

*Sanchez Family*

Personal Update

Hi Friends,

We haven't given a personal update in a while, so I wanted to take a moment to tell you how we are all doing. I am coming up on my 10th anniversary of living in Guatemala; My 18-year-old self would never believe this is the life I'm living. I'm not living in Tulsa, using my business degree, with my 2.5 kids like I always thought I would be!

I just turned 32, and Kevin is 34. We are both the founders and operators of Academy of Future Leaders (AFL), an English academy created to help Guatemalans of all ages learn English in the afternoons and give themselves better job opportunities, especially as Guatemala's tourism industry continues to thrive. AFL is now in its sixth year, and we have over 200 students!



This year, we also launched SEEDS in the mornings, a bilingual Christian preschool with hopes of eventually expanding into an elementary school. SEEDS was born out of a very personal question. We were driving 30–45 minutes every day to give our own kids access to a good-quality education, and we started wondering: What are other families in our area doing? Why are there no good educational options closer to home? SEEDS is our attempt to help fill that gap.

Our oldest, Fernanda (20), is working full-time at an NGO in Antigua while attending college on Saturdays to study psychology. Evelin (19) is set to graduate as a preschool teacher in October and will be joining us as an assistant teacher at SEEDS in January 2027. Norma (17) is halfway through business school and thriving. We are incredibly proud of her—she finally got in trouble for talking in class after struggling to find friends when she started at a new school. Anita (13) is in her first year of middle school and is taking some classes with the 9th graders because she is so advanced. Evelin, Norma, and Anita are all valedictorians of their classes, and we couldn't be more proud of them. Kevin (better known as Keke, 4) is studying with us in the mornings at SEEDS and thoroughly enjoying school. Hazel (3) will join him in January and will also be attending SEEDS.

And now for our BIG announcement...

Our family of eight will soon be a family of nine! We will be adding another little member to our family in 2027. I am currently 16 weeks pregnant, and my due date just happens to be Fernanda's birthday in late January!

Our family is starting to feel more like a herd, but honestly, we wouldn't have it any other way. We are incredibly grateful for the life we have been given, for the people who have become part of our family along the way, and for all of you who continue to follow, support, and encourage us from near and far.

We can't wait to see what this next year brings!



Loving People Well

Very early on in our relationship, even before we were married, Kevin and I would frequently talk about what we had seen done well—and not so well—on the mission field. We have seen many missionaries with incredible intentions, but time and time again, we have also seen “missions” done in ways that unintentionally created dependency, caused hurt, and reinforced paternalism. Kevin, in many ways, has personally experienced the effects of missions done wrong.

Because of this, we agreed on a few things from the very beginning. Foremost, we wanted to love people well. With every decision we made, we wanted to consider the long-term effects on the development, dignity, and well-being of the people in our community. We would prioritize our staff and do everything in our power to treat them with respect and pay them fairly. We would choose the harder path, over and over again, if it meant contributing to the long-term health and growth of our community rather than creating a culture of dependency. **We have always wanted to help people who want to help themselves.**

A few Bible verses have really stuck with us over the past decade. Both from 1 John:

“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God... Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.” And “Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.”

For us, loving people well means more than saying we care. It means putting that love into action—in the way we treat our staff, the decisions we make, the opportunities we create, and the way we think about the long-term health of our community. Kevin, especially, has always placed a huge importance on making sure our staff is well cared for. Recently, we had an encounter that really reaffirmed that we are accomplishing what we set out to do.

At the end of last year, we approached one of our older and more experienced afternoon teachers, Vicky, about working as a preschool teacher at SEEDS in the mornings. She told us she was making about Q5,500, or roughly \$725 a month, in her current teaching position in the mornings at a different establishment. She said she would happily come work with us if we could pay her roughly the same amount. I hung my head. We were nowhere close to being able to pay that. Teachers in our area average around Q900, or about \$120 a month. While we already pay significantly more than the average for our area, we simply could not match what Vicky was making.

Fast-forward to last month. Vicky approached us and asked if there were any teaching positions available in the mornings. Honestly, I was confused. She knew where we stood on salary and benefits. I reminded her that we couldn't offer anything close to what she was making at her other school.

She told us, ***“If you can pay me about half of what I am currently making at my other teaching job in the mornings, I would love to come work at SEEDS. These last two years at AFL, I have felt more loved, seen, and taken care of than I have at any of my previous employments. You both are excellent bosses, and I am at a point in my life where I want to love my job and feel like I am making a difference. This work environment is like nothing I have ever experienced before.”***

I turned to Kevin and immediately said, *“Draw up the contract. Have her sign before she changes her mind!”*

Little comments and connections like this fill our cups. They remind us why we have chosen the harder path so many times over the past decade. They reaffirm that we are leading our ministry the way we always hoped we would—with respect, humility, and a genuine desire to love people the way we believe God loves us. We don't want to simply *do things for* people. We want to walk alongside them, create opportunities, invest in their gifts, and build something that contributes to the long-term health and flourishing of our community.

At the end of the day, we want people to know they are seen, valued, respected, and loved. Sometimes, the best confirmation that you're getting it right comes in the form of a teacher who chooses to take a pay cut just to be part of what you're building.

As always, thank YOU for being a part of this journey with us.

Support

Lauren & Kevin Sanchez

Thank you for your gifts and prayers. Reach us by email at lauren.s@cimissions.org

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PO Box 192

Wilmore, KY

40390-0192

