



*No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak. Otherwise, the patch pulls away from it – the new from the old – and the tear gets worse (Mark 2:21)*

Greetings from the village of Atacapi, Napo Province, Ecuador.

When we reflect on the work we are called to do, we realize it is both “new” and “old”.

The eastern rain forest of Ecuador is a new location for Mennonite mission agencies. We are the first to be based in this region. The work we have been given – accompanying indigenous believers as they seek to follow Christ in their distinct cultural contexts – seems fairly new to the people we meet here. And we, ourselves, are new to the mission field.

Yet two weeks ago we were reminded how old this work really is. On April 3 we received a weeklong visit from the Ecuador Partnership, a diverse group representing four organizations, three nations and many perspectives:

- Danielle Sanchez is a leader in the recently-formed Mennonite Anabaptist Christian Church of Ecuador
- Peter Stucky is a pastor in the Colombian Mennonite Church
- David Boshart, Don and Shirley Kempf, and Doyle and Ann Roth represent the Central Plains Conference of Mennonite Church USA
- Linda Shelly and Marisa Smucker are part of the North American staff for Mennonite Mission Network (MMN). Peter Wigginton, Delicia Bravo and their daughter Aliyah, along with Gloria Showalter, are MMN workers serving in the capital city of Quito.

Known for the pastoral accompaniment model developed by the “Mennonite Team” in the Chaco region of Argentina, Mennonites were invited by an association of indigenous church organizations (FEINE) to work alongside native churches here in Ecuador more than two decades ago. The Ecuador partnership was formed in the 1990s to promote theological training and accompaniment for indigenous pastors. Seen in this context, our work here among Kichwa, Shuar and Cofan church leaders is already decades old. And from a biblical perspective, of course, the work of sharing the good news is much, much older!

The partnership visit offered us a chance to invite people we have gotten to know to come share their stories and perspectives with the group. We walked to our neighbor's home, entering a typical Kichwa farm and sampling *cacao* seeds roasted over Lourdes and Cecis' fire. We listened to Clever Machiant's vision for forming leaders that have both Christian beliefs and indigenous identities. Pablo and Marcela prepared dinner for us and afterwards described their work with Kichwa children and youth in the community of Muyuna. Pastor Dorian Grefa, accompanied by his mother, Helena, and two other women from the congregation, gave us a tour of the cacao plantation that generates income to support the "Two Rivers" Church budget. We enjoyed a lunch of leaf-wrapped fish at the "New Paradise" Church with Pastor Moises, followed by a worship service with church members and school children – God was praised in four languages: Kichwa, Shuar, Spanish and English!

That covers our first two days together. On day three we toured an innovative education project funded by earnings from an eco-lodge. The following morning, we travelled to Quito to talk with Randy Borman about mission and development among the Cofan people. We met with leaders of FEINE, the organization that first invited Mennonites, including our family, to work with indigenous leaders in Ecuador. And the visit concluded with several days of meetings with leaders of the newly-formed Mennonite Anabaptist Christian Church of Ecuador and Sunday worship, a joint service at Quito Mennonite Church.

The partnership visit brought to a close the first half of our stay in Ecuador this year. As the second half begins, we are mindful of two things:

First, we leave tomorrow at sunrise for the Cofan village of Zabalo. We will drive for six hours and spend the next four on a motorized canoe on the Aguarico River. We are invited to accompany

Iter, the leader of the local church, sharing stories and helping this small group of believers discover how to lead others as followers of Christ in a Cofan cultural and geographical context. The community lies at the gateway to a huge, primary forest abounding in wildlife – a stunning example of God's creation.



Second, as we were preparing this letter, Ecuador was shaken by a 7.8 magnitude earthquake. At the time of this writing, hundreds of people have lost their lives, thousands have been injured and an unthinkable number of homes, businesses and churches have been damaged or destroyed on the other side of the country. Reports in the media, as well as the accounts of church leaders living along the Pacific Coast, make us painfully aware of the suffering this has caused. Perhaps God will open up a way for our family to make Jesus' love known as part of the recovery effort, after the first responders are finished and the rebuilding begins. In the meantime, we ask for your prayers for the millions of people who are affected, one way or another, by the tragedy.

May Christ's peace be upon you -- and may you share it with those around you,

*Jerrell, Jane, Sierra, Naomi, Teresa and Jordan Ross Richer*