

January 21, 2004

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

We wish to share with you the testimony of a lovely and productive experience. Representatives of the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) met together on January 19, 20, and 21, 2004, en Villa Bacuranao, east of Havana. Our primary purpose was to reflect on the biblical-theological and pastoral bases of partnership in mission.

This idea emerged during previous meetings of the network of partnerships, particularly the one that took place in 2002 in Washington D.C., in which the Cuban church spoke of the need to “clearly articulate and highlight the philosophy (biblical-theological foundation) that provides guidelines for our partnerships; and study the implications.”

Thus, we spent time reflecting together and seeking a deeper understanding of the biblical-theological bases that sustain the partner relationships between various entities of our respective churches. As we talked, we kept in mind the larger context of our churches as well as the world in which we live as Christ’s body.

We began by looking at our history: 114 years of relationship based on a spirit of partnership from the very beginning. We focused primarily on the most recent stage of partnership, beginning in 1985 when the two churches signed a “Mutual Mission Agreement” and formal relationships between presbyteries, and later congregations, began to be formed. Today there are about 16 congregational partnerships that are not part of presbytery partnerships, as well as another 50 or so that function within the structure of their presbytery partnerships.

We give thanks to God for the mutual enrichment of faith experienced by Presbyterians in both countries through these relationships. We gained an appreciation for the importance of history, not only to celebrate the past, but also as a way to respect and heal the wounds that our human imperfections have caused over the years.

We lift up a number of biblical themes that emerged in our Bible study and reflection. Joint biblical reflection around these themes could help deepen partner relationships. They are:

- Unity in Christ – Ephesians 4: 4-6, 11-13; 1 John 1:1-2; Luke 7.22; 1 Corinthians 12:12-26, Galatians 3:26-28
- Testimony – 1 John 1:1-2; Luke 7:22
- Reconciliation – Ephesians 2:13-22; Genesis 33:10; Mathew 5:43-48; Luke 16:19-31
- *Koinonia* – John 13:21; Mathew 20:25-28
- *Kenosis* - Philippians 2:1-11
- Hospitality - Luke 7:44-46
- Identity - John 4:1-42; Ruth 1

We also found it important to clarify terms that are frequently used in our mission language, such as rich and poor, poverty and wealth, and see them in the context of God's economy and a biblical understanding of justice.

A concern for identifying theological themes emerged in our discussions, given the important of understanding partnership in the context of the whole mission of the church. Therefore we see a need to rethink our concept of mission from our respective contexts and, of course, from the global context in which God has placed us all. This takes us to a rethinking of our ecclesiology (understanding of church), always seeking unity in the midst of the diversity that exists within each of our respective churches as well as between the two churches. Within our relationships of mutuality and interdependence, we sought to redefine our Reformed identity in ways that make sense in our specific cultures.

We identified pastoral challenges that face our churches. We can summarize them in this way:

- The search for a Presbyterian and Reformed identity
- The need for reconciliation
- Evangelization
- Families in crisis
- Strengthening our responsibility as churches
- The formation of leaders
- Education for mission in our congregations
- Social responsibility

We hope that our reflections will serve to enrich congregations and presbyteries in their partnership relationships. We look forward to a Partnership Celebration with a larger group of brothers and sisters to take place in Cuba this October 18-21.

Finally, we affirm our commitment to continue walking together as partner churches, no matter what, confident that God revealed in Jesus Christ is also God of the future.

In the name of Christ,

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