



CONTEXT OF THE PROJECT

Santa Maria Cunen district is 230 km northwest of the capital city. Over 30,000 people live in some 40 communities within its 177 km² territory. The people confront serious problems such as illiteracy, malnutrition, infantile deaths, and poverty. There are few technological services for agriculture, drinkable water, and electricity. They have few junior or senior high schools in Cunen municipality and no universities. The government only supports primary and elementary education. To continue high school in the capital, Santa Cruz del Quiche, would require Q800 (\$160CAD) per month, a luxury few families can afford with their average monthly income of Q360 (\$72 CAD). The lack of basic education destines these people to remain marginalized, denying them access to the political, economic and social life of their country.

The Catholic church introduced a Guatemalan Institute of Education Radiofonica in 1990. In a little over a decade, it prepared about

200 youths in the cycle of basic education, but did not reach the majority who remained truncated in their hope of continuing high school, yet alone college or university.

As the youth demographics increase, it is remarkable the interest they have to better themselves. Sadly, the cost of education hinders them, and the circle of poverty and the problems associated with it continue from one generation to the next.

The lack of basic education destines the people to remain marginalized, denying them equitable access to the basic political, economic and social life of the country.

PROJECT: Intercultural, Bilingual, Mixed College (High School/Teachers' College)

LOCATION: Cunen, Guatemala



Cunen community greet Rainbow of Hope with a traditional Mayan "Welcome Dance" in 2004.

To improve matters, the municipality founded the *Bilingual Mixed Intercultural Colegio in 1999* - a Mayan community education program that seeks to train bilingual teachers for primary school in the language and cultural context of the communities. Since the federal government shows no interest in education of Mayan cultural context, this grand enterprise is due to parents, students, local authorities, and local teachers. The professional teach with little salary primary and elementary students in the morning, and volunteer to teach high school and then the teacher education program in the afternoons, evenings and, even on weekends. Remarkably, of 257 graduate students of the College, about 170 young teachers already are teaching in K'iche/Spanish in communities in the municipality. However the continuation of the program is threatened by a lack of a suitable educational facility to meet pedagogical needs.

HISTORY OF THE CUNEN TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM

A visionary group of teachers headed by the director, Miguel Angel Camaja, all from poor families, managed to study in different educational institutions of the country. During their studies, they had the idea of contributing to the education of rural communities in their country, especially among the Mayan population. This motivated the group to continue their studies and become qualified teachers.

Ten years ago, the teachers seeded the idea of a high school that would incorporate a teacher training program so grads could teach in remote communities. From then the work started in the preparation of the teachers. They volunteered teaching junior and senior high school utilizing the public elementary school.

Rainbow of Hope found over 40 high school students in this elementary room that normally would accommodate 25 students in Canada.

Through formation of a registered school authority, a low tuition assured the high school/teacher education program was accessible to students of the poorest families. However, without a suitable facility, even with the best the teachers and community can offer, the program is in jeopardy.



THE PURPOSE OF THIS PROJECT

The Guatemalan government has no interest in funding higher education, choosing instead to leave access to high school and beyond to the few who can afford tuition in the private schools and universities. Also, few government authorities worry about an education in cultural context of the community. The purpose of this project is to help the people to construct a high school/teachers' college that would enable all students of limited financial resources to access high school and training to improve the economic, social and political development of their communities.

The teacher education program at Cunen is compatible with the Bilingual Mayan Education Intercultural PEMBI program, the institution for qualifying teachers of alternative education, but it lacks the facilities to meet pedagogical needs. The municipality is providing land but has no funding for a building.

A recent study confirmed that few Government service exist in Cunen relative to other municipalities, where there are up to 70 institutions at the service of the people. The criteria used to determine support was to offer grants to those who suffered violence during the internal armed conflict. The government deemed Cunen exempt of violence, but Cunen also suffered from the war. Thus, the people's struggle for education is necessary to overcome their abandonment.



Fr. Gerry LeS-trat and Mayan teachers marveled at the social justice mural at St. Joe's in Edmonton and the schools they visited in Canada on their speaking tour in 2003.

FACILITY AND CONSTRUCTION

The building will be built in 2 stages. The first stage will be 6 classrooms, a computer lab, an electrical/mechanical lab, a home economics lab), administration office, and bathrooms.

The budget for phase one is \$200,000 CAD. The project includes volunteer labour from the community of Cunen.

IMMEDIATE GOALS OF THE PROJECT

1. To design and construct a building that facilitates the necessities and educational needs of the society
2. To respond to the educational needs of 200 plus junior and senior high school students in Cunen
3. To offer teacher training to enable children in remote communities to obtain bilingual intercultural education
4. To open youth to two more careers to better serve their personal needs and those of the Mayan community.

DIRECTOR MIGUEL ANGEL CAMAJA'S VISION OF THE FACILITY

We are convinced that only by obtaining an adequate education facility can we continue to provide and enhance education programs to respond to the expectations of the students anxious to obtain a quality education.

We believe it is important that the building has a centre for good courses in organic agriculture that the students will study during their three years of academic and scientific formation, as well as good recreational facilities that go hand in hand with our Intercultural Bilingual (Mayan-Spanish) Education. It also will provide us the opportunity to open up to other careers that would improve the continuing development of our communities and country.

This project will be favorable for dynamic, creative, participative, interactive and innovative work of students and for improvement of the political, economic, and social life of the entire Mayan people of Cunen.

Miguel speaking to Rainbow of Hope monitors in the town hall donated for our visit in 2004.



SUSTAINABILITY

The College submitted a 5-year plan of operations, such as salaries, electricity, water and sewage, cleaning and maintenance, as well as revenue. They will receive \$15,000 CAD annually from MINEDUC and the Ministry of Education will offer some support for teacher salaries if the facility is built. The municipality already commits \$2,000 CAD annually for maintaining the elementary classrooms when they are used by the teacher education program and will add to this funding to cover the cost of the electricity in the new facility.

Students in the basic program pay a tuition of \$72 CAD and in the "Magisterio" plus computer courses \$240 CAD, annually. The College will receive annual international support of \$10,000. The 5-year plan shows a balance budget.

Here is the land set aside by the municipality. Having matured in 5 years, the College is sure to be of even greater impact with a building.





Fr. Gerry LeStrat with the Cunen gradating class of 2006. Fr. Gerry is originally from St. Front, Saskatchewan. He is an advocate for the Mayan people in their struggle for full citizenship.

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TITLE UPON GRADUATION

Master of Primary Bilingual Education
Inter Cultural Mayan Spanish.

The degrees are recognized by the National Ministry of Education.

GRADUATE PROFILE 2001-2006

Total number of graduates is 257. About $\frac{2}{3}$ are teaching, many in small remote Mayan communities. The others are all continuing studies or employed in career jobs. Recently in post grad interviews, 90% were happy with the program and improvement in their standard of living.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BUILDING PROJECT FROM FR. GERRY LESTRAT

Aix en Provence, France June 6, 2006

I am now in France with the Oblates in the beautiful city of Aix in southern France, where our founder St. Eugene de Mazenod was born. Being away from Guatemala has given me the opportunity to think. Not one day passes that my mind does not go to what is being lived in Guatemala and the high school/teachers' school building project.

For Cunen, the building is important, but also the relationship that has begun with Canadians is of equal or perhaps even more value to them. As Indigenous people, they feel left out of society's mainstream and have found a listening ear and understanding heart in you. The visit of the four teachers to Canada in 2003 was a highlight for them, and then when several of you came to their town and stayed in their homes, the reality of the relationship strengthened.

Here, in an ambiance of prayer, reflection and study, makes me more convinced of the importance of continuing to support the needy, the poor and the powerless. What I want to stress is that by supporting the Cunen Education project, which is a grass root initiative, it is also encouraging a people that has been struggling for centuries. It is a very meaningful project and Louis Morin followed up on it, because he had the intuition that the construction of a community or a people starts from the bottom-up. I want to congratulate him and the whole group that has been working hard for the last months, planning and looking at all aspects of it. That shows the seriousness of your dedication, and also your care for our brothers and sisters in this underdeveloped corner of our planet. I keep you in my prayers in a special way these days asking our Lord to bless you and your families. Thank you for caring.

HOW CAN I HELP?

If you would like the joy of being part of this project, you can make a donation any amount or buy a classroom individually or group for \$25,000. No donation is too small or too large. Please send your gift to:

**Rainbow of Hope for Children
PO Box 2883
Wainwright, AB T9W 1S7**

All donations are appreciated and acknowledged with an income tax deductible receipt.