

Our trip to Guatemala was relatively short, but very productive.

We were invited to give two workshops at the first Central American Youth Specialties conference. The conference was fantastic. It drew 1200 youth leaders...a huge number in this type of work, which is even more impressive when you consider these leaders were almost exclusively from Central America and the Spanish-speaking parts of the Caribbean.



We know that the only thing that really matters about a workshop is the extent to which it actually affects someone's life and ministry. But since we can't know that at this point, we'll fall back on the relatively inconsequential data. Our workshops were well attended (about 150 people between the two), we had fun giving them, and people looked like they enjoyed them.

Our favorite topic is **"Training that Transforms"** in which we don't just talk about experiential learning but model it, trying to use all eight learning styles in the session. One leader from Panama said he was blown away by the class (ok, so he said something in Spanish but we promise it was the functional equivalent of "blown away"). One of the activities we lead was having someone looking at a complex design and describe it to his or her partner who couldn't see the original but had to draw a copy based on their partner's only verbal explanation. The Panamanian was actually on the winning team; he and his partner's drawing was deemed by Tim to be the closest to the original, but he saw how it didn't accurately represent the original design. He said that as a preacher, someone who communicates with words all the time, he had never experienced the limitations of purely linguistic communication so dramatically.

The second workshop, **Being a Couple in Youth Ministry**, apparently tapped into a huge felt need because the room was full to overflowing. We had a lot of fun as we invited Marci and Wayne Rice to join us fielding the questions. The Rice's have over 40 years of experience doing youth ministry, and raising three kids at the same time. For most of the people in the room their idea of youth ministry is being a leader while you're single and then moving on after you get married, so I think just realizing that there is such a thing as long term youth ministry done as a couple was eye opening for many of them.



The conference was also a great time to connect with ministry partners we don't see very often. There is something about the face-to-face that lets more happen in 20 minutes than happens in the rest of the year over email. For example we met Joel Van Dyke in Ecuador last year at the Summit for youth ministry trainers. We had talked about what we do, the resources we provide and had even given him a CD with some of the animated classes on it, but nothing more had happened about it. But at the conference we pulled away to talk for about an hour, I (Annette) walked him through the specific materials in the classes and he got incredible excited as he saw how this could fit into his training program, saving him lots of time from having to prepare something himself, and helping his trainees cover the basics of youth ministry so when he's present with a group (he has training groups all around Central America) he know exactly what they've covered during his absence. He's just the kind of leader who is in the "trenches" and can use our materials to their fullest, so we're excited to see what happens as a result.

One of the reasons we went to Guatemala was to consider some possible opportunities for the future, including the OC team in Guatemala and a partnership with Liderazgo Juvenil (Youth Leadership) an organization that also provides training and resources for youth leaders. Both groups are meeting significant needs in the country and we enjoyed quality time with them but didn't sense that our long-term presence in Guatemala is needed for us to support them. We'll tell you more about the Liderazgo Juvenil project as it becomes a reality, but we do want to go into a little bit of detail into how we're already being useful to OC's team in Guatemala.



We had lunch with Willy, a Guatemalan member of the OC team, who lives in the city of Huehuetenango. One of his passions is helping rural churches meet the needs of their youth (about 65% of the population in Guatemala is rural) and he said that he has found that the materials on ParaLideres.org are the most helpful resources for them he has come across. Willy works closely with a friend (Jenner) to whom we had given permission via email to copy and distribute our resource CDs. Willy explained that even though the rural churches don't have internet access, the people do have access to a computer somehow so they CDs are very useful to them. Jenner has taken it upon himself to continually update the CD's with the latest materials that we've published on the web site and then he and Willy distribute these at training events they do. Willy explained that a typical scenario might be for a region of a denomination to invite them to spend time with their regional leaders, maybe ten to fifteen leaders who each oversee and provide support/guidance to a dozen or so congregations. So, Felix in Barcelona, Spain writes a 14 lesson inductive bible study series on Ephesians. He sends it to us and we publish it on ParaLideres.org. Jenner sees it, adds it to the CD, and then passes that CD to 100 congregations in remote districts of Guatemala through their denominational leaders. It's so incredible to see how God multiplies and multiplies the "loaves and fishes" that the members of our "web team" offer him.



Other highlights included spending time with Kyle and Nell Stiff and getting to meet our nephew Nicholas Arthur Linares (hanging out with his parents and siblings was fun too ☺). The coffee in Antigua wasn't bad either. Ah, the sacrifices we make.