

## Report on Christmas Event for Faith Seeds Ministry, funded by Salem Heights Church and Coordinated by Reid Saunders Association

It was December 23, 2016, a Christmas program was ready to begin at 7 pm. The beautiful Guatemala City weather, clear skies and in the low 70s, made the evening pleasant. The church was filling up with children and parents, the band was finishing its practice, the volunteers were still working on getting ready the Christmas dinner that was going to be served after the program, the greeters were ready to greet the guests and, and the people involved in the program were doing the final prayer before going up on stage. The time was nearing to begin celebrating Christ's birth on earth! There was excitement in the air!

Interestingly, it was not a regular Christmas church service. The Friends Church that was allowing for this program to take place was going to be closed the week of Christmas because most its church members were going to go to their hometowns to be with their relatives. But, there we were ready to have a Christmas celebration. It had been a God planned event. About six months earlier a dream had been born to celebrate Christ's birth with the children and families in the Faith Seeds Ministry program. These children and families live near and work at recycling trash at the major garbage dump in Guatemala City. The Friends Church leaders were allowing Reid Saunders Association and Salem Heights Church to use their facilities to carry out this event. And now the dream was about to happen!

The program begun with a welcome and prayer by Gaby Muñoz, Faith Seeds Ministry Founder and President. All sung Jingle Bells and Silent Night. Yes, these songs may not be the traditional Christian songs sung at a Christian Christmas service but most of the people present haven't ever been at a Christmas Christian program. You see, these families do not have the custom to attend a Christmas service. Most of them are unchurched and don't have the means to afford a Guatemala typical Christmas dinner.

The band was composed of a violinist, a pianist and a guitarist. The violinist played the melody to "O Holy Night" beautifully and the crowd clapped! For most of them, it was probably the first time they heard this type of music in a church. A volunteer from a Friends plant church two hours away from Guatemala City gave some reflective words. Allen Cardona, Friends Church Youth Pastor, shared on the gifts the Magi brought to Jesus. He also said that as the Magi had brought presents to Jesus, we could also give Him a present, and that this present could be our hearts/lives. The altar call was made and 20 people raised their hands to give their hearts to Jesus! The seed of the Gospel was placed in all the hearts of the 250-people present. All present were invited to come back to the church for the Sunday service at 10:30 am. They were told that the church was always open for them to come to pray and learn about who Jesus is.

We were expecting 400 people but we learned that most of them were unable to come because they were busy working at the garbage dump. It was explained to us that right before Christmas Eve, most people in the city dispose of their old things because they are getting new ones! So, there is a lot of 'good trash' to be acquired or recycled. Old beds that are trash to some, become new beds to others. Old fridges, become new...old things become new!

The night finished with a tribute to Faith Seeds Ministry staff for their commitment to bless the children and families in their program throughout the year. The Faith Seeds staff was asked to come to the front and they were presented with a Christmas card and offering given by Salem Heights Church. Also, an offering from Salem Heights was given to Pastor Allen and the Church. After a final prayer, everyone was invited to a traditional Guatemalan Christmas dinner, which included tamales, bread, cake, Guatemalan hot fruit punch, coffee, and apples.

The crowd was delighted! They had never had such a feast for Christmas! They sat around tables with white tablecloths, were served by the volunteers who were church members mainly from the Friends plant church two hours away from the city, our family and Pastor Allen's family.



Friends Church filling up before event.



Gaby welcoming everyone



New-believers praying.



Faith Seeds staff being honored.



Children and families at their Christmas dinner.

While at the dinner, Gaby's staff shared many stories happening that night, here are some of them.

There were two girls who wanted lots of attention and to be hugged. One of the staff shared that a few weeks before there had been a huge trash slide that had buried many people, and one of them was the father of the girls. These girls were fatherless for Christmas and were feeling this emptiness in their hearts. Our hearts were saddened and we hugged them even more!

Two other girls came by to get the food and said that they were sorry that their mom couldn't be there because she was feeling very sick. A doctor in Gaby's staff went to see what was wrong with their mom, and he found that the lady had given blood that afternoon and was fainting. In Guatemala, people who give blood are given about \$2 so they can get something to eat right away. The lady had donated blood so she could feed her family that night. Our hearts were saddened again. So, since we had ordered 400 tamales, we had more than enough to give more tamales for families to take home to have food for the next day. And so we did, this mom and the rest of the families were blessed!!

One of Faith Seed's teachers shared that when he was speaking to the people, he almost had tears seeing for the first-time students and parents together in a church hearing about Jesus.

It was impactful to know from Gaby and Chayito, one of the teachers at Faith Seeds, that for five years, their ministry has been praying to one day provide a Christmas dinner for the families in their program. They would have never been able to do this on their own and felt that God had answered their prayers through the generosity of Salem Heights and the coordination of the event by a staff member from the Reid Saunders Association, along with her family.

It was apparent to many that the guests left the event with joy in their hearts. The seeds of the Gospel were planted! The doors of the church are now open for them to come in at any time!

My family and I thank God, Salem Heights and Reid Saunders Association for giving us the privilege to be a part of something so beautiful! To Him be the glory!

The Daniels Family: Pat, Ruth & Carl



Neighborhood where the Faith Seeds Ministry works daily with families.



A picture with Gaby!