

PWNC Unexpected stay in Guatemala City

Oct. 3- 10, 2023

Dear sisters and brothers in PWNC churches,

When our group, from several churches in WNC, arrived in Guatemala, we had plans for visiting our partners in southwest Guatemala. Shortly, we realized that travel would not be possible. We were not able to leave the capital. While this was a great disappointment, we are grateful for the opportunity to be in Guatemala in this historical moment.

On our first evening, we were joined by Osmundo Ponce. Osmundo is a Presbyterian pastor who is a member of Guatemala's National Congress. Then, the next day we met with Hector Casteñada, a Disciples of Christ pastor in the capital. Both men have participated for years in the struggle for democracy in Guatemala. Their experiences helped us understand the situation that was unfolding.

Casa San Benito, where we stayed, provided a tranquil place of hospitality—food for our bodies and souls. Our hosts' periods of song and prayer several times a day blended th our worship times to ground us in God's love and grace.

Although we couldn't travel, we were able to be "with" our Guatemalan sisters and brothers, by Zoom we could hear their struggles, their hopes, their longing for justice and their concern for us—all as we saw their faces in tiny boxes in our cell phones!

Because we couldn't travel, we were able to explore the National Palace, the Cathedral, Central Park, Casa de Memoria, and to walk along Sixth Avenue with families on Sunday afternoon.

In the capital we talked with people who were supporting the protests and blockages, which were led by indigenous people. We heard about people bringing food and drinks to those who were protesting and those who where affected by road blocks.

Doug Michael

Ellen Dozier

Linda Abel

Judy Nebring

katie Reese

Bob Abel

Carole Ball

Randall Boggs

Sarah Robinson

Report from Fuente de Vida

10/08/23

(Written notes from Ruth Barrios and Notes from Zoom Conversation)

Present:

PWNC: Carole Ball and Sarah Robinson Bryan (PWNC Guatemala Partnership Coordinator)

Translator: Zoily Chacon Paz

Fuente de Vida:

Pastor: Lionel Guzman

Session: Amanda Gabriel, Loida Echeverría (also on Partnership),

Milda Lopez

Mirna Hernandez

Leiby Ordonez (absent)

Partnership and Scholarship:

Ruth Magali Gabriel Martinez

Elistar Valarde Barrios

1. How are the protests affecting your daily life?

"What we want to show is that we want to defend and take back democracy."

It is affecting us in a critical way since we cannot transport ourselves to our jobs, the basic basket (of food) has increased in price, fuel costs have doubled and has already collapsed and we cannot drive from one place to another.

Schools, and some markets are closed.

2. What do you think/what is your perspective/how do you feel about the political situation/recent events?

The political situation in our country is very unfortunate, but the situation is not in our hands, we can only amend it in God's commands.

3. What are the dangers/problems and opportunities/good things about the situation? For the country

It may affect the economy in the country more than it already is since it increases extreme poverty. In our opinion, we do not find good things or improvements for the country, with these demonstrations in this way since it is not the correct way to solve the political problems.

4. How can we help you? Your prayer requests?

In prayer, putting the problems in God's hands and he will be the one in charge of solving the conflicts that are being experienced.

Other Conversation:

Pastor Lionel Guzman, comes 1 time/month, his goal is membership growth. He is willing to come 2 X per month if paid.

The congregation has been fasting on Wednesdays (not sure if all day or just dinner).

5 Students in Diversificado (High School) Possibly 3 could graduate (2 in accounting, and 1 in Agriculture. They all plan to continue their studies.

Many families are sick and most members are very poor and in need of health care.

Projects: (The Church is in dire need of repair or rebuilding)

Bathroom: They are in the process of building a bathroom on the outside of the church. They need to purchase a door.

Fellowship Roof: Beams are rotting, falling down and need replacing

Church Floor: Tree roots are lifting up some of the tile.

Angelita

By David LaMotte

*The ground beneath my feet became the tree that stands beside me
An avocado's hanging from that dusty roadside tree
I'll eat that avocado with my breakfast in the morning
And the ground of Guatemala will become a part of me*

*They're burning off the cane fields 'cause it's almost time for harvest
Those leaves will slice you bloody, so it's best when they're not there
You've stirred that very sugar in your Guatemalan coffee
It inhabits your own body, like this smoke hangs in the air*

*This country seems so far away, so strange and unfamiliar
When it's closer to your body than the steaming cup you hold
Am I my brother's keeper? No, I'm just my brother's brother
And the family's got some work to do to love each other whole*

*A burlap bag rides heavy on the bent back of an old man
His skin is thick as leather and his body knows that weight
In my country we complain our cup of coffee's too expensive
Don't say that to a man who trades a dollar for a day*

*This country seems so far away, so strange and unfamiliar
It's closer to my body than the steaming cup I drink
Am I my brother's keeper? No, I'm just my brother's brother
And the family's got some work to do to love each other whole*

*La pequeña angelita is sitting in a window
In a wall that's slowly crumbling, but is painted brightest blue
She's laughing as she greets me, a weary extranjero
I will take this blessing with me, I will bring it home to you.*

*I can feel that it's too far away, that this is not about me
As if there are those whose struggles are too much for me to bear
Am I my sister's keeper? No, I'm just my sister's brother
And the family's got some work to do to love each other whole.*

Song- "Fronteras" (Borders) by Gaby Moreno

There's a path that brought us here.
It knows nothing about the borders of the passion inside of me.
Longing is what pushes me forward with every new sunrise,
with my fears, illusions, and the remains of yesterday.

Hope is with us.
With it nothing can stop us.
I (go) holding you hand, and you (go) holding mine;
there is nothing to fear.

And I laugh and dance.
It's in my veins,
and I dream, free.
I belong here.
I belong here.

Who knows what gift
Tomorrow will make to us?
Today is all I have;
I will treasure it.

Thereby manifesting
as much light as I can give off.
And to be happy is the solution;
it can make everything better.

And I laugh and dance.
It's in my veins,
and I dream, free.
I belong here

And I laugh and dance.
It's in my veins,
and I dream, free.
I will go on until the end
I will go on until the end.

I belong here.

Guatemala Is Like A Women

WHY?

Why is so little known
of Guatemala's
crucifixion?

Why do the delegations
and the newspapers
and the important people
worry zealously
over Argentina and Chile,
over Haiti and the Philippines
over El Salvador and Honduras?

Why not over Guatemala?

You know, my friend,
our little wounded
Guatemala
Land of widows and orphans,
our sister homeland
is only a woman.
Now do you understand?

Geneva, Switzerland
March 19, 1986

And finally . . .

What Can We Do to Help?

- Pray for the people of Guatemala and their partners working for justice and peace
- Learn about the past and present of Guatemala
- Stay informed and aware of events in Guatemala
- Work for peace anywhere
- Write or Call:
 - * Members of the U.S. Congress and Senators (to maintain pressure for ongoing action)
 - * the U.S. Embassy or State Department
- Demand that the U.S. government promptly apply Magnitsky Act sanctions to those undermining democracy in Guatemala