

The Bridging Our Connection with Juntos Guatemala

While our new associate pastor, Austin Ashenbrenner was transitioning into his first call at First Presbyterian, his parents, **David and Wendy Ashenbrenner**, were transitioning out of ministry in the US and into a ministerial call in Guatemala. David had been leading short-term, international mission visits for about 20 years. In 2011 the Ashenbrenners made the decision to join David’s longtime friend and missions peer, **Roduel Pérez** in his family’s ministry and outreach work to overlooked indigenous communities.

Through David, we first became acquainted with the Pérez family and some of their community development and outreach ministries, *Hechos 2:8*, *Healthy Communities*, and *Próximos Pasos* then organized under the North American-based NGO of *Mission Impact*.

The Relationships: Roduel, Hilda, and Gerber Pérez

Roduel and **Hilda Pérez**, indigenous Maya of the Kaqchikel community of San Antonio Aguas Calientes, had begun their outreach ministry, *Hechos 2:8*, to the rural and displaced indigenous peoples in the remote northern region of Guatemala known as Ixcán, in 1991. Prior to the formation of *Hechos 2:8*, Roduel had been a translation checker and trainer for Wycliffe Bible Translators. It was while working and traveling throughout Guatemala with Wycliffe, that Roduel was profoundly moved by the desperate and heart wrenching circumstances of indigenous people who had fled to the remote and dense jungles of Ixcán. Roduel and Hilda understood that they were called to provide presence and reassurance, as well as physical and spiritual care to these traumatized refugees from multiple linguistic backgrounds. These circumstances and their call brought to mind, “And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?” - Acts 2:8 / *Hechos 2:8*.

Roduel ingrained in his family and reiterated to mission guests that faith is a lifestyle - that faith is lived out each day, in all you do, in every place that you go.

In 2012, **Gerber Pérez**, youngest child of Hilda and Roduel, was just beginning his own outreach ministry called *Healthy Communities*. Our pilot team had the good fortune to have Gerber as our guide during our first immersion into Guatemalan culture and its heavily saturated arena of volun-tourism. Gerber understood the importance of addressing the physical health needs for households and communities in remote, underdeveloped areas as a foundational necessity in cultivating healthy communities. Several from our first teams were able to work, play and be challenged by Gerber to examine our motivations for coming to Guatemala. His early childhood development prepared him for an impactful ability to skillfully navigate the nuances and power dynamics of Guatemalan and North American cultures. In no small way, Gerber immediately and simultaneously welcomed us into his culture and began schooling us in the tension between good-intentions and healthy collaboration. “People want to know that you care before they care about what you know.” Gerber is a scalpel in cross-cultural community development, skillfully trimming away at the remnants of paternalism that team members have unknowingly carried down into his country. This is precisely why Gerber was the best first-introduction to this partnership. He tested our mettle and resolve in fostering healthy, intentional, outreach partnerships.



To be continued.



Next month: The Relationships...Mirna Pérez and Walter Hernandez