



## Excerpts from Christmas Letter to Greg and Maura Robertson and Others

**BY BROTHER JAMES MILLER, FSC**

December 1981

Dear Friends,

Greetings and best wishes for a peaceful and blessed Christmas and New Year. I hope this finds you in good health and in good spirits. I am presently in the States for a short visit with my family and for knee surgery.

Please excuse a duplicated letter at this time – it's the only way I can keep up with my correspondence and maintain contact with my many relatives and friends.

My first year in Guatemala was a very interesting and rewarding experience, but my many responsibilities there didn't allow me much time for correspondence. Please excuse the delay if you've written during the year.

After nearly 10 years in Nicaragua and a year and a half in the States, I arrived in Huehuetenango, Guatemala, in early January 1981. Our community of Brothers consisted of three from the States and three from Guatemala. I had a double assignment: to teach in our school in Huehuetenango and to help direct the Indian Center (Casa Indígena De La Salle). Both assignments were challenging: The former, because I was assigned to teach Guatemalan art (I had to become an "expert" overnight!) and several English classes, and I was responsible for guidance in a school of 900 pupils; the latter, because it meant living and working with 150 Indian boys in a boarding school with the help of two other Brothers.

My duties at the Indian Center also included the maintenance of a large building and responsibility for the small farm (10-12 acres) that is one of the educational projects of the Indian Center. (There is also a carpentry shop.)

The days were often long, but I thoroughly enjoyed my work with the Indian boys. Through daily association I have come to respect and love them all and to have deep respect for their centuries of Mayan history and tradition that are their heritage.

Guatemala is a beautiful country of mountains, valleys, lakes, lush tropical forests and fertile coastal plains. The ancient Mayan modes of dress and custom blend with those of the Spanish conquerors to form a rich panorama of colors, sounds and special traditions. The Indians still speak their traditional Mayan tongues. Seven or eight Indian tongues are spoken among the boys at the Indian Center — Spanish has to be the common language.

The Indians are industrious farmers, honest, peace-loving, simple people whose hospitality is proverbial. I always find it a joy to visit the homes of the boys from the Indian Center. The Indians from Guatemala form about 50% of the 7 million-plus population of the country, but they are the poor, the oppressed, the forgotten ones of Guatemala. Many of them are desperately poor, the majority is illiterate, and malnutrition and infant mortality are endemic problems.

Our apostolate at the Indian Center has for its principal purpose the formation of educated Indian leaders among the Indian population. We have hundreds of requests each year from priests, sisters and village leaders to accept boys from their towns and villages, but we can accept only 150. The selection process is difficult, but we try to accept those with the most leadership potential. We ask the families to pay \$12.50 a month for their sons' room and board and schooling, but many can only pay a fraction of that. Real costs are \$50 per boy per month. The rest of our funding comes from the Christian Brothers in the U.S., the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, and from many generous relatives and friends in the U.S. and Europe. CARE provides some rice, wheat flour, cooking oil and so on each month. God must smile on our venture with those fine lads, because somehow we always manage to receive help just when we need it most.

I can't end this letter without asking for your prayers for Guatemala (and all of Central America). The level of violence here is reaching appalling proportions (murders, torture, kidnappings, threats, etc.), and the Church is being persecuted because of its option for the poor. The Indians of Guatemala, caught between the army and rebel forces, are taking the brunt of this violence. We pray and long for peace and a just solution to Guatemala's many social and economic problems, but until now peace and justice elude us.

Aware of the many difficulties and risks, we continue to work with faith and hope and trust in God's providence. Please join your prayers with ours every day. Many hardened hearts must be converted to the love of Christ before a lasting solution can be found. Armed forces will not solve the problems. Only dialogue and mutual understanding can offer solutions.

I am personally weary of violence, but I continue to feel a strong commitment to the suffering poor of Central America. “God’s ways are not man’s ways,” says the Bible. God knows why he continued to call me to Guatemala when some friends and relatives encouraged me to pull out for my own comfort and safety. I have been a Christian Brother for nearly 20 years now, and commitment to my vocation grows steadily stronger in my work in Central America. I pray to God for the grace and strength to serve him faithfully among the poor and oppressed of Guatemala. I place my life in his providence; I place my trust in him.

I hope you understand my position. The intensity of the past year in Guatemala has come out in these last paragraphs. Please pardon so many personal references, but I can’t take the situations and experiences of the past year out of a personal context.

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*This letter was edited lightly for style.*

### **BROTHER JAMES MILLER GUILD**

The Brother James Miller Guild is an intentional community of those committed to promoting Blessed James Miller’s cause. Guild members actively share Brother James story, pray for his intercession and take part in community events in-person and online. To learn more about the guild, its benefits and to become a member, visit [brotherjamesmiller.com/guild](http://brotherjamesmiller.com/guild).



This resource is provided by the Brother James Miller Guild, which is housed at Christian Brothers Conference, the office for the Lasallian Region of North America.