

Chiapas Connection

Spring 2024

Clínica Familiar Lak Ña Clara SNAPSHOT OF A MEDICAL MISSION

We've all heard the phrase "it takes a village;" well, in the case of our medical mission, it takes a village and then some!

Things have certainly changed from the days when our small team would load supplies into a pick-up truck in the early morning hours and set out across rough roads to remote villages. Today, roads and transportation have improved and the establishment of our permanent clinic has made a dramatic difference in delivering health care to the indigenous population.

Despite these improvements, our help is still needed and in November 2023, a team of volunteers from Western New York and central California set out to make a difference. There were 5 physicians, 3 nurses, a nurse practitioner, a midwife, 3 interpreters, and a maintenance worker. They worked alongside seven of our sisters and the permanent clinic staff comprised of 3 physicians, a psychologist, social worker, clinic director, lab technician, nurse, x-ray technician, dentist, permaculture farmer, and maintenance worker. Also stepping in to help were 6 nurses and 1 physician who volunteered from the local city of Palenque. This cooperative effort enabled them to provide care to 585 patients in just 5 days!

The services provided varied from family practice and dental services, to lab services including sonograms and x-rays, ob/gyn examinations and education, nutritional and psychological counseling, as well as pediatric care.

Dr. Peter Kowalski, our team leader from Western New York, notes that having lab services on site has made a tremendous difference to deliver appropriate care. Additionally, being able to collaborate with local clinicians and communicate with specialists back home, has enhanced services and educational opportunities for patients and providers alike. Everyone has worked together with great enthusiasm and it feels as if each team is better than the last. The greatest gift, says Dr. Kowalski, is being able to practice medicine as he was trained to do. The gratitude expressed by the patients is priceless!



CLÍNICA FAMILIAR LAK ÑA CLARA
Salud con dignidad

Del 26 de febrero
al 1 de marzo
del 2024
8:00 am a 2:00 pm

JORNADA MÉDICA
y de servicios

Con médicos de
Estados Unidos

916 690 1153 f Clínica Familiar Lak Ña Clara @clinica_familiar_lak_ña_clara

Prolongacion Velasco Suárez S/N, Colonia Nuevo Belen, a lado del convento de las Hermanas Franciscanas, Palenque, Chiapas.

A local advertisement provides information for the February 2024 medical mission. Below, boxes of supplies are readied by the Sisters at Stella Niagara to be sent with the team.



Go Where the Spirit is Sending You!

Planning for the Future

Tweaks are constantly being made in the day-to-day operations of the clinic. For example, the solar panels that came with the clinic-in-a-can pods were inadequate to provide consistent power, so electric and back-up generators have been installed. Most importantly, the clinic's director is searching for ways to make the clinic self-sustaining. At the moment, payment for services only covers about 50% of clinic expenses, so additional partnerships are being formed to increase clinic revenue, such as contracting x-ray and lab services to outside facilities, and signing a two-year contract to provide medical services to employees working on building the "Mayan Railway."

A current priority is rebuilding the surgical suite pods that sustained storm and flooding damage - a task that is anticipated to take two years and more than \$100,000 to complete. Sister Maria Elena Martinez, Provincial Minister for St. Francis Province, explained that nothing is ever easy and it's always a delicate dance, with one step being reliant on another. For example, because Palenque's population has grown substantially, the health regulations pertaining to the clinic have changed from "rural" to "city," and now change rooms, rest rooms and recovery suites will need to be attached to the surgical suites, x-ray and examination rooms - a change that dramatically increases the cost of repairs and construction. Further, in order to obtain the building permits, the sisters need to confirm they have the funds needed to complete the construction, but they won't know those numbers until a consultant is hired to complete the design, budget and submit the paperwork for the permits. Finally, the permits will set the deadline to complete the work, putting pressure on fundraising and logistical details. While all this is happening, grants are being written to incorporate a surgical rotation at the clinic for residents of California's Marion Medical Center's surgical program. For this to be approved, we need to be sure the construction will be complete!

Throughout all of this, the Sisters of St. Francis hold the faith of their foundress, Mother Magdalen Damen, who always trusted in God's providence.

In 2024, as the Sisters of St. Francis celebrate 150 years of ministry in the United States, God's providence abounds as their ministries continue to grow and flourish!

S. Nancy Zelma, Medical Mission Coordinator
716-754-4312 ext. 777 nzelma@stellaosf.org

Barbara Johnson, Office of Advancement; Donations
716-754-2193 bjohnson@stellaosf.org

4421 Lower River Road, Stella Niagara, NY 14144
www.stellaosf.org

How can you help?

Cash donations, mailed to the address above, may be made payable to Sisters of St. Francis Development Fund. All funds are directed to the clinic's most urgent needs.

Donations of needed supplies:

- *AA or AAA batteries
- *Contour Next diabetes meters, testing strips and lancets
- *Small pill baggies
- *Large bottles (500 pills or more) of children's vitamins, adult vitamins and prenatal vitamins. (Not gummies)
- *Powdered pedialyte
- *Reading glasses, various strengths

Volunteer:

Family physicians and specialists
Nurse practitioners
Nurses
English/Spanish translators



Dr. Peter Kowalski with medical resident and patient (left), and with clinic lab technician and his family.

150
Years!
Crossing the Threshold
Then and Now!

Sisters of St. Francis - USA
Holy Name Province, Sacred Heart Community, St. Francis Province