

Indiana Disciples travel to Chiapas, Mexico



The first of several planned trips to Mexico for people of the Indiana Region was completed in June 2019. Ten Disciples from six congregations travelled to Chiapas, the southernmost state in Mexico on the Guatemala border. Participants were **Bob Shaw** and **Susan McNeely** of Tapestry Church, Greenwood, **Tawn Parent Spicklemire** of Downey Avenue Christian Church, **Maggie Harris** of First Christian Church, Jeffersonville, **Kristin Miller** of Carmel Christian Church, **Angel Rivera-Agosto**, of Central Christian Church, Indianapolis, and **Rachael**

Jacobs, Kathie Meyer, Diane Spleth, and Rick Spleth, of Allisonville Christian Church, Indianapolis.

The trip was coordinated by **Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ**, with the intent to understand how our church is engaged in service and witness in this challenged part of the world. Long time Disciples mission co-worker, **Elena Huegel**, was our guide along with Global Ministries Area Executive **Angel Rivera-Agosto**.

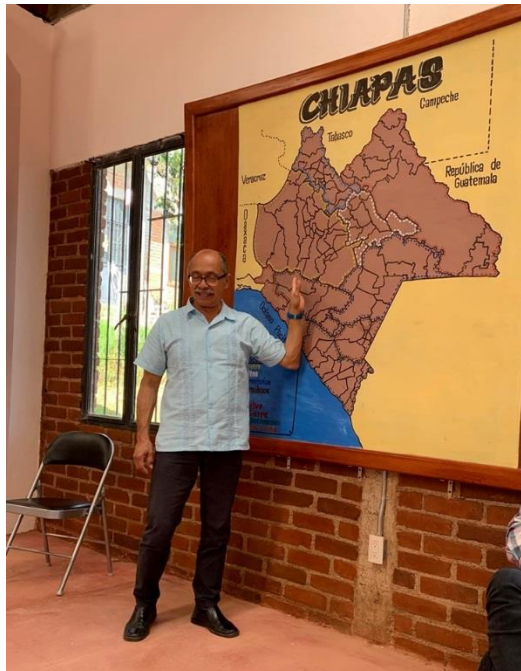
The group stayed at INESIN, our primary partner in Chiapas. <http://inesin-mx.org/english/aboutus.htm> INESIN serves as an ecumenical retreat center whose mission is to foster interreligious and intercultural dialogue transcending the years of conflict that began in that region following the Zapatista uprising in 1996 and the influx of many Guatemalan refugees. INESIN offers a variety of retreats and classes to strengthen communities of indigenous people assisting them with through developing food security and improved nutrition, reclaiming cultural identity and spirituality, developing sustainable agricultural practices, and fostering of gender equity. We visited a rural community where they are engaged in a variety of such services.

Our group also interacted with a variety of other organizations who are partners with INESIN and Global Ministries. These included **Melel Xojobal**, an internationally recognized organization working with street children, <https://www.melelxojobal.org.mx/> **Si Paz**, a human rights organization composed of journalists who document what is occurring in Chiapas to indigenous people and refugees, <https://www.sipaz.org/?lang=en> and **Frayba**, a group of attorneys who provide legal assistance to indigenous people and immigrants, <https://frayba.org.mx/> Each of these organizations were begun by the church in Chiapas.

On behalf of the Central Christian Church in Washington, Indiana we presented Elena Huegel a certificate representing the support they have pledged to give to **Roots in the Ruin** a program she has created to assist persons and groups to heal from the trauma of earthquakes and war.

The trip participants collaborated to create this blog of day to day reflections.

Day 1 Kathie Meyer, Allisonville Christian Church, Indianapolis



Feelings and facts in overload summed up the experience of my first day in Chiapas, Mexico. We spent the morning with Pastor Martin who led us through worship and taught us about the indigenous peoples of Chiapas. We learned about the discrimination they have experienced through the ages into modern times.

While Chiapas has 40% of the water in Mexico and is one of the richest states in natural resources it is one of the poorest states in Mexico. The needs of the area are many. It especially struck me concerning the need to strengthen gender equality. The indigenous girls are expected to leave school in the sixth grade, get married, raise children, and run the household. If women in Chiapas are at risk, so are we all. The rights of women in the US and other countries are in jeopardy right along with them.

Pastor Martin went on to introduce us to the work of INESIN the Institute where we are staying. From him I learned the term Food Sovereignty. Our church in Indianapolis has been struggling with feeding the

hungry, using terms like food justice and food security. Food Sovereignty, which gives people a stake in feeding themselves seems to be a much more worthwhile concept. INESIN seeks to teach people to produce and conserve their own seeds and also to plant trees to aid in reforesting the area.

In the afternoon, we experienced the Tatik Samuel Museum. A museum dedicated to Bishop Samuel who sought to help the indigenous peoples of Chiapas. He came to evangelize them, and they in turn evangelized him. I think that what we learn from the people of Chiapas and those who work with them will be far more than we could ever offer them.

It started to rain at the Tatik Samuel Museum, so we headed to a Chocolate Museum where we sampled most excellent chocolate. Elena Huegel, our leader during our stay here, had challenged us to think what the word dignity meant, and the examples we shared during our ending devotional gave us much to think about when it comes to our everyday treatment of all people. Thanks to our most excellent cooks Lucy and Betty, the food has been amazing. After an exhausting day, I fell asleep wondering how much more I will learn in the next several days in this most interesting part of the world.



Day 2 Diane Spleth, Allisonville Christian Church, Indianapolis



We began our time on Day 2, Wednesday, June 12th, by building a Mayan altar together under the guidance of Pastor Martin, the director of INESIN. It was quite a moving thing to do. We began by making a circle of pine needles on the floor and then mentally divided it into four quadrants. On each of the quadrants we spread four different colors of flower petals, each quadrant aligned with one of the four cardinal directions.

Red flowers represent new life in the east, black or purple flowers representing rest in the west, yellow in the south representing

fertility, and white in the north to honor the ancestors. Votive candles were placed in each quadrant and in the middle, and then we each “planted”, by softening the bottom of the candles in a flame, tall, thin candles around the perimeter lit with our individual intentions for something good.

It was a powerful meditation for all of us to construct the altar together and then to lift our prayers around it. For the indigenous people the altar stands as a sign of hope for the community and I think we all felt that way about it too – it was a sign of our community gathered there.

We spent the rest of the morning at Melel Xojobal, a partner organization of INESIN and Global Ministries. Making the presentation was Ayelén, a vibrant young Argentinian woman, who shared the important work they are doing with indigenous, also known as original people, children and adolescents.

They focus on three main projects. The first is a program for children from birth to four years old called “Arrumacus” which means “to cuddle” or “embrace” and serves mainly the children of working single moms. Its focus is to nurture the children so that very early they develop and claim their own personal agency.

The second project is the Working Childhood Program for children ages 6-13. It supports and protects the rights of working children. To us that sounded a little crazy at first – supporting working children?

But these are not exploited children. They are children who take part in “the family business” so to speak, much as farm kids do in the U. S. Often, they are working in a craft or



helping to sell what their family has made. Their earnings provide money for their school uniforms, books, or transportation to school.

Melel recognizes both the value of the children's participation in their original peoples' community through their work and their education. The children do go to school and Melel provides some much-needed scholarship assistance for them.

The third project works with 13-18-year-old adolescents around issues of sexual and reproductive health, gender issues (girls are discriminated against in almost every area), addictions, and non-violence.

Many students, especially young girls, drop out of school in Jr. High and Melel is making a difference in those issues that lead to girls dropping out. They are currently celebrating that for the first time among the girls in the program there were no pregnancies in the last year. They are also working with both boys and girls to reduce violence against girls and women.

We found a great deal of hope in the projects Melel is doing with the original peoples but also recognize that they can reach only a small percentage of those who would benefit from their wonderful programs and care.



After another delicious meal prepared by Betty and Lucy at INESIN we were visited by representatives of Si Paz, another partner organization to Global Ministries. Si Paz is a human rights organization that remains politically neutral so they can work with everyone.

Their work is divided into three areas:

- 1) Accompaniment and International Presence – In this crucial area of their work Si Paz personnel use their privilege to “get in the way” in troubling situations. They are very obviously and visibly “there” and they observe what goes on. Just their presence can make authorities behave in a more humane way. This area of their work requires a lot of travel.
- 2) Information and Analysis – Based on their observations, Si Paz publishes a newsletter every three months in four languages. They also keep up a blog in Spanish and in English and have a presence on Facebook. They are considered a very reliable source of information.
- 3) Networking and Dialogue – This means that Si Paz shares information with and gets information from other networks to help flesh out what everyone knows.

Si Paz does all of these things with the aim of promoting peace and justice.

They are currently working on gender and gender violence issues, forced displacement of original people, the criminalization of human rights defenders, and migration which is on everyone's minds these days in Mexico and points south and in the U.S.

It was sobering for us hear that since December 2018 sixteen human rights workers have been killed and ten journalists have been killed, and to learn that human rights defenders are now being treated as criminals.

What they most wanted us to take away? “Indifference is not an option.” I think all of us came away with that phrase, indifference is not an option, engraved on our hearts.

Amazingly, we still had time late in the day to go into the city center to visit some shops and rest a while in an open-air café before a big rainstorm sent us scurrying.

Our reflection time that night was centered on hope. Elena Huegel, our mission co-worker, used a doll named Esperanza (Hope), handmade by a woman who had lost everything in the 2017 earthquake, to help us focus our thoughts.

The next morning at breakfast we learned that though we'd slept well the previous two nights that night many of us had difficulty falling asleep the night before. We all agreed that our heads and our hearts had been just too full of all we'd learned and experienced on Wednesday to easily take our rest. But we also agreed we have *esperanza* – hope.

Day 2 Rachael Jacobs, Allisonville Christian Church, Indianapolis



Our word for the day was 'hope'. We were tasked with keeping this word in the back of our heads all day as we listened to what each of the organizations of the day told us. Sometimes hope is hard to hold on to, especially when you hear about all of the injustices that are taking place right on your doorstep. So often we ask ourselves, "Okay, we are sitting here and talking, but what are we actually going to **do**?" I know I struggle with this. Education & Advocacy is something that I have always been passionate about - going home and sharing what I have learned about the world with other people in the hopes of opening their eyes to see a little more of what I now see. Even though I love being that educator for other

people, I still struggle with feeling like I am doing enough. Today, the organization SIPAZ came in to give us a testimony about their work. At the end, Elena asked what they would tell us to go back and tell our loved ones upon our return home. The answer was: "Indifference is *not* an option". Then they proceeded to draw a graph on the board as an outline for how to get started with those difficult conversations we will be having back home. It was here that I realized that the education & advocacy that I partake in *is* enough. Without advocacy or facilitating conversation about hard things like these, there would be no beginning to the longer process ahead of working for justice. Education & Advocacy is the gift that I am able to bring to the table, and that is okay. Coming to this realization gave me hope.

I also saw an immense amount of hope in the work being done by the first organization of the day, Melel Xojobal. They have three branches of the work that they do for the indigenous youth in the community. I saw hope in the youngest children that they help in a daycare-like setting by acknowledging the children's own agency. I think this is so important - treating children, no matter what age, just like the rest of us. They are individuals with wants and needs, and by treating them as lesser than or as if we (as adults) know better, we are teaching them to

treat others the same way. Melel Xojobal is raising these children in an environment that teaches them to be their own person, and I can't wait for the future to see what these children become. This gave me hope.

Another aspect of Melel Xojobal that showed me hope was the obvious impact that they are having in the community. The oldest group of youth that they help is ages 13-18, and they do their work here by going into the high schools and continuing their conversations about agency and bodily autonomy. In the indigenous culture, women are raised to be wives and mothers. It is very rare to find a young girl continue with her education after 6th grade. Because of this belief and sense of self-worth that these young girls have, the rate of adolescent pregnancy is quite high. When Melel goes to these schools, they provide the teenagers with a list of options to show them that they have more opportunities in the world than they might think. The girls don't have to get married and become a mother at 13 if they don't want to. Melel supplies the students with a holistic sexual and reproductive education that they otherwise would not have received. I feel like in the US we always hear that proper sex education is one of the best preventative measures to take, as it often leads to fewer pregnancies, STDs, etc. This very theory is being proven by Melel Xojobal, as last year was the first time in 5 years with no adolescent pregnancies in the community. This gradual but important and exciting change in the young girls and women here gives me hope. Hearing about the feminist group 'F-Code' that has been formed at Melel by these young indigenous girls gives me hope.

Hope can be hard to find in areas like Chiapas, where discrimination and persecution run rampant. I am continually amazed by the Mexican and Indigenous people here who hold on to hope, regardless of the fact that they live in a country whose government seems set on violating their rights as human beings. It is difficult for me to come to Chiapas for only 8 days and try to absorb every bit of information being thrown at me in such a short period of time. But the work being done by the organizations we met is giving me more and more of the hope I am so desperately looking for. I continue to persevere and allow myself to be vulnerable in order to fight for understanding and justice. That is why I have hope. That is why I am here. ***Indifference is not an option.***

Day 3 Maggie Harris, First Christian Church, Jeffersonville

We began our day with a devotion on Mexican Catholic Spirituality. We learned the use of the hourly liturgy format. The devotion consisted of unanimous recitation of Psalms, Canticles, and songs. We recited in alternating Spanish and English, attempting to use our individual voices as one. For those experienced in this format, their voices match in pitch, tone, and cadence. While our voices did not match the abilities of the Mexican Catholic priests, the



power of trying to unite our voices as one was powerful. Afterwards we visited the organization known as FRAYBA. This is another organization born from the compassionate heart of Bishop Samuel Ruiz working to restore rights to the indigenous peoples of Chiapas. FRAYBA is a group of lawyers working to defend some of the most difficult cases of human rights infractions. Some of the most pivotal services provided by FRAYBA are empowering the indigenous people with access to justice, accompanying victims and survivors of torture, forced displacement, and femicide, and accompanying journalists and those in the communication field. FRAYBA has teams in different areas throughout all of Chiapas in the field and following the judicial processes. FRAYBA uses the Social Justice Model to enable the indigenous people to become principle actors in their own defense (another organization empowering the indigenous by fostering independence—notice a theme?). One project I found unique to the organization was reminiscent of the work provided by SI PAZ and is called the Human Rights Observation Project. This project sends people to areas of the Zapatistas and their supporters during police presence to prevent human rights violations. The observers will stay in the area for 2 weeks and then will report their observations back to FRAYBA for analysis. During our time here, we also learned more about the complex history of the Zapatistas, the Mexican Governments, and the indigenous peoples, but that is a topic deserving of its own blog entry.



After our time at FRAYBA, we visited a coffee co-op. We learned more about the people working together for the betterment of themselves and their community. Our guide provided detailed descriptions of the structure of the co-op, the coffee farming, harvesting, roasting, and brewing processes and he explained how the co-op distributes their coffee beyond the borders of Chiapas. We all enjoyed a delicious cup of coffee before venturing in the rain to visit an indoor market.

Justice was our theme for today. During our evening processing time, we discussed the different types of justice. Justice can be vengeance, it can be restorative, or it can seek to put an end to something so that others do not suffer as we have suffered. We have heard stories of all types of justice during our time here in Chiapas. The organizations we visited today are working to provide justice for the indigenous peoples through retribution, restoration, and creative avenues. They serve as an inspiration and provide a beacon of hope and light in a place where injustice has a deep and rooted history.

Day 4 Kristin Miller, Carmel Christian Church, Carmel, Indiana

Friday morning the breakfast bell rang at 8 am and I knew we were going to be served something delicious. There was a buffet of scrambled eggs mixed with chopped green beans, tomatoes, and onion (colors of Mexico's flag and a culinary trend), a baked tortilla dish, beans, cantaloupe, bananas, strawberry and peach yogurt with granola, toast with jelly or Nutella, apple juice, grape juice and orange juice. Tortillas and salsa were the centerpieces of the dining tables. Betty and Lucy were fantastic cooks.

Angel lead us on the guitar as we sang and then prayed. Afterwards, he gave a presentation on Global Ministries. We learned the history of GM of how and why it formed, their core values, and the role they have with the partners they work with.

Rick spoke about the significance of offering to the collection plate. He informed us that a percentage from each church's collection is given to Global Ministries. GM distributes the money to many different places, partners, and people. We were suggested to not rush the collection plate down the pew, but to hold the plate and add a special blessing before we pass it. Rick and Angel presented a designated gift to INESIN from Central Christian Church in Washington, Indiana.



We took an hour and a half van ride through the dense mountains to the city of San Jose la Nueva. To avoid any possible conflict, we were instructed not to take photos of the beautiful surroundings after we drove out of San Cristobal. We passed three jeep loads of police/military. In the first jeep all of the soldiers had AR's in hand. There were more police standing in the street. Elena, our INESIN guide asked our group how we feel when we see police officers in our community. As a whole we said we feel safe and empathize when we see officers pulling over people of color or ethnicity. Elena then asked two INESIN workers how they felt when they saw officers in their community. They both said they felt uneasy, suspicious, and would avoid them at all costs.



On the way to the community we saw dogs walking along the side of the road (and the entire time in Chiapas), pigs and goats on leashes, chickens (lots of chicks), cows and turkeys. We passed many farms with corn being grown down the mountains and all the way to the edge of the street. We drove passed a military base and a military college. There were countless

speed bumps on this winding road (and spread throughout Chiapas). There were scattered food stands with bathrooms for rent (5 or 10 pesos). We saw a few men on horseback. We passed many abandoned buildings in the process of being built. There was an endless view of green mountains and valleys. I'm glad I took some motion sickness pills, although it did make me sleepy. When we pulled up to our known meeting place, lots of children were already on

both sides of the street where our van would be coming to a stop. One little boy that looked 3 or 4 years old was walking towards us from the field holding a little chair. It made me wonder exactly how long they had been posted up anticipating our arrival. The people lined up outside our van and we greeted them with handshakes, hugs, and kisses on the cheek. I was delighted to see that the women had made a Mayan altar for us! We learned all about Mayan altars and made one as a group two days prior. Next we played a little game to introduce our names. A month was called out and everyone born in that month would raise their hand and say their name. There were 10 people in our group, Elena, two INESIN workers, our driver Enrique, 13 women of the community, 13 children, and 4 men and somehow I was the only person born in January!



We gathered and listened to a woman speak as she told us so much information about her community's way of life. They had lost the crops their grandparents had due to chemicals, government programs, slash and burn tactics and the economy. She explained how the government offers programs to the community in exchange for a copy of their voter registration card. These programs keep the people busy in all day meetings, and always lead to unfulfilled promises. The government counts on the people to be broke and dependent. She told us that before INESIN

stepped in to help, the community relied only on beans and corn. They were given new seeds of fruits and vegetables. They saw these foods in the marketplace but never dreamed of being able to grow themselves. Thanks to INESIN, they now have tomatoes, amaranth, wheat, soy, onions, squash, cabbage, kale, peas, turnips, carrots, lettuce, cucumbers and more. They eat chicken once a month and beef on special occasions. They were taught how to properly plant seeds and take care of the plants without chemicals. They learned about using earth worms as fertilizer. They learned how to make septic tanks, shampoo, and herbal medicines. They stopped eating so much fried and greasy foods. Parents have noticed a difference in their children's health and happiness. They were very scared to let go of any hope and support from the government, but together were brave and learned how to live and eat together. In return, they are living a happier and healthier life. They check on each other's gardens, grow and exchange seeds where there are shortages. They have workshops and inter-community gatherings. They have been given the chance to think and learn on their own. Dignity over dependency. These hard workers "live off their own sweat" and "feel protected by God." Only

1/3 of this community has chosen this route. INESIN has assisted with 15 families containing about 150 people in this community.

Hearing all this made tears build up in my eyes and then spill over when she said, "Each one of your faces will forever be in our hearts." They had food prepared for us, so we ate and socialized. Some kids showed us their chickens.

Later that evening we went to the Santo Domingo Market. Vendors create a village under white tents with their crafts, clothes, jewelry, purses, and more on display. I bought two shirts with embroidered flowers, a woven bookmark, and two woven head bands.

For dinner we had a noodle lo mein with sweet peppers and mushrooms, chicken, salad, bananas, and juice.

Our group processing meeting was delayed two days so we could let everything we saw and heard sink in. We compared our community in the USA to the community of San Jose la Nueva. We pointed out that our neighborhoods have fences six feet tall and we might not even know our neighbors. We wondered why it usually takes a tragedy to unite us. We discussed how the church needs to be the best example of a community. We noted that we can each do something that others will notice and catch on to. We need to overcome the barriers that separate us, set aside our cultural differences, and show love. If we convert feelings into actions, we will begin to see that the kingdom is close!

Day 5 Susan McNeely, Tapestry Church, Greenwood

Today we rose early to enjoy another hearty, nourishing breakfast prepared by our cooks here at INESIN. I think this is becoming my favorite meal of the day. It always includes eggs, fresh tomatoes and other vegetables, another dish, fresh fruit, and tortillas. Yogurt is also there to refresh us. Our cooks are arriving this morning as I write this, so I am looking forward to the last meal they will prepare for us.

We travelled more than 2.5 hours over the mountains down to the valley where the archeological site of Toniná is located, near Ocosinga, Chiapas. We rode together in a white van driven by our driver, Enrique, a young man who has amazing skills in navigating these difficult roads. We climbed about 700 feet to the top of the ring of mountains surrounding the



caldera where San Cristóbal is located, then dropped almost 5000 feet to the valley where the ruins are located. It is not a long distance as the crow flies, so it is a pretty dramatic descent along winding roads, which include more speed bumps (many erected by local people in protest of the appropriation of

their land) than you can possibly imagine. This makes for an interesting experience in the back of a van.

As we approached the ruins, we could see the grand temple set on a hill above the surrounding plain. We learned from our guide that this city, for a city it once was, is understood to have included about 30,000 inhabitants, and to be spread out over a distance of about 9 km (5 miles) in diameter. As time goes by, archeologists understand more and more about the Mayan people who built this and other cities, but still much is a mystery. There are theories as to why, but sometime around 900 to 1000 yrs C.E. (Common or Christian Era), the cities were abandoned and the people "disappeared". Was it climate change? Depletion of the soil and inability to support such a dense collection of people? Warfare? People forsaking an oppressive government? No one knows.

Actually, these were the ancestors of the original (indigenous) Mayan people who live in Chiapas and neighboring areas now, and these people have great pride in the accomplishments of their ancestors. While they can appreciate seeing the monuments, it is upsetting to them to observe the disregard for these places that are their heritage, their history. It is one more source of pain to a people whose land, since the Spaniards arrived in the 1500s, has been stolen from them. The issues continue today as the government plans large "projects" which require them to appropriate more of the land, and leaves the Mayans without a means to survive. We are here to learn about their struggles, for *acompañamiento*, to take their pain and fear into our own hearts, if only for a short while, so that we can tell their stories to you, and to the rest of the world. They have blessed us deeply as they shared the stories of resistance to land and water appropriation, of suppression, of the "disappeared" persons, of the reality of life for an impoverished people in many ways forgotten by the rest of their country. But their land and resources are not forgotten, for this is the Mexican state richest in resources, the "lungs" of the country due to its forests, and the source of 40% of the fresh water in the country.

We are coming near the end of our journey, but our prayers are that the Mayan people will always be in our hearts, for with true *acompañamiento*, we are forever joined as humans living under the same sky on the same small planet. We are looking forward to sharing their stories with you.

Day 6 Tawn Parent Spicklemire, Downey Avenue Christian Church, Indianapolis

This morning we traveled 75 minutes, through mountains shrouded in low-slung clouds, to reach Iglesia Cristiana el Buen Pastor, in the nearby town of Tuxtla, the capital of Chiapas. Our guide, Elena Huegel, informed us that the church is progressive, by Mexican standards, and allows women to be pastors. The church also is active in social issues. (Acceptance of homosexuality remains a struggle for churches in Mexico, however. Elena said she is aware of only one open and affirming church in the entire country. That church, in Mexico City, routinely has its windows shattered and suffers other forms of violence.)



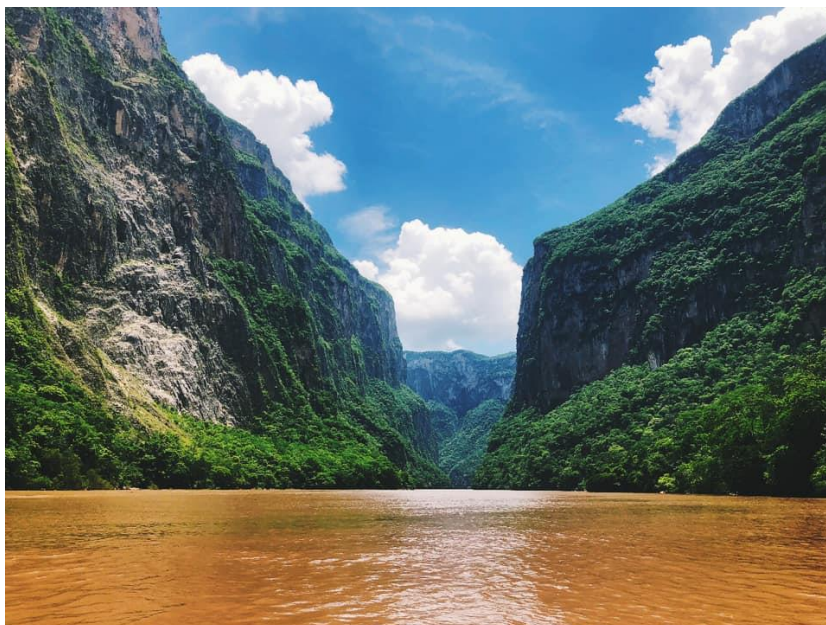
But in the simple church in Tuxtla we had the pleasure of worshipping with about 20 members of the congregation, who greeted us with smiles and “¡Buenos Dias!” Most of the members would arrive later for the main service, which is held in the evening.

There were no hymnals or stained-glass windows, but the front of the church was adorned by colorful flowers, both fresh and embroidered on tapestries. And I was grateful for the ceiling fans stirring the humid air.

After the first hymn, Angel Luis Rivera-Agosto offered an opening prayer in Spanish. Rick Spleth then greeted the congregation and introduced our delegation. Next came the offering. Worshippers walked to the front of the church to place their gifts into a chest. (We had been cautioned not to give more than 100 pesos, about \$5, so as not to overwhelm the collection.)

My favorite song of the service was “Da la Luz” (Give Light). The reading of Psalm 8 was followed by a spirited sermon delivered by Angel Luis (which I tried my best to follow with my limited Spanish).

After the service, the congregation treated us to delicious pastries and a special chilled chocolate drink. The glow-in-the-dark bracelets and necklaces we had brought to share with the children turned out to be a hit with the adults as well. They all sent us on our way with warm wishes.



Next we headed to the Grijalva River, a 300-mile-long waterway that begins in Guatemala. The river, one of the deepest in Mexico, features a hydroelectric dam that provides a significant portion of the area's power. Grijalva runs through the Cañon del Sumidero, whose walls tower up to 3,000 feet above the water.

Our three hours on the river enabled us to see a stunning range of wildlife, from multiple crocodiles (including babies), to cranes, pelicans and kingfishers, to a spider monkey who hovered just above our boat, almost close enough to touch. For a

moment we feared he might jump into the boat with us!

Sights along the river ranged from the unfortunate quantities of trash that wash in from the city during heavy rains to the unlikely appearance of a statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe, ensconced on a high shelf in the Grotto of Many Colors. Boats congregate in the cave for mass on the water every December for her feast day.

We ended our day in the airy shelter at the top of our compound. Our reflection time was punctuated by fireworks, which had been going off daily since our arrival, to celebrate one patron saint or another. At the beginning of the week I was annoyed by the loud, startling noise. But after spending days learning about the oppression of Mexico's indigenous people, I reconsidered my take on the fireworks: as an insistence on the right to celebrate, as an ebullient expression of joy.

We closed our week by walking a mediation labyrinth, a Shalom journey, during which we reflected on what we had learned in Mexico, about migration, dignity, trauma, hope, injury, truth and justice. We then celebrated communion together, appropriately, in this “upper room.”

We sat in a semicircle with our heads bowed, feeling the evening breeze blow through the open windows, as thunder rolled through the twilight. I felt a pang of Thanksgiving for all the courageous people who had shared their stories with us that week, who had indeed, as the hymn had said, given us their light. Now it was our turn to carry it forward, to carry it home.

Day 6 Bob Shaw, Tapestry Church, Greenwood



Today is our last day of both real content (academic and spiritual) and tourism. Tomorrow we wake up about 2:30 a.m. and travel 16 hours home. I think we are all trying not to focus on that. We drove about an hour this morning for worship at Iglesia Buen Pastor (Church of the Good Shepherd). This is Elena's church where she teaches Sunday School. The children were all over her squealing and giggling.

There were about 25 in worship in addition to the 11 of us. We were told they have a larger service later in the day. We were

greeted and hosted like long separated family, just like everywhere we've been all week. They were genuinely glad we came. Angel was the guest preacher and he was well received. He reminded us that this was Trinity Sunday and part of his sermon suggested that God himself, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (herself? themselves?) is actually a community. Great insight! I wish I had thought of that. I've been disappointed all week that I wasn't following the Spanish as well as I'd hoped but was pleased I understood this point.

I opted out of the boat ride because of the heat and my own fatigue and enjoyed a quiet and comfortable afternoon in a cafe'. Everyone else seems to have had an absolutely wonderful time on the river.

Our closing meditation focused on issues of reentry after a truly intense experience. Other people are interested in where we've been and what we've seen and done, but we can't expect them to catch our passion. Elena suggested there is a difference between "dragging" and "encouraging" others to a place of caring.

This has been one of the best trips of its kind ever for me. Our group of people was wonderful together. We intend for trips like this to be life changing. I was afraid I might be a bit past that at my age, but apparently not. I'm really glad!

