

Feels like home (cont)

God did have other plans, and on July 3, 2007, we were introduced, through pictures, to Ana Maria, a little girl who had been born in the southwest region of Guatemala just two weeks earlier. She was beautiful. Could she really be our daughter? Any doubts we had about that vanished as we learned about the name her birthmother, knowing nothing about us, gave her. You see, Ana's birth mother's name is also Ana; and my middle name is Marie, which means she shares both of her mother's names. What a beautiful confirmation from the Lord that she was, indeed, chosen by God to complete our family. We met Ana in September and brought her home just before Christmas, when she was six months old. She's been a gift to us ever since.

Fast forward to 2015, when I was invited to join a few others in the Presbytery of Baltimore to learn about CEDEPCA and explore a partnership between the two entities. It didn't take long for our team to realize what an amazing ministry CEDEPCA is; and we quickly moved forward with an exploration trip. What a trip it was! I returned home understanding more about the country of my daughter's birth, and how God is using CEDEPCA to usher in the love and justice of Jesus. I also came home with new friends in Guatemala and a desire to introduce others to CEDEPCA. Since that time, I have been blessed to continue serving as a pastor on our Presbytery's partnership, help lead women's leadership trips (I'll be there again this month,) and also serve on the board of CEDEPCA USA.

It wasn't until this summer, however, that the most meaningful of all my visits took place, as our family travelled to Guatemala to reintroduce Anna to a country she loved and knew so much about, but felt so disconnected from. We didn't travel alone, but with dear friends, Andy and Eileen, and their children, Juan and Angelina, who also were born in Guatemala. Our families have been friends since before the children were born; and we had dreamed about a trip together since the girls came home. What an amazing gift, we had said, if our children could learn about Guatemala through the eyes of our friends at CEDEPCA, Guatemalans who love Jesus and are working for Kingdom justice.

A trip like this was a new idea for CEDEPCA. What would we do? Where would we go? How could we make the best of what CEDEPCA offers relatable to 11-16 year olds? It was a risk; and I'm eternally grateful that Judith, Nancy and Emerson were open to figuring all of that out with us and hosting us for the week. As we planned the itinerary, we tried to balance learning, personal interactions, a glimpse at how God is at work, and opportunities for fun. We knew we could not shelter our kids from the many difficult realities; but we also wanted them see that while there is a great deal of brokenness, there is also so much beauty and life! So, we planned an itinerary that included visits with volcano survivors in Antigua, time with students at Francisco Coll school in Guatemala City, and women at the Community Center in San Lucas Toliman. We visited the Ecofiltro plant, Mayan ruins, zip lines and monkeys in Panajachel, and spent time exploring Antigua. We shared a wonderful evening of soccer, delicious food and friendship at Susana Noriega's home, and time over lunch with the CEDEPCA staff. We even took in a professional soccer game on our son, Joshua's, 16th birthday!

Our time in Guatemala really did feel like a dream, a gift from Jesus, for which I will be forever grateful. I know CEDEPCA is in conversation about future trips for families. A word to the wise: if they decide it's a go...Go!!