

Niños Creadores de Historia

Childrencreatehistory.org

[This is an adaptation of an article that Crellin Byrd wrote for her church up north; The Church of the Holy Spirit in Mars Hill, NC. They have also been a big supporter of the school].

Many of you met Deacon Phyllis Manoogian when she has joined our Zoom services from Guatemala. In 2015 Phyllis visited Guatemala and observed the severe needs of the indigenous population, especially in rural mountain villages. As a retired Deacon, with the sponsorship of her Diocese in California, she founded Niños Creadores de Historia (Children Create History) as an alternative school for at risk students. The school provides educational and nutritional support for at risk students.



On March 15, 2020 Guatemala CLOSED completely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All schools were canceled, airports were closed, public transportation suspended, and all non-essential businesses completely shut down. There was, and still is, very limited access to those businesses remaining open. The village of San Andres, where the school is located, has no jobs, no income, and no transportation to the nearest town which is about an hour bus ride away. At the time of the closure there were 60 students enrolled, the absolute maximum the tiny 3 room school could handle. Phyllis continued to pay the staff 50% of their salary and began providing monthly food supplies to the families of the students.

While the public schools are still not meeting in person, they are using only online learning or take-home worksheets. Niños Creadores de Historia has, since April, been operating at 50% capacity with 32 masked students. They meet three days a week in two shifts: a morning and an afternoon session. Nutrition is a severe problem for these families. Before the pandemic, students were provided with a nutritious, delicious free lunch. For many students this was their only meal all day. Some students would take home some of their lunch to share with family. Phyllis and her staff determined that the food supplies provided to the family was so important that now families continue to be provided with staple foods while students receive a healthy snack.

Just when they were settling into a new routine, the president has threatened to again close the school due to rising covid case numbers. As of this writing they were unsure what would be happening with keeping the school partially open, however, Phyllis will continue to provide food for the families and as much support as possible for the students.

How can you help?

- Niños Creadores de Historia, as with all charitable organizations, needs funds to continue its operation. If you would like to make a donation (one-time or recurring), you can do that on the All Saints' website (allsaintsfl.org). Click the red Donate button at the top and then in the "Apply

My Donation To” drop-down, choose *Niños Creadores de Historia (Children Create History) School*. 100% of your gift goes directly to the school.

- iPads, laptops, tablets, kindles, etc. Donations: If you have a functioning electronic device, that you no longer need, contact the All Saints’ office or drop it by on Sunday morning. We have a friend who is a professional IT technician. She is helping to clean off all old data, install new appropriate software (including security), and then we send them to the school. Some (most) of these children have never been exposed to technology. This is a new and exciting project.
- Preschool through 2nd grade level books in Spanish. The school desperately needs books for the children learning to read. Again, contact the office and we will be able to include them in boxes being sent to them.

All Saints already sent one huge crate of school supplies back before the pandemic. We are currently working on another crate. Anything you can do is most definitely appreciated and tax deductible.

How did we come to know about Niños Creadores de Historia?

In 2019 Crellin Byrd joined members of her Ft. Lauderdale church, All Saints Episcopal, on the mission trip that had been organized by All Saints’ Deacon Jon Owens, a former classmate and friend of Deacon Phyllis. A group of eight people flew to Antigua, Guatemala where a van transported them to the mountain village of San Andres Itzapa where Phyllis’ school was located. The school is about halfway up a steep hill and the driver didn’t think the van could make it, so they walked, as the locals do, except for the few fortunate enough to have a horse to help with their heaviest loads.



When they entered the school, they were all just looking around in bewilderment and a bit of awe. They marveled at how these people could make do with so little. The purpose of the mission trip was to assist with repairs and improvements at the school. Cleaning, painting, and roof repair were on the top of the list. The teachers had picked the colors and the paint was there. Our first job was to clean and prepare the walls and that was quite a job. In addition to painting, some electrical work, and roof repair, one of our group designed and painted a mural on outside wall facing the street. It has given the school wonderful recognition. Now the many people going up and down the street admire this amazing little school. On our last day, we helped with the traditional end-of-



year party. The children entertained us with prepared dances and songs. The girls showed off dresses sent to them from All Saints church. They were happy, enthusiastic, and loved all the games we played with them. It was a wonderful day.

Check out the school's website: www.Childrencreatehistory.org where you can learn more about the children and the school.

Location of the school:

The school is located in San Andres Iztapa, a village in the department (state) of Chimaltenango, Guatemala. San Andres is transitioning from a predominantly agricultural community. Families are struggling to move from supporting themselves on the land to finding jobs in the tourist center of Antigua, about an hour's bus ride away. The school is in one of the most disadvantaged neighborhoods in the area. Most of the children are from indigenous family, many of whom speak only the local dialect in the home, creating an additional language problem for young students. The indigenous students are likely to encounter discrimination. The hope is to help prepare these students for the future that awaits them.



Educational and Nutritional needs in Guatemala:



Before the pandemic, the Guatemala government reported 50% of children in the country suffered from malnutrition and few continued to attend school beyond the 6th grade. In the public school there are usually 45 students per class with no teacher's aide so there is little individual attention for students who fall behind. Niños Creadores de Historia targets students recommended by their regular classroom teachers. Because schools in Guatemala are so crowded, they operate on two shifts a day – morning and afternoon. When fully operating, Niños Creadores de Historia students continue to attend public school while receiving extra tutoring and assistance the other half of the day.

The staff and school operations:

The staff, one credentialed teacher, two aides, a cook and the cook's helper, are all lifelong residents of San Andres, are 80% of indigenous heritage and speak the local dialect as well as Spanish. There is close contact with the public-school teachers, and parent-teacher meetings, held each grading period, provide parents with copies of their child's marks. Different grades have been targeted in the past, but it was found that the academic and nutritional intervention is most effective with first graders. Although families are asked to pay the equivalent of 25 cents a week, no child is excluded for lack of funds. Students are often the most consistent and reliable babysitters for younger siblings

Unexpected consequences:

One of the unintended consequences has been the empowerment of the female staff. Several years ago, one of the aides broken down in tears and said she thought she would never have a job more professional than cleaning someone else's toilet. After going to school on weekends she is now a nurse running a wellness clinic out of her home in the evenings and weekends as she continues as an aide at the school.

At first, there was a fight to have girls included, but now the school has an equal number of boys and girls. In 2019, the last year of full operation, the school had 100% success with all their students passing the test required to go on to the next grade level. Students are encouraged and, in many cases, overcome their feelings of inadequacy to develop good self-esteem. Not only do they learn, but they also love coming to school and have learned to love learning!

