

WHY GUATEMALA NEEDS A SOCIAL DEMONSTRATION

PERSONAL OBSERVATION

I just returned from Guatemala after 5 weeks of helping in the relief effort of the United Presbyterian Church, USA and Church World Service. Moved by the unbelievable destruction that left 23,000 dead, 75,000 injured, and 1,500,000 homeless, I feel deeply that something significant should be done with these suffering people. Having been seriously involved in the movement since the Los Angeles ITI, it is my conviction, after my experience in Guatemala, that the country is ready for a social demonstration that would have impact throughout Central and South America.

SOCIAL SITUATION

Guatemala is a Central American country just southeast of Mexico about the size of Ohio State. Its 6 million people are 55% Indian, 35% Spanish and Mestizo, and 10% other races (mainly European, Black, and Chinese). 30% of the population is classified as urban with 1,000,000 in Guatemala City. The remaining people live in rural areas, villages, and small cities. The country has 32 volcanoes which are part of the Andes Sierra. Like other Latin American countries, most of the people are nominally Roman Catholic, but 10% are Protestants. Coffee, tourism, cotton, sugar, and bananas are the basic life support of the country. There is also an emerging local industry, but Guatemala is still heavily dependent on imports.

RECONSTRUCTION EFFORTS

The earthquake hit particularly the poor people whose homes were made of adobe. 200 towns and villages were drastically damaged or almost totally destroyed. Within this context the country is moving into a long period of planning and reconstruction by the government, churches, businesses. Among the people in general, the talk is of nothing else but rebuilding the country out of ruins. Building houses won't change things significantly, however, if the people's essential economic and social status is not also changed. There must be a change at a deeper, more crucial social level. A spirit of cooperation among the local people has developed as never before seen in the history of the nation. Out of the destruction, a new expectancy for the future is evident everywhere - a mindset that could be expanded with imagination and possibility.

POLITICAL AND BUSINESS READINESS

There is a fresh readiness on the part of the government to cooperate with all public and private agencies for this period of reconstruction. This readiness has been evident on the part of the government to facilitate authorizations for local projects. Likewise, local businesses have been busy planning and implementing plans of reconstruction everywhere. I personally know of this readiness because my brother owns a coffee plantation and moves widely among influential political leaders with whom I was able to exchange concerns.

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**SOURCES OF
FUNDING**

Sources of funding would be easy to tap as the whole world is ready to continue to support any Guatemalan effort. Right after the earthquake governments, businesses, churches, local committees and agencies representing over 100 countries began to pour aid into Guatemala. The knowledge of the Guatemalan tragedy and the present needs are before all these concerned people, and now is the time to tap such wealth. Church denominations will continue their aid, many of them through Church World Service, which was instrumental in providing considerable aid and will continue to support restoration efforts. It is my conviction that we, as strategic thinkers, would be foolish not to jump on the bandwagon and use this opportunity for an amazing program which we are offering to the world through social demonstration.

**MOVEMENT
PRESENCE**

We don't have an array of grads in Guatemala, but we have 6 or 7. Before I left, I held two informal meetings where two Caracas ITI grads, Ety Herrera and Lionel Cifuentes, were present. These two are ready and committed to spend their efforts in something as significant as a comprehensive social demonstration. I promised them that I would do whatever was in my power to convince my ICA colleges in the United States to assign Guatemala as a social demonstration project. Should the ICA move in this direction, my wife Janet, and I would be ready to explore the possibility of going to Guatemala to do what is needed to bring about such an event. My presence would be important as I, through my brother and other friends, have personal access to government officials and would immediately start working on the preliminary planning.

Armando Divas
April 1976

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