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January 2025 Newsletter

Happy New Year! 2025! Time passes so quickly, but we are excited about the new year. The Merida Foundation is now in its 22nd year of operation. Every year of that history represents hundreds of hungry kids fed and thousands of rural residents fitted with glasses.

We will be adding another school, Petectunich, this month and have plans for two or three more by the end of the semester. However, before we race into the new year, we want to take time to look back at 2024 and the impact that the Merida Foundation is having.

During the past year we added 3 new schools, bringing our total to 12 and the number fed to around 650. We gave out over 2,500 pairs of glasses to the visually impaired in remote villages in Yucatan state. We funded small projects for our partners, ranging from pots, pans, and stoves, to upgraded classrooms and playgrounds.

Perhaps the most important word in that brief review is “partners.” The Merida Foundation is a small charity facing huge challenges in the Merida area. Our most important partners, our donors, have faithfully supported our efforts, but there is only so much that we can do alone. However, the past year underscored the fact that we are not alone.

We have developed a partnership with the Diocese of Jefferson City, which has made an annual financial contribution to the foundation for many years. We introduced Jake Seifert, the diocesan mission director, to the folks at Escuela Hogar and the diocese funded a solar panel project to minimize the cost of electricity for the boys’ school. We are now looking at other projects for the future.



This past year we developed a relationship with the Jorge Marin Foundation (Fundacion Jorge Marin) founded by the famous Mexican sculptor and painter. The foundation is also interested in the education of children. We agreed to a partnership for the school in Petectunich in which the Jorge Marin foundation would build and equip

the kitchen and then our Merida Foundation would feed the kids. We are looking at further collaboration this year.

The parents of the students we feed are vitally important in our efforts. We have entered partnerships with parent groups in a number of our schools. In addition to parents volunteering to prepare and oversee the meals, we are asking them to take ownership in school projects. For example, if the school needs a video projector, we make it a joint effort, asking them to hold a fundraiser for a portion of the cost and we cover the remainder.

In reviewing 2024, we thought that you might like to hear from some of the local people involved in our work. Here are a few “testimonies” which we hope will give you a feel for the importance and the impact of our presence in the Merida area.

Milton's Testimony

My name is Milton Pech, and I am currently 22 years old, studying for a degree in mechatronics engineering. I decided to pursue this career because I have always had a passion for mathematics and physics, so I wanted to learn more and use this knowledge to benefit society.

When I was a child, I lived with my older brother and my mom. As a single mother, she took care of my brother and me. The house we lived in was small, but our desire to move forward was bigger. Thanks to my mother, I have grown up to be a good person and have been able to reach where I am today.



For financial reasons, my older brother started working after graduating from high school, just as I graduated from middle school. He no longer lives with us, but we always try to stay in touch. At the age of 7, I discovered my love for mathematics, and since then, I began studying it with more dedication and participating in math competitions. In this way, I reached the national stage of the math olympiad in 6th grade.

Four years later, I again reached the national stage while in my first semester of high school. At the same time the Mérida Foundation was supporting the elementary school where I studied. The janitor talked to Mrs. Patricia about me, and they all came to visit me at my house. That day, my mom and I met Mrs. Patricia, who offered her support so that I could continue my studies.

The main financial difficulty I had at that time was paying for transportation to school, as I traveled every day from my home in the town of Yaxkukul to the high school in Mérida. Her help was a great relief for my mom and me, as it allowed us to cover transportation costs. From that moment, I began communicating with Mrs. Patricia by email, telling her how I was doing in school.

At the same time, I received her financial support on a monthly basis, and occasionally, she would visit me personally. Mrs. Patricia then told me that she wanted to support me until

university, which would be a great help for me to focus more on my studies. Currently, I have completed four years of the program, with one year left to graduate. During this time, I have received support from the foundation and have used it for transportation expenses, just as I did in high school.

For my part, I continue to write emails to Mrs. Patricia to inform her of my progress in the program, show her the academic projects I work on, and thank her for all her support. Additionally, in my free time, I tutor elementary, middle, and high school students in mathematics. I enjoy sharing my knowledge and helping other students with the subjects they find difficult.

In the near future, I will graduate as a mechatronics engineer and will be able to work in the industry. I still have many goals ahead of me, and I am determined to achieve them. I will always be grateful to my mom for all her support and sacrifice, as well as to the people who have helped me, including my brother and Mrs. Patricia.

Testimony of Principal Lourdes



I am María Lourdes Colli Uc, the principal of Chichén Itzá Preschool, located in Mazucil. I want to thank the Mérida Foundation for all the support they have provided us. Thanks to the Foundation, the school offers breakfast support services to the children.

Currently, the school's kitchen is equipped with a refrigerator, stove, gas tank, blender, utensils for serving and preparing breakfasts, as well as plates, cups, spoons, among other things. The children have breakfast at school according to the menu

provided by nutritionist Seidy, from the Merida Foundation too. We are very grateful for all the support, including talks for the parents and guidance.

All of this has been a great benefit to the students. At the beginning of the project, it was a bit difficult to get the children to adapt because they were not used to eating certain foods, especially because meals at home are adapted to what is available. However, with the support, the supplies provided by the Foundation, and the nutritionist's talks, we have tried to prepare complete and balanced meals that include vegetables, fruits, meat, and more, ensuring the children receive good nutrition.

Some children accepted the new foods from the beginning, while others had a bit of difficulty incorporating certain foods. We have cases of children who did not eat certain fruits or vegetables, but thanks to persistence and seeing their classmates eat them, many children now consume everything we offer. Parental support has also been crucial. By attending the talks and

meetings organized by the Foundation's nutritionist, parents have become more aware of the importance of giving their children a balanced diet.

The school provides breakfasts thanks to the support you give us, which is a relief because sometimes children arrive without having eaten breakfast due to economic issues at home. Before receiving breakfast support, this affected the children's learning. Now, with the food provided at school, the children concentrate better, participate more in class, and stay active.

Mothers also feel secure knowing their children will be well-fed when they go to school. The mothers are very happy with the support we receive as they see the benefits in their children. They have organized themselves, taking turns to prepare breakfast and clean the kitchen daily.

One mother once told me that her child initially did not like eating anything, especially foods with tomatoes and onions. He rejected everything we offered. However, with persistence and addressing these issues at school, the child (and all the children, really) have started accepting the foods given to them because it is for their benefit. It is a bit challenging, but we are managing to adapt to these dietary changes.

Mazucil is a very small community, and it is easier for the mothers to get fried foods like panuchos and salbutes for breakfast, which the children were used to. Now, they have healthier breakfasts that include fruits, vegetables, and a wider variety of foods. Thanks to your support, we have been able to expand the variety of foods for the children.

Therefore, the support goes beyond just helping the children; it supports the community, the parents, and even the teachers. I am personally very grateful for all the support you have provided because, thanks to you, the school has improved in this aspect. We used to have a dining area but nowhere to store or cook the food. Now we have all of that. Once again, I thank you from the bottom of my heart for all the support you have given us.

We join Lourdes in thanking you for the contribution you make that allows all this to happen. We couldn't do it without students like Milton who embody the hope of our efforts, without teachers like Lourdes who are in the trenches every day, feeding and educating these precious young people. Most of all though we rely on you and your generosity that allows them to do what they do.

In Mexico, there's a New Year's custom of giving *botellas de abundancia*. These contain seven grains including rice, corn, and beans, which signify a wish for prosperity. Your donations do more than express a wish for prosperity, they ensure it by giving these foods to kids.

Un Prospero Año Nuevo!



Merida Foundation Board: Pat Joyce, Larry Lewis, Greg Mihalevich, Mark Saucier, Jamie Schulte, and Anne Scott

In loving memory of Dorothy and Rudy Lemke