

Springbank United Church Celebrates Easter with a Guatemalan Tradition

We had managed to score a couple of spots on the steps of the cathedral only about an hour before the procession was due to pass by this spot. We considered this very lucky considering our experience of the Calgary Stampede parade and arriving on the street about 4 hours before the parade passes by in order to secure curb seats. We were there to watch the first of several parades during Semana Santa in Antigua Guatemala. It was about 9 pm and dark. There was a definite air of excitement, but also of calm and seriousness. You could hear the drone of the band that follows each procession, you can smell the incense blocks before it arrives at your location along the route.

We were there, two families from Springbank United Church for Easter 2010 as part of a voluntour to Guatemala with Hearts and Hands Foundation. We had completed our week of building stoves in the highlands of Guatemala and were now participating in the second week and second purpose of the foundation, to learn about the culture of Guatemala.

Hundreds of years of tradition are played out in the streets of Antigua Guatemala during Semana Santa or Easter week. Guatemalans celebrate Easter by holding processions (parades) depicting Easter week and the passion story. Huge platforms — (floats) weighing

up to 3 tons, made of wood, and carried on the shoulders of up to 80 men at a time are carried through the city.

Lining the streets, families and businesses create beautiful carpets or Alfombras. These carpets are made of dyed sawdust and can be anywhere from eight to eighty or more feet in length. Generations of families and friends gather together to create these carpets to make beautiful the path the procession will take. Hours and hours (often up to 12 or more) are spent on making these carpets, so that the procession may walk over them. House of work are destroyed in minutes as the procession and the platform travel over the carpet. To the people of Guatemala, this signifies the sacrifice that Christ made for the people of the world.

As we sat waiting in the dark for the procession to reach our spot along the route, the hundreds of people who were dressed in purple robes and part of the pre procession were passing out small purple candles to the crowds of hundreds of spectators from all over the world. We were about as far from home as we had ever been for Easter. As we saw the platform navigate the corner, the candles were lit one by one and a wave of candle light filled the square. The procession marched by us with the platform swaying to the movement of the men as they carried the platform on their shoulders.

I thought of our traditions in our little church at Springbank and thought I might keep my candle and use it to light the Advent candles at our church at Christmas as a way of remembering the people of Guatemala but also of thanking the people from our congregation who have supported the work of the Hearts and Hands Foundation. We came home and life went on. Our family wasn't home this Christmas, but that little purple candle still sat on my bureau waiting to be used.

I thought about this and dreamed that maybe we could make a carpet for our congregation for Easter. I spoke to the other family and they were game. It took some researching because you can't buy coloured sawdust in Calgary. We figured it out and on the Saturday between Good Friday and Easter, 10 of us gathered at Springbank United Church to produce the carpet you see in the photo attached. We did not, have a procession walk through it as they do in Guatemala. We had the carpet on display for three weeks and some are already talking about the design we will use for our carpet next Easter. Oh, and the purple candle was used to light the Christ Candle on Easter Sunday.

— Linda McLean
Springbank United, Calgary



Laying the base



In the process...



Finished carpet