

WINNEBAGO DELEGATION TO WASHINGTON D.C.

SUMMARY REPORT OF THE FEBRUARY 22-25, 2009 TRIP

Submitted by Richard Manny on behalf of the delegation that also included Michael Lukens, Lucy Rupe, Marian Seagran-Hall, Anneliese Waggoner, and Gert Walsh

During these dates informational meetings were held with:

- The Latin America Working Group
- Center for International Policy (CIP) Demilitarization Program
- The Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)
- The AFL-CIO
- The Washington Office, PC(USA)

Key points learned from the informational meetings:

1. U.S. Embassy employees in other countries are often “anything but experts” on the countries where they are serving.
2. The Colombian government spends about \$100,000 a month in lobbying efforts to maintain support for “Plan Colombia”, the U.S. aid package of \$500 million.
3. The aid package has gradually moved its focus from military aid to non-military aid; today the percentage is 55% military and 45% non-military.
4. There appears to be little accountability or transparency as to where U.S. aid is being spent.
5. U.S. pressure (on the basis of the aid package) has resulted in some effort, at least, in Colombia’s need to address its human rights violations and abuses.
6. Attempts to eradicate cocaine production have been fruitless.
7. There is a huge need to direct funds to 3.5 million displaced people for housing, education, job training, etc.
8. Colombia has a fine constitution and appropriate laws which respect human rights. The problem lies in consistent, historic disregard for law.
9. “Retiring” paramilitary combatants receive \$50 in aid for every \$1 which displaced people receive.
10. 72 members of the Colombian Congress are currently under investigation, in jail, or on trial for their collusion with paramilitary forces and thus their involvement in human rights abuses.

Meeting with the staffs of U.S. Representatives Obey, Petri and Kagen and U.S. Senators Kohl and Feingold resulted in our encouragement that they pursue the following issues:

1. The accountability and transparency of the expenditures of U.S. aid.
2. Human rights abuses, as violence continues; especially violence which is directed toward human rights and labor leaders.
3. An aid package which abandons attempts at drug eradication and which continues to shift aid from military to non-military use.

Winnebago – Urabá: Presbyteries in Partnership

In October 2008, a delegation of six elders and ministers from Winnebago Presbytery traveled to Columbia for a week.

Elders Nancy Siewert (Green Bay), Anneliese Waggoner (DePere) and Jim Baumbach (Memorial, Appleton) and ministers Richard Manny (Sheboygan), Lucy Rupe (staff)



and Susan Gilbert Zencka (Frame, Stevens Point) began the trip with a one-day visit to Barranquilla, then spent most of the week in Urabá Presbytery, learning and meeting people, and then concluded the trip with a day in Medellín.

While there, the partnership agreement between our two presbyteries was renewed for another five years. (See photo, left.)

We learned a great deal about the gifts and blessings our partner Presbytery possesses: their members are active, most churches have activities many days a week, members are involved in mission to their neighborhoods and beyond, their Sunday Schools are lively, their faith is passionate, and their spirits are strong.

Living in Colombia, they face challenges that many of us had been unaware of. Colombia has 4.5 million internally displaced persons – *los Desplazados* - people who have been driven off their land by violence or the threat of violence. In fact, Colombia has the second-highest number of internally-displaced persons in the world – second to the Sudan (home of Darfur), even more than in Iraq! In the church in Carepa (right) many displaced persons told us their stories, and of the strength they find in their congregations.



Our brothers and sisters in Urabá Presbytery are working hard on behalf of los Desplazados – ‘the least of these’ in Colombia – even though their advocacy and ministry can be very dangerous. Let us keep our partner presbytery in our prayers, and let us learn from their faithfulness!

--Susan Gilbert Zencka

National Days of Prayer and Advocacy for Colombia

April 19-20, 2009