

Short term mission as transformational ministry or . . . the art of giving and receiving

Editorial

By Lindsey Hepburn-Aley

Rev. Herb Gale recently gave a talk to the committee of Presbyterian World Service & Development and asked everybody in the room to name the most valuable gift they had either given or received. It surprised us all that most people in the room named gifts they have *received*. Many expressed that the best gifts were ones that were *unexpected*.

A participant this past summer on the Youth in Mission trip to Taiwan expressed this in her evaluation saying,

I was ready to go to this far away place that needed my help...What I did not count on was to go to this country that is already established and healthy in their Church, and be taught things about how I could come back and change my own church and my own faith... Mission is not always about going out and changing the world, but about being open to having parts of yourself changed.

Many people returning from short term mission trips are surprised to receive gifts from people they expect to give gifts



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to! Participants on St. Andrew's Coldwater trip to Malawi this past summer even received two live chickens from one of the villages they visited. One visitor to the Winnipeg Inner City Missions this past summer said, "My favorite thing of the whole trip was the naming ceremony. They named us all... and it is considered a great honor to receive a new name."

It is a great honor to receive a gift, whether it is a new name, a chicken or changed perspective. But what makes a gift special is what God helps us do with it. Gifts can be transformed into stories, new ways of living and being in the world, and we never know what a gift will mean to the person it is given to.

Mission trips are an incredible gift. They give us opportunities to learn and share with people from around the world. One elderly woman at Knox Spadina recently reminded a room full of young missionaries that it used to take months to get to India - and you had to travel by boat! Never before in history has it been so easy to connect with people so far away.

But sometimes in our speediness to serve one another we forget to listen and simply be in Christ's presence with one another. After returning from a conference in the Middle East, John Park reflected on this in his evaluation; "When one focuses on *doing*, the mission can easily become a tool for one's own satisfaction. What is really valued in mission is one's presence and support" I would add that the openness to receiving the gifts of those we hope to serve is also valued in mission .

It is in the act of giving and receiving we are transformed and often not in the ways we might expect. We learn that we are all part of the same body of Christ, and what we do affects the way that others live even on the other side of the world.

The following people who have written for this issue of Women's Perspectives are a handful of these stories of mission. These courageous men and women took up the challenge of going somewhere they had never gone before, asked questions they had never asked, and have turned these experiences into gifts to share with others. Enjoy.



By Heather Paton

Should I really spend my money on a trip
so far away
When the hungry and the needy have so
little day to day
Though I want to learn and realize gifts of
different folks and lands
How I balance both these values I cannot
quite understand

Still I venture into newness: colours,
landscapes, smells and sounds
As a white girl, trying to listen I find
prejudice abounds
Grasping sex and race relations, do I
really know what's right?
Can I fit here or contribute with my
blurred outsider sight?

Expectations slowly crumbling I begin to
see my place
Not as profound mover shaker, but as
presence held by grace
Humbled by true hospitality, stirred by rich
communal hope
I am blessed to be a witness to the Spirit's
love-filled scope

I return with mixed emotions: eager also
deeply drained
Will I convey all the beauty, will my
passion be maintained?
Trusting God to keep transforming all I've
seen and all I'll be
I can dwell amidst the questions formed in
new community.

By Cathy Finlay

The newest photo on my fridge gallery is of global church family: a Baptist pastor, his wife Elena and their daughter Yanci. They were my hosts in Nicaragua for only 24 hours but have had a great impact on my life.

This family lives in an isolated village in the mountains of Northern Nicaragua. The pastor visits his parishioners on bicycle. They have no electricity in their village. Cooking is done on a wood-fired cement stove. The latrine is up the hill behind the house. The shower is located in the field, beside the well, and water for household use is carried in pails from the field.

They welcomed our group into the community and into their home and generously shared their food and life experiences with us. When we were getting ready to leave, Elena asked if she could keep a photo of my family that I had shared with her. It was humbling to see that a simple photo was so treasured.

The people we encountered on this trip have influenced my faith journey. It wasn't possible to continue on with life as it had been before the trip; God was nudging me in a different direction.

I began this trip thinking of Micah's words: "what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?." (Micah

6:8) Supporting the work and mission of my own congregation, PWS&D and *Presbyterians Sharing* has always been the way I have chosen to live out this passage. But being a retired teacher I decided I could give another resource - my time.

After several months and much reflection and prayer, my focus has expanded and I've been inspired by another passage in the bible, from James: "But -- be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being --- not hearers who forget but doers who act--they will be blessed in their doing". (James 1: 22, 25, *NRSV*)

All my life I have been much more a Martha than a Mary, a 'doer of the word and not merely [a] hearer" (although hopefully I listen well enough that my actions are part of God's plan). This passage has compelled me to use my time to import fair trade Nicaraguan arts and crafts here to Canada. I have become a member of Faces of Fair Trade (www.facesoffairtrade.com), a group of like-minded people working collaboratively to improve the living conditions of people around the world. We work in partnership with artisans, valuing their skills and their dignity, aiming for long term and sustainable solutions to the problem of poverty.



For more information about Faces of Fair Trade, please visit our website at

www.facesoffairtrade.com

We work not only as individual companies, but also as an entirety, bringing caravans of fairly traded products to your home or school or church.

By Wendy Renault

In February 2010 I travelled with seven others from Hamilton area Presbyterian churches to visit organizations and people in Guatemala that we supported through our gifts to Presbyterians Sharing and Presbyterian World Service & Development.

My father was a Presbyterian minister and I'd heard about Presbyterians Sharing and PWS&D all my life – but seeing first-hand the depth of commitment to partnership in Guatemala was when I really learned about mission.

The people we met in Guatemala did not need my help in the ways I expected. They didn't need me to build their buildings; the Fraternity of Maya Presbyterians had been able to employ local builders with the support we sent for their office extension. The amazing teachers and staff at the Francisco Coll School did not need me to teach at the school. The women's groups we visited did not improve their businesses because we visited. But they all wanted me to be aware of what they do there – working with Guatemalan women, teaching in heart of the Guatemala City dump community, and improving their lives. And they all were encouraged by our presence and because we

would share with others the work they are trying to do.

The trip brought some troubling realities to the surface for me. Beyond the question of why some people have more wealth than others, it troubles me more to think of people not having basic freedoms and free will. It troubles me to think of people being oppressed because of their sex, heritage or beliefs.

Now, I am aware that having all of these wonderful gifts is a big responsibility. Since returning home I've been learning how to be a good steward of what God has entrusted to me. I have started asking: will I keep my good fortune to myself or will I share? Will I share grudgingly, my leftovers - or will it be my best?

The remarkable women that we met in Guatemala taught me to celebrate our differences, to remember one another in our prayers and to remember we must always act to promote social justice in our own communities and in the world. They taught me that mission is about building relationships and empowering each other by creating positive social change.

A Different Kind of Amazing

By Audrey Little

I never dreamed that one day I would walk on the same soil as David Livingstone, one of the first missionaries in Africa. I heard about missionaries in church and knew they were a different kind of amazing people, somewhat fictional in my world. They lived in faraway places that seemed fictional too.

When I was in grade eight, I had a Sunday school teacher named Dr. Livingstone who was the nephew of David Livingstone the missionary. Having someone I knew connect me to those faraway places made them feel real.

As an adult I became more interested in mission and Malawi in particular. I started reading accounts of people

who had visited Malawi and couldn't believe it was actually possible to go and see what was going on there.

The opportunity to go and see myself changed my life and my priorities forever. "Love your neighbor as yourself" became a focal point of my life, my life's calling.

In recent years more and more "ordinary people", like myself, are being given the opportunity to "go and see" and responding passionately to the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Mission becomes not just a trip or an experience, but a life and a calling, not limited to loving the place you visit, but serving all of God's children everywhere.

By Ian Hepburn-Aley

On our mission trip to Malawi this past summer we visited an Orphan Care Centre in Blantyre where we met members of the community supporting the young people and a group of men and women who do home based care visits with people who were very sick with HIV. One day we accompanied the home based care volunteers on their visits. We began the morning walking through the streets, and stopping at homes to visit. At the homes, the volunteers would check in about medications, speak with supporting family members and pray with the person whose home we were in. Then we would head to the next house. Sometimes the homes were 45 minutes apart.

As we were walking late in the day, Janice, one of the female volunteers told us that she too had HIV. She said she had been sick like the people we had visited that day, almost near death. But her church community had done as she was doing now: visiting and providing basic medical care, and through God's grace, she had become well. As soon as she was well enough to begin walking, she became a volunteer and has been serving the community for the

past fifteen years. Still living with HIV, Janice walks for eight hours a day, visiting people suffering from HIV.

I was deeply moved by Janice's commitment to give back to her community from the gift of life she had received. Witnessing her faith has deepened and renewed my own. We visited many projects supported by Presbyterian World Service and Development. Again and again in talking with the staff of the organizations we visited, I saw the way that faith guided and sustained the staff in their work. Faith gave people a common vocabulary for discussion of the joys and challenges of life.

I work for a secular development organization in Toronto and at times we don't openly talk about faith for fear of being offensive, even though it is the way many of us understand and experience our work. Since coming home, I have become much more comfortable voicing this part of myself and I'm finding this has helped others feel comfortable expressing themselves too.

I feel very grateful to have had this opportunity.

NATIONAL PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN'S GATHERING

DATE: May 20-23, 2011

PLACE: Sheraton Parkway Hotel, Richmond Hill (GTA), Ontario

REGISTRATION FEES:

\$425 (deadline March 31, 2011)

Family Rate: \$50.00 off per person (18 years and over)

INQUIRIES:

skim@presbyterian.ca

(416) 441-1111 or 1-800-619-7301 Extension 321

For more information visit: www.womensgathering.ca



Subscriber News:

Faith in fiction? Share your thoughts . . .

Thank you for your continued interest in Women's Perspectives. As you know, the purpose of this publication is to share the thoughts and views of Presbyterian women in Canada and keep them in touch with each other. The Women's Perspective Committee is planning an issue about faith in fiction and we would like to invite you to share your thoughts with us about a book that has stretched your spirituality, caused you to stop and think...or talk...or pray. If you are interested, please submit a short write-up (maximum 200 words) to Liz Brewer at ebrewer@presbyterian.ca by April 15, 2011.

Thanks to Sheila Lang

This issue marks the last time we will have the services of Sheila Lang as our administrator on Women's Perspectives. Sheila will now be working as the Program Coordinator for Canadian Ministries/The Vine. We wish Sheila the best in this new endeavour and thank her for her enthusiastic support of the Women's Perspective Committee and editorial committees.

We welcome your comments and suggestions for future issues of Women's Perspectives. Are there particular questions or issues you would like Perspectives to address? Would you like to comment on any of the articles in this issue or form an editorial committee to produce an issue of Perspectives? We want to hear from you. Please email us at ebrewer@presbyterian.ca or phone Liz Brewer at 1-800-619-7301 ext. 248. Thank you for your support.

Women's Perspectives (WP) strives to keep women in touch with each other and share their theological perspectives, biblical insights, special interests, joys and concerns with the whole church. WP is published 6 times yearly. It is written by guest editors and overseen by WP Committee, in co-operation with the Women in Ministry Committee.

These committees are connected with the office of Ministry and Church Vocations, the Life and Mission Agency, The Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC). Views expressed in WP are not necessarily endorsed by the WP Committee or the PCC.

Readers comments and contributions are welcome at womensperspectives@presbyterian.ca

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