

Sophia's Circle & Weaving for Justice Annual Newsletter

Friend us on Facebook at Weaving for Justice/Email us at weavingforjustice@gmail.com

Visit our website and on-line store at www.weaving-for-justice.org

We are also on Instagram at Weaving for Justice



Members of Tsobol Antsetik (Women United) welcome a delegation from Weaving for Justice to their meeting house to celebrate International Women's Day. Photo by Peter Vanier, March 7, 2022

30 March 2022

Dear Friends,

We open our newsletter this year with a photo of a celebration in Chixiltón, Chenalhó, Chiapas earlier this month. This photo could come from another universe when compared to the one that opened our 2021 newsletter – an empty chair in front of a back-strap loom. At that time members of the weaving groups with whom we partner were mourning the deaths of loved ones to COVID and people everywhere were unsure of how to go about their lives. Although we aren't out of the woods yet, we are grateful for moments like the one captured in this photo. Albeit with caution, we are connecting again, even across international borders.

Despite the pandemic, our organization has grown and prospered over the past year with the tremendous support we have received from volunteers, members, donors and purchasers of the weavers' work. As an all-volunteer organization, we can't thank you enough for your support. We also remain forever grateful to the weavers in cooperatives in Chiapas who are keeping their weaving traditions alive and at the same time standing up for peace with justice in their communities and the world. They have been teaching us about the meaning of solidarity through drawing us into their struggles to defend the dignity of their people and the importance of working together to create alternative societies that uplift everyone. And they are doing this in the face of COVID, threats from criminal organizations, and the government's disregard for their human rights. For more about their struggles we refer you to the web pages of Las Abejas (www.acteal.org); the EZLN (www.ezln.org.mx, www.enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx); and the website of the Center for Human Rights Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas (<https://frayba.org.mx>)

In February 2022 we moved to a new store space at **First Christian Church**, 1809 El Paseo Rd. in Las Cruces, New Mexico. We are grateful to the church members for allowing us to hold our 3rd Saturday monthly sales in their spacious Atrium and to sell by appointment at other times in our store located in a wing of the church. Before moving, we spent three years in a beautiful room at Makai Suites, 525 E. Lohman Ave. We want to thank Beatriz Ferreira for renting that space to us. Going forward we will also resume selling at fiestas and other public events and on Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/weavingforjustice/>).

The weaving cooperatives we assist are **Tsobol Antsetik** (Women United), a group of 35 women and their children in the township of San Pedro Chenalhó, with a meeting house/store in the community of Chixiltón (see p. 6 for information about visiting the meeting house); **Mujeres Por La Dignidad** (Women for Dignity), a Zapatista collective of about 90 women with their headquarters in Oventic in the autonomous township San Andrés Sacham Ch'en de los Pobres; and several smaller groups of weavers in **Aguacatenango, Chamula, Oxchuc, Pantelhó, Venustiano Carranza**, and a **doll-making group** in San Cristóbal de Las Casas. Earlier this year we began to work with a new group of weavers, **Jolom Luch Maya (Maya Weavers and Embroiderers)**, comprised of 24 women members of Las Abejas (The Bees), the Catholic social justice organization based in Acteal, Chenalhó.

All the women in these weaving groups are in the resistance, that is they do not participate in top-down economic development projects that fail to take their needs into account. Instead, they rely on developing local economies of solidarity in collaboration with civil society organizations in Mexico and in the U.S. and other nations, such as Weaving for Justice.

THE YEAR IN REVIEW: Over the past year we've tried to keep in touch with you through monthly email newsletters. If you haven't been receiving our newsletters please email us at weavingforjustice@gmail.com so we can add you to the email list. The following are excerpts taken from these newsletters:

Solidarity in the time of COVID-19, July 2021: *"We recently learned of the assassination of **Simón Pedro Pérez López**, catechist and President of **Sociedad Civil Las Abejas (Civil Society The Bees)** in Santa Catarina Pantelhó. The Catholic Diocese in San Cristóbal de Las Casas stated that Chiapas is witnessing "the reactivation of the forces that have changed from paramilitaries to organized crime, allies of the narco-government, who have invaded the state to control the resistance of the organized peoples who defend their autonomy." **Las Abejas** formed in 1992 in Chenalhó. After the Zapatista uprising in 1994 the two organizations became leaders in the struggle for social justice in Chiapas. Paramilitary threats to both organizations led to a massacre in 1997 of 45 women, children, and men belonging to **The Bees** who were praying for peace in a chapel in Acteal, Chenalhó."*

Solidarity in the time of COVID-19, September 2021: *"All the Maya garments that have been donated to Weaving for Justice to sell at our upcoming annual scholarship fundraiser to benefit Maya youth have stories. We've learned some of them. Most we don't know. But what is clear is that they all tell of women using textiles to bind their own and other households together with a mixture of love and obligation. They tell of mothers holding generations together by teaching their daughters to weave in order to keep themselves and their future families clothed; they tell of especially gifted weavers keeping their people connected to the saints and to the Maya dieties through creating complex ceremonial garments; they tell of stressed mothers trying desperately to imagine what tourists might buy so they can sell enough to feed their children while their husbands are away doing migrant*

labor. These women's artisanry make clear the actual physical, mental, and emotional labor embodied in what we culturally conceive of as love."

Solidarity in the time of COVID-19, February 2022: From our friend who works with Zapatista weavers: "Compañeros y compañeras in solidarity, I am in an organization that recently went to visit other anti-capitalist organizations in Europe, renamed [by us] SLUMIL K'AJXEMK'OP ("Tierra insumisa/Unsubmissive Land"). I went as part of a Zapatista delegation. I visited a small place in a part of Germany where we visited several collectives and also the Nazi concentration camps of the Second World War. Truthfully, that was what most called my attention. It's different to be present in the very place, rather than to read about it in books. The concentration camps were totally a place that for me has no name - a life of slavery, of murders, of savagery, of hell...Well, it could have a lot of names...It was a very painful story of thousands of people. Well, compañeros, compañeras, our struggle is for a life where we don't keep seeing discrimination, oppression, repression, pollution, and where our mother nature is no longer being destroyed."

Solidarity in the time of COVID-19, March 2022: "International Women's Day took on special meaning this year to Weaving for Justice when four members of our organization met face-to-face with the weaving cooperative, Tsobol Antsetik (Women United). The gathering took place at the group's meeting house in Chixiltón, Chenalhó, Chiapas. It was a joyous day, including a special meal and talking about old textiles that the weavers keep to remember how their work has changed over the years. The women of Tsobol Antsetik and their daughters, granddaughter's and great-granddaughters are determined to keep their traditions alive!"



Visit of Weaving for Justice members to the Tsobol Antsetik meeting house, March 7. Photo by Peter Vanier.

“When a Woman Rises: Maya Weavers Creating Relationships Through Textiles”
New Mexico State University Museum, August 1, 2021- August 1, 2022



Saint Mary Magdalene’s huipil and shawl (viewed from the back) woven by Juana María Arias Pérez and María del Carmen Ruíz Pérez. On the right Juana María is weaving the huipil on a back-strap loom. Photos by Tsobol Antsetik.

The huipil and shawl in the photos above were woven by Juana María Arias Pérez and María del Carmen Ruíz Pérez of Chenalhó, Chiapas, Mexico in 2021 at the request of Weaving for Justice and the New Mexico State University Museum. The shawl replicates the many cloths draped over the statue of Mary Magdalene that weavers give to the saint in gratitude for answering their prayers for guidance to learn to weave well. In March 2022 the huipil ensemble became the centerpiece of an exhibit of Maya weaving and weavers from highland Chiapas, Mexico.

The huipil took Juana María eight months to weave. Tradition requires that the weaver of saint’s huipils be a virgin. Juana María met this requirement having never married, devoting her life instead to weaving and to her natal family and community. Juana María and María del Carmen studied the huipil and shawl from photos in books, because road-blocks and other threats from paramilitary groups prevented the women from safely traveling to the neighboring municipality of Santa María Magdalena Aldama. A team of women in their weaving group, Tsobol Antsetik, helped obtain the threads and other materials and documented the process. Carol Karasik kindly gave the weavers a copy of *A Textile Guide to the Highlands of Chiapas* which has a photo of the original huipil.

The huipil and shawl are replete with designs of great antiquity that Tsotsil-speaking Maya weavers began to revive at the turn of the 20th century through dreams, studying scraps of old huipils, and exchanging patterns between communities. Weaving for Justice and the NMSU University Museum are deeply grateful to the women of Tsobol Ansetik for bringing this important project to fruition. We also thank Anya Darrow, Louis Harrison, Kim Sorensen, an anonymous donor, and the Tucson Handweavers and Spinners Guild for their generous donations which made it possible to compensate Juana María and María del Carmen fairly for their time and talents.

When the exhibit closes on August 1, 2022 the huipil ensemble will become a part of the New Mexico State University Museum's Maya textile collection. The exhibit is the creation of Dr. Kristin Otto, Curator of the NMSU University Museum. We can't thank Dr. Otto enough for inviting us to collaborate with her to bring the stories of women weavers and weaving of Chiapas to a broader public. For more information about visiting the exhibit please go to: <https://univmuseum.nmsu.edu/>

Annual Donated Textile sale to raise funds for scholarships for Maya youth

After a year's hiatus, on October 29th-30th, 2021 we held our 7th annual fundraiser for Maya youth at The New Mexico State University Museum. With the generosity of 53 textile donors and the enthusiastic support of Weaving for Justice volunteers and Museum staff we raised \$10,000 for scholarships for Maya youth. These funds went to our partner, The Maya Educational Foundation (www.mayaedufound.org), which in turn passed them on to MEF's scholarship programs in Belize, Chiapas and Guatemala. Each year more and more children and youth in Belize, Chiapas, and Guatemala, are pursuing their dreams of an education thanks to our textile donors and the Maya Educational Foundation. Please go to www.mayaedufound.org for more information.

On October 28-29, 2022 we hope that conditions will permit **Dr. Carol Hendrickson**, Professor Emerita of Anthropology, Marlboro College, to speak at our 8th annual fundraiser. Dr. Hendrickson is an anthropologist who has worked in Guatemala since the 1970s and was one of the first donors to help launch our donated textile project. She is also a long-time member of Weaving for Justice and former Board President of The Maya Educational Foundation.



Weaving for Justice volunteer Flora Graham in photo on left. Photos by Til Zimmerman, October 31, 2021.

WAYS YOU CAN HELP

*** BECOME A MEMBER** - All proceeds from weaving sales go back to the weavers. We depend upon memberships and donations to cover the costs of holding sales and events. Costs include printing

literature, covering booth fees, and paying the rent and insurance for our store space at First Christian Church. Donating automatically enrolls you as a member. Membership in Weaving for Justice comes with our gift of a woven bookmark, a 10% discount on purchases at our face-to-face and virtual sales sites, and our eternal gratitude!

To donate and become a member please go to the **DONATE** button on our website homepage: www.weaving-for-justice.org There you will have the option to make your donation a recurring one. If you'd prefer to become a member by check, please fill out the form on p.7 of this newsletter or on the membership page of our website. (When you donate on the homepage of our website – www.weaving-for-justice.org – your receipt will come from Sophia's Circle, our 501c3 umbrella organization.)

* **DONATIONS IN HONOR OR MEMORY** of a special person in your life. Please use the form at the end of this newsletter to provide the name of the person with their contact information and any additional information you'd like us to have and we will notify them.

* **DONATE MESOMERICAN & LATIN AMERICAN TEXTILES** to raise scholarships for Maya youth in Belize, Chiapas, and Guatemala. If you would like to clean out your closets and donate to a worthy cause, please contact Christine Eber at ceber@nmsu.edu. We partner with the Maya Educational Foundation in this project. MEF is a 501c3 organization and your donation may have tax benefits.

* **VOLUNTEER WITH US** – We're happy to explore with you how you might get involved in our work. One way you could help is by **hosting a home sale** at which time a member of our steering committee will come to your home or organization to offer weavings for sale and speak about the weavers' work and lives. As a thank you, you will receive our gift of a weaving. Please contact us at weavingforjustice@gmail.com.

* **VISIT INSTAGRAM & OUR WEBSITE STORE** for many woven personal and household items, including blouses, shawls, scarves, table runners, bookmarks, photo books by weavers, nursing mother dolls, bilingual cloth books of animals or numbers in Tsotsil and Spanish, and woven squares embroidered with "When a woman rises no man is left behind" and the face of a Zapatista woman (also in Spanish) <http://weaving-for-justice.org/online-store-books-for-sale/>

* **VISIT THE WEAVERS IN CHENALHO, CHIAPAS** - When you feel safe to travel again, the weavers of Tsobol Antsetik welcome you to visit with them at their meeting house in Chixiltón, Chenalhó, Chiapas. Directions to the house are on our webpage – www.weaving-for-justice.org. A good way to prepare for your visit is to view the film, "A Maya Celebration," made by Janet Darrow, Weaving for Justice Steering Committee member. Janet made the film during the inauguration of the meeting house in April 2016. A link to the film is on our website under "About Us." Another helpful film in which two weavers from Tsobol Antsetik are interviewed is "Maya Faces in a Smoking Mirror" by Bill Jungels. This film is available on youtube.

* **PATRONIZE THE FOLLOWING STORES & VENUES:**

* **Las Cruces, New Mexico - 3RD Saturday of the month sale** – Our monthly sales are on the 3rd Saturday of each month, 10 – 4 in the Atrium of First Christian Church, 1809 El Paseo Road in Las Cruces.

* **Mesilla, New Mexico - Bowlin's Mesilla Book Center**, 2360 Calle Principal, Mesilla, New Mexico.

* **Denver, Colorado - Hijos del Sol**, 2715 W. 8th Avenue, Denver. The Latino Cultural Arts Center's retail store, Hijos del Sol, is open every second Saturday of the month or by appointment. 720-353-2233 www.lcac-denver.org

* **Phoenix, Arizona - Palabras Bilingual Bookstore**, 906 W. Roosevelt St. Unit 2, Phoenix.

THANK YOU!!

A beautiful part of the process of selling remotely this past year was working with volunteers who generously modeled clothing for us to post on Instagram and Facebook. **We extend our deepest thanks to the volunteers who modeled huipils in 2021:** Melody Burns, Janet Darrow, Julia Estrada, Patricia González, Flora Graham, Aurelia Holliman, Tess Lane, Lia Norem, Taylor Rey, Nena Singleton, Kristi Smith, Kim Sorensen, Sheryl Williams, Amalia Zeitlin, and Leora Zeitlin.

We especially wish to thank the following individuals for their assistance over the past year: *Guillermo Acosta; Shirley Baca; Cristie Barron; Andrea Bryan; Dave Burge; Mike Cook; Amy Dockter; Carlota Duarte; Beatriz Ferreira; Gail Forrest; Rain Gass; Peter Goodman; Flora Graham; John Graham; Anna Gray; Elaine Hampton; Bill Jungels; Mary Kerwin; Tess Lane; Greg Lester; Sally Meisenhelder; Sarah Murphy; Elisabeth Nicholson; Kristin Otto; Victor Paalvast; Tom Potts; Jeanne Simonelli; Karen Sprenger; Carol & Peter Vanier; Jonathan White; Rebecca Wiggins-Reinhard; Milo Williams; Sheryl Williams; and Til Zimmerman; and to the members and staff of the following organizations & businesses: ABC Printing; Bentley College Service Learning and Civic Engagement Center; Bisbee Fiber Arts Guild; Border Servant Corps; The Las Cruces Bulletin; The Chiapas Photography Project; First Christian Church of Las Cruces; KRWG Radio; KTAL Radio; Latin American Solidarity Committee of Western New York; Maya Educational Foundation; Maxwell Museum of Anthropology at the University of New Mexico; New Mexico State University Museum; Rochester Committee on Latin America; Tucson Spinners & Weavers Guild; Weave a Real Peace; The Society for Applied Anthropology; and The Southwest Women’s Fiber Arts Collective.*

Warmest regards,

Aurelia, Christine, Crystal, Janet, Jean, Kristi, Lorena, Meghann, Patricia, and Susan (Weaving for Justice Steering Committee)

MEMBERSHIP FORM

YES! I want to support Weaving for Justice in its work on behalf of weaving cooperatives in Chiapas, Mexico. Enclosed is my check payable to Sophia’s Circle in the amount of US \$_____ Sophia’s Circle is a 501c3 organization so your membership/donation may have tax benefits. Please mail your form to: Sophia’s Circle, 1825 Myrtle Ave., Las Cruces, NM 88001. **Note:** You may also pay with a credit card on the membership page on our website – <http://weaving-for-justice.org/become-a-member/> Please consider a recurring membership!

Membership: Budget membership _____ **(\$15)**; Basic Membership _____ **(\$35)**;
Gold membership _____ **(\$50)**; additional donation _____.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ email: _____

Please tell us anything else you’d like us to know:

A PHOTO GALLERY



Above and on the right -- youngest generation of weavers in Tsobol Antsetik. Photo on left by Peter Vanier & on right by Flora Graham, March 7, 2022.



Petra López Díaz of the doll-making group in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas. Photo by Christine Eber, 2019.



Faustina Gómez Ruíz of Tsobol Antsetik. Photo by Peter Vanier, March 7, 2022