

Dear and good friends,

Greetings from 70-degree North Carolina. Merry Christmas to you all. It feels more like the 4th of July than Christmas, but we'll take it. Elisa and family and Nan and I, plus Nan's mom, plan to visit Isaac and Elizabeth in Atlanta for Christmas. We're excited. We plan to see Molly and her family (in Hawaii) in February.

I've been back from Guatemala for almost three weeks. A few comments:

As I walked around the village, I heard more spoken Mam and less Spanish than I can ever remember. Sociolinguists would say that this shows the strong identity that the Mam feel for their community. Mam continues to be spoken by young and old alike—especially the sizeable teenage population which also speaks good Spanish, but who choose to speak Mam in public because they are proud of their heritage and mindful of their legacy, even as young people.

There has been a conspiracy of factors that have come together to help make this happen. Linguistic training has helped people see that Mam is as grammatically complex and as semantically nuanced as Spanish or any other language. There are now two generations of proud Mam Indians who have experienced seeing their language being written and read. The Central Mam New Testament was published in 1999 and now translation work continues on the Old Testament. While I was there, Mam leaders would come by the office and ask for translated chapters of Psalms and Genesis to take back to their congregations to preach and teach. Today, more Mam people read Mam, including the Mam Scriptures, than at any time ever in their long history. May God bless the reading of His Word among the thousands of language groups around the world. And as we celebrate the Advent of the Logos into the world, may the groups that still haven't heard the Good News come to hear and read and experience it in their mother tongue.

There is a Mam consortium of churches. Much of the praying and singing and preaching (and announcements) go on in Mam. There have been local schools and even regional universities that promote bilingualism and reading and writing in both Spanish and the language of the heart. And there have been literally thousands of North Americans who have visited Comitancillo to help with projects and health care and Bible study, and small businesses, and training of all kinds—all committed to the premise that the Mam deserve to use and to maintain their own language. Thanks to all of you as well. You've been part of the "conspiracy of factors."

And there has been grass roots interest in Mam (and other indigenous language) literacy. Nancy and I and our colleagues are pleased and humbled to have had a part in this people movement. A bigger part has been played by the LAMP literacy program under the direction of our good friend, Byron, and the coaching of our Wycliffe Canadian friends, the Vaters—plus a lot of other people—gringo, Latino and indigenous.

LAMP's plan for this year is to publish literature: a dictionary, some Old Testament portions, some linguistic booklets and some cultural and educational materials. Byron reminds us that if there aren't Mam materials to read, the ability to read them (if there were any) isn't very promising.

I wonder if you might be willing to help with this. We're looking to help fund Byron's work for the coming year with enough left over to publish a number of books in Mam. The project requires around \$1500 a month to support Byron and his family and to provide office space, some transportation costs and funds for publications. The plan is for publications to generate income which will be plowed back into future publications.

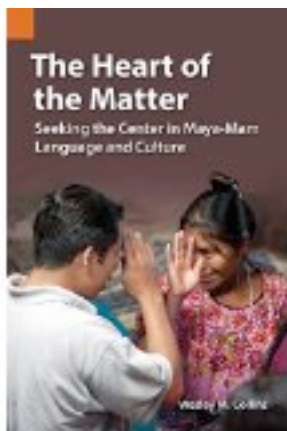
If you would like to support this cause, an easy way to do so is by credit card. Go to:

<http://www.mhm-guatemala.org/>

Go to the site and navigate to "Give Now." Then look about two thirds of the way down the column of ministries cited and find "Literacy Ministry." Then just follow directions. It is a secure site. Nancy and I have used it for several years. The site is run by good friends of ours and it produces IRS acceptable receipts for your charitable giving. There is provision for a one time gift and also a way to set up for monthly giving, if that would be your pleasure.

To change the subject, the book that I have been working on about Mam language and culture is now available at amazon.com.

If you go to the site and search for <Collins The Heart of the Matter: Seeking the Center in Maya-Mam Language and Culture> you can find it. It lists for \$40 (I had nothing to do with setting the price), but you can get it from a parallel seller at the



Amazon site for \$30 (plus shipping) so it isn't so bad for an academic book.

To change the subject yet again, Francis Schaeffer, that great Christian philosopher of the 70's and early 80's, said that the Advent is the touchstone of true Christianity. He went on to say that all "Christian heresy" starts with a denial of the virgin birth. I confess not being able to put my fingers on the exact quote, so if you have some time on your hands and a better manipulation of Google than I do, you're welcome to search for the quote. I may actually have heard it at a live conference with Dr. Schaeffer in Dallas when Nancy and I were in grad school back in the day.

Well, the advent is again upon us in song and Scripture and our own deep yearnings for a relationship with God. He made this possible "by Thine advent here" (quoted from O Come, O Come Emmanuel). I really love the serious music of Christmas.

God's best to all and thanks for your participation in our work among the Mam and among those who would work for the linguistic and spiritual good of indigenous minorities.

Blessings to all and Merry Christmas.

Wes and Nancy Collins