



## *Reflection from Marcia Nicely*

### **TRIP TO GUATEMALA**

I loved our week in Guatemala working with the amazing team from Nativity Parish, the 24 Mayan sisters (Hermanas) of the Carmelite Convent in San Andres Itzapa, the translators and cement masons and, of course, my family, Steve and our son and daughter-in-law, Chris and Sharon, and four teenage grandchildren, John, Donovan, Grant and Kate.

We were there to improve physical living conditions in some way and to show that we were walking in solidarity with them on their journey. Building something with our hands (even though I was just soaking firebricks and sifting sand for cement) is such a SATISFYING thing to do. We looked at the stove, or chicken coop, or cement floor, and felt a rush of pride because wow, I just helped build that. One of the biggest thrills was waiting for the smoke to rise from the chimney of a just-finished cook stove. It meant that no longer would the wood smoke from cooking at ground level fill up the house and turn the walls black. We wished we could build a stove for everyone who needs one (We built 17 of them), but we had to remind ourselves of the Starfish story. "If we can't save them all, start with one."

Two special experiences stood out to me on this third trip to Guatemala. One was watching our grandchildren grow spiritually and emotionally on this trip. It was a joy to see them recognize the goodness of the Guatemalan people and how much they appreciated even the small things we gave them, like a jar of bubbles for their children. The experience sharpened the appreciation of our grandchildren for all the privileges they enjoy in the United States. They could see that the Guatemalan people were more appreciative of their "little" than we are of our "plenty." The truth is, the families we served gave us more with their joyful expressions of thanks and blessing than they received from us.

The second experience was the seeing the progress of Condalaria and her family. We first met her in 2018 in dire straits as a recent widow with three small children. Lesly, 9, her oldest, was in school but thinking of dropping out to help her mother work in the fields. With the help of a scholarship, Lesly, now 14, has remained in school and is excelling. Her younger brother is also in school. Condalaria is participating in women's groups sponsored by the convent. She told her story to our group of 21 without notes and with great poise and vulnerability. When we visited her home to install a tin roof on one of her rooms, her home was well-kept.

Both experiences brought tears to my eyes.