

Mexico Partnership: Born out of the Spirit

Edited with an Introduction by James D. Bartlett
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Sanders Read, Phil Gladden, Rix Threadgill and a cloud of Angels

The Division for Stewardship and Mission Education (DSME) has played a vital role in initiating and supporting stewardship and mission projects. It has also provided the churches in the Presbytery of Coastal Carolina with a better understanding of the role of stewardship and mission within the life of the church. Certainly this is not by accident. Forming a presbytery from four antecedent presbyteries that were part of the pre-reunited PCUS and UPCUSA presented a major challenge to all of the committees given the responsibility to form a structure that would be faithful to the Scriptures, the Reformed Tradition, the "Articles of Agreement" hammered out by the two re-uniting denominations, and to all of God's people regardless of their station or situation.

From the very beginning DSME, took seriously the motto "*Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*," ["*The church reformed, always being reformed*," first used in the Dutch Reformed Church.] Its current working definition of "responsibilities" states:

- a. to provide training opportunities for local church leaders in stewardship responsibility and in church programs of stewardship;
- b. to encourage local churches to develop year-round programs of stewardship of time, talent, and resources;
- c. to interpret and encourage support for mission programs of higher governing bodies, including educational institutions and international missions;
- d. to interpret and encourage support of Special Offerings authorized by General Assembly, Synod (or Presbytery).

In its attempt to be faithful in promoting "c" above, the Division sought ways to highlight opportunities for mutual benefit and support in making the Gospel of Jesus Christ relevant to the world in which we live.

In the last decade the Hispanic population in Southeastern North Carolina has increased over 350% [percent]. The Presbytery of Coastal Carolina recognized, before the heavy migration of Hispanics, that an opportunity for ministry in this area was evident. In its wisdom the Presbytery undertook a mission of evangelism to bring the Gospel to the Hispanic people within its bounds. This led to calling an Hispanic pastor to lead the Presbytery in this undertaking. Eduardo Moreno, a pastor in Mexico, was chosen to spearhead this effort. The success of this ministry has been phenomenal. Numerically, there has been significant growth; however, beyond that there has been wide acceptance and support from the individual churches within Presbytery, attesting to the validity of this ministry.

Early on it was evident that this mission project had all the "earmarks" of bringing the Gospel to a deeply committed group of Christian folk who were without the necessary shepherds to ensure their continued spiritual growth.

The formation of this ministry and the excitement about the possibilities for the future, led DSME to begin working toward a partnership with the Presbiterio del Golfo de Mexico that would be mutually helpful, giving both Presbyteries new visions for being faithful to Jesus Christ and to the Gospel. Formulating this partnership agreement took extended efforts on the part of several divisions and committees in our Presbytery, the assistance of Louisville, churches from other Presbyteries, and numerous individuals.

It was determined that this partnership agreement would be further enhanced by having representatives from the Presbiterio del Golfo de Mexico visit with us at a time when they could be introduced to our Presbytery and for the Presbytery of Coastal Carolina to reciprocate at an appropriate time.

After a significant struggle with U.S and Mexico bureaucratic "red tape," and establishing a workable itinerary for their visit, the representative arrived in time to be introduced and share in our June 26, 2003, Presbytery meeting held in Dunn.

The following is an account of their eight day visit, recounting all of the "good, the bad, and the ugly,"—well maybe not "ugly." Eduardo Moreno, Nancy Miller, Rex Threadgill, Sanders Read, and Ed Jennings (White Memorial Presbyterian Church, Raleigh) provided the information about the visit from the perspective of host(ess), driver, guide, translator, etc.

The editor has attempted to use, as much as possible, the narrative written by each individual but part of one narrative might be "sandwiched" in another part to be consistent with the chronology of the events; even with this I have attempted to let the writer present her/his perspective of the events.

The arrival of our guests was filled with all the drama and comedy you can imagine, especially if you have traveled to a foreign country without a seasoned guide.

We begin with Eduardo Moreno's view of that eventful arrival.

"This is Eduardo. Let me tell you my story, ok?"

Tuesday, June 24. 'T' was the night before the meeting with the DSME,² the eve of the truth, everything was quiet while the designated driver traveled to the airport thinking of the wonderful time the visitors from El Presbiterio del Golfo de México were to have the next week. At the airport, they arrived on time, except for a box containing a suit—which delayed us for an hour.

The next step was to know if we were able to unify the group. Why? Well, because everyone came in a different plane and with a different plan.

First, the clerk came two days before to Charlotte to visit a church with his church youth group. Then he decided to go to Raleigh by train thinking of the good time he would have. After a five hour trip from Charlotte to Cary he thought that it was not such a good idea. He called ahead and asked that the group meet him at the station.

Having misunderstood the message, the President, the Legal Advisor, and the designated driver headed to Raleigh, confident that the clerk would arrive at the bus station. But the second call fixed everything and we changed directions to Cary to the train station and found the Clerk crying over the remains of an apple he was eating.

Let me tell you their names: There was Fidel; and the Clerk, Moises; and the Legal Advisor, Francisco.

But something is missing; yes, where was the President of the Seminary? His name is Huascar. Well, he came in another plane, arrives later and lost his luggage on the way from Houston. By the way, in Huston, because he did not have our address, he was sent to an office were he was interrogated about his motives to come to the USA. Well, at the end and nearly missing his plane they permitted him to continue to Raleigh. (Some obscure mind among the migration officers.) After picking up the clerk we suddenly felt hungry and started the odyssey to find a place to get some food at eleven at night, trying at the same time to find an exit from Cary. Somehow we found a place, and how delicious can a simple hamburger taste when you are really hungry. From there, the group headed toward Elizabethtown where they had accommodations at the local motel. Let me tell you that neither we nor the clerk at the motel knew what was happening at one o'clock in the morning, the hour we check in.

Wednesday, June 25. But the day of truth arrived very soon, with only five hours of sleep, everyone alone in their own room, waiting for our leader, Nancy Miller, who would bring us to a place where we would get back our strength. Thanks to Ann and Bob Macduffee, who fed us one super, generous, breakfast. Did we get our strength back? I'll say we did it!!! hooray!!!

(The following narrative comes from Nancy Miller, Moderator of DSME and a hostess and driver for our visitors from Mexico. The breakfast was so good that it warranted a double mention)

I met our guests, with Eduardo, at the Elizabethtown Days Inn. (Mildly stated, they loved their 1-to-a-room king size accommodations). We walked over to the home of Ann and Bob MacDuffie for a delicious Southern breakfast. Then on to the Presbytery office for meeting with Hispanic Committee and then with DSME. There was a good representation from DSME and the discussion was rich and helpful, covering a multitude of issues that had been raised in the DSME monthly meeting.

After lunch at Front Porch, we were back at Presbytery office for more conversation and time to meet staff, also touring the office, explaining the working operation of each function.

(Eduardo continues his chronological narrative at this point)

Interviews were scheduled with members of the Hispanic Ministry Committee, including Jerry McCann, Jacob Santizo and myself. at the Presbytery office. The only thing missing was brother Huascar. Thanks to our brother in Christ, Ed Jennings, who drove from Raleigh that morning in time to bring Huascar to the meeting. It was then that he told us about his missing bag of clothing.

The meeting with DSME lasted more than two hours where substantive questions and answers were exchanged. It was agreed that PCC and El Presbiterio del Golfo de Mexico would begin immediately to prepare for the reciprocal meeting that would be held in Tabasco in January 2004. With six months lead-time, it is possible to enlist a good representative contingent from PCC to make the initial trip to Mexico.

The time with the Hispanic Ministry and DSME had been so productive that everyone had forgotten how long it had been since the delicious breakfast. Almost in unison everyone said "I am hungry."

This was the time to demonstrate the superiority of Southern USA cooking, and off we went to the Front Porch—who received accolades from our partners for their superb offerings and hospitality.

At three sharp we returned to the Presbytery office, where it was explained about our various ministries and where and how the boundaries of our Presbytery came into being. They were delighted to know that this partner is well organized and could be very helpful in implementing some plans they have down there in México.

At four we were on the road again, this time to Seven Springs, via Wallace to buy some clothing for Huascar at WalMart. We then traveled to Chinquapin to visit the Hispanic Ministry office. It was here that each of our partners called home. It was awfully hot and they drank every can of soda and every bottle of water I had in the fridge.

The arrival at Seven Springs was on time which allowed them to go to the hotel and relax for a while before going to the Rios de Agua Viva church. We realized that last night we were in separated rooms with a king size bed for everyone, but this time they had only a room with two double size beds for four people, which you can imagine, presented a minor problem and no doubt a temporary let down—however, they took it good naturedly.

After a short, well-deserved rest, we went to church, and many of the people attending recognized Francisco as one of the preachers at the 100th anniversary of the Gospel in Chiapas. We had a very pleasant time with them, both in the worship service and the sharing of the food they brought.

Wednesday was not a regular night for service (the regular night being Thursday), but the pastor called the members and asked them to come if possible—and did they come—almost 80 people turned out. It had been a long two days for the driver and he went to the comfort of his own home to take a brief break from his duty and spend the night.

Thursday, June 26. At the Presbytery meeting, the next hour of truth; our partners were introduced to the Presbytery by Nancy Miller and myself. A Covenant Partnership Agreement having been approved by both Presbyteries, was formally signed by the delegation from El Presbiterio del Gulfo de Mexico and the Stated Clerk, John Goodman along with representatives from the Presbytery of Coastal Carolina.

Following Presbytery Francisco and Huascar went to Wallace with Rev. Phil Gladden and Moises, Fidel, and I accompanied Rev. Tom Dendy to Laurinburg. (Please ask Philip about the story of them staying at Wallace church).

The group who went to Laurinburg had a good time that night, being hosted by a wonderful family who invited us to use their swimming pool, even though it was late in the evening.

Friday, June 27. Imagine, at 6 o'clock in the morning we went canoeing in the swamp! It was the first experience for all of us and we were thoroughly enjoying the outing. Unfortunately, our host experienced an apparent heart attack. This was a sad moment for all of us.

Later we went to meet Lee Hinson-Hasty the Director of Church Relations at St. Andrews Presbyterian College, who gave us a warm welcome and guided us on a tour of the campus and facilities. We all agreed that St. Andrews and the school sponsored by the Presbiterio del Gofu in Tabasco should be able to establish a good relation between the two.

After having lunch at Scotia Village we headed to Fayetteville. There we joined again with the other group and met with representatives of the Fayetteville Hispanic Presbyterian Council at ... what was the place where Robin Hood used to do his good deeds? Ha, yes, Sherwood forest... at Sherwood Presbyterian Church where David Bush does his good works.

Let me tell you about a couple of curious thing that happened there. For the first time the group I was driving arrived on time, but the other group was not there; what happened? The couple in charge of bringing the group from Wallace became confused and somehow got lost. They took the road up north instead of down south and many miles later they realized they were going in the wrong direction. Well, they arrived not too late, but 15 minutes after we started the meeting. Our Lord is good to all of us. Really!!! (And keeps us humble.)

We were received with warm hugs and plenty of—oh, not again—food. We discussed the different ways to develop a better relationship with Presbytery-to-Presbytery, church-to-church, and even ministry-to-ministry.

We learned both Presbyteries have a very urgent need to work with sister churches at the other place and develop opportunities to share experiences, exchange information, and develop ways to answer questions that will appear along the way.

At the end of the meeting we prepared ourselves to continue, because we had to be in Wilmington at night. With the long trip before us we went to fill up the gas tank. You always feel good when, after getting to know someone for a short time, they begin feeling comfortable and responding as they would if they were in their own environment. Sometimes it

is a shock when you see it happening. You see the "markers" but don't expect them to come all at once.

Not so! Those "markers" seemed to come all at once! I asked myself what happened to the serenity displayed so vividly by our visitors over the past four days?

I do not know, but when we were ready to leave the gas station, there was a sudden change. They first asked to stop to go to the bathroom; second, to stop to buy some drinks; third, to stop and buy some telephone cards to call home. Each request came at a different time but all just when we were leaving the same gas station.

Due to our unscheduled stops we arrived very late in Wilmington. Rev. Rix Threadgill, who had been waiting a very long for our arrival, was very cordial, polite, and genuinely delighted to see and meet our visitors. A tip of the sombrero to Rix.

Having fulfilled my mission for the day, I left them in good hands, headed home to take a rest. I was in bed by 11 o'clock; what came as a real surprise was that when I awakened it was 4 o'clock the next afternoon

Friday, June 27 at Wallace Presbyterian Church

We had a wonderful time hosting Huascar and Francisco. We introduced them to Eastern North Carolina barbecue at the Rose Hill Restaurant and enjoyed fellowship over ice cream at the church. They brought inspiring messages and greetings to the folks who were present. Thomas and Lois Edgerton, members of our congregation who have lived in Mexico City and both speak Spanish, were perfect hosts. On Friday morning, our visitors attended the opening assembly of our VBS and spoke to the children about VBS in Mexico. They invited the children to visit them in Mexico and all of the children accepted! Thomas toured them around town for a couple of hours and then they returned for our closing program and cookout. Again, they had a chance to speak to the parents and families who had come for the program.

(Rix Threadgill provides his overview for part of the day spent in Wilmington)

Saturday, June 28. First Presbyterian of Wilmington's adventure with our friends from the Presbytery of the Gulf of Mexico began on Friday night shortly after their arrival. Two of them were staying near the Intercostal Waterway and two were going to stay in a condo on the beach. So the debate began as to who would stay where—and it lasted 10 minutes. Once that was decided, we all agreed to meet for breakfast at the Middle of the Island Restaurant the next morning where several in the group were introduced to grits. I do not believe they were much interested in this Southern phenomenon, but they smiled and were gracious for the meal.

There are several funny stories to report from our excursion. As we traveled from the beach to our downtown church, they were witnesses to a squirrel attempting to cross the road. Needless to say the squirrel did not make it, meeting its Maker on the front of some Buick. As my passengers "oohed" and "ahhed" and expressed feelings of remorse, they asked if drivers were fined for hitting passing animals. I said no, but unlike this other driver, most attempt to slow down or avoid them. At that moment we all looked over to see the man pull out a large cigar and begin

puffing away. I then exclaimed that after hitting something, most Americans also don't celebrate by smoking.

Wanting to give them their own experience, I asked them what they would like to do, and Francisco decided that he wanted to shop. So I took them to the mall, and as they left in different directions, I attempted to keep my eyes on all four. Needless to say, I lost them. And Fidel, who spoke no English at all, was the one we could not locate for fifteen minutes. As we spread out in the mall, we agreed to return to a central location. And when we all gathered, there was Fidel, standing at the entrance we had come in, wondering where we had been this entire time.

(At this point Nancy Miller re-enters the picture as hostess and designated driver)

When I arrived at the parking lot of First Church Wilmington, Bob Bankhead was returning with our guests from the Seaman's Center, at the Port Authority, where he had taken them on a tour. The group was very much interested in the Church's steeple and wanted to climb to the top, but the ladder was too dangerous.

With that brief moment of disappointment, we were on to Southern Pines, where all hosts were assembled to greet us and take us to (all separate) homes for a good night's sleep.

Sunday, June 29. There were two services on Sunday and both were well attended. Huscar and Fidel brought greetings from El Presbiterio del Golfo de Mexico and from the seminary. They also led prayer in both Spanish and English.

They were able to arrange a meeting between services with Zoe Ann Cagle, church educator, to begin planning for their trip to visit with our new partners from Mexico next summer.

Our next stop was Blandonia to visit their church but especially to visit their Day Care Center to make inquiry about its operation and maintenance.

We were met by Jerry Vuncannon, Mamie Wilson, pastor of Blandonia, and Mr. Beady Waddell, co-director of the Center. There never seems to be a want for good refreshment among Presbyterians. Well, today was no exception. The Presbyterian Women of the church provided some very welcome, cool and delightful treats. The day was hot and humid but largely forgotten, thanks to the PW.

From that delightful meeting, we ventured on to First Church Sanford where Jerry Vuncannon had assembled reps. from about 8 churches. This may have been the best discussion of all—everybody relaxed and talked freely about how we can help *EACH OTHER*—visits to and from, medical supplies there, they come here to share spirituality; we go there to assist with VBS, camps, etc.

(Eduardo Moreno picks up the narrative at this point, giving us his perspective on the events of the day; Nancy will join us again later.)

My family and I join the group at Brownson Memorial Presbyterian Church in Southern Pines; we were at the interview they had with the mission group and Ms. Zoe Cagle who is preparing a youth group to go to Tabasco the next summer. We stayed to attend the second worship service that was wonderful; again we participated in sharing a meal.

Later we went to Blandonia Presbyterian Church in Sanford and visited the Day Care Center they have there. After that at First Church of Sanford, with the presence of more than 8 churches represented, we discussed the ideas about how to do ministry together in both Presbyteries.

Monday, June 30. From Sanford to Raleigh, where Ed Jennings received the group with open arms and gave them a tour of Raleigh and Durham, including shopping the next day. I met them mid-afternoon and drove Moises to Charlotte to meet with his group from Tabasco to return home the following day.

(An added note from Eduardo)

At six sharp at White Memorial Presbyterian Church they were received by the Mission and Construction Committee to talk with the president of the Seminary in Tabasco, Rev. Huascar de la Cruz Angulo, about the construction of the facilities at the Seminary. Our people were permitted to talk a little about their positions in the Presbiterio del Golfo.

Later, at nine we said goodbye to our visitors, who will fly home tomorrow at eight in the morning. We think both Presbyteries passed the test of the truth; praise God. We hope that this relationship will become powerful in time and that we praise the Lord and grow the church in His name.

(The following is from Ed Jennings, who is able to share with us the rather hectic pace maintained by one of our visitors from Mexico.)

"I bring you Greetings from the Seminary in Villahermosa, Tabasco, Mexico.

Their semester ended last week with the Music Recital on Thursday night, June 18th and the graduation ceremonies on Saturday, June 21st. There were a total of 11 graduates. The Chapel was filled with friends and relatives, with approximately 1,200 people attending. The service was special with Pastor Jorge Lopez Perez giving the keynote address. He is currently President of the General Assembly for the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico. I will try and provide a more complete update around mid July. Below is the schedule and itinerary during Huascar's visit here in the US.

Huascar and I returned to the US late Tuesday evening. On Wednesday (June 25) we visited the Coastal Carolina Presbytery office in Elizabethtown, NC. Today (June 26) we were at the Presbytery meeting at First Presbyterian Church in Dunn, NC

Huascar will be visiting Wallace, Wilmington, and other areas within Coastal Carolina Presbytery until Sunday evening, June 29th. The delegation will arrive in Raleigh late on June 29th.

On Monday, June 30th, we will be visiting the Farmers Market and have breakfast at the restaurant there. Then we plan to visit the downtown area of Raleigh, visiting the Capitol, the Legislature Building, and the science museum. For lunch we will be at Cooper's Bar-Be Que.

After lunch we will travel to Durham, NC and visit the Duke Chapel and gardens. Monday evening we will have a potluck dinner at White Memorial Presbyterian Church, Raleigh at 6:00 PM. Everyone is welcome, just bring a covered dish. The meeting will end at 8:00 PM.

After dinner President of the Seminary, Dr. Huascar de la Cruz Angulo will speak about the seminary. The President and delegation will answer questions from the audience about the seminary and the Presbyterian Churches in Mexico.

On Tuesday, July 1st, the delegation will return to Villahermosa, Tabasco, Mexico except for Huascar.

Huascar and I will leave on Tuesday, July 1st and will travel to Hinton, West Virginia and will be at First Presbyterian Church in Hinton on July 2nd.

We will return to Raleigh on July 3rd, Huascar will leave on July 4th and fly to Chicago and Grand Rapids, Michigan to visit churches in that area.