

The History

Called to Colombia

The Colombian Accompaniment Program is a ministry of presence. Since 2004 each month two trained accompaniers have been sent for a month to live and worship with the people of the churches under the careful, loving care of Colombian pastors and deacons and elders. At first the accompaniers were headquartered in the large city of Barranquilla (Presbiterio de la Costa) where the Reformed University is located. Doug and Cheryl Hunt were asked to spend the month of April 2011 there.

In 2010 the church in Colombia asked PCUSA to expand the program to include sending accompaniers to Apartadó (Presbiterio de Urabá). Doug and Cheryl spent the month of November 2012 there, staying in the homes of six different pastors and congregation members.

While in Urabá, Doug and Cheryl realized that no one in the whole area has safe drinking water. Everyone buys or boils water if they have the resources to do so. They saw the doctors' reports citing the water-borne diseases suffered by the children in the childcare centers attached to the churches. Having attended Living Waters for the World Training at Calvin Crest in October, they suggested that a partnership be formed with one of the churches, Cristo Viene of El Tres, and First Presbyterian Church of Stockton to provide clean water for 300 people. This was done in discussion with the General Council of the Presbytery of Urabá, the Executive Secretary of the denomination, Diego Higuera, and the Moderator of the denomination, Jesus Vargas. All of these individuals have committed to help with the installation and to be present at the celebration and dedication of the system on May 7, 2013, God willing. Wanting to do the first project right, they enlisted the help of Mark Vanciel from the Presbytery of San Joaquin who has installed over thirty systems, most in Guatemala. Also joining the team are Cecilia Moran and Al Taylor, trained and experienced mission team members from Trinity Presbyterian Church in Stockton.

As you know this is a partnership; a 3-year, signed covenant clearly outlining the obligations and responsibilities of both sides is essential. Already we are learning a lot about sharing our faith, our life stories, and our resources.

If this project proves to be successful, appropriate, and desirable by the Presbytery of Urabá, it is the dream that a partnership could be formed at the presbytery level with the Presbytery of Stockton. It has been a while since we have had the joy of doing mission together as a presbytery. Doug and Cheryl felt very at home in Urabá because of the similarities to our valley; small rural towns which depend on an agricultural economy along the major north-south highway from Panama to Medellín.

In the words of another accompanier, “The Presbytery of Urabá is the youngest presbytery in Colombia. It is also the poorest, and has no large city within its bounds. Nevertheless, in Urabá, there are already eleven Presbyterian churches, fourteen ‘congregations’ (some with buildings) and twenty-three semillantes (house gatherings). The Presbyterian Church in Urabá is growing organically, sending out runners—like strawberry plants—to other neighborhoods where new congregations take root and spring up. There is a dynamism and joy in the congregations we have visited that belie the suffering present in their context—or perhaps confirm the power of faith in the midst of suffering.”

El Tres Cristo Viene Church is typical; it has about one hundred active members. Less than five members have dependable income (jobs), one of which is the pastor. Yet it supports a childcare center for 225 at risk kids a week through Compassion International. Sixteen years ago most of the members of the church were peacefully raising their families on successful farms. That land was violently stolen from them by armed groups, and they have been displaced ever since. We really feel that this is the time for us to share our abundance with them, so they can rebuild safe, healthy communities.

The Session of First Presbyterian Church in Stockton has set up a holding fund for this mission project. If you choose to be a financial supporter:

1. Make checks payable to First Presbyterian Church
2. In the memo line, write Clean Water for Colombia
3. Place it in an envelope, put it in the offering plate, or send it to the church office.

