To touch hearts, change lives, and transform the world – this is the mission of UUS.

In June of 2018, 14 members from our congregation traveled to Guatemala to volunteer and to serve three organizations committed to making a difference in the lives of indigenous Mayan people.

Because of our long-standing relationship with these Guatemalans, we wear clothing made by our friends there as a way to honor and share their culture.

Our first stop was Antigua, a city near the capitol. We just happened to be there the day **Volcán de Fuego** - Fire Volcano - erupted just 15 miles away. On Sunday afternoon we noticed it was raining – but it was raining ash and sand! Over 2,000 residents near the volcano perished, were injured, or displaced. So while there, we not only delivered the school supplies we had brought for a local school, but we mobilized and purchased and delivered emergency supplies for families displaced and injured by the volcano. After the service you are welcome to check out the volcanic ash we brought home with us.

The second stop, *Chico Mendes Reforestation Project* in Pachaj, is in the western highlands of Guatemala near Quetzaltenango. This organization is based on principles of environmental remediation and community awareness. For 18 years Armando Lopez, with his wife, Claudia, have been planting trees and educating the community on the environmental importance of trees. His stated goal in 2016 was to plant 3,000 *pinabete* trees to lure the quetzal bird back to the nearby mountainside from where the community draws its water. Guatemalan law protects both the *pinabete* tree and the quetzal bird. If Armando is successful and the bird returns to the mountainside, it will prevent Canadian mining companies from mining in the mountains near his community. To date, he has planted 2,500 of those *pinabete* trees.

In 2018, the Chico Mendes project planted 14,000 additional trees in the community. Our group helped with 500 of those. The 2019 goal is to plant 28,000 trees.

Our third stop was the *Centro Maya Project*, in San Juan La Laguna, located west of Guatemala City on the shores of a picturesque volcanic lake. We brought nearly 200 pairs of shoes - many of them donated by you - to distributetofamilies in need. *Centro Maya* programs alsosupport education and the dignity of work, offer food assistance, and connect people to medical care with an emphasis on helping the deaf and hearing impaired. Benedicto Ixtamer and his wife, Maria, are passionate and dedicated to coordinating these programs in their community.

It was rewarding and motivating to work side by side with Armando, Claudia, Benedicto, and Maria. They happily shared their lives, their homes and their cultures with us. Their grand visions for their communities are truly inspirational.

We look forward to sharing our stories of touching hearts, changing lives, and transforming the world with you today.

Deb Schoelerman

