

GUATEMALA PARTNERSHIP 2008 REPORT

Thanks be to our Lord Jesus Christ, who has brought us together in partnership for nearly 15 years! 2008, as every year does, presented its challenges and blessings.

The year started out with a new relationship between the partnership committees and the Proyecto de Salud (Health Project). Concern over whether the program could proceed following the dismissal of the director of Health Project led to the suspension of Health Committee activities until the new Joint Committee in Guatemala and the PWNC Health Committee could meet. The Partnership Committees recommended these Health Committees take time to evaluate the management and direction of the program. In April 2008 they met in Guatemala together with Judith Nebrig, representing the PWNC's partnership committee, and Tracey King, the PCUSA regional coordinator with training in conflict management. From their deliberations a working document outlining present concerns and future directions was drafted. Since then, some Health Committee work has been reactivated (specifically the Children's Nutrition Program). Macario Sanchez has been selected as the coordinator for Sur Occidente and Edwin Gelista is the interim coordinator for Suchitepequez..

Children's scholarship programs, largely funded by partner churches, continued to grow. Currently all except two in Suchi are engaged in helping children with school expenses. And all but four churches in Sur Occidente have programs. All together around 500 students are being helped.

Visits between North Carolina and Guatemala continued as well. Three PWNC churches: Brevard-Davidson River, partner church of Horeb; Shelby, partner of Monte los Olivos, and; Grace Covenant, partner church of Jerusalem, sent teams to visit their partners in 2008. Through the PWNC partnership delegation, the following churches made visits to their Guatemalan partner churches:

Sur Occidente Presbytery: First Presbyterian Church, Hendersonville (Jesus la Luz del Mundo); Newland (Estrella de Belen); FPC, Belmont (Buenas Nuevas); Banner Elk (Arca de Noe).

Suchitepequez Presbytery: First Presbyterian Church, Mt. Holly (Palin); FPC, Gastonia (Primitiva); FPC, Dallas (Bethesda); FPC, Hickory (Monte Hebron); FPC, Burnsville (Nueva Esperanza).

The PWNC partnership committee visited in Suchitepequez: Golgotha (FPC, Cherryville); Jesus El Buen Pastor (Long Creek); Nueva Esperanza (FPC, Burnsville); Monte Horeb (needs partner). In Sur Occidente, committee members visited El Redentor (FPC, Newton and Emanuel), Bethlehem (FPC, Swannanoa), Nuevo Jerusalem (Waldensian); Jerusalem (Grace Covenant).

Unfortunately, none of the proposed Guatemalan delegates were granted visas. PWNC has asked PCUSA to take up the matter of visas with the US Embassy in Guatemala City. Two women, however, who already had visas, were invited to PWNC to meet with the Presbyterian Women and to help celebrate Ellen Dozier's retirement as a mission co-worker in Guatemala. They also visited their partner churches, (FPC, Gastonia) and Brevard-Davidson River.

All three presbyteries continue to provide both financial and spiritual support for Dr. Barbara Nagy and her three daughters, missionaries in Malawi, Africa. As well as unified giving and offerings, members of churches in Guatemala have been collecting aluminum cans and members in Western North Carolina have been collecting cell phones to sell in order to increase the amount of money we can together send to help the patients and staff of Nkhoma Hospital.

At the beginning of 2008 PWNC was able to provide both Guatemalan presbyteries with some money to use to handle personal emergencies within their presbyteries. Both have established guidelines for disbursement and have committees providing oversight. This year PWNC suffered a major economic setback along with the rest of the country and, indeed, the world and will be unable to replenish these funds without designated gifts for them.

Both Guatemalan presbyteries are attempting to provide theological education for those who aspire to become pastors and lay leaders. PWNC provided a small amount of financial help to support these endeavors. The Theological Institute in Sur Occidente is now officially a seminary.

New financial arrangements between PCUSA and IENPG have allowed PWNC to send the 5% of 2007 project monies being held back, on to the IENPG for their use. PWNC's suggestion that it be given as part of IENG's pledge to the special restricted account that Synod (May 2007) voted to set up to help the Jerusalem and Eben Ezer churches in Sur Occidente was not accepted. We continue to look for ways to support the churches in Guatemala that lost their church buildings first by illegal seizure by dissidents, then by the Synod's acceptance of the dissidents back.

The planned PWNC celebration of the Guatemalan partnership in September was postponed due to gas shortages. It has been rescheduled for January 11, 2009.

The churches in PWNC were asked to evaluate the partnership over all and their partnership with their Guatemalan sister church. During their annual joint meeting, the Partnership Committees of PWNC, Suchitepequez, and Sur Occidente evaluated the current five-year covenant which expires at the end of 2009, and began the process of developing a new one.