

# Many lives, one mission: dreaming together in global partnership

By Leslie Clay and Carl Agsten

Presbyterians do mission in partnership. This basic strategy has become a mature and effective way of doing mission in Nicaragua for 40 years through the global partnership of the PC(USA) and the Council of Evangelical Churches of Nicaragua (CEPAD).

CEPAD has partnered with Presbyterians since its formation in December 1972, just three days after the historic, devastating earthquake in Managua. Out of the 14 covenant relationships CEPAD currently facilitates, 13 are with PC(USA) churches or presbyteries.

As we write this, we are in the middle of a 12-state tour of the United States, visiting U.S. partners and sharing our mission stories. Many generous people are opening their homes and church doors to us, and the energy of this sharing is infectious. We have spent the past two years in Nicaragua as mission co-workers, learning to receive the wonderful hospitality of our Nicaraguan friends, and now in our own culture we can see that this God-given gift knows no boundaries.

For the first three weeks of our travels we have been accompanied by Anita Taylor, the Nicaraguan director of CEPAD's program for Brigades, Delegations and Partnerships. Anita and Leslie have preached together and presented the story of how their totally different lives have joined to begin a new story of cross-cultural mission. Together they facilitate the CEPAD Partnership program,

supporting the bonds made between churches in the United States and communities in Nicaragua.

The partnership between two congregations in Kentucky and the pastoral committee of San Carlos, Nicaragua, located in a remote spot where the giant waters of Lake Nicaragua flow into the Rio San Juan, has developed over 10 years and has thrived with commitment and communication from both sides of the border. The churches in Kentucky are the Community of Faith Presbyterian Church of Covington and the First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) of Madisonville, separated by 200 miles but joined by a desire to accompany their brothers and sisters in San Carlos with annual visits to Nicaragua, mutual prayer, support of the Nicaraguan community's priorities and sponsorship of Nicaraguan visits to their churches in Kentucky.

Bill Lindsay of Covington is the logistical leader of the trips to Nicaragua, and has visited his partner community more than 10 times. In reflecting on the meaning of mission for him, Lindsay said: "As we engage with global partners, facilitated by mission workers, we are encouraged, even forced, to recognize that there are critical daily and ongoing needs of people that are far larger and more basic than our day-to-day wants at home. In partnership in the Rio San Juan region of Nicaragua, we realize that there are villages that don't have decent water, children who are not able to go to school for lack of acceptable clothing (uniforms), and individuals who go to bed hungry at night. It makes us look at needs and wants differently."

Mark Lee of the Madisonville congregation said that the experience of partnership is transformational in his life and the life of his fellow travelers. "If a person's sense of community is quite limited in scope, it is easy for one's own beliefs and practices to be seen as not only the norm but also the one true way," he said. "However, if one develops relationships in a broader community—relationships that value each person and recognize and celebrate differences as well as shared customs or traits—one can't remain provincial for long. My experiences with global partners have made me more aware that the world doesn't revolve around me or my country and culture. We all can learn so much from each other."

The work of individual partnerships has a broader significance as well. What seems like a personal experience becomes a blessing to the global body of believers as mutual understanding becomes

*The children of San Carlos, Nicaragua, receive school uniforms through the support of their partners in Kentucky and the sewing cooperative in San Carlos.*



the norm. Lee expressed it this way: “As we work together to achieve common goals, we hopefully start to see each other as children of God, as brothers and sisters. The barriers that too often separate us—ethnic, theological, political, socioeconomic—become part of our life stories that create interest, part of what makes us who we are, and cease being the walls they too often have been.”

“Christ is present in the faces of those we meet when we sing together in churches, dance together with children, break bread and drink coffee in the homes of families, and study the successes and challenges of other partnerships,” said Lindsay.

Partnerships in faith take many forms. As we visit congregations in the United States and share their experiences as well as our own, we realize that the relationship between these communities is made possible because partnerships have been a way of doing mission for many years. It is not always easy. As we partner together we are celebrating our oneness in Christ in a world that is in need of peace, in a world we are each called to serve. We are dreaming together. We are becoming familiar with each other’s rhythm and learning the pace of being together.

We are blessed to be in partnership!

If you would like a mission co-worker to visit your congregation, visit [www.pcusa.org/missionconnections](http://www.pcusa.org/missionconnections).

The Nicaragua Mission Network is one of more than 40 networks that connect Presbyterians who share a common mission interest. Most participants are involved in mission partnerships through congregations, presbyteries or synods. Network members come together to coordinate efforts, share best practices and develop strategies. Contact Maria Arroyo at [maria.arroyo@pcusa.org](mailto:maria.arroyo@pcusa.org) for information.



*Rev. Leslie Clay (second from right) and Anita Taylor, Director of CEPAD's Nehemiah program for delegations and partnerships, join Ed Ramsey and Rev. Don McLaughlin (right) for World Communion Sunday in Madisonville, Kentucky.*