

faith reason justice

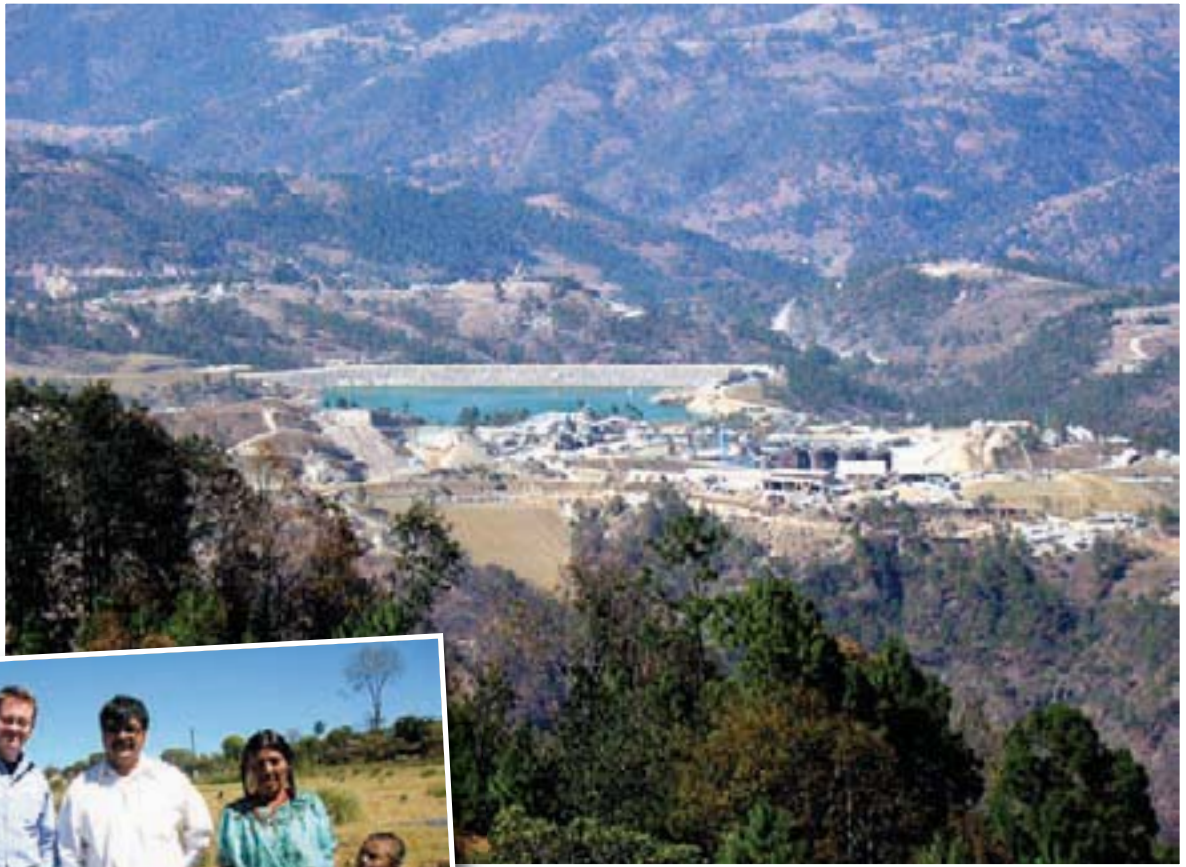
SPIRIT

***GREEN THEOLOGY:
Eastern's Environmental Leadership***



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UNIVERSITY

Going Home: Mining in



“I saw the enormous hole in the ground where a mountain peak had once been.”

By Tim Høiland '09

I was less than enthusiastic about growing up in the middle of nowhere, at 9,000 feet above sea level in the Sierra Madre mountains of western Guatemala. Our neighbors were Mayan subsistence farmers with a way of life largely unchanged for generations. Our family lived quite simply by North American standards, without electricity or running water in our small adobe house, but even so we stood out as privileged *gringos* from *el norte*.

My parents were missionary linguists, translating the Bible into Sipakapense, a language that hadn't yet been reduced to writing. They were interested in making

Guatemala

Scripture available to the people of Sipakapa, as well as helping to ensure the preservation of the language and culture of the people.

Years after we left Guatemala and moved to the United States, we began to hear about Sipakapa again, that seemingly off-the-map town we had once called home. There were rumors of mineral deposits buried in those mountains, along with large quantities of gold. A Canadian mining company was moving in. The people of Sipakapa were opposed to it; they were never properly consulted. A good friend of ours, who had become mayor, traveled to Washington, D.C. to meet with the head of the World Bank to voice the concerns of the people. All of this struck me as complicated and very sad, but seemed beyond my control, so I more or less forgot about it.

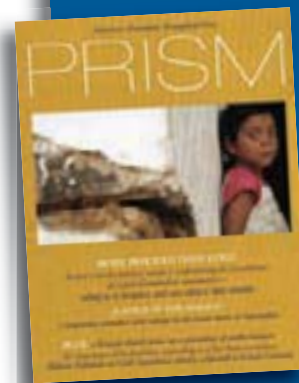
When I came to Eastern to pursue an MA in international development and it came time to pick a research topic, it occurred to me that I could finally find out for myself what had been happening in my old hometown. While I was doing extensive secondary research, **Dr. David Bronkema** suggested I travel to Sipakapa and continue my research there. Through **Rev. Stan LeQuire** I was put in contact with **Nate Howard '05**, an Eastern alumnus, who works with the Mennonite Central Committee in a town not far from there.

The following March I returned to Sipakapa for the first time in more than a decade, where I conducted interviews and saw the enormous hole in the ground where a mountain peak had once been. I heard from the people affected by the mine, many of whom remembered me by name.

They told me about the devastation the mine has brought: mind-boggling quantities of water used, causing a shortage for residents; cyanide poisoning in what little water remains, killing animals and causing skin infections among children; deforestation and erosion of topsoil, making farming increasingly difficult; explosions in the mountainside, causing structural damage to surrounding houses; a rise in prostitution and sexual assault of women; an increased armed presence, brought in to protect the mine against the interests of the community; and social tensions that deepen and intensify as a few benefit and many are ignored.

Sipakapa is no longer the middle of nowhere. Resistance to mining in Guatemala, which began in that small town five years ago, has become a movement, spreading throughout the Sierra Madre mountains in anticipation of the mining company's plans for expansion. The story of this resistance movement is far from over, as indigenous people struggle to defend their way of life against the profit-driven whims of a company with everything to gain and nothing to lose.

Based on my research and experience, I wrote the cover story for the November/ December issue of *PRISM* (the magazine of Evangelicals for Social Action) focusing on the role Christians can and must play in reversing this tragic story. I'm grateful to Eastern for the opportunity to take the values of faith, reason and justice beyond the classroom and into a world of beauty and brokenness, where the Kingdom of God is advancing and Jesus is found, among the poor and oppressed.



Read more about Tim Hoiland's research and experience in Guatemala in the Fall 2010 issue of *PRISM*.

EVANGELICALS FOR SOCIAL ACTION

Evangelicals for Social Action (now part of the Sider Center on Ministry and Public Policy at Palmer Seminary), began the Evangelical Environmental Network, the evangelical partner of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, the most influential national religious environmental organization in the U.S. The other partners are the U.S. Catholic Bishops, the National Council of Churches, and Jewish Coalition. ESA won an Evangelical Press Association award for a 2007 cover story on mountaintop mining in their *PRISM Magazine*.

ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP
Beth Birmingham and Stan LeQuire, both of the School of Leadership and Development, have co-authored, "Green Heroes Reexamined," a chapter in the new book, *Leadership for Environmental Sustainability*. This chapter challenges contemporary models of environmental leadership and encourages a more just approach to leadership which includes the marginalized as authentic leaders for creation care.