

Presbytery Partnership
Presbytery of Coastal Carolina and El Presbiterio del Golfo de Mexico
Three Year Evaluation of the Presbytery Partnership

History

The partnership between the Presbytery of Coastal Carolina and El Presbiterio del Golfo de Mexico (The Presbytery of the Gulf of Mexico, PGM) was three years old in March 2006.

At the sixtieth stated meeting of the Presbytery of Coastal Carolina on March 8, 2003, a covenant agreement was signed that included the following commitments: “In mutual agreement with what we believe, we, the Presbytery of Coastal Carolina and El Presbiterio del Golfo de Mexico, do covenant: to pray for and with each other; to communicate with and listen to each other; to learn from each other; to work with each other; to stand in solidarity with each other; and to witness to God’s reconciling work of love with each other for the period of five years with a comprehensive evaluation to be conducted after the third year.”

Location

The PGM is contained within the state of Tabasco in southeastern Mexico. Tabasco is bordered by the state of Chiapas and the country of Guatemala to the south, the state of Veracruz to the west, the Gulf of Mexico to the north, and the state of Campeche to the east. The airport is located in the capital city of Villahermosa, a large city of approximately 750,000. The Seminario Presbiteriano Teologico del Sureste (The Presbyterian Theological Seminary of the Southeast) is located outside of Villahermosa. This school has been built over the past eleven years. The seminary president, Dr. Huascar de la Cruz, is a member of the PGM partnership committee.

The presbytery office is located in the city of Comalcalco, about ninety minutes northwest of Villahermosa. The president of PGM (until the end of December 2005) is Rev. Francisco Magaña, who also serves as a member of the partnership committee of PGM.

The National Presbyterian Church of Mexico is growing very rapidly in Tabasco. The state is predominantly Protestant while the majority of Mexican residents are Roman Catholic. PGM was the fourth presbytery founded at the national level and is 109 years old. The presbytery has churches, congregations, and missions (listed in the order of magnitude). Each church will be responsible for a few congregations. Each congregation will be responsible for a number of missions. The missions are served by the elders of the congregations.

Partnership Committees

Both presbyteries have partnership committees that communicate regularly. The partnership committees will provide guidance to congregations that want to visit in Mexico and North Carolina. While the committees do not intend to “micro-manage” exchange visits, each committee wants to be kept informed of plans, so as to coordinate the overall partnership development. Furthermore, there may be personal and corporate experience and/or background or training materials that the partnership committee can provide or recommend to groups considering a partnership trip.

Projects

Two main projects have been identified by both presbyteries as the focus of this developing partnership:

- (1) The Siloam Health Clinic Project in Comalcalco: El Presbiterio del Golfo de Mexico has plans to construct a health clinic compound on a 60-acre site near Comalcalco, Tabasco. When completed, the compound will include a health clinic, mental health inpatient facilities, retirement housing for pastors, drug and alcohol rehabilitation services, and camping programs and facilities for youth. The PGM currently has a capital campaign in place to raise the necessary funds to purchase the land. The PGM has established the Jose Coffin Sanchez Foundation to oversee the planning of the proposed clinic. Dr. Drusso Lopez Estrada, a physician and active church member, serves as president of the foundation. The council of the Presbytery of Coastal Carolina has identified the Siloam Health Clinic as the number one partnership project. Conversations between the two partnership committees and physicians from both presbyteries continue.
- (2) Congregation-to-congregation partnerships: Several congregations in the PGM are interested in having congregational partnerships with congregations in the Presbytery of Coastal Carolina. These congregational partnerships will be the strength of the overall partnership, as church members visit back and forth between Mexico and the United States, learn about two different cultures, and work together.

Previous Visits

Three delegations from PGM have visited in the Presbytery of Coastal Carolina. Two presbytery delegations and one youth group from Coastal Carolina have visited in PGM. The Wallace Presbyterian Church visited with Iglesia “El Divino Verbo” in January 2006. The Bethesda Presbyterian Church in Aberdeen, NC visited with the Iglesia “Emmanuel” in Arroyo Hondo in June 2006.

Opportunities

Nine congregations in the PGM are interested in developing congregation-to-congregation partnerships with congregations in the Presbytery of Coastal Carolina. Opportunities exist for visits within the PGM and with individual congregations. The emphasis in these visits is on *partnership*, finding ways to work together, either in Mexico or in North Carolina. An important part of these visits is the cultural exchange. While the physical labor of any particular project is important, the sharing of our common faith and learning about different cultures are most important. This necessarily involves being open to new experiences and being willing to reserve judgment when you encounter a different way of doing things.

Contacts

In El Presbiterio del Golfo de Mexico:

- Rev. Francisco Magaña: francmaga@hotmail.com (may be helpful to translate your message into Spanish before sending)
- Dr. Huascar de la Cruz: hdelac50@hotmail.com (Huascar is fluent in English)

In The Presbytery of Coastal Carolina:

- Rev. Philip Gladden, moderator, Presbytery Partnership Committee, Presbytery of Coastal Carolina
Wallace Presbyterian Church,
P.O. Box 717, Wallace, NC 28466
(910) 285-2808 wallacepresbyterian@earthlink.net

Rev. Gladden and other members of the Presbytery Partnership Committee are willing (when available) to visit your congregation and present a program (e.g., displays, Power Point, narrative) about the partnership and opportunities for your congregation to be involved.

**VISITS FROM THE PRESBYTERY OF COASTAL CAROLINA
TO EL PRESBITERIO DEL GOLFO DE MEXICO**

January 2004

Sixteen representatives from the Presbytery of Coastal Carolina visited El Presbiterio del Golfo de Mexico, including: Rev. John Goodman, Executive Presbyter; Zoe Anne Cagle, minister of youth and education at Brownson Memorial Presbyterian Church, Southern Pines; Rev. Tom Dendy, pastor of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Laurinburg, Ms. Rosia (Gerri) Freeman of the Haymount Presbyterian Church in Fayetteville, Rev. Philip Gladden, pastor of the Wallace Presbyterian Church in Wallace, Ms. Marian James of the Maple Hill Presbyterian Church in Maple Hill, Rev. Jerry McCann, retired pastor, Rev. Burwell Shore, retired pastor, Ms. Lynn Warren of the Jonesboro Presbyterian Church in Sanford, Rev. Eduardo Moreno of the presbytery staff, Ms. Helen Williams of the College Heights Presbyterian Church in Fayetteville, Rev. Mamie Wilson, pastor of the Blandonia Presbyterian Church in Sanford, Ms. Nancy Miller of the Elizabethtown Presbyterian Church in Elizabethtown, Mr. Jose Perez, commissioned lay pastor from Lillington, Rev. Sanders Read, pastor of the Bethel and Shiloh Presbyterian Churches in Raeford, and Ms. Kathleen Read of the Shiloh Presbyterian Church in Raeford. The group was hosted for one week at the Presbyterian Seminary of the Southeast in Villahermosa, Tabasco and in various locations throughout the presbytery. Group members visited the Alfa y Omega School, the presbytery meeting in Comalcalco, the presbytery office (to attend a meeting with presbytery officials who explained various presbytery ministries and projects), the Dorcas Bible School for Young Women (a school of sacred music and Christian Education in Comalcalco), and numerous congregations. There was also time for sightseeing.

July 2004

Zoe Anne Cagle (former minister of youth and education at Brownson Memorial Presbyterian Church in Southern Pines), Rev. Burwell Shore, and Rev. Eduardo Moreno led a group of youth from Brownson Memorial PC for a week-long visit to Tabasco.

March 2005

A group of seven representatives visited El Presbiterio del Golfo de Mexico, including Dr. Carl Walters (professor, St. Andrews Presbyterian College), Ms. Helena Lee (associate executive presbyter), Dr. Marvin Hage (OB/GYN from First Presbyterian Church, Wilmington), Rev. Philip Gladden (pastor, Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace), Ms. Lydian Altman-Sauer (member, Graves Memorial Presbyterian Church, Clinton), Rev. Louie Andrews (pastor, Graves Memorial Presbyterian Church, Clinton), and Ms. Cecelia Walters (translator). Group members visited the presbytery office, with members of the Jose Coffin Sanchez Foundation for the construction of the Siloam Health Clinic, with representatives of congregations interested in developing partnerships, the Alfa y Omega School (to investigate an exchange program with St. Andrews Presbyterian College), a main hospital in Villahermosa, and numerous congregations.

January 2006

The Wallace Presbyterian Church of Wallace, NC sent a group of six people to visit with Iglesia “El Divino Verbo” in Libertad, Cunduacan, Tabasco. These two congregations are developing a congregation-to-congregation partnership. Group members included Rev. Philip Gladden, pastor of the Wallace Presbyterian Church and elders Pat Barrow, Greg Maready, and Charles Stark. Elder Mike Mills of the Lake Waccamaw Presbyterian Church and Rev. Eduardo Moreno of the presbytery staff were also group members. Group members stayed in the homes of church members, ate meals at the church, and helped with a construction project at one of the mission churches (Salem) in a nearby neighborhood.

June 2006

A group of seven adults and eighteen Senior High youth from the Bethesda Presbyterian Church in Aberdeen, NC visited with the Iglesia “Emmanuel” in Arroyo Hondo near Comalcalco.

**VISITS FROM EL PRESBITERIO DEL GOLFO DE MEXICO
TO THE PRESBYTERY OF COASTAL CAROLINA**

June 2003

The members of the Partnership Committee of El Presbiterio del Golfo de Mexico visited within the bounds of our presbytery for one week: Rev. Francisco Magaña, Rev. Moises Osorio, Rev. Fidel Angeles Fuentes, and Dr. Huascar de la Cruz. They visited the June presbytery meeting.

October 2004

Another contingent of visitors traveled throughout our presbytery in various congregations: Rev. Francisco Magaña, Dr. Drusso Lopez Estrada, Guillermo Dorantes Graniel, Marco Bocanegra, and Dr. Huascar de la Cruz. They visited the October presbytery meeting.

November 2005

Three men visited various churches within our presbytery and brought us up-to-date on the progress of the Siloam Health Clinic and the congregation-to-congregation partnerships: Rev. Francisco Magaña, Dr. Drusso Lopez Estrada, and Rev. Abraham Martinez.



GOALS FOR THIS PRESBYTERY PARTNERSHIP

According to our agreement,

“The hope is that this partnership will:

- strengthen Hispanic ministry in southeastern North Carolina;
- focus mission education in the churches of Presbytery toward a shared goal;
- facilitate participation in the PCUSA’s primary procedure for mission in today’s world (how to be in mission WITH people in other countries, rather than in mission FOR others);
- encourage members and churches to share faith, learn about Presbyterian missions, and be involved in mission.”

At the end of three years, the presbytery partnership between the Presbytery of Coastal Carolina and El Presbiterio del Golfo de Mexico is helping Presbyterians in Tabasco and North Carolina meet these stated goals.

- (1) As members of congregations from the Presbytery of Coastal Carolina visit in Tabasco and learn more about the Mexican culture, they are developing a greater understanding of and appreciation for Hispanic neighbors in southeastern North Carolina. Brothers and sisters from PGM can contribute to our knowledge of Mexican culture with cultural exchanges and education.
- (2) The presbytery partnership provides opportunities within the Presbytery of Coastal Carolina for different congregations to work together toward a common goal. Already members of different congregations have traveled and worked together. The partnership committee hopes to sponsor presbytery-wide trips to Tabasco to encourage and enable members of congregations (in particular, smaller churches) to travel and work together. In addition, the partnership serves as a uniting factor for the Presbytery of Coastal Carolina.
- (3) The presbytery partnership committee is committed to helping congregations and individuals learn more about the concept of “partnership” as we seek to work WITH people in Mexico. Different languages and cultures prove to be challenges but do not have to be barriers to working together. Congregations are encouraged to design visits that will emphasize partnership, even while acknowledging differences (e.g., financial resources, ease of travel, language, culture, etc.).
- (4) The presbytery partnership provides a wonderful opportunity for congregations in the Presbytery of Coastal Carolina and El Presbiterio del Golfo de Mexico to share their faith. While construction projects are beneficial and enjoyable, worshiping together, sharing common meals, and visiting in homes and churches are activities that will promote understanding, appreciation, and Christian love.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the events and developments of the past three years in this presbytery partnership, with thanksgiving to God, the members of the Presbytery Partnership Committee of the Presbytery of Coastal Carolina enthusiastically recommend:

- that the partnership continue;
- that congregations of the Presbytery of Coastal Carolina be encouraged to plan visits to Tabasco;
- and that information continue to be shared presbytery-wide and, in particular, with congregations about the joys and opportunities that are available through our work with our brothers and sisters in El Presbiterio del Golfo de Mexico.