

San Lucas Toliman

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October 10, 2005

Dear Friends,

Thank you for your care and concern for the People of Guatemala. The reports that I have seen in the papers and heard on the radio seem accurate. The serious flooding and landslides in many parts of Guatemala are from the excessive rains coming in the aftermath of Hurricane Stan off the eastern coast of Mexico - near Vera Cruz. Flooding of rivers along the Guatemalan pacific coastal plains is severe. In the highlands along the Guatemalan - Mexico border there are also serious mudslides and considerable flooding. The best information I have is about areas surrounding Lake Atitlan and in the highlands near Solola. I left Guatemala just as the serious mudslides were beginning in Panajachel (on the shores of Lake Atitlan across the Lake from us in San Lucas Toliman), in Santiago Atitlan (ten miles west of us) and in the San Lucas area itself. I keep in daily contact with Fr. John Goggin by cell phone so I am able to keep up with daily reports coming into the parish. I also have daily contact with Byron Maldonado and Felipe Yoxon of San Lucas. Just this morning I was able to speak by cell phone with Dr. Alfredo Garcia who had just returned from two days of medical care to the People of Santiago Atitlan.

Panajachel: The Community was seriously damaged by flooding from a river that flows along the side of most of the town and then just before reaching Lake Atitlan - through an area of the town itself. One important access bridge was taken out. Many, many houses and small shops were swept away. Numbers of killed and injured vary in reports. A common number of killed given is 15 ... of injured - 30. Property damage is extensive.

Santiago Atitlan: The 'Canton' Panabaj (a community right on the western edge of Santiago proper) was destroyed by mudslides. Numbers of people killed vary between 800 and 1200. They continue to excavate the bodies buried and have recovered 600 thus far. The mayor of Santiago has asked that this area simply be considered a cemetery. He does not see how it will be possible to recover all the bodies. There are some 1500 people from this 'Canton' now living temporarily in the Parish Center and large halls in town. The parish of Santiago was built originally (in 1547) as a monastery for Franciscan Priests and Brothers. They served the whole Lake Atitlan area in those years of Guatemalan history. The very large courtyard area used for the monastery now serves to house so many, many families needing temporary shelter.

Roads: To the north of San Lucas roads are blocked by enormous landslides. In one area of the Pan American Highway above Solola, a section of the highway was simply swept away. To the south of San Lucas, there are three serious washouts. One near the plantation Pampojila (immediately south of San Lucas ... another further down toward the plantation Ingenio ... another closer to Patulul.

Equipment has been brought in to repair the roads. At present, temporary wooden bridges have been built for people to cross the 'gullies where the road was'. Vehicles (usually pick-ups) then move people and supplies between the washed out areas. Relief supplies from Guatemala City as well as foreign relief supplies are brought in by this route. Helicopters supplied by the Government of Guatemala move supplies and medical personnel into Santiago Atitlan also.

San Lucas Toliman: The town of San Lucas has had limited flooding of houses. There have been no injuries or deaths. Damage is limited. However, the community of people living on the Plantation Pampojila has been hit hard. Water and mud from the mountain side washed down through the housing area of plantation virtually destroying all of the small houses. Huge rocks tumbling with the rushing water and mud caused the most damage. All of the people got out before the worst of the rushing water, mud, and rocks hit the area. No one was hurt. All of the families are now living temporarily in a large hall in the Colonia San Jose Pampojila (just south of the plantation) and in San Lucas proper. The owner of the plantation has been approached about rebuilding. He has agreed to take responsibility for rebuilding for those actually working on the plantation. Those working on a plantation are commonly known as 'colonos' and a plantation owner would be responsible for them. However, on the plantation Pampojila there are a total of 136 families living there. Of those, 30 are 'colonos'. The other families are those of retirees and extended family members who have simply added a bit of a lean-to type of structure to the original house and moved in. These would be most of all older children of a family married and with children who only work on the plantation part-time and search out work elsewhere when available. These 106 families must move.

We do have some land available for these families. However, we would have to purchase a piece of property adjacent to this land for adequate space and complete a water project we are working on so that families could have potable water. The piece of land we would need to purchase is available for sale at the cost of \$50,000.00. It would be adequate for housing some 40 families. We have approached a Government Office for helping to build houses and bring in electricity if we should be able to get the property I speak of. They have agreed to help with the building of small houses and bring in electricity if we can make the property available to the families in need. We have just completed a large project in housing three communities with these same Government Offices. Because of the success, we are convinced we can make similar arrangements for these families because of their emergency need. Our part of the effort was to make the land needed available to the Government Offices and they did the rest.

If you might like to help in this effort, please send your donation to:

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% Kathy Huebert
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Thank you very much for your care and concern for the People of Guatemala.

Gratefully,

