



Heartland International Mission

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New Beginnings at El Tablon Centro and El Tablon Cerna

One of the most challenging parts for Heartland International Mission (HIM) is to understand that we cannot change everything. The lack of economic development opportunities is the greatest barrier to self-sustainability. The people living in the cantons are primarily farmers and their skills have been centered around agriculture. The literacy rate in most cantons is low and inhabitants have very little access to skill development outside of agriculture. The available markets are very competitive or there are significant barriers to entry for their hand-made and agricultural products. We realize the need to either improve the yield of agricultural products, diversify the products grown, or simplify and expand the distribution to available markets. At the same time, we recognize the need to provide educational programs that increase the basic skill-level in reading, writing, math, social, general business, and financial management. Without focused efforts and improvements, the people of the canton will not be able to cover the most basic needs for their family.

We understand the scale of this undertaking and our inability to effect change without additional resources. And that is where the University of Central America (UCA) comes into the picture. The UCA has made a four year commitment to work with Heartland's sister communities, El Tablon Centro and El Tablon Cerna. This partnership will create opportunities for the communities that will allow them to sustain themselves through economic and social development. The UCA had their first "official visit" last month signifying the beginning of the formal relationship with the communities, UCA, and Pastoral Team.

The four year commitment includes:

Phase I – The Diagnostic (3 months) -- The students at the UCA perform a diagnostic to study the demographics of the communities. The students will meet with multiple groups including the leaders of the communities, representatives from other non-governmental organizations, youth groups, older adult groups, and representatives of committees within the community (water, women, health, etc). From the diagnostic the UCA hopes to learn: what are the interests, restrictions, and motivation of the groups in the communities.

Phase II – Study the Diagnostic and Commit to a Theme (1 month) -- The UCA and the students study the results from the diagnostic and present several opportunities to the community that they believe will be a successful product. They look for a product that will grow in the area, be profitable in the market, and the communities can sustain on their own. Then, the communities and the UCA commit to the theme and document the projects that they will move forward on.

Phase III – Create the Plan (1 month) -- The UCA builds the implementation plan and the steps of the project. During this time, they will define the roles of the community members, Pastoral Team, and HIM.

Phase IV – Implement the Plan (3-4 years) -- The UCA begins work in the communities – guiding, teaching, and leading them to success. They provide literacy and technical training to those residents who will be working on the projects. The UCA not only works on a "product" for the community, but also the social necessities. The UCA commits to walk with the community until they are absolutely confident that the community can sustain the project independently.

HIM is thrilled about this opportunity for both the communities and the UCA. The resources of the UCA significantly expand opportunities for the residents. The Pastoral Team and mission co-worker will be involved to keep Heartland informed of the progress throughout the project. And HIM will keep the congregation aware through newsletter articles and the new committee website (www.heartlandinternationalmission.com).