

InnerCHANGE—Central America

Nate and Jenny Bacon

My wife Jenny (who is Guatemalan—though we met and married in San Francisco) and I serve as missionaries with [InnerCHANGE](#), an ecumenical incarnational Christian Order among the Poor, in Central America. We live in Quetzaltenango (also known as ‘Xela’), the second largest city of Guatemala, in the western highlands, where over half the population is indigenous. We serve as **Central America Regional Directors** for InnerCHANGE, and as part of the **Horizons** team establishing new InnerChange teams in new places. I have been with InnerCHANGE for 30 years. Before moving to Guatemala in 2009, Jenny and I spent over 15 years working with Latino gang members in San Francisco. InnerCHANGE began among Cambodian refugees and Latino immigrants in Santa Ana, CA in 1985, and currently has 17 sites among the poor on 5 continents.



With my wife Jenny, our son Nathanael, Jr. (17), daughter Gabriela (25), and her boyfriend Thibault, and on the Right our Foster son Agustin (38). Agustin came to live with us at 17, one of many gang members who lived with us in SF. The photo was taken at his new job in Hayward, CA where he is being groomed for Director of Operations at a large wholesale meat company after just two weeks on the job.

InnerCHANGE (as part of Novo/ formerly Church Resource Ministries, based in Anaheim) sends teams to live and work in marginalized barrios and slums around the world – places most people want to avoid or ignore. Our mission seeks to live out the good news of Jesus among the poor, up close and personal, both with words and deeds. We believe that God transforms societies by transforming people and communities, and that takes time. We focus on deep and mutually transforming relationships, working among and alongside the people we love and serve, to see communities transformed from the inside out. God often uses our teams as an extended family for those who have no family, and as a bridge between the Church and the streets.

One of our unique characteristics is that we have Evangelical Protestants of many different denominations, together with Catholics, united in the same mission. My ecclesial path began in the Lutheran Church, then Baptist, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Vineyard, almost-Anglican, almost-Orthodox, with a bit of Anabaptist flavoring before

finally joining the Catholic Church in 1992! There were no Catholics in InnerCHANGE at that time, so they had to decide whether to kick me out or be more open! Thankfully the CRM/ Novo leadership opted for the latter. This eclectic ecclesial journey has given me a deep appreciation for all the beautiful manifestations of the grace of God in the greater Body of Christ. And the parable of unity we have been able to live out for over 26 years has been a great sign of the Gospel (John 17) in severely divided contexts.

Interestingly enough, God has magnified our concentrated focus on 'breaking down the dividing wall of hostility' in the streets and the small and low places, and we have found ourselves invited into global conversations as a result. Here are a few from the past year or so:

- **Wittenberg 2017:** November, 2017. With 400 Christians from all manner of denominations, gathered at the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in Luther's town of Wittenberg to repent for our divisions, and pray for unity in Christ.
- **World Mission Conference:** Arusha, Tanzania; March, 2018. I was one of 20 Vatican representatives at this incredible multi-denominational missions conference, held once every 10 years. 1000 delegates from around the globe, and from nearly every denomination, all focused on living out the mission of Christ in the world, and were invited to speak as well.
- **Global Christian Forum:** April, 2018. We were two of 250 representatives selected from all over the world for the 3rd world-wide gathering of this innovative, yet simple approach to Christian unity, which focuses particularly on involving Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and Independent Churches, alongside mainline denominations.
- **The Initiative:** Wisconsin; June, 2018. A gathering of 60 representatives of a broad swath of denominations, but clustered around Evangelical-Catholic relationships, and centered on being together in the Mission of Jesus.

This last phrase best describes us: *"together in the Mission of Jesus"*. We are focused on bringing and being Good News to the Poor. Our ministry is in the trenches, in the broken places, among broken people. It is precisely there that we seek to be instruments of healing and reconciliation, that the Broken Body of Christ might be made whole, and the 'world might believe'...it is there that we also discover our own brokenness, and find the grace of God bringing healing to us as well...true Inner Change...

On the following pages you will find overviews of the InnerCHANGE teams and New Starts we are currently overseeing in Guatemala, Honduras, and New York City.

GIVING INFORMATION

Link to Novo/InnerChange Giving Page: <http://staff.novo.org/Bacon>

For questions or assistance, please contact: Trevor Smith. trevor.smith@novo.org

(714) 779-0370

CURRENT INNERCHANGE TEAMS WHOSE LEADERS WE SUPERVISE:



*L: German and Karla in back row, (Yudi in between). Our nephew Julio is front left, planning to join the East Harlem team.
R: The extended Xela InnerChange family with the street kids among whom they serve.*

- **Quetzaltenango (Xela), Guatemala** (founded 2006)
 - Team of eight, led by German and Karla Avila, from Xela.
 - Ministry focused on children and youth living and working on street, (shining shoes, selling gum, etc.), who easily get caught up in drugs.
 - Sports teams and tournaments.
 - Getting kids back into school. Scholarships, Tutoring.
 - Life-on-life mentoring, out in the streets, and in the homes of our missionaries. Bible study, re-parenting. Restorative justice circles.
 - Carpentry training for more manual work and artistic kids.
 - Ministry with women in jail. Bible study/ mentoring.
 - Presence ministry at center for deported unaccompanied minors caught in Mexico trying to make it to the US.
 - Chepe, who lives with German and Karla, and considers them his parents, was the first shoe-shine kid we met in 2006. Just last month, he graduated from Law School!



Chepe next to me, having just graduated from Law School, and Byron who overcame addictions, and just graduated from high school, heading to College, and also has a thriving Carpentry business! Celebrating both their accomplishments!



L: Jenny w/ team: Jose, Celida, and Ana Beatriz; Blue building is new Nutrition program dining room. Jose and Celida hope to build a home for themselves and future missionaries where they are standing. C & R: Games & activities with kids in nutrition & peace programs.

- **Tegucigalpa, Honduras** (founded 2015)

- Team of three, led by Jose Peñate (from El Salvador) and his wife Celida (from Mexico), together with a team member from Colombia.
- Poorest neighborhood of the capital city of Honduras 'La Nueva Capital'.
- Life-on-life discipleship, Bible study groups, catechism, focused primarily on youth.
- Malnutrition program for children. Local foundation built a new building on property InnerCHANGE purchased this year. (Interesting God story, the property was purchased from an imprisoned drug trafficker, and was an area formerly known for holding and torturing kidnap victims!)
- "Sowers of Peace" program for children. Gospel-based curriculum building foundations for nonviolence in a violent neighborhood in the #1 country for homicides in the world!
- Other recent involvements include helping to find water, dig a well, and create water system to meet the needs of a neighborhood where the poor often have to decide between buying food or buying water.
- As a Deacon in the Catholic Church, Jose has had an increased pastoral influence, and a prophetic impact on the Archdiocese of Tegucigalpa.
- Jose and Celida, together with the Church, helped to build and establish a medical clinic in a place that is far removed from medical services. Surprisingly, our Guatemalan nephew Aidan (who is a doctor) and his wife Johanna decided to move to Honduras and be the first to officially staff the clinic! Aidan is the eldest son of German and Karla, who direct our Xela team, and Johanna is the eldest daughter of our missionaries in Caracas, Venezuela!



L: W/ Ana Beatriz in front of cistern project for new well. C: Aidan & Johanna and the new clinic. R: With the whole team.



L: Fito and Nanci Sandoval. C: At the entrance to their house on one side, the dump on the other. R: Rick Steves (PBS travel show guy) and David Beckmann (Pres. of Bread for the World) visited their home in October, and will film a travel show focused on combatting hunger. It will cover Ethiopia and Guatemala, and Fito and Nanci will be featured! (Fall 2019).

- **Guatemala City, Guatemala** (joined InnerCHANGE in Feb, 2018, but 12 yrs. in ministry)
 - Led by Fito and Nanci Sandoval, from Guatemala City.
 - In slum at edge of largest garbage dump in Central America, our missionaries live in a tin house on top of garbage landfill 100 yards from the current dump entrance.
 - Fito grew up in the garbage dump, was a founding MS-13 gang member in that slum for 7 years, and then had a radical conversion. Of his 70 fellow gang members, only three are alive today. From there he moved fairly quickly into ministry.
 - Fito and Nanci were deeply formed in ministry with YoungLife and have raised up bands of young leaders (both men and women) for youth group Bible studies. They utilize regular camps and meetings to mentor/disciple these leaders, and to help bring in non-Christians and new Christians.
 - Sports discipleship ministries. (Soccer).
 - Whole family discipleship with several neighborhood families.
 - Fathers and Mothers groups...so critical in a place where all conditions seem to battle against healthy family life.
 - Support of local artisans, creating recycled art from the garbage itself.
 - Fito also helps promote collaboration between disparate NGOs all working in the same area, yet so often completely disconnected.

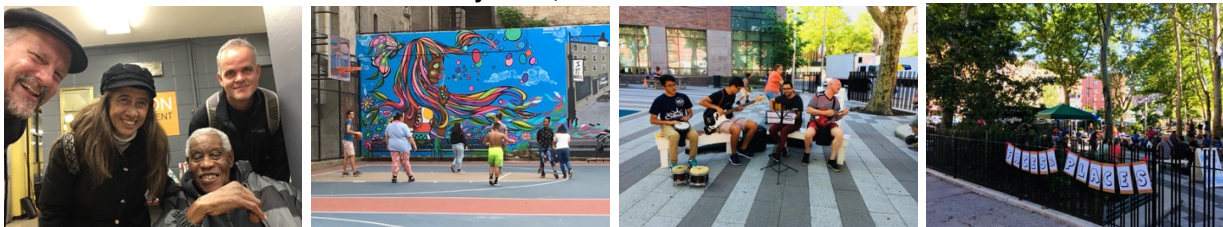


1: Nanci with women leaders in the slum. 2: Camp for leaders. 3: Camp for youth-early discipleship. 4: Fito speaks to NGO leaders serving in the garbage dump area.



Chris and Naomi Lawrence and their four beautiful kids (and Bobby their dog). Naomi's impressive yarn work at center.

- **East Harlem, New York City** (joined InnerCHANGE in fall 2018, but 4 yrs. in ministry)
 - Led by Chris and Naomi Lawrence, from England.
 - Our nephew Julio, a former atheist, who has been an IC missionary for 2 years in Xela, has discerned a call to this team after a summer internship.
 - Chris and Naomi in gradual transition from Chris' pastorate of the Church of the Living Hope on E. 104th in East Harlem (aka 'the Barrio')
 - Through no intervention on our part, a family appeared, interested in the Church apartment just as Chris and Naomi were looking to move out. And we know the family! Ruben Nuño is former pastor of the church in LA, where most of our IC team attends! I walked 150 miles with Ruben two years ago on an immigrant solidarity pilgrimage. He and his wife Meg are the perfect balance to Chris and Naomi, and eager to take on more church leadership...which Chris is eager to give away! 😊
 - Creative cultural block parties to foster community, celebration, and spiritual interest. Such community activities are rare here at best.
 - Listening campaigns bringing young people in to 'map' the demographics (spiritual and otherwise) of the neighborhood.
 - Particular focus on Gaylord White complex, large, historic senior living apartment building. Cultural activities, song, art, outings, Biblical reflections, photography projects.
 - Collaborative presence amongst more permanent street/ drug set.
 - Naomi does the most amazing yarn work displayed on fences throughout the neighborhood, beautifying cold streets, recently contracted to do a piece for a tv show! She also teaches this kind of art in local schools.
 - In process of serious support raising (Family of six, Manhattan rent!)
 - Chris has been working on attracting investors to communally purchase local housing which can then be rented at affordable rates to missionaries for a set number of years, after which owners can sell.



L: With 86 yr old Anthony at Gaylord White Complex. Other photos: Sports, Music, and Park Cultural ministry events.