

## *Guatemalan Misión Update: Santa María de Jesus*

### ***Earthquakes and hundreds of aftershocks cause severe damage in Santa Maria de Jesus, Guatemala***

The following is an update written by the staff of Colegio Angelitos de Dios:

Santa María de Jesús, Sacatepéquez is a town where people are humbly hard-working, who earn a living day by day. The majority of the population are people who work the land and sell products in the markets. On Tuesday, July 8th, in the afternoon at 3:11, a 5.7 earthquake shocked our community. There were cries, screams, wails, deaths and above all the fear that traumatized the little ones, due to the movements that occurred constantly and that continue to occur to this day.

As a result of the seismic movements, electricity, phones, and food were not available for days. The two main roads to Santa Maria de Jesus have collapsed, one leading to Antigua Guatemala, and the other leading to Palín Escuintla. There were many landslides, which left the town isolated. Sick and elderly people had to leave their homes, and there was a lot of crop loss.

Hundreds of homes and thousands of people were affected by the quakes. Some homes can be repaired, others were destroyed and cannot be repaired, and some families are sheltering in different shelters. (see photos)

The Catholic Church suffered severe damage, and the population mourns because it is a place of refuge, faith, and hope for our town. Mass must take place in a courtyard, and it is rainy season.

As a result of all the earthquakes, the population has been left with a shortage of drinking water, since the water system was destroyed. The whole town is traumatized, and especially the children are scared. The aftershocks continue as of this writing three weeks after the initial earthquake. There is still not enough food and water for the people, and the roads are not repaired.

At Angelitos de Dios School, as teachers, parents, and students, we are alive thanks to God. We have several families who left their homes due to cracks and collapses, and the principal and many teachers also lost their homes. The school building where we are renting had no structural damage, only some minor cracks, Thank God.

Classes are suspended because we are still in the red zone, but as a private institution, we continue educating children with learning guides so they can complete their lessons at home and maintain their learning sequence.

Thank God, kind-hearted people came to support us in different ways. As a population, we must entrust ourselves to God because the tremors continue. May He have mercy on us.

The Catholic Action Team is planning a fundraiser on September 27 to help this community that we have had a relationship with for over 15 years. The priorities now are clean water and food. You can buy a water filter for a family for \$50. \$27 buys a bag of food and provisions for a child. We are also hoping to help the Church build a temporary roof so the parishioners can attend Mass, which will cost around \$3000. We are partnering with Habitat for Humanity Guatemala to help repair homes and build new ones. Please look for more information in the coming weeks. You can donate at [smcr.org/Guatemala-1](https://smcr.org/Guatemala-1)



*Landslides destroyed the roads and cut off the town from food and basic supplies.*



*Hundreds of homes were damaged or collapsed.*



*Families sheltering in tents.*



*The new water system was destroyed so families must scrounge for water again.*

## Teachers' Comments on Their Own Experiences

I'm Leandro, a fifth-grade teacher. Arriving home after lunch, everything was proceeding normally until the first aftershocks began. I thought we no longer had to worry, until after 15 minutes the worst began, and then we didn't know what to do. All the neighbors were screaming in the street. They were moments that no one will forget since it happened in less than a minute and caused a lot of damage to the infrastructure of homes throughout the municipality. All of this happened so quickly and the concern was growing since some relatives were in La Antigua, Guatemala. We had to risk ourselves and go through the different landslides until we reached our relatives. We were without electricity, drinking water, without telephone service, and all the stores no longer had supplies because people had already run out.

We helped carry power poles so the municipality could have electricity and deliver supplies to different parts of the town, as needed. Many people expressed concern, anguish, fear, and panic, but they didn't lose faith that everything would calm down.

What's happening isn't real, it's like being part of a science fiction movie. Everything is going very badly, people whose relatives have died, giving them hope that everything would be over soon, but the tremors still linger. From time to time, rumbling sounds can be heard inside the volcano, and residents of the town mention that the volcano could erupt. We only pray to God that this never happens.

We are saddened by everything that happened, from children to the elderly. We will never forget that time and date. Many people, even now, risk their lives to earn their daily bread. Because they have a family, and even worse if that family lost their home in the earthquake that affected us so much.



I'm Kimberly, the first grade teacher. Tuesday, July 8th will remain an unforgettable experience for everyone, especially those in my community, Santa María de Jesús. Neighbors ran out of their houses, all scared because parts of the volcano were also collapsing and the volcano could not be seen with so much dust. People were scared because they said the volcano collapsed and that we should run, but well, that didn't happen. Many of the neighbors took refuge in the street, and we took refuge in the house of a neighbor named Petronila Sian. She has a small, very large cane house. 8 families stayed there, including mine. We made a hut where we stayed for approximately 10 days because the cold, the dew, and the mosquitoes were our enemies. Besides, many people started getting sick because of this. Until now, Monday, July 21st, we slept in the patio of our house because we had structural losses and they said we couldn't sleep downstairs because of the tremors that were still going on. We are very sorry about what happened, but the one who is always in control is God our Lord.



Families picking up learning guides for their children.

Hello, I'm Silvia, a fourth-grade teacher. This Tuesday morning felt like a normal day. In the afternoon, our fear of dying began, but God has plans for us.

We lived in fear, dread, and sadness because of the tremors. Thank God, no lives were lost in my family. But for fear that our little house would fall, we slept in the yard of our house, far away from the tall buildings. The first night, however, we didn't get a deep sleep because we felt the tremors constantly, and with no electricity, it was very scary. Thank God, we're here, and although it's very sad to see the streets and the collapsed houses, or to see some people crying for everything they've lost, all we can do is pray and pray, asking God for help with everything that's happening to us.

I am Elvia, the Director of Angelitos de Dios School. I would like to share my little experience. As all my colleagues say, it was a moment of fear and uncertainty because we were not prepared for natural disasters. When the earthquakes began, I thought it was only going to shake that time, but after 10 minutes the worst moments began. The heartbreaking moment is seeing the cries of my nephews, screaming and saying, "Don't let us die." That is the saddest and most regrettable thing. My house cracked and the CONRED told us that we could no longer live there due to the severe damage it had suffered. We did not know where to go. My parents decided to go to a field to take shelter with huts made of nylon. My uncles and aunts also accompanied us because their house was also damaged, totaling 30 people. It is very sad to know that everything is lost, but God is great and wonderful, and little by little we will get ahead. Everything was fine in the field, but the first two days of the earthquakes, we had nothing to eat. It is very sad to tell everyone that there is only bread and a tortilla to eat. Even though we didn't have always have food when we grew up, but as children, that's what we always asked God for.

Thanks to Don Luis de Construcara, who sent me help in the early days so I could eat, and to other people who supported us. Now it's up to God to help us keep going.

