

## **Witness Division Report - End of Year 2014 January 31, 2015**

The focus of the **Peace and Justice Committee** in 2014 has been on Care of Creation, environmental issues, global warming, and the Earth Care Congregations initiative. As such, we have tried to both educate ourselves around caring for the earth and encourage others, individuals and congregations, to reduce their carbon footprint. The grants provided by the 2104 Peacemaking offering have been given to facilitate this focus and have been related to environmental health. In addition, at the recommendation of the Peace and Justice Committee, our presbytery chose to endorse one of the overtures to the General Assembly in Detroit on sustainable agriculture, attempting to raise awareness within the PWNC and beyond.

The work of the **Missions Committee** continues to be concentrated around supporting the PCUSA mission co-workers from our presbytery, strengthening the mission and outreach of local congregations, and facilitating the teams that travel to walk with our partners in Guatemala and Malawi. 2014 has brought changes in the ministry of Becca Young at the seminary in Jakarta, Indonesia. Because Becca is now fully funded as a resident faculty member at the seminary, she is no longer officially a PCUSA mission co-worker but, now works directly and closely with seminary students and faculty colleagues. Meanwhile, Dr. Barbara Nagy, our missionary doctor in Malawi, has made the transition back to Malawi following the completion of her public health degree in Columbia, GA. while meeting a multitude of family challenges. Barbara's sister lost her battle with cancer. Oldest daughter, Melia, joined the Navy instead of returning to Malawi. Daughter, Happiness, was not admitted to the expected school, requiring Barbara to revise her education plans for Happy significantly. Barbara has dealt with all this with an abundance of grace and resumed her important medical work in Nkhoma, Malawi. This year, the 10<sup>th</sup> year of our relationship, two mission teams from PWNC visited Malawi, working at Nkhoma Hospital, its outlying rural clinics, and the school we established in Nkhoma. In addition, 21 people went on the November delegation to Guatemala, celebrating 20 years of partnership between the PWNC and the presbyteries of Sur Occidente and Suchitepequez, as well as planning for the coming year together.

**Campus Ministry** attention in 2014 has been focused on the emerging new student ministry at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee. The Administrative Commission for Cullowhee morphed into a new Board of Directors for the student ministry at WCU. Much prayer, consultation, and discernment as to how to develop a meaningful campus ministry has already and will continue to take place. We have met with Brian Santos of Collegiate Ministries of the PCUSA and, as a result of all these deliberations, have decided on two steps forward. One is to seek a leader for the new ministry (See the PWNC website for a position description or contact Board Chair, Mark Hanna for additional details). The other is to develop a coffeehouse on the site (a nearly ideal, central location at WCU) to use as a venue for the ministry platform.

### **Hunger Committee**

Your Hunger Committee reminds you that **April 1, 2015, is the deadline for Nickel-A-Meal grant applications** awarded in the Spring. If your church supports or considers initiating a hunger relief project download the grant application form from Presbytery's website or call the Presbytery office for a mail delivery. The hunger relief projects our Presbytery supports include: community gardens, food pantries, hunger awareness events, community feeding programs, school backpack programs, delivered meals, nutritional education, etc. In addition our Presbytery supports hunger relief projects in Guatemala, Malawi, Cameroon, Haiti, etc. To all of our churches who faithfully collect the Nickel-A-

Meal offering and collectively raise over \$100,000 each year for these projects we say, “THANK YOU!” To those churches not supporting this effort we ask, “WHY NOT?”

The Hunger Committee would like to extend a thank you to all of the churches who contributed to Nickel-A-Meal in 2014. Through your faithful giving to the Nickel-A-Meal program, you are helping to support the cause of hunger relief.

**Churches Participating in Nickel-a-Meal (2014)**

Asheville, First	Gastonia, First	Reems Creek-Beech
Banner Elk	Grace Covenant	Robinson Memorial
Belmont, First	Grassy Creek	Rutherfordton
Bessemer City, First	Green Street	Ryburn Memorial
Black Mountain	Hickory, First	Saluda
Brevard-Davidson River	Jack’s Creek	Shelby
Brittain	Kenilworth	Sherrills Ford
Bryson City	Lincolnton, First	Siloam
Burnsville, First	Long Creek	Southminster
Canton	Lowell	Trinity
Cherryville, First	Marion	Tryon
Clinchfield	Mills River	Union
Columbus	Montreat	United
Conley Memorial	Morganton, First	Unity
Crossnore	Morrison	Vians Valley
Dallas, First	Mount Holly, First	Waldensian
Dulatown	New Hope (Asheville)	Walnut
Duncan’s Creek	New Hope (Gastonia)	Walnut Grove
Etowah	Newdale	Warren Wilson
Fairview	Newland	Waynesville, First
Fletcher	Newton, First	West Asheville
Forest City, First	Northminster	West Avenue
Franklin, First	Olney	Westminster

Your Hunger Committee awarded the following grants in November, 2014, from the Nickel-a-Meal fund:

**REGIONAL:**

Feed a Kid of Columbus	\$6,000
HeartLife of Morganton	\$2,000
LINC Home Meals of Lincolnton	\$5,000
Loving Foods of Kenilworth, Asheville	\$5,000
Veterans Restoration Quarters of Asheville	\$5,000
Snack Sak of Rheems Creek/Beech	\$2,000

**INTERNATIONAL:**

Guatemala Partnership Health project	\$14,160
Nkhoma Hosp. Children’s Ward, Malawi	\$26,814
Thandizo Orphan Care Project, Malawi	\$9,453

THANK YOU for your faithful support of the Nickel a Meal offering which allows our Presbytery to be a strong advocate for hunger relief in Western North Carolina and on the international mission field.

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Remember the **Souper Bowl of Caring** offering received on **February 1**. Your church will be joining thousands of other churches across our nation in this effort. Money and nonperishable food received on that Sunday may be donated to the hunger relief organization of your choice. Register your church at [superbowl.org](http://superbowl.org). Click “Get Involved”, then “Hold a Collection.”

**Presbytery of Western North Carolina  
Report of Delegation to Guatemala  
November 5-12, 2014**

Eleven members of various churches in our presbytery left airports in Asheville and Charlotte to make the trip to Guatemala on November 5. We left with anticipation and a little anxiety. Some were anxious to practice their Spanish. Others knew their Spanish was not going to get them very far. We had met each other in meeting prior to our take off, but were looking forward to learning more about each other. We came from different backgrounds and places, but we all shared hearing a call that this was where we needed to be. We were even more certain that God was with us when in changing planes in Atlanta on our way to Guatemala City as the doors opened to let us on the train, there were our Asheville people welcoming us on. What a powerful message that we were to be together, that was.

The morning after we arrived in Antigua, Ben Hill reminded us in devotions that God is like the sun. It doesn't move. The earth does. God doesn't move. If we don't see God, we need to move. We saw God over and over again in our visit. We had to only look into the faces of the people we were visiting to see God. They had a powerful faith. They had close, loving family relationships. In the interplay between members of the families, the soft loving looks they gave each other, we could see God.

We began our trip after we arrived in Antigua with a tour of the city. That helped us understand the culture of the country, the attitudes of the country and the government of the country. Some of us had read Bitter Fruit before we arrived to help us also understand the role of the United States government in some of the unrest and heartbreak of what makes up Guatemala.

We took a scenic trip through the highlands on our way to the seminary. Guatemala is a beautiful country. It is a contradiction. For all the beauty of the mountains, the flowers, the statues, there is abundant poverty. There are dilapidated houses.

From the seminary, we also visited a coffee plantation. Not only did we see how coffee was made, but we learned how they have diversified. We learned more about the history of the country, how free trade helped people on Wall Street get rich, but took money from the people who actually produced the coffee. We learned how the rich in Guatemala are able to have rivers dammed and diverted, flooding other land. That would be important to our later encounters on our journey.

We then gathered for the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of our partnership with our brothers and sisters in Christ in the presbyteries of Sur Occidente and Suchitepequez. Again we saw God. About two hundred fifty people traveled for long distances to reach this celebration. The partnership is important to them. They were friendly, eager to talk with us. At the gathering, the health promoters were recognized. A large number of people are working to help educate people about things to promote better health in Guatemala. As rain poured down, we sang and worshiped together. The sermons throughout our time there talked of our call to service. We sang a song that was written specially for this service. As we said in our evening gathering to reflect on the day, they sang with gusto. They sang loudly as if they wanted to be sure God heard it. They value the partnership with Malawi and the ministry of Barbara Nagy. They took an offering at the service to send to her. They collected about \$425. That is no small sum for these people.

One of the ladies with whom we stayed collects cans and has her children and grandchildren crush them. The proceeds also go to Malawi.

The next day we went to our sister churches. Our churches included Primativa, Monte Hebon, Monte Horab, Golgotha, El Divino Salvador, Arca de Noe, and Bethel. We stayed in homes of church members. Our experiences were different. Some people had a bucket of water for bathing purposes while some had a bathroom with a shower. The shower was cold water that came straight down from a pipe. (I describe this to give you a picture of what it was like.) While visiting with our churches, we got to talk about our scholarships, clearing up any questions either side had. We met the students and talked with them. It was the time for end of year parties. We learned that some of our students were studying English at school.

We learned of some of the misery of living in Guatemala. From Primativa Church, we visited a nearby church where the minister had died about half an hour after leaving a meeting with other ministers. Bobbie White wished to call upon the family. The worship service was at the widow's house. There was a large group of church members who joined us. Sadly the man had taken a loan for repair of his house shortly before he died. He had also taken a loan for a car to enable him to travel in his work. Now he is gone. The income is gone. The sixteen year old daughter is going to make tamales to sell on the roadside. However as sad as the situation was, I found God in their midst. Earlier the gusto with which they sang was mentioned. The same situation was occurring again. The thought came to me that we are called upon to "praise the Lord with gladness." That is what they do. It is not how technically correct you are, but the joy with which you sing. The same story of desperation was told at other churches. At another church, the members of the delegation found a family of ten with the oldest daughter sixteen. The mother was hit by a car and killed. The sixteen year old is tending the rest of the children while preparing twenty pounds of tortillas a day to earn money for the family. These stories repeat themselves over and over. We encountered at the celebration a young woman who wanted to come to the United States. We saw her again at the widow's house. She lost her home due to flooding. The river had been redirected. She had to leave her house. The rich can then take it as no one is living there. This story was repeated again and again.

We learned of a program to get stoves in people's houses. Some are currently cooking on a wood stove that is not vented to outside. Thus you have harmful inhalation of smoke on the inside. They also have a lot of deaths from fires. There is a program providing stoves for people. They loan you the money. They have you pay it back for two years the money that you save in not having to buy as much wood. When the people understand that in the third year that is money in their pocket, they are quite interested in having a new stove vented to the outside.

There is so much to be done in Guatemala. Frederick Buechner said, "If we are to love our neighbors, before doing anything else we must see our neighbors with our imagination as well as our eyes, that is to say like artists, we must see not just their faces, but the life behind and within their faces. Here it is love that is the frame we see them in." As we met with the people in our churches seeing the families interact, the children talking about their lessons and their needs at school, the proud family members encouraging them to talk, we saw the steady progress toward lives being changed in a positive way. There is much work to be done, but so much hope for what can be accomplished there.

We left the seminary early going back to Antigua because of reports of demonstrations that would be blocking the roads. We did need to be able to meet our airplane. However the

demonstrations were because the government had not paid the health care workers. That is the reality with which they live.

It is easy when we return home to let the other pressing needs of our lives lead us to put the needs of our partner churches on the backburner. The faith of our partner churches is so strong that we need to remind ourselves of it and the needs of our partner churches. Their need for better education, nutrition, health care, and economic opportunities are so great that we need to look for ways to continue to work together with them. There are many opportunities in the sharing of letters, photos, and prayer requests with each other in our worship services, cards of encouragement to our students and their families, and reports to congregations on projects such as wood stoves and water filters and initiatives in health care and education. If our partnership churches in the PWNC would plan their calendars for the coming year to include items such as these on a monthly basis, whether it is a moment for mission, a visit to Sunday School classes, a fellowship luncheon program/display, or a focus of one of the groups within the church, we feel our Guatemalan partnership would benefit greatly. We could encourage our members to participate in mission trips to Guatemala and encourage our youth to take advantage of opportunities either as a group or with others in the presbytery. Ongoing emphasis such as this should improve understanding of the partnership with our congregations at home and will provide ways to be more present with our partners in Guatemala. Our communication with our partner churches is very important to them and we need to take our promises seriously and work diligently to keep them.

The delegation from our presbytery included Beth Bolin, Katie Reese, Bobbi White, Anne Evans, Ben Hill, Edwin Holcombe, Marsha Ferrell, Ginnie Stevens, Susan Maveety, Kathy Ward, and Rosalyn Barker. The leadership team consisted of Randall Boggs, Valerie Holcombe, Ellen Dozier, Barbara Hosbein, Marie Palcios, Judy Nebrig, Carole Ball, Becca Weeks, Doug Michael, and Mimi Michael.

Report prepared by Beth Bolin with significant input from delegation members.

## Where Did You See God Today

A basic query one might think  
No need to study, read nor pray.  
A very simple question –  
Where did you see God today?  
I saw Him in smiles beamed  
From faces tired and worn.  
I saw Him when the sun peaked out  
Behind a volcano in the morn.  
I saw Him in the children  
Who face futures yet unknown.  
I saw Him in the ancient eyes  
Of a life 'twas mostly gone.  
I saw God when new friends stood to pray  
In churches and in shacks.  
And in their hands reaching out to us  
And our hands reaching back.  
When strangers met as brothers  
And new sisters hugged and kissed.  
When our differences didn't matter  
I knew God was in our midst.  
When did I hear God today  
In this cacophony of sound?  
In every child's peal of laughter  
At each new joy they found.  
I heard God in hymns sung loudly  
Perhaps off-key but great with praise.

When the Word was read and people  
murmured out  
With hands upraised.  
I heard God when rain beat on the roof  
And the wind blew 'cross the land.  
And I heard God when prayers were said  
In words I did not understand.  
I heard God when He said be still.  
When He told me He was near.  
And I heard Him in the silence  
When He called me to come here.  
And where did I feel God today?  
When I saw you cared so much.  
I felt God when my heart was moved  
Because your heart was touched.  
And I felt God when holding hands  
Praying in silence or out loud.  
In different tongues the words went up  
But it was the same prayer that went out.  
I felt God when I tried to speak  
When I hoped they would understand.  
And I felt God when my face was cupped  
By abuela's withered hands.  
I saw and heard and I felt God  
In ways both old and new.  
But where did I see God today?  
I saw God in you.

Author: Ben Hill, First Presbyterian Church Hickory  
Written in honor of The PWNC Guatemala Partnership 20th Anniversary Delegation