving some cooking mentoring at Centro Opp to Damaris, a young woman who has come through the mentoring program and is now volunteering. It is so encouraging to see Damaris and other young people who have come from situations of great risk, poverty and



**Name:** Mark and Rosalie Balfour

**Location:** Guatemala

**Our call:** To support and encourage Jesus-centred urban ministries in Central America that connect with the marginalised and the poor.

**Our role:** Providing pastoral support for Street Kids Direct staff and partner projects in Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua and supporting others engaged in difficult urban ministries.



Rosalie with Damaris and Azaria at Centro Opp.

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violence, now seeking themselves to help others and be involved in mission, with a growing, personal trust in Jesus. Recently we have been thinking and planning with Azaria as to how we might grow more prayer activities at the centre, including 24/7 prayer in the New Year.

We continue to meet with other members of the SKD Guatemala team on a regular basis to listen, encourage and pray with them and in September we hosted another retreat for the team, with plans for more in the New Year.

In October we drove again to Honduras – having promised the Project Alas team that we would try to get there three times a year. Our visit included running a retreat morning for them, with creative prayer activities that they were then able to use later in running their own retreat for mentors in their programme. Since our visit, Alas has had to move out of the base it had been using, but thankfully the Lord has provided a new base for them which is more central in the town of Talanga.

Part of our work is giving pastoral support to Aaron and Analoren, the couple whom Mark married in our garden last year and who run a ministry, Café Refrescante, which reaches out to those living on the streets in Guatemala City and nearby Antigua. It was good to visit the project in Antigua and pray with some of the staff team there. As we have mentioned before, there is a desperate need for Jesus-centred, long-term rehabilitation centres here in Guatemala – so please do keep praying.

With the blessing of CMS and SKD we are also giving pastoral support to the leadership of Treasures of God, a home for girls with serious disability, and Encounter, a ministry that seeks to enable families in cross-cultural mission to thrive, including helping with provision of education for their children. In both, our particular focus has been how to enable people in mission to care for themselves and their families and have sustainable and healthy patterns of ministry. Two key themes crop up again and again: the need to base our identity in who we are in Jesus, not in our work or our role, and the invitation to be filled continually with the Holy Spirit. Please pray that this is something we live out ourselves.

Although we continue to offer hospitality to individuals and small groups, sadly because of the pandemic we are still not able to have the large gatherings here at Betania that we did in our first Christmas. However we will be involved in Christmas celebrations nevertheless, including two Christingles with SKDG.

Thank you so much for all your prayers and generous giving which enable us to serve here. May you know the wonderful, life-changing love and grace of Jesus this Christmas and be able, confident in him, to walk into the New Year with hope,

Love, Mark & Rosalie



*Photos from top to bottom: Rosalie cooking with Damaris; The Proyecto Alas team at the retreat; Children at Proyecto Alas; Praying with the Cafe Refrescante team.*

## GOING FURTHER WITH CHURCH MISSION SOCIETY

We live in a violent world but CMS partners in Africa and across the globe are bringing change, hope and freedom to lives wrecked by war. You can help bring the peace of Christ to lives torn apart by conflict too. Find out more at [churchmissionsociety.org/christmas2021](https://churchmissionsociety.org/christmas2021)

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You can give to Mark and Rosalie at: [churchmissionsociety.org/balfour](https://churchmissionsociety.org/balfour)

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