

GUATEMALA PARTNER CHURCH TRIP

March 24-April 1, 2008

Report of Marie Pender, FPC, Hendersonville to her congregation

Now I get it! For years, I had heard Betty Yoder speak about this partnership with *Jesus la Luz del Mundo*; but, I never fully understood it or its significance. When she announced at our Global Missions committee meeting last year that “we” would be traveling to Guatemala in March of '08, I thanked God for answering my prayers to do mission work. He must have chuckled, for it was during this recent week that He showed us that our ministry was more about “*submission*” than “*mission*.”

Submission of worry---leaving our families and responsibilities for 8 days. They survived, relatively unscathed! Our team, ten delegates from various Presbyterian churches in WNC traveled smoothly and never got too lost or sick.

Submission of purpose---it was not about *us* but them. We delivered Sunday school materials, Bibles, and fabric to the women of the church. For 4 days, the elders walked us from home to home in their village of Sintana, visiting members of the congregation, praying over each family, eating and worshipping with them.

Submission of schedule---going with the flow of Guatemalan time, culture, and language. All are “fluid” indeed. Occasionally Betty would casually announce, “I’m not exactly sure what we’re doing or what they’re talking about, but let’s just go with the flow!” We might sit for two hours visiting, and then out of nowhere a feast of tamales wrapped in banana leaves would come parading out before the women’s beaming faces.

Submission of judgment---it is NOT Christ’s will for me to question their parenting styles or home maintenance. As a mother of two young children, I really struggled with this. It baffled me that children played by open fires, ate candy all day, and, through littered streets, ran barefoot and unsupervised alongside the chickens and pigs. Ironically, the mothers were astounded that I am not still breastfeeding my two year old and that he sleeps in a ‘cage!’

Submission of self---accepting that it is not our talent and our idealistic views to improve their lives, but rather it is *Christ* through us to encourage them in their present circumstances. Our family at *Jesus la Luz del Mundo* appreciate our small financial contributions, which enable 50 children to attend school and provides a modest building to gather for worship. However, they are more grateful for the people from FPC who support them in prayer and come to visit them.

It was humbling to see how dependent on Christ many at our partner church truly are. This was evident in their generosity toward Betty in me, as they treated us like royalty. Many exuded a sincere character of hospitality, offering us more than they could afford in some cases. Also humbling was their open worship and bold praise. Hearing them sing *Unidos Unidos, en tu nombre unidos* (united, united, in Your name, united) still gives me chills.

I was most impressed by the strong sense of community among our brothers and sisters in Sintana. Church seemed to be a safe haven and base for fellowship where they could cast their burdens upon the Lord, rest in the hope of Christ, and sing praises to His holiness. We at First Presbyterian Church have that as well! Regardless of culture, language, or socio-economic status, we *all* can relate to the truth of Christ’s unconditional love, once we submit our hearts to Him. He meets us wherever we are; He goes before us and behind; he bridges the gap between the willing souls of his children around the world. God has much to accomplish through these relationships if we are willing to give and receive His abundant love. I hope more members from FPC will be inspired to correspond with our families in Guatemala so as to encourage one another in faith.