

## The Story of the Pigs: Hope Comes in When Barriers Disappear

On our trip to Guatemala in February the Presbytery of Middle Tennessee travel group spent several days with pastors from the Presbytery of the Peten. This small presbytery covers one of the poorest regions of the country. This year for the first time in 10 years of building relationships, most of the pastors brought their wives to meet with us. It was a significant, wonderful step, and we were thrilled to get to know these women.

The five women who came had to go through a lot to get there. The trip involved walking and taking buses, and each had to arrange for the care of their children. In some cases this meant the children were staying in houses with no security – thatched roofs hardly keeping out the rain or not keeping it out, dirt floors that became mud when water poured in . . . there were reasons to be anxious, even though these mothers wanted to come.

The ten of us spent an afternoon sharing our stories, trying to move past barriers of culture, language and education, economics and race. Tara Lentz, our translator from Second Presbyterian Church, did a lot to make this happen. So did Imelda, one of the Guatemalan women who could translate from Tara's Spanish into the native tongue of the women, Quiche.

Our new friends covered their mouths with their hands when they smiled, and looked down into their laps or off into the distance when they spoke. It could be hard to make direct eye contact with them. Their sentences, like ours, were short or constructed in phrases to make translation easier. The younger women expressed how difficult it is to care for so many children. We all shared something about the spaces in our lives where we most need our faith, where we feel most vulnerable

On the second day of conversation, while the men were building a pavilion, we asked the women how we could help them grow as leaders in their churches. We were aware that this was a very American thing to discuss! We had no idea if they thought of themselves as leaders or potential leaders, and we didn't know if this would be helpful, but we were trying. And we could sense so much potential! We knew that they had small chapters of Presbyterian Women or as they call it, Presbyteriale. And we quickly discovered that they viewed Presbyteriale as their avenue – their way to a kind of spiritual release and strengthening in the face of their burdens, a way through and beyond – both individually and for the churches. It became clear that

Presbyteriale, and our support of it, is a way to generate hope in the future, and to help other women to imagine the future in these churches.

On the second day when we got together again for conversation, we were blown away when Christina, one of the younger women, began to describe her dream of how to help the church. She had thought it through completely – it was now a plan – a way for each Presbyteriale to help each church raise money.

Christina wanted to buy two pigs for each church, and enough wood and wire to build a pen. They would fatten the pigs, breed them and sell them. With fatter pigs they would make a profit over the original price and there would be more pigs. They would fortify the feed with vitamins to fatten them.

They spun this out as we listened. We knew that our Presbyterian Women chapters around Nashville would be interested in helping these women pursue this way to stand on their own, to contribute in a tangible way to their church. We all started buzzing about the possibility. How could we fund this project enough to get it off the ground? Imelda, who could write, said she would give us a written proposal before the trip was over.

That same night when we gathered after dinner, Imelda brought us a two-page written proposal spelling out the details of how they would raise pigs to help their churches become more self supporting, and help these pastors' wives connect with other women. They wanted to train other women to raise pigs and work for the good of the church. They wanted to get above the weight of carving out a life on a few dollars a week with many mouths to feed, and almost no resources.

Now we hope to make this possible through our PW chapters throughout Middle Tennessee. We want to raise what these women will need to buy two pigs for each of seven churches, and build a fence!

In the gospels, we see how radical changes occur where a seemingly small change in behavior takes place. A woman gives Jesus a drink at a well and become a prophet in her hometown; Jesus makes a paste out of mud and a blind man sees.

You only have to go somewhere like Guatemala to see the Gospel lived out this way today, in ways that can open the eyes of any American.

Will you join in helping our sisters in Guatemala?

