



Mark and Rosalie Balfour

Link Letter no. 20 | December 2022

Contact details:
revmbalfour@gmail.com
r_balfour@sky.com



Location: Guatemala



What we do: Providing pastoral support for workers in urban ministries, especially Street Kids Direct and partner projects in Guatemala and Honduras.

Dear Friends,

As we write this letter Christmas Day is only a month away and we are amazed at how quickly this year seems to have gone. Change is constant here in Guatemala and much of our life is spent walking with people through changes that have been happening in their lives. In it all, we hold onto Jesus, our hope, whom we know also holds onto us. And we are very grateful to those of you who support us through prayer, giving and friendship – we could not do this without you!

In October Street Kids Direct Guatemala (SKDG) had a much-needed retreat in Antigua Guatemala and we helped with some teaching and food. In addition to meeting with various members of the team singly or in families, we also hosted a day at our house with SKDG, looking at how to improve pastoral care both of staff and of the families they support through the mentoring programme. The work done by SKDG is extraordinary. To give just one example: this past year the young woman Damaris, with whom Rosalie had been doing some cooking mentoring (see last year's Christmas letter) became pregnant and now has a baby. Duncan Dyason and the SKDG team have given her support and, thankfully, at time of writing she and the teenage father of her child are both wanting to pick up their studies again. Damaris's story is typical of the many challenges faced by young women growing up in Guatemala.

In November we hosted a visit from Paul Tester, CMS mission development manager for Latin America, who is based in Peru. With Paul we had a get-together for the CMS "Central American team" – currently ourselves and Azaria Spencer in Guatemala, and Lindsey and Steve Poulson in Honduras. There was time for conversation, prayer and planning but also for fun – a frequently neglected spiritual discipline!

Paul wanted to see something of the urban ministries in Guatemala with whom we have contact. We introduced him to our friends Natalie and Shawn Sagert and their ministry, Tamar's Hope, which reaches out to women working in prostitution. Because of our sudden pastoral trip to Honduras in August we had missed the opening of their new centre, La Puerta ("The Door"), right in the heart of La Linea, one of the main areas of prostitution in Guatemala City. To hear from Natalie and Shawn of how Jesus is changing lives in this dangerous place was a huge encouragement.



The SKDG team on retreat

Support Mark and Rosalie Balfour:
churchmissionsociety.org/balfour

**With Jesus
With each other
To the edges**



We also introduced Paul to the ministry of the street church Sigo Vivo. Our visit coincided with their ninth anniversary celebration, complete with rap and dance and clowns. It was poignant to talk with one of the young men whom we have known for some time whose mother was murdered a few weeks ago. Life is very fragile here, which is why when people in Guatemala pray they so often begin by giving thanks to the Lord for another day of life.

Our ministry description states that alongside our role providing pastoral support for the staff of Street Kids Direct and partner projects in Guatemala and Honduras, we also aim to support and encourage others working in difficult urban ministries and build relational networks between them with Jesus at the centre. Jesus has

brought many people into our lives who work in tough urban contexts, people like Alex and Clarita who pastor a church in Mixco, the city that adjoins Guatemala City, whose congregation deal on a daily basis with the threat of gangs, the prevalence of domestic violence, and the vulnerability that comes with poverty. Please pray that we hear from Jesus how and when to move forward with developing those networks.

As we write this letter we are in the midst of moving home here in Guatemala. At the beginning of 2022 we sensed the Holy Spirit telling us we would be moving from Betania this year, so when a few weeks later Charly our landlord told us that he had to sell the house it was not a surprise. At the time he said there was no rush for us to move. But when we returned to Guatemala in August it was clear that we would need to start looking for a new home. Late last month we went to see a house for rent, expecting to turn it down as being too small, but on our visit we knew that this was the place Jesus was leading us to. We paid the rental deposit that evening and two days later Charly sold Betania – much sooner than he had expected. The Lord's timing in this was amazing.

We are moving about 20 minutes' drive away to a large and secure residential area in a town called Santa Lucia Milpas Altas – “milpas altas” means “high fields of maize” in Spanish. Although the house is much smaller than our current home, it still has room for people to come and stay. We will only have a small garden area but the residential area has plenty of green spaces (with BBQs) and large areas where bigger groups can meet. We are sure that this is the right place for the next season in our time here. Please pray it will also be a place of hospitality where people encounter Jesus.

In the New Year, we travel to Argentina for the first ever CMS Latin America regional conference. We hope to tell you more about that in our next letter. But for now, may you have a Christmas in which you know personally the extraordinary love of God revealed in Jesus and that, with Jesus, there is future hope no matter how fragile and difficult life can be.

With our love,

Mark and Rosalie



Photos from top to bottom: With Juan Carlos and Heydy, members of the SKDG team; CMS Central American team selfie (with Paul Tester) in Antigua Guatemala; with Shawn and Natalie Sagert of Tamar's Hope; at Sigo Vivo's anniversary celebration



Going further with Church Mission Society

Stories from the edges: Find out how God is meeting people on the edges around the world through CMS people in mission. Go to churchmissionsociety.org/stories