

The 2014 Malawi Mission Team Report

Submitted by Rev. Steve Austin

While this report is written in the first person, I think it represents all who travelled to Nkhoma since no single member could write a report that captured all the experiences we had on this spiritual journey.

I cannot begin to tell you how strongly I have been impacted by my trip to Malawi. While I have always wanted to go to Africa, while I have longed to see the magnificence of the wildlife of what we call the Dark Continent and while I have for years wanted to experience mission work in another country; what affected me most were the people. I came to meet and know several Malawians over the two weeks I was there. People who worked at various places like the Nkhoma Hospital, the P.B.+ J. plant, the Ebenezer Institute of Learning, or the people who served us while staying at the Tahar's guesthouse, all presented a new and hopeful face to humanity for me. And they have names. Samuel, Henry, Serena, Job, Deviswan, Timoth, Adam, David, Chief Hastings, Matrine, Lincoln, and Kuchipala. But as interesting and impressive as their names are, as powerful as their personal stories are, it is their faces that I remember most.



Then there were the countless people I constantly encountered whose faces I also remember whether I came to know their names or not. They almost always had smiles on their faces. Smiles from the children at the Ebenezer school, people I passed or traded with in the market, seminary students who gave me a tour of the Nkhoma museum, or the people who I waved to on the dusty roadsides as we drove to the villages. All these people had something in common and it was more than dark brown eyes and skin. That something was the face of Christ. Each one was a creation of the same God that created you and me. Some of them were Christians while others were not

and yet in each one I met a person that was formed in the image of God. Each one was a person who deserved love, care and respect. And each one was my brother or sister.

Along with 10 other Americans, I had travelled half way across this globe to meet and serve strangers, all the while knowing I was the real stranger. My eyes were opened by these people who were kind, generous, warm and child-like in so many ways. As I saw these people, as I made new friends, as I walked among them in their world, I was constantly reminded of so many stories and parables from the life and words of our Lord. Childlike faith, hospitality, giving with a loving heart, humility, caring for one another and loving my neighbor. While I have seen these things in people throughout my own life, I have never witnessed them in such abundance as I did in Nkhoma, Malawi. I was in the 7th poorest country in the world and met women who had HIV and yet they shared their daily bread (Nsima) with me. I had travelled thousands of miles and met people who made me feel at home. I could barely speak more than a few words in their language of Chichewa and yet was able to share smiles, laughs, prayers, and hugs while they overlooked my bumbling of their language.

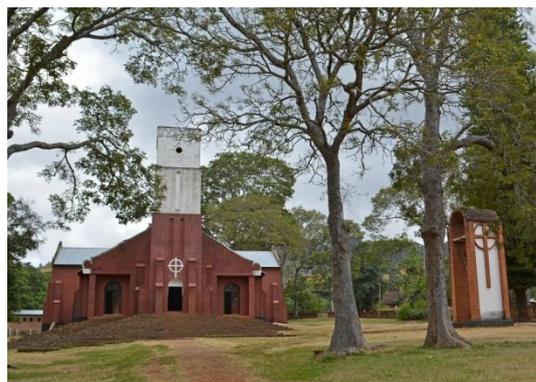


Our mission team had come to help and serve and we came to represent the love and care of the people of Presbytery of Western N.C. We were recognized by so many people and our reputation is

admirable. I heard from more than one person that while other people, groups, and denominations come to Nkhoma to help, our delegation is seen as dependable. One person said that "Other people come and go, but you come and come every year. This is good" It made me proud to be a part of the group even though I was a Freshman, so I took the compliment on behalf of everyone else. Hey, I'm here to help. I was also aware how directly God intervenes to make his ministry happen. I had come to do great things or small deeds. But it would be God who decided. I wanted to help and the first opportunity was an expensive one. Since I had only one piece of carry-on baggage I was given a small parcel to take for the Hospital. I had no problem until I found out that it was a portable ultrasound machine worth some \$20,000.00's. I carried it like a baby and was never so glad in all my life to deliver such a precious bundle. While I didn't donate it, I made very sure it arrived safely. God also took disappointing dilemmas and transformed them into opportunities to serve. He helped us see just how life changing simple kindness can be and how everyone needs to be loved no matter how important they are or aren't.

God knew where the work was most needed and we learned to trust his choices more than our own.

We are so blessed here in America. And so are the people in Malawi. We are rich in money and resources. They have a wealth of family, community, culture and joy. We have schools and churches. So do they. We worship freely for a few hours a week at most. They worship for 3 hours on Sunday alone. We tithe and contribute to our churches. They do the very same thing. We are blessed in so many ways, they are too. But, in the end, I was humbled by their openness to us. People who had more to learn from them, than they from us.



Like all of us in the team, I was often asked about my first impression of Malawi but I really didn't have one. My life had been one of stories, movies, videos, and study of Africa. I had learned of this small, poor, unknown country, years ago from reports by this very Presbytery. I was always open to new ideas and willing to respect people different from myself and love them as my Lord commanded. But no single impression stood out. There was so much to see, absorb, experience and learn. I only hope that I can translate my experiences, along with the rest of the Team, in such a way that more people will do as much as possible to help those in need. No matter where those people may be found.

I am eternally grateful to God for this marvelous opportunity, to this Presbytery for its commitment to Malawi and to the people I journeyed with along the way (especially their patience). I will never forget our experiences in Malawi. But I will more deeply remember how much love they showed us as fellow Christians. In Africa I found the brothers and sisters I knew I had but had never met. I was no closer to Christ in Malawi than I am here, but I sincerely believe I learned how to see Him a bit more personally.

Thanks Be To God.



2014 Malawi Mission



**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.

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.**

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 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.



Help Celebrate the 20th Anniversary of our Guatemala Partnership by Participating in an Art Exchange Project!

LEARN MORE 

All churches in the Presbytery of Western North Carolina are invited to be a part of this project, which involves **creating a work of art** that depicts your vision for the **abundant life** God envisions for God's people, for all of creation.

Use the words of Scripture, in **John 10:10** and/or **Isaiah 65:21-25** as you inspiration and create art in any medium – visual or literary – that can be displayed in churches in the PWNC and sent to Guatemala. You might use drawing, fabrics, collage, paints, graphics, power point, a written poem, etc.

A church school class, youth group, mission or partnership committee or other group or individual in your church is invited to submit a project.

Send your project to the PWNC, 114 Silver Creek Road, Morganton, NC 28655 no later than Tuesday, October 21. All projects will be **displayed at the October 25 presbytery meeting**, and then taken to Guatemala **to be a part of the November 7th partnership celebration there.**

Our hope is to have the **Guatemalans create art projects** on the same theme and their art work will be shared in the PWNC. Still working on the details of how that will happen.

If you have any **questions** about this Art Exchange Project, contact **Ellen Dozier** at ellendozier@hotmail.com or 828-862-3995.