

packets sent by their children and grandchildren in Worthington, and pointed out the names of the children. We discovered that some of these grandparents had never even seen photos of their grandchildren. There was laughter and tears too as the families of San Lorenzo shared their gratitude to us and their overwhelming sadness because of the separation of their families. They opened to us their hearts and incredible hospitality. That day we visited several of their homes, and were treated like honored guests. We were shown photos of their children growing up, fed traditional Guatemalan food, and given small gifts of food and water for our journey. We were embraced by loving Catholic families. We all hated to leave, and wished we had more time to spend with them. This visit only affirmed the desire to bring their grandchildren to visit them.

In the months that have passed since that visit, plans have begun to form and a great deal of interest is being generated. Again, thanks to our friend, Luis Argueta, we were put in contact with Hugo Hun, the Consulate General of the Guatemalan Consulate in Chicago. Fr. Jim Callahan of St. Mary's Parish and I were able to meet with Mr. Hun on August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2012 and he assured us that he would help us with all the paperwork necessary for such a trip, and that the Consulate would help us in any way they can. Hugo Hun was very supportive and interested in our endeavor.

Now meetings are on-going with the Guatemalan families to actually lay out plans for a trip for this summer. Luis Argueta is planning to do a film about **Abuelos y Nietos Juntos** and on November 11-12,, 2012 he was able to visit St. Mary's and meet the families that wish to send their children. He took photos and conducted some video interviews. We currently have eighteen children ages 9-18 who wish to go to Guatemala, and they and their families are eagerly preparing for the journey.

All involved feel that this project has great potential, and believe that it is inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit. It certainly will bring joy to the families involved, and hope for others. It confirms the belief in our Catholic Faith that families need to be protected and honored, and that our broken immigration system drives families apart. The humanitarian aspects alone are incredible, and it will offer the opportunity to raise our voice through film media in the current discussion of immigration reform and to bring another perspective to immigration – the faces, fears, joys and sorrows of the children who are affected and their grandparents who are separated from them.

## ABUELOS Y NIETOS JUNTOS

**"Grandparents and Grandchildren Together"** is a project that brings the vision of allowing children to meet (for the first time) their families in Guatemala, to visit the country of their family of origin and also to show the

issues of our broken immigration system through the experiences and lives of some of those greatly affected; the children here in the US and their families in Guatemala. Inspired by our Guatemalan families here in Worthington Minnesota and their deep desire for their children to know their family members in Guatemala, a group of volunteers will be taking some of these (US born citizen) children to make this dream

come true in July of 2013. Currently, we have eighteen children whose families would like them to travel with us for this experience. With very limited resources, it's almost impossible for these families to come up with the money to make this a reality, so we are seeking sponsors



and donations to make it feasible.

Thanks to the interest and collaboration of Guatemalan filmmaker, **Luis Argueta** (director and producer of *The Silence of Nieto* and *abUSed: The Postville Raid*), we also have the opportunity to share this experience through the media of film.

Luis will travel with us and will document the stories of the people, and the experience of this incredible first time inter-generational encounter.

Financial support is needed, both for the travel costs of the children, and to cover the initial expenses of the filming. It is possible to sponsor a trip for one of the children for \$1,500, but all donations are gratefully accepted. If you would like more information about supporting this incredible venture, please contact Lisa Kremer at 507-360-3423 or email her at [lisakremer@hotmail.com](mailto:lisakremer@hotmail.com)

## **The History of Abuelos y Nietos Juntos ~ shared by Lisa Kremer OFS**

In the city of Worthington, we have people who struggle with many difficulties because of the immigration issues. At the Church of St. Mary, we acknowledge and celebrate the active participation of our immigrants, and their deep faith. We also acknowledge that while very rich in their spirituality, they are also often poor in material things, and have difficulties in working conditions and wages, affordable housing, and sometimes even having enough to put food on the table. Many of these families have lived here and contributed positively to the community for many years. Their children have been born and raised here. St. Mary's Church has been concerned about these – the poor among us - and we have tried to help with both their spiritual and temporal needs. We seek ways to improve their lives, and work towards comprehensive immigration reform that will affect our immigrants and their families in a positive way.

**Abuelos y Nietos Juntos** – is a project that has been conceived through the requests of our Guatemalan immigrants, along with a trip recently taken to Guatemala by several of our parishioners, and led by me. I have made 3 previous trips to Guatemala in the past 10 years, taking groups of youth and adults and mainly visiting The Mission of San Lucas Toliman, a mission that has been sponsored by the Diocese of New Ulm for the past 50 years. These “Awareness Trips” are meant to help people of our culture better understand and embrace our Guatemalan brothers and sisters, bringing solidarity and understanding to both cultures. When I made the first 3 trips, I was working in parishes that didn't have a Guatemalan population. Through a series of events, I came here to St. Mary's as faith formation director, where we have a large (and growing) Guatemalan population, mainly from the region of San Marcos. They are deeply faith-filled members of our parish and I've been privileged to get to know them as friends. When they learned I was planning a trip to Guatemala, they began to ask if I would visit their families there. So on my most recent trip – in January of 2012 - I decided to travel beyond my previous “boundaries” and visit San Marcos, and the families of our families here. I called upon a dear friend, Monsignor Greg Schaffer, priest at the mission of San Lucas for nearly 50 years, and he agreed to help me to arrange transportation to the region of San Marcos.<sup>1</sup> Another friend, film producer and director Luis Argueta, also helped to make contacts for the trip to San Marcos. The San Marcos families living here in Worthington were so happy that we planned to visit their homes. We

took many pictures, and they alerted their family members in Guatemala that we would be coming. As we made preparations for the January trip and the families were coming with photos and mementos to take to their parents in Guatemala, I was struck by the injustice of it all. Here I was able to travel freely to visit their families in Guatemala, and it wasn't possible for them. In the Guatemalan culture, family is everything. They all wanted more than anything to see their families again, but with little hope that would happen in the foreseeable future. One night in particular, as I was driving home, I was praying and the thought came to me (I believe it was divinely inspired) that the adults couldn't go to Guatemala – but it could be possible for their US born citizen children to travel to Guatemala to meet their grandparents and other relatives for the first time (some even have older brothers and sisters whom they have never met). When I mentioned this thought to a few of my Guatemalan friends, they were very happy and asked me to please find out if it would be possible. And so the idea for **Abuelos y Nietos Juntos** was born.

I also shared the idea with my co-ministers here at St. Mary's, and they encouraged and assisted me in pursuing the vision. When I spoke with Luis Argueta, he too thought it was a great idea, and immediately expressed interest in filming the trip, maintaining that “*The potential benefits of this trip are immense, from humanitarian to psychological, to economic.*”

So as we made our journey to San Marcos in January, **Abuelos y Nietos Juntos** was already in our minds and hearts. I was accompanied by my oldest son and a dear friend who is also an immigration attorney here in Worthington. The trip was incredible, and thanks to the connection made by Luis Argueta, we were able to visit with Monsignor Ramazzini, then bishop of the Diocese of San Marcos. He shared with us his dedication to peace and justice in the region of San Marcos and throughout Guatemala, and we were able to tell him about his people that have come to live among us in Worthington. Just before we left for Guatemala, we took a photo of several hundred people from San Marcos that attended Mass that particular Sunday, and we gave a copy of the photo to Bishop Ramazzini. As wonderful as that visit was, it couldn't begin to compare with what we would experience the next day.

Words cannot express the emotions and the sentiments that were shared the day we visited the small community of San Lorenzo, where we were to meet family members. We waited at the church, and people began to come and shyly greet us. But soon the connections were obvious, Jacinto and Ramon look just like their mother, and Carmela's sister Juliana was a younger version of Carmela. We began to share the photos and other

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<sup>1</sup> Fr. Schaffer was at that time living in the US and being treated for cancer. He died on May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2012.