



PEACE RIVER PRESBYTERY



Dear Colleagues and Friends,

Last week, it was exciting to have members of the reformed family from around the world, including the Caribbean, Cuba, Geneva, Ghana and Tanzania, gather in our area for a regional meeting of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. They spent their first day with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and visited Misión Peniel. Miguel Estrada was able to interview the Spanish-speaking representative on the radio program that is part of the ministry of Misión Peniel. For the program that evening, Tom Harp and I were asked to be part of a panel discussion with six other participants.



For the panel, I was asked to share reflections on the ecclesiology of the Presbytery's involvement, support, and advocacy for the farm worker community in Immokalee and how that has informed, impacted, or reshaped our understandings of the nature of church. I don't think that we have thought about our work in Immokalee under the rubric of ecclesiology, yet it is our ecclesiology and understandings that compelled us to be involved with CIW as well as Misión Peniel. As I thought about it, maybe our involvement with Immokalee and other similar contexts and ministries is helping us rediscover what the Apostle Paul as well as Calvin understood to be the nature and purpose of the church.

Jürgen Moltmann, a reformed theologian of our time, in the book The Church in the Power of the Spirit has said that our center as the church is Christ, yet our hope in Christ compels us to move from the center to the action and activity of God on the horizon. Scripture reads: For God so loved the world - not the church, but the world - and it is that love of God that puts us on a trajectory to impact and love the world that God so loves. The church exists not for itself, but as the Body of Christ for the sake of the world that God so loves.

To say it in a very simple way, some understand the purpose of the church as being primarily about Jesus loving me while others see it as being about Jesus transforming the world and its social structures, confronting powers and principalities.

Calvin and Moltmann and our reformed heritage would say something like this: the church is about proclaiming the reality that Jesus' love is not only transforming me, but is calling us to join with God in the transformation of the world God so loves.

When folks like us gather Sunday after Sunday, it is easy for church to be just about us, but when members get involved in mission and justice ministries like in Immokalee, then, using Moltmann's language, the centrality of Christ compels us in concrete ways to move to the horizons.

Over the past year, 22 churches in Peace River have taken turns going to Misión Peniel to help serve the Friday evening meals. That translates to almost 800 members who understand church in a way they never would have if they did not have a face-to-face, person-to-person involvement. Without a face, without a story, without a relationship, it is easy to fall back into a much privatized understanding of God's mission to the world. Even though Jesus gave us the Great Commandment and even though the story of the Good Samaritan is known by everyone, unless one is in a context where one sees the abuses of power and sees the face of people oppressed by systems that are wrong and sees need and the opportunities right around us, it is easy to avoid our role and do nothing.

As I think about the big word "ecclesiology", I believe our work in Immokalee has opened some of us up in a new way to both the center of our faith, namely the call to discipleship, and to the horizons toward which the love and justice of Christ calls us.

I would invite your thoughts on how, in your church and life, moving to the horizons, whatever that looks like for you or your congregation, has strengthened your relationship to Jesus Christ who is the center.

On a personal note, it is a small world. At the panel discussion, I was able to reconnect with a person from Ghana who, while he was doing a PhD at the University of Chicago, worshiped at the church where I was the pastor. It's a small world after all...

Thanks be to God,

Graham

Graham Hart

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Friends,

I am asking you to act on what you hear... to let your light shine.... to show your faith under pressure so that you might experience the desirable and beneficial gift that comes out of heaven when we join in God's desire for us to be generous. Since 1949, Presbyterians have joined with millions of other Christians through One Great Hour of Sharing to share God's love with people experiencing need. Our gifts support ministries of disaster response, refugee assistance and resettlement, and community development that help people find safe refuge, start new lives and work together to strengthen their families and communities.

I have seen it help the earthquake victims from Haiti and our own citizens right here in Southwest Florida in need of food and shelter following recent hurricanes and freezes. Specifically, since 2004 PDA has sent \$1,066,307 to Peace River Presbytery to help repair hurricane damage, feed immigrant workers after freezing temperatures destroyed their livelihood, and aid in restoring a fire-damaged church. Additionally, SDOP gave \$21,000 to the Coalition of Immokalee Workers in 2007 primarily for the establishment of the radio station in Immokalee. That's a total of \$1,087,307 from OGHS in direct assistance to the people and churches of Peace River in the last seven years, all from your gifts. It is outreach to the world but not forgetting our own backyard.

Recognizing that the hope we have in Christ is lived out in our hope for one another, we respond with gifts that help our sisters and brothers around the world find the hope for a brighter future.

When is the offering received?

Most congregations receive the offering on Easter Sunday, Palm Sunday or both, while many receive it throughout Lent.

Where does the money go?

The Presbyterian Hunger Program receives 36 percent of undesignated One Great Hour of Sharing gifts, while the Self-Development of People and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance each receive 32 percent.

Use this opportunity to help demonstrate in love for one another how we can affirm each other, connect in mission as disciples and be the body of Christ in unity. Pray that we respond to Jesus' command that we love each other as we share together in One Great Hour of Sharing.

Blessings,

On behalf of the Mission and Justice Committee

John Lawson. Elder, Moorings Presbyterian Church

The articles below may interest you. I have found some of them in my reading, and others have been passed on to me. Just click on the underlined phrases.

[U.K. astrophysicist wins \\$1.6 million religion prize](#)

Associated Press: Though he claims no religion, British astrophysicist known for his theories on the origin and the destiny of the universe wins top religion honor, \$1.6 million Templeton Prize.

[Catholics who seek Last Rites advised to plan ahead](#)

The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer: Although fewer Catholics are seeking Last Rites, those who do want it need to plan ahead.

[Church hopping](#)

Busted Halo: After a lot of church shopping, Vanessa Gonzalez Kraft and her husband "realized how jerky we were being. The Church is made up of people and people aren't perfect."

[In Afghanistan and Florida, incendiary fictions](#)

The (Toronto) Globe & Mail: Facts are being diluted in a sea of fiction. And there seems to be nothing we can do to stop it, writes Adnan R. Khan.

[World's biggest statue of Christ symbolizes church's power in Poland](#)

The (London) Guardian: Secularization seems to be a long way off in a country where 90 percent claim to be Catholics.

[Bob Alper and Mo Amer: Don't be afraid to be funny](#)

Humor is a universal language that helps bring understanding to each other's humanity, say a Jewish and a Muslim comedian who have teamed up for the "Laugh in Peace" tour.

Please add these concerns to your personal prayer list.

Please pray for:

Lee Martin, member of Presbytery's Board of Trustees, as he recovers from leg surgery

Please continue to pray for:

Becky Beckwith who has health concerns. (She is the wife of Jim Beckwith, Vice Chair of Committee on Ministry.)

Rev. Bob Rea

Pastors and Educators in transition

Nations in crisis

Please also keep in your prayers:

Beth-El Farmworker Ministry

Misión Peniel

Cedarkirk Camp and Conference Center

CONGREGATION OF THE WEEK:

April 3	First Presbyterian Church, Port Charlotte Mark Knowles, Pastor mknowles@fpcpc.com
April 10	Wintergarden Presbyterian Church, Port Charlotte Ruth Schaaff, Temporary Supply revruth2@yahoo.com
April 17	Burnt Store Presbyterian Church, Punta Gorda Tim Stewart, Pastor sunburn1320@mac.com Valerie Bell, Associate Pastor pastorval@embarqmail.com

April 24	First Presbyterian Church, Punta Gorda Steve Mock, Pastor revmock@fpcpunta.org
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PRESBYTERY CALENDAR (for more details, go to www.peaceriverpresbytery.org)

APRIL, 2011

- 7th
Records and Overtures

- 12th
Committee on Ministry
Disaster Preparedness and Response Team

- 13th
Committee on Preparation for Ministry

- 14th
Board of Trustees
Mission and Justice
Theology and Worship
Nominations – conference call

- 19th
Evangelism and Church Development – conference call

- 22nd
GOOD FRIDAY – Office closed

- 24th
EASTER

- 26th
Leadership and Congregational Development

- 28th
Council