

Dear Sponsors and Friends,

I hope that our April newsletter finds you, your family, and your friends doing well. Spring has been slow to arrive in Minnesota and I am waiting with anticipation for warmer temperatures and May flowers, especially the tulips my daughter gave me (as bulbs) from her studies abroad at the University of Amsterdam.

Enjoy Rita's newsletter and her photos of recent events in San Lucas! **Julie**

From Rita -

This greeting is sent to you with my sincerest thanks for your valuable support of the SLT Scholars program. It is a pleasure to greet you again via this newsletter to inform you about our program's activities in 2023.

The good news! In January the order was received from the government of Guatemala that classes in all schools and universities would begin in person. News that brought many changes in our families.

- Psychologically, most children and young people were traumatized with everything that happened during the time of COVID-19. They had been waiting for the good news that classes would be held in person, which meant a change in their learning environment and above all to be with their friends again.
- It has been proven that children and young people improve their learning in groups because they exchange ideas and interact with several people.
- The economy was reactivated in several businesses and families. For example, tailors and seamstresses had a lot of work at the beginning of the year making school uniforms – a big increase from the past 2 years. Bookstores which sell school supplies saw increased sales, repairs inside and outside school buildings were needed, public transportation increased – many businesses returned to normal!

All schools started the school year in a very special way, with beautiful ceremonies that welcomed all students. These ceremonies are an important part of our culture.

By order of the Guatemalan government, private schools began on January 16th and public schools began at the end of February. This is the second year of staggered starts. Little by little we are getting used to this rhythm of different school schedules.

All social and sports activities in schools have returned. The municipality held Tecún Umán Day, Carnival, election of the Mayan Princess, and many soccer and basketball games were played.

Thanks to a generous donation from the First Presbyterian Church in Bend, OR, SLT Scholars purchased and installed 6 overhead projectors in the Pachojilá school; Pachojilá is a community in San Lucas Tolimán. The teachers in the school were interested in augmenting their teaching using this technology. Most schools in San Lucas do not have this technology. The projectors were installed in March as part of the school's celebration of its 14th anniversary which included a trip on Lake Atitlán. Alberta and I were invited as special guests. We really enjoyed being with the students and teachers.

As part of Holy Week as is the tradition here, people made beautiful, intricate carpets using flowers and sawdust. There were traditional processions as well as recreational activities on the shores of the lake, family gatherings with customary food dishes prepared and enjoyed. This is very important to our families because it maintains unity.

In June, the IMED school will be celebrating its 50-year golden anniversary – 50 years of education! The IMED school is the largest school in town and is considered the best. Many of our scholars attend here. We are looking forward to the festivities!

On June 25th, Guatemalans will vote to elect new leaders. We are in a season of political campaigns, and we hope that the elections end in a good way and that our new leaders will implement programs of change for true development in San Lucas Tolimán and Guatemala.

As life returns to more normal, we have seen the following as a longer-term effect of COVID-19. At the beginning of the school year, we learned that 4% of our scholars decided not to study in 2023; this is 1-1.5 percent higher than in most years. While the economy is rebounding for people who run businesses, that is not true for some of the poorest families - our families. The young people in these families have found work and their income is needed to provide necessities for their families.

Our goal is to support education in young people. Each level of education achieved gives young people a better foundation for raising a family.

This is the work God has entrusted us to do and we want to do better every day.

Thank you for your support of our program. We are a light of hope in many children and families so that in the future they can lead a more dignified life.

Enjoy my photos of the different activities mentioned in this report.

[SLT SCHOLAR PHOTOS 1 - Google Drive](#)

Rita Chajil

SLT Scholars Program Director