

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE GUATEMALA PARTNERSHIP

Soon after the PWNC was formed in January of 1989 a Task Force was formed to explore the possibility of an international partnership. In October of 1992 a presbytery consultation on international partnership was held at the Black Mountain Church; based on this consultation and a questionnaire to churches, it was determined that there was interest in a partnership; presbytery “assets” and “weaknesses” listed on the questionnaire were used to frame a proposal for such a partnership. This proposal was approved at the July 30, 1993 meeting of the PWNC. In October of 1993 three members of the Task Force visited Suchitepéquez and Sur Occidente presbyteries in Guatemala. The decision to enter into a partnership was endorsed by PWNC at its January 1994 meeting; two representatives from each of the two Guatemalan presbyteries came to PWNC in the summer of 1994 to work with representatives of PWNC to draft a Memorandum of Understanding. All three presbyteries voted to accept this document, and thus the partnership in the fall of 1994.

In November 1994, four members of PWNC visited Sur Occidente and Suchitepéquez Presbyteries to see their churches, lead workshops, and witness the presbytery votes on partnership.

During 1995 both PWNC and Guatemalan churches began to experience the koinonia enabled by this partnership by joining in an active church-to-church relationship. A Guatemalan minister selected by the Guatemalan presbyteries came to PWNC to lead an expanding Hispanic ministry in the Burnsville area.

Over the years there have been numerous exchange visits, with Guatemalans coming here and members of PWNC churches visiting Guatemala. Each year there is a PWNC trip to Guatemala as well as visits by individual PWNC churches to their sister church. There have been delegations of young people from PWNC which have visited youth in Guatemala, and Guatemalan youth who have visited our churches and participated in the national Youth Triennium. Several delegations of Guatemalan women have come to WNC and women from WNC have made trips to Guatemala, in November of 2004 there was a women’s pilgrimage to Guatemala and in 2013 a retreat in Guatemala with women from all three presbyteries. These visits have helped all of us gain a better understanding of one another’s dreams, hopes and faith and make plans for our future together. Both the youth and Presbyterian Women are looking at ways, times and places where stronger bonds of friendship and sharing can be created.

Health ministry in Guatemala was one of the priorities for our partnership. In January 1996 a health team from our Presbytery went to Guatemala and a “Basic Principles” document was composed which has guided our work together since that time. There had been several components to this work:

- * training of several members of most of the churches in our partner presbyteries as community health promoters

- * a children’s nutrition program providing children in many communities a healthy snack on a weekly basis

- * a variety of community health improvement projects such as vegetable and medicinal herb gardens, composting latrines, fuel-efficient stoves, family sized water filters

- * a Global Village located in our presbytery at Camp Grier is being developed where technologies appropriate for use in Guatemala and elsewhere are demonstrated, experienced and shared .

When the health program began, the focus was on gathering information and teaching; now that focus has changed to applying the information and doing projects that are initiated by the Guatemalan communities according to their needs.

Health ministry in Guatemala is supported by the 5 cents a meal offering, by our presbytery’s annual alternative Christmas giving program, and by monetary donations and the personal involvement of members of partner churches in the PWNC.

Another program priority of the partnership is education. At the October 1996 meeting of Presbytery approved support of scholarships for members of our partner presbyteries to attend seminary. A scholarship was offered as a Christmas gift project and a number of churches supported this effort

which enabled both men and women to study at the seminary and so better prepare themselves to be ministers and lay leaders of their churches.

In 2006 partner churches in PWNC began a program of providing scholarships for children in their partner church in Guatemala to attend school knowing that many families do not have the resources to provide an education for their children and knowing the importance of an education. This program has been an important part of the partnership, not only providing financial help to children and youth in Guatemala but also providing a way for PWNC church members to relate on a personal basis to families in Guatemala. . Between the years of 2006 and 2014 the number of churches in scholarship covenants grew from 18 to 31. Approximately \$100,000 was provided for the 2014 school year for girls and boys in primary, middle, high, trade and vocational schools and to attend the university. In 2013 two scholarships were established for youth, one from each partner presbytery, to attend a university beginning with the 2014-2015 school year. .

In 2013 a new phase of our concern for education began with an Education Study Trip in Guatemala. Eight women – four from PWNC and four from Guatemala presbyteries – spent a week together learning about the education system in Guatemala and dreaming of ways that the quality of education for our Guatemalan children could be improved. From this trip, an Education Committee has been formed which will be implementing some of the many findings and learnings from the trip. On October 30, 2013 the Joint Partnership Committee of the Guatemala Partnership approved the creation of an Education Committee to be composed of members who are current and/or former educator from all three partner presbyteries. Through the newly formed Education Committee many plans are being made to improve the area of and opportunities for education in the partner presbyteries of Sur Occidente and Suchitepéquez in the next three years.

As our relationship with Guatemalans and the Hispanic population in Western North Carolina have both grown, so has our recognition of and concern for our Spanish-speaking neighbors. In Avery, Gaston, Catawba, Transylvania, Henderson and Buncombe counties Presbyterians have become involved in ministry to and with Hispanics. In 2013 the congregation of Iglesia Emmanuel in Hickory joined with New Vision Church in Conover to form a bilingual, bicultural congregation which now has a partnership with a church in the Presbytery of Sur Occidente.

Much has happened during these 20 years of our partnership. We have learned from one another, experienced moments of celebration and joy as well as dismay and failure. We have learned a lot about Guatemalan life and its challenges, we have been impressed by how much faith, deep faith, informs the lives of our Guatemalan brothers and sisters. So we have developed a yearning for deeper faith for ourselves. Some of us have heard God calling us to new ventures or ways of living, and using our gifts, expertise and experiences in brand new ways. We look forward with hope and expectation to the future into which God will lead all of us.

Prepared for celebration of 20th anniversary of Guatemala Partnership

LOGO of the PARTNERSHIP

This logo has things in it that tell us about each other and the partnership. For instance, the dove above the tree is the sign for God's Spirit which is with us; it is also a sign of peace. The symbols for North Carolina are on the left and for Guatemala on the right -

- * the state bird of North Carolina is the cardinal
- * the national bird of Guatemala is the quetzal
- * the state flower of North Carolina is the dogwood
- * the national flower of Guatemala is the monja blanca
- * a cross is a symbol of God's love for all of us
- * Both North Carolina and Guatemala have mountains, but Guatemala also has volcanos





GUATEMALA PARTNERSHIP – join us in CELEBRATING 20 YEARS of being “TOGETHER IN CHRIST “

"that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith." Romans 1:12

The partnership approach to mission is based on the biblical understanding of "koinonia," which the Apostle Paul interpreted as "working together for the Gospel." This suggests that we are not only to serve our sisters and brothers in other lands, but that we are also to seek the help which they can offer us from the rich resources of their faith and experience. It was the recognition that we need to listen and learn from Christians whose lives and faith are shaped by other cultures that initiated and has sustained the quest for an international partnership.

The presbyteries of Western North Carolina, Sur Occidente, and Suchitepéquez will be celebrating twenty years of partnership in 2014. The PWNC Guatemala Partnership's Leadership Team in conjunction with the Guatemalan presbyteries' partnership committees is planning a number of activities throughout the year to acknowledge this milestone.

All three presbyteries have designated **Sunday, March 2, 2014 as "Partnership Sunday"** to inaugurate the celebrations. We have developed some common elements and suggestions for their use in worship that day and would ask that all churches, whether or not they are actively engaged in the partnership, recognize this unique relationship in whatever way they deem appropriate. There will be an envelope with worship resources and highlights of the history of the partnership available for all WNC churches at the presbytery meeting on January 25th.

At the **October 2014 PWNC presbytery meeting**, the partnership covenant will be renewed for another five-year period.

Friday, November 7, 2014 is the day when all three presbyteries will celebrate the 20 years of partnership together in Guatemala.

Throughout 2014, in Guatemala and Western North Carolina, different aspects of the partnership will be remembered and celebrated, including **new initiatives in health and education, a youth trip to Guatemala, and much more.**