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Guatemala Partnership: The Tide is Raising All Ships by Chris Hickey

It has been a transformative year for the New Castle Presbytery, the Association of Mam Christian Women for Development, and CEDEPCA largely due to the creation of Ignite. There is an aphorism that suggests, “A rising tide lifts all boats”. In this case, Ignite has lifted up all three groups in this partnership as they explore and grow together.



Ignite is responsible for granting funds (formerly held in Speer Trust and West Legacy) to congregations and organizations within NCP with the intention of sparking new, creative, bold, and inspired missional partnerships in our communities and abroad. In that same vein, a Presbytery-wide leadership team just travelled to Guatemala in January 2019. Trip members included: Jessie MacMillan (Connectional Presbyter), Lynette Kenton (NCP Treasurer), Kim Jackson (Pastor, Dover), Terry Dougherty (Pastor, Ocean View, Ignite Board), Edwin Estevez (Pastor, Riverfront & Grace Methodist, Ignite Board), Julius Jackson (Elder, Community, Ignite Board), Meg Burich (Elder, Westminster-Wilm), Carrie Saathoff (Elder Westminster-Wilm), Cathy Higgins (Elder Westminster-Wilm, Ignite Board) and Chris Hickey (Youth Leader, Westminster-Wilm).



One of the highlights of the trip was the agreement signing with CEDEPCA. After twenty years of traveling and working together, NCP and CEDEPCA felt called to enter into a formal three-year partnership, which commits NCP to providing financial support and to sending at least one delegation to visit Guatemala annually. In turn, CEDEPCA promises to facilitate our intercultural encounters and send at least one delegate to visit us in the United States each year. Both groups will continue to pray for each other and work together on mutual projects. **You can watch the agreement signing ceremony here:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wdel-o-7L7w>



After our time at the CEDEPCA headquarters in Guatemala City, we traveled to San Juan Ostuncalco to visit with the women of the Association of Mam Christian Women for Development. We met with various NCP-sponsored microloan groups to see their progress and enjoy each other's company. We spent time with five different groups, expanding our prayer partnerships and participating in bible studies where we recognized that we are all children of God and must have faith while being open to God's help. These microloan groups showcased their reforestation projects and family gardens. It quickly became clear that these women are the most vulnerable to climate change. Last year, there were hailstorms and inconsistent rains during the raining season, making their crops less predictable and profitable.



Other groups gave us tours of their impressive inventory of livestock- huge cows and pigs, cute rabbits, and chickens. One group even killed 12 chickens to serve us an afternoon feast! Overall, it was inspiring to see such a continued demand for this successful program, which continues to make such a lasting impact on the lives of these women.



We also had a dinner and a morning meeting with the Board of Directors of the Association. We were able to personally congratulate them on all their hard work during 2018. Our favorite line in their official 2018 report to NCP reads: “Please note we can ordinarily fit our activities on one page, but this year the number exceeds what can be stated within that limit.” Some projects that they worked on in 2018 included: family gardens, stoves, VIP latrines, water filters, CEDEPCA training, health clinics, maintaining health of livestock, formalizing the Association, and prayer partnerships. Thanks to a generous grant from Ignite, we were able to deliver funds for CEDEPCA and Heifer trainings; salaries for an accountant, secretary and auditor; and costs related to Association meetings.

This partnership is open to all churches in New Castle Presbytery. Please join us! To learn more about the trip or how to get involved, contact Carrie Saathoff (carriesaathoff@hotmail.com) or Cathy Higgins (cathy-higgins@comcast.net).