

Message of the Week: Humanity is shared in missions

Helping ones in need helps mend creation

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By Mike Magee, MD, MDiv

I believe God inspires humankind to partnership in the mending of creation. We respond with Christian vocation. One form of Christian vocation is a short-term global mission trip. With God's help, we proclaim God's good news in word and deed. We practice forgiveness. We tear down the walls of hostility. We liberate the oppressed from injustice.

Some question the validity of a global mission trip when there is so much domestic suffering. Suffering among Katrina victims, tornado victims, Appalachian children, and the homeless right here in middle Tennessee. But others believe the God of all peoples and all ages is not a God of "either / or," but a God of "both / and." Apostle Paul writes in *Romans 3* that God is the God of both Jew and Gentile. That is, all of humanity.

So what as people of faith are we called to do about global mission?

The Presbytery of Middle Tennessee's (PCUSA) 91 churches send representatives twice a year to meet with the leaders of the Presbytery of the Petén in Guatemala. We share our needs with each other, and each partner tries to fulfill the other's needs as brothers and sisters in faith. As a result of this four-year partnership, the Presbytery of Middle Tennessee sends teams three or four times a year to the northern part of Guatemala, the Petén province. In response to the needs expressed by our partners, we have participated in theological education for their pastors, vacation Bible schools for their children, have taken down 400 Bibles, have roofed 5 churches, have funded 5 rain-water harvesters and reservoirs, have taken well-drilling trips to the villages with the financial support of the Franklin Rotary club, have staffed dental and eyeglass clinics, and have just sent a team to focus on improving literacy. In November another team from our Presbytery will make an unusual medical trip: instead of passing out vitamins, and seeing and providing surgery for as many patients as possible, they will focus on educating and lifting up the village "health promoters." They will also attempt to forge relationships between them and the conventionally trained physicians in nearby cities.

PCUSA Guatemalan missionary Roger Marriott says, "What we offer by our presence in mission is some tangible evidence of our love for God's children, forced to live under oppressive conditions we cannot begin to understand. Coming here is worth doing, a faithful use of time and money."

PCUSA pastor Dr. Nancy McCurley says this about who helps whom in mission work: "However much scripture is good news for the materially poor, it is also good news for the poor in spirit - often those rich in things. We do indeed meet God in the face of the one in need, and are startled when we recognize a brother or sister, not just a poor person. They call us into their suffering, and into a widening, more inclusive compassion. From that perspective, we are the ones who are most helped."

It may not seem the most efficient stewardship of time and money, but going to stand beside another projects profound regard, care, and honor for that person. We serve others most profoundly not by giving them things or doing things for them, but by accompanying them on their way. We participate with God most fully in mending creation by standing beside each other in solidarity. In this age of high speed internet, cell phones, instant messaging, and wire transfers, the presence of someone standing beside us has impact. It bears powerful witness to God's work in our lives. When our feet literally share common ground with others, we share their humanity, and they share ours. And we mend our broken global community.

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