



Matching funds are now available for donations to the Lemoa Nutrition Center

We are now beginning to raise the funds needed to operate Lemoa Nutrition Center for another year.

Thanks to a generous commitment from an anonymous donor, donations received through May 31st will be matched up to \$10,000 total.

Donate by check using the enclosed envelope, or online at puravida.org/nutrition



The Lemoa Nutrition Center

In 2016, a young Guatemalan woman studying at a local university came to the Maryknoll Contemplative Community in Lemoa. She asked Sisters Connie and Helen if she could stay with them while she completed her degree. In return, she would help the Sisters with their work. That woman was Valentina, no one knew that she would one day run what is now the Lemoa Nutrition Center.

Valentina stayed with the Maryknoll Sisters for a couple of years while she finished her Bachelor's Degree in Social Work. It was a mutually beneficial arrangement – she needed to live close to the university, and the Sisters were happy for the help of a native K'iche speaker around the house.

During those years, Valentina developed an especially close relationship with Sister Connie. Soon after graduation Valentina landed a job, but Connie encouraged her to find a way to apply her education locally to help needy families in Lemoa. Connie had a dream of starting a nutrition program in the old orphanage building in Lemoa. Connie would arrange for funding from the United States, and Valentina would develop the program in Lemoa. Valentina jumped on board.



Sister Connie and Valentina

Where to begin?

With a roughly 80% malnutrition rate in the area, it was hard to know where to start. Connie and Valentina's first step was to reach out to the local Puesto de Salud, one of the basic government-run health facilities found in most villages in Guatemala. These facilities are only occasionally staffed, and deal mainly with vaccinations and records. In this case, the records were the key. Whatever their shortcomings, these health outposts regularly tracked the weight and height of the local children. With this data they could determine those most in need of assistance.

The initial focus would be on severely malnourished children. The program would also work with mothers lacking sufficient education to care for their children. One of the biggest challenges was finding a way to distribute nutritious food in a way that it couldn't be sold for profit. This is where the in-person feeding program came in.

In all her work in Guatemala, Connie was always laser-focused on human dignity. Any local development solutions that she and Valentina undertook would need to be culturally appropriate and respectful. They were especially focused on the plight of women and children, who are some of the most vulnerable members of the community.

Program Details

The program began operation on August 8, 2016. The basic idea was to invite mothers and children to eat a healthy home-prepared meal each day. Staff would introduce new foods, and teach mothers how to cook nutritious meals at home while children learned and played nearby.

Things started small, but program activities and membership grew each year. Staff was slowly added as possible

Valentina keeps in close contact with the nurse at local Puesto de Salud in Lemoa, who in turn recommends children for the program. The program monitors the height/weight data of children every 6 months. Once the Puesto de Salud says that a child is back within target range, they can leave the program.

Valentina is well-known in the village, and is able to find children that often fly below the radar of government programs:

- families in extreme need;
- children with single mothers;
- families with alcoholic parents

Growth and Development

Valentina knew that she would need a holistic approach if they were going to provide reliable long-term benefits. They began teaching mothers to read and write while the children were eating. Children were encouraged to do arts and crafts. A space was dedicated to radio-based learning for older children who were not able to attend class in-person.

According to Valentina, women in rural Guatemala don't have the same opportunity to share and talk with each other as men do, instead staying in their homes with the children. She sees the Nutrition Center as a rare place where

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Pura Vida Ministries is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with programs in Guatemala.

The mission of Pura Vida is to facilitate the sharing of resources with communities in Guatemala in a meaningful, respectful, and long term way. Our primary focus is on providing educational opportunities for children in rural villages through scholarships, tutoring, and support of local schools. We encourage others to work with us as we give our time, knowledge, and resources to help poor rural communities attain a standard of living in which their children can thrive.

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Letters from a Purple Pen

Some years ago Pura Vida tried a fundraising approach commonly used by nonprofits: sending a stamped return envelope with a fundraising letter. It didn't seem to help, and it caused at least one complaint. Bob Wallace, a new student sponsor, told us that he would discontinue his support if we ever sent him another stamped envelope, period. He felt manipulated, and in retrospect it probably wasn't a great idea.

Bob went on to be the largest single supporter of our annual milk distribution in Lemoa. He was also a dedicated student sponsor. Pura Vida had the privilege of facilitating a wonderful relationship between him and his scholarship student Wendy that lasted for many years. For two people who had never met, their relationship was amazingly close.

From the start, Bob's letters to Wendy were easy to recognize – they were always hand-written in purple ink. His letters were full of wisdom, fun, and love. Wendy wrote back with equal enthusiasm.

In one of Bob's earliest letters to Wendy, he wrote:

As I may have mentioned we only have grandsons, so I hope you don't mind if we consider (pretend) you to be our granddaughter.

They were grandfather and granddaughter from that point on. Bob's wife automatically became grandmother as part of the deal.

I told your grandmother when we first got married that she could not have a cat. We have had a cat ever since.

Bob peppered his letters to Wendy with anecdotes in the style of Mark Twain, one of his favorite authors. Most of his stories had a message:

When I was 15, I tried to quit school and get a job, but my mother would not allow me. I also started smoking cigarettes but she made me quit. She saved my life twice. Smoking will kill you, and without an education life can be poor.

You said in your letter God would reward us for our help to you. He has already done so. Our reward is you.

(A board member from Pura Vida was able to spend time with Bob in the last years of his life, and he granted permission to share these photos and letters.)



Often his letters were motivational:

Education is the best tool for life.

School is important because in life most of the things we possess can be taken away from us, but what is in our heads can never be. Thinking is what makes us human.

Yet even as he got serious, his deep affection for Wendy came through.

Bob and Wendy continued to correspond after she finished the scholarship program. When she had COVID, he sent her a cash gift to help her buy electrolytes. She sent him drawings of her pets. They shared their joys and sorrows.

In December, 2021, Bob's wife passed away. He wrote to Wendy:

I am sorrowful as I have lost the love of my life and wife of 58 years. She blessed me and made me happy. I have joyful memories that will last for 100 years.

Soon after, Bob's health rapidly began to deteriorate. His final note to Pura Vida was full of concern for his sponsored students. Alarming, it was hand-written in black ink.

Due to my declining health, I am now under home care after a bout of congestive heart failure. My condition makes it extremely difficult to communicate with my students, so I will cease. Be assured that my support will not decline.

Please reassure them that I love them. Facing hard times. All blessings, Bob

Bob passed away in October, 2022. In his final months, he gave one last gift to his remaining 8th grade student. True to his thoughtful nature, Bob pre-paid for his education through the end of high school.



Persistence pays off with a career in medicine

In this issue our guest contributor is Candelaria, a former Pura Vida scholarship student (GU-QCH-0009) who has gone on to great things. While not all of our students have a story like this, it's impossible to know ahead of time which ones might. That's why we try to maximize our student recruitment at an early age.

My name is Candelaria. I am 31 years old, and I live in Santa Cruz del Quiche.

I enrolled in the John Wesley School at the age of 13. I was excited for the opportunity to study and improve myself. My only support came from my mother, who had never attended school in her life. She really wanted me to study. I knew that finances would be difficult, but I didn't care. I just wanted to go to school.

As time went by my mother got sick. I continued in school, but with even less funds than before. God was so great to me. I remember a time when I hadn't paid my tuition in five months. School Director Fausto saw me crying one day and he asked what was happening. I told him that I would not be able to continue studying because of my economic situation and my mother's illness.

He told me not to worry, and that he would nominate me for a full scholarship from Pura Vida because I was a really good student. I did receive a scholarship, which allowed me to complete my high school studies. I graduated with a concentration in pre-med. I was so happy.

At that point I really wanted to find a job, but nobody trusted an inexperienced teenager. So I decided to study nursing at the university. I didn't know how much it would cost, but I enrolled anyway. Thank God my sponsors continued supporting me. The degree required 3 and a half years of study, but I didn't care. I just wanted to graduate from university.

Thanks to the scholarship from Pura Vida, I graduated with an Associates Degree in Nursing from Rafael Landívar University in



Candelaria

late 2014. On May 5, 2015, the regional hospital in Santa Cruz offered me a job. I worked there as supervisor of the maternal area for 3 years. In 2018 I was promoted to the position of Head of Labor and Child-birth, where I worked for 4 years. Later I began to supervise the COVID department, and now I am the head nurse for internal medicine. I love my job so much.

Last year I also started working for a private clinic, Hospital Sagrada Familia, as head nurse for internal medicine. It is very tiring to have two jobs, but I love them both. I like to serve others, and a profession in healthcare lets me do this kind of humanitarian work.

Thanks to my Pura Vida scholarship, I finally achieved my dream. In 2021, I graduated with a Bachelor's

Degree in Nursing from Davinci University. I am satisfied with everything I have done, and grateful for the effort of those who supported me, especially my sponsors, who were there when I needed them. I want to thank them from the bottom of my heart for giving me so much. I love them, and they are always on my mind.

I know I am fortunate to have realized my dream, even though it required some difficult sacrifices. I want to give thanks to those who believed in me. I became a very strong woman because of the obstacles I had to overcome along the way. The obstacles did not make me give up, but instead gave me a reason to keep fighting.

I encourage anyone who has the opportunity to study with a scholarship to make the most of it. I would motivate them to continue studying, fight for their dreams, seek success in life, and be thankful for the people who believe in them.

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village women can eat together, share with each other, and just socialize. Valentina sees this as a great psychological help, therapy really, for mothers to be able to simply weave and chat with others. It's also an opportunity for small children not yet in school to be with others their age.

Early during the COVID-19 pandemic, Sister Connie passed away unexpectedly. Valentina was left to administer the entire program. Fortunately, funding was still coming in from prior donors via Maryknoll. Sister Helen stepped in to facilitate the finances in Connie's absence.

Government restrictions related to the pandemic soon made serving in-person meals at the center impossible. Valentina quickly pivoted to distributing food bags to families with the remaining funding. It wasn't ideal, but it was better than doing nothing during a time of extreme financial hardship for local families.

In late 2021, Sister Helen told us that she had been recalled to the United States. At this point, the continued operation of the Lemoa Nutrition Center looked doubtful. There would no longer be any Maryknoll local staff to administer funds. As funding for the center ran low, Pura Vida began talks with Valentina to work out a budget in order to continue the program. Many prior donors and contacts of Sisters Helen and Connie came forward to continue their support. The program continued to provide food bags, and in-person meals were resumed once restrictions were dropped later in the year.

The Lemoa Nutrition Center is now fully operational, and Valentina is still making plans for the future. High on her list of goals for the program is to expand the holistic approach. She wants to increase the amount of time she's able to spend with the mothers and children, for both learning and socializing. She wants to increase salaries for the cooks, and hire a bilingual assistant (Spanish/K'iche) to teach hygiene and literacy, and to interact with the children.

Pura Vida is currently funding consumables and salaries for the program. We would like to do more, but it was something of a leap of faith for us just to add the new program to our budget. Please consider joining us in helping make new things happen in Lemoa!



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Help create a brighter future for children in Guatemala

Here are some ways you can help us maintain and expand our programs:

SPONSOR A STUDENT –

The average student in rural Guatemala drops out of school by the time they reach 3rd grade. Your sponsorship can help them get to high school and beyond. Make a dream come true – sponsor the education of a student in Guatemala. [puravida.org/education]

TRAVEL TO GUATEMALA WITH US –

“Travel with a purpose” is a good way to describe what our international work trips are all about. Our emphasis is on developing and maintaining relationships with local communities and sharing our time and resources with our partners in Guatemala. Team experiences include building homes for families in need, teaching English to local students, and seeing first-hand the work we are doing in Guatemala. [puravida.org/trips]



DONATE ONLINE –

Support our Un-sponsored Student Fund, which lets us keep more students in school while looking for sponsors. You can make a secure donation online at the link below. [puravida.org/donate]

LEGACY GIVING –

Help sustain our work in Guatemala far into the future by making a contribution through your IRA RMDs, wills, securities, and life insurance. [puravida.org/legacy]

ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS –

Do you want to make a really long-term investment? Our Legacy Endowment will one day give us flexibility to improve our programs and increase our level of support in Guatemala. Since this endowment is in the early stages of funding, we can really use your assistance in getting it up to speed. [puravida.org/endowments]