

Mutual Mission:  
The Presbyterian Church in the Mexico - USA Border Region  
by  
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## ABSTRACT

In 1972, when relationships between the Mexican and USA Presbyterian denominations fractured, within a few years they found agreement in a newly crafted covenant, “A New Relation in Joint Mission.” At the denominational level, the leadership envisioned a new paradigm for international missional practice in which both entities shared in the developmental and oversight processes. This was an exercise in diplomacy as the denominations were distinctly different in theological perspectives and expectations for program implementation. It was on the local and regional level, motivated by their deep convictions of faith, that a cadre of binational mission workers, pastors, and volunteers built meaningful, intercultural relationships under the Presbyterian Border Ministry (PBM), established in 1984. To implement the denominations’ new concepts of mutuality in mission, the PBM established binational ministry sites in twin-cities along the *México*/USA border. The PBM promoted spiritual growth, articulated border realities through the lens of faith, and served with and for those in need of support.

Geographically, and for the purposes of this dissertation, the border region represents two spaces: the sites of engagement in the settled communities at the edges of two nations and the programmatic extensions into the interior of the two countries. In their roles of advocacy, the ministries engaged at the highest levels of both the denominations and the seats of political power, far from the border. Contextually, the *México*/USA border region, rich in its complexity, is a space of simultaneous conjunction and separation, influenced by its history, international politics, cultural diversity, economic disparity, and religious presence.

The intent of this historical analysis is to share an important history that provides insights into the efficacy of binational ministry, to identify the contributions of bicultural engagement, and to consider the value and insights of faith-based perspectives when addressing complex border realities and social issues such as migration. It asks how the binational mission, in collaboration with faith-based and secular partners, has affected the lives of individuals, and made an impact on local, regional, national, and international political, economic, social, and cultural concerns.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ABCFM	American Board of Commission of Foreign Mission
AHA	American Historical Association
BPM	Baja Presbyterian Mission
CCLA	Committee on Cooperation in Latin America
COEMAR	Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations
CRREDA	<i>Centro de Rehabilitación de Enfermos de Drogas y Alcohol</i>
GA	General Assembly
ICE	U.S. Immigration Customs Enforcement
IMC	International Missionary Council
INPM	<i>Iglesia Nacional Presbiteriana de México</i>
JMC	Joint Mission Committee
MCC	Mennonite Central Committee
MIP	<i>Ministerio Interfronterizo Presbiteriano</i>
MRC	Migrant Resource Center
PBM	Presbyterian Border Ministry
PBRO	Presbyterian Border Region Outreach
PCA	Presbyterian Church of America
PCOME	Pima County Medical Examiner
PCUS	Presbyterian Church US
PCUSA	Presbyterian Church USA
PW	Presbyterian Women
UPCUSA	United Presbyterian Church USA
VIM	Volunteer in Mission
WCC	World Council of Churches
WMD	World Ministries Division (PCUSA)
WMD	Worldwide Ministries Division
YAV	Young Adult Volunteer

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

A religious presence has been integral to the lives of *México/USA* border peoples and has influenced the development of the region. This dissertation explores the forty-year history of the Presbyterian Border Ministry (PBM), a binational mission program situated in eight so-called “twin cities” across the two-thousand-mile reach of the *México/USA* border region.<sup>1</sup> Formed at a significant moment in the relationship between the Mexican and USA Presbyterian denominations, the organization’s growth and development is a bifurcated narrative of denominational, high-level purpose, juxtaposed with bi-cultural, local-level engagement.<sup>2</sup> The leadership envisioned a new paradigm for international missional practice in which both entities equally shared in the developmental and oversight processes – an exercise in diplomacy and negotiating divergent theological and doctrinal perspectives, and distinctly different directions for

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<sup>1</sup> The term, twin-city, in its simplest definition, refers to two cities or urban centers situated near each other, such as Minneapolis/St. Paul. Defining twin-city gets complicated quickly due to the many variations of place across the world. There is no all-purpose description of two adjacent towns or cities. Geographers complicate the term as they consider factors such as area history, political connection or divide, economics, local cooperation or not. See Jan Buursink, “The Bi-national Reality of Border Crossing Cities,” *GeoJournal* (Vol. 54, 1: 2001) 7-19. In this dissertation, I use the term cautiously since reporting has popularized its application to border towns and cities. Glen Sparrow, Professor of Public Administration and Urban Studies elected to use the alternative term, ‘companion cities’ in his case study of *Tijuana/San Diego*; a term that arguably is more applicable, especially for the *México/USA* border region. Glen Sparrow, “San Diego-Tijuana: Not Quite a Binational City or Region,” *GeoJournal* (Vol 54, 1: 2001) 73-83.

<sup>2</sup> In the global Presbyterian structure, the General Assembly is the top governing structure in a denomination, with a coalition of sub-structures, usually the Synod, Presbytery, and the local churches. In the USA, there are multiple denominations that claim membership in the greater Presbyterian global family. The history of the PBM starts with the United Presbyterian Church USA (northern denomination), and the Presbyterian Church US (southern denomination) were in the process of reuniting as the Presbyterian Church USA after more than a century of division. The Presbyterian Church of America, a more conservative group, split from the PCUS when it merged with the UPCUSA. I am aware of two Presbyterian denominations in Mexico, the largest being the INPM. The second Mexican denomination split from the INPM in the mid-1950s as the National Conservative Presbyterian Church of Mexico and is a very small denomination comprised of just a few presbyteries.

programmatic implementation. On the local level the ministry built meaningful, bi-cultural relationships as participants implemented the denominations' new concepts of mutuality in mission. The PBM, in binational cooperation, sought to promote spiritual growth, articulate border realities through the lens of faith, serve in relationship with their Mexican counterparts, and both help and advocate for people in need of support.

The history of the *México*/USA border region is incomplete without recognizing the important cadre of faith communities intentionally acting in and for people, cultures, and environments that define the expansive area. Both residents and migrating people experience the geographic and socio/cultural footprint of the religious presence that has marked the landscape since human settlement in the area began. The new binational border ministry settled in spaces where faith-based institutions had been engaged for centuries. It was a bold, new effort to bridge boundaries constructed over time, not just social and political divisions, but limitations built of theological, organizational, and cultural differences. The Presbyterian binational border ministry worked with other denominations and worshipping communities, cities and towns, governmental agencies, and area businesses, and it is through the exploration of these relationships that this study will discern the impact and influences of the border ministry work.

This narrative is an addition to the growing historical literature on the *México*/USA border region and migration. It is an institutional history of the PBM, a ministry designed specifically to engage the context of the border region. This dissertation analyzes the PBM's extended history of work, through analysis of five distinct themes. First, the dissertation illustrates an alternative process for bridging divides of political, social, and cultural engagement. Through the years of experience in

multi-cultural, international encounter, the PBM modeled a non-hierarchical process of respect and relationship-building. Second, the narrative shares personal stories that, coupled with the organization's history, dispel generalizations about Mexican identity, religious practice, and the border region as a living space. Third, the study considers the efficacy of binational ministry and mission engagement. Fourth, the dissertation demonstrates the importance to historical analysis of the inclusion of religion and religious practice, both in its role of defining community and its importance for interpreting and understanding life experiences played out in the historical frame. Finally, the dissertation recognizes the influences of the PBM, from the local to the global, as the organization engaged impactful political, economic, cultural, and religious concerns.

Over a fifty-year span of time, 1970s into the 2010s, the ministry work responded to the ever-present challenges of poverty (such as medical problems, lack of education, and economic development) and the ever-changing border issues including migration, cartel and gang violence, substance abuse, and the changing international relations. It is the style of response by the border ministry - a binational mutuality - that opens new insights into the lived experience of religion and culture in the ever-shifting social, political, and economic landscape that defines the border region.

As a practicing public historian, initially I designed this dissertation as a working document for my clients, the Global Mission Division of the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA), and the border region ministries. As is usually the case, history has so much more to offer than a simple, albeit fascinating story of something that happened. The historical analysis of the PBM proved rich in lessons-learned through the persistent exercise of respect and relationship formation in the context of missional and theological

differences. While the local ministries lived and operated in a border region that seemed to highlight economic disparity and oppositional political and social forces, their collective embeddedness instead found a space of community, collaboration, and coalescence. The process by which the ministry sites developed their work, a process that persistently engaged mutuality over cultural divides or fiscal power, was a call to serve as articulated in Psalm 133. The biblical passage asks all people to consider how “good and pleasing” it is when brothers and sisters live together as one. It speaks not only to the blessings of such an act when achieved, but also the aspirational outlook for such an act. With programming successes or failures, the PBM efforts toward mutuality, respect, and justice persisted through the years. The history is vitally important for present and future polity and policy, whether religious, governmental, corporate, or organizational, where cultural privilege and power structures heavily favor a specific group. It offers lessons in how to bridge divides using a non-hierarchical methodology.

Through the personal story of those engaged in the PBM, Mexicanos/as and *Norteamericanos/as*, whether from inside or external to the organization, their remembrances offer insights and honesty that an outsider might never be privileged to see or hear. To witness the work they do, their laughter and tears, the sincerity they demonstrate, the many frustrations they feel, and the depth of belief they exude through their acts of compassion and understanding is to see a different people and place identity emerge. This dissertation is an addition to the literature that dispels unfortunate generalizations of Mexican identity, spiritual engagement, USA missionaries, and the border region experience, ideas that exist externally, removed from the real experiences and opportunities of transnational, multicultural, religious spaces. The history of PBM

joins the body of work that challenges recent negative, even hostile political discourse and societal rhetoric, replacing it with real people – with their shortcomings and strengths, in real times – good and bad, situated in a real, multidimensional place of engagement.

Historical analysis of the PBM provides insights into the efficacy of binational ministry played out in the spirit of mutuality, a progressive step in the history of global religious outreach. This dissertation offers the Presbyterian denominations, as well as other religious communities engaged in international mission, insights on evangelism and service opportunities and some of the pitfalls, as each envisions the missional future. The delineation of past events presents perspectives germane to creating new directions and new opportunities. Understanding what actions worked and why they worked and learning from the historical actors, establishes a solid foundation for building the future. Understanding historical mission is essential to missiology, the study of missional work particularly as it relates to missionary activity. Though the Presbyterian denominations are not the only worshipping communities to shift the power structure of mission relationships, the transnational nature of the PBM offers a new, progressive layer for historical inquiry.

This study recognizes religion as a social-cultural system with enduring effects on community structures, political power, and economic growth. The dissertation also considers religious practice as it defines community and helps practitioners to interpret and understand life experiences. Border ministry people expressed their beliefs through their faith and in their relationships, the work, the place, and their life-altering experiences. Along with engaging the immediacy of surrounding need, the PBM

envision a future that blossoms from seeds they have planted; a future they have mentored by their engagement and their example.

The American Historical Association (AHA) website provides the collective answer to the question, “Why study history?” In part, the answer posited, “history contributes to moral understanding... studying the stories of individuals and situations... to hone one’s own moral sense against some of the real complexities individuals have faced.... [it is] History teaching by example.”<sup>3</sup> In the sharing of individual story and collective decision-making the narrative offers an understanding of the people of the border region who, faced with daily adversity and challenge, sought moral, faith-filled, even biblical direction as they responded to the predicaments, both lived and witnessed.

Beyond the fields of History and Religious Studies, this dissertation joins related sociological and political/policy inquiry. In a macro sense, the dissertation considers the impact of border region ministry on local, regional, national, and international political, economic, social, and cultural concerns. In this case, the methodology, implementation, and practice of transnational mission engagement suggests a supportive and empowering alternative when engaged in the complex and challenging work of international negotiation. With analysis on a micro, local level, the dissertation describes ways in which the bi-national Presbyterian church work (in collaboration with religious and secular partners) has affected the ministry workers who have been involved and the individuals it has served.

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<sup>3</sup> Peter N. Stearns, “Why Study History (1998),” American Historical Association, updated 2021, [https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/historical-archives/why-study-history-\(1998\)](https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/historical-archives/why-study-history-(1998)).

## Border Region Defined

To define the *México*/USA border region for this dissertation, I considered the overarching geography and context as they relate to the PBM. Presbyterians located the ministry sites in settled communities at the conjoining edges of *Los Estados Unidos de México* (The United States of *México*) and the United States of America (USA). Mexican and USA missionaries felt called to the bordered location due to the two primary factors: first, for the INPM, the importance of establishing worshipping communities in northern *México* and second, for the PCUSA, to respond to their perceptions of the human desperation entrenched along the southern side of the border. The individual ministries filled the Boards of Governor seats with locals from both countries. The two Presbyterian denominations assigned Co-Mission Workers and Co-Directors, most of whom migrated to their placements near the international boundary to live and work. Twin cities, from Reynosa, Tamaulipas/McAllen, Texas to Tijuana, Baja California/San Diego, California, became the locational spaces for the offices, churches, community centers, and clinics that straddled the border, and the bulk of their daily work inhabited the municipal spaces.

Geographically, the ministry sites, situated along the international boundary, interpreted the locations of the border locations as points of origin. For each PBM ministry, the geographic border region began as a discreet, bounded space near the line of national division and extended north and south, distant enough to include the people who lived, worked, and interacted under the influence of the line. Very quickly, however, as outreach and development opportunities occurred, varied ministries expanded south into *México* and, on occasion, contracted back toward the border to the central offices, churches, clinics, and community buildings. The programmatic expansion and



contraction influenced the perception of the PBM border region; with changes in outreach, the ministry sites redefined the extent of their physical reach.

The initial push south included *México*'s northern states of *Baja California*, *Sonora*, *Coahuila*, and *Tamaulipas*. Eventually, some mission programming extended the ministry's geographic border region even farther, reaching the southern state of *Chiapas*, and later including the states of *Hidalgo*, *Nayarit*, and *Vera Cruz*. Due to the connectivity of the expanded ministry southward, the PBM border region expanded to include the additional staff, volunteers, and related structural presence at the geographic outer limits. The PBM map also extended north into the USA, again flexible and movable depending on the ministries connecting activities focused northward. The work of mission, advocacy, and educational outreach grew to incorporate churches and organizations across the country, from the PBM administrative office in San Antonio, Texas, to partnerships in Tucson and Phoenix, Arizona, and as far away as the churches in North Carolina, New York, and Oregon.

For the purposes of this dissertation, and in recognition of the interconnectedness of the growing ministry, the physical external boundary is a movable, flexible location on the map. The programmatic, administrative, and political work of the ministry reached far into the interiors of the respective nations. Until recently, Mexican Presbyterian workers could travel into the USA for missional-connected work, to collaborate with their northern counterparts, or travel to the interior to expand the ministry reach and establish new programming and financial development. Beyond the direct services missional work, the PBM leadership and the individual sites staff invested time in advocating for the concerns they witnessed in their border region. The influence and advocacy wielded by

the PBM extended into the countries' interior spaces where the respective denomination's central offices and the civil government seats of power were located.

Articulating a changing perspective of the geographic border region, John Fife, Presbyterian Pastor, and former PCUSA General Assembly Moderator pointed out that in his experience, "The border is north of El Paso somewhere... in the Mexican community of Maryville, Tennessee... [in] Seattle, Washington... [and] a small college town in Iowa..." He continued, "One of the things we hear [from Mexicans who migrated] again and again is, "I didn't cross the border, the border crossed me.... Everywhere you go, the border is crossing us all."<sup>4</sup> The PBM has not been bounded by geographic limitations imposed by external forces and could not envision a delimiting geographic border region space. Rather, the organization stretched its border region space as it privileged the expanding and contracting extent of missional work across *México* and the USA.

Contextually, the *México/USA* border region, rich in its complexity, is a space of simultaneous conjunction and separation, politically, culturally, and economically. Lupe Castillo, professor, and long-time community activist in Southern Arizona reminds us that to appreciate the border region is to know something of its past seventeen thousand years.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, there are historical through-lines of settlement and migration that contribute to understanding the natural environment, the region, the politics, and its people. For Castillo, like many people in the border region, family roots in the area dated back for generations. Her early ancestors lived on land that was part of *México*. Other

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<sup>4</sup> John Fife, "The Border Isn't Just on the Border Anymore," *Church & Society: Presbyterian Church (USA)* (July/August 2005): 38-39.

<sup>5</sup> Rick Ufford-Chase, "1600 Years of Border History (In a Few Pages)," *Church & Society: Presbyterian Church (USA)* (July/August 2005): 7.

residents of the shared space were comparatively recent migrants who traveled from places throughout both countries, bringing their cultures and lived experiences to the already diverse mix. Collectively, they created, and continue to create a metamorphosing border region culture that, despite persistent outside forces, defined, then redefined as needed, the identity of the space and the individuals. Despite the challenges of diversity and the political and economic conflicts throughout the area, for many residents the border region became their cross-cultural comfort zone.

Since the mid-twentieth century Mexican and USA governments have imposed rules and restrictions at the border, from passport and visa authorizations to the USA construction of fences. Despite emigration laws in *México* and immigration laws in the USA, border controls remained lax until the USA invested increasing monies in border security in the 1970s because of Congressional amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.<sup>6</sup> People living and working along the international boundary could no longer ignore national difference, particularly that which influenced, even challenged, the existing regional lifestyles. The national border became a tension line, made taut by its basic function, to divide a space in the interest of making political claims of ownership and legal regulation of control over the land and the people. Such impositions by the nation-states became a locally shared, binational, social experience. Examples of challenge include the peso devaluation of 1994 that altered, overnight, the interchange of commercial activity or periodic, government-imposed travel restrictions

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<sup>6</sup> Oscar J. Martinez, "Migration and the Border, 1965-1985," in *Beyond la Frontera: The History of Mexico-U.S., Migration*, ed. Mark Overmyer-Velázquez (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 109-111.

that slowed, even ended crossing at international Ports of Call. In addition, border residents struggled with the threat of violence, not just from government actors but also, powerful cartels in *México* or non-governmental militia in the USA (armed and angry at perceived threats to national sovereignty). Despite construction of the first border fences in 1945, ostensibly to control migration, and the constancy of outside forces, for those living adjacent to the *México*/USA border persisted as transnational, connected, and cultural-blended communities.<sup>7</sup>

As the PBM ministries developed their individual sites, they acclimated to the border culture, something the local Boards of Governors and volunteers helped the incoming ministry staff to understand. New arrivals from north or south experienced a level of culture shock, immediately overwhelmed by changes as simple as food preparation or conversational style and barraged by the new visual experiences of a different built environment or even the physical appearance of residents. In that cross-cultural space, the “locals” had developed their own unique cultural identity, living daily with that line and the supralocal external forces, primarily governmental and economic. With time, newcomers grew to appreciate the influences of the past, the arid environment and the constructed spaces, the cross-border economics, and the bicultural and binational nature of the community in the context of the border line, designed to divide but, ironically, unifying.

Migration made an impact on the border communities the PBM ministries served. Soon, an important part of their work addressed migration in a variety of ways. The data

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<sup>7</sup> Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Migra! A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2010), 130.

on migration numbers from *México* and Central America, particularly prior to 1990, is incomplete; more recent data sets, particularly on unauthorized migration, tend to be estimates. During the timeframe of the PBM, mid-1970s to 2015, the USA immigration population originating in *México* and Latin America grew from seventeen percent in 1970 to fifty-one percent by 2015. While total unauthorized immigration numbers decreased from 2007 to 2016, numbers from Central America, primarily from the Northern Triangle (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras), increased over the same period. Statisticians attributed the decline of 1.5 million to fewer people moving from *México*, though they accounted for roughly half of the USA total of unauthorized migration. Overall, unauthorized immigration shrank by thirteen percent; by contrast, the lawful immigrant population grew twenty-two percent.<sup>8</sup> Another data set that further helps with seeing trends in migration patterns from *México* and Central America is the number of border apprehensions reported by the US Border Patrol. (See chart below)

BORDER APPREHENSIONS REPORTED BY THE US BORDER PATROL <sup>9</sup> (Data presented are often estimates or averages used to discern trends)				
	1970	2000	2014	2019
Mexican	219,000	1,615,081	450,000 (Decline since 2007)	blank
Other*	12,000	68,000	52,000 (unaccompanied Central American minors)	685,050

\*All nationalities except *México*; the increase attributed to migration from Central America.

<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey S. Passel and D’Vera Cohn, “U.S. Unauthorized Immigrant Total Dips to Lowest Level in a Decade,” *Pew Research Center* (November 27, 2018), <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2018/11/27/u-s-unauthorized-immigrant-total>.

<sup>9</sup> D’Vera Cohn, Jeffrey S. Passel and Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, “Rise in U.S. Immigrants from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras Outpaces Growth From Elsewhere,” *Pew Research Center* (December 7, 2017), <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2017/12/07/rise-in-u-s-immigrants>; Jens Manuel Krogstad and Jeffrey S. Passel, “U.S. border apprehension of Mexicans fall to historic lows,” *Pew Research Center* (December 30, 2014), [pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/12/30/u-s-border-apprehensions-of-mexicans](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/12/30/u-s-border-apprehensions-of-mexicans).

I have been involved with the PBM Arizona sites for thirty years including leading church mission delegations to both sites in early to mid-2000s and traveling to Chiapas on the *Frontera de Cristo* Border to Border immersion experience in 2015. I have worked at *Frontera de Cristo* in the Migrant Resource Center, assessed records at Puentes de Cristo, led meetings at multiple sites, and visited board members, churches, and facilities tied to the ministry. I have been able to attend worship, weekly prayer meetings and vigils, participated in study activities, worked with women at the *Douglaprieta Trabaja* cooperative, planned and implemented national education events, and supported financial efforts and advocacy opportunities. Along the way, I had the opportunity to meet casually with Hunter Farrell, then Director of PCUSA Global Mission. He asked me to consider authoring my dissertation on the PBM/PBRO; an idea I immediately accepted. As a professional historian, the position of outsider to the organization though with a level of familiarity held some appeal. Then, in 2017, while attending the annual PBRO board meeting in conjunction with the dissertation research, through an odd set of circumstances, the members present asked that I serve as organization Board of Directors President. I served in that capacity for two terms, four years. As a researcher, the role as “insider” can be problematic as it is easy to grow too close to the people and the work and lose objective perspective. In my situation, it has been helpful in that it opened many doors I might not have been able to crack. The various ministry sites, board members, and leadership provided access to ministry records and engaged openly in interview discussions.

The challenge was to retain an objective posture in the interpretive work of the information obtained from the interviewees and to treat their memories and perspectives with respect. The practitioner-client relationship requires every effort to thoughtfully analyze the information and knowledge gained through the research process. Since the PCUSA Global Mission division and the PBM have entrusted me with the work of gathering information and organizing all findings, they depend on the historical analysis as a tool for their work, present and future. It is incumbent on me as a practitioner to embrace their trust and provide the most accurate and objective tool that I can provide.

For example, as a friend and colleague, I found it difficult to write the history of a time of extreme frustration, anger, and even hurtful interchange. Yet, I had not only witnessed the situation but, held the documentation that revealed some of the interaction and helped to describe the underlying roots of the misunderstanding. The personal struggle to bury the story about people I admire and personally care about. Though difficult, I could not ignore a piece of the PBM history that occurred at a key moment in organizational history and affected the future. A different example of exercising objectivity occurred as I discovered a small amount of documentary evidence of potential gender discrimination. Having served as a woman in a position of leadership in the PBRO, I was personally aware of challenges women faced when interfacing with a Mexican culture and a denomination that openly defied gender neutrality in church governance. With awareness but little evidence, I could not allow a subjective reporting of the incident but had to back my firsthand experiences out of the narrative and let the documentation speak for itself. An understanding of objectivity and subjectivity in the process of historical interviews is an equally important skillset. When any two

individuals interact, subjectivities are engaged due to a variety of variables including location, gender, age, class, and relationship. An interview is more than a simple exchange of facts but involves cooperative sharing of both facts and feelings. On occasions when my recollection did not match the subject's recollection, it was important to recognize and honor their remembering as just that, theirs.

### Sources

The design for the interview process focused on three separate groups of people: The first group was comprised of representatives of Presbyterian or other faith communities: present and past PCUSA leadership, Co-Mission Workers including Mexican and USA Ministry Co-Coordination, Mexican and USA interns, and USA volunteers. The second group was to be a variety of people served by the various ministries but, it only included six women who were part of a woman's permaculture farming cooperative in *Agua Prieta*. For practical and ethical reasons, the plan to interview some of the migrating people served by the border ministry did not materialize. Group III included individuals peripherally related to the ministry including partner organizations, politicians, and government officials. I conducted the interviews in the USA and *México* and in English and Spanish. While I have good Spanish language skills, a translator assisted with most of the Spanish-only interviews. The following table provides additional data about the interviews. Note that while there appears to be an even split between USA and Mexican subjects, six of the interviews had little direct bearing on the border ministry history.



INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED 2017 TO 2019		
Group Divisions	Language	Location
Group I = 22 people	English = 15	USA = 15
	Spanish = 7	<i>México</i> = 6
Group II = 6 people	English = 0	USA = 0
	Spanish = 6	<i>México</i> = 6
Group III = 8 people	English = 5	USA = 5
	Spanish = 3	<i>México</i> = 3

I tailored the interview questions to fit with the specific groups and then matched each interview to the individuals and their circumstances. The interviews for Group I focused on several key areas from general personal information and religious affiliation to ministry involvement and perspectives on various aspects of the ministry. An important part of each conversation tried to uncover what compelled people to serve. Those in leadership provided an understanding of binational, denomination relationships, along with the expectations and hopes for and management of the ministry. Group II, in this case a very distinct grouping, shared their arrival in *Agua Prieta*, their church affiliations, and primarily a discussion about the cooperative – *DouglPrieta Trabaja*. The women discussed the impact this creative ministry had on their lives and their families. Group III was sort of a catch-all group and included several from the partner organization, *Café Justo*. Each shared personal story but also provided their perspectives on the value of the ministry work and its importance to the border cities.

The opportunity to interview people involved with the ministry was a key analytical element of this study. The relational work of people connected to faith-based institutions in the border region is different from the human connections made through politics, commerce and trade, and socio-cultural interactions. They found, through the shared foundations of religious training and organizational mutuality, a common sense of respect and trust. Each person communicated insightful perspectives that bore witness to the implementation and management of the PBM. The history of their collaborative work despite differences, challenging divisive influences, and language barriers, provided unique insights into developing binational relations and mutuality.

These first two categories were simple to organize and carry out as the subjects knew me or knew of me and appreciated and trusted my engagement with their work. Several of those interviewed represented more than one category, for example, people who moved to northern *México* seeking work due to desperate situations in their home communities became leaders in the local ministry. Their lived experiences conveyed valuable, multidimensional insights, in this case, as one who understood the pain of migration and the opportunity to serve as a mentor.

Comparatively, there were not equal numbers of Mexican to USA interviews and, as a result, the text does not present their voices equally. This was an unfortunate though unintended consequence of limitations in access and time. It was simply not possible to connect with the Mexican leadership due to the residual level of separateness and hostility resulting from the denominational fracture in 2011. Several of the older Mexican leaders had either passed away or, due to age and lowered cognitive ability, were not available for interviewing.

I did speak with people in partner organizations, each started and supported by the local ministry. In each case, the subjects felt reassured by familiarity and the presence of people they knew acting as interpreters. I conducted a total of thirty-six interviews in *México* and the USA, with men and women representative of the three categories. I did have some interviews transcribed and, in those cases, I will cite to the written document; for the remainder, I will cite to the location on the audio.

During the research and the interview process, I acquired a strong set of records (eight to ten linear feet) from the decades of PBM development and management. Some ministry sites either did not have documents or their materials were not accessible. Nevertheless, I successfully collected the historic records, early 1970s to 2020, created by the INPM and the PCUSA, the PBM (later the Presbyterian Border Region Outreach – PBRO), and several ministry sites. Files were in Spanish and English and included founding documentation, meeting minutes from all levels of the organization, status reports, strategic planning documents, annual and monthly financial records, donor lists, internal committee reports and correspondence, newsletters, related studies and articles, and some ephemera. For future access, I will submit all primary materials to the Presbyterian Historical Society Archives in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Several archival institutions supported my early research: University of Texas El Paso Oral History Collection which, though a large and growing collection, did not have information on the subject's religious affiliations or interests; Austin Seminary had a few pieces written by seminary students; the Presbyterian Historical Society had little as well, one collection of mostly images from missionaries who served in New *México*. I also visited the Arizona State Archives in search of materials relevant to my topic and found

some interesting correspondence in the governor's papers but little to assist with this research path.

The primary documents of the organization provided decades of detail about the administration and programmatic work at all levels of the organization. Utilizing the organizational structure that was evident in the documentary record, I arranged the dissertation by first, providing the history of the binational efforts at the denomination level. Then, I drew the focus to development of the PBM polity and administration followed by formation of the varied ministry sites, arranged in a geographic order. While each site had unique characteristics, they also shared similar work addressing issues of poverty and migrations, both persistent border region issues. The records provided information necessary to adequately share the history of each site. The related interviews added a richness to the history.

To understand the nuanced history of the PBM and the context for the ministry work, the dissertation draws on theoretical and analytical engagement by scholars from several academic disciplines: history, religious studies, sociology, anthropology, and political science. This study also referenced several in-depth studies researched and written by journalists and authors that focused on the *México/USA* border region. While on the surface it seems to be a simple history of a small, insignificant corner of a large binational picture, I argue knowledge of the ministry's past opens new perspectives to interpreting religion and mission work, international engagement, borderland uniqueness, and understanding the people who live in and move through the borderland space.

The historical inquiry started with understanding Mexican history, including northern *México* (now much of the USA West and Southwest), and the interactions with

the USA during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This provided the essential background for discerning how the political, social, cultural, and foreign relations in the border region make sense. Two texts provided a broad sweep of Mexican history and were particularly useful in understanding the background of the Spanish conquest and the powerful role of Catholicism that accompanied European contact. Henry Bamford Parkes early work, *A History of Mexico*, begins with a review of the indigenous people and the Spanish conquest and colonization of the country through the 1950s.<sup>10</sup> The text served as an interesting resource, especially as it did or did not align with more contemporary historical accounts of the same period. A second general history of *México*, Colin MacLachlan and Jaime Rodríguez O.'s *Forging of the Cosmic Race: A Reinterpretation of Colonial Mexico* also started with the earliest known civilizations, then studied the period of colonization under Spanish rule. MacLachlan and Rodríguez O. counter studies that interpret New Spain through the lens of exploitation and violent cultural integration. The authors focused on New Spain outside the context of the Spanish Empire and, incorporating their analysis of the indigenous peoples, they considered formation of the mestizo culture, what the authors argue is a successful response to a complex blending of societies. Along with analysis of the politics and economics of the period, MacLachlan and Rodríguez O. incorporated social history, including a study of the role of family and women.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Henry Bamford Parkes, *The History of Mexico* (Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969 reprint).

<sup>11</sup> Colin M. MacLachlan, and Jaime E. Rodríguez O., *The Forging of the Cosmic Race: A Reinterpretation of Colonial Mexico* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1980).

A third text on the general history of Mexico helped to contextualize *México*'s recent past, the period of this dissertation. John Mason Hart, in his book *Empire and Revolution*, looked at the history of *México* through its contacts with Americans primarily through the power and influence that accompanied heavy financial investments in *México*.<sup>12</sup> The study of engagements of USA financiers helped in understanding some of the parallel proselytizing efforts by early Protestant missionaries across *México*. Hart's subsequent discussion of what he refers to as the "Return of the American Financiers" in the 1980s and 1990s, delves into the unequal distribution of wealth and influence and the related migration of people to Mexico's northern border and beyond. Hart concluded, "The relationship that evolved between the United States and Mexico beginning at the end of the American Civil War anticipated the issues of globalism that emerged during the 1990s."<sup>13</sup> His book provided insight into the consequences of relationships between the powerful and less powerful nations and the impacts on the people of each country, an understanding that is important for interpreting the border engagement in this dissertation.

J.H. Elliot provided a broad context for studying early settlement in the USA in his book, *Empires of the Atlantic World*.<sup>14</sup> Along with his comparison of the two quite different settlement styles, Elliot also introduced parallels between the Spanish and British communities. Through his research, he determined that while many early

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<sup>12</sup> John Mason Hart, *Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico since the Civil War* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> John Mason Hart, *Empire and Revolution*, 506.

<sup>14</sup> J. H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America 1492-1830* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

immigrants shed the circumstances of their old country, much of their cultural heritage, including religious beliefs, traveled with them. Once on the American continent, both groups of settlers and religious leaders established new social and political systems and, with time, developed economic opportunity. In addition, each settling group pushed the boundaries of their territories forward, creating new zones of contact and new external perimeters.<sup>15</sup>

The study of northern *México*, now the area known as the USA West and Southwest, started with Herbert Eugene Bolton and his cadre of students who proposed a new perspective in the study of American history. Specifically, they argued that colonial America and the eastern seaboard should not be the sole interpretive model for early American history but, should include the simultaneous European/Mexican settlement on the land of the West and Southwest. As an aside, two important aspects of his work included his theory on the interconnectedness of both American continents as the proper context for each country's history, and his privileging of archival collections on an international scale. Bolton, and a colleague and former student, John Francis Bannon, considered the Spanish Borderlands and Spanish Borderlands Frontier respectively, demonstrating that westward moving Anglo-Americans were latecomers to the region. Each author tells the history of northern *México* beginning with the coming of Spanish conquistadors.<sup>16</sup> Both texts treat their Borderlands histories up to and through the period

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<sup>15</sup> J. H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World*, 274.

<sup>16</sup> Herbert Eugene Bolton, *The Spanish Borderlands: A Chronicle of Old Florida and the Southwest* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1921); John Francis Bannon, *The Spanish Borderlands Frontier: 1513-1821* (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1974).

of Mexican independence and the move toward conflict with USA encroachment on the northern territory. Bannon concludes, "...the Borderlands story is a fundamental starting point for the comprehension of the problem of one of the nation's contemporary minority groups, the Mexican Americans, descendants of the Borderlanders of yesteryear..." who contributed to, "...that nebulous thing called American civilization."<sup>17</sup> Repercussions and benefits of the earlier years of contact remain evident to the present and help with understanding some of the tensions that still exist between the two countries and in the border region history.

In his book, *The Spanish Frontier in North America*, David Weber built on the Bolton and Bannon concepts of border region (frontier), reframing the definition to be a zone of interaction between two distinct cultures where they, "contend with one another and with their physical environment to produce a dynamic that is unique to time and place."<sup>18</sup> For the field of history, specifically border region history, and as a contribution to understanding the context on which this dissertation is built, Weber's book solidified the value and importance of a binational understanding of border region history.

Another Weber book, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821 to 1846*, and *Wandering Peoples* by Cynthia Radding are historical surveys that describe times of significant contact.<sup>19</sup> Weber provided important regional context of northern *México* between the

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<sup>17</sup> Bannon, *The Spanish Borderlands Frontier*, 238.

<sup>18</sup> David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press: 1992), 11.

<sup>19</sup> David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier 1821 – 1846: The American Southwest Under Mexico* (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1982); Cynthia Radding, *Wandering Peoples: Colonialism, Ethnic Spaces, and Ecological Frontiers I Northwestern Mexico, 1700 – 1850* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1997).



period when *México* gained independence from Spain and prior to the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo with the USA. His work covered the geographic breadth of the area and the political, cultural, social, and economic developments as the peoples of the two nations met and engaged or clashed. Contact and convulsion described the colonial period Redding analyzed, a time when Spanish mission settlement and economic development made a permanent impact on the indigenous peoples of the Mexican north country. Redding's work is particularly important as her subjects include ordinary people establishing their place in the context of power, conflict, and challenge. These works are a part of the body of historical literature that helps with understanding some of the questions we face as we interpret spaces of engagement and exchange in binational relations, particularly in the *México/USA* border region.

A critical area of historical inquiry for this dissertation is the study of migration and migrating people. Dirk Hoerder called on the history profession to consider "human history is the history of migration." In collaboration with key colleagues, his analyses considered human movement, from regional to transnational spaces, unimpeded by political demarcations except as they influenced the migration story. Hoerder effectively challenged historians to study the migration experience as it touched all people, (gender, race, age), the environment, and made an impact on sending and receiving locations as well as the spaces in-between. It is the influence of his work that encouraged inclusion of an entire chapter for this dissertation on migration and migrating people. The Hoerder and Faires anthology, *Migrants and Migration in Modern North America*, modeled historical analysis in a multi-national context while simultaneously incorporating the

small group and individual experience, a method applied in this dissertation.<sup>20</sup> Hoerder and Faires incorporated works that looked at both the northern and southern borderlands of the USA, offering opportunity for comparison. The narratives engaged a variety of themes including labor and economics, trade, gender and family considerations, cultural exchange, border construction, and legal/political influences.

The Marc S. Rodriguez anthology, *Repositioning North American Migration History*, opened with the Hoerder mantra privileging the study of migration history at the core of human history.<sup>21</sup> Rodriguez and the contributing colleagues considered the broad range of migration stories, exploring people crossing borders both internally and internationally. The contributors discussed such issues as migration patterns, sending and receiving communities, gendered and race-specific experiences, impacts of transportation and industrialization, and the implications of people on the move challenged by government authority. This dissertation attends to these themes and frameworks, as well.

A subset of migration studies focused on the development of USA laws aimed at controlling the flows of migrants. Two books published in 2004, not only documented the history of immigration laws but provided the necessary context for understanding the political activity and public perceptions that surrounded eventual passage of those laws. Both Roger Daniels, in *Guarding the Golden Door*, and Mae M. Ngai, in *Impossible Subjects*, began with the first USA laws designed to exclude specific peoples from

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<sup>20</sup> Dirk Hoerder and Nora Faires, eds., *Migrants and Migration in Modern North America: Cross-Border Lives, Labor Markets, and Politics* (Durham, UK: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Marc S. Rodriguez, ed., *Repositioning North American Migration History: New Directions in Modern Continental Migration, Citizenship and Community* (Rochester, New York: University of Rochester Press, 2004).

entering the country while simultaneously building the new labeling protocols of “illegal aliens.”<sup>22</sup> As each text lists the continuous rollouts of immigration laws, they weave narratives rich with data, public discourse, faith-based engagement, judicial action, and administrative enforcement. A growing number of historians joined both authors to further elucidate complicated and dizzyingly detailed historical accounts of USA immigration law, a necessary tool for understanding migration history, particularly as it relates to the *México/USA* border region and the work of the PBM.

Descriptions of the border region have included: contested, porous, fuzzy, fugitive, troublesome, permeable, and continental crossroad, and while the naming convention is not a competition, the challenge of describing the space defined by the touch of two countries remains open for continued consideration. Samuel Truett has strengthened the field of borderland studies, emphasizing the unbounded, transitional nature of the land and people that contribute to the borderland personality. In the book, *Fugitive Landscapes*, Truett’s regional history located in the states of Arizona and *Sonora*, described shared pasts that connected lands and peoples now divided. He noted the patterns of human engagement on the “transnational” space, from entrepreneurial development to state controls, elites to laborers and migrating peoples.<sup>23</sup> Truett’s and Elliot Young’s anthology, *Continental Crossroads*, further developed descriptive studies

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<sup>22</sup> Roger Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants Since 1882* (New York, New York: Hill and Wang, A Division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004); Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and The Making of Modern America* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>23</sup> Samuel Truett, *Fugitive Landscapes: The Forgotten History of the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2006).

of border regions and drew historians farther from nation-centric historical treatments.<sup>24</sup> The authors revealed an ever-more complex environment challenging existing assumptions of relationships, expanding the population paradigms to include other contributing races and ethnicities, and revisiting periods of conflict to further elucidate regional pasts.

Defining the *México*/USA border region has challenged historians since Eugene Bolton's work in the 1920s and 1930s. Since more recent work has not landed on one specific, unifying definition, the profession has tacitly agreed to afford authors the latitude to consider how they will define the border region in their analyses. Rachel St. John added another strong consideration to the conversation in her book, *Line in the Sand*.<sup>25</sup> St. John's text is the history of the actual border line and how and why it changed over time. For her purpose, the border is the surveyed line that cuts across the continent and divides two countries. Understanding the history of the line brings to light the burden of that history on current binational relations. What was once northern Mexico, including the current border region, the USA took by force from Mexico. That is a shared history that continues as an undercurrent to both political and cultural interactions.

Another strong border region historian, Oscar J. Martínez, produced an expansive text, *Border People*, which opens for the reader insights to the unique processes and characteristics of the borderlands and the experiences of borderlanders.<sup>26</sup> His vision

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<sup>24</sup>Samuel Truett, and Elliott Young, eds., *Continental Crossroads: Remapping U.S.-Mexico Borderlands History* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> Rachel St. John, *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western U.S. – Mexico Border* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2011).

<sup>26</sup> Oscar J. Martínez, *Border People: Life and Society in the U.S. – Mexico Borderlands* (Tucson, Arizona: The University of Arizona Press, 1994).

reflects a space where people interact and even in times of duress, the “transnational borderlanders” build bridges with those on the other side. In a later book, *Troublesome Border*, Martínez approached borderland study differently employing conflict as the overarching theme.<sup>27</sup> He presented a history of layered resentments by *México* and Mexicans toward the country to their north and the *Norteamericanos/as* residing there. Both volumes contribute to a broader understanding of the complexity of relationship-building in the border region.

Kelly Lytle Hernández published a comprehensive book on the history of the Border Patrol, *Migra! A History of the U.S. Border Patrol*. The text began with the earliest legislated controls placed on immigration in 1907 and the birth of the Border Patrol agency. Hernández’ research took her into *México* where she unearthed information regarding the Mexican government’s role in controlling Mexican emigration and the binational effort to manage migration into the USA. She demonstrated how, over the century, what started as immigration control became a federal law enforcement agency. Hernández discussed the developmental process and linked it to the law, public expectations, and the impacts on migrating people. This work provided another layer of insight into the analysis of migration in this dissertation and one area of work by the PBM.

Understanding the historical accounting of the PBM was not possible without religious history texts. *Themes in Religion and American Culture*, edited by Philip Goff

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<sup>27</sup> Oscar J. Martínez, *Troublesome Border*, revised ed. (Tucson, Arizona: The University of Arizona Press, 2006).

and Paul Harvey, provided a chronological treatment applied to each thematic chapter.<sup>28</sup> For this dissertation, the most applicable theme from the book centered on proselytization from the precolonial era through to modern USA. The context for each period, outlined by Goff and Harvey, support the dissertation discussions of best practices in missional service. A second book, authored by Jon Butler, Grant Wacker, and Randall Balmer, *Religion in American Life: A Short History*, also focused on the broad periodization of religious history in the USA.<sup>29</sup> The foundation of the book argued that "...religion in America stands at the heart of the story of America itself.... It is the story of natives and immigrants, of the wealthy, the poor... women, men, and children in families and out, of powerful political movements and parties to highly introspective individuals... of bigotry, yet also of often tender generosity, kindness, and mutual esteem."<sup>30</sup> Indeed, these two volumes supported the history of the PBM, a history that is part of a greater story.

There is a collection of books that discuss the general history of Presbyterianism, Presbyterian mission, and regional Presbyterian work including border ministry. For this dissertation, the historic information provided a deeper appreciation for the inner workings of the denomination and the missional practices as they developed over the decades and centuries. The history of Presbyterian polity and mission engagement supports a richer understanding of the developments that led up to and informed the implementation of the PBM. The authors were not academic historians but tended to be

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<sup>28</sup> Philip Goff, and Paul Harvey, eds., *Themes in Religion and American Culture* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 2004).

<sup>29</sup> Jon Butler, Grant Wacker, and Randall Balmer, *Religion in American Life: A Short History* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>30</sup> Butler, Wacker and Balmer, *Religion in American Life*, xi-xii.

seminary professors and denominational leaders, some of whom started their careers in the mission field or held positions in border ministry. In their research, the authors utilized the primary sources of the denominations, and the national and global church organizations.

One valuable set of books were reprints of mission accountings, now in the public domain, penned by early missionaries and evangelical authors, and originally published between 1875 and 1923.<sup>31</sup> Two additional books that have been particularly informing are *Iglesia Presbiteriana* by Brackenridge and García-Treto and *Bishops on the Border: Pastoral Responses to Immigration*.<sup>32</sup> *Iglesia Presbiteriana* covered USA Southwest history from 1830 to publication in 1987. The book was rich with detailed historical data extrapolated from written and oral interviews and English and Spanish printed records, from church facilities across Texas, New Mexico, and California. The second book, *Bishops on the Border*, was a collection of essays by bishops, pastors, and mission co-workers living and serving in Arizona and the state's adjacent border region in *México*. The diverse clergy representing varied denominations, shared their personal perspectives

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<sup>31</sup> Melinda Rankin, *Twenty Years Among the Mexicans: A Narrative of Missionary Labor* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Chase and Hall, 1875) reprinted by Forgotten Books at [www.ForgottenBooks.com](http://www.ForgottenBooks.com); Francis E. Clark and Harriet A. Clark, *The Gospel in Latin Lands: Outline Studies of Protestant Work in the Latin Countries of Europe and America* (New York, New York: The McMillan Company, 1909) reprinted by Forgotten Books at [www.ForgottenBooks.com](http://www.ForgottenBooks.com); James Gary Dale, *Mexico and Our Mission (Associate Reformed Presbyterian)* (Lebanon, Pennsylvania: Bowers Printing Company, 1910); William A. Ross, *Sunrise in Aztec Land: Being an Account of the Mission Work That Has Been Carried On In Mexico Since 1874 by the Presbyterian Church in the United States....*, (Richmond, Virginia: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1922).

<sup>32</sup> R. Douglas Brackenridge and Francisco O. García-Treto, *Iglesia Presbiteriana: A History of Presbyterians and Mexican Americans in the Southwest, Second Edition* (San Antonio, Texas: Trinity University Press, 1987); Mark Adams, Minerva Carcaño, Gerald Kicanas, Kirk Smith, and Stephen Talmage, *Bishops on the Border: Pastoral Responses to Immigration* (New York, New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2013).

of the migration situations they saw and experienced regularly in their call to serve in the USA Southwest. The contributors to the anthology, *A History of Presbyterian Missions 1944-2007*, edited by Scott W. Sunquist and Caroline N. Becker, line up as a veritable ‘Who’s Who’ of academic and administrative leaders of the USA Presbyterian denomination.<sup>33</sup> The editors designed the text as a substantive record of the past in service to the denomination.

Scholars in a variety of academic fields have collaborated on, authored and edited narratives and anthologies that provide interesting and important cross discipline perspectives that are germane to this dissertation. The researchers in Religious Studies, Philosophy, Ethics, Sociology, Anthropology, American Studies, Political Science and Law contribute to the study of the *México*/USA border region, migration, and religion. Religion is central to this dissertation of human interaction, compassionate engagement, the border region, migration, and poverty, and these scholars affirm the value of factoring the impact of religious influence and experience into the scholarship. Their work demonstrates how religion pertains to all aspects of the human experience.

*Living Illegal: The Human Face of Unauthorized Immigration* a collaborative work by Marquardt, Steigenga, Williams and Vásquez used stories of individuals to counter the loud anti-immigrant rhetoric, and walked the reader through the primary issues of the modern immigration experience in the USA.<sup>34</sup> An anthology, edited by

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<sup>33</sup> Scott W. Sunquist and Caroline N. Becker, *A History of Presbyterian Missions 1944-2007: A Project of the World Mission Initiative of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary* (Louisville, Kentucky: Geneva Press, 2008).

<sup>34</sup> Marie Friedmann Marquardt, Timothy J. Steigenga, Philip J. Williams, and Manuel A. Vásquez, *Living “Illegal:” The Human Face of Unauthorized Immigration*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York, New York: The New Press, 2015).



Alba, Raboteau, and DeWind, *Immigration and Religion in America*, utilized an international approach to compare the importance of varied religious organizations to the immigration experience in the USA.<sup>35</sup>

Two books by professors of Religious Studies addressed two different yet relevant subjects for this dissertation. Leah Sarat's *Fire in the Canyon* unpacked the history of a town in Southern *México*, made complicated by religious traditions and a Pentecostal imposition on / addition to the old ways.<sup>36</sup> Sarat demonstrated that ritual and religious belief affect each migrating individual, from the decisions to leave, through the trip north, the USA experiences, and the return to their community. Heather Curtis' book, *Holy Humanitarians*, looked at the roots and history of philanthropic engagement around the globe by evangelical religious communities in the USA.<sup>37</sup> Curtis presented the history of a self-appointed movement leader that successfully popularized and employed religious journalism to compel contributions on behalf of the poor and needy around the world. The early evangelical charities, much like the PBM, faced challenges in the ministry programming. Neither fully resolved the ethical and theological questions regarding best practices in philanthropic engagement. The will of people to serve can be clouded by strong and compassionate desires to help, an important challenge in missional practice.

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<sup>35</sup> Richard Alba, Albert J. Raboteau, and Josh DeWind, *Immigration and Religion in America: Comparative and Historical Perspectives* (New York, New York: New York University Press, 2009).

<sup>36</sup> Leah Sarat, *Fire in the Canyon: Religion, Migration, and the Mexican Dream* (New York, New York: New York University Press, 2013).

<sup>37</sup> Heather D. Curtis, *Holy Humanitarians: American Evangelicals and Global Aid* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018).

Sociologists have linked the study of religion to explorations on migration and migrating people, the *Mexico/USA* border region, and the impacts of multinational politics and economics. This valuable scholarship varied in scope from the study of religious networks formed by people who migrate, to supportive faith-based networks. It looked at the engagement of religious communities with the culture, politics, and policies of the day and the unjust social misunderstandings formulated by prejudice, racism, or ignorance. There are five books that offered a breadth of research and analysis. Hagan's *Migration Miracle* not only articulated the “central and intertwining role of culture, religion, and spirituality in the lives of the poor and working class who wrestle with the migration undertaking,” but also challenged existing political and economic models for migrating as incomplete analyses.<sup>38</sup> Hagan, joined by Ebaugh and Chafetz, in *Religion and the New Immigrants*, revealed the interplay of religious experience and faith communities in both the receiving countries and the points of origin for the migrating people.<sup>39</sup> In her book, *One Family Under God*, Grace Yukich studied the work of progressive religion in the USA as it grappled with the injustices and hostility toward migrating people.<sup>40</sup> Yukich' focus on the New Sanctuary Movement showed the inner workings of a diverse coalition challenging immigration policy and reimagining the influence of the religious left while it wrestled with the tensions of religion vs state.

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<sup>38</sup> Jacqueline Maria Hagan, *Migration Miracle: Faith, Hope, and Meaning on the Undocumented Journey* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008), 3.

<sup>39</sup> Helen Rose Ebaugh and Janet Saltzman Chafetz, *Religion and the New Immigrants* (Walnut Creek, California: AltaMira Press, 2000).

<sup>40</sup> Grace Yukich, *One Family Under God: Immigration Politics and Progressive Religion in America* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

*Religion and Social Justice for Immigrants*, an anthology edited by Hondagneu-Sotelo, presented varied scholars focused on the migration experience in an environment rife with racism, nationalism, and a conflated sense of threat due to unknowns posed by the newcomers.<sup>41</sup> The book discussed the work of varied religious communities that offered alternatives of support, with resources, education, even respite, and advocacy through public discourse and political action. Finally, Pablo Vila's *Border Identifications* gave voice and meaning to residents in the border region as he interpreted the influencing roles of religion, gender, and class as identity categories for borderland lives.<sup>42</sup> His work delved into the personal reasons Pentecostalism appealed to Mexican working classes and the varied interpretations of Mexican-ness by people of different faiths.

Anthropologists, law professors, and journalists join the cadre of scholars and authors to study and elucidate the experiences of migrating people. They researched personal migration stories, from the first decisions to leave, to the journey experience, and then, to their settlement once at their destinations. Each contributed to analysis of the illegalization of migrating peoples from the beginnings of political formation to the recent exercise of management and control systems. In addition, there is a large body of literature on the history and the contemporary work of the Border Patrol. Every theme contributed to the understanding of not only migrating people but the authority of and lives lived by the federal agents.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Religion and Social Justice for Immigrants* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2007).

<sup>42</sup> Pablo Vila, *Border Identifications: Narratives of Religion, Gender, and Class on the U.S. – Mexico Border* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2005).

<sup>43</sup> Patrick Ettinger, *Imaginary Lines: Border Enforcement and the Origins of Undocumented Immigration 1882-1930* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2009); Robert Lee Maril, *Patrolling*

A subset of research that I have found particularly illuminating has been the study of art, poetry, and music created out of the immigrant experience; much of it as expressions of love, loss, and faith. The study of beauty and holy places, both natural spaces or constructed shrines, offered glimpses into the deepest feelings, sorrows and joys, of the travelers, their loved ones, and their advocates.<sup>44</sup>

Most of the articles cited came from the Journal of Presbyterian History, American Presbyterians. The websites utilized include the Presbyterian Historical Society, Presbyterian Border Ministry, Presbyterian Church USA, and newspapers.com, Latin American Politics and Society, Population and Development Review, Consumer Affairs, and Sociology of Religion. Websites that proved useful, especially for background information, included: The Pew Research Center, the Migration Policy Institute, USA government sites (most particularly Congress, Customs and Border Patrol,

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*Chaos: The U.S. Border Patrol in Deep South Texas* (Lubbock, Texas: Texas Tech University Press, 2004); Todd Miller, *Storming the Wall: Climate Change, Migration, and Homeland Security* (San Francisco, California: City Lights / Open Media Series, 2017); Todd Miller, *Border Patrol Nation: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Homeland Security* (San Francisco, California: Open Media Series / City Lights Books, 2014); Todd Miller, *Empire of Borders: The Expansion of the U.S. Border Around the World* (London, England: Verso, 2019).

<sup>44</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (San Francisco, California: Aunt Lute Books, 2007); María Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound: The Mexican Immigrant Experience in Ballad and Song* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1993); Alicia Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New York, New York: New York University Press, 2008); Jorge Durand and Douglas S. Massey, *Miracles on the Border: Retablos of Mexican Migrants to the United States* (Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1995); David Bacon, *Communities Without Borders: Images and Voices From the World of Migration* (Ithaca, New York: ILR Press, 2006); Maeve Hickey and Lawrence Taylor, *Ambos Nogales: Intimate Portraits of the U.S. – Mexico Border* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press, 2002); Alan Weisman and Jay Dusard, *La Frontera: The United States Border with Mexico* (Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1986); Michael Hyatt, *Along the Migrant Trail: A Borderlands Portrait* (Santa Monica, California: Fronteranueva Books, 2019); John Ittmann, ed., *Mexico and Modern Printmaking: A Revolution in Graphic Arts, 1920 to 1950* (San Antonio, Texas: Philadelphia Museum of Art McNay Art Museum, 2006), Don Coen, *The Migrant Series* (Phoenix, Arizona: Phoenix Art Museum, 2014).

state legislatures), and religious communities of varied denominations that work with migrating people and advocate for just immigration policy.

## Chapter Layout

Chapter Two reviews the development of USA Protestant and, primarily, Presbyterian mission history. It covers an expansive period, from the seventeenth century to the nineteen-eighties, at which time the Mexican and USA Presbyterian denominations launched a new type of binational, missional programming. Though early European settlers had planted Presbyterianism in North America during the colonial period, it was not until the late nineteenth century that missionaries ventured into *México*. The primary goal for those early missionaries as they moved into *México* was to evangelize non-Christian and Catholic peoples and to further advance the growth of the church. This dissertation draws a connection between the early engagement by missionaries in the field, backed by their denomination, to the establishment of the INPM in *México* and the growth of inter-denominational relations into the twenty-first century.

In the earliest years, the missionaries settled throughout much of *México*. Following 1914 and what became known as the Plan of Cincinati. The plan conceived of and developed by USA Protestant missionaries unilaterally divided *México* into geographic zones. Presbyterians took the central and southern portions of the country and expected the northern Presbyterians to vacate their denomination and conform to Methodism which took over the entire northern regions of Mexico. The Plan is one of the first examples of friction that developed due to paternalistic insensitivity on the part of USA missionaries and the loss of control by Mexican Presbyterians over their churches.

As the Presbyterian presence expanded in *México*, USA missionaries poured considerable resources into construction of schools, hospitals, missions, churches, and seminaries. With that growth came the continued imposition of power and control by the USA missionaries, a persistent problem that led to an eventual split between the two denominations in 1972. In the process of reconciliation, the INPM and the PCUSA leadership developed a new, innovative mission program which established a ministry on their common border.

Chapter Three tells the history of the development and implementation of the reunification covenant signed by both denominations and the subsequent development of the Presbyterian Border Ministry (PBM). After several years of engagement and negotiation, in 1980, the INPM and two USA Presbyterian denominations, United Presbyterian Church USA (UPCUSA) and Presbyterian Church US (PCUS), in the process of merging into the PCUSA, signed a covenant agreement that outlined the new missional relationship. Among the tenets of the covenant, it established a border ministry program designed to ensure bilateral administration and decision-making, autonomous control by Mexican leadership of the INPM, and a binational, organizational structure to provide oversight and management of the mission programming. The PBM was responsible for building churches and fostering evangelization across the border region and implementing service programs that addressed critical needs in the region.

In 2011, the INPM split again from the PCUSA and presented a new type of challenge for the border ministries. Chapter three explains the reasons for the second denominational fracture and describes the work by the PBM to figure out what their next steps needed to be. While they were able to sustain their binational status, the last three

years of working to reimagine a new PBM, renamed Presbyterian Border Region Outreach (PBRO) in the process, failed in its collective effort. The ministries fell into a sort of organizational malaise as each turned inward to manage their local programming. Despite the years of facing challenges and obstacles, the next steps in the face of loss, structurally, administratively, and financially, seemed to have eluded them.

Over the decades, the PBM provided oversight for eight mission programs in seven twin-cities along the *México/USA* border. The programming varied somewhat depending on location-specific needs and the talents of the individual binational leadership teams and volunteers at each site. Generally, however, they focused on implementation of a new concept developed in the earliest years of the border ministry, *serviglesia* (*servicio + iglesia* or service + church). Chapters Four, Five, and Six provide detailed histories of each border ministry, beginning in the 1970s and extending to 2015/2016. The chapters introduce the ministry sites by geographic region, east to west along the *México/USA* border.

Each chapter sets forth an organizational history of the PBM ministry sites, outlining the administrative structure, staff and volunteer development, the processes for program implementation, fiscal management, and organizational self-care. This portion of the dissertation describes the heart of the binational plan. The ministry site histories are replete with detailed information, made stronger by the information gathered in the interview process. They demonstrated through actions and articulated through their words a mutuality of purpose and service. With a common embrace of their mutual mission, the faith workers along with staff and volunteers, propelled the work forward despite the differences in theological perspective and cultures. The mutuality of their commitment to

the work is the framework that transcended divisive politics, economics, and socially driven othering of peoples.

The three chapters divide the ministry sites by their geographic locations. Chapter Four looks at five ministries established between 1978 and 1998, all situated along the border between Texas and the three Mexican states of Chihuahua, Coahuila, and Tamaulipas. Two of the ministries, *Proyecto Verdad* and *Puentes de Cristo*, started before establishment of the PBM. The chapter includes three additional sites, *Puentes de Cristo*, *Proyecto Amistad*, and *Laredos Unidos*, in a single sub-section due to the shared geographic similarities and common regional experiences. In 1998, the PBM joined with the Tres Rios Presbytery, *Presbiterio de Noroeste*, and area churches to launch *Pasos de Fe* as a new binational program in Juárez/El Paso.

Chapter Five covers the history of *Frontera de Cristo* and *Compañeros en Misión*, both located in twin-cities of Sonora, México, and Arizona. The binational leadership and the PBM established the ministries almost a decade apart and though the histories are different, the sites share a geographic space that is unique to them. Chapter Six looks at one of the first established ministry sites in the PBM program, *Pueblos Hermanos*, located in the Tijuana/San Diego area. The history of *Pueblos Hermanos* is different from the other ministry sites in that local Presbyterians had begun the work of building churches and it was incumbent on the new missionary leadership to discern the best paths for engagement and participation in the existing work of the Mexican and USA denominations.

Chapter Seven looks at the PBM from a distinct perspective, it assesses the organization's history through the lens of their migration programming. The ministry



sites responded through their daily work providing the essentials: food, medical care, clothing, a place of rest, and compassionate listening. They also engaged in strong advocacy against injustice on behalf of the migrating people. The religious workers have witnessed the plight of the travelers, from their decisions to make the journey, their trips north, and their final disposition. Either the migrating people arrived at their destination and into an often unfriendly political and social environment, they faced capture and repatriation, or they died in the isolated spaces of the USA Southwest. Through education, religious ritual, prayer, and outreach to the political leadership, their cries for just immigration policy convey a deep and very real passion, a commitment to metaphorically walk with and strengthen the people migrating.

Chapter Eight, the concluding chapter begins with a review of the eight ministry sites then, recounts several key themes that emerged in the history of the PBM. The importance of relationship and relationship-building, the value of respectful and just engagement with others despite the many differences, and the embrace of mutuality in all aspects of the ministry. Most importantly, ministry workers share a compelling understanding of their faith and their commitment to all of God's creation. The story of the PBM, the staff and volunteers, and the people served by the programming is a vital part of the border region story. It presents alternative approaches to engaging cultural, racial, political, and economic difference and discounts the many perceived notions of threat and justifications for divisiveness. It is an articulation of faith-in-action that tried to understand and respond to the world through the love expressed as God, and the words and actions in biblical text attributed to Jesus the Christ.

## CHAPTER 2

### PRESBYTERIAN MISSION: DEVELOPMENT AND EXPANSION

At its core, this dissertation, situated in the border region of *México* and the USA, is about a Presbyterian ministry and the interactions of faith workers with each other and those they committed to serving. The dissertation is a two-part historical accounting. First it is an institutional history of a binational, faith-based organization that formed during the late twentieth century and developed successfully into the twenty-first century. Second, it is a history of faith-workers who met many challenges and formed relationships of respect and mutuality despite the many theological, cultural, political, and economic differences. The history of the Presbyterian Border Ministry (PBM) is a history of alternative forms of engagement in a zone rife with conflict.

The Presbyterian faith workers came together, each on a mission for their respective denominations, but that is where similarities began to break down. This complex history of individuals and religious institutions began before the leadership of the Mexican and USA denominations set a new course for collective missional engagement. The denominations and the mission workers in the border region faced one-hundred years of history in which Mexicans were part of building the Presbyterian presence yet, USA missionaries had exercised much of the power and control over the Mexican denomination. The border ministry workers also shared a rocky history of international relations between their respective countries, a history that extended back over several centuries. Relations between the governments of the two countries included war and conquest. Bankers and entrepreneurs sought financial opportunities that set economic courses which made challenging impacts on modern times. Early migration and

settlement patterns, and quests for new entrepreneurial opportunities resulted in contacts that often resulted in conflict and subjugation. Religious institutions were a part of the years of international development.

This chapter steps back in time to provide the context needed to interpret the late twentieth century history of the binational mission programming of the Mexican and USA Presbyterian denominations (INPM and PCUSA). It begins with a brief history of the development of Protestant and, primarily, Presbyterian mission organization in the USA as it progressed toward an eventual reach into *México*. As the Presbyterian denomination became established during the colonial period, an emphasis on mission evangelism developed almost simultaneously and the membership looked outward to advance their faith and convert the non-Christian, and later, the Catholic. By the late eighteenth, early nineteenth century, Protestant and Presbyterian missionaries, captured by a passion to save the souls of the many unconverted of the world, traveled westward across North America and to distant places around the globe. The earliest mission forays into Mexico occurred in the late nineteenth century as the Mexican government lifted restrictions placed on religions other than Catholicism. Into the twentieth century, USA Presbyterian missionaries had successfully engaged in *México* and invested significant numbers of personnel and amounts of money into establishing their foothold.

Early missional decisions made by the USA Presbyterian church directly affected the impact missionaries made through their work in the foreign mission field; impacts that had far-reaching effects on future, global Presbyterian denominations and their foreign ministries. The evangelizing zeal and outreach practices of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries laid the groundwork for the future *Iglesia Nacional Presbiteriana de*

*México* (National Presbyterian Church of *México*, INPM) and the missional ties between Mexican and USA Presbyterians in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This chapter begins in the seventeenth century on the east coast of the American colonies and ends in the early nineteen-eighties, as Presbyterians prepared to launch their new, untested form of binational mutual mission.

### Early Years of Presbyterian Mission

The roots of Presbyterianism in the USA date back to the seventeenth century; it would be two centuries before its missional spread reached southward into *México* and Latin America. In 1690, a few congregations existed in the colonies but within a few short decades the Presbyterian numbers rapidly grew. Most of the new worship communities were filled with immigrants, predominately Scots-Irish, who settled across the colonies. "...active missionary efforts and effective organization by the Presbyterians won many Scots over to Presbyterianism."<sup>45</sup> By the early eighteenth century, enough Presbyterian churches existed in North America to form Presbyteries (geographically organized representational bodies which provide leadership and authoritative oversight for church management). Three or more Presbyteries within a region combined to form a Synod (a representational entity with a broader political reach for ensuring the successful growth of the church specifically for the region it represented). With the influx of the Scots-Irish to the middle colonies in the eighteenth century, Presbyterian numbers grew to one of the largest denominations of the colonial era. Toward the end of the century, enough churches, presbyteries, and synods existed to form a national Presbyterian

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<sup>45</sup> Butler, Wacker and Balmer, *Religion in American Life*, 84-85.

denomination, the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA). In 1789, a representational gathering from all churches, Presbyteries, and the four Synods met in Philadelphia for the first USA General Assembly (GA).<sup>46</sup> Throughout this developmental period (and up to present day) Presbyterianism in the USA experienced divisions over a variety of theological, cultural, political, and organizational issues, some of which are relevant to this study of binational engagement and the *México/USA* border region.

One action by the first USA General Assembly was to call for missionary assignments from each Synod and to ask the Presbyteries for the necessary funding to support the mission work. Subsequent formation of missionary societies, Presbyterian and ecumenical, coupled with the influence of the Second Great Awakening movement, compelled a strong shift to a church that was meant to evangelize in the world. Since its formative years, the purpose of mission service has remained a central question in the life of the Presbyterian church.<sup>47</sup>

By the mid-eighteenth century and with the establishment of Fort Pitt by the British, the migration westward over the Allegheny Mountains included the growing numbers of Presbyterian Scots and Scots-Irish. At that time, the frontier was a porous region, not delineated by a line but as a zone of contact where interaction, violent or

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<sup>46</sup> James H. Smylie, *American Presbyterians: A Pictorial History*. Bound volume from *Journal of Presbyterian History* 63, nos. 1 and 2, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1985): 15, 50.

<sup>47</sup> S. Donald Fortson III, *The Presbyterian Story: Origins and Progress of a Reformed Tradition* (North Carolina: Presbyterian Lay Committee, 2013), 143.

cooperative, occurred.<sup>48</sup> The Synod of New York and Philadelphia (est. 1717) sent ministers to the area to establish churches. In the early nineteenth century, the newly formed Synod of Pittsburgh focused heavily on an evangelizing ministry to area settlers and regional Indian American nations.<sup>49</sup> Presbyterians had formalized “home mission” activity by establishing the Standing Committee of Missions and soon after, collaborated with the Congregational, Dutch Reformed, and Associated Reformed churches in the work of the non-denominational American Board of Commissions of Foreign Mission (ABCFM).<sup>50</sup> The ABCFM, a voluntary organization, focused on spreading Christianity to the USA West, rural areas in the south, and overseas. When two of the early Presbyterian missionaries to the Pacific Northwest died at the hands of area indigenous people, their deaths increased concerns about the needs for evangelism in the West and increased numbers of missionaries, including women, followed.<sup>51</sup>

For the Presbyterian leadership, participation with the ABCFM created a binary theological dilemma. Some believed mission work should be integral to the very nature of the denomination, at the heart of the church, and thus organized and managed by the denomination. Others approved the work with ABCFM, a para-church organization, which left mission obligation as optional for individuals and individual churches. Various

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<sup>48</sup> J. H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2006), 274.

<sup>49</sup> D.G. Hart and John R. Muether, *Seeking a Better Country: 300 Years of American Presbyterianism*. (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: PR Publishing, 2007), 95.

<sup>50</sup> Michael Parker, “History of World Mission,” (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Presbyterian Historical Society, 2012), <https://www.history.pcusa.org/history-online/topics-note/history-world-mission>.

<sup>51</sup> Butler, Wacker and Balmer, *Religion in American Life*, 188.

member-coalitions presented overtures at annual meetings of the General Assembly, in 1812, 1828, and 1831, calling for a conceptual shift in mission thinking with the establishment of a denominational foreign mission board.<sup>52</sup>

In 1831, when the overture failed for the third time, the Synod of Pittsburgh created its own mission organization, the Western Foreign Missionary Society. Despite continued opposition, the denomination incorporated the Western Foreign Missionary Society at the 1837 General Assembly and renamed it the Board of Foreign Missions; headquarters moved to New York City. The opposing faction continued to send missionaries through the ABCFM.<sup>53</sup> The split over denominational organization and management, and collaborative, ecumenical mission work, occurred along decades-old lines of division in the denomination. Moves toward and away from ecumenism and the persistent string of denominational fractures and reunifications continue to the present. The long-standing North and South divide, initiated primarily over internal divisions around the issue of slavery, occurred just prior to the Civil War period and the two USA denominations did not resolve differences until the formative years of the PBM.<sup>54</sup>

Throughout the nineteenth century, the greater Christian community in the USA fervently embraced evangelization of the non-Christians in other parts of the world. Early church literature often referred to the peoples of foreign lands as “heathens” for whom the Gospel would assure their salvation – a mission purpose considered ‘worthy of all

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<sup>52</sup> Parker, “History of World Mission,” 2012

<sup>53</sup> Parker, “History of World Mission,” 2012

<sup>54</sup> Andrew T. Roy, “Overseas Mission Policies-An Historical Overview,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* 57, no. 3 (Fall 1979): 186-194.

believers.<sup>55</sup> Matthew 28:18-20, known as the Great Commission, became the biblical text that guided global mission policy.

*<sup>18</sup>Jesus came near and spoke to them [the eleven disciples]. 'I have received all authority in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup>Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age.*

Popular perceptions of the time asserted that Protestant western culture was superior to the so-called heathen world and was fully capable of effecting global religious change.<sup>56</sup>

During the nineteenth century, women became an integral component of the evangelical missionary movement despite their subordinate roles in the home, the church, and society. While early church polity did not explicitly declare restrictions on women, reformed traditions coupled with biblical interpretation fostered an implicit understanding of the role of women as silent members of the church. The historic data indicated women were the core membership of most Christian organizations, yet they were not to speak in public, lead corporate prayer, teach, or serve in any leadership capacity. The church community expected women to remain quiet in worship or bible study, turning to men for leadership and guidance.<sup>57</sup> Early nineteenth century Protestant women developed alternatives – small gatherings in homes and women’s social spaces. They formed female

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<sup>55</sup> John C.B. Webster, “American Presbyterian Global Mission Policy: An Overview of 150 Years,” *American Presbyterians* 65, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 72-7, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23330429>.

<sup>56</sup> Webster, “American Presbyterian Global Mission Policy,” 82-83.

<sup>57</sup> Marilyn J. Westerkamp, “Puritan Women, Spiritual Power, and the Question of Sexuality,” chap. 1 in *Reimagining the Past: The Religious History of American Women*, ed. Catherine A Brekus (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 53.



prayer groups and benevolent and mission societies designed to support each other while responding to their individual and collective call to support mission service.<sup>58</sup>

As the country recovered from a devastating Civil War and grappled with reunification and emancipation, a significant shift began to take shape in the Presbyterian church regarding women's roles. It was a time when civil discourse reflected on the proper role of women and increasingly, the support of mission service, particularly as it related to women and children, fit with notions of female responsibility and respectability. Church leaders espoused gendered notions of appropriate mission work for women, in part due to the effectiveness and focus of the mission societies. Those in the church leadership who reluctantly acquiesced to women's increasing public visibility likely did so to secure the growing financial and social benefits to the denomination.<sup>59</sup>

Over the last years of the nineteenth century, Protestant women outnumbered men in church membership, social reform organizing, and missionary support and growth. As such, they began to experience greater control and authority over their efforts.<sup>60</sup> In 1870, Presbyterian women formed two regional foreign missionary societies in Philadelphia and New York with five more established over the following decade. The women's mission societies functioned separately from the denominations and thus, women maintained greater autonomy and their numbers and power grew. They focused on

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<sup>58</sup> R. Douglas Brackenridge and Lois A. Boyd, "United Presbyterian Policy on Women and the Church-An Historical Overview," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 59, no. 3 (Fall 1981): 384-7.

<sup>59</sup> Margaret L. Bendroth, "Women and Missions: Conflict and Changing Roles in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1870-1935," *American Presbyterians* 65, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 51-2.

<sup>60</sup> Amy DeRogatis, "Gender," Chapter 7 in *Religion and American Culture*. Goff and Harvey, eds., 216.

nurturing financial investors and recruitment of members with a primary goal of developing single women to serve in the missionary field among women and children.<sup>61</sup> The early machinations over women's public roles remains an issue up to the present as the PBM faced questions of how women step into leadership positions in the border region; echoes of a USA Protestant and Presbyterian past.

The early decades of missionary service for all denominations were a time of trial and extreme personal risk and yet interest in the work gained popularity. Annually, increasing numbers of missionaries went to new mission-fields around the world. An early policy focus of the Presbyterian leadership was on the administration and polity of missionary service on the global stage. The first Presbyterian missionaries to India in the 1830s failed to adhere to the principles of self-governance opting instead to form a Presbytery but retaining the powers of management with the missions and thus, the missionaries. They assumed they should conduct the business of evangelizing, believing their converts incapable of such important leadership responsibilities. By 1848, when the first Indian received ordination, the missionaries voted him into the Presbytery but not the mission. The Indian community believed the actions of the missionaries to be racist, a problem the missionaries had built into the life of the Indian Presbyterian church. For the next four decades, efforts by the mission and presbytery to rectify the situation were unsuccessful and fully achieving the rights to self-governance languished.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Webster, "American Presbyterian Global Mission Policy," 72-3. The Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions supported the work of the women's missionary societies and by 1922, 62% of the missionary personnel overseas were women. In 1956 PCUSA united all missionary societies into a single mission organization under the auspices of the PCUSA, at which time, women quickly lost control of recruitment, fund-raising, and field service. Within a decade, the denomination eliminated women from mission leadership.

<sup>62</sup> Webster, "American Presbyterian Global Mission Policy," 72-74.

In 1862, the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Mission had published its first manual which “affirmed the [long held] principles of self-determination, autonomy, and full responsibility of indigenous national churches.”<sup>63</sup> While, on paper, the church sustained these principles over the coming century and a half, in practice, the missionaries held onto control of the local ministry, demonstrating little regard for the self-determination and autonomy of the local converts. Missionaries serving in other countries across the Presbyterian mission field replicated the unofficial structure first established in India. It is unclear why they elected to do so since the actions ran contrary to church policy. A simple explanation suggested that to replicate the mission structure like India, might have seemed to be the pragmatic option, choosing to follow the path laid by their colleagues. It is likely that, given the imperialist ethos of the period, inside which the global mission field functioned, the polity of the denomination could not effectively align with the work in the foreign arena like it could for USA home mission work. Well after distribution of the 1862 manual, the home offices continued to tacitly accept the situation, though the problem persisted through the rest of the century.<sup>64</sup> This unmet challenge of nineteenth century missionary responsibility proved complicated and challenging into the twenty-first century, including the missional relationships across Mexico.

Real change to the unofficial structural format did not begin to take hold until the 1930s, at which time native leaders gradually gained the authority needed to move toward

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<sup>63</sup> Roy, “Overseas Mission Policies,” 195.

<sup>64</sup> Webster, “American Presbyterian Global Mission Policy,” 74.

full self-governance of their local churches, presbyteries, and synods.<sup>65</sup> With the growing strength of nationalism across the globe, it became increasingly clear that nationals were best qualified to effectively evangelize in their countries, rather than the practice of years past of bringing in foreign missionaries.<sup>66</sup> It would be years before an increased number of autonomous national churches entered cooperative relationships with the Presbyterian denomination in the USA.

In the period 1870 to 1900, foreign mission expansion paralleled the rapid colonization by western Europe and the USA. Often, missionaries moved into the nations that had yielded to “gun-boat” or “big stick” USA diplomacy and once established, missionaries in field service benefitted from the political and economic dominance of their respective colonized countries. For example, when the USA colonized the Philippines, the 1897 Presbyterian Board recognized an opening for mission service, “We cannot ignore the fact that God has given into our hands, that is, into the hands of American Christians, the Philippine Islands, and thus opened a wide door and effectual to their populations has, by the very guns of our battleships, summoned us to go up and possess the land.”<sup>67</sup> At the time, very few within or outside of the church objected to such a position. Eventually, the denomination could not ignore, nor deny the causal relationship between imperialist aggression and simultaneous missionary settlement, and once challenged loudly enough internally and by colleagues in the mission field, altered

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<sup>65</sup> Webster, “American Presbyterian Global Mission Policy,” 75.

<sup>66</sup> Webster, “American Presbyterian Global Mission Policy,” 76.

<sup>67</sup> Roy, “Overseas Mission Policies,” 205.

the mission service process of engagement in new areas.<sup>68</sup> The residual of aggressive and paternalistic missionary behavior led to many of the later tensions between the denominations and numbered among the causes for the multiple fractures between the INPM and the PCUSA.

During the last decades of the nineteenth century, a compelling and influencing factor in responding to the call to mission in *México*, rested with a Presbyterian perception of the Catholicism that was very present and very influential throughout the country. Beginning in the 1500s, the Catholic Church, in conjunction with the Spanish conquest of *México* and much of Latin America, had established a strong foothold through their alliance with the Spanish Crown. In a general sense, the Catholic conversion of the surviving native peoples blended indigenous faith and customs with Catholic religious traditions. While Indigenous Mexican religious philosophy accepted Catholic iconography, they did not lose the entirety of their belief structures and the Catholic laity adopted local rituals and legends that melded comfortably into their worship.<sup>69</sup> A miracle, the appearance of the *Virgen de Guadalupe* to a newly baptized Mexican peasant in 1521, resonated well through the indigenous populations and, over the centuries, spread across *México* gaining traction and creative adaptation.<sup>70</sup> Guadalupe, above all other religious traditions, solidified the merging of two cultures, the conquered

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<sup>68</sup> Roy, "Overseas Mission Policies," 196-197.

<sup>69</sup> Colin M. MacLachlan and Jaime E. Rodríguez O., *The Forging of the Cosmic Race: A Reinterpretation of Colonial Mexico*. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1980), 85; Henry Bamford Parkes, *The History of Mexico* (Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1938, reprinted 1969), 107.

<sup>70</sup> Stafford Poole, C.M., *Our Lady of Guadalupe: The Origins and Sources of a Mexican National Symbol, 153-1797*, 3<sup>rd</sup> printing, (Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1997), 217.

and the conquering.<sup>71</sup> Catholic traditions did not lose power and control in Mexico during the years that followed the period of conquest. When *México* established independence from Spain in 1821, the Catholic Church retained its position of power as the constitutional church of the state. Thirty years later, a newly drafted constitution separated the church from the state with decades of upheaval to follow, fluctuating between pro and con forces regarding Catholicism and the continued influence and power of the Church. The first Presbyterian missionaries stepped into that erratic environment, often vulnerable, welcomed by some – unwelcomed by many, and initially deemed illegal.

Cynthia Radding, in her book *Wandering People* discussed the convergence of varied cultural traditions in northern Mexico, what she labeled “resistant adaptation.” Indigenous people “selectively blended Christian ritual and doctrine with their own cults and belief systems.”<sup>72</sup> The early Presbyterian missionaries moving into Mexico focused heavily on their perceptions of Catholic theology generally and the unique religious traditions of Mexico. They expressed disdain for the Catholic clergy and the perceived failures of the Catholic church to properly teach their parishioners to worship God “in Spirit and in truth,” and justified their own version of proselytizing by stating, “...there rests on Protestants in the United States the solemn obligation....to work until the

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<sup>71</sup> Louise M. Burkhart, *Before Guadalupe: The Virgin Mary in Early Colonial Nahuatl Literature*. (Albany, New York: Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, University at Albany, 2001), 1, 6.

<sup>72</sup> Cynthia Radding, *Wandering Peoples: Colonialism, Ethnic Spaces, and Ecological Frontiers in Northwestern Mexico, 1700-1850* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1997), 15-16.

Kingdom is established in *México*.”<sup>73</sup> In a 1910 book, *Mexico and Our Mission*, James Gary Dale articulated his version of Catholic history in *México* to foment his call to Reformed Presbyterian mission with statements such as,

The whole land is given to idolatry... they tell us that they do not worship images, that these visible representations help them to adore the invisible spiritual beings...let it be said that whatever be the purpose, the practice is a positive transgression of the command not to make idols of anything in the heavens or on earth... Crosses abound on the hilltops, but the Christ of the Cross is a stranger to the people. Their supreme thought is fixed on the ‘Queen of heaven,’ whose heart, they say...is more tender than Christ.<sup>74</sup>

Dale concluded, “Roman Catholicism has been weighed in the balances and found wanting.”<sup>75</sup> The spread of such anti-Catholic sentiment persisted and has been a challenging dichotomy for the border ministry to deal with. As USA Presbyterians increasingly embraced ecumenical engagement, Mexican Presbyterians sustained a distrust of the Catholic church. Early USA Presbyterian missionaries to *México* sowed the seeds of cynicism and discrimination against the Catholic presence, seeds the membership nurtured over the past century which, then, became an issue the PBM faced.

On the global stage, as the twentieth century opened, with technological advances in transportation and communications, expanding human networking capabilities, a growing global interest in unified Christian missional service began to take shape. As Presbyterian missionaries ventured farther into *México*, Protestant Christian mission

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<sup>73</sup> William Alfred Ross, *Sunrise in Aztec Land: Being an Account of the Mission Work That Has Been Carried on In México Since 1874 By the Presbyterian Church in the United States* (Richmond, Virginia: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1922), 42.

<sup>74</sup> Dale, *Mexico and Our Mission*. 53, 57, 59.

<sup>75</sup> Dale, *Mexico and Our Mission*. 74.

based in Europe and the USA started uniting as a coalition in support of their global evangelicalism which reached into Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Their networking efforts both supported and justified the expansion of missional efforts and helped to articulate further the purpose and trajectory of their field work.<sup>76</sup>

In 1910, Presbyterians, along with members of other Protestant denominations from the USA, joined a large contingent of representatives from predominately British and Western Europe, for an international conference in Edinburgh, Scotland. That first conference launched an era of Anglo-centric globalization of cooperative mission evangelization under the leadership of the International Missionary Council (IMC). Global ecumenism, described by William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, as a “great world fellowship,” expanded throughout the twentieth century despite two world wars and challenging inter- and intra-denominational struggles.<sup>77</sup> Few of the delegates attended the international conference from non-Western countries, and the organizers did not invite members of the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Pentecostal traditions. Though delegates generally objected to the inclusion of Latin American representation, the missionaries serving throughout Latin America determined to meet separately and planned a conference of their own in New York City in 1913. The second conference included executives from thirty mission organizations and missionaries on furlough; it is unclear if any of the delegates were actually Mexican or Latin American. The 1913 conference created the Committee on Cooperation in Latin America (CCLA) with its first

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<sup>76</sup> Sunquist and Becker, *A History of Presbyterian Missions 1944 – 2007*. 15.

<sup>77</sup> Sunquist and Becker, *A History of Presbyterian Missions 1944 – 2007*. 16.



meeting the following year, also in the USA. The failure of these first steps to coordinate and unify Protestant mission rested with the exclusion of their Mexican and Latin American brothers and sisters in ministry.<sup>78</sup> The process of privileging USA missionaries in the important decision-making of the denominations persisted long enough to set a tone of disunity that still existed as formation of the Presbyterian Border Ministry (PBM) began. The work of collective awareness and perhaps elimination of the pall of inequality and discrimination settled on the border region ministry.

Dave Thomas, PCUSA Co-Mission Worker in the PBM pointed out that the introduction of Christianity and Protestantism into *México* was a vastly dissimilar experience than for the USA. From the early eighteenth century, the Presbyterian Church in the USA was deeply rooted in the Protestant Reformation. Thomas stated that, by contrast, “Beginning with the first migration to *México* from Spain and up until the Protestant missionary thrust into *México* in the late nineteenth century, the country was dominated by centuries of Catholicism. The Protestant Reformation, occurring simultaneously in Europe, remained a virtual unknown in the new Latin America.” That fact is evident in popular parlance. Mexican and Central American people are unfamiliar with the term Protestant and do not make distinctions between the various Protestant denominations or the theological variations such as evangelical, mainline, fundamental, or progressive. Generally, they lump most non-Catholic, Christian denominations into the

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<sup>78</sup> Philip Wingeier-Rayo, “The Impact of the World Missionary Conference on México: The Cincinnati Plan,” in *The Reshaping of Mission in Latin America*, ed. Miguel Alvarez (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publisher, 2015), 36-39, 46.

category of *Christiana*.<sup>79</sup> With little empirical evidence, and except for seminary-trained Presbyterians, the Mexican faith workers in the border region do not articulate theological differences between the “Christian” communities. Mexicans engaged in the border ministry tended to understand Presbyterianism more through a comparison with Mexican Catholicism, which was all around them, embedded in every aspect of Mexican life.

Mexican law forbade all forms of religion except Roman Catholicism until 1857 when President Benito Juárez granted the right of religious freedom to the nation. Even before the change in Mexican law, USA missionaries, planting the seeds of Protestantism in the new independent Republic of Texas, had designs on expanding southward. In the 1840s, Melinda Rankin, a New England school teacher, traveled to Huntsville, Texas where she worked as a teacher and a writer for religious journals. Rankin reported meeting Reverend Daniel Baker just after his visit to the newly aligned *México*/USA border where he believed opportunities were eminent for advancing Protestantism into *México*.<sup>80</sup> Moved by Baker’s findings and her personal sense of call to mission, Rankin traveled to the border town of Brownsville, adjacent to *Matamoros, México*, where she established a school for Mexican girls. Along with academic instruction the students received Spanish bibles and bible lessons. While her work could not officially go south of the border due to the constitutional restrictions, her informal reach into *México*

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<sup>79</sup> Dave Thomas (PCUSA Co-Mission Work, Co-Coordinator, *Compañeros en Misión*, Co-Director, PBM, and PCUSA Liaison with Mexico) in discussion with author, via SKYPE, October 2017, 16.

<sup>80</sup> Rankin, *Twenty Years Among the Mexicans*. 84.

succeeded, in part due to family and friend connections unimpeded by a border barricade.<sup>81</sup> She left the border to seek financial support when competition arrived in the form of French Catholics planning to build a convent. Having acquired support from the Presbyterian Board of Education, she returned to Brownsville and, in 1854, opened the Rio Grande Female Institute, eventually with oversight by the Presbytery of Western Texas.<sup>82</sup> Accusations that she embraced Union sympathies interrupted Rankin's work and she fled the region. With her return, Rankin ventured south to Monterrey and beyond, starting new schools as she went. In 1866, Rankin established the first of several Protestant missions in northern *México*, one of which later authorities transferred to the Presbyterian Board of Missions.<sup>83</sup> In part due to the earlier work of Rankin and other Presbyterian advances into *México*, in 1872 the USA Presbyterian governing bodies formally approved mission expansion into the country.<sup>84</sup>

While missionaries established small ministries in northern *México*, three distinct USA Presbyterian denominations focused largely on *México's* interior to evangelize, establish churches, and build hospitals and schools. The three USA denominations were: United Presbyterian Church USA (UPCUSA), Presbyterian Church US (PCUS), and the Associate Presbyterian Church. They started mission work in *Ciudad México* (*México* City), and the states of *Zacatecas* and *San Luis Potosi*. The 1870s and 1880s also was a time of increased American economic and political involvement in the seats of power in

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<sup>81</sup> Brackenridge and García-Treto, *Iglesia Presbiteriana*, 10-11.

<sup>82</sup> Brackenridge and García-Treto, *Iglesia Presbiteriana*, 11-12.

<sup>83</sup> Rankin, *Twenty Years Among the Mexicans*, 132, 139-41.

<sup>84</sup> Brackenridge and García-Treto, *Iglesia Presbiteriana*, 12.

*México*. USA financiers and industrialists planned capital investments including transportation and communications infrastructure expecting returns on their efforts of economic success and North American political hegemony. Missionaries benefitted from the influence and power wielded by USA elites.<sup>85</sup>

Over the decades at the turn into the twentieth century, a country-wide Presbyterian organizational structure took shape, which included a seminary (1882) in *Ciudad México*, and in 1901 the USA denominations led the effort to establish the first Presbyterian Synod in *México*. The *México* Mission operated on a decentralized basis with two stations: the Central Station which grew to include *Vera Cruz* (1897) and *Oaxaca* (1919), then the Peninsula Station (1915) which included the states of *Yucatan*, *Campeche*, *Tabasco*, and the territory of *Quintana Roo*.<sup>86</sup>

As the early missionaries met with some success in establishing a foothold in *México*, their arrival, and that of other Protestant missionaries, came at a transitional time in Mexican history. By 1909, just before the Mexican Revolution, the numbers of Mexican Protestants were growing along with the influence of their churches, hospitals, and schools.<sup>87</sup> In his study on Protestantism and radicalism in *México*, historian Daniel Miller wrote, “In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Mexican Protestants

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<sup>85</sup> John Mason Hart, *Empire and Revolution*, 1-2.

<sup>86</sup> Frederick J. Heuser, Jr., “Biographical Note / Administrative History,” *Finding Aid to Record Group 87, United Presbyterian Church in the USA. Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations. Secretaries’ Files: México Mission, 1867-1972* (Presbyterian Historical Society, 1983), <https://www.history.pcusa.org/collections/research-tools/guides-archival-collections/rg-157>.

<sup>87</sup> Protestant numbers in *México* were growing slowly; in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century they accounted for about half of one percent of the total population. A little over three-hundred missionaries from USA denominations were working in *México*, often in rural areas, where they had planted churches and schools; Wingeier-Rayo, “The Impact of the World Missionary Conference on *México*,” 39.

viewed themselves as advocates of social and political progress in contrast to the Catholic Church which they stigmatized as arrogant and reactionary.”<sup>88</sup> Though Protestant numbers were on the rise, they still counted as a small portion of the overall population, yet they represented a larger percentage in the leadership that opposed the Porfirio Diaz government. Austin Seminary professor Philip Wingeier-Rayo posited, “In many ways, the Mexican Revolution actually embodied Protestant values of democracy, equality, and justice.”<sup>89</sup> Simultaneously, growing numbers of Mexican citizens were concerned about the reach of the USA influence into *México*. Simultaneously, many Mexicans saw the foreign missionaries as part of the growing USA threat to Mexican identity and nationalism.<sup>90</sup>

The Mexican Revolution stretched across ten years, waxing and waning in its ferocity. Officially, the USA government maintained a neutral stance but was particularly concerned for its millions of dollars invested in *México*'s economy. In the late nineteenth century, while missionaries began to establish footholds across the country, considerable private USA wealth poured into *México*. By the beginning of the Mexican Revolution, USA companies owned 51% of the commerce in *México*. In 1911, safety concerns for the *México*/US border compelled President Taft to station twenty-thousand USA troops along the border. With the invasion of *Veracruz* by US Marines in 1914, many USA citizens

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<sup>88</sup> Wingeier-Rayo, “The Impact of the World Missionary Conference on México,” 39.

<sup>89</sup> Wingeier-Rayo, “The Impact of the World Missionary Conference on México,” 40.

<sup>90</sup> Wingeier-Rayo, “The Impact of the World Missionary Conference on México,” 44-45.

left *México* at the urging of their government; almost all Presbyterian mission workers evacuated along with other Protestant colleagues.<sup>91</sup>

During this period of instability in *México* and mounting distrust between the two nations, sixty-five delegates representing eleven USA Protestant mission boards convened in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1914. A number of those who gathered were on furlough from the mission field in *México*; there were no Mexicans present at the meeting. An emerging trend across the churches of the USA and Great Britain, to divide the missionary field and assign areas to specific denominations, influenced the Cincinnati Conference. Under the banner of good stewardship or “fiscally responsible expansion of Protestantism,” participants divided mission work in *México* by geographic regions, assigning one denomination to each region. Presbyterians agreed to do mission work in southern *México* while Methodists took responsibility for northern *México*. Consequently, the agreement dictated that established Presbyterians in northern *México* were to become Methodists while the reverse occurred in southern *México*. The USA Presbyterian leadership supported the Plan of Cincinnati with little to no acknowledgment of the opinions of their colleagues in *México*.<sup>92</sup>

Not surprisingly, with strong commitments to the ministries in their home regions, Mexicans resisted the Cincinnati Plan. After studying the proposal, the Mexican Presbyterian Synod (like their counterparts in the Methodist Church) rejected it with one leader calling the Plan of Cincinnati “a plan to assassinate the Presbyterian Church of

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<sup>91</sup> Wingeier-Rayo, “The Impact of the World Missionary Conference on *México*,” 42.

<sup>92</sup> Wingeier-Rayo, “The Impact of the World Missionary Conference on *México*,” 43-44.

*México.*”<sup>93</sup> The callous actions of the USA Protestant denominations provided the impetus for Mexican Presbyterians in *Nuevo Leon* to form their own denomination – *Iglesia Nacional Presbiteriana de México*, INPM (National Presbyterian Church of México) in 1919. The newly formed denomination took over responsibility for salaries of the ordained pastors, determined that only national clergy would preach, and resolved the Mexican presbyteries and synods would manage church polity.<sup>94</sup>

Hard feelings over the Cincinnati Plan endure. In the border region when Mexican pastors and church workers recount the history of PBM beginnings and the need for new churches they invariably bring up Cincinnati (or they use the nickname ascribed to the plan at the time - the Plan of Assassination). Pastor Jesus Gallego shared, “...you know the Mexican history about the why-reason we did not have a Presbytery in the north...the Cincinnati meeting. For example, my church in my hometown never had support. I grew up and never met a missionary; I didn’t know we had missionaries in *México*. We were self-support, self-government, self- ... and the good idea was to start new churches along the border.”<sup>95</sup>

The geographic impact of the Cincinnati Plan is evident up to the present. The regions of *México* assigned to Presbyterians in 1919 remain the areas of the heaviest

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<sup>93</sup> Wingeier-Rayo, “The Impact of the World Missionary Conference on México,” 44.

<sup>94</sup> Saul Tijerina, “National Presbyterian Church of México” Presbyterian Border Ministry / Ministerio Interfronterizo Presbiteriano (2008), [http://presbyterianborderministry.org/about/inpm\\_history.cfm](http://presbyterianborderministry.org/about/inpm_history.cfm).

<sup>95</sup> Jesus Gallegos [Pastor, former Co-coordinator at *Frontera de Cristo*] discussion with author, Longmont Colorado: Longmont Presbyterian Church (July 3, 2019), 19-20. Note - Pastor Gallegos spoke English well, better than my Spanish, so we elected to conduct the interview in English. I have changed the text from present to past tense for ease of reading.

concentration of Presbyterian churches, initially with the Spanish-speaking people and by mid-century, indigenous peoples.<sup>96</sup> Presbyterianism has steadily grown with continued heavier distribution in the southern states; by the turn of the twentieth century, Chiapas, for example, accounted for nearly 50% of the total Presbyterian population of *México*.<sup>97</sup>

### Growing Toward Autonomy

Celebrating their Diamond Jubilee in 1947, the INPM officially recognized its General Assembly – the final formative step in development of its national structure. This marked a large leap toward independence and full autonomy. To that end, in its first year, the INPM GA established a special committee to study the relational work of the church with the missions. After the years of struggle during the Great Depression and a global war, the notion of a fully independent, self-sustaining church loomed large as a challenge. In those post-war years, the Mexican government, the Mexican people, and the Mexican Protestant churches sought freedom from USA interventions. In the same period, the USA missionary force doubled in size, claiming the need for greater response to the extensive suffering due to poverty and all its related challenges. The expanding foreign clergy faced considerable new governmental restrictions on their work in *México* and a growing public prejudice that occasionally resulted in physical harm.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Tijerina, “National Presbyterian Church of México,” 2008.

<sup>97</sup> “*Cifras del protestantismo en Chiapas*,” (Statistic figures of Protestantism in the State of Chiapas), ProtestanteDigital.com, <http://www.universocristiano.com/articulos.phtml?id=7227>.

<sup>98</sup> Frank Arnold, “Latin America and the Caribbean,” in *A History of Presbyterian Missions 1944-2007; A Project of the World Mission Initiative of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary*, eds. Scott W. Sunquist and Caroline N. Becker (Louisville, Kentucky: Geneva Press, 2008), 162.



The growth of the INPM, with the persistent planting of new churches, is in part due to the evangelistic fervor of the Mexican laity. There are three stages in the process for establishing a new Presbyterian church in *México*: 1) establish a mission with an assigned pastor/evangelist under the direction of a local church or the presbytery; 2) when the mission has twenty-five members, it becomes a congregation with self-governing opportunity though the Presbytery maintains oversight of management; 3) the Presbytery declares the congregation a church when it has sixty members or more and trained leadership (elders, deacons, and trustees).<sup>99</sup>

Dave Thomas, with *Compañeros en Misión*, was part of planting five missions in separate locations in the northern state of *Sonora*. This gave Thomas an opportunity to travel frequently away from the border town of *Ambos Nogales* (Both Nogales) as he visited the missions and led delegations to work and study at the various sites. When he talks about the people he worked with, his love for them is palpable despite the challenges he frequently faced due to cultural and religious differences. Thomas explained, “The people we were working directly with and the people we had most contact with were fundamentalist, born again, charismatic Christians because, in *México*, that’s what the Presbyterian Church is. It is not the liberal denomination that it is in the USA. It is a very conservative, bible-thumping, holy-roller type denomination. Maybe not as much as the Pentecostals but it is not nearly as liberal as the PCUSA, not even close.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Tijerina, “National Presbyterian Church of México,” 2008.

<sup>100</sup> Thomas in discussion with author, 8.

Since its official formation as a denomination, Mexican Presbyterianism has espoused a conservative theology, not unlike the theology early missionaries brought to *México* and taught their new converts. From its inception, the Mexican church placed a heavy emphasis on the evangelization of peoples and the establishment of churches - growing the denomination. In contrast, the USA Presbyterian church gradually shifted toward a more progressive theology with an increasingly greater emphasis on social services. The challenges of recognizing and engaging with cultural and political differences proved straightforward but, it took time before the undercurrents of difference in theology and church polity emerged. As the disparities became increasingly evident and as the Mexican denomination stabilized, the national church sought greater autonomy from their USA counterparts. While governance gradually fell to Mexican leadership, the presence of USA missionaries and their influence, backed by the infusion of mission dollars, challenged any sense of true autonomy.

With its centennial in 1972, the INPM assumed full responsibility for directing and supporting its own institutions and work. The Mexican denomination severed ties with the USA denomination, imposed a temporary moratorium on all USA mission personnel living and working in the country, and asked everyone to leave. While such actions were severe, the end goal for the leadership was a hope that with time, the separation would help to realign the binational relationship between the denominations into one of greater mutuality and respect.<sup>101</sup> The decade of the 1970s was one of rebuilding the relationship between the two national denominations, from the leadership

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<sup>101</sup> "Presbyterian Border Ministry: Program History, Goals and Organization," (San Antonio, Texas: Presbyterian Border Ministry, 1999), 1, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

to the mission workers and volunteers, and the congregations. It was a time for re-imagining evangelization and mission service in a collegial spirit that honored and recognized theological diversity, celebrated similarities, and encouraged Mexican autonomy and self-reliance.

Historically, among USA Protestants, concerns for the “least among us” (Matthew 25:40) have been compelling yet, with time and inward analysis, it became clear to many, Presbyterians included, that, “...the practice of philanthropy has always involved the exercise of privilege, prejudice, and power.”<sup>102</sup> There have been plenty of occasions when even the most altruistic of missional endeavors ultimately resulted in harmful consequences. The reach for full autonomy from USA support was not a new concept in the Protestant mission communities, nor USA secular humanitarian organizations and governmental aid programming. It grew out of an understanding of the relationships between the provider and recipients of mission services. For far too long, the expectation that imposing what worked in the USA would work in all parts of the globe resulted in harm for the receiving communities including, at times, a failure to resolve the immediate concerns missionaries intended to address.

By the 1980s, challenges for change in mission service pointed toward an embrace of advocacy, and in partnership, dealing with issues centered on a call for justice. The concerns pointed at issues of inequality, structural violence, and the unfair distribution of wealth. Such challenges informed the planning for the future binational leadership team, the Joint Mission Commission (JMC) and promoted implementation and

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<sup>102</sup> Heather D. Curtis, *Holy Humanitarians: American Evangelicals and Global Aid* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018), 6.

support of the PBM. Over a century, USA Presbyterian missionaries in *México* had built schools and hospitals, and successfully planted a Protestant denomination in a Catholic-centric culture. To address the results of economic injustice, USA missionaries focused on short term needs of individuals by providing necessities. While the missional work proved valuable, and at times, lifesaving, the time for a course correction in the form of new relational processes had arrived.

Embracing the rapport between denominations, the opportunity for moving forward, for learning from past mistakes, and building on past successes occurred in 1979 when the INPM extended an invitation, “A New Relation in Joint Mission,” to the General Assemblies of both USA denominations, the PCUSA and the PCUS. Signed by all parties in 1980, the new covenant outlined a reformulated mission partnership that declared an innovative approach to mission work in *México*.<sup>103</sup> The covenant iterated the importance of mutuality in purpose and management. Programmatically, the most important “principle” framed by the agreement was the creation of a JMC comprised of equal representation by high-level delegates from both national churches.<sup>104</sup> This oversight team was responsible for management of the new areas of *México* that would open to Presbyterian ministry and listed several goals: planting a church in each Mexican state capital, addressing mission concerns along the northern *México* frontier, and supervision of specific mission programs like the Hebron Plan, established to address

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<sup>103</sup> “A New Relation in Joint Mission,” English version. Juan García Martínez, Secretary, approved by the General Assembly of the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico in its XIV special called meeting of July 10-13, 1979, Filadelfia Church, Cuernavacas, Morelos. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>104</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry: Program History, Goals and Organization,” 2, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

needs of Guatemalan refugees in southern *México*. The newly formed binational ministry served *México* from border to border. This new vision of cooperation and polity reflected a significant shift from the earlier missiology protocols.<sup>105</sup>

With the reunification and a renewed binational spirit, the Mexican church received greater leadership authority over the shared ministries while responsibility as financial supporter remained primarily with the USA. In retrospect, for those in the USA border ministry programming, the potential pitfalls of their privileged and fiscally controlling role was daunting. On the global stage, the new ministry structure was a complete shift – a peculiar combination of full Mexican autonomy with mutual leadership in decision-making and program implementation.

The work in the *México*/USA border region was different and uniquely challenging. Hunter Farrell, head of PCUSA Global Mission (2007-2016), reflected on the challenges. Along with his colleagues in the PCUSA mission agency leadership, Farrell worked hard to find North Americans to serve the new ministry, people that he described as having,

...a deep sensitivity to the contradictions of power on the border. Culturally, historically, economically, politically, militarily, North Americans are coming from a position of power in the international relationship—that is the challenge. If they [USA mission co-workers] are put into equal relationships, explicitly and implicitly there's all this power on [their] side so, when push comes to shove, the co-workers are tempted to rely on the implicit power and not keep faith with what's been explicitly stated in terms of relationship with counterparts.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> "A New Relation in Joint Mission," English version. 3-4. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>106</sup> Hunter Farrell [Reverend, Dr., former Director of PCUSA Global Mission] in discussion with author, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 2018, 12.

Two binational border ministry sites already existed: *Proyecto Verdad* in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua/El Paso, Texas and *Puentes de Cristo* in Reynosa, Tamaulipas / McAllen, Texas. The initial success by the two ministries suggested an opportunity for building a strong, impactful ministry across the entire *México/USA* border region. Initially, the INPM and the UPCUSA and PCUS perceived the geographic boundaries of the border region they served to be close to the actual *México/USA* borderline. However, they quickly recognized the foundations for the border economy, cultural influence, political relations, and human justice realities, extended thousands of miles to the south and to the north. First, the central authority of both church systems was located far from the binational border. Second, the flow of people south to north across the border came from as far as Chiapas and beyond and traveled to all points across the USA. Third, the local, regional, and national economic and political influences held sway over the sphere inside which border region residents lived and worked. With time, experience, and discernment, the binational border ministry grew to recognize and articulate the varied external influences on their work, their border region.

### Establishing PBM

The USA General Assemblies formed a Joint Task Force on *México/USA* relations and invited the INPM to join them as an equal participant. Their task was studying border and immigration issues (social, economic, and spiritual).<sup>107</sup> In 1981 they published a report, “Mexican Migration to the US: Challenge to Christian Witness and

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<sup>107</sup> *Frontera de Cristo* records, “Development of the National Presbyterian Church of *México*,” 1992, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

National Policy.” With a commitment to embrace and respond to the findings of the report, the PCUSA hired Gerald Stacy and charged him with implementing the recommendations. Having just returned from the mission field in Chili, Stacy recalled the leadership saying,

There’s a possibility of something on the border but more than anything else there’s a paper, a document that we just passed which is about Mexican migration and the US challenge, Christian witness, and public policy. We want you to interpret that document in the southern part of the United States: Texas, Arizona, California, New Mexico, and the Denver, Colorado area. They gave me like a five-synod region. I said okay.<sup>108</sup>

At that time, the two USA Presbyterian denominations, UPCUSA and PCUS, were in the process of reunifying as the PCUSA.

Stacy was based in San Antonio and reported to the Synod of the Sun executive in Dallas, Texas. He recognized his job needed to be that of publicizing the document and discerning with people across the USA on how to respond to the newly articulated charge. He led workshops at Synod and Presbytery meetings and reached out to the Presbyterian Hispanic leadership throughout the West.<sup>109</sup> In addition, people across the country invited him to speak about his work in Chile; Stacy used the opportunity to discuss the Presbyterian position on the border region. He invited people to join him in the Rio Grande Valley – a learning opportunity that proved to be fruitful. Stacy shared, “I could really teach the document rather than going around whistling in the night. Let them get their feet wet. Let them step in the context of it.”<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Gerald Stacy (Former Co-director, Presbyterian Border Ministry) discussion with author, January 24, 2020, 8.

<sup>109</sup> Stacy discussion with author, 8.

<sup>110</sup> Stacy discussion with author, 9.

By the time the new relationship began, the *México*/USA borderlands were becoming a region in crisis. In the 1980s, millions of Mexicans were moving to their country's northern border due to an economic downturn and the deterioration of the agricultural industry in southern *México*. The new migration moved northward toward opportunity for steady jobs and relatively higher wages in newly established border factories and assembly plants (*maquiladoras* or twin plants) in northern *México*. The lower labor costs appealed to USA manufacturers and *maquiladoras* (manufacturing plants) sprung up across the border frontier.<sup>111</sup> Large numbers of Mexicans moved to the northern cities seeking employment, in fact, desperate for employment. Unfortunately, the border cities did not have the capacity to meet the needs of their exploding populations, further exacerbating the disparity between wealth and poverty.<sup>112</sup>

As twin cities along the border expanded into large urban centers, seemingly overnight, the inability of the federal and state governments along with municipal authorities to keep up with the explosive growth quickly translated to widespread problems. Despite the growing human-needs crisis, the Mexican contingent of the newly formed Presbyterian coalition wanted to focus on evangelism and church-planting.<sup>113</sup>

Jerry Stacy interpreted the Mexican perspective this way:

You know, the US is constantly interested in programs of service and mission and compassion. The Mexican Presbyterian church said you denied us our access to the northern part to build churches--we want to build churches. I think they were saying to us, you all are going to leave

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<sup>111</sup> Oscar J. Martinez, "Migration and the Border, 1965-1985," in *Beyond la Frontera*. 108-109.

<sup>112</sup> "Presbyterian Border Ministry: An Historical Sketch, 1973-1989," c. 1990. 7, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>113</sup> *Frontera de Cristo* records, "Changes in the Mexican church since 1972 (after missionaries left)." Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.



but the church will be there when you're gone. Help us build churches because you didn't allow us to build, to work in the northern part. You didn't cooperate with us in the northern part of *México* for years. So now we're being invited back. Don't just make social programs. Help us build churches. So, the commitment of the Joint Commission was if we build a program of social ministry you have to build a church alongside it.<sup>114</sup>

It had been more than two centuries since USA Presbyterians started their first missional efforts and a century since the first missionaries entered *México* to teach a different vision for religious engagement. Rectifying past actions, Mexican and USA denominational leadership developed an innovative, forward-facing mission program which focused on *México's* northern and southern borderlands and state capitols. For the USA, most of the work and interest centered on their common border with *México*. The next chapter is a history of the development and implementation of the *México/USA* collaborative mission programming of the two Presbyterian denominations.

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<sup>114</sup> Stacy discussion with author, 11.

## CHAPTER 3

### ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY OF THE PBM

In 1980, *la Iglesia Nacional Presbiteriana de México* (INPM) and two USA Presbyterian denominations, UPCUSA and PCUS signed a covenant agreement which outlined their plan for implementing a new missional relationship. The denominations contracted first to respect and appreciate their differences, recognizing God's creative hand in all things, and second, to engage interdependently to ensure their many gifts and talents would enhance their collective work of evangelism. This chapter discusses the formation and work of a new binational Presbyterian organization in the years after signing the covenant. The denominations designed the new organization as the oversight commission for the collaborative work of mission in *México*.

A key component of the missional focus was the Presbyterian Border Ministry (PBM), the central story of this dissertation. The PBM developed a network of border ministry sites with three primary responsibilities: build churches, foster evangelizing efforts, and address the critical needs of border region people. This was a complex undertaking as the participants forged new directions both at the denominational level and the local level. While they shared a common history, some fraught with trials, they did not share nationalities, cultures, or theological perspectives. Yet, the denominations forged ahead, making organizational course corrections as needed, and addressing administrative and polity challenges. The relationship between the denominations ended in 2011, a disheartening break-up for the PBM work in the *México*/USA border region (which persisted despite the separation). The history of this new vision in binational missional engagement reveals many of the challenges inherent in multinational faith

relations. It recounts the history of a Protestant organization situated in *México*, generally, and the *México/USA* border region specifically, through the documentation of the organization. Finally, it adds a new layer of untold information about the *México/USA* border region.

Chapter Three lays out the organization history of the PBM in six sections. The first section discusses the “risky vision,” that is the new and untried Presbyterian missional program. It describes the foundational development of mutuality in mission begun at the denominational level and the early forays into locating and launching individual binational border ministry sites. The next section – Renewed Binational Spirit – reviews the early developmental stages of the organization’s structural design. The work began in the 1970s, prior to official formation of the PBM. Section three – Managing the New Relationship – describes the early structural formation of the binational mission. Initially, the JMC designed a multi-tiered administrative structure that proved to be too cumbersome. The JMC also designed the structural protocols for the ministry sites which included binational Co-Coordiators and local Boards of Directors staffed with volunteers committed to the local mission. Section four – Mutual Mission: Medical Services – focuses solely on implementation of medical and public health services across the multiple border sites covering decades of PBM’s programmatic development process. The next section – PBM Financials – describes the history of the financial methodologies and fiscal challenges of the PBM and reveals some of the impacts of outside economic influences on the ministry. The chapter concludes with a section – Looking Back – Looking Forward – that analyzes the many challenges that

confronted the PBM calling into question the sustainability of the organization. The staying power of the organization rested with the resiliency of the local ministries.

Though there were conflicting economic, political, religious/theological, and cultural differences between the denominations, the concerted effort to develop programming in the border region yielded connections (short-term and lasting), partnerships, and collaborations which generated religious and social programming that served in the border region for five decades. The connecting work of PBM touched many lives. From the beginning, the ministry goals were ambitious, addressing the long-standing injustices that grew out of the juxtaposition of rich and poor, power and weakness, of those who were “in” as citizens with those who were “out” as foreigners, migrants, or asylum-seekers. Despite the many challenges, the PBM established a binational foothold in the border region. The organization began to break down some barriers while it could not dissolve others.

### A Risky Vision

The establishment of the binational Presbyterian Border Ministry (PBM) reflected a new vision, a step into a new form of mission engagement. The INPM and the two USA Presbyterian denominations, UPCUSA and PCUS, worked to establish a co-equal, co-administered missional program designed to support and grow the denomination in *México* and across their shared border region.

Ministry in the *México*/USA border region was part of the binational plan, formalized by the denominations in 1980. Six years earlier, in *Ciudad Juárez*/El Paso, an effective mission concept addressed several areas of socio-political challenge and

religious development – *la serviglesia: servicia + iglesia* (service + church). It suggested a good format for building out a ministry that reached across the border region and fulfilled expectations of both the Mexican and the USA churches. The *serviglesia* model combined two methodologies for the new work by Presbyterians. First, it embraced the importance of evangelism and church planting in northern *México* – the foremost requirement of the INPM. Second, in deference to the social services interests of the USA, the ministry responded to the desperate needs of those peoples in the border towns and cities who struggled, primarily with issues caused by extreme poverty. Developing around the *serviglesia* model, by 1986, a formalized organization existed, the Presbyterian Border Ministry (PBM) or *Ministerio Interfronterizo Presbiteriano* (MIP).<sup>115</sup>

The denomination’s representatives formed a leadership and accountability structure and established ministries at several *México/USA* sites. They incorporated the existing Presbyterian border ministries, *Proyecto Verdad* in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua/El Paso, Texas and *Puentes de Cristo* in Reynosa, Tamaulipas/McAllen, Texas, into the binational program. Perhaps most importantly, the planners and implementers of the new mission articulated their call to the work, primarily focused on re-introducing Presbyterianism in northern *México* amidst the challenges of cultural diversity and desperate human suffering. The PBM risked serving in ministry together; not a risk to life and limb but something much more profound. They risked failure in their

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<sup>115</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry Program History, Goals and Organization,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Manual of Operations*. Draft, (revised January 2005), 5-6, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Minutes of the Presbyterian Border Ministries Corporation,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Corporation: Minute Book* (Juarez, Mexico, May 5, 1987) 2, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

embrace of the “other;” could they trust each other despite all the cultural, economic, political, and theological differences? With a combination of trepidation and hope, the PBM issued the following statement in 1986: “A call to be the church on the US/*México* border:”

The border is a unique community. It does not resemble life in the interior of the US, nor the interior of *México*. A quick glance will tell the casual observer that life on the border is particularly harsh on the poor. God responds to injustice by calling the faithful to action. The PBM projects do justice, love mercy, and attempt to walk humbly with their God in the shadow of the border.

We believe that the human suffering caused by conditions on the border is a priority concern of God. We have not found quick fixes to relieve misery along the border nor do we anticipate facilitating major changes in those international structures responsible for much of the suffering. As the church, we are trying to be faithful, in both spirit and action, to a vision of what could be. The vision is one of people taking responsibility for themselves and for one another – aware that new life comes with full citizenship in the kingdom.

PBM reflects the kingdom of God as we call people from east and west and from north and south to the border. The body of Christ is present when disciples from the INPM and the PCUSA struggle to learn to love and trust each other enough to risk being in mission together as we discover ways in which God’s creative and redemptive power can become ‘enfleshed’ on the border.<sup>116</sup>

## A Renewed Binational Spirit

At their Diamond Jubilee celebration in 1947, the INPM formally recognized its General Assembly – the final formative step in development of its national structure. This developmental step marked a large leap toward independence and full autonomy. To that end, in its first year, the INPM GA established a special committee to study the relational work of the church with the missions. After the years of struggle during the Great

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<sup>116</sup> “A call to be the church on the U.S./Mexican Border,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry*. (c. 1989), 2, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

Depression and a global war, the notion of a fully independent, self-sustaining church loomed large as a challenge. In those post-war years, the Mexican government, the Mexican people, and the Mexican Protestant churches sought freedom from USA interventions. The expanding foreign clergy faced considerable new governmental restrictions on their work in *México* and a growing public prejudice that occasionally resulted in physical harm.<sup>117</sup> For far too long, paternalism – the expectation that imposing and controlling what worked in the USA would work in all parts of the globe – resulted in harm for the receiving communities including, at times, a failure to resolve the immediate concerns missionaries intended to address.

By the 1970s and 1980s, challenges for change in mission service pointed toward an embrace of advocacy, and in partnership, dealing with issues centered on a call for justice against inequality, structural violence, and the unfair distribution of wealth. To address the results of economic injustice, missionaries focused on short term needs of individuals by providing necessities while simultaneously developing opportunities for self-development. While the missional work proved valuable, the time for a course correction with new relational processes had arrived.<sup>118</sup>

After 1972 and the INPM declaration of moratorium from USA Presbyterian mission work, a period of cooperation between Mexican church leaders and USA missionaries ensued. Most agreed that after one-hundred years, it was time for full independence for the INPM. In mutual agreement, the moratorium also severed ties with

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<sup>117</sup> Arnold, “Latin America and the Caribbean,” 159.

<sup>118</sup> Arnold, “Latin America and the Caribbean,” 159-160.

USA financial subsidies and the Mexican denomination was to determine any subsequent actions.<sup>119</sup>

The emerging notion of “mutual mission” did shine a new light on the long-lived perspective that the Presbyterian leadership in the USA called the church to lead and serve, not to be led and be served. The General Assembly stated, “...we have been a giving and sending church, we have been slow to listen to and receive gifts from churches in the Third World. It is often difficult to understand or accept the idea that there is a mission field in the US and that we need our partners in the Third World to help us. They can bring fresh approaches and prophetic criticism to our understanding of the gospel.”<sup>120</sup>

The 1980 covenant, “A New Relation in Joint Mission,” signed by the Mexican and USA Presbyterian denominations, stated two basic principles. First, the demand for autonomy: “...God has bestowed on us a self-identity that demands respect, understanding, and complementation in the tasks entrusted to us.” Second, the call for interdependence: “...the task of evangelization... cannot be undertaken either by isolated efforts or by exclusive ministries. The need is imposed on every one of us to enter into the spirit of true interdependence that will make wise use of our particular gifts and the resources within our reach.”<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry Program History, Goals and Organization,” 5-8; Arnold, “Latin America and the Caribbean,” 163.

<sup>120</sup> “Mutual Mission,” Global Mission Unit, PCUSA. Brochure, 1988, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>121</sup> Samuel Trinidad B., Dr. Pablo Perez Morales, Juan García Martínez, Isais Uc Colli, Dr. Alberto Alvarado B., Dr. Saul Tijerina Gonzalez, Severo Ek, and David Macias S., INPM Executive Committee, “A New Relation in Joint Mission,” (Cuernavacas, Morelos: INPM General Assembly, July 1979): 2-3.



A first step in the implementation of the “New Relation” vision was formation of the Joint Mission Commission (JMC), a binational team of top-level denominational leaders. By 1984, the JMC created a binational Border Committee, tasked with oversight of a PBM and authorized to select binational directors to manage the growing border ministry. The new PBM Co-Directors, Reverend Gerald Stacy and Reverend Saul Tijerina had offices in San Antonio, TX and Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, respectively. Two years later, the JMC approved establishment of the PBM Corporation, accountable to the JMC and charged with supporting and developing the PBM finances.<sup>122</sup>

After a 1989 ministry evaluation by the JMC, the Border Committee developed PBM goals and objectives for the program.<sup>123</sup> The leadership found that the PBM met some but not all mutual expectations, most importantly, the failure to plant an adequate number of churches in northern *México*. Despite the disappointments, the border region program had successfully established five binational ministries with equal numbers of representation from both countries. In a short narrative of the history of the PBM designed for public distribution, the organization stated,

Our border with *México* is particularly unique in that it is the longest international border in the world where the contrast of wealth and poverty is so great. . . .not all ecclesiastical practices nor traditional mission activities are valid on the border. Nevertheless, the border is a place where there is pain and suffering, where there are persons with special needs, where there are three cultures (Anglo, Mexican, and "border") and where there are two national Presbyterian churches that share the same faith and tradition. It is a challenge that forces us to find a new language, new practices, and a new commitment in order to remain faithful to the gospel.

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<sup>122</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry: Program History, Goals and Organization,” 2.

<sup>123</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry: Program History, Goals and Organization,” 3, 4.

It offers an opportunity to build bridges of understanding between two nations and cultures.<sup>124</sup>

As the local leadership looked to the future of the PBM, most importantly, they articulated the importance of their work as they reached outwardly for support of the greater Presbyterian community. “When we work together, we have the opportunity of demonstrating the reconciling effectiveness of the Gospel. A disjointed, divisive, and conflictive mission is a denial of that Gospel.”<sup>125</sup> The PBM leadership affirmed continuation of the work to develop new churches, and to offer services that empowered border region peoples. Drawing on biblical text, the organization embraced Romans 8:21, “...that the creation itself will be set free from slavery to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of God’s children.” The binational border ministry declared, “The needs of people living on the border are common. They need to be part of a community with hope and vision which affirms and values them. They need the strength to face each day. They need adequate food, health care, clean water, sanitation, jobs, housing, and healthy recreational opportunities.”<sup>126</sup>

Even in the early planning stages, Presbyterians in the two countries disagreed over mission focus. The Mexican church emphasized evangelism and the establishment of new churches in the northern states and along the *México*/USA border. The USA church focused heavily on social services and addressing the systemic impacts of poverty and injustice. The bifurcated mission perspectives remained a persistent challenge in the

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<sup>124</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry: An Historical Sketch,” 5.

<sup>125</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry: An Historical Sketch,” 6.

<sup>126</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry: Program History, Goals and Organization,” 4.

years to come. During his years of missionary service Dave Thomas, PCUSA mission co-worker acted in several capacities, first as Co-coordinator with *Compañeros en Misión* (Nogales, Sonora/Nogales, Arizona, PBM Co-coordinator), and later as PCUSA Regional Liaison in *México*. His eleven and a half years of experience took him to states across *México* where he visited countless Presbyterian churches and met most of the INPM leadership. Thomas articulated what he saw and learned,

Their mission is to bring people to Jesus. Their mission is to save souls. Their mission is to expand the kingdom of God and it is not to provide social services. Now I know there are exceptions to that. I've seen many exceptions, particularly on the border. But the rest of the country doesn't see that as the reason they exist as a church. If there is a disaster they'll jump right in and they'll contribute and they'll help but every day thinking about justice issues and migration questions and economic issues--if it doesn't have to do with saving souls, they're not into it. In their theology justice is not related to saving souls.<sup>127</sup>

Jerry Stacy, PBM Co-director, elaborated,

...the Mexican church had been burned lots of times by us and we still continued to burn them even though we thought we had improved our situation or improved the relationship. The US is constantly interested in programs of service and mission and compassion, and the Mexican Presbyterian church said, 'you denied us our access to the northern part [of *México*] to build churches-we want to build churches.' So, the commitment of the Joint Commission was if we build a program of social ministry you have to build a church alongside it. Bill's model [Bill Schlessinger, Proyecto Verdad] already kind of started that. Let's build on that – *serviglesia*. ...my gratitude to God is that we did hear the cry of 'help us build churches;' the churches will be there long after we're long gone."<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Thomas discussion with author, 10.

<sup>128</sup> Stacy discussion with author, 10-11, 19.

## Managing the “New Relationship”

The Border Committee, the official conduit between the border ministry sites and the international leadership, was the network hub for all the ministry sites, the border presbyteries, border synods, and the PBM coordinators, with meetings held once, sometimes twice, per year. As the liaison between the JMC and the ministry sites, the Border Committee participated in the hiring and review of all staff, then forwarded the information to the JMC for final approval. Along with staffing, the annual budget process and costs for all programming needed to go through the Border Committee and up to the JMC. Though cumbersome, this administrative process lasted five years before the leadership changed protocols in the interest of time and efficiency.

The leadership established a vertical line of authority, in deference to the Mexican efforts to develop missional control in *México* and to adhere strictly to the tenets of the “New Relationship” agreement and mutual mission ideals. After a century, the new situation challenged representatives from both countries to step into positions of equality and mutuality. Neither came to this “New Relationship” comfortably but both felt committed to forging a new future as people of faith. For the PBM, the lines of authority started at the top with the two denominations. Representatives from the INPM and the PCUSA sat on the JMC – the top layer of management accountable to both the denominations while providing oversight for the mission programming in *México*. The Border Committee came next in the organization structure; its membership ranged from the highest leadership of the denominations to representatives of the border synods, presbyteries, and the ministry sites. In keeping with the binational protocol, each

denomination assigned a Co-Director to provide leadership to the PBM. They, along with the chair of the Border Committee attended JMC meetings.<sup>129</sup>

The developmental years took place in two arenas: the bi-denominational international level and the binational, local level and each arena acted in response to different realities. At the highest level, following the split instigated by the INPM in 1972, the focus was on building mutually beneficial standards of engagement. The heart of the border ministry was the work at the binational sites along the two-thousand-mile *México/USA* border. On the local level, the focus was on building churches, meeting the missional needs of the twin-city areas as a binational collective, and working effectively on the local level while under the directives of distant, high-level management.

The Reverend Gerald F. Stacy was one of two directors hired to represent the PCUSA; the JMC assigned his binational equal, Reverend Saul Tijerina. Responsibilities of the PBM Co-directors included management of the PBM, support of the individual ministry sites, and accountability to the Border Committee and the JMC. Stacy spoke very warmly and respectfully of Tijerina, "...a wonderful soul. He was kind of like an older brother/mentor for me."<sup>130</sup> Along with their friendship, the two formed a strong binational partnership – a good foundational beginning for the PBM which helped to ensure decades of Presbyterian ministry in the border region.

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<sup>129</sup> "Organization Guidelines for the Administration of Presbyterian Border Ministry (PBM) Local Projects," *Manual of Operations and Personnel Development, 1987-92 (English)*. 3, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>130</sup> Stacy discussion with author, 12.

Each ministry site started with its own set of Co-Coordinator and a “Binational Leadership Committee” (Board of Directors) comprised of local volunteers from both countries. Charged with representing the local organization, the committees discerned the specific needs of the area, the talents of the staff and volunteers, and the opportunities for ministry and service. Oversight of the local ministry program planning, development, and coordination rested with each binational leadership committee.<sup>131</sup>

The grassroots forging of relationships to serve the area community took on the challenging work of learning what it meant to adhere to new denominational policy, build churches and develop missional programming while navigating the politics of an international border, the impacts of economic disparity, and cultural difference. The real meaning of challenge and grace resided with the day in and day out experience of listening, talking, learning, and working together in a setting designed by outside forces to frustrate, to separate, to create enmity, and to foster inequity. The work of the many serving in the local ministries of the border region demonstrated the denominational values of mutual mission. Adrian Gonzalez, described the mutuality he witnessed,

What I have seen – a really symbiotic relations [sic] – the Mexican church more evangelical but lacking the social justice. The US Presbyterian church is all about social justice. So, I think we are complimenting each other, we are learning from each other. This [*Café Justo*] is the effort of the ministry, doing social justice. We need to feed people spiritually but also economically. It needs to be a balance. I love the phrase of *Frontera de Cristo* – we come together because of our difference.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> “Organization Guidelines, 1987-92,” 2.

<sup>132</sup> Adrian Gonzalez, Manager of Customer Relations for *Café Justo* (a *Frontera de Cristo* program) discussion with author (*Agua Prieta, Sonora*, May 30, 2018) 50:00.

For those serving on the local level, lines of authority had remained challenging and reporting protocols were cumbersome and confusing. As each site grew on its own, connecting with area leadership in and out of the church, and addressing local needs, its staff and volunteers became heavily inwardly focused and independent. The stronger commitment to the work of the individual ministry persistently diminished a sense of connectedness across the umbrella organization, the PBM. Each local site vied for dollars out of the same general fund. Often, the individual ministry sites formulated and updated their Articles of Incorporation, By-laws, and goals without input, review, or approval of the organization's upper management. In addition, vision statements, objectives, volunteer programming, and job descriptions fit the needs of each location and often did not consider the ministry site's relationship with and obligation to the PBM, and the denominations. While commended for their strong local commitment, in some ways the resulting local autonomy undermined the collective goals and responsibilities of the border ministry. Conversely, breakdowns in communication and insistence on heavy oversight challenged the ministry sites when they did not receive the supporting, upper-level feedback they needed and wanted in a timely fashion. The lack of timeliness in decision-making directly affected the individual ministries, especially regarding financing, staffing, and programming, and did not serve the PBM well. For all parties, the formative years for the PBM were a time of trial and error requiring considerable patience, flexibility, and creativity.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Ernie supplement to December 15, 1989, memo to Jerry, April 2, 1990, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

While the PBM celebrated and promoted the many successes the ministry experienced, it also addressed the problems and missteps that had occurred during the earlier years. The ministry sites settled into their programming and the higher levels of leadership began reorganizing administration processes to better facilitate the border region work. Tijerina and Stacy, with the Border Committee and supported by the JMC, shored up the organizational structure and organization-wide understanding of the levels of authority and programmatic decision-making. The first change was to shift financial and administrative approval processes to the PBM executive, the Border Committee, and the Co-Coordinators, with annual accountability to the JMC and the two denominations.<sup>134</sup>

The PBM started the 1990s rolling out two significant organizational documents, approved by the JMC: “Guidelines and Recommendations for the Administration of Presbyterian Border Ministry (PBM) Local Projects,” and the “Comprehensive Five-Year Plan for Presbyterian Border Ministry, Inc.” The PBM developed the two documents in compliance with the covenant between the national denominations, the expectations of the JMC, the PBM administration, and in consideration of the uniqueness of each ministry site.<sup>135</sup> The development and presentation of these two documents was a pivotal moment in the early life of the PBM and opened the way for future changes that would

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<sup>134</sup> “Minutes: Corporation for Border Ministries; San Antonio, Texas, April 25-6, 1988,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Corporation Minute Book. Section-Minutes; Presbyterian Border Ministries Corporation, “April 13, 1989,”* Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>135</sup> “Guidelines and Recommendations for the Administration of Presbyterian Border Ministry (PBM) Local Projects,” *PBM Goals and Objectives, 5-year Plan 1990-2010.* (May 13, 1990), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.



further uncomplicate the organization's cumbersome hierarchical structure yet sustain the unifying covenants.

Following another major review and evaluation of PBM by the JMC in the mid-1990s, the binational ministry made additional changes to the organizational structure to further streamline administration processes. Subsequently, the PBM Executive staff coordinated job descriptions, initiated employee development programs, adopted a single accounting system, eliminated the Border Committee, and formed the Coordinating Council placing the financial and fund-raising work under its direction. Again, the goal was the formation of a body with even greater autonomy but not fully independent of the hierarchy. The PBM leadership placed a heavy emphasis on internal and external communications, coordination and collaboration among the ministry sites, and stronger outreach to the denominations. Each local ministry and PBM revised their respective by-laws to reflect the many organizational changes.<sup>136</sup>

In 1995, the board of the newly formatted organization, was composed of fourteen members: a representative from the PCUSA Worldwide Ministries Division and the INPM General Assembly, and twelve representatives elected by border Presbyteries and Synods.<sup>137</sup> At that same time, the INPM and PCUSA crafted an updated "New

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<sup>136</sup> "Minutes of the Presbyterian Border Ministry, Incorporated, Minutes, November 7, 1994, San Antonio, Texas," *Presbyterian Border Ministry Corporation Minute Book*. (c. 1987); "Presbyterian Border Ministry, Inc., Minutes, September 11, 1995, San Antonio, Texas," *Presbyterian Border Ministry Corporation Minute Book*. (c. 1987); "Minutes, Presbyterian Border Committee, November 8, 1995, Hidalgo, Texas," *Presbyterian Border Ministry Council binder* (c. 1996), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>137</sup> "Presbyterian Border Ministry: Administrative Structure of Each Project," *Presbyterian Border Ministry Council Binder, Organizational Chart*. (1996), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

Relationship” document.<sup>138</sup> While the binational JMC had released considerable administrative control to the PBM, it strengthened its efforts toward internal *México* missions. The new contract prioritized *México*’s interior areas of work beginning with new church development in the northern capitols and tourist cities. The INPM committed to financial support of fifteen percent and missionary personnel to initiate new projects.<sup>139</sup>

Initially, the new PBM Council met two times per year. The agenda was heavy with administrative responsibilities as the reorganized PBM took this opportunity to reimagine functionality, shift and/or share responsibilities, and bring in new perspectives while relying on existing experienced leadership. During this period, the Mexican contingent persisted in its call for construction of new church facilities and growth of the small mission congregations to larger, self-sufficient churches. They also called for equalization of pastor’s salaries – a persistent and unresolved issue since the early days of *Proyecto Verdad*.<sup>140</sup> Generally, most of the financial burden for church development, construction, and social services fell to the PCUSA and USA churches.

By the end of the decade of the 1990s, organizational accountability and uniformity seemed to be the order of the day. In a document of theological affirmations, the PBM

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<sup>138</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministries Corporation, El Paso, Texas – February 5, 1996, Report from the Border Committee and the Joint Mission Commission,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Council binder* (c. 1996), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>139</sup> “A New Relation in Joint Mission,” *Manual de Operaciones – Manual of Operations, Comisión de Misión Conjunta – Joint Mission Commission, Iglesia Nacional Presbiteriana de México – PCUSA* (c. 1988), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>140</sup> “Executive Committee, Presbyterian Border Ministry Council, Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Binational Border Ministry Council, Mission Presbytery Office, January 20, 1997, San Antonio, Texas,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Council binder* (c. 1996), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

Council couched responsibility to organized, programmatic management in terms of responsibility to God: “God is a God of order,” “Jesus Christ organized his ministry based on the priorities of the Kingdom of God,” “God demands of us efficient use of skills and talents,” “...as administrators of the Kingdom of God we should be organized in our programs and projects.”<sup>141</sup> While a shared faith had always been foundational to the PBM and was articulated clearly in the “New Relationship,” mission statements, and covenant documents, this is the first time the records overtly showed such a strong connection between business processes, personnel management, and God’s call to serve. It is unclear what the context of the time might have been to prompt this type of call to organizational responsibility; however, the years of discussion and prompting regarding administrative improvements suggests a level of frustration existed on the part of leadership. Whatever the context, at the turn of the century, the PBM leadership, as administrators, would face a persistent reticence across the organization to adhere to unifying management policy.

It was about this time that Reverend Saul Tijerina retired from PBM, leaving behind a legacy of commitment, creativity, and compassion, not just in the border region but across *México*. He had grown up the son of peasant farmers near Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, MX, raised in *El Buen Pastor* Presbyterian Church where he would one day serve as pastor. Despite roots in poverty, the community and his church elders recognized his intelligence and leadership capabilities when he was young. He benefitted from a good

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<sup>141</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry Council, Minutes, September 20-21, 1999, Meeting, San Antonio, TX,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Council binder* (c. 1996), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

education due to the strength of his family and the support of mentors. He served as Moderator of the INPM General Assembly on several occasions and was Rector of the *Seminario Teológico Presbiteriano de México* (Presbyterian Theological Seminary of México) in México City for seven years. Before promoting and launching the PBM, Tijerina established a college and a seminary in the city of Monterrey. “He was known as a consummate pastor and teacher and also for his political capacity to navigate denomination waters.”<sup>142</sup> His PBM colleague, Jerry Stacy, elaborated, “He understood the Mexican church and the U.S. church as well as anyone and helped us all understand the importance of the work along the border.”<sup>143</sup> Tijerina was an essential leader in the early efforts to reunite the INPM, the UPCUSA, and the PCUS. It was with “uncanny insight and grace that he brought understanding and cooperation” between the denominations.<sup>144</sup> The INPM approached the ministry on the northern border with caution and concern; it was Tijerina’s “profound understanding of scripture that helped the JMC understand how to base PBM in the Word of God.”<sup>145</sup> On the occasion of his parting, Tijerina shared his belief in the ministry, his hopes for the organization’s future

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<sup>142</sup> Parrish W. Jones, *Presbyterians on the Frontier*, x.

<sup>143</sup> Jones, *Presbyterians on the Frontier*, x.

<sup>144</sup> Jones, *Presbyterians on the Frontier*, xi.

<sup>145</sup> Jones, *Presbyterians on the Frontier*, xi.

growth, and, most importantly, the continuance of collegiality, mutual respect, and relationship.<sup>146</sup> Jesse Gonzales replaced Tijerina for a time.<sup>147</sup>

In 2000, the new Mexican Co-Director for the PBM, Jorge Alvarado R., reviewed the organization structure and visited each of the ministry sites. The results of his analysis pointed to some familiar administrative gaps but also made some new growth recommendations for the greater church. Alvarado R. recommended the now-familiar call for “development of a PBM overall plan that would work as the basis for site-specific organizational planning.” In recognition of the growing Presbyterian presence, he suggested the INPM consider establishing new Presbyteries in *México*’s northern region. The PBM Council forwarded the recommendation to *México*’s border Synods. Alvarado R. also saw a need for a ministry start-up with new church construction in the *San Luis Rio Colorado, Sonora*/Yuma, Arizona area. A coalition of PBM ministry representatives, the Grand Canyon Presbytery, and First Presbyterian Church of Yuma launched a feasibility study.<sup>148</sup> There was little information about the study, its findings, or subsequent implementation plans but, financial reporting indicated payments to a Yuma project as late as 2004.<sup>149</sup> Establishment of the new ministry site did not come to fruition.

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<sup>146</sup> Jones, *Presbyterians on the Frontier*, xi; “Presbyterian Border Ministry, Inc., Minutes, February 5, 1996, El Paso, Texas,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Corporation Minute Book*, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>147</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry, Inc., Minutes, February 5, 1996, El Paso, Texas,” Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>148</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry Council Minutes of the Meeting April 5-6, 2000, Piedras Negras, Coahuila,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Corporation Minute Book*. (c. 2000) 2. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>149</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry, Minutes, February 26, 2004, Cd. Acuna, Coahuila,” *Presbyterian Border Ministries/Ministerio Interfronterizo Presbiteriano, Reunion Annual/Annual Meeting, Agenda February 2005*, 13-16. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

That same year, the PBM Council also floated several additional ideas for consideration. A need clearly existed for mission to Hispanic communities along the USA side of the border and the Council asked the PBM and site coordinators to explore, with the INPM and the PCUSA, the viability of bringing Mexican missionaries to the USA. With time, some ministry sites explored opportunities for engagement north of the border including support of existing churches or launching new projects.<sup>150</sup> A second idea addressed the language barrier, which, though not a roadblock, certainly hampered the ministry work. They broached the idea of an organization-wide language exchange course, at least for the site leadership but perhaps for more people living in and visiting the border region. Also, the Council asked about organizing a pan-border youth congress in 2001. Youth groups from across the USA had attended the ministry sites for years, but the PBM had not, to date, connected them with their counterparts in *México*.<sup>151</sup>

Along with the transition of PBM executive leadership, the three Council sub-committees had their work cut out for them. The Personnel Committee had staff positions to fill at three ministry sites. The Program and Evaluation Committee worked with the sites to comply with JMC and PBM expectations for timely annual reports, strategic plans, and staff training and evaluations. An important piece of the forward trajectory for the organization was ministry and church self-sufficiency; the leadership coined the

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<sup>150</sup> “PBM/MIP, Executive Committee of Council/*Consejo*, September 9, 2004,” 7; “Reunion Annual/Annual Meeting Agenda February 2005,” *Presbyterian Boarder Ministries/Ministerio Interfronterizo Presbiteriano*, 9. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>151</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry Council Minutes of the Meeting September 14-16, 2000, San Antonio, TX,” 2. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

phrase, “the three ‘selfs:’ self-supporting, self-governing, self-reproducing.”<sup>152</sup> With twenty congregations established on the *México* side of the border, and growing programmatic needs, the Finance Committee worked closely with the PBM Corporation to address donor growth and collaborative participation by all ministry sites.<sup>153</sup> The movement for financial independence for all churches and ministry sites was top of their agenda. This included navigating the tricky business of equitable pastor’s salaries.

Since its inception and the intentionality of autonomy for the Mexican denomination, the issue of equal pay for border pastors and mission workers was complicated. On the one hand, the early planners embraced the notion of equal pay for equal work. In addition, USA work groups not only built church buildings but also built manses for pastors and their families. On the other hand, the inequity the higher pay caused for Mexican religious workers outside the PBM created a new set of problems. An INPM challenge was the internal perception that pastors sought northern region placement primarily to gain a greater income and not from a call to serve the church. The PBM challenge centered on who paid the salaries – monies that came primarily from the USA and not from the northern Presbyteries. Again, in the interest of autonomy, the PCUSA worked to encourage independence from its denominational purse. Despite efforts to remove PBM responsibility for payment of Mexican pastor’s salaries, some of

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<sup>152</sup> “Report of Coordinators, PBM/MIP Executive Committee of Council,” September 9, 2004, 5-6.

<sup>153</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry Council Minutes of the Meeting April 5-6, 2000,” 2; “Presbyterian Border Ministry Council Minutes of the Meeting September 14-16, 2000, San Antonio, TX,” 4. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

the ministry sites found it difficult to implement and rather than undo years of support, some continued to provide regular subsidies.

In 2003, PBM celebrated a significant transition in the life of the ministry, The Reverend Dr. Gerald F. Stacy, PBM Co-Director and co-founder retired after twenty years of service. In his parting remarks, Stacy expressed his joy in the founding of thirty-seven Presbyterian mission churches in northern *México*; churches that did not exist prior to 1980.<sup>154</sup> He did not immediately sever ties with the PBM but maintained his contacts around the USA and spent the next few years traveling on behalf of the border ministry. Stan de Voogd stepped into the PBM USA Co-Director position after serving twelve years in the mission field. He shared, “I realized how participating in cross cultural mission settings had such a profound impact on my faith. I want to be a part of a ministry that makes it possible for many to be involved in work alongside our brothers and sisters from other cultures.”<sup>155</sup> Initially, the organization benefitted from de Voogd’s familiarity with PBM, he had served in the San Antonio office prior to taking the position.

By mid-to late-nineteen-nineties, reports of border region violence, particularly the rampant femicide in *Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua* splashed across the headlines in both *México* and the USA. With USA work groups avoiding travel to the area, the numbers of mission delegations dropped precipitously in cities and towns across the border region. The loss of visiting groups translated to a significant drop in income for the PBM. The

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<sup>154</sup> *Nuestra Frontera (Our Border): The Newsletter of Presbyterian Border Ministry*. (Spring 2003) 1. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>155</sup> *Nuestra Frontera (Our Border)*. (Spring 2003) 2. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.



dire situation required attention by the highest levels of both denominations and, in 2004, preparations were underway for studying the situation and discerning a churchwide response.<sup>156</sup>

Around this time, the USA government imposed another complication by increasingly restricting movement into the country from *México*. Up until that point, the work of the ministry could take place on either side of the international border but, the INS began refusing visas for the Mexican Co-Coordinator and ministry staff. At a time when fears were keeping USA citizens from crossing into *México*, Mexican citizens and residents in border towns could no longer cross into the USA despite years of freedom of movement between the countries. From that point, very few PBM staff and volunteers have been able to qualify for USA visas.<sup>157</sup>

The PBM opened the new year, 2005, with a revised Manual of Operations. The mission statement stipulated the ministry's focus embraced binational management as it continued with new church development, collaborating with, and supporting existing border churches, offering mission education/immersion opportunities, and promoting justice and compassion work. The document appendix included several "how to" documents covering topics such as board governance, managing with less funding, developing a strategic plan, and coordinating multiple ministries. Ministry sites requested the information and the leadership deemed it essential since compliance with business

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<sup>156</sup> "Report of Coordinators, PBM/MIP Executive Committee of Council," September 9, 2004, 3-4.

<sup>157</sup> "PBM Funds Development Committee," *PBM Conference Call*. (May 12, 2004) 1. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

accountability continued to fall short of management expectations – a problem that dated back to PBM’s earliest years.<sup>158</sup>

Also, in 2005, in their analysis of interdenominational relations the JMC revealed work of advancing autonomy and partnership still lay ahead. After one hundred and thirty years, the INPM and the PCUSA recognized and celebrated accomplishments such as: mutual service and evangelism, and the commitment of countless numbers of volunteers and personnel who served. However, the analysis pointed to two situations that had little to do with the work on the border but set the tone for denominational relations. First, the JMC had little to no confidence in government authority. Likely this was nothing new but, it was a time of increased economic migration to northern *México* and into the USA; a reality that strained the missionary environment. Second, the analysis pointed to some of the same challenges that plagued *México* mission ministry from its inception, challenges that PBM programming knowingly took on as it positioned itself to serve in the *México*/USA border region. Across *México*’s interior, missionaries from the USA continued to work unilaterally, failing to communicate with the INPM leadership. In fact, Presbyterian missionaries often were not official representatives from the PCUSA but traveled as representatives of individual churches and presbyteries, working in a community-to-community fashion, often unsanctioned by either denomination. Consequently, the independent missionaries engaged in their mission work without a

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<sup>158</sup>“Presbyterian Border Ministry: Manual of Operations, draft, revised,” (January 2005), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

trained sensitivity to relational power structures. They tended to plan and work separately from the denominations and selectively engaged in and curtailed local projects.

Regarding the border ministry, the JMC leadership seemed to cast around for the next phase in the management life of the PBM. The perception was that after two decades, the PBM was ready to move from a start-up entity to an established ministry. What that move would look like called up familiar issues beginning with renewing the call for less paternalism and increased coordination and communication. Tensions persisted between the importance of evangelism and the need for social service; new project development and project maintenance; controls from the denomination levels or increased engagement by border region presbyteries; the importance of growing volunteer numbers but insistence on increased training; and support for community projects without displacing the local churches.<sup>159</sup>

After two years of observing the PBM, the new Coordinator, de Voogd, started shaking things up when he presented his recommendations for the future of PBM and interdenominational relationships. First, he envisioned a reformulation of international mission by combining the JMC and the PBM – a flattening of the management structure. The PBM Co-Directors would take on the role of liaison for all of *México*, representing their respective denominations. The San Antonio office would remain open, under the oversight by the two liaisons, to manage PBM public relations and fundraising. The ministry sites would broaden their engagement to include their respective border region

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<sup>159</sup> “*Reunión de Misión Conjunta con Comité Ejecutivo de MIP en Monterrey*,” *Presbyterian Border Ministries/Ministerio Interfronterizo Presbiteriano, Reunion Annual/Annual Meeting, Agenda*. (February 2005) 21-22. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

presbyteries and eliminate the presbytery role at a higher management level.<sup>160</sup> De Voogd wanted to sustain the annual meeting of the PBM “to share site reports, establish joint strategies, and distribute funds raised based on project requests.”<sup>161</sup>

The process for significant downsizing began around this same period as the PBM reassessed staff positions and considered ministry site unification. In the process, PBM leadership eliminated the Mexican Co-Director position, though maintaining the USA Co-Director position and the PBM decided to merge two of the Tamaulipas/Texas ministries.<sup>162</sup> As staff retirements or relocations occurred, PBM reviewed each position from a fiscally frugal perspective. For example, to replace the Mission Co-Coordinator at *Pueblos Hermanos* in *Tijuana, Chihuahua/San Diego*, the prohibitive costs of housing in San Diego prompted a need to consider alternatives. As PBM replaced Mission Co- Coordinators at ministry sites, they expected the incoming staff to sustain existing and develop new avenues for financial support, relieving responsibility for the Director’s office.<sup>163</sup>

In December 2011, the INPM officially severed ties with the PCUSA, marking one of the most devastating times in the four decades of PBM binational ministry. The

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<sup>160</sup> Stanley de Voogd, “Activity Report, Feb 2005- Feb 2006 and Recommendations,” *Presbyterian Border Ministries/Ministerio Interfronterizo Presbiteriano* (c. 2006) 25-27, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>161</sup> “Report of Coordinator Stan deVoogd; Annual meeting 2005, Acuna, Mexico, February 1-4,” 4-5, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>162</sup> Report of Coordinators, “PBM/MIP Executive Committee of Council,” (September 9, 2004), 3-4, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; Annual Meeting of Presbyterian Border Ministry, Notes (February 7, 2006) 3, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; Minutes of Presbyterian Border Ministry Meeting (September 12, 2006) 8, 9, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>163</sup> Minutes of Presbyterian Border Ministry Meeting (September 12, 2006) 9, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

prior August, the PCUSA received a communique from the INPM making official the plan to end the association. Hunter Farrell, World Mission Director responded, “We have had initial conversations with Mexican church leaders since the decision, and together we shared a hope for healing and a renewed ability to engage God’s mission together, but at this moment this is not possible, and it brings me great sadness.”<sup>164</sup>

The PCUSA General Assembly had passed Amendment 10-A, amending ordination standards in the denomination constitution. In effect, the constitutional change provided inclusion in the ministry for all people, including those identifying as LGBTQ. The dramatic shift was unacceptable to INPM theology. Both denominations had been aware of marked theological differences but the step toward fuller inclusivity by the PCUSA created a division the two could not reconcile. At the time, the INPM had begun to formalize relations with the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA), the theology of the two denominations aligned. The PCA had organized in 1973 as an offshoot of the PCUS and by 2000, they reported over seventeen hundred churches and missions in the USA and Canada with over three-hundred-thirty-five thousand members.<sup>165</sup> Like the INPM, evangelizing mission was and is one of their primary tenets. Secondarily, PCUSA funding for INPM had been decreasing as the USA denomination grappled with declining enrollment and loss of income. Despite the articulated cause for ending the relationship, the INPM felt hard hit by the defunding process.

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<sup>164</sup> “World Mission responds to ending of partnership by Mexican Presbyterian Church,” (August 24, 2011), <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2011/8/24/world-mission-responds-ending-partnership-mexican/>.

<sup>165</sup> “A Brief History of the Presbyterian Church in America,” <https://pcanet.org/about-the-pca-2-3/>.

Unfortunately, the thrust of the INPM call to disband the binational ministry with the PCUSA was not pleasant. Dave Thomas, who at the time was the PCUSA Regional Liaison for *México*, attended the INPM General Assembly meeting in *Xonacatlán, Estado de México, México* and recalled,

One of the officers of the National Presbyterian Church of *México* reached in his pocket of his coat and pulled out a list of the grievances that he had against the PCUSA. He said this decision is long past due. This is the same denomination that denied the lordship of Jesus Christ. This is the same denomination that denied the virgin birth. This is the same denomination that denied that Jesus Christ is the only pathway to heaven. When he ended somebody stood up and asked if the representative from PCUSA could address these questions.<sup>166</sup>

Because Thomas was under a gag order by the INPM, he could not speak. He continued,

...there were various motions, not just one motion to end the relationship... one of those motions came from someone who wanted to maintain the relationship, and that motion received fourteen votes in favor. The motion to sever the relationship came after that vote, and the fourteen-or-so delegates [most from northern *México*] who had voted in favor of the previous vote either abstained or voted against severing the relationship.<sup>167</sup>

With that, the INPM informed PCUSA World Mission and asked all PCUSA missionaries to leave the country, once again. The JMC cancelled any future meetings.

The PBM drafted a letter to all ‘Friends’ about the actions by the INPM and the PCUSA/PBM future in the border region. The communication assured recipients that the PCUSA would be engaged with border region presbyteries and congregations “to continue to respond to God’s call to mission along the US/*México* border.” PCUSA World Mission planned to assist PBM sites and participating Presbyteries with “a

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<sup>166</sup> Thomas discussion with author, 28.

<sup>167</sup> Dave Thomas correspondence with author, “checking in,” (January 25 and 26, 2021).

thorough collaborative evaluation of the shared work and strategic planning for the future.”<sup>168</sup> María Arroyo, PCUSA Area Coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean, offered her expectations for the future of PBM,

We seek to help Presbyterian Border Ministry identify things that might change as they prayerfully consider how to do faithful and effective mission in light of the INPM decision to sever ties. We expect this process of discernment and evaluation to continue through the rest of 2011. We should be able to announce to U.S. congregations and Mid-Councils our recommendations for how we can best engage in ministry along the border in early 2012.<sup>169</sup>

A temporary agreement between PBM, INPM, and PCUSA World Mission stipulated that Mexican border presbyteries would decide on participation with the ministry sites depending on the partner presbytery’s commitment to disavowing the PCUSA 2010 GA action on Amendment 10-A ordination standards. Should the partner presbytery choose not to commit, the ministry site board would decide on its future ministry and partners. The border presbyteries could establish covenants in the event of agreement against Amendment 10-A. The two denominations committed to continued open dialogue during the transition period.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> “Correspondence, Micaela Reznicek, Funds Development Coordinator, Presbyterian Border Ministry to Friends of PBM,” (September 22, 2011), *Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Presbyterian Border Ministry, Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico, February 9-11, 2011*, 5-6. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>169</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry Conference Call Meeting, May 15, 2012,” *Annual Meeting of PBM, Motel del Centro, February 8-10, 2012*. 7; Judson Taylor, Communications Associate, “World Mission committed to continuing ministry in Mexico and along border,” *PCUSA News Service* (January 25, 2021), <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2011/11/14/world-mission-committed-continue-ministry-mexico-a/1/25/2021>. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>170</sup> “Correspondence - Micaela Reznicek, Funds Development Coordinator, Presbyterian Border Ministry to Friends of PBM, September 22, 2011,” *Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Presbyterian Border Ministry, Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico, February 9-11 (2011)* 5-6. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

The PBM, initially without any members of the Mexican contingent, faced an uncertain future and as they gathered to consider next steps, four options presented themselves. They could dissolve the PBM all-together, make PBM a networking hub that supported the ministries from a virtual office, make PBM a networking hub and move the office to a location on the border, or reinvent itself considering new context that would support the three PCUSA World Mission pillars: poverty, violence, and evangelism. The organization needed to consider a lot of factors, some of which included: How would they work with the border partners considering the split? Would the partners agree with the three focus issues for the PCUSA? Could they avoid dependency on mission teams and continue to do binational work?<sup>171</sup>

During the next several years, the PBM staff, ministry site board members, and Co-Mission Workers, along with border region presbytery representatives and World Mission representatives, tried to regroup. Soon, the ministry sites also welcomed many of the Mexican counterparts and acknowledged them as integral to the meetings and the discernment process. The process for re-envisioning a future was complicated. Though feeling flummoxed by the situation, the entire group also considered their current situation as an opportunity, a new beginning. Preparing for their new future began at the beginning, defining the organization's mission, vision, and purpose and even instituting a name change to Presbyterian Border Region Outreach (PBRO). Then, they needed to rethink the governing structure; operational and programmatic methodologies; personnel, communications, and financial protocols; new relations across the denomination and with

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<sup>171</sup> "Discerning the Future of PBM-Small Group Discussion Points," *Future of PBM Discernment Gathering Agenda* (October 17-19, 2012) 1 – 2. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.



non-Presbyterian partners; and finally, the relationship with and between the border ministry sites and the surrounding communities.<sup>172</sup> They crafted a temporary Mission and

Purpose statement:

PBM [PBRO] is an umbrella for ministry sites to help facilitate our holistic approach to addressing root causes of poverty and promoting reconciliation in cultures of violence. In all our work, we are accountable first to our Lord Jesus Christ and through his Spirit to one another, always responding to God's image in our neighbor. PBRO will conduct an annual program and external financial audit.<sup>173</sup>

Very quickly, PBRO recognized the need for a general administrator who could support the ministry sites, provide needed financial oversight, communications, and outreach, and maintain relations with churches, border Presbyteries and Synods, and PCUSA World Mission.<sup>174</sup> The PCUSA World Mission and PBRO selected Omar Chan to begin his work in June 2014 with plans for a three-year tenure financially supported by the national denomination. At the end of Chan's term, his hiring as a new step forward for the PBRO did not end well, for a variety of reasons.

Before he had an opportunity for a thorough orientation, Chan's first task as new PBRO Facilitator was representing the organization at the General Assembly gathering in Detroit. Born in Guatemala, his parents raised him in the Catholic church but, when a young boy, they shifted to Protestantism. Chan's family moved to the USA in 1999 where he received his resident status followed by his citizenship. He attended Indiana

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<sup>172</sup> "Meeting on Implementation of Plan for Future of PBM," *2012 PBM Annual Meeting* (March 2013). 1-7, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>173</sup> "Presbyterian Border Region Outreach," *PBRO 2013* (March 1, 2013). Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>174</sup> "Presbyterian Border Region Outreach," *PBRO 2013* (March 1, 2013).

University and earned a business administration degree. Chan met and married Amanda Craft, a lifelong Presbyterian who worked in the PCUSA. Chan's graduation coincided with Amanda's new job with World Mission working with Presbyterian women in Guatemala. They lived and worked in Guatemala for six years. While there, Chan worked in the mission field and partnered with the Presbyterian church. His business acumen, experience in mission service, knowledge of Presbyterianism, and bi-lingual skill fit well with the needs of the PBRO.<sup>175</sup>

By the end of the year, Chan reported on his progress, beginning with his time at the General Assembly and clarifying his responsibilities as PBRO facilitator. He set up plans and database platforms for conducting an agency-wide needs analysis of procedures, processes, and structures, and worked on computer-based communications and marketing tools such as website and social media construction, and logo and newsletter design. His next steps included a hard look at the old donor contact information and taking first steps to assist with fundraising presentations. In addition, Chan scheduled site visits along the border and planned to attend the Frontera de Cristo Border to Border trip to Chiapas.<sup>176</sup>

In October 2015, Chan provided a comprehensive analysis of PBRO with proposed solutions to problems he detected during his site assessments and review of administrative systems. Chan's report was direct and challenging in its findings, calling

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<sup>175</sup> Chan Kraft discussion with author, (May 24, 2017) 1-19; "Minutes, Presbyterian Border Region Outreach-PBRO, Bob Seal, Secretary," *PBRO Transition of Leadership* (February 10-12, 2014) 1, 3-5, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>176</sup> "Work update," *PBRO 2014* (September 19, 2014) 1-2. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

out many of the persistent administrative problems that had plagued the organization for years: poor internal communication, no financial management strategy, lack of agility in decision-making, lack of strategic planning, lack of clarity and alignment of objectives, duplicity of functions, conflict of interest due to board integration, low commitment, weak teamwork, low productivity, lack of organizational integration, poor management of priorities.<sup>177</sup> The first solution Chan recommended was a reorganization that would, he suggested, “provide agility and objectivity in decision-making.”

The PBRO membership and executive board approved his recommended changes which included a new Board structure (Alliance) and two staff members – Operations Coordinator and Coordinator of General Relations. The Alliance structure (seven members) consisted of a representative of donors and associations, a PCUSA representative, a Presbyteries representative, a representative from both *México* and USA ministries, the Executive Director, and the Operations Coordinator.<sup>178</sup> The October 2015 board meeting minutes stated, “the Alliance be composed of two from each border ministry, one from each side of the border, by a representative of the PCUSA, by representatives of each of the six PCUSA presbyteries, by two representatives of an assembly of donors, by the Executive Director, the Coordinator and his (sic) assistant. The Coordinator would be accountable to the Alliance. This proposal was approved.”<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Omar Chan, “Facilitator’s General Report, Presbyterian Border Region Outreach,” *PBRO Report, Presentation, 2015* (April 2015) 10-13. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>178</sup>Chan, “Facilitator’s General Report,” 23-37. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>179</sup> “Minutes-Chronicle of the meeting of Presbyterian Border Region Outreach,” PBRO, (October 5-7, 2015) 3. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

PBRO did not meet in 2016 except for a possible conference call on February 9, 2016. There are no minutes from the call and no record of approval of the October 2015 minutes.

The second proposal focused on “financial management” with a strong budget execution and administrative audits. The question Chan proposed was how to generate cash flow and his answer involved training a volunteer team under the leadership of the Coordinator of General Relations.<sup>180</sup> Chan’s third proposal focused on the relationships of the border ministries with each other and with the PBRO organization. His findings suggested the PBRO did not have an open or transparent relationship with the six ministry sites and that most of the ministries perceived the PBRO as simply a funding stream. In addition, he learned that the border ministries did not consider each other as partners but as “individual entities with their own individual work area and unlikely to work on projects together as partner ministries.”<sup>181</sup> In response, Chan recommended creating a structured program designed to develop creative relationships between ministries with a strong focus on programming that aligned with the PBRO mission and PCUSA World Mission expectations.<sup>182</sup>

Along with the report, the first published newsletter went out June 2014 and the PBRO Facebook page went live around the same time. Chan completed and launched the new website mid-2015. His challenge, consistent with past performances, was receiving

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<sup>180</sup> Chan, “Facilitator’s General Report,” 39-51. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>181</sup> “Chan, “Facilitator’s General Report,” 53.

<sup>182</sup> Chan, “Facilitator’s General Report,” 52-64.

contributions in the form of information and articles from the ministry sites. Despite meeting the functions PBRO hired Chan to execute, several disgruntled members mistakenly expected him to take responsibility for hosting delegations and to act as PBRO fundraiser.

While the board approved the new strategic plan, Valdir Franca, the new PCUSA Regional Liaison for Latin America and the Caribbean did not guarantee funding from World Mission for the Relations Coordinator position. Chan, Reverend John Nelsen, PBRO President, and Amanda Craft had continued to work on facilitating the new hire seeking new funding sources. It was a big step and Chan asked that the PBRO “join strengths and resources, to work as a team, and above all else, to be strategic with our time, labor, and ministry efforts.”<sup>183</sup> As outlined in the Chan report, approved by the Board, and reiterated in later correspondence, the next steps for PBRO included recruiting the new Alliance members (Board of Directors), applying promotional strategies, and launching a fundraising and new volunteers campaign.<sup>184</sup> There did not seem to be any forward movement on the strategic plan until May/June 2017.

Efforts to meet by conference call early June failed and Chan resorted to an email sent June 6, 2017, to announce a new seven-person PBRO Alliance and the upcoming Alliance meeting scheduled for June 21-22, 2017. The email briefly reiterated the reasons for the change to the organizational structure. Chan invited former PBRO board members to participate in the meeting, in recognition for their service, to meet the new Alliance,

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<sup>183</sup> Omar Chan to PBRO members, “A brief update,” *PBRO 2015-17* (January 24, 2016) 1. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>184</sup> Chan to PBRO members, 2. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

and to provide historical perspectives. News of the newly formed Alliance and the next board meeting did not sit well with some PBRO members. The changes seemed unexpected and not in alignment with what they believed to be the fresh look for the PBRO. The morning of June 16, while en route to *Agua Prieta, Sonora/Douglas, AZ* after a year's sabbatical, Rev. Mark Adams, PCUSA Co-Mission Worker, emailed a request for a special meeting of the board to discuss, "the plan Omar has come up with which is very different than the approved decisions of the last board meeting."<sup>185</sup> Throughout the day, a flurry of emails exchanged between board members, ministry coordinators, and Chan suggested a growing concern and increasing frustration, even some accusations. A variety of miscellaneous factors help to explain the incident, including a year of poor communication across the organization. However, the discrepancy between Chan's board-approved strategic plan of 2015 and the board minutes from the same meeting regarding Alliance (board of directors) configuration seem to be central to the reasons for misunderstanding, concern, and disagreement. On the one hand, Chan believed he was acting in compliance with the board directive as he formed the new Alliance and on the other hand, some believed the new Alliance structure "subordinated the project leaders" and accused Chan of overstepping his authority.<sup>186</sup>

On June 19, Chan contacted the newly formed Alliance to report cancellation of the first meeting and announce the transition could not happen. He reported, "World

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<sup>185</sup> Mark Adams to Dan Abbott, John Nelsen, Bob Seel, and Bob Battenfield, *PBRO 2015-2017* (June 16, 2017, 8:38 AM). Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>186</sup> Bob Battenfield to Omar Chan, Mark Adams, Robert Seel, John Nelsen, Dan Abbott, re: "one more call to service," *PBRO 2015-2017* (June 16, 2017 5:01 PM). Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

Mission has decided, given the present environment, that it be best that the current board lead the transition.”<sup>187</sup> When his three-year contract ended, the PBRO and PCUSA did not renew; Chan and the PBRO abandoned the reorganization plans and he left El Paso, Texas with his family. It is unclear if the PCUSA, the PBRO, and Omar Chan exchanged any final severing discussions or documents. The existing board did not act immediately and PBRO, as the umbrella organization for six border ministry sites, languished.

The 2011 dissolution at the denomination level was particularly heartbreaking for those engaged on the local level. All the ministry staff and volunteers (including board members) had worshipped and prayed together, had reached out to the community together, and had planned, developed, and implemented programming together. The years of mutual mission engagement strengthened their relationships, and the action by the INPM along with the potential for full dissolution after all the years of service was painful.

One way the staff and volunteers built strong relationships was through their collective commitment to programming that responded to neighborhood needs, and their related engagement in networking, partnering, training, and fundraising. The following section details the programmatic development, implementation, and commitment to medical and health services across the organization and over the decades. The ministries faced a challenging task as they provided medical services to some of the most desperate barrios that lacked municipal infrastructure (water, sewer, electricity), and the residents

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<sup>187</sup> Omar Chan to Kathy Staudt, Catherine May, author, Jeannette Pazos, Juan-Daniel Espitia, Amanda Craft re: Postponed board meeting, *PBRO 2015-2017* (June 19, 2017 6:22 PM). Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

struggled with lack of food and resources. The work did not just require skilled staff and volunteers, but medical personnel with the necessary heart and fortitude to respond to such extreme poverty. At times, while there was never a question about need, the ministries would close the clinics due to lack of doctors, nurses, and volunteers, and unsustainable funding sources. However, with persistence, new opportunities arose, and the medical services provided had far-reaching impacts on the communities they served; each success was a measure of the quality of programming.

#### Mutual Mission: PBM Programming in Medical Services

From the outset, as the border ministries developed, PBM and the local sites planned the programming based on a variety of factors. Through networking, relationship building, and partnership development, plans grew out of local need, mutual interest, and available resources (funds, staff, volunteers).<sup>188</sup> At the annual meetings of the Border Committee (later the Border Council), ministry leaders and directors would share their work with each other and make an accounting to the PBM leadership of their expenditures, successes, and failures. While there were common border concerns and challenges brought on by the extremes of poverty and migration, most program development and management remained at the local level and did not move to the PBM level for leadership. One important exception has been medical and public health services which developed both at the local level and through top-down implementation and administration.

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<sup>188</sup> See sections on the individual ministry sites for more detail on PBM programming.



The Reverend Mark Adams had learned that medical staff were employed at *Frontera de Cristo* in the early years, prior to his coming to *Agua Prieta, Sonora/* Douglas, Arizona. “I remember one of my earliest PBM meetings over in Laredo was all about health and public health. *Puentes, Amistad, Frontera, and Pueblos Hermanos* all had health stuff going on.”<sup>189</sup> Reverend Jorge Pasos, M.D. began his career in private practice in *Saltillo, Coahuila* where he and his family were active in the Presbyterian church. As an elder, he represented his church at a gathering in the Caribbean where he met Baltazar González, then Co-Coordinator of *Proyecto Verdad* in *Juárez, Chihuahua*. Jorge shared, “It was easy for me to say goodbye to *Saltillo*, because he [González] had given me the opportunity to work in the health programs that were in the churches. I saw that there was an opportunity for me to take charge of a mission, because there was a scarcity of pastors.”<sup>190</sup> After ten years in *Ciudad Juárez*, Pasos and his family moved to *Tijuana* to start a new health program with *Pueblos Hermanos*. The new programming included training classes in medicine, personal health care, and counseling.<sup>191</sup> Eventually, Pasos moved to *Compañeros en Misión* as the Mexican Co-Coordinator.

*Compañeros en Misión* in *Ambos Nogales* received a Presbyterian Women (PW) Thank Offering grant to start a health training program. Due to the poverty that existed in *Nogales, Sonora*, as well as most locations along the *México/USA* border, many people could not address their health needs nor that of their children. Often, they did not know

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<sup>189</sup> Mark Adams (PCUSA Co-Mission Worker and Co-Coordinator, *Frontera de Cristo*) discussion with author (May 28, 2019) Part 1, 13.

<sup>190</sup> Jorge Pazos discussion with author, May 30, 2019, Nogales, Arizona: *Compañeros en Misión* office, 1-2.

<sup>191</sup> Pazos discussion with author, 1-2.

about basic hygiene, and certainly, they could not afford the costs of medical or dental care. The idea behind the health training program was to educate residents on basic health care and public health so they could, in turn, serve many of the community health needs. Thomas explained, “In Spanish they’re called *promotoras*. In other words, they are health promoters in their local communities. We hired Yvonne Pazos, Dr. Pazos’ daughter, who’s a registered nurse.”<sup>192</sup> *Compañeros* partnered with a local organization to train *promotoras* and, ultimately, spread the program to four of the *Sonoran* cities they served: *Nogales, Caborca, Navajoa, and Guaymas*.

Presbyterians have traditionally emphasized the need for medical services and poured money and effort into building hospitals and clinics around the world. The PCUSA Medical Benevolence Foundation (MBF), a para-Presbyterian missionary group formed in 1963, approached their work as “...a science-minded alternative to evangelical efforts that disregarded public health as a primary concern.”<sup>193</sup> The work of Dr. Paul Crane and his wife Sophie Earle Montgomery Crane as medical missionaries in Korea from 1947 to 1969 mirrored the purpose of the MBF. While in the mission field, they established a hospital, a medical training program, a nursing school, and a traveling public health education program to reach people in rural environs. When the Cranes retired from missionary service, Dr. Crane remained active in global medicine and church leadership. He ended his service as PCUSA Director of Health Ministries in the Division of International Mission and as one of nine PCUSA representatives on the PBM

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<sup>192</sup> Thomas discussion with author, 4-5.

<sup>193</sup> Presbyterian Historical Society, <https://www.history.pcusa.org/blog/2020/04medical-benevolence-foundation-preach-kingdom-god-and-heal>. Accessed October 14, 2020.

Corporation Board. In a PBM newsletter, he wrote, “For me the visit to the border area was a shocking experience beyond anything I had imagined. The basic infrastructure is lacking so that people live without good water, electricity, plumbing, public sewage systems, schools, or health facilities. Where health conditions are so deplorable, I saw more malnutrition among children than I saw in Central Africa.”<sup>194</sup>

The PBM, with support from the JMC developed and promoted medical programming for all the ministries in the border region. While the leading causes of morbidity varied between the border cities, there were health concerns common across the region: diabetes, heart disease, accidents, infections, intestinal disease, and perinatal disorders. As PBM faced such extreme realities and with the influences and knowledge of leaders like Dr. Paul Crane, in 1987, a Binational Border Committee comprised of representative of the JMC, PCUSA, and INPM gathered. They developed the “Presbyterian Border Ministry Composite Three Year Health Plan,” which emphasized the “self-health potential” of individuals and families, a concept promoted by UNICEF in 1986, as key to better universal health. Reviewing the leading causes of morbidity, the Plan listed five areas of top concern for each ministry site to consider: the lack of primary health care facilities for burgeoning populations, disease prevention and detection, sanitation, documentation of recurring illnesses in high-risk populations, and support for local government public health programs. Initially, Presbyterian health teams deployed to the region – ultimately, PBM focused on “prevention through education, detection, and

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<sup>194</sup> Paul S. Crane, M.D. Director of Health Ministries, Division of International Mission PCUSA, “Health Issues,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry. Newsletter* (Fall 1987) 2. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

community development.”<sup>195</sup> As a formalized network under the Three-Year Health Plan, each ministry site responded with action plans tailored to fit the specific needs of their respective communities.

Ten years later, at the behest of the Mexican church leaders, PBM developed a comprehensive family counseling program designed to train pastors and church leaders across the ministry. The goal proposed to strengthen staff responsiveness to the complex psychosocial needs of border region peoples. The rapid growth of border cities due to explosive northward migration out of *México* and Central America resulted in an array of problems. Municipalities failed to respond effectively to the burgeoning population growth. Water delivery systems, if in place, often failed to provide safe clean drinking water, sewage systems did not expand into newly settled barrios, and people experienced months-long delays for hook-ups to electric power and gas, even in areas where delivery systems were available. New arrivals to the border towns often came with heavy personal burdens: loss of income, distance from their family and their land, some fleeing violence, and once arrived – social alienation. Without the skills to cope, too many fell prey to violent abuses, drug dependency, adolescent pregnancy, divorce or separation, and low self-esteem. The counseling program, “*La Familia*,” offered formal training for selected individuals from each ministry site.<sup>196</sup>

By 2010, the six local ministry sites collectively worked four programmatic areas along with the medical and health ministries: evangelism, mission education, training and

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<sup>195</sup> Paul S. Crane, “Health Issues,” 2.

<sup>196</sup> “*La Familia*, A Comprehensive Family Ministries Training Program of Presbyterian Border Ministry,” *PBM Council Binder 1997*. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

economic self-help, and education scholarships. A 2010 Work Plan, developed by the JMC, laid out future programmatic activities, but implementation of the plan fell victim to the seemingly abrupt severing of ties between the INPM and the PCUSA in 2011.<sup>197</sup>

While the PCUSA and the PBM grappled with their next steps, the binational work at the ministry sites remained. The question of how to pay for programming became a huge, local concern, one they had not been prepared to undertake. Nevertheless, faced with necessity, they had at their disposal years of consistent, professional work and training by the fundraising arm of the PBM – the PBM Corporation. The next section takes a brief look at the fund-raising, public relations, and outreach efforts, along with some lessons-learned by the PBM Corporation.

#### PBM Financials: Raising Funds for a Binational Non-Profit

In 1986, the PBM Corporation filed as a non-profit for official status with the State of Texas. The corporate office was in San Antonio with Gerald F. Stacy, USA Co-Director as the registering agent.<sup>198</sup> The stated purpose of the Corporation was to respond to the social and spiritual needs of residents in the *México*/USA border region. In 1991, the IRS confirmed the PBM status as a 501(c)(3), a non-profit ready to receive much needed donor support.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> “Work Plan: Presbyterian Church USA and National Presbyterian Church of Mexico (INPM),” *INPM & PCUSA Work Plan* (c. 2010) 1-2. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>198</sup> The Board of Directors listed on the incorporation document: Robert Frere, TX; Edwin Rosser, TX; Pedro Villarreal, NL, MX; Rose Lancaster, TX; Roland R. Taylor, CA; Paul S. Crane, GA. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>199</sup> “1986 Articles of Incorporation, Secretary of State, State of Texas to Presbyterian Border Ministry Corporation, Charter Number 01018870-01,” and “Internal Revenue Service 1991 to Presbyterian

The PBM established an internal PBM Corporation as the official fund-raising arm of the organization. The in-house Corporation did not have administrative authority but existed to serve PBM with planning for long-term funding, capital expenditures, and start-up funding for new programming. During its first year, the Corporation received a ten-thousand-dollar grant from the Trull Foundation as seed-money for developing their administrative plan and to work with the ministry sites as each formulated their goals and objectives.<sup>200</sup> The PBM Corporation was charged with providing minimal operation funds for the ministry sites with the expectation that each site would develop its own support system over a period of approximately five years.<sup>201</sup> As the Corporation solidified its purpose and direction, it established sub-committees charged with coordinating fund-raising goals, outreach strategies, and advertising campaigns. With a strong and knowledgeable board, it planned multiple outreach methods, beginning with interpreting the PBM to churches and individuals across the USA. PBM published a newsletter, *Somos Vecinos / We are Neighbors*;<sup>202</sup> the ministry sites sent the monthly publication to their mailing lists.<sup>202</sup> *Somos Vecinos* documented the programming life of the organization and provided opportunities to contribute through prayer, service, and monetary donations.

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Border Ministry Corporation,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Corporation Minute Book* (c. 1987). Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>200</sup> “Minutes of the Border Ministry Corporation, 1<sup>st</sup> Presbyterian Church, San Diego, CA, November 10, 1987,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Corporation Minute Book*. (c. 1987). Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>201</sup> “Minutes: Corporation, April 25-6, 1988.”

<sup>202</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry, newsletter,” (Fall 1987), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

Through its efforts, the Corporation professionalized the financial functions of the PBM developing long-term fiscal planning and budget protocols, clarifying audit procedures, and creating strategic donor opportunities across the organization.<sup>203</sup> It worked in tandem with the Border Committee, standardizing policies and guidelines to simultaneously support functionality across the organization while building a strong basis for outreach and funds development.<sup>204</sup> To effectively respond to an array of promotional and funding needs, the Corporation asked for regular updates from all local ministries on budgets, project needs, and funding goals.<sup>205</sup>

As volunteers traveled across the USA and shared news about PBM, the work and the need, it was essential to have strong talking points and stories about the impact of the work in the border region. The Corporation developed six broad focus areas to facilitate selective giving: evangelism, health, education, housing, childcare, and community development.<sup>206</sup> To challenge and encourage the local ministry's fund-raising efforts for the giving areas, the corporation promoted networking in the local communities,

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<sup>203</sup> "Minutes of the Border Ministry Corporation, First Presbyterian Church, San Diego, CA, November 10, 1987," *Presbyterian Border Ministry Corporation Minute Book*. (c. 1987), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>204</sup> "Presbyterian Border Ministries Corporation, minutes, May 4, 1990, San Antonio, Texas," *Presbyterian Border Ministry Corporation Minute Book*. (c. 1987), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>205</sup> "Minutes: Corporation, April 25-6, 1988."

<sup>206</sup> "Minutes: Corporation, April 25-6, 1988;" Details of the six focus areas: Evangelism: proclamation, church extension, community fellowship, church building; Health: sanitation, first aid, medical services, training; Education: literacy, health, nutrition, family counseling, job training; Housing: construction, financing; Child Care: day care, orphans, after-school tutoring; Community development: water, sewage, recreation.

suggesting the ministries reach out to local congregations, covenant with the Presbyteries, and establish relationships with local governments and community leaders.<sup>207</sup>

In 1989, the Corporation launched a fund-raising program, approved by the JMC, called *Amigos de la Frontera* (Friends of the Border), designed to form a coalition of Presbyterians (churches, small groups, and individuals) across the USA.<sup>208</sup> The *Somos Vecinos* newsletter introduced the plan of the new financial support arm to build the broad network of local fund-raising groups.<sup>209</sup> Nurtured by the Corporation, *Amigos* developed well-organized, aggressive outreach campaigns, and quickly established a strong network of skilled implementors to spread the word about PBM plans and needs.<sup>210</sup> The *Amigos* envisioned a growing organization and promoted lofty expansion plans for existing and future programming along the *México/USA* border.<sup>211</sup> However, within a few short years it became clear that the *Amigos* plan would not work as

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<sup>207</sup> “Minutes: Corporation, April 25-6, 1988.”

<sup>208</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministries Corporation, Executive Committee, Minutes, February 9, 1990,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Corporation Minute Book* (c. 1987), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Minutes of the Presbyterian Border Ministry, Inc. Pilgrim House, San Juan, Texas, October 27-28, 1992,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Corporation Minute Book* (c. 1987), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Minutes of the Presbyterian Border Ministry, Inc. Ramada Inn, San Antonio, Texas, November 8-9, 1993,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Corporation Minute Book* (c. 1987), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Minutes of the Presbyterian Border Ministry, Incorporated, Minutes, April 10-11, 1994, Chula Vista California,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Corporation Minute Book* (c. 1987), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>209</sup> Carl Siegenthaler announcement to Jerry, Helen, and Ernie, “Amigos de La Frontera de Austin: Affiliated with Presbyterian Border Ministries,” (January 24, 1991), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>210</sup> Amigo Roster, June 4, 1991, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>211</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry, Inc., Executive Committee Meeting, San Antonio, Texas, January 16, 1992,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Corporation Minute Book* (c. 1987), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Consider Becoming an Amigo,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Newsletter* (1989) 5, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.



expected. One analysis noted that while the idea was good and a network formed, the much-hoped-for cadre of nationwide volunteers “have other lives to lead and do not want a formal structure or do not use it to raise money.”<sup>212</sup> Specific requests and tasks consistently worked best because the volunteers could not stay energized about a general task to simply “raise money.” The recommendation, in 1992, was to utilize the network primarily for connecting with regional, small groups such as Mission Committees at local churches. These were the most effective points of contact for spreading the word about PBM work and soliciting funding for specific short-term needs.<sup>213</sup>

A second major source of funding for the PBM came from the many volunteers who traveled from across the USA to the southern border for short-term mission experiences. The binational mission team process for PBM began in the early years of border ministry at *Proyecto Verdad* in *Ciudad Juarez/El Paso*. Initially, the visiting groups from across the USA showed up with money and supplies, focused on building the structures and infrastructures of the ministry, but often remained disconnected from the people with whom they were serving. The Reverends Tijerina and Stacy explained, “Building something seemed to meet the groups’ needs to complete something which they could identify as a concrete response to their faith.”<sup>214</sup> However, it became evident to the PBM leadership that the border guests from the USA were missing an opportunity

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<sup>212</sup> Letter from Helen Fitzpatrick to Bob Battenfield (July 6, 1992), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>213</sup> Fitzpatrick to Battenfield, July 6, 1992.

<sup>214</sup> Saul Tijerina and Jerry Stacy, “*de Los Coordinadores*” *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (June/July 1992) 2, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

to connect with their Mexican counterparts, to gain a sense of binational partnership and sharing.

Often the early work groups left behind a negative cultural experience when their intent was to leave behind a positive gift of faith-based care. Construction needs and planning usually took place prior to the arrival of USA work teams. The participants, usually joined by their church communities, contributed to the building costs. Unfortunately, most work teams did not have the experience necessary for construction. The next chapter recounts some of the stories shared by interview subjects about *Norteamericanos/as* doing substandard construction work by day and the *Mexicanos* redoing the work by night. In addition, the language difference and economic disparity often were barriers too difficult to get through. While some visitors and locals were able to communicate despite the language challenge, many visitors failed to accept the economic differences in lifestyle and most failed to appreciate their Mexican colleagues as true partners.

Thomas offered a second concern, a lesson learned about international economics from the experience of mission construction. “I can’t tell you how many times we’d be working with a group of gringos on a project and an unemployed Mexican guy would walk by and ask, ‘can you hire me for the day to work?’ Well, I would explain these folks are all working as volunteers. No one here is being paid. If you’re willing to work under those conditions, you’re welcome to join us, but we don’t have any money to pay you. That was hard, very, very hard, knowing that this group of well-meaning US folks had come down and literally taken work away from an unemployed Mexican. We thought we were providing a service to our Mexican brothers and sisters. In reality, many times we

weren't. We were creating negative situations that we didn't even know we were creating."<sup>215</sup> Thomas added, "I stopped calling them mission teams [changed to delegations] in all our printed matter or newsletters because we were really trying to get away from so much focus on building things. ...we were in the construction business. We wanted to get out of that."<sup>216</sup>

When launching new sites, the ministry needed and valued the construction of sanctuaries, community centers, and homes. With limited resources, the ministries depended on USA churches and partners to complete the first structures foundational to the work in the border region. PBM quickly understood that the experiences for the visiting groups were neither theologically reflective nor appreciative of the opportunity for personal engagement with the Mexicans in the ministry community. PBM subsequently developed a comprehensive curriculum, "to help all groups see and understand the event in the broader context of God's plan..."<sup>217</sup> The PBM central office published and distributed literature for work study mission teams prior to their travel to the border region. Each new participant understood that PBM offered, not just a work experience but, an opportunity to participate in mutual mission with all its challenges, meanings, and engagements with unfamiliar places, cultures, and peoples. Faith put into action meant more than raising a hammer, using a shovel, or writing a check; it meant

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<sup>215</sup> Thomas discussion with author, 13.

<sup>216</sup> Thomas discussion with author, 13.

<sup>217</sup> "De Los Coordinadores: Saul Tijerina and Jerry Stacy," *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Nov/Dec 1992), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

experiencing, firsthand, the meaning of serving with Presbyterian brothers and sisters of a different place and culture.<sup>218</sup>

By 1992, approximately two-thousand people per year were visiting the border, attending study events, and participating in mission support activities. They shared in worship and community prayer studies, provided direct health services, enjoyed rolling out Vacation Bible School and recreational opportunities for children, and continued with construction as needed to expand the ministry's many services.<sup>219</sup> On behalf of the INPM, Reverends Tijerina and Stacy, PBM Executive Directors shared,

We want to be friends, brothers, sisters and partners in mission. We want to be a church that knows no borders, ambassadors for Christ in the world which our God has created. We would not want our visiting brothers and sisters to feel as if they were called to help the 'poor ignorant Mexicans' improve their living conditions. Your experience will be enriched if you leave all colonial or paternalistic thoughts behind. Don't bring clothing or items to give away. Rather, come with a desire to do something together with us. ...join forces as the church and demonstrate our unity in Christ.<sup>220</sup>

The ministry site directors utilized the curriculum and encouraged visitors to experience the border region opportunities of mutual mission. Daily schedules were a balance of physical labor, study and reflection, worship, and community engagement. To build respect, it was essential that people not only met but experienced each other's many gifts. It was not easy, as preconceived notions of the "other," along with the language barrier, required an openness to difference that felt uncomfortable. Mexicans in the border region learned that the visitors were not just wealthy do-gooders while the visitors

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<sup>218</sup> Saul Tijerina and Jerry Stacy, "*de Los Coordinadores*" (Nov/Dec 1992).

<sup>219</sup> Saul Tijerina and Jerry Stacy, "*de Los Coordinadores*" (June/July 1992), 2.

<sup>220</sup> Jerry Stacy and Saul Tijerina, "*de Los Coordinadores*" *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Feb/Mar 1994), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

confronted the harsh reality of the impact that their lifestyles had on their neighbors. When successful, the groups made connections and returned home to share stories of real people and new friendships while the Mexicans held memories of a faith-filled people (they would say “memories of brothers and sisters in Christ”).<sup>221</sup>

At mid-decade, the PBM experienced a dramatic drop in income and the leadership concluded that while they had developed some positive income sources, they needed new funding strategies to continue seeing growth of the evangelizing and serving programming. Initially, the Co-Coordinator committed considerable time reaching out to national funding sources outside the existing money streams. While expectations had been set that the new churches and ministries in the border region would move toward self-sufficiency, very quickly, it was evident that project personnel could not meet the challenge of local fundraising without cutting into demanding program time.<sup>222</sup>

Then, in 1996, the PCUSA General Assembly cut personnel budgets putting a real strain on the PBM. A partnership formed between PBM and the PCUSA World Mission Division which sought to find new funding sources for eighty percent of mission personnel cost with PBM committed to raising the additional twenty percent, an estimated \$100,000 within three years.<sup>223</sup> As funding sources from the denominations’ national levels lessened, it fell to the organization to strengthen and build its fund-raising

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<sup>221</sup> Jerry Stacy, Saul Tijerina, “De los Coordinadores,” *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (August/Sept 1993), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>222</sup> “Funding History of Presbyterian Border Ministry: 1986-1994,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Corporation Minute Book* (c. 1995), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>223</sup> “The Good News and the Bad News,” *Nuestra Frontera: The Newsletter of Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Spring 1996) 1, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

efforts. Local ministry attempts spottily advanced or declined depending on a variety of factors ranging from staff skills to volunteer support to regional situations outside the organization's control. For example, an increase in local violence primarily from drug trafficking and competition among the Mexican cartels, (notably, Juarez experienced years of horrific femicide) had changed the USA understanding of border region safety. Not surprisingly, the increase in violence in Mexican border towns slowed and in some cases ended interest and support from churches across the USA – a primary funding sources for the ministry sites.<sup>224</sup>

When the PBM Council met in April 2000 in *Piedras Negras, Coahuila*, the first order of business was a training session on fund-raising. They invited all staff and board members to attend. Across the denomination, in response to persistent decreases in income, church leaders at all levels initiated cutbacks to mission budgets. The PBM had to do the same and fund-raising training was a good first step. At that meeting, they revisited the issue of self-sustaining and self-supporting churches and ministries. The Council recommended each church establish a goal of eighty percent self-sufficiency with PBM committing to partnering with twenty percent of the support dollars. The meeting minutes noted, “This would insure a permanent relationship between the church and social ministry.”<sup>225</sup> Also, acknowledging the challenges of raising money through tithing and stewardship programming in churches situated in impoverished areas, the

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<sup>224</sup> Jerry Stacy cover memo to All Board/Project Leadership Teams re: Information/Action, December 7, 1990, “Comprehensive Five-Year Plan for Presbyterian Border Ministry, Inc.” prepared for the International Joint Commission, January 1990, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>225</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry Council Minutes, April 5-6, 2000,” 3.

Council offered a suggestion that new churches be planted in middle class neighborhoods on both sides of the border.<sup>226</sup> The tension between monetary realities and the human condition come into stark contrast with these two recommendations of the Council. The seeming interest in maintaining some level of programmatic control through monetizing the ministry and suggesting church planting occur away from the poor among us, in the interest of building sustainable structures seems counterintuitive to the mission of border ministry. This could be an early sign that the foundations for the PBM were beginning to crumble as its founding and visionary leadership retired out and the PCUSA and PBM could not meet the staffing obligations of earlier years.

In 1993, the PBM had launched its own alternative giving program during the winter holiday season – Matthew’s Market – with a catalog of items, some crafted at the ministry sites.<sup>227</sup> People could make individual purchases from the catalog or churches across the country would host holiday markets. In 2002, Matthew’s Market went online<sup>228</sup> and within a few years, the Presbyterian Border Gift Market (new name for same program) generated nearly \$23,000. The PBM distributed the money to each of the ministry sites supporting health and dental care, construction projects, nutrition programs, and projects of evangelism.<sup>229</sup> Just after starting the Matthew’s Market program, the

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<sup>226</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry Council Minutes April 5-6, 2000.”

<sup>227</sup> “Matthew’s Market,” *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (May/June 1993) 3, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>228</sup> “Matthew’s Market online!” *Nuestra Frontera (Our Border); The Newsletter of Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Spring 2002) 8, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>229</sup> “Border Gift Market,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry: 2005 Annual Report*, 3-4 Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Funds Development Committee Meeting, January 30, 2008,” *PBM Annual Meeting*, (February 2009) 11-13, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

PBM added a new fundraiser, the Memorial/In Honor, a gifting program. The program offered the opportunity to contribute in memory of a loved one.<sup>230</sup> Despite these extra efforts by the PBM Corporation and outreach of the PBM Directors, by 2006, contributions were down forty-three percent and PBM had only three months operating expenses left.<sup>231</sup>

### Looking Back – Looking Forward - Preparing for A New Century

The 1995 PCUSA Worldwide Ministries Division (WMD) reported on the border ministry, “Generally speaking, the participants agreed that the work of the two cultures enriches the vision of mission of both churches and facilitates the understanding of the Gospel. The programs address real spiritual, social and physical needs.”<sup>232</sup> The report also listed challenges that would need continued attention beginning with persistent confusion about theological terms and concepts between the two denominations, and the lines of organizational authority within the complexity of different denominational structures. There was agreement among participants that the program was “special” but there was no implementation of special organization patterns to meet the expectations of the programming. For example, with the growing interest by USA Presbyterians in border

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<sup>230</sup> “Express Your Love and Respect with A Memorial/In Honor Gift,” *Nuestra Frontera: The Newsletter of Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Summer 1995) 5, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>231</sup> “Financial Report,” (February 7-10, 2006) 7, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Minutes of Presbyterian Border Ministry Meeting, Tuesday, September 12, 2006,” 11, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>232</sup> “Worldwide Ministries Division Ecumenical Partnership; Report #30, Mexican/United States Border Ministry Evaluation,” Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.



region mission and despite efforts to the contrary, “in some instances [it] promoted paternalistic relationships, and dependency had been nurtured instead of attitudes of self-reliance.”<sup>233</sup> This was in direct conflict with the basic tenets of the “New Relations” covenant between the INPM and the PCUSA. All agreed, nevertheless, that despite a growing list of challenges, the binational, bi-denominational work in mission and witness at the *México*/USA border should continue. The report concluded with a recommendation that a representative from the Worldwide Ministries Division (WMD) should regularly participate in JMC and PBM Council meetings, an earlier commitment that, apparently, the PCUSA leadership had failed to sustain.<sup>234</sup>

By the end of the 1990s, the level of PBM personnel turnover became an important predictor of coming problems, which, for several of the ministry sites, was proving “fatal.” The loss of directors and staff on the border was a huge problem for the local ministries: the various board’s effectiveness suffered when the staff could not nurture their local relations and programming. One option the PBM proposed to the PCUSA WMD was an interim missionary position for existing site personnel as an alternative career track with an increase in salary.<sup>235</sup> PBM also sought a covenant with the WMD to prioritize a continuity of leadership personnel for each site. While the personnel stream was waning, WMD was working with PBM to take on a new employee program - Young Adult Volunteer (YAV). Implementing a YAV program required a

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<sup>233</sup> “Worldwide Ministries Division; Report #30.”

<sup>234</sup> “Worldwide Ministries Division; Report #30.”

<sup>235</sup> Jesus Juan Gonzalez and Gerald F. Stacy, “PBM Council Meeting, *Agua Prieta, Sonora* – April 2, 1988, Coordinators Report,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Council binder*, c. 1996, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

commitment on the part of the PBM and the individual ministries. While the YAV's provided staffing opportunity, the period of employment lasted a year, sometimes two, and was time and cost consuming, especially for an organization already strained with staffing challenges. The obvious values of the YAV program were the opportunity to train future leaders of the church and community so, in a show of support, in 1997, the border ministries received the first YAV for a year-long term. It was at that time that the USA church encouraged the INPM to develop a similar program for young adult Presbyterians from throughout *México*. It does not appear they did so.<sup>236</sup>

As PCUSA was decreasing in membership, PBM programming was growing. Like Christian denominations across the USA, membership in the Presbyterian church had been declining since the mid- to late-1960s.<sup>237</sup> Mission programming began to feel the impact of that decline beginning in the 1990s and into the new century. As the PBM and the work of the ministries captured the interest of the many Presbyterians, without the significant funding streams through and related to the PCUSA, PBM needed to be prudent with program expansion. In 1998, attendance to the Border Council meeting was strong from both denominations. The minutes suggested that despite the financial squeeze and the need to focus on managing existing programming, the attendees focused on new plans. Some of the planning tapped into the idea of launching a YAV program in *México* and developing a program to bring mission teams from Mexican churches to serve in the

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<sup>236</sup> "Border Ministry Council, Minutes, April 2-3, 1998," *Presbyterian Border Ministry Council binder*, c. 1996, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>237</sup> Jerry Van Marter, "PCUSA Membership Decline Continues But Slows," May 24, 2017, [www.PCUSA.org/news/2017/5/24/PUSA-membership-decline-continues-slows/](http://www.PCUSA.org/news/2017/5/24/PUSA-membership-decline-continues-slows/).

USA. While both plans were exciting and forward-thinking, they required personnel time the PBM did not have and launching new funding efforts in the USA, a challenge that was growing increasingly difficult to meet.<sup>238</sup>

In the context of rapid change, the extraordinary in-migration over the past decades complicated all aspects of life in the *México/USA* border region. Large numbers of people suffered from inadequate: food, shelter, health care, clean water, sanitation, employment, and education. The municipalities were unable to keep up with the growth and could not provide proper sewer systems, water treatment and supply, transportation and public health services and education opportunities. The situation grew more dire with each passing year.<sup>239</sup> The 1990 PBM Comprehensive Five-Year Plan stated, “Even the casual observer will discover that life on the border is particularly harsh on the poor. God responds to such injustice by calling the faithful to action. Border Ministry projects preach, teach, and heal in an attempt to be responsible before God.”<sup>240</sup> The Plan articulated four programmatic areas to work with - church development, community health, community education, and economic and community development - providing the ministries with a flexible breadth of opportunity to ally with the expectations of the denominations, to increase financial assistance, and to develop further the services most needed in their respective areas of the border region.<sup>241</sup> An analysis of the ministry sites

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<sup>238</sup> “Border Ministry Council, Minutes, April 2-3, 1998,” Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>239</sup> “Comprehensive Five-Year Plan for Presbyterian Border Ministry, Inc. prepared for the International Joint Commission, January 1990,” 3-5, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>240</sup> Comprehensive Five-Year Plan for Presbyterian Border Ministry, Inc. January 1990,” 5.

<sup>241</sup> “Comprehensive Five-Year Plan for Presbyterian Border Ministry, Inc. prepared for the International Joint Commission, January 1990,” 8-9; “Presbyterian Border Ministries Corporation, Minutes,

will reveal that very few would or could adhere to the Five-Year Plan but would proceed on their chosen programming-path and try to make it fit some of the Five-Year Plan when called on to report to the PBM and JMC.

After two and a half decades, the PBM met the dual objectives of the PBM *serviglesia* model, church development and social service, but the emphasis clearly rested with the social programming, suggesting that with time, the structural development of the organization favored the PCUSA trends in mission service and not the desires of the INPM for evangelism and church planting. While the PBM approved larger budgets for clinics, personnel, facilities, and equipment, the constructed churches (many erected by mission work teams from the USA) struggled and a few failed. It was incredibly difficult for mission churches, planted in marginal communities selected by the local programming, to grow a self-sustaining congregation amid the poverty. The lack of supervision, direction, and support by local Mexican presbyteries and assigned pastors bore a good deal of the responsibility for the lack of church progress. Missions that were up to ten years old had no plans to become churches, all were dependent on financial support from local boards of directors and the PBM. The PBM Executive Coordinators Gonzales and Stacy wrote, "It is clear that the establishment of organized churches is not a vital part of the agenda of the presbytery or of jurisdiction either in *México* or the US. The PBM Council and representatives from border presbyteries, included as priorities in their agendas the development of strong, self-sufficient churches on the border; and that

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October 19, 20, 1989, Laredo Texas," *Presbyterian Border Ministry Corporation Minute Book*. c. 1987, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

the Mexican presbyteries be intentional in enforcing applicable articles from the Book of Order to the development of churches within their jurisdiction.”<sup>242</sup>

Into the new decade, new century, and new millennium, the PCUSA World Mission Division pushed harder for all aspects of the ministry to become self-supporting and less dependent on outside funding streams. One challenge from the Border Council was that local boards needed to learn how to raise funds to grow their ministry; both networking and fund-raising was still a challenge despite years of work by the Executive Coordinators and the PBM Corporation.<sup>243</sup> Another important and persistent issue for the PBM was both the equitable comparison between Mexican and USA pastors in the border region and the question of income amounts for director’s salaries. With a nod to self-sufficiency, the PBM committed to covering the total salary of the pastors, to be appropriately set based on the cost of living for each location, for three years. The PBM commitment was to diminish its portion of the salary payout by twenty percent each subsequent year.

As the year 2000 approached, the PBM seemed to be on shaky footing yet, at the local level the passion for the binational work remained strong. The interaction with border region peoples fueled the border ministries in their daily work. Miriam Maldonado, Co-Mission Worker at Frontera de Cristo, and a fourth-generation Presbyterian, recalled her journey north from the state of Chiapas a decade earlier. She

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<sup>242</sup> Jesus Juan Gonzales, INPM and Gerald F. Stacy, PCUSA, “Development of the Border Church,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Council binder*, (December 1997/January 1998), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>243</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry Council, Minutes of the Meeting, April 5-6, 2000, Piedras Negras, Coahuila,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Council binder* (c. 1996), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

arrived in *Agua Prieta*, having left a budding career as a teacher to join her father and work in a maquiladora to support the family. She was afraid and sad but her welcome at Lily of the Valley Presbyterian church lifted her. “I arrived to someone with open arms waiting for me. I received open arms, I received love. The church understood that I was far from my home, my church, my family, my mother, my siblings... I felt the love of my mother in their hugs. I felt the love of God.”<sup>244</sup> Miriam’s story is like so many who experienced the challenges of leaving home and living in the border region – but, for Miriam, she found a church, a place where they offered compassion and support. Ultimately, Miriam became part of the ministry – where once she received love, she also gave love.

By 1990, the Presbyterian Border Ministry had five ministry sites that reached from *Reynosa, Tamaulipas/McAllen, Texas* to *Tijuana, Baja California/San Diego, California: Puentes de Cristo, Proyecto Amistad, Laredos Unidos, Frontera de Cristo,* and *Pueblos Hermanos*. Project *Vida* (formerly *Proyecto Verdad*) left the PBM in 1989, but remained active and vital in El Paso, serving many of the lower income, predominately Hispanic barrios.

The next three chapters cover the history of each site and further elucidate the collective work of the ministry and the individuals that staffed it.<sup>245</sup> Again, using records of the organization, along with interviews from many of the faith-workers, the chapters

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<sup>244</sup> Maldonado discussion with author, 9.

<sup>245</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministries Corporation, Minutes, October 19, 20, 1989, Laredo Texas,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Corporation Minute Book* (c. 1987), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection. Noted earlier in the text, the binational border ministry had severed ties with Project *Vida* (formerly *Proyecto Verdad*) in 1989.

look deeper into the work, the challenges, the success and failures, and the networking of the border ministries. Interviews include both Mexican and USA staff, volunteers, and partners. One mantra of the PBM reads, “In the kingdom of God there are no boundaries, so as called servants of the Kingdom we dare not allow borders to divide our mission efforts.”<sup>246</sup> In proximity to the dividing line that separated nations, the PBM ministries found opportunities to unite.

The heart of the Presbyterian Border Ministry (PBM) is in the decades of local, binational engagement by eight mission programs at seven twin-city sites along the *México*/USA border. The next three chapters provide the history of the varied programs where relationships formed around the concepts of binational sharing, building, compassion, inclusion, service, and justice in the name of faith. Each site bore a title that reflected its place and its mission while they grappled with both the minutiae of the day and the greatest of international and economic questions. The staff and volunteers, from *México* and the USA, collectively defined each site, through their work and by what they represented – knowledge, experience, and expertise about all things ‘border region.’

<b>PBM/PBRO Ministry</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Founding Date</b>
<i>Proyecto Verdad</i>	<i>Juárez, Chihuahua/El Paso, TX</i>	1973
<i>Puentes de Cristo</i>	<i>Reynosa, Tamaulipas/ McAllen, TX</i>	1980
<i>Frontera de Cristo</i>	<i>Agua Prieta, Sonora/ Douglas, AZ</i>	1984
<i>Pueblos Hermanos</i>	<i>Tijuana, Baja California/ San Diego, CA</i>	1984
<i>Proyecto Amistad</i>	<i>Piedras Negras, Coahuila/Eagle Pass, TX</i>	1985 (orig)
<i>Laredos Unidos</i>	<i>Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas/ Laredo, TX</i>	1988

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<sup>246</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry: An Historical Sketch,” 6.

<i>Companeros en Misión</i>	<i>Nogales, Sonora/</i> Nogales, AZ	1993
<i>Pasos de Fe</i>	<i>Juárez, Chihuahua/</i> El Paso, TX	1998

The historical analysis captures the breadth of their engagement in the border region both as individual histories of the ministry sites and as the collective story of the PBM. The embrace of the *serviglesia* model (described in Chapter Two) straddled the differences between the denominations and provided a stable foundation for building a binational ministry. The ministries focused on evangelizing, building churches, and responding to the local needs of both the area communities and the migrant populations. Collectively, the history of the binational ministry sites, through their successes and failures, provides an important and valuable perspective on binational and bi-cultural relationship – a perspective that transcends divisive politics, economics, and socially-driven othering of peoples.

There are common threads that move through the histories of the individual ministry sites. Over an approximate forty-year span of time, they demonstrated flexibility and an openness to listening and learning from each other and the people they served. They built churches, responded to desperate, immediate needs, and tried to lay the groundwork for sustainable support and individual self-reliance. Comparatively, some of the sites flourished, some settled into a sort of comfortable stasis, and others faced closure.

The site histories are about the visions and actions of binational people who came together on landscapes that showed a lot of the ugly side of national differences, the injustices of economic disparity, and clear cultural distinctions. Amid divisiveness and



difference, to be successful in the work of the PBM they developed a cooperative atmosphere. Each ministry site faced its own internal challenges, discovering along the way the value of learning about and embracing cultural diversity, and the importance of collective, supportive action. The experiences of the PBM mission sites along the *México/USA* border have a lot to teach as they led the way into a new paradigm of missional programming. Their work and their stories, the successes, and failures, join a few, similar faith-based efforts as scholars continue to sort through the complexities of religious engagement, the *México/USA* border region, and the juxtaposition of two nations and cultures.

## CHAPTER 4

### ESTABLISHING MINISTRY SITES

#### REYNOSA TO JUAREZ (MCALLEN TO EL PASO)

Five of the Presbyterian ministry sites span eight-hundred miles and almost five decades of binational missional work on the *México/USA* border region. Two of the ministries, *Proyecto Verdad* and *Puentes de Cristo*, launched before the JMC officially started the Presbyterian Border Ministry. Two of the sites, *Proyecto Amistad* and *Laredos Unidos*, formed separately by three years and approximately one hundred miles. They unified in circa 2005 to form *Proyecto Amistad* in *Laredos Unidos*. Another significant shift in the PBM occurred in 1989 when *Proyecto Verdad* and the organization severed ties. Almost a decade later, a new binational border ministry emerged, *Pasos de Fe*.

This history of the five sites covers the decades of church development, community programming, regional networking, and the interaction with mission work teams and mission delegations. *Proyecto Verdad* established the general ministry format for engagement, growth, and outreach and trained the later ministries. From the outset, the missionaries, pastors, and volunteers embraced the two primary responsibilities set forth by the denominations and the JMC, church construction and evangelism, and service and support to the areas they served. Early leaders designated the new model as *serviglesia*, an appropriate term that represented the dual responsibilities of each ministry site, service (*servicio*) plus church (*iglesia*).

The history of these five sites begins with a look at *Proyecto Verdad*, the first established ministry site in *Juárez/El Paso*. Also, this chapter bundles three sites, *Puentes de Cristo*, *Proyecto Amistad*, and *Laredos Unidos*, due to their geographic and historic

proximity. *Pasos de Fe* was the last ministry site to be established under the PBM, located in Juárez/El Paso as a second beginning to binational Presbyterian ministry in the twin city.

### *Proyecto Verdad / Project Vida*

The 1960s and 1970s was a time of tremendous change for Protestantism in the USA. Surrounded by cultural upheaval and the ever-increasing flow of social awareness (growing out of the student activism, anti-Viet Nam war, the War on Poverty, and movements for the environment, women's rights, gay rights, civil rights, Chicano rights, American Indian rights, and more) faith communities were struggling with how to respond. In the USA, responses to the turmoil and the growing global challenges to Christian mission work resulted in new perspectives and sweeping changes in the how and what of missionary engagement.

The theological shifting and swaying of the time had a direct impact on the relational conflicts faced by *México* and USA Presbyterian denominations. Through the 1960s, the Commission on Ecumenical Relations (COEMAR), formed under the United Presbyterian Church USA (UPCUSA), sponsored multiple studies on global mission work which included a look at USA and Mexican Presbyterian relations.<sup>247</sup> The study team, comprised of international participants, used the research to conceptualize new opportunities for advancing the mission work of the church including developing

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<sup>247</sup> A merger in 1958 of the PCUSA and the UPCNA (forming the United Presbyterian Church in the USA or UPCUSA) led to formation of the Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations (COEMAR) to replace the Board of Foreign Missions. The Program Agency replaced COEMAR in 1972, when a denominational reorganization occurred.

protocols for binational ministry. In 1973, the El Paso Herald-Post quoted the Reverend Dr. Jack H. Boelens, “We no longer think of missions as ‘putting pants on the savages,’ to put it vulgarly... this is a ministry aimed at self-development of people—there is to be no more paternalism; deciding for others what it is they need, and giving it to them, whether they want it or not.”<sup>248</sup>

As is often the case when times are challenging, people and organizations seem more amenable to change and, in this case, the denominations considered new and innovative ideas in binational mission services. Subsequently, in partnership with *la Iglesia Nacional Presbiteriana de México* (INPM), COEMAR launched the first binational mission project—*Proyecto Verdad*.<sup>249</sup> The newly formed Synod of the Sun, comprised of Presbyterian congregations in Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Louisiana, approved the plan. Their proposal was to hire two directors, one from the INPM and the other UPCUSA, to work as a team in the twin border cities of *Cd. Juárez, Chihuahua* and El Paso, Texas.<sup>250</sup> The Presbyterian leadership charged the local binational ministry team with “defining, exposing and aiding in solving problems of the peoples of El Paso and *Ciudad Juárez*.”<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Betty Pierce, “Theological Questions of ’73 Concern Responsibility to God, Justice for Man,” *El Paso Herald-Post*. (El Paso, Texas: February 10, 1973) 3. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/11095542>, April 25, 2020.

<sup>249</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry: An Historical Sketch,” 8.

<sup>250</sup> “Presbyterian Synod Approves ‘Project Verdad,’” *El Paso Herald-Post*. El Paso, TX; March 10, 1973, 3. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/68911826>.

<sup>251</sup> “Synod Favors Joint Ministry with Mexico,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; March 7, 1973, p. 10. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/453866579>, April 26, 2020.

The official founding of *Proyecto Verdad* occurred in 1975, after the Mexican Presbyterian General Assembly declared a moratorium and requested all USA missionaries leave the *México*. *Proyecto Verdad* was a small step toward resolving the tensions that existed between the two denominations. Pastor William Schlesinger, Co-Coordinator, *Proyecto Verdad* shared, “Apparently, there had been some conflict over missionaries running programs and who controlled the money including the difference in salaries and economic resources between missionaries and local pastors.”<sup>252</sup> Schlesinger’s recollection was not wrong but, the situation was much more complex. Many problems were rooted in the realities of binational relationships at the border including economic disparity, unjust political and legal practices, cross-border travel, and persistent cultural misconceptions and ignorance that gave rise to mutual distrust.<sup>253</sup> While the two national Presbyterian denominations grappled with such challenges inherent in the binational, bi-cultural arena, this first step in mending division was a heavy burden for the small border ministry to bear.

The Mexican denomination, with its strong evangelical thrust, expected the new northern ministry to grow through the establishment of churches and the saving of souls; at the time, there were no Presbyterian churches in *Juárez*. Priorities for USA Presbyterians were different. While they certainly agreed with the importance of planting churches and evangelical outreach, their focus of mission ministry emphasized compassionate service, addressing the needs of those experiencing the ills of extreme

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<sup>252</sup> William Schlesinger discussion with author, (El Paso, Texas: Project *Vida* office, January 20, 2020) 6.

<sup>253</sup> “Synod Favors Joint Ministry with Mexico,” *The Daily Oklahoman*.

poverty. *Ciudad Juárez* and some El Paso *colonias* were suffering dire circumstances. The challenge for the new ministry was figuring out how to respond to the bifurcated expectations of the denominations.

When Pastors William and Carol Schlesinger arrived in El Paso in 1980, they joined Pastor Baltazar and María Theresa Gonzalez as Mission Co-workers and project Co-Coordinators, filling in a spot vacated by a prior USA Co-Coordinator. Schlesinger recounted those earliest days, “So, the moratorium happened and the first step towards resolving the moratorium was to open *Proyecto Verdad*. It was supposed to be ‘Project Truth,’ to tell the truth about the border. The structure called for a USA and a Mexican Co-director to have equal salaries and equal responsibilities. Baltazar Gonzalez focused on something that he called *serviglesias* (serving churches). He was developing community oriented, boots-on-the-ground ministry programs in *Juárez*.”<sup>254</sup> Baltazar was also laying the groundwork for new church development. The early success in *Juárez* – a combination of offering the gospel word, forming religious community, and providing for social needs – resonated with the INPM and the northern Mexican Presbytery leadership and they sent more pastors to the northern region. In the USA, the response to the many social needs in the twin-cities arrived in the form of volunteers, supplies, and money, channeled through the USA Presbyterian connections.

Gonzalez and his colleagues had time to build on the innovative model of service and church in the context of one of the more blended twin-city environments. Dating back to the seventeenth century, the settlement that became *Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua*

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<sup>254</sup> Schlesinger discussion with author, 6.

and El Paso, Texas shared a history and culture where families and friends lived and moved freely through the space now divided by a national barricade. It made perfect sense that the new border ministry could work effectively in the blended city with centuries of binational, bi-cultural experience. The reunification of denominations and formation of a binational mission structure, the JMC, comprised of bi-denominational officials, affirmed that new church construction would accompany any social services programming. Gonzalez and Schlesinger's *Proyecto Verdad* "expanded new church development, and launched community health services, economic development, kindergarten nutrition programs, and more during the 1980's."<sup>255</sup>

As border region Presbyterians developed local programming, the two national denominations continued to strengthen binational relations while building an oversight structure with national level participation. Along with the JMC, Dr. Saul Tijerina, INPM Stated Clerk, was the key lead in establishing the team known as the Committee of Churches, to directly deal with local issues in the *Juárez/El Paso* area. The head of UPCUSA Global Mission, Latin America, and Caribbean, Ben Gutierrez, attended the Committee of Churches meetings.

All this had occurred by 1980 and the Schlesingers' arrival. Unfortunately, their hiring created a small schism within the UPCUSA where top-down management brushed up against local control. Schlesinger recounted, "When we were hired, part of the problem was that the local committee hired us before Ben [Gutierrez] approved it and that was one of the reasons that the PCUS began to pull back financially. They said we'll

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<sup>255</sup> "Presbyterian Border Ministry: An Historical Sketch," 8.

give you a year, but you've hired somebody who is essentially a mission worker without us approving it-- we're going to give you a year of funding and then we're going to pull back on the US side. Tres Rios Presbytery at the time was flush with cash. They just covered it.”<sup>256</sup>

The Schlesingers brought strong skills in community development, expertise the Tres Rios hiring committee hoped would build on the earlier years of advocacy work established by the *Proyecto Verdad* predecessor. Schlesinger shared the job description they agreed to, “The initial charge to us was to begin to develop things there.”<sup>257</sup> They immediately set to work, operating out of their home in El Paso.<sup>258</sup> Joining with the Gonzalez’ and the ministries in *Juárez*, they initiated visitations in the poorer, predominately Hispanic *colonias* located primarily on the east side of El Paso. They began the El Paso work by walking the community and talking with the residents about local concerns and needs. The first community they worked with, Sparks, had dirt roads which connected small concrete block houses, constructed piecemeal as time and money permitted. While surveying the community, the Schlesingers learned that residential electrification numbered among their highest priorities. While residents had telephone service, they depended on car batteries and gasoline heaters for their electrical needs. The cost for bringing power into Sparks was prohibitive but, with a combination of facilitated negotiation and outreach by the Schlesingers, and collective action by the community,

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<sup>256</sup> Schlesinger discussion with author, 6.

<sup>257</sup> Schlesinger discussion with author, 6.

<sup>258</sup> Schlesinger discussion with author, 16.



within a year Sparks received electricity. As the work of *Proyecto Verdad* extended into other El Paso *colonias*, and in keeping with the *serviglesia* model, the ministry established new churches along with medical services, adult classes, after school programs, and other requested needs of the neighborhoods.<sup>259</sup> The ministry recruited pastors from *Juárez* to serve the new, predominately Spanish-speaking churches.

Another particularly successful talent the Schlesingers brought to their work in the border region was their skill at engaging not only area Presbyterians and other serving denominations but, a broad range of secular support services and funding sources. They drew on medical personnel from universities and regional hospitals, applied for and received municipal grants for local schools, and established health clinic partnerships with Kellogg Foundation grants, among others. In talking about the workload, Schlesinger shared,

“Carol and I worked on some ministry projects on the US side but a lot of it (the ministry responsibilities) had to do with bringing work groups and people into *México* showing them what was available and bringing resources into *México*. They would be building buildings, laying block, doing stuff with neighborhood kids, painting walls, fixing toilets, that sort of stuff. They did actual things that were helpful but really, the reason we were doing it was to give people a sense of what the border was and what it looked like and what it smelled like. Anglos are very task oriented and if you give them something to do, they’ll do it but, if you ask them to come down and look at it, they won’t. The way you get them to come down and look at it, you ask them to do something.”<sup>260</sup>

During the group visits, the Schlesingers and Balthazar Gonzalez offered orientation, education, presentations, and led reflections and prayer times. Schlesinger recounted,

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<sup>259</sup> Schlesinger discussion with author, 5-10.

<sup>260</sup> Schlesinger discussion with author, 17.

“Balthazar was good with receiving visitors. His English was clear, his stories winsome, his presentation convincing. A very charismatic guy. He played the guitar. He sang. He was very attractive in his presentation.”<sup>261</sup>

Well into the 1980s, *Proyecto Verdad* grew in the number of churches in both cities, the provision of community and social services, and a successful, short-term mission program that reached across the USA to engage a wide variety of mission teams. Schlesinger recounted,

About that time, there was some dissent on the Mexican side between what had become a growing number of Mexican pastors who came to us and said that they were uncomfortable with the way in which some of the resources were being used. They then went to the Tres Rios Presbytery Executive from the US side. By this time, the national church on the USA side had devolved all responsibility from maintaining Project *Verdad* to the Presbytery and so it was the Presbytery with some support from the Synod of the Sun that was handling the US side commitment of, I think it was fifty or sixty thousand dollars a year.<sup>262</sup>

Validating the concerns of the Mexican pastors, Tres Rios called together the Committee of the Churches (comprised of national-level Mexican leadership from the INPM and Tres Rios leadership). The Committee determined that the best course of action was to separate responsibilities, placing all programming with Gonzalez and all finance responsibilities with the Schlesingers. The new financial protocols, built on North American models, meant changes to the business-as-usual processes that had been employed for more than a decade. The effort to resolve conflict opened old wounds and pushed the binational ministry into an untenable situation.

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<sup>261</sup> Schlesinger discussion with author, 18.

<sup>262</sup> Schlesinger discussion with author, 8.

At the heart of the friction seems to lie with the expectation by the Schlesingers, responsible for managing the books, for total transparency in all fiscal matters which included the requirement that all refunds requests required documentation of proof of purchase. The Mexican pastors and project directors responded with renewed frustration and resentment.<sup>263</sup> Schlesinger recounted, “It was trust us. Give us the money and trust us.”<sup>264</sup> This was in part due to hard held memories of missionary control over all aspects of the church but, perhaps equally important to the Mexican clergy, the trust factor really mattered culturally. For more than a decade, the ministry had an established process for reimbursement and salary. Though the change in financial policy meant full transparency to the USA contingent, for the *México* contingent it reasserted monetary privilege and power on the part of USA ministry leadership and spoke volumes about a relationship that demonstrated little respect.

The *serviglesias* in *Ciudad Juárez* represented the first Presbyterian presence in over one-hundred years. Under the new binational ministry, *serviglesia* pastors received salaries that were higher than Presbyterian pastors in the Mexican interior (though not the equivalent of USA pastors in El Paso). Ironically, while the leadership initially sought equity in pay between the USA and Mexican clergy, the salaries created a separate set of problems—one that resulted in an internal rift between north and south that fed off existing cultural tensions between regions. Culturally, central, and southern *México* considered northern *México* as the country’s frontier, while they remained the civilized

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<sup>263</sup> Schlesinger discussion with author, 9.

<sup>264</sup> Schlesinger discussion with author, 13.

*México*. Conversely, the north, particularly Catholic northerners, often considered themselves the more modern while the southerners as more traditional.<sup>265</sup>

Schlesinger offered more thoughts on the cross-cultural challenge of running a binational ministry:

Underneath the tension with that situation was the really different perspective that the primary responsibility of the church, in the Mexican church's mind, was that people are taken out of the culture that is not Christian, that's Catholic, and brought into a Christian culture. You do community services and outreach and activities to show people a better way and bring them into the fold and that is what *serviglesia* is for. On the US side, we were into self-development of people. We were into the poor and gospel to the poor and that people need to direct themselves and come to a sense of fullness of their own humanity and it's the church's responsibility to God for the world that you bring people into self-direction. Those are two very different visions of mission. They had been cobbled together by, from my perspective, Mexican leadership saying to US donors what they believed US donors wanted to hear because they knew that if they owned their own commitment, they would risk funding from the US. I don't know if that was true or not but that was the perception.<sup>266</sup>

A 1988 memo to PCUSA Global Mission mentioned changes to job descriptions for *Proyecto Verdad* Co-Coordinator and the subsequent termination of Baltazar and María Teresa Gonzalez for financial reasons. The Mexican presbytery objected to the unilateral action and raised the concern to the JMC. A representative group from the Joint Commission were to meet with the *Proyecto Verdad* board seeking additional information.<sup>267</sup> The church leadership in *México* provided a new staff person who wanted money placed back under his control, contrary to the policy laid out by the Committee of

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<sup>265</sup> Pablo Vila, *Border Identifications*. 59.

<sup>266</sup> Schlesinger discussion with author, 13.

<sup>267</sup> Dave Young memo to Howard Salzman and David Sholin (March 3, 1989), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

the Churches. The imbroglio persisted and all efforts to find mutually acceptable solutions failed. With little to no hope of an eventual resolution, the binational leadership terminated *Proyecto Verdad* as a binational border ministry in October 1989.<sup>268</sup> Around that same time, *Proyecto Verdad* had incorporated in the USA. The Synod of the Sun and the Tres Rios Presbytery determined the ministry in El Paso alone was a valuable mission concern and instructed the Schlesingers to continue but to focus only on the USA side. Schlesinger recalled, “We had a retreat where we sat down, looked at the whole thing and they said do it on the US side. We did and then a couple months after that we were asked by the national church on the US side to change our name, so we changed it from Project *Verdad* to Project *Vida* (Life).”<sup>269</sup>

Recollections of what occurred to end *Proyecto Verdad* were conflicting. However, the *serviglesia* model and the training offered to the PBM start-up ministry sites by the Gonzalez’ and the Schlesingers set the course for the binational Presbyterian Border Ministry. The early successes in El Paso/*Juárez* had encouraged the two denominations and the JMC to locate other border communities suitable for launching additional binational ministries. Schlesinger stated, “El Paso was the model, and we had several conferences where Baltazar, María, Carol and I would meet together with the new teams and introduce them to how we develop *serviglesia* models.”<sup>270</sup> Mexican missionaries were prepared for service in *Tijuana, Baja California; Agua Prieta, Sonora;*

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<sup>268</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry: An Historical Sketch,” 8.

<sup>269</sup> Schlesinger discussion with author, 9.

<sup>270</sup> Schlesinger discussion with author, 11.

and *Reynosa, Tamaulipas* with specific expectations to plant Presbyterian churches at each site.

Three Ministries: *Puentes de Cristo, Proyecto Amistad, Laredos Unidos*

Interest in binational ministry spread and Presbyterians established three additional ministry sites along the *México/USA* border: *Puentes de Cristo* (Bridges for Christ) in 1980, *Proyecto Amistad* (Project Friendship) in 1985, and *Laredos Unidos* (United Laredos) in 1988. The region the ministries served extended from *Piedras Negras, Coahuila/Eagle Pass, Texas* to *Matamoros, Tamaulipas/ Brownsville, Texas*; an approximate two-hundred-seventy-five-mile reach along the Rio Grande. The Rio Grande Valley watershed comprised the southern-most one hundred miles, ending at the Gulf of *México*.<sup>271</sup>

All the twin-cities where the three border ministry sites located have deep roots in the border region culture shared by Mexicans and Texans. The earliest European settlers transformed this reach of land to a colonial frontier that eventually became a transnational borderlands space. The first explorers arrived from Spain in the 1680s and traveled by ship along the Gulf of Mexico coast, landing around *Matamoros, Tamaulipas*. In the eighteenth century, Spanish land grants (large cattle ranches) and Catholic missions dotted the region, from *Matamoros/Brownsville* to *Nuevo Laredo/Laredo*.

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<sup>271</sup> “Coahuiltecan, Brief Overview,” <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coahuiltecan>. Accessed March 11, 2021.

A group of families established the town *Reynosa, Tamaulipas* in 1749.<sup>272</sup> Its twin-city, McAllen, like so many early USA western towns, located adjacent to the site of a future train depot (funded by local rancher John McAllen) in 1904. The second location, *los dos Laredos* (the two Laredos) began as a single settlement in 1755 but divided in 1848 with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Seventeen Mexican families founded *Nuevo Laredo* that year, choosing to remain in their country.<sup>273</sup> The third location, the twin cities of *Piedras Negras/Eagle Pass* share a different history from the other two border sites. Eagle Pass was the first Texas settlement on the Rio Grande, originally a temporary outpost for the Texas militia with establishment of Fort Duncan in 1849. A year later the Mexican military located an outpost near the fort - *Nueva Villa de Herrera*, later *Villa de Piedras Negras*.<sup>274</sup>

In 1981, prior to formation of the PBM, the INPM and the Mission Presbytery in Texas collaborated to establish the border ministry of *Puentes de Cristo* and located the new ministry in the twin-cities of *Reynosa/McAllen*. The idea for launching this new binational border program started at First Presbyterian Church in McAllen and support quickly grew with other Rio Grande Valley churches and pastors.<sup>275</sup> Using the *serviglesia* model, *Puentes de Cristo* immediately redeveloped three existing congregations and three

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<sup>272</sup> “McAllen, Texas, history,” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/McAllen,\\_Texas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/McAllen,_Texas); Moises Garza, “Early Settlers of Reynosa: Carlos Cantu and María Gertrudis Cavazos,” Las Villas del Norte family website, <https://lasvillasdelnorte.com/>.

<sup>273</sup> “Nuevo Laredo, History,” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuevo\\_Laredo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuevo_Laredo).

<sup>274</sup> “Eagle Pass, Texas, History,” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eagle\\_Pass,\\_Texas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eagle_Pass,_Texas).

<sup>275</sup> In this context, “Valley” refers to the Rio Grande Valley, a floodplain located in the southernmost tip of Texas and a portion of northern Tamaulipas. “Presbyterian Border Ministry: An Historical Sketch,” 4.

new *serviglesias*. Under the leadership of two area locals, Fidel García as Director with Deantin Guerra as Office Administrator, the new collaborative venture started with a two-pronged focus on evangelism and education.<sup>276</sup>

By 1984, *Puentes de Cristo* had expanded its outreach geographically both up the Rio Grande Valley and down river to the Gulf of Mexico; the offices remained in McAllen. The expanding focus included a health ministry, vocational education for adults, and community development. An early project in a nearby smaller town, *Empalme, Tamaulipas*, southeast of *Reynosa*, *Puentes de Cristo* joined with the community and the town to rehabilitate the local water treatment plant to ensure potable water for the fifteen-thousand residents.<sup>277</sup>

In 1988, García shared some of the realities of poverty he witnessed in a letter sent to ministry donors. He wrote of water delivery that arrived in trucks, water the truckers pumped, unfiltered, directly from the Rio Grande. The contaminated water resulted in a variety of health problems, most tragically, diarrhea in infants and children, which, at the time, was the leading cause of infant mortality. The situation affected children in other ways as they suffered IQ losses of as much as twenty points from malnutrition. Almost eighty percent of children tested suffered severe health problems associated with inner ear and throat infections that affected speech and hearing. In response, the ministry applied the donations and annual income support directly to

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<sup>276</sup> Presbyterian Border Ministry: INPM and PCUSA, “Puentes de Cristo: (Bridges for Christ)” *Newsletter* (1985). Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>277</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry: An Historical Sketch,” 4.



address the ever-growing results of extreme poverty at the eight small Presbyterian churches located in some of the poorest neighborhoods around *Reynosa*.<sup>278</sup>

Within a few years of its founding, *Puentes de Cristo* had moved under the umbrella of PBM. The ministry approved its bylaws in 1987, reiterating their dedication to serving people “in and around” the two border Presbyteries, Mission (PCUSA) and Tamaulipas (INPM). There were six INPM pastors serving seven congregations in the area, and each church offered weekly health clinics, and two supplemental food programs.<sup>279</sup> *Puentes de Cristo* had extended its mission reach southeast toward *Matamoros/Brownsville* and northwest to *Nuevo Laredo/Laredo*. In 1994, *Puentes de Cristo* purchased a former Baptist church in Hidalgo, Texas, (sandwiched between McAllen and the border, near the north end of the Reynosa bridge) to function as its central office.

In *Reynosa*, the *Puentes de Cristo* construction program with visiting mission work groups focused, initially, on individual houses but it quickly expanded to construction of chapels, multipurpose buildings, and a dormitory (completed in 1996 in *Colonia Cumbres*) to house joint work groups from the USA and *México*.<sup>280</sup> The planners

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<sup>278</sup> Fidel P. García, Executive Director, *Puentes de Cristo* to “Dear Friends of Puentes de Cristo,” August 28, 1988, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “They are tearing down walls and building bridges: A visitors report about Border Ministry’s Puentes de Cristo project,” *Nuestra Frontera: The Newsletter of Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Spring 2002) 3-4. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>279</sup> Presbyterian Border Ministry, “*Puentes de Cristo: (Reynosa, Mexico/McAllen, Texas)*” *Newsletter* (c. 1989), 5, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Project Highlights: *Puentes de Cristo* (Bridges for Christ),” *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (June/July 1992), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>280</sup> “Doors Swinging Open at Puentes de Cristo,” *Nuestra Frontera*, 2.

designed the dormitory to enhance intercultural exchange. One college age volunteer, part of a visiting global issues class from Schreiner Presbyterian College, shared thoughts following his time at the border: “How can I begin to take in the full impact of their everyday lives when I will probably never have to do that? I don’t think I can feel it completely. I would give up hope and that’s the main word, HOPE!”<sup>281</sup>

A year later, the newly established JMC collaborated with the *Presbiterio de Norese* (INPM), and Mission Presbytery (PCUSA) to explore the possibility of a new border ministry in *Piedras Negras*, across the border from Eagle Pass. At the time, *Piedras Negras* had a population of one hundred and twenty thousand; it was an industrial center with several maquiladoras.<sup>282</sup> After the leadership selected the site, volunteers Reverend Jesus (Jesse) Gonzalez and Bertha Gonzalez in *Piedras Negras* worked with Homer and Sue Spencer in Eagle Pass and three other families in the area to launch the new ministry-*Proyecto Amistad*.<sup>283</sup> The new Presbyterian church in *Piedras Negras*, *Uno en El Espíritu* (One in the Spirit), grew quickly. In 1988, *Proyecto Amistad* purchased a manse for González and invested in land across the street from the church for the future Amistad Presbyterian Center which, first, supported a medical clinic. Later,

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<sup>281</sup> Project Highlights: Puentes de Cristo (Bridges for Christ),” *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (May/June 1993), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>282</sup> The black rock, referenced in its name, referred to the large coal deposits in the area; coal mining operations south of town supported coal-fired power production in Mexico.

<sup>283</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry: An Historical Sketch,” 4; “Project Highlights: Amistad (Friendship),” *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (June/July 1992). Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

volunteers constructed a new wing on the Center to house education classes for all ages: they completed the addition by the mid-1990s.<sup>284</sup>

Reverend Dr. John Nelsen, University Presbyterian Church El Paso and Chair of the PBM Board of Directors shared his journey from annual work experiences with *Proyecto Amistad* to eventually living, working, and serving in the border region. While pastor in Sapulpa, Oklahoma, the church visited *Proyecto Amistad* in *Piedras Negras* annually for more than fifteen years. He described their trips as, “a stereotypical average trip,” with fifteen people, mostly adults. The teams participated in a variety of construction projects, bible studies, and children’s programs at three separate locations supported by *Proyecto Amistad: Piedras Negras, Acuña, Coahuila* sixty miles farther upriver, and inland one-hundred-fifty miles to *Castaños, Coahuila*. Increasingly, the mission teams walked side-by-side with the Mexican locals. “The first few years we just went to restaurants or brought food in but eating in people’s homes really was significant. We developed relationships....” When the time and opportunity arrived, Nelsen was pleased to accept a call at the “very mission oriented” University Church in El Paso. Nelsen had returned to the border region where he, again, reengaged in relationship with Mexican brothers and sisters in faith.<sup>285</sup>

The staff and volunteers out of Reynosa/McAllen traveled a great distance down the Rio Grande to serve in Nuevo Laredo. The distance and amount of travel time became problematic, and the ministry turned to the JMC with a request for a new

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<sup>284</sup> “Project Highlights – Amistad (Friendship),” *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Feb/Mar 1994), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>285</sup> John Nelsen discussion with author, 2-4.

ministry site to be located there. Three Presbyterian churches in the twin cities *Nuevo Laredo/Laredo* supported the effort and, following a socioeconomic study of the area, the JMC approved the new project, dubbed *Laredos Unidos* (Laredos United) in November 1988. A Presbyterian Volunteer in Mission (VIM), Ms. Cema Powell, took on leadership for the new ministry focused on new church development, building bible study opportunities, and developing a public health program. Interim Director Powell began outreach efforts with First and Sinai Presbyterian Churches in Laredo and *Iglesia Presbiteriano de Puerta del Cielo* (Door to Heaven Presbyterian Church) in *Nuevo Laredo*. *Puerta del Cielo* supported the new ministry and helped establish sister congregations - two small chapels in *Nuevo Laredo* colonias *Union de los Recuerdos* (Union of Memories) and *Colonia Las Torres* (The Towers).<sup>286</sup>

Mission work teams, primarily from USA churches, were ready and willing to travel to the border region to assist with the process of building the ministry infrastructure: churches and chapels, multipurpose rooms, clinics, manses, and in some cases, family homes. A top responsibility of the leadership was first, to communicate the need for assistance across the USA Presbyterian churches, then second, to coordinate the interest, ensuring as many viable opportunities for mission work groups as possible. Some years, ministry sites reported as many as eighteen visiting groups per year with hundreds of participants, youth and adults.

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<sup>286</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry: An Historical Sketch,” 4; Presbyterian Border Ministry, “*Laredos Unidos (Nuevo Laredo, México/Laredo, Texas)*,” (c. 1989), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; Jones, *Presbyterians on the Frontier*, 125.

PBM Co-Director Stacy authored his dissertation on work group programming and developed a manual specifically for PBM use. About the many volunteers, he shared, “Some people came to learn and some to build something. Presbyterians are that way; I’m that way. We want to do something. We want to contribute, give you something.”<sup>287</sup> During those start-up years, the three ministry sites offered plenty of opportunity for work projects, particularly in construction. Though the PBM Co-Directors expressed strong interests in developing binational, bi-cultural relationships, thus imparting a new understanding for and a sensitivity to the people in the border region, often the focus by both the visiting Presbyterians and the local Presbyterians was on completing the construction projects. Reflecting on the value to visiting *Norteamericanos/as*, Stacy said, “Honestly, a good seventy-five percent of them took something away. They didn’t just go down and have a party or something.”<sup>288</sup> Stacy also pointed out, each of the ministry sites were very aware of the reason for them coming down.

The other side of that whole thing was always the question of getting donations. Fidel García down in the Valley [*Puentes de Cristo*] was the best at this, getting the money out of them when they came down. By the time they were done they’d promised big bucks for him. He would tell these heart rending stories; he was a master at this because he had polio as a kid, so he limped all the time. He was from Mexican descent so you know he could tell the stories as if it was about him and their hearts were just bleeding, and they gave him lots of money.<sup>289</sup>

The poorer communities of *Nuevo Laredo*, as was consistent in other border towns and cities, lacked the basic needs of potable water, a sewer system, and electricity.

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<sup>287</sup> Stacy discussion with author, 27-28.

<sup>288</sup> Stacy discussion with author, 27-28.

<sup>289</sup> Stacy discussion with author, 27-28.

As part of his community health programming, Dr. Antonio Tostado coordinated a water program (similar to the collaboration in Empalme years earlier).<sup>290</sup> In 1993, *Colonia Union de los Recuerdos* celebrated municipal electrification (promised in early 1991), however, neither the city nor the community had successfully rectified the lack of clean water and the need for sewer services.<sup>291</sup> At the time, the Rio Grande was so polluted, it had been dubbed “the world’s longest sewer.” *Nuevo Laredo* pumped raw sewage and toxic wastes upstream from the city’s water supply. With support from the Hunger Network of the Synod of Living Water of the PCUSA, Reverend Brown met with *Colonia* leaders to seek solutions. They developed plans for laying a main water line from the city works with monies from *la Estada Tamaulipas*. The Hunger Network provided chlorination units. Pastor Brown had written, “we have learned, over and over, unless the community works together and is the driving force, whatever is done will ultimately fail. WE hope to work WITH the community on THEIR project...”<sup>292</sup> Despite a myriad of delays, the coalition did complete the project.<sup>293</sup>

Along with the commitment to neighborhood improvements, church construction never waned. In 1992, the *Laredos Unidos* dedicated the new chapel, *Monte Si3n*, in

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<sup>290</sup> “Laredos Unidos, Inc: A Binational Border Ministry United in Faith,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Council binder* (c. 1997), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>291</sup> “Project Highlights: Laredos Unidos (United Laredos),” *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry*, (May/June 1993), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.; “Project Highlights – Laredos Unidos (United Laredos),” *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Feb/Mar 1994), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>292</sup> “Project Highlight – Laredos Unidos (United Laredos),” *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (April/May 1994), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>293</sup> “Project Highlight – Laredos Unidos (United Laredos),” *Nuestra Frontera* (April/May 1994).

*Colonia Union de los Recuerdos*.<sup>294</sup> The members sustained their commitment to evangelism, with invitational outreach to the surrounding communities and the congregations continued to grow at both *Monte Si3n* and at a second chapel, *Iglesia Peniel*, in *Colonia Las Torres*.<sup>295</sup> Over the decade, the work/study teams from USA churches and universities and the Mexican church members and partners grew increasing comfortable on the rare occasions when together. The collective commitment to addressing the spiritual and physical needs of children and adults became a tie that bound them together in their faith. They shared the work, they often shared a meal, and they worshipped together.<sup>296</sup>

Gerry Stacy, PBM Director, had the responsibility of finding Co-Coordinator for the USA side of the Border Ministry. As the first cadre of Co-Coordinator began to leave, and despite the caveat that all Co-Coordinator required approval by the relative Presbytery, the responsibility for finding USA replacements very quickly fell to Stacy. In 1990, when *Proyecto Amistad* had no leadership team and Stacy, with the help of PCUSA Mission, had been unable to find someone,<sup>297</sup> he turned to the Volunteer in Mission (VIM) program as an alternative.<sup>298</sup> Stacy shared, “So I would go back to the national

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<sup>294</sup> “Project Highlights – Laredos Unidos (United Laredos),” *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (June/July 1992), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>295</sup> “Laredos Unidos Continues to Experience Growth,” *Nuestra Frontera: The Newsletter of Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Fall 1995), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.; *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Sept/Oct 1992), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>296</sup> “Laredos Unidos, Inc: A Binational Border Ministry United in Faith,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Council binder* (c. 1997), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>297</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry: An Historical Sketch,” 4.

<sup>298</sup> Stacy discussion with author, 13.

offices to find a missionary and if we couldn't get one, we'd get a Volunteer in Mission... I got all kinds of volunteers. I mean I was able to hustle volunteers. The PCUSA VIM program connected the border ministries with countless volunteers – some served for a few months, others stayed a year or more, all found the experience to be life-changing. One young volunteer, Alexa, a college student majoring in Spanish, recalled her tears when she thought she would never return to *México*. She had traveled from New Hampshire each summer with her church youth group to work in partnership with a church in Nuevo Laredo. “The last year was the hardest because I knew I may never see them again.” Three years later, she returned to work for the summer and spoke of the welcome she received. “I am staying with a host family who have taken me in as one of their own.”<sup>299</sup> Generally, the VIMs engaged with the programming in *México* and worked directly with the Mexican congregations and partner communities. Each added their own unique skills, some as teachers and medical personnel, or in specialty areas such as child development and teaching. Some brought nothing more than a willingness to learn, to be part of something important.<sup>300</sup> A steady stream of PCUSA VIMs nurtured the ministries; three in particular: Susan R. Frerichs, in the summer of 1993,<sup>301</sup> Reverend Mark Adams,

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<sup>299</sup> Alexa Rosenberger, “June, July 2010 Summer Intern,” *Proyecto Amistad* 5 (Summer 2010) 7.

<sup>300</sup> “Personnel Notes,” *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Feb/Mar 1994), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Project Highlights – Puentes de Cristo (Bridges for Christ),” *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Feb/Mar 1994), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; Jack to David correspondence with attached building information, purchase proposal, and hand drawn drawings and plans (November 8, 1993), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>301</sup> “Personnel notes,” *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry*, August/Sept 1993. Located in F-PBM Newsletter, 1987-2007.



for six months in 1994/5, and Reverend Elizabeth Toland Smith in 2006. Each served in the mission field in Mexico, Adams and Toland Smith as ordained pastors.

Soon after Frerich served for a summer as a VIM in *Piedras Negras*, she returned to the border region and responded to a call to act as Co-coordinator – a position she embraced for almost twelve active years. During that time, Roberto Medina and Kassumy Medina (RN) accepted the positions of Mexican Co-Coordiators. As with the other Presbyterian border ministries, the 1990s was a period of growth in congregational numbers, people served, and mission work teams. Elder Chris McReynolds replaced Frerich in 2005. Frerich moved to *México*'s interior to serve in the *Presbiterio de Huastecas* which encompassed the *México* states of *San Luis Potosi* and *Hidalgo*. In 2005 and 2006, *Proyecto Amistad* supported her work, facilitating mission teams to travel to the mountains of Central *México* and help with construction of a sanctuary.<sup>302</sup>

Mark Adams, PCUSA Co-Mission Worker and Co-Coordinator of *Frontera de Cristo* looked back on his 1994-95 VIM experience as foundational to his current ministry. “I left South Carolina to be a mission volunteer at the border ministry site in *Piedras Negras, México*. I was excited about developing close relationships with Mexican sisters and brothers. The reality of how grand this community is didn't become clear to me until I lived and served with *Uno En El Espíritu* (One in the Spirit), a church in *Piedras Negras, México*. I experienced the power of Jesus Christ to break down

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<sup>302</sup> Proyecto Amistad Travels to Central Mexico,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry 2005 Annual Report* (2005-06) 1, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

barriers that we humans erect. Language did not define our relationships, nor did nationality, ethnicity or social class, for we are *hermanos y hermanas en Cristo*.”<sup>303</sup>

Much of the programming at the three ministry sites addressed similar issues in similar fashion. Each ministry responded aggressively to the requests for medical services and the need to address basic health concerns of the community, especially for the children. By 1993, in response to the extreme malnutrition in the area, *Proyecto Amistad* expanded the food services program and provided meals to more than two hundred children per day at several locations. A strong medical staff comprised of a parttime doctor, a fulltime nurse, and a social worker, traveled to various sites, always greeted by people lined up waiting for basic medical services. The nurse and social worker, with fulltime volunteers, also offered preventive health programming.<sup>304</sup>

In *Nuevo Laredo*, outreach started with neighborhood health surveys and multiple meetings with community leaders to identify and prioritize needs. With Powell’s departure, to take on a position as a Mission Diaconate with *Proyecto Amistad*, the INPM and PCUSA hired Co-Coordinator Rita Moreno and Arturo Moreno, and Reverend Ken Brown and Kim Brown, respectively.<sup>305</sup> When they took over the leadership, the program staff had a strong medical ministry in progress.

Nurse María de la Luz Ramos, Medical Director, launched a health program that included family planning, pre- and post-natal care, and community training in basic

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<sup>303</sup> “Mark Adams and Miriam Maldonado Escobar,” PCUSA Mission website, <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/missionconnections/the-rev-mark-adams-and-miriam-maldonado-escobar/>.

<sup>304</sup> *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Feb/Mar 1993).

<sup>305</sup> *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Sept/Oct 1992).

hygiene, rehydration procedures, and nutrition. Again, with alarmingly high rates of malnutrition so common among children, by late 1991, medical services opened a children's nutrition program. Under the leadership of Dr. Laura Tostado, the children's nutrition program, located at both Presbyterian church sites in *Nuevo Laredo*, doubled in size by 1995. In the meantime, Co-Coordinator Rita Moreno and Dr. Brown continued to emphasize the chronic malnutrition concerns and focused on long-range solutions. In addition, the medical team collaborated with the Presbyterian Medical Benevolent Foundation and the *Nuevo Laredo* hospital and in one year changed the lives of twenty-one people; the collaboration underwrote surgery to correct cleft palates and other facial abnormalities.<sup>306</sup>

Around 1995, two new leaders joined the staff at *Puentes de Cristo*, Reverend Gilberto Medina as Director and his wife, María Medina, RN, as Medical Supervisor. Under their leadership and with a broad range of financial and volunteer support, the work of evangelism and social services continued to grow.<sup>307</sup> Into the twenty-first century, the population of the *Reynosa* metropolitan area hovered around one million – many lived in barrios that skirted the city where the living conditions worsened. Despite the persistent and seemingly insurmountable challenges, the outreach and service programming pushed forward. One new, creative program reached out to females ages

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<sup>306</sup> *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Sept/Oct 1992); "Laredos Unidos," *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Nov/Dec 1992), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.; "Project Highlights – Laredos," *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Nov. Dec. 1993), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; "Laredos Unidos Continues to Experience Growth," *Nuestra Frontera: The Newsletter of Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Fall 1995), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>307</sup> "They are tearing down walls and building bridges," *Nuestra Frontera* (Spring 2002) 3-4, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

eight to fourteen, a targeted group due to the high rate of teen pregnancy and school dropouts. The new program dubbed “*Las Muchachas*” addressed not only their health and spiritual needs but also their social and economic challenges. By 2005, sixty-eight girls participated.<sup>308</sup>

In *Piedras Negras*, Esmeralda Castaneda, RN provided the same types of clinical and preventative health services as the other ministry sites; volunteer physicians and dentists from *México* and the USA offered specialty care to the more severely ill patients.<sup>309</sup>

Another area of importance for the three ministry sites focused heavily on education and economic development. They supported children and youth with bible study classes and tutoring during after-school and Saturday programming. Results of surveying the neighborhoods revealed that adults requested skills training opportunities. Based on the talent of the staff and volunteers, the three ministry sites responded with classes in English, sewing, cooking and baking, typing, handcrafts, cosmetology, horticulture, and preparation for the Mexican equivalent of the GED.<sup>310</sup> Often the nurse or a *promotora* would cross over into the community development programming offering classes for children and adults in hygiene and dental care.

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<sup>308</sup> “PBM at Puentes de Cristo says Goodbye to Old Coordinators and Hello to New,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry: 2005 Annual Report* (2006) 2, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>309</sup> “Proyecto Amistad, flyer” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Council Binder* (c 1997), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Project Amistad (Piedras Negras, Mex./Eagle Pass, TX),” *Newsletter* (c. 1989) 4, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>310</sup> “Project Amistad (Piedras Negras, Mex./Eagle Pass, TX),” (c. 1989) 4; “Amistad Celebrates Ten Years of Ministry in Piedras Negras,” *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Summer 1995), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

In 1993, at *Puentes de Cristo*, a new scholarship program realized almost immediate value for the community as early recipients returned as graduates to teach new skills and offer newly acquired strengths. The scholarship program opened new opportunities for young people whose families could not offer support, primarily because they could not afford the costs for high school and advanced education. One young scholarship recipient, Sandra Marquez, attended nursing school in *Morelia, Michoacán*, graduated in 1995, and returned to the border region to practice.<sup>311</sup> Later, *Puentes de Cristo* formalized its adult classes into a Self-Development of People Program that offered occupational training with considerable focus on women in Colonia Carlos Cantu and Colonia Lucio Blanco. One graduate of the Self-Development Program, Seferina Moncada Salazar, studied cosmetology, professional ethics, and hair styling for women and men. She shared her gratitude, “Thanks to God and *Puentes de Cristo* for giving me the opportunity to take these courses because I was able to achieve a career; I was able to open my own beauty salon at my house, and now my life has improved tremendously.”<sup>312</sup>

The *Laredos Unidos* ministry invested money, time, and energy in economic development programming for church and community members. In 1992, Olga Caballero of *Iglesia Puerta del Cielo* in *Nueva Laredo* launched a sewing project, a first step for area women to envision collaborative business ventures.<sup>313</sup> By 1994, women who

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<sup>311</sup> “Puentes de Cristo Scholarship Makes Possible Nursing Education,” *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Summer 1995), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Puentes de Cristo: Summer Internships Available,” *Nuestra Frontera: The Newsletter of Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Fall 1995), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>312</sup> “They are tearing down walls and building bridges,” *Nuestra Frontera* (Spring 2002) 3-4.

<sup>313</sup> “Laredos Unidos (United Laredos),” *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Nov/Dec 1992), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

gathered for bible study began to produce jewelry made from recycled church bulletins. Alan Zermeno, a volunteer from *Monterrey, Nuevo León*, with a BA in Communications, worked with the women to design an economic model and promote their “bulletin jewelry” project. By 1995, thirty women had joined the collective to produce jewelry and market it through SERRV, a non-profit that supported artisans from around the world through fair trade marketing of crafted products. Through the program, the income for the women not only supported family basic needs but fostered self-esteem for the individuals and the community.<sup>314</sup> Another economic development program – bicycle repair - opened, initially for men, then quickly expanded to include women. Each graduate received a bike but, more importantly, with the new skills gained from the training course, they could supplement the family income and provide a service to the community.<sup>315</sup>

By the late 1990s, *Proyecto Amistad* experienced what many of the ministry sites were dealing with. The early foci on health and subsistence needs shifted with municipal improvements. *México* expanded medical services enough to meet the needs of many more people and utilities and municipalities improved the electrical, water, and power services. Public schools increased in numbers enough to serve many more of the children. The communities grew less dependent on the churches and ministry services, particularly as the general health of the population improved. When surveying the community to

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<sup>314</sup> “Mission team to Return to Laredos Unidos,” *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Summer 1995), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Laredos Unidos Continues to Experience Growth,” *Nuestra Frontera: The Newsletter of Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Fall 1995), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>315</sup> “Project Highlight – Laredos Unidos (United Laredos),” *Nuestra Frontera* (April/May 1994). “Project Highlight – Laredos Unidos (United Laredos),” *Nuestra Frontera* (June/July 1994).

ascertain their concerns and needs, most people pointed at the worrisome violence and growing substance abuse that was becoming pervasive in their neighborhoods. It was difficult to make a transition from providing medical/dental services and education needs to directly addressing the abuses and violence in *México*.

Without a successful transition to serving the changing needs of the congregation and surrounding communities, the Centers in *Piedras Negras* and *Nuevo Laredo* closed, and the mission teams stopped coming. (As mentioned in Chapter two, the growing fear of border violence also accounted for the decrease in mission delegations' numbers). As mission delegations stopped coming to the border region, the ministries experienced a significant decrease in both the income stream from the mission teams and the donor income from long-time supporters. Adding to the growing challenges, finding Co- Coordinators for the ministry sites became increasingly difficult as the first waves of employees retired or moved to other positions. The leadership vacuum hit the three ministry sites particularly hard. At times, a new hire would be short-lived as they did not fit well with either the work or their colleagues, resulting in fractures, hard feelings, and a loss of volunteers. If the local Boards of Directors could not manage the ministry without a paid staff in the leadership, the work would often slow, or end and the congregations and community members would be without the services on which they depended. For *Proyecto Amistad* and *Laredos Unidos*, the combination of Susie Frerichs leaving and the loss of volunteer support resulted in the eventual decision to combine the two ministries into a single entity, relocated to *Nuevo Laredo/Laredo*. The new ministry maintained the title *Proyecto Amistad* and Elder Chris McReynolds joined the new ministry as Co-

coordinator after Frerichs. Roberto Medina and Kasummy Medina continued to serve and *Proyecto Amistad* reimagined the future for the border region they served.<sup>316</sup>

Linking concerns over local violence with the mission of evangelism, the new *Proyecto Amistad* investigated AMO, an organization with education materials and Spanish language biblical materials for children and for teacher training. The program not only taught the bible but embraced non-violence. *Proyecto Amistad* started a new children education program – *Club Amistad* – in *Nuevo Laredo* and towns in the interior of *México* which filled several needs for the community. First, the children had safe places to gather, share, and learn from dedicated teachers. Second, the families felt the support of the program through the children’s curriculum activities and, while on occasion they joined the local church, many more reached out to their community and formed stronger bonds with their neighbors. The use of AMO materials did not resonate well with the PCUSA as it supported a fundamentalist perspective that tended to be chauvinistic regarding women, homosexuals, some minorities, and others. The program did, however, address issues of violence and promoted strong family support and community development. The program also brought people to the church though that was not the primary goal. As such, it responded to the PCUSA World Mission pillars (mentioned in Chapter Three) by addressing issues of violence, providing opportunity for healthier living in their homes and local community, and offering a worshipping community for those who were interested. For Medina, *Club Amistad* offered children

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<sup>316</sup> “Proyecto Amistad Travels to Central *México*,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry 2005 Annual Report* (2005-06) 1, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Laredos Unidos Overcomes Obstacles to Find New Life in 2005,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry: 2005 Annual Report*. (2006) 3, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.



and their families a sort of sanctuary where they could know God's love and learn to believe in themselves.<sup>317</sup> The tension between the importance of theological perspective and successful programming was evident in this situation; in this case, the PBRO did not end its relationship with *Proyecto Amistad* and the Medinas.

In the border region of southern Texas and northern Coahuila and Tamaulipas, three thriving ministry sites in the 1990s and early 2000s eventually became two struggling ministry sites. Though they maintained personal contact with the PBM/PBRO, each ministry fell away from their commitment to and acknowledgement of the tenets of PCUSA Global Mission. Working solo, the Mexican Coordinator at *Proyecto Amistad* and the USA Coordinator at *Puentes de Cristo* both focused almost entirely on outreach and evangelism with little to no structured social services. As the Medinas continued with their education programming, they have maintained loose ties to the PBM/PBRO. When the USA Coordinators at *Puentes de Cristo*, Andres and Gloria García, retired, the PBRO and PCUSA did not find replacements. Without a Mexican Co-coordinator, the mission's Board of Directors found themselves sustaining the ministry with the building in Hidalgo and little connection to their Mexican counterparts. After 2015, it would begin to revitalize with renewed energy, an infusion of grant monies, and a new director.

#### Pasos de Fe

Since 1989 and the separation of *Proyecto Verdad* (renamed Project *Vida*) from PBM which essential stopped any official relationship between the INPM and the PCUSA, hope in a reawakening of mutual mission never disappeared in *Ciudad*

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<sup>317</sup> Parrish W. Jones, *Presbyterians on the Frontier*, 191, 206-207.

*Juárez/El Paso* Presbyterian churches. As Project *Vida* successfully pursued its work across El Paso, an informal binational Presbyterian connection persisted between *Ciudad Juárez/El Paso* churches, and the PBM.

In the mid-1990s, Reverend Robelio Roblero coordinated Presbyterian congregations in *Ciudad Juárez*, all part of the *Presbiterio de Noroeste*. With the active work of Mexican Presbyterian congregations, missionaries, and pastors, the group coalesced and formed *Proyecto Paso del Norte*, a committee designed “to coordinate the work of visiting mission teams and promote oversight for churches under its care.”<sup>318</sup>

Among the many Mexican Presbyterian congregations, evangelism training and successful outreach meant the congregations continued to grow. Women’s groups met regularly, youth programs grew, and weekly prayer vigils served the needs of the growing faith communities. A medical clinic opened three mornings a week serving primarily respiratory and gastro-intestinal problems and women with pre- and post-natal needs. Each Sunday, the doctor offered church families regular instruction in first aid, nutrition, and personal hygiene.<sup>319</sup> The PBM supported the *Paso del Norte* medical and dental work in Juárez.<sup>320</sup> The large cadre of Presbyterian churches in *Ciudad Juárez* included: *Príncipe de Paz* (Prince of Peace) in *Colonia Hidalgo*; *Verdad y Redención* (Truth and Redemption) pastored by Roblero, in *Colonia Morelos*; *Verdad y Vida* (Truth

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<sup>318</sup> “Juarez Mission Adopts New Name,” *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Fall 1995) 3, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>319</sup> “Juarez Mission Adopts New Name,” *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Fall 1995) 3, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>320</sup> “Project Highlights: Juarez,” *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (August/Sept 1993), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

and Life) in *Colonia Anapra*, a suburb located across the border from Santa Teresa, NM; *Verdad y Salvación* (Truth and Salvation) in the *Toribio Ortega barrio*, led by Gloria Cuevas, a Mexican missionary; *Verdad y Esperanza* (Truth and Hope) in *Colonia Guadalajara*; *Verdad y Fe* (Truth and Faith) in *Azteca*; and Renewal Church in *Villa Hermosa*.<sup>321</sup>

Juárez remained open to work/study groups with the caveat that at least two members of the group were fully bilingual since a Mission Co-worker would not be on site. In the early 1990s, work teams from the USA built a social hall for one church, a manse for a pastor, and a chapel.<sup>322</sup> As the cross-border relationships developed, a few fiscal concerns arose beginning with the question of accountability. Without a reporting mechanism, it was difficult to check on the distribution of funds to *Ciudad Juárez*. While the PBM had to account to the IRS, donors, and the JMC binational infrastructure, the *Paso del Norte* group did not.<sup>323</sup> The concern was familiar, almost a repeat of the financial challenges faced by *Proyecto Verdad* a decade earlier. In addition, PBM monies to support *Ciudad Juárez* pastors went directly to the *Presbiterio de Noroeste* rather than through the JMC; again, a fiscal concern for the PBM and Tres Rios Presbytery since this fell outside the usual protocol.<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>321</sup> *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (November-December 1993); "Juarez Mission Adopts New Name," *Nuestra Frontera*. 3.

<sup>322</sup> "Project Highlights: Juarez," *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (August/Sept 1993), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>323</sup> "Minutes of the Presbyterian Border Ministry, Incorporated, Minutes, April 10-11, 1994, Chula Vista California," *Presbyterian Border Ministry Corporation Minute Book* (c. 1987), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>324</sup> "Minutes of the Presbyterian Border Ministry, Incorporated, Minutes, April 10-11, 1994," *Presbyterian Border Ministry Corporation Minute Book* (c. 1987), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

The time had come to formalize Presbyterian relations in the *Ciudad Juárez/El Paso* area and, in 1995, the *Juárez* pastors and the Tres Rios Presbytery met to begin development of a new, binational border ministry.<sup>325</sup> Over the next year, as the mission teams continued to arrive, a formation team, which included the PBM Co-directors, developed the new ministry by-laws and moved them through an approval process with the related presbyteries in *México* and the USA (*Noroeste*, Tres Rios, and Sierra Blanca).<sup>326</sup> With the final bylaws completed and approved in 1998, the formation of a local committee/board on February 12, 1999, the newly appointed board approved the *Pasos de Fe* Articles of Incorporation for submission to State of Texas.<sup>327</sup> The PCUSA assigned Elder Antonio Gamboa Lopez as Co-Coordinator; the INPM had not yet assigned a Mexican Co-coordinator.<sup>328</sup> In the early years, a series of short-term Co- Coordinators moved through the ministry and, along with the *Pasos de Fe* board, provided enough support to ensure the continuance of programming for the regular mission work teams.

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<sup>325</sup> “Minutes, Presbyterian Border Committee, November 8, 1995, Hidalgo, Texas,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Council binder* (c. 1996), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>326</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry Council, February 1-3, 2001,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Council binder* (c. 1996), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; Jesus Juan Gonzalez and Gerald F. Stacy, “PBM Council Meeting, *Agua Prieta, Sonora* – April 2, 1988, Coordinators Report,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Council binder* (c. 1996), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>327</sup> *Pasos de Fe, Inc.* By-laws, revised May (1998) 1; William F. Clark, Jr., *Pasos de Fe* letter “To Whom it may concern,” (July 8, 1999). Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; Names of *Pasos de Fe* incorporators: Reverends Trina Zelle, John Poling, Bill Clark executed February 12, 1999, filed with the State of Texas, County of Midland.

<sup>328</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry Council, Minutes, Sept. 20-21, 1999, Meeting, San Antonio, TX,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Council binder* (c. 1996), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

In 2005, a “Save the Women” event in Juárez addressed disappearances and murders of women in *Cuidad Juárez*. Jean Marie Peacock, Vice Moderator of 216th PCUSA General Assembly and Lic. Teodoro Villanueva, INPM Treasurer preached to a crowd of more than six hundred people. *Pasos de Fe* and the *México* and USA Presbyteries organized the three-hour, outdoor service in a *Juárez* park, with a strong ecumenical presence from the New México and Texas Conferences of Churches. The service included music, prayer, and poignant personal witness from loved ones of the victims and the disappeared. Peacock preached, “What a blessing it is that Christians from many churches have come together to speak for justice. We want to make it known that when one of God’s children is hurt or suffers, the whole of creation groans and cries for justice.” While the event could not solve the problems of femicide, it did speak loudly to the horror and offered support across a border and across the many differences between people and cultures.

By 2005, *Pasos de Fe* support began to broaden beyond construction projects for the *Juárez* churches to including shared activities in *Juárez* and El Paso. Relationships of trust and respect grew as the ministry increasingly supported evangelism and education events, programs for youth, and a prison ministry, all developed by the Mexican contingent. The *Pasos de Fe* Board of Directors approved a different level of commitment: the two-thousand-dollar purchase of bibles, supporting a summer camp, developing a library and computer center, technical skills training, and assisting with

medical and dental clinics. Construction projects for visiting work groups continued and land purchases prepared for future mission possibilities.<sup>329</sup>

Often, the border ministries hosted communion service at the border fence, a powerful experience of spiritual relationship and political division. In 2010, fifty-five commissioners with Tres Rios Presbytery met twenty-five Presbyterian colleagues in *México*. At the time, the USA government had constructed the fence with wire yet, the experience of forced separation was real for some of the attendees. Reverend Jose Luis Casal shared, “Seeing the face of a friend through the wire fence on the border gives a different perspective. I had the sensation that I was visiting a man in jail, or maybe I was the one in jail.”<sup>330</sup> Yet, despite the sense of disconnection, Casal concluded, “...our presence here in solidarity with our Mexican brothers and sisters demonstrates that fences or walls cannot divide the people of God. We are one people under God.”<sup>331</sup>

Reverend John Nelsen, Pastor at University Presbyterian Church El Paso and Chair of *Pasos de Fe* and PBM recalled, PBM had at least a couple of communion services at the fence, constructed of chain link.

We literally would take two communion tables and back them up to each other with the fence in between. The border patrol was pretty cool about the whole deal. My experience has been that you can talk to them and tell them what you’re going to do. They did have agents there on horseback, but they stayed back. They said please don’t pass anything through the fence or don’t reach through. There were some family members that hadn’t seen each other,

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<sup>329</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry 2005 Annual Report.” 2, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Pasos de Fe Grows in Faith,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry: 2005 Annual Report*. 2, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>330</sup> Jerry van Marter, “Christian witness through a wire fence; Texas, Mexico Presbyterians worship together at the border,” November 2, 2010, <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2020/11/2/christian-witness-through-wire-fence/>.

<sup>331</sup> Van Marter, “Christian Witness Through A Wire Fence.”

and they were holding hands through the fence. The border patrol didn't say anything. I thought that was very compassionate.<sup>332</sup>

Nelsen remembered a time when a mission team from a supportive Korean Presbyterian Church out of the Detroit area visited *Ciudad Juárez*. Mexicans and people of Korean descent stood side by side in *México* sharing worship and communion with Anglo parishioners in the USA. "I thought wow, God, we've got a little bit of everything going on here."<sup>333</sup>

In 2011, with the action of the INPM to sever relations with the PCUSA, the *Pasos de Fe* ministry seemed minorly affected. The *Presbiterio de Chihuahua* and Tres Rios Presbytery had jointly sponsored the program.<sup>334</sup> Reverend Tim Gray, Associate Pastor at University Presbyterian Church El Paso and *Pasos de Fe* Board member explained,

Since 2010 and the breakdown of the relationship between the Mexican Presbyterian Church and the PCUSA, we are no longer allowed to talk to one another directly which makes getting things done really difficult. What we have done and continue to try and do is to try and find ways where our different denominations in terms of mission and goals really overlap. For the last three years what that overlap has looked like has been how do we serve the Guadalajara Barrio. So how do we serve this community in ways that do not get us into trouble? Instead of saying okay let's find a church in Kansas who will bring doctors, we say let's find doctors in *Juárez* who are willing to serve this community. What support can we get from the United States to make sure this continues to happen? So, we're really interested in making sure we're developing nondependent support for ways to build up the community there. If we start talking about larger goals, then the small community things don't go very well. I should say that the *Juárez* Mexican Presbyterian pastors have no problem talking with the PCUSA pastors in El Paso, no problem. But the people above

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<sup>332</sup> Nelsen discussion with author, 9.

<sup>333</sup> Nelsen discussion with author, 9.

<sup>334</sup> Presbyterian Border Region Outreach – PBRO, Survey of Each Ministry, 2.

them say we [PCUSA] are evil. So now we cannot sign a covenant as PCUSA.<sup>335</sup>

The *Pasos de Fe* ministry continued to function well as a binational ministry, holding true to the tenets of mutuality in leadership and mission. Earlier work by Presbyterians and their partners in both cities, solidified the foundations on which mission and church workers developed *Pasos de Fe*. In *Ciudad Juárez*, Mexicans had planted several Presbyterian churches and missions with more in the planning stages, a network between the Mexican pastors and congregations strengthened their evangelistic outreach, the Board of Directors had been comprised of strong and experienced leaders from both cities, and the flexibility of service programs responded to a variety of needs for the surrounding neighborhoods. However, a second significant imposition stymied progress – the reaction to the widely publicized violence in *Ciudad Juárez*, including femicide, hit *Pasos de Fe* hard.

Beginning around 2008, the publicized increase of violence in Mexican border towns and cities resulted in an increase in fear by potential mission teams from the USA. The result for border ministries was a decrease in volunteer support and commitments of funding. *Pasos de Fe* fiscal solvency had grown dependent on the funds received through the group mission work programming. The visiting teams paid for their visit costs including room and board, as determined by the ministry, covered the cost of supplies and equipment for the work they planned to do, and, often, donated additional funds that further supported the work of the ministry. The loss of a significant funding stream was not the only concern of Reverend Nelsen. He recalled a group of seminary students on a

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<sup>335</sup> Tim Gray discussion with author, El Paso: University Presbyterian Church, (May 23, 2017) 13.



work/study trip sponsored by *Pasos de Fe*. At their orientation meeting before crossing in *Ciudad Juárez*, the group announced,

...they were not going to cross; just in good conscience couldn't cross with the violence the way it was. I thought, oh my golly, this is the future of our church leadership and a lot of churches. I get it if you've got a stereotypical youth group... But these were adults, and the reality was the odds of groups experiencing violence were small. Fear of crossing practically ended all work/study mission programming though, the people living and working in the border region persisted. ...we went across at the height of the violence. We kept going across because I felt that was our responsibility as brothers and sisters. I got very bitter over that because it was just real obvious that the commitment to "standing with" was surface level at best."<sup>336</sup>

Any bitterness that the leadership may have felt came out of the sorrow and disappointment they experienced. They had grown to feel love for and compassion with their Mexican colleagues – their brothers and sisters – with whom they stood in response to the life-altering call to serve God's children. The work of the ministry had become part of their daily lives and defined who they were as border people of faith. It was difficult to see the energy of years past, with hundreds of people coming to the border region, fall away. Also, the related loss of funding halted the sense of forward momentum and reframed the way they had to do their work.

In 2014, with no Co-Coordinator due to loss of funding and cutbacks to PBM by donors and the PCUSA, *Pasos de Fe* determined a new course of action focused on four goals. First, it was important to continue the work in the *Guadalajara* barrio. The site was large, by *México* standards and housed a chapel as well as a multipurpose building. The numbers in attendance at the chapel worship rose and fell based on the regularity of

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<sup>336</sup> Nelsen discussion with author, 5.

worship opportunities and the availability of a pastor. At times, the *Presbiterio de Chihuahua* assigned pastors to work at the *Guadalajara* Community Center and the ministry of worship and social services flourished, however, assignments were irregular. In 2011, Reverends Roberto Mendoza and Mercedes Romo Castro worked with the Community Center. Reverend Romo took a cut in pay so he could have an official position as Director.<sup>337</sup> In 2015, under the leadership of Program Director, Isaias Ramirez, a new program for male youth living in extreme poverty provided skills training (electrical, plumbing and air-conditioning) so they could find parttime work and stay in school. The ministry started when Isaias Ramirez connected with a group of young boys, engaged with them and heard what they needed – work to help their families. With financial support from *Pasos de Fe* hands on training at the community center, and job-searching by the Presbyterian churches in *Juárez*, the program flourished.<sup>338</sup> The youth shared with visiting PCUSA Moderator Dr. Heath K. Rada, that the program not only gave them hope but, it was fun.<sup>339</sup> The successes encouraged *Pasos de Fe* to continue its support by encouraging and supporting a staff presence, and through building maintenance and construction, periodic health clinics, vocational training, and regular classes for women, children, and paroled prisoners.

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<sup>337</sup> Parrish W. Jones, *Presbyterian on the Frontier*, 117.

<sup>338</sup> “Pasos de Fe: Accompanying Children and Youth,” *News from the Border: US/Mexico Binational Ministry, Presbyterian Border Region Outreach*. no. 2 (April 2015) 3, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>339</sup> “Hosting a special visitor: PCUSA Moderator Dr. Heath K. Rada,” *News from the Border: US/Mexico Binational Ministry, Presbyterian Border Region Outreach*. no. 2 (April 2015) 4, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

Second, *Pasos de Fe* offered weekly Spanish worship services and an education hour in El Paso at University Presbyterian Church. Held in the afternoon hours, one of the Pastors from *Juárez* had sufficient time to cross into El Paso to lead worship and support the Christian education opportunity. Third, they formed a coalition of pastors to assist families in the consulate process in *Ciudad Juárez*. Finally, *Pasos de Fe* looked to the future launching an all-out effort to engage a PBM/PBRO facilitator and to bring work/study teams back to *Ciudad Juárez/El Paso*. By 2015, the level of violence dropped dramatically, and they witnessed a growth in tourism and city promotions.<sup>340</sup> The timing was right for forward momentum – the question remained, how could the ministry accomplish that without paid leadership and given the inter-denominational challenges to maintaining a binational Presbyterian ministry in *Ciudad Juárez/El Paso*?

The histories of these five sites represent the simultaneous new church development, and programmatic growth and compassionate service. They also experienced managerial division with, on the one hand, failure to adequately respond to the financial challenges and on the other, failure to address the understaffing of leadership essential to managing the many responsibilities of a site ministry. A variety of reasons stack up to explain the loss of two of the ministry sites from the PBM, one a fallback to paternalistic control that resulted in loss of a binational ministry. The second ministry lost strong local and organizational support. It is noteworthy that neither ministry completely discontinued but continued its work down different paths.

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<sup>340</sup> Omar Chan, “Facilitator’s General Report, Presbyterian Border Region Outreach,” (April 2015) 13, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

The five decades of border ministry with new church development, evangelistic action, and a variety of programs that served countless individuals, strengthened the PBM. Of worthy note is the outreach to churches across the USA that fostered new growth, new understandings, and valuable experiences in a space of misunderstandings and bad experiences. The PBM sites opened opportunities for people to interact with people that did not know and could not relate to prior to their first encounters. Hundreds of people per year traveled to the border region to experience.

The ministry sites all met their *serviglesia* objectives, but in some instances, could not sustain the new churches or the many service programs. The next chapter looks at two additional ministry sites, both able to expand significantly in new church development and service programming. One site, *Frontera de Cristo*, sustained its growth and continues to strengthen, while the second site, *Compañeros en Misión*, though still an active ministry, is no longer the dynamic *serviglesia* it once was.

## CHAPTER 5

### ESTABLISHING MINISTRY SITES

#### NOGALES TO AGUA PRIETA (NOGALES TO DOUGLAS)

If you trace a direct line along the *México/USA* border line, eighty miles separate the two border ministries, *Compañeros en Misión* in *Nogales, Sonora/Nogales (Ambos Nogales)*, Arizona and *Frontera de Cristo* in *Agua Prieta, Sonora/Douglas*, Arizona. The ministries reside in the same states of both countries and serve in the same presbyteries of their respective denominations. While *Compañeros en Misión* was a late comer to the PBM, *Frontera de Cristo* was one of the first ministry sites selected by the combined leadership of the JMC, Synod, and denomination leaders. Both launched well, starting with strong binational Co-Coordinator and Boards of Directors and both acted on the primary duo responsibilities of the *serviglesia* model, constructing churches and serving the area community. While the two ministries continued in their work, *Frontera de Cristo* built and further developed its programming while *Compañeros en Misión* slowed in the extensiveness of its work and went into a sort of maintenance mode.

The review of their respective pasts points at some of the most successful work that developed out of the forty-plus years of PBM programming. The chapter begins with the history of *Compañeros en Misión*, a binational ministry that started in 1993 as *Programa Nogalillos*, a bifurcated administration located in both *Ambos Nogales* and *Hermosillo, Sonora*. The plan for two points of leadership fit well with the JMC vision for churches in the border twin cities as well as the state capitols. This was the only ministry that tested a distanced leadership model. Outside interests for both ministry sites, generally from Arizona Presbyterian churches, along with support from the two Arizona

Presbyteries, strengthened the early growth and development efforts, whether with work teams, services programming, or financial aid.

As one of the first ministry sites, *Frontera de Cristo* broke ground in planning and implementation of a *serviglesia* model building a strong local, binational Board of Directors, connecting with local Presbyterians, and starting a new church mission in *Agua Prieta*. *Frontera de Cristo* built on the strong beginnings and has continued to develop, learning from mistakes, making tough decisions, but also building new programming as opportunity, either made or found, occurred. With its successes and financial solvency, *Frontera de Cristo* uses its connections and contacts effectively, certainly to build capacity for its own work but also to support the PBM/PBRO. Both ministry sites are key to understanding the history of the PBM, in all its strengths and weaknesses.

### *Compañeros En Misión*

When the first Spanish expeditions traveled through the area (now the site of *Ambos Nogales*) in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, they found Tohono O’odham people settled in small agricultural communities across the region.<sup>341</sup> The Elías family received a land grant from the government in the mid-nineteenth century and named their lands *Los Nogales de Elías* (*Nogales* is the Spanish word for the black walnut trees which are indigenous to the area). As a result of the Gadsden Purchase in 1853, the lands for the future *Ambos Nogales* divided. In 1883, a USA post office marked Nogales on the USA

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<sup>341</sup> The Spanish colonizers called the Tohono O’odham peoples, “Pimas Altos” (high Pimas); later settlers called them Papago (bean eaters); in recent times, the Tohono O’odham claimed their name, meaning ‘people of the desert.’ <https://explore-sonora.com/indigenous-peoples-of-sonora/tohono-oodham/>.

side of the border and a year later; México formally established the *Municipio de Nogales* (Municipality of Nogales) south of the border. *Ambos Nogales* became a transportation hub in that same period; and was, in fact, the first rail connection between *México* and the USA.<sup>342</sup>

A century later, the development of *maquiladoras* encouraged northward migration by people in search of employment. In *Ambos Nogales* in the early 1990s, as the population exploded with the in-migration of peoples from the south, its story of deprivation and squaller was a repeat of the story in towns on the *México* side across the entire reach of the *México*/USA border. Many people went without electricity, running water, or sewage services; individuals often stored the home's water supply in scavenged and unsafe fifty-five-gallon drums.

When the JMC and the PBM first scouted *Ambos Nogales* in 1984, the nearest Presbyterian Church was in Tucson, Arizona, some sixty miles north. A decade passed before the leadership officially established the new border ministry under *el Presbiterio del Noroeste* (the Presbytery of the Northwest). Unlike the earlier border ministries, this new ministry had a base at two separate sites, *Hermosillo* and *Ambos Nogales*, one-hundred-seventy-five miles apart. Without evidence to support this supposition, likely the double location came from the interest in planting a Presbyterian church in the capitol of the Mexican state of Sonora along with a new church at the border location. With the bifurcated ministry center, the founders created a composite name, *Programa Nogalillos*. Dr. Jorge Pazos transferred from Tijuana to Hermosillo where he started a

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<sup>342</sup> "Nogales, Arizona," [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nogales,\\_Arizona](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nogales,_Arizona); "Nogales, Sonora," [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nogales,\\_Sonora#History](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nogales,_Sonora#History); "Nogales, Arizona," <https://www.britannica.com/place/Nogales-Arizona>.

'house church' (1993) and served as the Co-Coordinator with the Reverend William Buehler and Marj Buehler living in Nogales, Arizona.<sup>343</sup> The Buehlers had served as interim Co-Coordiators at Frontera de Cristo, prior to moving to Nogales to support the newly forming ministry. The program started from nothing – no local Presbyterian church, no Board of Directors, no pastors, no property, no church members – just an idea and a plan to develop a Presbyterian *serviglesia*.<sup>344</sup> Ironically, the ministry grew very quickly; within a few short years, it hosted five staffed missions, four located inland from the border.

Four men, Methodist pastors from two prominent regional families, the Cotas and the Bobadillas, expressed interest in building church communities with the new Presbyterian ministry in the area. They approached Pazos and the Buehlers, seeking an opportunity to join with them as they built *Programa Nogalhillos*.<sup>345</sup> The *Presbiterio de Chihuahua* and the INPM approved the plans for incorporating the missions into PBM with the proviso that the *Nogalhillos* leadership train the Methodist pastors in the reformed theology of the denomination – a task the ministry prepared to meet.<sup>346</sup> Dr. Pazos recalled that *Programa Nogalhillos* purchased land from two of the brothers in

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<sup>343</sup> "Personnel Notes," *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (August/Sept 1993), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; "Personnel notes," *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Nov/Dec 1993), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; "Project Highlights – Nogalhillos," *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Feb/Mar 1994), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>344</sup> "Minutes of the Presbyterian Border Ministry, Inc., San Antonio, Texas, February 26-27, 1992," *Presbyterian Border Ministry Corporation Minute Book*. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>345</sup> Parrish W. Jones, *Presbyterians on the Frontier*, 134.

<sup>346</sup> *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Apr/May 1994). Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.



*Caborca* for the mission church at that location. He remembered the challenges of guaranteeing a living wage for the pastors and their families; at times they called on the “Presbyterian authorities in Hermosillo to help” (likely referring to the Presbytery). “We were confronted by necessities that were different for each coordinator [mission]. So, we went, little by little, supplying what we could in a makeshift fashion.”<sup>347</sup>

In 1994, *Nogalillos* purchased a piece of property in *Colonia Buenos Aires* – the site for the first Presbyterian church in *Nogales*.<sup>348</sup> Arizona Presbyterian churches and individuals funded purchase of the *Nogales* site and the UCC Church of the Beatitudes in Phoenix offered a modular unit to be used for a residence and the new chapel.<sup>349</sup> By the end of 1995, the *Nogales*, *Magdalena*, and *Caborca* congregations numbered greater than forty members – many still meeting in homes. In *Hermosillo*, local and visiting work teams completed chapel construction and Dr. Pazos opened a free medical clinic.<sup>350</sup>

When the Beuhlers retired, it was difficult to find their replacement.<sup>351</sup> John Sidnor, a Volunteer in Mission (VIM), joined the *Nogalillos* staff and served as an interim Co-Coordinator until Reverend Randy Campbell arrived toward the end of

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<sup>347</sup> Dr. Jorge Pazos discussion with author, 3-4.

<sup>348</sup> Lorie and Phil Gates memo to Stacy, Armistead, Buehlers, and Erickson (April 20, 1994). Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Minutes of the Presbyterian Border Ministry, Incorporated, Minutes, November 7, 1994, San Antonio, Texas,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Corporation Minute Book* (November 7, 1994), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>349</sup> “*Programa Nogalillos Purchases Lot for New Church Development in Nogales, Sonora, Mx*,” *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Summer 1995), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>350</sup> “Minutes, Presbyterian Border Committee, November 8, 1995, Hidalgo, Texas,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Council binder* (c. 1996), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>351</sup> “Minutes, Presbyterian Border Committee, November 8, 1995, Hidalgo, Texas.”

1996.<sup>352</sup> During Sydnor's brief time in *Ambos Nogales*, he supported the growing numbers of work groups coming to the border to help build the needed hard infrastructure. He wrote about the gratitude Mexicans felt and how "Americans are always impressed with the Mexicans' generosity, hospitality, and enthusiastic faith."<sup>353</sup> He believed all parties understood that the cooperation they shared "helped speed the gospel."<sup>354</sup> With time, *Nogalillos* transitioned from patronizing glorification of the kindly poor and needy, toward a ministry of respect, "mutual mission," and relationship-building.

Campbell faced plenty of work as the ministry was still in its early developmental years. When he arrived, *Nogalillos* had launched missions and programs across *Sonora* in *Nogales*, *Hermosillo*, *Caborca*, *Magdalena*, and *Empalme* (a small municipality embedded in the municipality of *Guaymas*). In *Nogales*, Pastor Arturo Bobadilla served out of a multipurpose building; a church building neared completion in *Caborca*, led by Santos Cota; a congregation met in homes in *Magdalena*, served by Pedro Bobadilla (brother of Arturo); and a house church in *Empalme* with Marco Velázquez pastoring.<sup>355</sup> Along with taking on five growing church sites miles apart in *Sonora*, the PBM had called on all ministry sites to make time for some intensive administrative work. Each

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<sup>352</sup> "Presbyterian Border Ministry, Inc., Minutes, February 5, 1996, El Paso, Texas," *Presbyterian Border Ministry Corporation Minute Book*, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>353</sup> "Interim Co-director reports on witness of *Programa Nogalillos*," *Nuestra Frontera: The Newsletter of Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Spring 1996) 3, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>354</sup> "Interim Co-director reports on witness of *Programa Nogalillos*," 3

<sup>355</sup> "Interim Co-director reports on witness of *Programa Nogalillos*," 3.

was to develop a three-year work plan and a manual of organization, implement leadership and stewardship training for all staff, plan regular staff and board meetings, and more.<sup>356</sup> At this juncture, Campbell and his colleague, Dr. Pazos, were becoming familiar with each other, the area, the people they worked with and served, and the PBM umbrella organization. The expectations of the newcomers to the ministry, to engage with the same skill sets, goals and objectives, and administrative prowess as ministries with greater organizational knowledge and experience, seemed daunting. With mentoring support from PBM, they proved capable of meeting expectations. Perhaps the development of a three-year-plan strengthened the ministry; five churches in five separate locations required considerable management and developmental support from *Compañeros en Misión*.

Each worshipping community related to the *Compañeros en Misión* ministry developed individualized identities, similar challenges, and celebrated successes. By most standards, the Hermosillo church, *Iglesia Voz del Desierto*, was the most successful of the churches. Reverend Dr. Jorge Pazos founded the church and *La Lengüeta* [the tongue] Community Center. They welcomed mission work teams to assist with early construction needs and later, to participate in the local ministry. *La Lengüeta* ran programs, often with a binational leadership team, that offered a variety of services and classes.<sup>357</sup> In 2008, again revealing a more progressive, northern México identity, the church called Yolanda

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<sup>356</sup> “Mission Statement of *Programa Nogalillos*,” (September 27, 1996),. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>357</sup> *Compañeros en Misión*, newsletter, no 8, (Summer 2002) 2-5, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “La Lengüeta Community Center changes lives,” *Las Buenas Noticias/The Good News*, no. 12 (Autumn 2004) 2, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

Galvez to pastor at *Voz del Desierto* despite the denominational restrictions against ordination of women.<sup>358</sup> Galvez served for a year and in 2009, under the leadership of Reverend Ramón García Sánchez, the church signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Presbytery of Chihuahua, *Compañeros en Mision*, and Christ Presbyterian Church, Madison, Wisconsin to fund a six-year program designed to “lift the congregation and move it toward self-sufficiency.”<sup>359</sup>

While unable to grow into a ‘successful’ church with a large congregation and buildings, the *Nogales* church, *Iglesia Sol de Justicia*, maintained a strong presence in its ministry and service to the community. The church hosted countless guests who visited with mission teams from the USA or came from *México* and the USA for conferences and special events. From its beginnings, contrary to the Mexican Presbyterian sole focus on evangelization, the church reached out with support for people in need of food and compassion from an infant feeding program to homeless outreach, serving migrants, and improving health services.<sup>360</sup> Likely, that was the result of Pazos years of experience serving with the PBM. In 2004, Pazos started a second church in *Nogales*, a home church at their residence with four to five families; twenty childrens attended their first Vacation

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<sup>358</sup> “New Missionary in Hermosillo,” *Las Buenas Noticias / The Good News*. no. 21 (Winter 2008) 3, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>359</sup> “Joint Mission,” *Las Buenas Nuevas; The Good News*. no. 23 (Fall 2009) 1. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>360</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry Council, February 1-3, 2001,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Council binder*, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; *Compañeros en Misión* newsletter, no. 8 (Summer, 2002) 2-5, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; Jorge Pazos Aragon, “Ministry to Migrants,” *Compañeros en Misión newsletter*, no 8 (Summer, 2002) 1, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Migrant Meals Expand to Five Days,” *Compañeros en Misión* newsletter no. 10 (Spring 2003) 2, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

Bible School.<sup>361</sup> That year, the Presbytery elected Pazos as Secretary, adding more responsibilities to the work of developing a new congregation and serving as Co-Coordinator.<sup>362</sup> It was in that context that Pastor Jocabed Gallegos served as untitled pastor of *Iglesia Sol de Justicia*. In 2009, the Chihuahua Presbytery initiated an aggressive plan, which included USA funding, to open new ministries in the burgeoning city of *Nogales, Sonora*. They assigned two ministers to the work; both joined the *Compañeros en Misión* team. The new congregation was to be a companion to the existing *Iglesia Sol de Justicia*.<sup>363</sup>

The ministry planted an additional church: *Iglesia El Buen Samaritano* in *Navajoa*. Each started as home churches and, with support from *Compañeros en Misión*, grew over time. The ministry paid for property ownership in *Caborca* and *Navajoa* and built chapels and started construction on a community center. Working from a rented building, the *Guaymas (Empalme)* congregation started a city bus evangelism program, opened a drug rehabilitation center, and initiated a jail visitation program for incarcerated men and women. Pazos shared that one of the addicts converted in the *Guaymas* church and became a pastor, serving churches in *Juarez* and later, a new church in *Ciudad Obregon*.<sup>364</sup> Two other men who attended programs and churches that were part of

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<sup>361</sup> “New Mission at Pazos Home in Nogales,” *Las Buenas Noticias/The Good News*. no. 12 (Autumn 2004) 2, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>362</sup> “The Lives of the Pastors,” *Compañeros en Misión newsletter*. No. 10 (Spring 2003) 3, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>363</sup> “Church Planting in Nogales,” 2.

<sup>364</sup> Pazos discussion with author, 4.

*Compañeros en Misión*, moved from a history of substance abuse, through treatment, and on to seminary, eventually serving as Presbyterian pastors in northern México.<sup>365</sup>

The congregations did grow, primarily with the leadership of lay pastors. These were churches serving poor communities and while, through their offerings, they did provide a small percentage of the pastor's salaries, they did not successfully develop to fully autonomous, self-supporting churches. The local struggles became overwhelming and the *Presbiterio de Chihuahua* eventually closed the *Guaymas* and *Navajoa* churches, in part because they were not sustainable ministries but also due to the loss of *Compañeros en Misión* USA leadership and the mission teams that had infused the work with support and hope. According to Pazos, the decision to close rested with the Presbytery.<sup>366</sup> Reflecting with sorrow on the situation, Thomas posed the question of what happened to the congregants. "Are they still involved in a church? Are they still on a faith journey of some kind, somewhere, with someone? I feel like somebody let those people down. I hope it wasn't us, but I feel like that was a failure, the fact that only three out of the five churches are still standing, still surviving. For me that was major failure."<sup>367</sup>

An analysis of *Compañeros en Misión*, conducted in 2012, listed the many positive impacts of the ministry. The ministry had changed people's lives, starting with the outreach to communities with bible-study, health service, and education support

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<sup>365</sup> Parrish W. Jones, *Presbyterians on the Frontier*, 136

<sup>366</sup> Pazos discussion with author, 8.

<sup>367</sup> Thomas discussion with author, 24.

including the ordination of several pastors. The services to homeless, migrants, substance abusers, and prisoners encouraged a new sense of the responsibility of people of faith beyond the walls of the church. The analysis did not and could not quantify the years of building relationships between visiting mission teams and border region people. The analysis also listed limitations to the ministry, each reflected the experiences of all the ministry sites: violence and security issues loomed large, affecting the income streams of each site. The poverty and low-income realities for Mexican populations served by the ministries required a persistent infusion of USA dollars, something the PBM and PCUSA could not maintain. The hope of reaching self-sufficiency in all five churches was not reachable and the cycle of donating funds-receiving funds continued. On the other hand, the commitment of people, mutuality of decision-making, and the social action focus remained foundational values the ministry could utilize looking forward.<sup>368</sup>

The push to self-sufficiency, embedded in the foundational literature of the entire binational organization, seemed a distant possibility to the new Co-Coordinators.

The economic situation in México makes that day seem far off because of the high rate of unemployment and the extremely low wages for those who do work. The minimum wage in México is \$3/day, while the prices for many items are equal to those in the USA. The result is that there simply isn't enough money available for churchgoers to support their own families and give much to their churches.<sup>369</sup>

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<sup>368</sup> Tim Wheeler, "Report on visit to Presbyterian Border Ministry sites, April 2012," (April 25-26, 2012) 11-13, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>369</sup> "Programa Nogalillos," *Presbyterian Border Ministry Council binder* (c. 1996), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

By 1998, Dr. Pazos began working with the individual sites to take partial responsibility for their pastor's salaries.<sup>370</sup> Contrary to any documentary information, Pazos reported that each site financially sustained its ministry, not as part of the effort toward full autonomy but due to the limited budget of *Compañeros en Misión*. It is unclear what he was referring to – perhaps at the time of the report, the ministry had not budgeted monies for direct payments to the ministry sites though, it is more likely he was referring specifically to pastor's salaries.<sup>371</sup>

In its growing years, *Programa Nogalillos*, provided monthly stipends to lay pastors including some money for social security, building rents, vehicle costs, and aid to people in extreme need. Pazos and Campbell explained the expenditures, “The hope is that the congregations will eventually be centers of ministry for both spiritual and physical needs of the people of their communities, providing such ministries as medical clinics, childcare and feeding programs along with worship services and Bible studies.”<sup>372</sup>

When asked about the goal of ‘self-sufficiency,’ Dave Thomas acknowledged that they had no source of income and no money from PCUSA:

We generated our own income through contributions, mostly from delegations that came down. We had some jackets with a map of *Sonora* embroidered on them... [and] Just Coffee, but the sales were to people that came in on mission trips. Most of the money that we had was a pass through. It came from US donors and every dime of it went straight to

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<sup>370</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry, Incorporated, September 14, 1998, San Antonio, Texas,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Corporation Minute Book*, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>371</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry Council Minutes of the Meeting February 1-3, 2001” 2-3. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>372</sup> “*Programa Nogalillos*,” c. 1996.



work in México, including Jorge Pazos' salary. I can tell you that in most of the cases the churches in México didn't contribute significantly to the pastors' salaries. They couldn't. They were all poor. The only one that stood half a chance in supporting the pastor was the one in Hermosillo. That was the only one because it had more of a middle-class congregation. When you talk about money in PBM, I would say almost everything... [came from]... donations.

PCUSA World Mission paid the salaries of the USA Co-Coordination and the USA PBM Director, and provided an expense account for each ministry site built from donations that came in through the national office. As with the other ministry sites, the most significant source of income for *Programa Nogahillos/Compañeros en Misión* came from mission work teams and study groups that came for short-term visits. Though their presence in the border region translated to financial viability for the ministry, much more came out of the mission team programming.

News had spread quickly of the opening of a new border ministry and the rapid increase in construction opportunities at several locations in *el Estado de Sonora*. During Reverend Campbell's three years, he supported youth and adult mission teams. He shared several experiences he had with youth groups – each a good example of the value of providing cross-cultural experiences for young people. It was difficult to make a trip to the border region for young people, this was not an exciting time for goofing off, playing, or partying. A short trip to the border region was an opportunity for a cultural experience, a deep dive away from anything they may have known into the realities of poverty, diversity, and the interconnections of faith. The experiences challenged the youth in a variety of ways though it is difficult to know the eventual impact their mission experiences had on their individual lives. Some of the youth may have left without reflecting on what they learned about life on the Mexican side of the border. Perhaps

more importantly, did the many sights, sounds, smells, even tastes of the border region reveal lessons they learned about themselves?

The first youth group Campbell talked about came from an Arizona church and teamed with members of the *Nogales* church, tasked with painting a double-wide trailer that was functioning as a church building and manse at the time. The temperature was hot, and at one point, Campbell realized the Arizona youth had disappeared from the work project and had “sacked out in the SUV with the air conditioning on.” He shared, “I can’t really get angry at them because it’s way out of their experience and their comfort zone.”<sup>373</sup> Campbell’s generosity in interpreting the actions of the visiting youth reflect a deep understanding of the challenges of cultural exchange in the border region and the response of visitors to the realities they have never known and would find difficult to interpret.

Often, *Compañeros en Misión* housed visiting groups at a facility – *Casa de la Misericordia* (House of Mercy) – up on a hill near the border fence, looking down on *Ambos Nogales*. As one youth group gathered at the end of a workday, some of the kids asked Campbell to check on one of their members. The young man was standing outside, alone and crying. Campbell recalled,

I went out and asked what’s going on. He said he was looking at all those shacks that are right around the place. He said, ‘I knew there was poverty in the world, but I didn’t know there was this much of it.’ It just broke his heart. If there’s anything that worked, it’s that kind of experience. Tony Campollo [Director of *Casa de Misericordia*] said one time, ‘the conversion is not complete until your heart is broken, as the heart of God is broken by human suffering.’ That’s just what happened to that kid. As I

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<sup>373</sup> Campbell discussion with author, 18.

talked to him, I shared that I was so glad that he knew this and that it impressed him so deeply.<sup>374</sup>

A third experience Campbell remembered involved a group of unskilled yet exuberant youth and Vaquero, a family man. Vaquero, a construction worker, who had been on the building crew for the *Casa de Misericordia*, lived with his wife and large family downhill from the facility in a dilapidated home.

Vaquero and his wife lived in this--it was made of wood and cardboard. With thirteen kids, he never had enough money to buy cement blocks for his own house. We told Vaquero we can bring a group and help build the house. Oh yes, yes, that's great. He did a design for this house that was behind the old house. It was a kitchen and then a bedroom, bedroom, bedroom, and bathroom. There was no hallway. No wasted space with a hallway so if you wanted to go to the bathroom or kitchen you had to go through everybody's bedroom. It was his design. This group – a senior high group from Colorado – would build the outside. They had no idea what to do but they built up the walls and then, at night, Vaquero would take all the walls down and rebuild them to where they were. The group would come back the next day and put a couple more layers on and that's how we actually got the roof on Vaquero's house. He would supervise that group during the day and at night he would correct all the mistakes. He was so excited to move into the new house with some of [his] kids, but his wife would not leave the old house even though she had a new one. She said, 'I raised all these kids in this house. I'm staying here.'<sup>375</sup>

Mission teams continued to visit *Compañeros en Misión*, engaged at all five sites. Many came to work, others to learn. The Co-Coordinator, Pazos and Thomas, supported the outpouring of interest by USA mission teams, always encouraging 'doing with' rather than 'doing for.' With an average of eighteen short term mission trips per year numbering hundreds of participants, they lived and worked by the mantra, "Building faith, Building understanding, Building relationships."<sup>376</sup> During the early years of the twenty-first

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<sup>374</sup> Campbell discussion with author, 19.

<sup>375</sup> Campbell discussion with author, 20.

<sup>376</sup> "Compañeros en Misión," c. 2005, <http://www.academy-7.com/CM-index.html>.

century, the program provided projects for the visitors to accomplish but, their goal for all people, hosts and guests, was to strengthen faith, improve understanding, and for relationships.<sup>377</sup>

Dave Thomas talked about the many groups they took to Navojoa, perhaps there more than any other location because of the hospitality, even though it was an eight-to-nine-hour drive. “The *Navojoa* church was so welcoming to us and they loved having visiting delegations and we helped them to build a sanctuary...”<sup>378</sup> In later years, Dave and Sue returned to the site of the church. Vandals had burned it to the ground; the congregation and the pastor were gone. Nothing remained except a slab of concrete which was being repurposed as a vehicle repair shop.<sup>379</sup>

During the planning process, the mission leadership listed their preferred work projects. Pazos and the Thomases saw the projects as “a way to foster togetherness, fellowship, community building, and getting to know one another.” Thomas shared that at first, it was difficult for the Mexicans to engage with the guests, “it was like pulling teeth because the Mexicans would come and sit along the sidelines and watch the gringos work and of course the gringos were perfectly happy to be working, perfectly happy. It

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<sup>377</sup> “*Compañeros en Misión*,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry: 2005 Annual Report*. (2006) 3, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Mission Teams Build Faith, Understanding and Relationships,” *Las Buenas Noticias/The Good News*. no. 14 (Winter 2005/06) 2, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “*Compañeros en Misión*,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry: 2005 annual Report* (2006) 3, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>378</sup> Thomas discussion with author, 1.

<sup>379</sup> Thomas discussion with author, 1-2.

took a lot of education on our part and Jorge Pazos' part to get them to want to work side by side. We eventually were successful in most places.”<sup>380</sup>

As part of the planned programming and to provide well-rounded exposure to the realities of migration and the situation in the border region, *Compañeros en Misión* included a visit with *Grupo Beta*, the Mexican agency tasked with migrant protection, and the Border Patrol station near Nogales. Thomas described some of what he witnessed.

We had all kinds of experiences with the delegations that went to the Border Patrol. Sometimes they'd come out of the presentation in tears. I can't believe this is our government in the way they talk. One time somebody asked a question, 'you don't really shoot people as they try to cross the border?' The agent said, 'unfortunately, no.' On the other hand, we had other groups where people came out saying I'm so proud that we have an agency that has people who care. Most people went back home with a much better understanding of how complex the issue [migration] is.<sup>381</sup>

The successful years of active support from churches across the USA can be attributed in large part to the capability of the USA leadership, Randy Campbell, Susan Thomas, and Dave Thomas. They not only strengthened the administration of the ministry but, established strong bonds of mutual mission with Jorge Pazos, the church pastors, and the Mexican communities.

The *Compañeros en Misión* Co-Coordinator and staff put the income to effective use, supporting existing programs and building new ones. Part of the organization's DNA – pastoral development – began in the earliest years when they embraced the Methodist

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<sup>380</sup> Thomas discussion with author, 13.

<sup>381</sup> Thomas discussion with author, 7-8.

pastors and provided them with seminary course work. After several years, the first four left the ministry and the *Presbiterio de Chihuahua* and the PBM Directors had a tough time finding replacements to serve at the new churches under the *Compañeros en Misión* umbrella. Consequently, the Presbytery leadership assigned *obreros* (lay pastors) to the work of a minister and the seminary training programs continued. In 2001, when the PBM offered courses in evangelism, *Compañeros en Misión* took advantage of the opportunity and included their five *obreros*.<sup>382</sup> In 2003, the ministry sent two aspiring pastors to seminary: Gilberto “Tito” Bojorquez attended Cook College, Tempe, Arizona, and Roberto “Beto” Mendoza, traveled to *Monterrey, Nuevo León* to attend the *Seminario Presbiteriano Saul Tijerina* (Saul Tijerina Presbyterian Seminary).<sup>383</sup>

*Compañeros en Misión* did not restrict its interest in education to training pastors. When possible, children in the congregations would start the new scholastic year with school supplies and uniforms though, this was not always a service provided to the greater community. Expanding on that model, Dave Thomas, Co-Coordinator, recalled the day they planted seeds for a broader education program for children. He shared, “...we had a lot of kids coming to the [Hermosillo] community center and we would take these delegations there and they would see that these kids needed education. They’d hand us money on the spot...”<sup>384</sup> Thomas would explain that any cash donation to the family

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<sup>382</sup> “2001 Annual Report,” *Nuestra Frontera (Our Border): The Newsletter of Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Spring 2002) 1, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>383</sup> “*Compañeros en Misión; Partners in Mission*,” *Newsletter*. no 10 (Spring 2003) 1, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “2001 Annual Report,” *Nuestra Frontera (Our Border): The Newsletter of Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Spring 2002), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>384</sup> Thomas discussion with author, 5, 6.

would not ensure that a child would be back in school. In many cases, the challenges of just getting a child to school with transportation, books, and clothing needs, the families needed the children to work to help support putting food on the table.<sup>385</sup> Thomas explained,

So, we came up with this program called Dollars for Scholars. We asked each of the five churches to select two students... to support with monthly scholarships... personally I didn't care where [the families] used the money. I didn't care if it went to the parents to buy groceries as long as that kid stayed in school and had improved grades. We would change the kids every year. We did that for a couple years and, at that time....<sup>386</sup>

In 2003, the *Compañeros en Misión* newsletter reported, "Education is the best way for young people to begin to break the cycle of poverty and hopelessness." That year, the new Dollars for Scholars program received designated funds of four thousand dollars from Scottsdale Valley Presbyterian's annual 'Cooks Tour.' Additional donations helped with scholarships for seminary students.<sup>387</sup> The ministry discontinued the Dollars for Scholars program in 2009 due to lack of funds however, some semblance of support for kids continued, with the goal of keeping them off the streets and in school.<sup>388</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> Thomas discussion with author, 5, 6.

<sup>386</sup> Thomas discussion with author, 5, 6.

<sup>387</sup> "Cooks' Tour provides Dollars for Scholars," *Compañeros en Misión; Partners in Mission*, no. 10 (Spring 2003) 2, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>388</sup> "2009 Financial Summary," *Las Buenas Nuevas/The Good News*, no. 26 (c. 2010) 2, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; "Compañeros en Misión: Going to School," *News From The Border. Presbyterian Border Region Outreach*, no. 1 (June 2014) 5, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; "Club for Boys and Girls," *Las Buenas Nuevas/The Good News*, no. 22 (Spring 2009) 2, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

Just like its sister ministry in *Sonora/Arizona*, the decision to serve the migrating population in *Nogales* happened in an instant. Thomas shared the story of how the program for migrants began.

Jorge had a car accident. He hit a child with his car and ended up in jail. While he was in jail, he met migrants and he began to realize that there was a whole population of migrants in the community that he could be serving. He felt like God had put him in jail for that reason, so that he could meet these migrants. That's why he started the migrant meal program. I think that was one of the things that set us apart from the others because, at that time, I don't think any of the others were feeding deported migrants on a regular basis.<sup>389</sup>

In 2004, Pazos started a new mission program in *Nogales*, serving one-hundred meals a day, five nights a week to twenty-five to forty migrants. When the Border Patrol/Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) returned the migrants from the USA, many had no money, clothing, jobs, no local family, no place to stay. While in *Nogales*, they stayed in a city-run shelter, *Plan Retorno* (Return Plan) located one block from *Iglesia Sol de Justicia*. Many migrants needed and received medical attention and the ministry also provided blankets, hygiene kits, and clothing.<sup>390</sup> With time, *Compañeros en Misión* received support from Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, PBM, churches, and individuals.<sup>391</sup> Dr. Pazos shared that there was a lot of local help as well, particularly

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<sup>389</sup> Thomas discussion with author, 13.

<sup>390</sup> PBM/MIP, Executive Committee of Council/Consejo, "General Reports on Ministry Sites," (September 9, 2004) 6, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; Presbyterian Border Ministries/Ministerio Interfronterizo, "Reunion Annual/Annual Meeting Agenda," (February 2005) 8, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; "Presbyterian Border Ministry 2005 Annual Report," 3, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>391</sup> "Ministry to migrants Expands in Nogales," *Las Buenas Noticias/The Good News*. no. 12, (Autumn 2004) 3, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.



from the Catholic Church. “Because the need was so great, we formed teams whose members could donate food, clothes, and health services.”<sup>392</sup>

In 2005, *Compañeros en Misión* reported the program served three-thousand-three-hundred-sixty-nine migrants and hosted two-hundred-twenty-eight visitors.<sup>393</sup> Thomas explained that almost all the visiting groups spent an evening meal with the people they served at the church, “That’s where people met lots of migrants. . . .those nights were really heavy duty because both Sue and I were busy translating the whole evening for these conversations that we were trying to stimulate between the migrants and the visiting delegations.”<sup>394</sup> Mexican volunteers reported, “It’s something we can do for these men, who are sent back to *México* with no money, no job, no family and no homes. Hopefully, they can see the love of Christ through us.”<sup>395</sup>

*Compañeros en Misión* also developed a strong public health program, *Fuente de Vida* (Fountain of Life), that served all the ministry sites and regional towns. With a generous gift of thirty-thousand dollars from the USA Presbyterian Women Thank Offering, *Compañeros en Misión* launched a health ministry, *Fuente de Vida* (Fountain of Life or Life Source) – a *Promotora* program that trained health promoters to serve their local communities teaching people about basic health issues.<sup>396</sup> The ministry hired

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<sup>392</sup> Pazos discussion with author, 4.

<sup>393</sup> “Presbyterian Border Ministry 2005 Annual Report,” 3. “*Compañeros en Misión*,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry 2005 Annual Report* (2006), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>394</sup> Thomas discussion with author, 14.

<sup>395</sup> “Our Faithful Mexican Volunteers,” *Las Buenas Noticias; the Good News*. no. 13 (Summer 2005) 1, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>396</sup> “PW supports Fuente de Vida with Thank Offering,” *Las Buenas Noticias; The Good News*. no. 15 (Autumn 2006) 1, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

Yvonne Pazos (Jorge Pazos' daughter), a registered nurse, to be the trainer. They collaborated with an existing *promotora* training program, Way of the Heart, a non-profit in *Nogales*. Co-coordinator Sue Thomas, RN worked very closely with Yvonne Pazos and a third woman, Jayne Raffety, RN, a volunteer who negotiated the collaboration with Way of the Heart and helped expand the Presbyterian programming to the various mission sites. At the sites, they started with surveys of the communities to discern needs, going door to door asking questions about respiratory problems, diabetes, and other health concerns. The connections they made helped in developing the local training programs.<sup>397</sup> In 2005-06, Ivonne Pazos took a leave of absence to serve two years on a missionary ship, the Logos II.<sup>398</sup> In her absence, Rafferty and Thomas continued to build the program and developed Phase II which provided advanced training, particularly in prevention care.<sup>399</sup>

By 2008, the health program had spread south to a small town, *Tubutama*. Pazos worked with city and school officials to offer workshops and *promotora* training. That year, she led seventeen classes with one-hundred-fifty-eight participants learning CPR, first aid, measuring blood in pressure and tests for blood sugar levels.<sup>400</sup> The following year, she led thirty-six workshops with four-hundred-ninety-one participants, mostly

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<sup>397</sup> Thomas discussion with author, 3-5.

<sup>398</sup> "Fuente de Vida extended to Guaymas and Navojoa," *Las Buenas Noticias/The Good News*. no. 14, (Winter 2005/06) 2, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>399</sup> "Fuente de Vida Program Trains Volunteer Health Promoters," *Las Buenas Noticias/The Good News*. no. 12 (Autumn 2004) 2, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; "*Compañeros en Misión*," *2005 Annual Report* 3; "Presbyterian Border Ministry 2005 Annual Report," 3.

<sup>400</sup> "Health and Life Extended," *Las Buenas Noticias / the Good News*. no 21 (Winter 2008) 3, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

women.<sup>401</sup> The strength of the *Fuente de Vida* programming under Pazos, Thomas, and Rafferty served the community well and while it is no longer a program in the *Compañeros en Misión* ministry, its legacy remains as part of the Way of the Heart organization.

Two changes had occurred in 1999. First, the ministry adopted a new name – *Compañeros en Misión* (Partners in Mission) – to reflect the growth from two ministry sites to six. Second, Reverend Campbell completed his three-year contract with plans to retire. Prior to his leaving, the organization clearly had embraced a shift in perspective, one that increased awareness and relationship between binational Presbyterians and encouraged missional exchange and mutual service.

Over the prior three years, Campbell had committed to several steps toward strengthening the ministry. To begin, the binational Board of Directors welcomed more qualified candidates to serve for a committed three-year term.<sup>402</sup> The Board and Campbell articulated their responsibilities, scheduled yearly planning retreats, and clarified the process of financial accountability. Each pastor opened a separate account through the Mexican bank Banamex to curtail cash exchanges. The program regulated the distribution of monies including salary payments and income expectation while stopping the practice of salary advances. Campbell committed to considerable annual travel, with

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<sup>401</sup> “Heal Ministry Wrap-up,” *Las Buenas Nuevas/The Good News*. no. 25 (Christmas 2009) 2. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>402</sup> 2003 Board of Directors: Rodolfo Navarette, *Agua Prieta*; Rommel Valero, *Hermosillo*; Betty Hillman, Tucson, Robert Seel, Tucson, Jesus “Chuy” Gallegos, *Agua Prieta*, and Fernando Valero, Tucson.

regular visits to the ministry sites and six trips per year to speak at churches in the USA.<sup>403</sup>

In 2003, Dave Thomas and Sue Thomas joined *Compañeros en Misión* as the USA Co-Coordinator. Graduating as a sociology major, Dave Thomas completed three semesters toward a Master of Divinity degree before leaving school and pursuing a career in broadcasting. Twenty years later, he started a new career as Director of Communications for the YMCA of the Rockies in Colorado. As a teen in Circleville, Ohio, he developed an interest in doing mission work and realized that dream in 2003 when he and Susan Thomas arrived in *Ambos Nogales*. Susan Thomas received her degree in nursing in Duluth. In Colorado, she worked in both Estes Park and Boulder, fourteen of those years in emergency room medicine. Susan also discovered her interest in mission through earlier involvement with her church in Oregon.<sup>404</sup>

In October 2005, Jocabed Gallegos, a graduate of the México City seminary, received a license to preach during special ceremonies from the *Presbiterio de Chihuahua*.<sup>405</sup> The action was significant for a denomination that did not allow women to serve as pastors. She had lived with her family in Hermosillo, then Agua Prieta. During

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<sup>403</sup> “Minutes, Presbyterian Border Ministry Council, San Antonio, Texas, October 8-9, 1998,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Council binder* (c. 1996), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Presbyterian Border Ministry Council, Minutes of the April 14-16, 1999, *Laredos Unidos, Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, México*,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Council binder* (c. 1996), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “History of Companeros,” *Compañeros en Misión: A Binational Program of Presbyterian Border Ministry brochure*, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “*Programa Nogalillos* Goals for Randy Campbell; January 1998 – June 1999,” attached to Mission Statement *Programa Nogalillos*, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>404</sup> “David and Susan Thomas,” *Mission Connections*, PCUSA website, <http://www.pcusa.org/missionconnections/profiles/thomasd.htm>.

<sup>405</sup> “Iglesia Presbiteriana Sol de Justicia, Nogales,” *Las Buenas Noticias; the Good News*. no. 13 (Summer 2005) 4, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

her years in seminary, she spent the summers as an intern for *Frontera de Cristo*; later working for *Café Justo* and leading youth and youth camps for the Presbytery. The Presbytery asked her to serve at *Iglesia Sol de Justicia* in *La Colonia Buenos Aires, Nogales, Sonora*. Gallegos explained,

I wasn't called the pastor. In the Presbytery they called me the person in charge of the church. That was my title. I was serving as the person in charge of the church for three years in *Nogales*. ... doing the work of a pastor. In fact, the church, they called me pastor; just in the Presbytery I wasn't allowed to be called like that. In the bulletins they always write Pastor Jocabed Gallegos. One day the Presbytery saw that it was Pastor Jocabed Gallegos and they were like oh, it's Joca... but they didn't say nothing.<sup>406</sup>

After three years at *Iglesia Sol de Justicia*, Jocabed Gallegos left to join her parents and help with her mother's care during cancer treatment and recovery – it was a sad and difficult decision for Gallegos, to leave the work she loved. While in *Nogales*, Gallegos also worked with *Compañeros en Mision* and BorderLinks, assisting with visiting delegations, leading worship, and teaching theology and Spanish.

In December 2006, the Thomases left *Compañeros en Misión* and moved to México City where Dave Thomas served as liaison for PCUSA.<sup>407</sup> In their final year living and working in the border region, Liz Toland joined the ministry again, this time as a YAV assigned to the *Presbyterio de Chihuahua* as part of the Tucson Borderlands Project. Her first time in *Ambos Nogales* had been at the age of sixteen while on a

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<sup>406</sup> Jocabed Gallegos [Seminary graduate (not ordained by INPM) and *Frontera de Cristo* Co-Coordinator] discussion with author, (Douglas, Arizona: *Frontera de Cristo* office, May 29, 2018) 14.

<sup>407</sup> "Farewell letter from US Coordinators Dave and Susan Thomas," *Las Buenas Noticias/The Good News*. no. 16 (Winter 2006-07) 2, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; "Minutes of Presbyterian Border Ministry Meeting, Tuesday, September 12, 2006," 9, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

mission trip with her home church, First Presbyterian in Iola, Kansas. She returned to work with the border ministry in 2003 and 2004 before the 2006 assignment.<sup>408</sup> Toland stepped into the Co-Coordinator position when the Thomas's left; her tenure lasted a brief time, she resigned in August 2008.

In a letter to the board, Toland explained her decision. In response to the strained financial situation, "many elements in the ministry have suffered."<sup>409</sup> *Compañeros en Misión* had suspended the migrant ministry and the scholarship program for children and redirected the monies for operating expenses. She also noted that ministers were planning to leave the program. Consequently, the nature of the work for Toland had changed from administrative to fund-raising.<sup>410</sup> In his capacity as Regional Liaison, Dave Thomas requested elaboration from Toland; she corresponded in January 2009. Generally, she reported that when she expressed concerns regarding cuts in programming and unfair distribution of salary reductions, Pazos and the Board of Directors ignored her except to suggest that she should contact a major financial supporter. Toland's efforts to evaluate and sustain the programming went ignored by the board and Pazos was unwilling to engage in strategic planning with Toland. The board did not respond to her letter of

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<sup>408</sup> "Young Adult Volunteer, Liz Toland, to Become Companeros US Coordinator in January 2007," *Las Buenas Noticias; The Good News*. no. 15 (Autumn 2006) 4, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>409</sup> The 2008 financial report indicated the total income and expenses \$115,197.95, a drop of almost \$40,000 in two years.

<sup>410</sup> Liz Toland letter to *Compañeros en Misión* Board Members, July 10, 2008, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

resignation, either individually or collectively, and she left the ministry, disappointed to receive one email expressing gratitude for her work.<sup>411</sup>

Several events combined to slow any forward momentum for the ministry starting back in 2001 with the USA responses to the terrorist attacks on September 11. USA policies restricting travel both in and out of the country made an impact on the border ministries directly but also hindered relationships across the entire border region. Then, in 2007, Hurricane Henriette pummeled *Sonora* with rain causing severe flooding and loss of property. For the border ministry, the focus shifted from bringing in mission work teams to disaster assistance. By 2008, with the economic downturn, not only were individuals and churches reticent to invest monies in mission travel to the border region but the PCUSA felt the loss which, in turn, severely impacted its investments in foreign mission.<sup>412</sup> After Toland left, *Compañeros en Misión* did not receive another Co-Coordinator through the PCUSA, further exacerbating the string of hindering disadvantages already experienced over the past decade.

At the PBM executive meeting in February 2009, the leadership appointed a commission to engage the *Presbiterio de Chihuahua* and evaluate the financial situation at *Compañeros en Misión*.<sup>413</sup> The *Presbiterio de Chihuahua* decided to curtail the work

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<sup>411</sup> Liz Toland to Dave Thomas, January 3, 2009, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>412</sup> Parrish W. Jones, *Presbyterians on the Frontier*, 138.

<sup>413</sup> "PBM Executive Meeting, San Antonio," attached to PBM Annual Meeting, (February 2009) 17-18, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

in *Navajoa* and *Guaymas*. Reverend Ramón García, Moderator of the Presbytery and PBM Council member took on the pastorate at the Hermosillo church.<sup>414</sup>

In 2011, following the denominational split, the *Presbiterio de Chihuahua* requested a letter from the Presbytery de Cristo in southern Arizona, that stated its desire to continue in ministry in the border region and to disavow the PCUSA Amendment 10A.<sup>415</sup> It is unclear if the Presbytery de Cristo provided the letter; it is clear the binational work continued. *Compañeros en Misión* updated its filing with the Arizona Corporation Commission and the bylaws.<sup>416</sup> Jorge Pazos shared his experience at the time of the denominational split; he had been attending the last meeting of the JMC when the Mexican leadership had officially severed relations. He recalled that new leaders had stepped in at the highest levels of the denomination, leaders that “espoused a different philosophy, and they succeeded in breaking relations with the PCUSA... the Mexicans [at his meeting] perceived the relationship as unimportant, as broken.” Speaking much as his colleagues have shared, Pazos went on to say, “It is very sad that always the mystery of the church on the border with such a diversity of finances, for one or two reasons they lose all of our work, *verdad?* And it was good work, and it continues.”<sup>417</sup>

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<sup>414</sup> “Presbytery Takes Action,” *Las Buenas Nuevas/The Good News*. no. 26, 1, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>415</sup> “Tim Wheeler “Report on visit to Presbyterian Border Ministry sites, April 2012,” 11-13.

<sup>416</sup> *Programa Nogalillos, Corporacion Incorporada Bajo el Acta para Entidades sin Fines de Lucro de Arizona* (Arizona Non-profit Corporation Act), no date, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>417</sup> Jorge Pazos discussion with author, 10.



The next year, the PBM approved three-thousand-six-hundred dollars for student scholarships and five-thousand dollars for two months of operating expenses for the failing ministry. Despite unmistakable evidence of struggles, by 2014, the *Presbiterio de Chihuahua* encouraged church growth sufficient enough to form a new northern *México* presbytery. The responsibility for growth and new church development in the *Estado de Sonora* (State of Sonora) fell to *Compañeros en Misión*.<sup>418</sup> Part of that development rested with locating pastors that could serve in the newly established missions. The expectation seemed unattainable, the situation untenable.

For decades, Reverend Dr. Jorge Pazos has maintained his commitment to the border ministry and the *Nogales* church, despite the many comings and goings of USA Co-Coordinator and Mexican pastors. He shared,

I came to the border believing that we would start large churches, but that did not happen. We have many little churches. We must adapt to the conditions on the border. We must understand the situation we have. I believe that this work must go on, even though Mexicans, Americans, Presbyterians do not have official relations. Right now, the social/political positions of our countries are quite different. In *México*, our economy is undergoing tough times. We are in a period of *vacas flacas*, not *vacas gordas* (thin cows, not fat cows). But we must keep going.<sup>419</sup>

Pazos has been through difficult periods in the past and, just as he did then, he sustains a strong belief in the work and places his hope in God's hands.

Unlike *Compañeros en Misión*, the neighboring sister ministry, *Frontera de Cristo* strengthened with the passage of time. It built a strong presence in *Agua Prieta/Douglas*, the USA Southwest, and in the PCUSA. It continued developing an ever-

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<sup>418</sup> "Presbyterian Border Region Outreach Survey of Each Ministry," February 12, 2014, 2, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>419</sup> Pazos discussion with author, 11.

broadening reach of strong relationships, sustaining consistent and improving programming, and advocating on behalf of border region people, permanent and transient. *Frontera de Cristo* maintains a good reputation with area residents, churches, businesses, and municipalities, along with religious and secular associations across the Southwest and the USA. They garner support in the denomination, due primarily to the quality of the programming and their depth of understanding of relational development in some of the most trying of circumstances.

### *Frontera de Cristo*

The founding group of *Frontera de Cristo* (Christ's border) established a stable basis for the long-term; the collective leadership of those early years built the strongest ministry of the seven under the PBM umbrella.<sup>420</sup> Under the aegis of PBM, and with the support of the PCUSA and the binational JMC up until 2011, *Frontera de Cristo* supported new church development and service programming along with building a strong standing in the community. Former Douglas Mayor Robert Uribe shared, "...they're an organization, a ministry that helps the people. Religion doesn't matter. Color doesn't matter. They bring a lot of awareness of issues and empower those who don't have a voice. I see them as a powerful force here. They are an incredible group of folks that are passionate about what they do... They are a ministry that helps the people, helps migrants. They help people get on their feet and in the meantime, they also provide

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<sup>420</sup> *Frontera de Cristo* maintained a strong collection of historic documentation. Coupled with the interviews of eight current and former staff and volunteers of *Frontera de Cristo* and Café Justo, the PBM and PBRO records, and PCUSA records, the history of *Frontera de Cristo* is the most thorough of the ministry sites.

the gospel.”<sup>421</sup> In the border region, the *Frontera de Cristo* story is one of success despite the many challenges. They engage in creative program formation and recognize when it is time to curtail a program that is no longer providing the services expected. Amidst all the programming activity, they have expended the energy necessary to build good relationships across a cultural and national divide.

In 1983, interest in developing additional ministry sites captured the imagination of Presbyterian leaders at all levels of the two denominations. Juanleandro Garza, INPM missionary serving with the Synod of the Southwest, visited the twin cities of *Agua Prieta, Sonora/Douglas, Arizona* and *Nogales, Sonora/Nogales, Arizona* where he met with local churches, area businesses, and municipal officials. His scouting work paved the way for several border gatherings of top representatives from both denominations including: Saul Tijerina, Moderator of INPM; Hector Zavaleta and Garza of the Synod of the Southwest; Jack Bennett from the PCUSA Atlanta office, and members of the JMC and the Border Committee.<sup>422</sup> The reconnaissance team visited sites across southern Arizona: Bisbee, Naco, Douglas, El Mirage, Nogales, and even Phoenix in central Arizona. At every stop, they found support for the new border ministry.<sup>423</sup> Ultimately, the

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<sup>421</sup> Robert Uribe discussion with author, (Douglas, Arizona: *Frontera de Cristo* house, June 2, 2018) 5.

<sup>422</sup> Benjamin F. Gutierrez, Liaison with Latin America-Caribbean, letter to Richard Smith, Synod Executive of the Synod of the Southwest, re: plans for JMC visit to border region, (July 8, 1983), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>423</sup> “Border Tour with Representatives of the Presbyterian US-Mexico Joint Commission on Mission, February 16-18, 1984,” (March 1984). Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

leadership determined *Agua Prieta/Douglas* would be the next viable twin-city site for a new, binational border ministry.<sup>424</sup>

Douglas, Arizona links its founding to the turn into the twentieth century in conjunction with area mining under the control of the Phelps Dodge Corporation. Named for the company president, Dr. James Douglas, it housed the smelter facilities for the mining operations. The company built the town of Douglas and designed an entire city square for four Protestant churches; Presbyterians organized First Presbyterian Church c. 1905.<sup>425</sup> The Douglas church partnered with *Frontera de Cristo* from the outset.

Using the established start-up model and with the oversight of JMC, the new border ministry began with assigning the binational Co-Coordinator team and a Local Committee populated equally by representatives from *México* and the USA.<sup>426</sup> The PCUSA and the JMC placed Reverend Gary Waller and Beth Waller as the first USA Co-Coordinator in *Agua Prieta/Douglas*; at the time, they had located to *San Jose, Costa Rica* to attend language school. The Wallers knew nothing about the area: the housing opportunities, the school system (they had three children ages three to thirteen), the border customs/*aduanas* policies and finally, if there would be room for their piano.<sup>427</sup> It

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<sup>424</sup> Gutierrez letter to Smith (July 8, 1983), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Development of the National Presbyterian Church of *México*,” *Report on February 1984 border tour with representatives of the Presbyterian US-México Joint Commission on Mission* (1992), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>425</sup> Oscar A. Olivares, “The Pastor’s Corner,” *Border Lines*. (Douglas, Arizona: First Presbyterian Church, April 1993) 1, 2, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>426</sup> J. Gary Waller, “Minutes of the Meeting of the Provisional Local Committee on the Douglas/*Agua Prieta* Mission, January 14, 1985,” Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; Juanleandro Garza and Manola E. Garza, “A report,” (Summer 1984), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>427</sup> Gary and Beth Waller letter to Robert Seel, Executive Presbyter, Presbytery de Cristo, *San Jose, Costa Rica*, (April 24, 1984), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

was important for the new ministry to get off to a good start, building a foundation for a strong future. For the Synod of the Southwest, questions arose about the quality of the Wallers' orientation to the border region, the local churches, the Presbytery, and the Synod. Could they develop a strong plan with clear goals and objectives? From the outset, higher-level leadership articulated concerns about the possibility of developing dependency relationships between *Agua Prieta* and Douglas Presbyterians which could result in the local ministry functioning independently from the JMC. Questions of dependency and independency followed all the ministry sites across the decades.<sup>428</sup>

In September 1984, the Waller family arrived in *Agua Prieta*/Douglas having completed their year of Spanish immersion study. With no available home rentals in *Agua Prieta*, they settled in Douglas until they could find a more permanent situation in Mexico. Within a few short months, the Wallers successfully pulled together the requisite Provisional Local Committee, comprised of members of the First Presbyterian Church of Douglas.<sup>429</sup> Reverend Robert Seel, JMC member, officially constituted the Local Committee in November 1984. Since the Mexican Co-Coordinator had not arrived in *Agua Prieta*, the Wallers and the Provisional Local Committee focused their efforts on founding the ministry and learning about Douglas and the USA Southwest. The Wallers traveled to El Paso, Texas to meet with Mexican and USA leadership and to spend some

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<sup>428</sup> Hector Zavaleta, Synod Associate in Spanish-speaking Ministries to Bob Seel, Executive Presbyter, Presbytery de Cristo, (August 24, 1984), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>429</sup> Attendees at the first official meeting of the future *Frontera de Cristo*: Manny Valenzuela, Shirley Jewell, George Frazier, Wayne Leipold, Arlo Janssen, Don Gray, Beth Waller, Gary Waller, Bob Seel.

training time with Bill and Carol Schlesinger at *Proyecto Verdad*.<sup>430</sup> In a memo to the Provisional Local Committee, Waller stated,

...at our first meeting on December 10, 1984, a convener was appointed for our meeting on January 14, 1985. Shirley [Jewell] accepted that responsibility. It is my feeling that we are now at the point in our development as a committee to elect our own officers and to establish an organizational structure that will enable us to be as effective as possible in carrying out the mission of our Lord. To that end, I am enclosing a first draft bylaws proposal for your careful reading.<sup>431</sup>

The Provisional Local Committee approved the bylaws and the slate of executive officers. Shirley Jewel served as the first elected moderator of the new ministry.

The bylaws formally established the name - *Frontera de Cristo* - and declared its general purpose, “to discern the will of God together and provide direction for *Frontera de Cristo* in harmony with the goals and guidelines of Presbyterian Border Ministry.”<sup>432</sup>

Along with outlining typical structural planning for any non-profit start-up, the bylaws connected the organization to the joint denominational ministry on the one hand and local relationships on the other. The State of Arizona approved *Frontera de Cristo*'s Articles of Incorporation March 1987, recognizing it as an official non-profit of the state.

Due to a delay in the arrival of a Mexican Co-Coordinator, the work of the border ministry could not take on a binational effort. Searching for a starting point in Douglas, the first

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<sup>430</sup> J. Gary Waller to Helen S. Fitzpatrick, “A Brief History of *Frontera de Cristo* Project,” (October 24, 1988), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; Minutes of the Board, (December 10, 1984), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; Shirley Jewell served on the Provisional Local Committee and continues to support *Frontera de Cristo* as of this writing; J. Gary Waller and Elizabeth Waller to the Joint Commission on Mission, *México*, D.F., *México*, (February 13, 1995) 1, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>431</sup> Gary [Waller] to Members of the Provisional LCDAPM re: Bylaws for LDCAPM, (c. 1985) 1, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>432</sup> “By Laws for the administration of *Frontera de Cristo*,” *Frontera de Cristo*, (c. 1986), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

outreach investigated the possibility of Spanish-speaking services and activities at the First Presbyterian Church of Douglas. The Local Committee called on Manny Valenzuela and Cecilia Castellanos, members of First Presbyterian and former members of the Spanish Church. The two researched the old church's history. The old Presbytery of Southern Arizona had organized the Spanish Church in 1908 in the nearby town of Pirtleville though the congregation soon relocated to Douglas (F Avenue between 15 & 16 Street). In 1956, with seventy members on the rolls, no pastor, and far too many financial challenges, the Spanish Church merged with the First Presbyterian Church of Douglas. The merger failed, attributed primarily to "differences in worship style and an inability for many of the new members to speak English..."<sup>433</sup> The new effort to launch a Spanish-speaking ministry in the Douglas church began with some community outreach efforts that showed some initial promise but, with little active interest over the next few months, the border ministry curtailed the Spanish worship program.<sup>434</sup> Though, over the years, most of the work of the border ministries focused on the Mexico side of the border; efforts to serve the USA side had begun with the first binational ministry site in *Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua/El Paso*, Texas. The difference between the outreach years earlier in El Paso and the efforts in Douglas, was in the preliminary work. In El Paso, the Co-Coordinator spent time talking with the Hispanic community to learn about their needs and hopes and responded accordingly, respecting the importance of planning, participation, and implementation from the

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<sup>433</sup> J. Gary Waller, "Minutes of the Meeting of the Provisional Local Committee on the *Agua Prieta/Douglas Mission*," (December 10, 1984), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>434</sup> J. Gary Waller, "Minutes of the Meeting of the Provisional Local Committee on the *Agua Prieta/Douglas Mission* (March 5, 1985), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; La Comisión, "no title" a questionnaire in Spanish, *File - Frontera de Cristo minutes 1984-86* (2006-07), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; J. Gary Waller, "Minutes of the Meeting of the Provisional Local Committee on the *Agua Prieta/Douglas Mission* (April 9, 1985), *File - Frontera de Cristo minutes 1984-86* (2006-07), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

community. In Douglas, in 1984, the ministry met with the Hispanic sector and invited the people into the ministry's own evangelical vision, yet they failed to ask the Spanish-speaking community what they needed or wanted. It was a good lesson in building relationships and successful programming.

In March 1985, Pastor Luis Manuel Lugo arrived from *Cuernavaca*, followed later by his wife Ana Lugo, and two daughters. Immediately, he facilitated establishing a Presbyterian mission in *Agua Prieta*. Reverend Waller reported, "Luis and I walked and rode the streets almost daily visiting potential members of the congregation and continuing the search for possible sites for a building in the future."<sup>435</sup> The beginnings for the *Agua Prieta* church began months earlier at the home of Amelia del Pozo and her teenage son, recent transplants from *Hermosillo*. Shirley Jewell, long time board member and volunteer, recalled,

Amelia was a very strong-minded lady and a wonderful lady. Her father was a presbyterian minister in Texas. I don't know her background exactly, but she ended up in *Agua Prieta* and was going to the Methodist church because there wasn't any Presbyterian. They told her that there was a new minister who had come to Douglas. Amelia found the Wallers and shared her expectations for a Presbyterian Church in *Agua Prieta*. As I understand it there were four of them in Amelia's little, small apartment in Mexico; Amelia said if we're going to start a church, we have to have a church service. So, they went through the whole thing, the singing and taking of a collection and all of that. That was the way it began.<sup>436</sup>

As the numbers at the worship services grew, the congregation moved to the Lugos' home. By the end of 1986, the mission purchased land in *Agua Prieta* and

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<sup>435</sup> Gary and Beth Waller and Luis Manuel letter to members of the Joint Commission on Mission, *México*, D.F, *México*, (June 10, 1985) 2, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>436</sup> Shirley Jewell discussion with author, Douglas, Arizona: Jewell residence (June 2, 2018) 5.



construction plans began. A colorful little sidebar story - An Arizona rancher and member of First Presbyterian Church in Douglas promised the donation of a large bell and four thousand adobe bricks.<sup>437</sup> Shirley remembered the donor as a “Border Patrol man,” caught smuggling and taken to jail.<sup>438</sup> It is unclear whether the adobe bricks or the bell made it to the *Agua Prieta* construction site. With or without the donation or the validity of the story, construction began on the first Presbyterian sanctuary in *Agua Prieta* and the State of Sonora.

By Mexican law, the mission service programs in *Agua Prieta*, including the medical clinic, required establishment of an *Asociación Civil* – the equivalent of a non-profit organization in the USA. Despite the protracted, administration-heavy process, the work of *Frontera de Cristo* and church building persisted.<sup>439</sup> There are several reasons an *Asociación Civil* is important. Most importantly, it protects a church’s assets. Under Mexican law, a church cannot own property but must transfer it to the state upon completion and become subject to arbitrary seizure or confiscation. Also, the government controls church programming and does not permit many social service operations such as day care centers. Within a few years, the ministry succeeded in formalizing the

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<sup>437</sup> “Waller letter to Fitzpatrick,” (October 24, 1988), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; Minutes of the [*Frontera de Cristo*] Board (May 7, 1985), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; Beth Waller, “Minutes of the Meeting of the Local Committee on the Douglas/*Agua Prieta* Mission, (May 7, 1985), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>438</sup> Jewell discussion with author, 15.

<sup>439</sup> Beth Waller, “Minutes of the Meeting of the Local Committee on the Douglas/*Agua Prieta* Mission, (August 6, 1985), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Report to Joint Commission on Mission,” (June 10, 1985), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; Minutes of the [*Frontera de Cristo*] Board, (May 6, 1985), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; Minutes of the [*Frontera de Cristo*] Board, (April 8, 1986 and December 2, 1986), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

*Asociación Civil - Nueva Esperanza, A.C* (Civil Association – New Hope) – with a Board of Directors headed by Amelia del Pozo.<sup>440</sup>

*Frontera de Cristo* launched into the year 1987 by breaking ground on a multi-purpose building designed to support not only the worship services and Sunday school, but also the many activities of the ministry including a health clinic with pharmacy, a day care center, and the food cooperative and clothing bank. Also, they facilitated formation of a Community Bank with an initial total of twenty-five loans of \$90 extended to individuals living in *Agua Prieta* including some members of the Presbyterian church. Eight separate work groups from six different USA states participated in building construction over the summer. *Frontera de Cristo* and friends dedicated the building in October, on World Communion Sunday; one-hundred and sixty people attended the dedication.<sup>441</sup> In a short span of time, with the effective, collaborative leadership of the Wallers and Lugos, the oversight and support of binational leadership, the labor of countless volunteers, and the infusion of monies and donations, *Frontera de Cristo* had built a border ministry. It established its Local Committee and bylaws, launched a *serviglesia*, formed an official Mexican non-profit organization, constructed a multipurpose facility and ten small homes/health posts, purchased a manse in *Agua*

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<sup>440</sup> Florencio Galvan C., President, “*Nueva Esperanza, A.C. Actividades,*” *Nueva Esperanza, A.C., Agua Prieta, Sonora*, (October 11, 1989), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; Les Winters, to Gerry Stacy, re: Five Year Plan comments, (November 1, 1989), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; Civil Association formed as *Nueva Esperanza – New Hope, A.C.* under Public Title no 7687, Oct 1989 registered under Secretary of Housing and Publicly - No NES891030SLO.

<sup>441</sup> Waller to Fitzpatrick, (October 24, 1988), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; Waller report to Joint Commission on Mission, (August 29, 1987), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

*Prieta*, developed partnerships, and designed programming that fit community needs.<sup>442</sup> With the *Nueva Esperanza* formalized, members of the church managed and staffed it with a simple statement of mission - to serve people in need. *Frontera de Cristo*, though still in a growing/developmental stage, had quickly advanced to a complex, multi-pronged system with responsibilities spread between the Co-Coordinator, Local Committee, and area churches and partners. Even with the intentionally broad, flexible statement of mission, they could never have imagined the work ahead with the coming surge of migrating people who would be without work, housing, food, clothing, medical care, even hope.<sup>443</sup>

By the end of the year, Pastor Lugo began reporting on the plight of the growing number of refugees who were finding their way to *Agua Prieta*. Most were desperate. In 1988, government estimates provided that the population in *Agua Prieta* had risen to as much as eighty-thousand people; with little more than eight-thousand people employed by the thirty-five local *maquiladoras*. *Frontera de Cristo* maintained a vigilant focus on the ever-increasing public concerns of the area. It was at this point that the Local Committee began to establish networks with other border region agencies, church and community based as well as governmental, in part to find collaborative partners to better

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<sup>442</sup> Florencio, “*Nueva Esperanza, A.C. Actividades*,” (October 11, 1989), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; Waller to Fitzpatrick, October 24, 1988; “Report of the *Frontera de Cristo* Committee in the areas of Faith Development and Service in AP,” (April 1990), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection. Almost from the outset, *Frontera de Cristo* received several significant payments from the PCUSA and the Border Committee – According to October 1985 meeting minutes the PCUSA Program Agency (later renamed World Mission) sent eight-thousand dollars, allowing *Frontera de Cristo* to open a money management account.

<sup>443</sup> The Foundation for International Community Assistance (FINCA) is a [non-profit, microfinance](#) organization, founded by [John Hatch](#) in 1984; Minutes of the [*Frontera de Cristo*] Board, (October 18, 1988, December 6, 1988, August 16, 1988, and November 15, 1988), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

assist with the extraordinary need developing throughout the border region. They struggled to understand, then spread the word about the growing, far-reaching complexities of the border region migrant situation.<sup>444</sup>

A publication issued by the Synod of Southwest proclaimed *La Decada de los Noventa* (The Decade of the Nineties), a time of “renewed challenge for a far reaching and sustained mission partnership with Hispanics” of the region. In recognition of the ethnic and cultural plurality of the area, they declared, “The present is a unique time of opportunity and grace. The Synod in partnership with its presbyteries must embody a renewed vision to support existing Hispanic churches and multi-cultural congregations.”<sup>445</sup> The Synod of the Southwest participated in the supervision of *Frontera de Cristo* through its representative serving on the JMC and Border Committee.<sup>446</sup> On June 28, 1990, *Frontera de Cristo* entered a covenant with Presbytery de Cristo that strengthened ties between the representational leadership and encouraged support of *Frontera de Cristo*. In return, the border ministry, would report to the Presbytery at least once per year and serve as advisor on border issues as needed.<sup>447</sup>

For *Frontera de Cristo*, the new decade began with several changes in staff, continued program development, and new challenges on the horizon. Les and Cathy

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<sup>444</sup> Minutes of the [*Frontera de Cristo*] Board, (December 6, 1988), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>445</sup> “*La Decada de los Noventa: Policy on Hispanic Ministries of the Synod of the Southwest*,” (March 16, 1990) 1-3, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “*La Decada de Los Noventa* - Internal quote taken from Lara-Braud, Professor of Theology & Culture, San Francisco Theological Seminary, (September 21, 1985), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>446</sup> “Excerpt from minutes of stated meeting of Presbytery de Cristo,” (June 28, 1990), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>447</sup> “Excerpt from minutes of stated meeting of Presbytery de Cristo,” (June 28, 1990).

Winters replaced the Wallers and Reverend Jesus Gallegos and his wife Rosario Viesca de Gallegos, and their children, replaced the Lugo family. Reverend Gallegos, like Reverend Lugos before him, worked two full-jobs, *Frontera de Cristo* Co-Coordinator and Presbyterian pastor at the *Agua Prieta* church.<sup>448</sup> The INPM had ordained Jesus Gallegos in 1986 and with his wife worked five years as missionaries in *Chihuahua*, followed by pastoring at *La Iglesia El Buen Pastor* in Tijuana.<sup>449</sup> Pastor Gallegos shared memories of a trip he and Rosario made to *Agua Prieta*, “Agua Prieta was a small town, very dusty. It was blowing sand over everything; inside the building was awful. My wife said, ‘I am never coming here.’ I said, ‘If they pay me, I’m saying no.’ We stayed fifteen years in Agua Prieta.”<sup>450</sup> As *Frontera de Cristo* matured into an established ministry, it promoted training opportunities, some offered by the PBM, for staff and volunteers to improve administration, outreach, and teaching skills. The PCUSA regularly sponsored a steady stream of internships to the *Frontera de Cristo* program; some worked through the summer months and others stayed an entire year.

The *Agua Prieta* congregation had increased to seventy to eighty people with members organized into four departments: Spiritual Life, Christian Education, Program and Development, and Human Relations. In 1991, in a ceremony attended by members of the Border Committee and Mexico’s General Assembly, the congregants officially named

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<sup>448</sup> Shirley Jewell, “Project *Frontera de Cristo* Local Committee: Report of the *Frontera de Cristo* Committee in the areas of faith development and service in *Agua Prieta*,” (April 1990), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection

<sup>449</sup> “Introducing,” *Frontera de Cristo News*, (Spring 1994) 2, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>450</sup> Jesus Gallegos discussion with author, 4.

the *Agua Prieta* church *Iglesia Presbiteriano El Lirio de los Valles* (Lily of the Valley Presbyterian Church).<sup>451</sup> By this time, the congregation was able to cover thirty-five to fifty percent of their annual costs with the remaining costs provided by *Frontera de Cristo*.<sup>452</sup>

In the 1990s, city water, power, and communication services ranged from insufficient to non-existent. *Frontera de Cristo* managed its communication challenges by purchasing a Citizen Band (CB) radio system that connected the ministry sites on both sides of the border with their staff and volunteers working offsite. Water needs, though not a concern at the *Agua Prieta* mission properties, raised a unique challenge for many of the outlying barrios. Many lived without a clean water supply and, unfortunately, when the city piped water in, many could not afford the cost for hook-up. While *Frontera de Cristo* worked with city officials to get water to certain neighborhoods, they developed an alternative program. Shirley Jewell stated, “We were going to bring water to these people, I mean pipe in water, get that done. What we did instead, I mean at first, was to bring water in trucks. I don’t remember which Presbyterian church it was in Texas that bought the water tanker for us. We gave every household a barrel or a tank to receive the water; the water truck that would go along and fill their tanks full of water. We had that program for many years. It took a long time to get the water going. We couldn’t get the city interested.”<sup>453</sup>

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<sup>451</sup> Gallegos and Winters, “Monthly Co-directors report to the Local Committee of *Frontera de Cristo*,” (September 7, 1991) 1-3, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>452</sup> Gallegos and Winters, “Monthly Co-directors report to the Local Committee of *Frontera de Cristo*,” (October 23, 1991) 2, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>453</sup> Jewell discussion with author, 8.

Mexican property law is different than in the USA, a challenge the border ministries regularly faced. The owner of any vacant property must erect a structure or be subject to forfeiture or squatters' rights. In addition, the owner must contract for water and electricity at all sites. As the city was slow to provide the necessary hook-ups to services, it was no small task for the church to bring in the requisite connection to electricity. The nearest delivery point was three blocks away.<sup>454</sup> Shirley Jewell recalled,

...we had not been able to get electricity in the church. We couldn't get any of the men who were able to do the work to come and help us. So, finally, Luis and Amelia found a man who would do the work but, he said, "you have to pay me a dozen T-bone steaks and two cases of beer. Well now... in Mexico, you wouldn't see a minister anywhere close to a saloon, right? ...and you didn't dare or who knew what would happen, you wouldn't have anybody in church anymore. So, Amelia and Luis decided that she would go to the saloon and pick up the beer and he would buy the T-bone steaks. So that's what they did. I forgot to tell you, we did have some electricity when some woman who was coming to the Presbyterian church loaned us the electricity. A wire was sent from her house to the church on Wednesdays when the women of the church would have their prayer meeting. Before that, the populace was looking in and they'd see people going back and then forth with candles, so they were being called the Brujas. Well, we couldn't have that. We were not witches. As I told you in the beginning, people knew nothing of the Presbyterian church. So, he put up the post and then the wires and we had electricity to the church. We went through all kinds of things like that, trying to get people to do things."<sup>455</sup>

Subsequent to the proclamation of *La Decada de los Noventa* by the Synod of the Southwest, *Frontera de Cristo* engaged with the Douglas church, once again, to try developing a cooperative Hispanic ministry north of the border. They planned to provide

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<sup>454</sup> Gallegos and Winters, "Monthly Co-directors report to the Local Committee of *Frontera de Cristo*," (September 7, 1991) 1-3, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; Shirley Jewell, "Project *Frontera de Cristo* Local Committee," (April 1990).

<sup>455</sup> Jewell discussion with author, Douglas, 12-13.

Spanish services, door-to-door evangelism, and an ESL (English as a second language) center with possible collaboration with the Douglas Literacy Council.<sup>456</sup> The First Presbyterian Church in Douglas approved the plan, “A Conceptual Approach for a Cooperative Hispanic Ministry,” and presented the idea to the New Church Development Committee of the Presbytery de Cristo.<sup>457</sup> In the meantime, they launched a search for a bilingual pastor (Spanish/English), someone with the skills to serve half time developing the Hispanic congregation. The Presbytery de Cristo and Synod of the Southwest committed \$120,000 over five years. The church’s Pastor Search Committee recommended Reverend Oscar Olivares; a Native of Yucatan, married with two children, a physician, and a graduate of McCormick Theological Seminary.<sup>458</sup> After Olivares’ arrival, attendance at the Douglas church doubled, pledges increased, and new member numbers went up. They offered a bilingual service, occasional ecumenical services, a prayer service, and pastoral counseling and visitation. The congregation reached out to social clubs, joined the Douglas Against Drugs group, and started both a Prison Ministry and a Hospital Ministry.<sup>459</sup>

Les and Catherine Winters arrived as Co-Coordiators after a six-month gap from the time the Wallers left *Agua Prieta*/Douglas. Though they had minimal Spanish skills,

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<sup>456</sup> Gallegos and Winters, “Monthly Co-directors report,” (August 19, 1991) 1-3.

<sup>457</sup> Les Winters, “Bi-monthly Report to the Border Ministry Program Office,” (April-May 1991) 1-2, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>458</sup> Les Winters, letter to Betty J Frey, (April 16, 1991), with attached documents: “Conceptual, Douglas, Arizona and the Approach for a Cooperative Hispanic Ministry of the First Presbyterian Church Presbyterian Border Ministry Project *Frontera de Cristo*.” (May 13, 1991) and correspondence from Pulpit Nominating Committee and the Session of First Presbyterian Church to members and friends, re: candidate Oscar Olivares (July 7, 1992), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection

<sup>459</sup> Oscar A. Olivares, “The Pastor’s Corner,” *Border Lines*. First Presbyterian Church, Douglas, Arizona (April 1993) 1-2, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.



Catherine Winters immediately joined Rosario Gallegos in the work at the *Agua Prieta* day care center. While Catherine found a niche, Les Winters did not seem to be a good fit. The local perception was that he preferred to act as a “CEO, working on his computer in the office, telling everyone what to do.” In response to the complaints, leadership developed a Co-Coordinator’s job description though Winters reportedly refused to meet the prescribed expectations. Winters resigned asking instead, to return as a Volunteer in Mission (VIM). When the Board declined his request, he tried to withdraw his resignation however, the PCUSA Global Mission office did not let him.<sup>460</sup>

Expectations for a daycare center started early in the ministry and with construction of the multi-purpose building, the proponents solidified their plan. Pastor Lugo felt the mission should place greater emphasis on developing church programs and the Wallers believed the ministry could better invest the money and time in programming, such as a medical ministry, that would have a more impactful reach. When Catherine Winters arrived, she felt called to develop the daycare center and with Rosario built the program, so it served thirty preschool children with seventy more on a waiting list. By 1992, plans were in place to increase the staff and expand to a second daycare facility on a corner property in Colonia Nuevo Progreso.<sup>461</sup> Warnings continued from

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<sup>460</sup> “Minute Executive Committee, *Agua Prieta, Sonora* 7 De December de 1993,” *Frontera de Cristo* (December 7, 1993), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>461</sup> “Prayer service initiated,” *Frontera de Cristo; Border Ministry, Douglas, Arizona/ Agua Prieta Sonora* (Spring 1992) 1, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Daycare Expanded,” *Frontera de Cristo; Border Ministry, Douglas, Arizona/ Agua Prieta Sonora* (Spring 1992) 1, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Health post completed,” *Frontera de Cristo; Border Ministry, Douglas, Arizona/ Agua Prieta Sonora* (Spring 1992) 1, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Minute Executive Committee, *Agua Prieta, Sonora* 7 De December de 1993,” *Frontera de Cristo* (December 7, 1993), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

outside consultants and the Local Committee, pointing at the “excessive costs for the number of people who would be served” and the amount of time needed to sustain the program.<sup>462</sup> The Committee was concerned that the daycare center would draw Catherine away from her mission interpretation and fund-raising responsibilities and Rosario from her responsibilities to the women’s programs and Christian Education. Though Catherine and Rosario believed they could successfully address the concerns, they could not, and it became necessary to hire additional staff. The budget for the daycare center exceeded all the other budgets of the church and Frontera de Cristo. When the Winters left, the project nurse, Lidia Villanueva, stepped into Catherine’s spot.<sup>463</sup>

Reverend Adams, Co-Coordinator for *Frontera de Cristo*, reflected on closing programs like day-care.

At the time, it was really a struggle because we questioned, do we subsidize the teachers with this daycare? Do we charge or do we just realize our need to provide this service is gone? It was a tough time in the life of the ministry, making those decisions, because it was recognition of the change in the context and deciding that the initial vision and purpose is no longer needed. What that meant was people that had been employed were no longer employed. That’s a tough piece because you always struggle with—the good thing about ministry is that you’ve become like a family and you support one another. So, it is upsetting that there’s not employment for the people we love and on the other end, it’s like, well, [sic] the purpose for the ministry no longer exists.<sup>464</sup>

By 1995, the daycare programming transitioned to family care. Daycare attendance had declined as other centers offered services free to workers. Increasingly,

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<sup>462</sup> “About the Day Care,” *Frontera de Cristo* (c. 1993), attached to Armistead article June 1993, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>463</sup> “About the Day Care,” *Frontera de Cristo* (c. 1993).

<sup>464</sup> Reverend Mark Adams discussion with author, Part 3, 3-4.

the ministry grew alarmed “over the situation of families due to poverty, stress, the low-wage female work force, the morally lax border society, and the constantly migrating population.”<sup>465</sup> They witnessed families disintegrating as substance abuse, infidelity, domestic violence, and abandonment increased. The economic decline in Mexico exacerbated an already challenging situation. In December 1994, the Mexican central bank had devalued the peso which launched a rapid series of economic events that spelled disaster for Mexican families.<sup>466</sup> In *Agua Prieta*, Frontera de Cristo reported, “the money in payroll envelopes lost 40% of its value. Prices skyrocketed and interest rates `doubled.”<sup>467</sup> *El Lirio de los Valles* could not meet its fiscal obligations and struggled to provide even ten percent of the pastor’s salary. The devaluation hurt Douglas businesses as well when Mexicans stopped visiting and shopping; “deserted streets and vacant store fronts were commonplace.”<sup>468</sup> An economic event such as the 1994/95 devaluation of the Mexican peso reveals the susceptibility of the border region, north and south, to global economic events.

Early in 1993, after the Winters departed, Reverend William Buehler and Marj Buehler arrived as interim staff and, in their brief time reportedly “restored the faith of the people of *Agua Prieta* in the project.”<sup>469</sup> Pleased with their leadership, the *Frontera*

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<sup>465</sup> “Devaluation Spells Disaster for Thousands of Mexican Families in *Agua Prieta*,” *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Summer 1995), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>466</sup> “Mexico Peso Crisis,” Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mexican\\_peso\\_crisis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mexican_peso_crisis).

<sup>467</sup> “Devaluation Spells Disaster,” *Nuestra Frontera* (Summer 1995).

<sup>468</sup> “Devaluation Spells Disaster,” *Nuestra Frontera* (Summer 1995).

<sup>469</sup> “Brief Outline of the Development of *Frontera de Cristo* and the Development of Current Problems,” (c. 1994) 1, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

*de Cristo* Local Committee requested the Buehlers remain for three additional years however, the PBM leadership reassigned them to *Nogales/Nogales* in mid-August to launch a new border ministry, *Compañeros en Misión*.<sup>470</sup> Reverend Robert Armistead and Estelle Armistead soon arrived in *Agua Prieta/Douglas*. They had served twenty-eight years in the mission field, first in *México*, then Ecuador and Chile.<sup>471</sup> Ordained in 1963, Reverend Armistead held a Master of Divinity from Columbia Theological Seminary.<sup>472</sup>

The decade of the nineties was a period of growth and transition for *Frontera de Cristo* with new leadership settling in, continued programs development, and administrative maturation. Co-Coordínators Gallegos and Armistead focused on preparing *El Lirio de los Valles* to become a fully designated church. Along with continuing outreach efforts and building the membership rolls, they trained deacons and elders to ready them for taking on official leadership of the church.<sup>473</sup> The Local Committee allocated time to review the internal workings of the ministry. The umbrella organization, PBM, communicated regularly with the ministry sites regarding

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<sup>470</sup> Shirley Jewell, *Frontera de Cristo* Committee letter to Juliann Moffett, Global Mission (March 19, 1993), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>471</sup> *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (August/Sept 1993), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; Bob and Estelle Armistead, "A New Opportunity! An Exciting Challenge in Cross-cultural Mission," (June 1993), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; Oscar Olivares, "Local Committee of *Frontera de Cristo, Agua Prieta, Sonora*, February 16, 1993, Minutes," (February 16, 1993), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>472</sup> "Introducing," *Frontera de Cristo News*, (Spring 1994) 2, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>473</sup> "Project Highlights –*Frontera de Cristo* (Christ's Border)," *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Nov. Dec. 1993), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

administration protocols including project documentation, evangelism, outreach and public relations, fundraising, leadership development, and mission group training. In preparation for the future, it was time for PBM and each ministry site to take a retrospective look at the past decade and analyze the work and determine the gaps in effective ministry.

As the daily work continued, the *Frontera de Cristo* Local Committee considered a variety of improvements and changes and developed internal subcommittees (such as personnel and vehicle maintenance), a hopeful step for better time management.<sup>474</sup> In an effort to build their donor lists, they announced a new program – Partnership in Mission – designed to reach out to USA churches and Presbyteries and create longer term commitments to build budget support.<sup>475</sup> The Local Committee needed to set a new strategic direction for developing long-term donor relations. The JMC was lessening the budget source amounts and could not be depended on for future fiscal planning. Thus, the local ministry needed to connect with churches and organizations willing to make pledges of three to five years.<sup>476</sup>

Initially, the ministry site’s fund-raising efforts leaned heavily on PCUSA related organizations, the PBM, and donations, some generated by visiting work teams. The

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<sup>474</sup> “Local Committee of *Frontera de Cristo*, Douglas, Arizona May 18, 1993, Minutes,” Spanish and English, (May 18, 1993), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Minute Executive Comite, *Agua Prieta, Sonora 7 de Diciembre de 1993*,” (December 7, 1993), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>475</sup> “Partnership in Mission,” *Frontera de Cristo News*, (Fall 1994) 1-2, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>476</sup> “Minutes Executive Committee, *Agua Prieta, Sonora 7 de Diciembre de 1993*,” (December 7, 1993), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

groups came from across the USA and invested considerable money in tools, equipment, and construction materials and then, donated their time to erect the needed buildings. Moved by their time in the border region where they witnessed extreme need and an organization that effectively addressed some of the need, visiting individuals and groups often provided additional monies for ministry programming. Visits from USA groups started the first year of the ministry, and from that point, *Frontera de Cristo* developed programming and invited people from across the country to visit, engage, and learn. One of their early themes read, “We sow seeds of love and hope on the border, responding to the spiritual and physical needs of the people on both sides.”<sup>477</sup>

In its first full year, *Frontera de Cristo*, though unprepared, responded to a request from a Junior High youth group in Phoenix that wanted to visit and learn about the border. The young Presbyterians received a lesson in “Borderology,” a program the Co-Coordinator quickly pulled together. The youth visited sites in the area and attended worship at First Presbyterian in Douglas before the five-hour drive back to Phoenix. Immediately, the Local Committee pulled together guidelines for groups requesting work/study opportunities. As the new border ministry developed, it annually hosted several work groups arriving from across the USA. With a new church in the works, assistance with construction topped the list of needs. Taking a creative first step, the ministry acquired a cement block-making machine, and later welding equipment, for a start-up business to assist with their construction needs but also to provide training and job opportunities for local workers.

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<sup>477</sup> “*Frontera de Cristo*,” (c. 1996), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

By 1989, a large and growing cadre of volunteers supported *Frontera de Cristo*. While many groups were Presbyterian, some came from churches of varied denominations, or from universities, colleges, and community organizations. Work and study groups visited on weekends year-round and all through the summer months, focused, primarily, on completing construction of project facilities.<sup>478</sup> Into the 1990s, as they completed the needed structures, and at a time when the organization was putting itself through an assessment process, strategizing for future works groups resulted in some significant changes. First, while they appreciated the visiting workers, the ministry recognized that volunteer labor took jobs away from local contractors, which, given the economic stresses in *México*, was inappropriate.<sup>479</sup> Second, the focus for visiting teams was on the work and not on the people and the place; it was time to raise up the importance of learning about mutual faith and building relationships and cultural understanding. The Local Committee recognized the expectations of the visitors and needed to make some tough decisions to stop the current trajectory and provide a new missional experience, one that reflected the values of the ministry and the shared understanding of God's presence with everyone.

In their assessment, the Local Committee concluded, "We cannot let the donor churches and organizations determine what we should do... churches that want to send groups to work on buildings that we do not have."<sup>480</sup> The situation had compromised the

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<sup>478</sup> *Frontera de Cristo* Minutes of the Board, (February 14, 1988, April 11, 1989, March 14, 1989, and May 9, 1989), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>479</sup> "Highlights from the History of *Frontera de Cristo*," (c. 2010) 16, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>480</sup> Robert Armistead, "Report of Project *Frontera de Cristo*, September 14 to October 19, 1993," (October 1993) 1, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

ministry as it called for inventing work to please the visitors who would spend a lot of money for unneeded work and thus, give them a false sense of mission service with little value to the ministry. This was a missional defining point for *Frontera de Cristo* and PBM. The PBM developed new, extensive curriculum, “mutual mission,” designed to welcome people to the border, “transforming their understanding of the real world in which oppression and poverty is an everyday happening. With this experience they are better equipped to return to their churches and do the mission interpretation that we need.”<sup>481</sup> They described the programming as “...an opportunity for the mission groups to learn more about Mexican culture, economy, and religious and secular values.”<sup>482</sup> In an early letter sent to churches and organizations across the USA, they offered an unexpected benefit from traveling to the southern border, the “mission teams will be coming to FdC to be the recipients of mission as well as the doers of mission service. In some instances, they will spend more time receiving than giving.”<sup>483</sup> With the relaunch of mission team experiences by mid-decade, approximately fifteen teams per year visited *Agua Prieta/Douglas*. Along with some medical and dental support, the teams offered bible school and basketball camp, engaged in evangelical outreach, and assisted with repairs and construction projects designed by the ministry. When evaluated, the Local Committee recognized their biggest challenge was helping the teams refocus and shift

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<sup>481</sup> Robert Armistead, “Report of Project *Frontera de Cristo*, September 14 to October 19, 1993.”

<sup>482</sup> “Project Highlights – *Frontera de Cristo* (Christ’s Border),” *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Feb/Mar 1994), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>483</sup> “Greetings...” *Frontera de Cristo News*, (Spring 1994) 1.



priorities from the simple satisfaction of doing and building to the deeper, more intensive work of building bi-cultural relationships and growing in the faith.<sup>484</sup>

In a redeclaration of purpose and mission in 1996, *Frontera de Cristo* stated of its Mission Interpretation programming,

While collaborating with mission teams, FdC works to promote the renewal of faith of individuals and churches of the PCUSA and INPM, that they may work together in the extension of the kingdom of God and that the two churches may become one body through the power of the Holy Spirit. Emphasis is placed in the interchange of gifts, understanding of life at the border, development of friendships, and capacity of visitors to be interpreters of mission in the home churches.<sup>485</sup>

A steady stream of visitors, from journalists to those on mission journeys, kept the Mission Education and Interpretation component of *Frontera de Cristo* active. With a focus less on bringing work teams to *Agua Prieta/Douglas* (unless the work was collaborative and executed in a side-by-side model of shared work/service experience) *Frontera de Cristo* designed a new Mission Team Ministry program to give North Americans a five-to-six-day immersion/fellowship experience on the border. Attendees learned about contemporary economic realities that had an impact on the border region and *México* and U.S. border policies. They considered responses to the immigration crisis, and made political, personal, and spiritual connections that the travelers could share when they returned home. Weekly prayer vigils and public demonstrations of

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<sup>484</sup> “*Frontera de Cristo*: Mission Teams 1997 Summary Evaluation,” *Frontera de Cristo, Agua Prieta/Douglas*, (c. 1998) attached to “*Frontera de Cristo, 1997*,” Health – Specific objects of the Work Plan, Bob Seel fax to *Frontera* (April 1, 1998), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection

<sup>485</sup> “*Frontera de Cristo*,” (c. 1996).

concerns for the plight of migrants became a commitment for *Frontera de Cristo* staff, volunteers, visitors, and members of the local community.<sup>486</sup>

What may have started as a financial decision, improving the mission work group programming, became the bedrock for the entire ministry – the extreme importance of relationships, both internal and external, to the faith community. Mexican Co-Coordinator Gallegos lead the way, recognizing the need for redirecting the visiting teams well before the formalized PBM curriculum arrived. He “steered the focus of the mission teams away from only leaving something tangible behind and leading groups toward building the ‘holy temple in the Lord in which God dwells by God’s spirit’ (Ephesians 2:20-22).”<sup>487</sup>

The Armisteads retired mid-1996 and Shannon Moses, former VIM, reluctantly stepped into the Co-Coordinator position.<sup>488</sup> Reverend Mark Adams arrived in 1998 and served as a mission specialist for a time as he became oriented to the ministry. In short order, he moved into the position of Co-Coordinator. The PBM determined that the Co-Coordination should not serve as church pastors as well and Reverend Gallegos was able to move out of his full-time responsibilities at the *El Lirio de los Valles* and in 1999 Reverend Rodolfo Navarrete stepped into the pastorate.

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<sup>486</sup> “*Frontera de Cristo* Coordinators’ reports:” January 14, 2000, March 23, 2001, July 27, 2001, March 15, 2002, May 17, 2002, and January 19, 2004, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>487</sup> “*Gracias por Compartir su Vida y su Fe!* (Thank you for sharing your life and your faith),” *Nuestra Frontera Nuestros Vecinos* (September 2005) 1, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>488</sup> “Highlights from the History of *Frontera de Cristo*,” (c. 2010) 18, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

The immigration crisis on the border also pushed *Frontera de Cristo* into relationships they could never have expected as they reached out to other church and non-church bodies to respond collectively to the expanding struggles in the border region. In 2000, the ministry stepped boldly into the unknown. Their awareness that the large influx of people to *Agua Prieta*, many from the southern Mexican state of *Chiapas*, was a symptom of a larger problem meant the ministry was open to new and creative opportunities when presented. A migrant from *Chiapas*, Eduardo Perez Verdugo, planted a seed with *Frontera de Cristo* and Adams, when he shared his simple truth, “To leave our land is to suffer.”<sup>489</sup> His comment posed the question, is it possible to ensure Chiapanecan coffee farmers of a just price for their crops; a price that would afford them and their families the living wage they needed so they would not have to migrate?<sup>490</sup>

The Co-Coordinator envisioned a cooperative in which the entire process for coffee, from planting in the jungle shade to roasting and packaging in preparation for market, would stay in *México*. For *Frontera de Cristo*, the idea held to the tenets of binational ministry and would address head-on the economic realities of a global market that negatively affected people forcing them to migrate northward.<sup>491</sup> As the vision unfolded on *México*'s northern border, the planners could not implement it without the

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<sup>489</sup> Mark Adams and Tommy Bassett III, *Just Coffee: Caffeine with a Conscience*, (Douglas, Arizona/*Agua Prieta, Sonora*: Just Trade Center, 2009), 12.

<sup>490</sup> For a history of Chiapanecan coffee production, see Daniela Spenser, “Soconusco: The Formation of a Coffee Economy in Chiapas,” in *Other Mexicos: Essays on Regional Mexican History 1876-1911* eds Thomas Benjamin and William McNellie (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1984).

<sup>491</sup> In 2003, the *Presbiterio Fronterizon Noroccidental* split into two: the *Chihuahua* and *Sonora* Presbyteries which includes the *Agua Prieta* area.

willing participation of the farmers near *México's* southern border. To ensure the coffee cooperative would work, the coffee farmers and their families had to invest fully in the idea and be committed to the implementation plan; a lesson *Frontera de Cristo* had learned early in its developmental years.

In 2001, Gallegos and Adams wrote to Daniel Cifuentes while he was visiting family in *Salvador Urbina, Chiapas, México* requesting that he talk to family and friends about joining with *Frontera de Cristo* to create a sustainable coffee business to market in the USA.<sup>492</sup> Daniel Cifuentes shared that at first, "...the farmers were unsure about the *Norteamericanos* but the decision to be part of *Café Justo* was good for the community. The best satisfaction is the relationship with the customer, the product goes directly to the customer."<sup>493</sup> The following year, Adams and his wife, Miriam Maldonado, along with Isaac Cifuentes and Tommy Bassett, journeyed two-thousand miles south to *Chiapas*. Their hope was to meet with the coffee farmers of *Salvador Urbina* to consider together the *Café Justo* vision. Though the Cifuentes family laid the groundwork, some local farmers were skeptical of the plan while others, based on prior experiences, could not trust *Norteamericanos/as* to be true to their word. After considerable discussion and taking time to build relationships of trust, several families agreed to try this unfamiliar way of doing the coffee business. This meant not only risking a cooperative relationship

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<sup>492</sup> Jesus Gallego Blanco and Mark S. Adams, Co-Coordadores, letter to Brother Daniel Sifuentes in Chiapas, Mexico, (December 18, 2011), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>493</sup> Daniel Cifuentes discussion with author (*Café Justo* roaster: Agua Prieta, Sonora, May 30, 2018), 20:46.

with the border ministry but also establishing a new kind of bond of cooperation among themselves.<sup>494</sup>

In *Chiapas*, Adams, Maldonado, and Bassett quickly understood that the business model they envisioned would not quite work for the coffee farmers. The commitment to family and community translated to an earnest desire to keep the business small and productive for the community. They wanted to invite other small towns to do the same, not as one large business venture but as individual cooperatives under the support umbrella of *Café Justo*. They valued relationships over profit opportunities. During the first visit, the planning meetings were extremely important but, equally essential were the visits to family homes, sharing pictures of children over a glass of fresh lemonade or recalling family stories over a meal. The farmers agreed to developing a cooperative and created their own plan. They decided to place the roasting operations in *Agua Prieta* to be closer to their customers and provide a better, fresher product. One seemingly insignificant business decision exemplified a core value of the young cooperative – they attached the name of a coffee grower to each pound of coffee, ensuring that the customers would know the name of the farmer who planted, nurtured, harvested, and prepared a quality coffee bean for their enjoyment.<sup>495</sup>

Their plans proved valuable as *Frontera de Cristo* and PBM began marketing the new product - Fair Trade Plus coffee. This was not the typical fair-trade model – as a Fair Trade Plus commodity, all production stayed in *México*. The ‘Plus’ translated to more

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<sup>494</sup> Adams and Bassett, *Just Coffee*, 47-55.

<sup>495</sup> Adams and Bassett, *Just Coffee*, 47-55.

jobs for Mexican workers and all revenues went to the cooperative, since the ‘middleman’ had been eliminated and marketing relied heavily on volunteer support. The *Café Justo* market was north of the *México*/USA border. The positive reaction of consumers resulted from the appeal of the cooperative’s story as an effective, human response to the northern migration and border crisis. *Café Justo* was also a very tasty cup of environmentally friendly coffee; arabica beans, shade grown, and without the use of fertilizers and pesticides. The quality of the coffee and the importance of the coffee message translated to immediate interest in the product; the initial plan projected a modest one ton of coffee the first year but, demand translated to more than six tons. For the ministry, it meant a steep learning curve about business, government regulations, and paperwork.<sup>496</sup> The need for additional employees launched *Frontera de Cristo* into another creative ministry.

*Café Justo* hired its first employees, two interns who had completed their initial three-month support program at *Centro de Rehabilitacion y Recuperacion de Enfermos de Drogas y Alcohol* (CRREDA – Center for Rehabilitation and Recuperation for Drug and Alcohol Illness). As part of their rehabilitation program, the interns gained work experience and earned a salary on their way to recovery.<sup>497</sup> This was the beginning of a mutually beneficial exchange program. In 1996, members of *Lirio* church had visited the local detox center to begin learning about the programming and to create a relationship with the program and clients.<sup>498</sup> A relationship between *Frontera de Cristo* and CRREDA

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<sup>496</sup> Adams and Bassett, *Just Coffee*, 47-55.

<sup>497</sup> Adams and Bassett, *Just Coffee*, 63-64.

<sup>498</sup> “Frontera de Cristo,” c. 1996.

grew from that mission outreach. Adams recalled the importance of CRREDA to him personally and to the ministry. During one of his first visits to the CRREDA facility, Adams, Gallegos, and the ministry nurse needed to transport a client, Jesus, to the hospital. Adams shared,

I sat with Jesus in the waiting room in an awkward kind of silence and I just said, ‘Jesus what do you want?’ He said, ‘I want to live again. I haven’t lived for ten years, and I want to live again.’ I think that’s what started softening my heart and opening my eyes. That partnership with CRREDA has been one of the more transformative parts of my ministry. The person who helped me understand more than anybody was Raul, Director of CRREDA. He was someone who lived a very hard life, then he became an instrument of vida (life). I remember one day when I was there talking with him, I noticed that they had new tile floors and mosaics on their sidewalks, and I asked him about it. He said, ‘we were cleaning up a construction site and we were told to throw these away and I asked the guy if we could keep them instead of taking them to the dump and he said sure.’ So, he took them to CRREDA and they made a mosaic on the sidewalks and the walls and some concrete tables. Then he said to me, ‘you know, it’s kind of like us, Mark. Society thinks we’re trash and that we’re not worth anything, but God doesn’t see us that way. God can take us off the trash heap and form us into something beautiful and useful.’ God doesn’t build like we build. God only uses broken pieces and brings together pieces that don’t seem like they fit to build his holy temple. At our best that’s what our community is.”<sup>499</sup>

The *Café Justo* cooperative associations were successful beyond any original intent. For the *Café Justo* farmers, they did not have to migrate to financially support their families.<sup>500</sup> But, the impact of that first cooperative expanded much farther than *Salvador Urbina*, *Chiapas* and *Agua Prieta, Sonora*. Some of the profits went into community improvements in *México* such as a water purification system. The Fair Trade

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<sup>499</sup> Adams discussion with author, Part 2, 11-12.

<sup>500</sup> Adams and Bassett, *Just Coffee*, 91.

Plus model expanded to the states of *Nayarit* and *Vera Cruz*. Collaboration helped CRREDA clients, *Café Justo* business, *Frontera de Cristo* ministry and mission delegates, and *el Lirio de los Valles*. Relationships grew as *Frontera de Cristo* and *Café Justo* offered a new opportunity for connecting the farmers and their families with customers and supporters through an annual “border to border” weeklong mission immersion experience.<sup>501</sup>

The first Border to Border delegation in 2004 set the tone for each subsequent event. From the moment participants stepped off the airplane in *Tapachula, Chiapas* and drove the winding road up the side of the jungle covered *Tacaná* volcano, to the last meal with the *Café Justo* cooperative community, they experienced a genuine welcome and learned firsthand about the lives of their hosts. They lived and ate with individual families, gathered for collective bible study and theological reflection on issues of migration, ventured into the thick jungle to pick coffee beans, witnessed workers toting huge bags of coffee beans through town, passed children on their way home from school, worshipped together on Sunday morning, and heard from the cooperative members of the hope and gratitude they felt because of *Café Justo*.<sup>502</sup>

Such connections meant a lot to the growers and the visitors. Often, the farmers displayed photos of individuals, groups, and churches in the USA celebrating their cup of *Café Justo*. One consumer shared, “Drinking Just Coffee makes us feel like true

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<sup>501</sup> Parrish Jones, “More than Fair:”

<sup>502</sup> “Report of the Coordinators,” (November 19, 2004) 1-2, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.



neighbors.”<sup>503</sup> Adrian Gonzalez shared, “It is rewarding to see relations between the farmer and the coffee drinker. It’s all about creating relationships.”<sup>504</sup> The commitment of neighborliness extended to times of challenge. In 2011, coffee production dropped low due to heavy rains during the crop’s flowering stage—a crucial time for a successful harvest. To protect the growers and processors, prices went up and supporters responded faithfully.<sup>505</sup>

Back in 2000, *Frontera de Cristo* developed a Micro-Credit Ministry with a plan of loaning amounts – \$500 to \$5000 – to seed start-up ventures. In preparation for *Café Justo*, the planners in *Salvador Urbina, Chiapas* needed a much larger investment amount and requested \$20,000, the largest request the Micro-Credit Ministry had received. The ministry board approved the loan. In 2005, following the success of the first cooperative loan, and committed to relieving the economic distress of coffee growers, *Café Justo* joined *Frontera de Cristo* and Catholic Relief Services-*México* to create the Just Trade Center. The Micro-Credit ministry converted its funds to the Just Trade Revolving Fund. This new concept differed from the global micro-business capital-lending organizations in that the investment went to larger cooperatives thus reaching a larger number of people.<sup>506</sup> While the news and popularity of *Café Justo* spread across

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<sup>503</sup> Parrish Jones, “Calculating the Cost:”

<sup>504</sup> Adrian Gonzalez discussion with author, 42:12.

<sup>505</sup> Parrish Jones, “Calculating the Cost:”

<sup>506</sup> Jesus Gallegos Blanco and Mark Adams, Coordinators, “Coordinator’s Report; *Frontera de Cristo*,” *Frontera de Cristo*, Douglas/*Agua Prieta*, 1, (November 11, 2000), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.; Adams and Bassett, *Just Coffee*, 44, 98, 100.

the USA, the new Just Trade Center reached out to coffee growers in *México*, Central America, and the Caribbean.<sup>507</sup>

By 2007, Tommy Bassett reported the outreach for the Just Trade Center had reached *El Aguila, Chiapas* with plans for a roaster in *Tijuana; Coyutla, Veracruz, Ciudad Juárez* and *Baranderes, Haiti*. The Center raised investment monies in multiple ways. Catholic Relief Services, the Synod of the Southwest, Arizona Presbyteries and churches, and the Just Trade Center collaborated to host several large dinner events – Just Coffee, Caffeine with a Conscience – raising tens of thousands of dollars of start-up money for the new cooperatives.<sup>508</sup> In 2008, the Just Trade Center received a grant from Presbyterian Women for \$20,000 and, a year later, the Warren Buffett, Jr. Foundation engaged to support expansion of Just Coffee sales and create a structure for all the cooperatives.<sup>509</sup> *El Aguila* and *Coyutla* formed and maintained cooperatives but the work in Haiti came to an abrupt halt when, sadly, the 2010 earthquake devastated the country, ending any hopes of continuing the coffee ministry there.<sup>510</sup> The efforts to roast beans in *Tijuana* failed for several reasons. Unlike in *Agua Prieta*, it was difficult to bring visitors to the facility and next to impossible to move the coffee north through customs. A roaster

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<sup>507</sup> “Highlights from the History of *Frontera de Cristo*,” (c. 2010) 25, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; *Frontera de Cristo Agua Prieta/Douglas*, 1-2, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “*Frontera de Cristo* Minutes March 16, 2007,” (March 16, 2007), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; Adams and Bassett, *Just Coffee*, 55, 69, 98.

<sup>508</sup> “Highlights from the History of *Frontera de Cristo*,” 28.

<sup>509</sup> “Highlights from the History of *Frontera de Cristo*,” 28.

<sup>510</sup> “*Frontera de Cristo* minutes May 25, 2007,” (May 25, 2007), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

in *Ciudad Juárez* never materialized and *Agua Prieta* became the receiving point for all raw coffee beans.

In 2016, *Café Justo* envisioned a new opportunity. The cooperatives, in collaboration with *Frontera de Cristo* and CRREDA launched a new effort, *Café Justo y Más* (Just Coffee and More), a coffee shop in *Agua Prieta* constructed across the road from *el Lirio de los Valles* as an addition to the roaster and processing building. The planners designed the addition to be large enough to accommodate community meetings and events, youth gatherings, musical happenings, and for receiving visiting delegations.<sup>511</sup> Febe Maldonado, Manager at *Café Justo y Más* stated, “*Café Justo y Más* is different than anywhere else in AP... it is part of a network, connected to *Frontera de Cristo*, the church, CRREDO... Many ask about the CRREDO connection, how can they be trusted? God is with me always.”<sup>512</sup>

While expansive programming such as *Café Justo* captured a lot of the attention of outsiders, the administration and work of the ministry continued. After fifteen years, Reverend Jesus Gallegos had left *Frontera de Cristo* in 2005 to start a new ministry launching a new Hispanic church in Foothills Presbytery, South Carolina. Elder Jose Angel Valencia moved into the Co-Coordinator position in January 2006.<sup>513</sup> A few years later, Rosario Jocabed Gallegos Viesca, a graduate of the *Seminario Teologico Presbiteriano de México* (Presbyterian Theological Seminary of Mexico) in Mexico City,

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<sup>511</sup> “Coffee Justo y Mas,” *Frontera de Cristo*, CRREDA, *Café Justo y Mas, Agua Prieta, Sonora* (c. 2016), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>512</sup> Febe Maldonado discussion with author, (*Café Justo y Más: Agua Prieta, Sonora*, June 1, 2018) 20:30.

<sup>513</sup> “Highlights from the History of *Frontera de Cristo*.” 28.

accepted the position of Co-coordinator. Joca grew up in *Agua Prieta* when her parents served as Mexican Co-Coordinators. As a seminary graduate, she worked with *Compañeros en Misión* in *Nogales/Nogales* before moving back to *Agua Prieta*.

On its twenty-fifth anniversary in 2009, the *Frontera de Cristo* border ministry had a lot to celebrate.<sup>514</sup> They were deeply committed to six areas of ministry where they had met considerable success: Church Development, Health, Family, *Nueva Esperanza* (New Hope), Mission Education, and the Just Trade Center.<sup>515</sup> From the outset, the PBM emphasized church development as a primary tenet of the organization and *Frontera de Cristo* immediately embraced new church development as a central focus of the local ministry. Since its modest beginnings, *el Lirio de los Valles* steadily grew. Even before there was a building, the church was a welcoming and inviting place, committed to nurturing faith and serving the community. It was decades before the *Presbyterio de Chihuahua* called Reverend Germán Casanova to develop a second Presbyterian church in *Agua Prieta*.<sup>516</sup>

The First Presbyterian Church of Douglas and *Frontera de Cristo* hired Pastor Carlos Montano to spend fifty percent of his time developing and coordinating an international program for interns from *México* and the USA. The Douglas church, with the support of Reverend Betty May Seel, *Frontera de Cristo* Board Member, had

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<sup>514</sup> “Highlights from the History of *Frontera de Cristo*,” 28.

<sup>515</sup> Mark Adams, “*Frontera de Cristo* Sees its Mission in Action,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry: 2007 Annual Report*. (2008) 1, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>516</sup> “Proposed Budget in Narrative Form; Finance Committee, *Frontera de Cristo*,” *Frontera de Cristo, AP/Douglas* (October 7, 2003) 1, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Highlights from the History of *Frontera de Cristo*,” 24.

developed its own plan for self-sufficiency. Along with intensifying its annual stewardship campaign in 2004, it energized its pastoral care support of the congregation while expanding its outward mission services.<sup>517</sup>

Another high-priority ministry of *Frontera de Cristo* was their Medical and Health services program. In 1987, Dr. Dodanim Talavera, Presbyterian raised and educated in *México*, and Beth Waller, *Frontera de Cristo* Co-coordinator, and a Registered Nurse, worked collaboratively to develop a multi-faceted medical services program; a program that set the standard for the Presbyterian Border Ministry.<sup>518</sup> They started, one *colonia* (neighborhood) at a time, surveying the residents to determine immediate and long-term needs. The fearless, assertive Amelia del Pozo, with her door-to-door visits, assured people they could confidently attend the new medical clinics.<sup>519</sup> They held public meetings that brought together community members and government officials to discuss the best ways to address the many health concerns that lurked in the unsanitary conditions of poverty in the burgeoning border city. Almost from the outset, the staff, doctors, and nurses focused on preventive along with curative medicine.<sup>520</sup> That first year, immediately expanding the impact of the health ministry, they started a training program for public health promoters, “*promotoras*,” and formed local health

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<sup>517</sup> Session of First Presbyterian Church, Douglas letter to Board Members of *Frontera de Cristo*, (September 8, 2003), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>518</sup> “Report to Joint Commission on Mission, June 10, 1985;” “*Frontera de Cristo* Minutes of the Board, May 6, 1985,” Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; Amelia del Pozo Martinez, “Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of the Local Committee of Project *Frontera de Cristo*, May 19, 1987,” Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>519</sup> Gerardo Peñaloza, “*Frontera de Cristo* Health Project Report,” (February 1991) 1, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>520</sup> Gerardo Peñaloza, “*Frontera de Cristo* Health Project Report.”

committees.<sup>521</sup> The health ministry offered family and child health programming; assisted the childcare center teaching child development and first aid to the workers; provided medical services at the *Agua Prieta* orphanage, *Brazos de Amor* (Loving Arms); and designed classes in personal hygiene and dental care for the local schools.<sup>522</sup> In later years, they provided medical services to thousands of immigrants at the Migrant Resource Center (MRC), located adjacent to the Mexico/USA border.

The ministry received support and financial assistance from a variety of sources. Furniture and medical equipment, including an ultrasound unit, came from the PCUSA Medical Benevolence program.<sup>523</sup> The Presbyterian Women donated five thousand dollars to each border ministry health program.<sup>524</sup> Doctors, nurses, and dentists from across the USA traveled to *Agua Prieta* offering short-term clinics, some in specialty areas such as ophthalmology and gynecology. (The *Asociación Civil* acquired the necessary government permission for foreign physicians and dentists to work in Mexico).<sup>525</sup> Idlewild Presbyterian Church in Memphis, Tennessee contributed and

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<sup>521</sup> “Waller report to Joint Commission on Mission,” (October 13, 1987), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Minutes of the *Frontera de Cristo* Board,” (November 10, 1987), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>522</sup> Waller report to Joint Commission on Mission, October 13, 1987; “Minutes of the *Frontera de Cristo* Board, November 10, 1987:” “Coordinators’ Report; *Frontera de Cristo*,” (July 27, 2001).

<sup>523</sup> Gallegos and Winters, Co-directors, “Monthly Co-directors Report to the Local Committee of *Frontera de Cristo*,” (April 22, 1991) 2, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>524</sup> Gerald F. Stacy, PBM letter to Gwen Crawley, Director, Health Ministries, PCUSA re: PW donation for health work at border ministries, (April 8, 1991), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>525</sup> “Executive Committee Meeting, March 9, 1993,” (March 9, 1993), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

installed a complete dental clinic.<sup>526</sup> Dr. Austin Bush and wife Mary Kay, a volunteer dentist team from Tucson, opened the dental clinic once a month offering cleanings, filings, and extractions.<sup>527</sup> After five years, the medical program had grown to four health clinics planted in various *colonias*, with a parttime physician, Dr. Peñaloza, and a full-time nurse, Lidia Villanueva.<sup>528</sup>

The medical services program added an important new component in 1995. Since the local government and several *maquiladoras* opened childcare, *Frontera de Cristo* and *El Lirio de los Valles* church closed the daycare center and shifted efforts to family services programming.<sup>529</sup> They planned a collaboration with an evangelical family ministry called EIRENE (Greek for peace, harmony and reconciliation) that emphasized marriage enrichment, crisis prevention and management, family therapy, and counseling. The new program trained members of the church and community in family counseling. By the end of the 1990s, the *Frontera de Cristo* medical and dental program had a pastoral support team in place for the sick and infirmed, a directory of service resources, and seven trained *promotoras* who hosted health fairs and talks that reached hundreds of people.<sup>530</sup>

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<sup>526</sup> “Project Highlights – Frontera de Cristo,” *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (April/May 1994), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>527</sup> “Frontera de Cristo Volunteer Describes the Border,” *Nuestra Frontera: The Newsletter of Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Spring 1996) 4, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>528</sup> *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the PBM* (June/July 1992), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Frontera de Cristo (Christ’s Border),” *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Nov/Dec 1992), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>529</sup> “Frontera de Cristo Volunteer Describes the Border,” 4.

<sup>530</sup> “Frontera de Cristo Volunteer Describes the Border,” 4; “Frontera de Cristo, 1997, Health – Specific objects of the Work Plan,” Bob Seel fax to *Frontera de Cristo* (April 1, 1998), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

In 2000, with a changeover in staff, the new nurse and interim physician conducted a needs assessment of the Nuevo Progreso Community.<sup>531</sup> Dr. Bush (dentist) noted the interest in dental services was low and the ministry needed to determine the best path forward – either close the dental services or conduct a campaign to get the word out about the importance of dental services to people who needed the services.<sup>532</sup> Neighborhood surveys identified the community’s array of predominate health concerns: diabetes and high blood pressure; drug addiction, poor hygiene and nutrition, children’s health, dental care; women’s gynecological needs including health problems in *las casas de huéspedes* (brothels). As in the past, the recommendations called for a greater focus on the education and prevention activities and, instead of hiring a new doctor, the medical program developed a voucher system for people who needed a referral to a physician.<sup>533</sup> The dental clinic moved to the Community Center and focused on childhood dental care.<sup>534</sup> The ministry did keep a nurse on part-time and she continued her work in the local elementary school, pre-school, and with special needs children where she taught good hygiene and health and provided minor clinical services. A local physician opened a bi-monthly clinic at the Community Center for diabetes education and testing and to

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<sup>531</sup> “Highlights from the History of *Frontera de Cristo*,” 21.

<sup>532</sup> Gallegos and Adams, Coordinators, “Coordinators’ Report; *Frontera de Cristo*,” (January 14, 2000) 1.

<sup>533</sup> “*Frontera de Cristo*; Informe de los *Coordinadores*/Coordinators’ Report,” *Frontera de Cristo*, Douglas/Agua Prieta (March 23, 2001) 1, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; *Frontera de Cristo* Coordinators Report/ *Informe de los Coordinadores* (June 30, 2000, March 15, 2002, March 23, 2001, May 18, 2001, July 27, 2001, c. 2006-07, January 19, 2007), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>534</sup> “Coordinators’ Report; *Frontera de Cristo*,” *Frontera de Cristo*, (July 27, 2001) 1, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.



provide pap smears.<sup>535</sup> The Health ministry offered *promotora* courses twice per year, curtailed only when a teaching nurse was not available.<sup>536</sup> By 2006, the health ministry engaged in an aggressive program to reach across the border wall into Douglas.<sup>537</sup>

*Frontera de Cristo* facilitated uniting medical communities and programs of Mexico and the USA in planning and implementing monthly clinics on both sides of the border.<sup>538</sup>

A lot of the programming was successful due to early development of a Community Center. During the early years of *Frontera de Cristo*, considerable focus and energy went into facilities construction in *Agua Prieta*. Once the ministry started work on the multi-purpose building (site of *La Iglesia el Lirio de los Valles*), the next step was construction of a series of ten small structures originally designed to be two-room homes. The first six structures, placed sporadically around the city, served four families and the program utilized two for “health posts” or local medical clinics. One of the health posts, located several miles from the church, morphed into the ministry’s community center.<sup>539</sup> Gallegos shared some of the process for planning and construction of the community center building. He worked with members of the church and *Frontera de Cristo* to survey the community and design the structure; the estimated cost for the building came to sixty-thousand dollars. The Board of Directors wanted the planning team to raise the money

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<sup>535</sup> “Coordinators’ Report; *Frontera de Cristo*,” (March 15, 2002) 1.

<sup>536</sup> “*Frontera de Cristo*: Health Ministry Work Plan, 2001-2005,” *Frontera de Cristo* (c. 2000) 1-4, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>537</sup> *Frontera de Cristo* Coordinators Report/*Informe de los Coordinadores*, (June 30, 2000, March 15, 2002, March 23, 2001, May 18, 2001, July 27, 2001, c. 2006-07, January 19, 2007).

<sup>538</sup> “*Frontera de Cristo* Minutes March 16, 2007,” (March 16, 2007), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection

<sup>539</sup> Parrish W. Jones, *Presbyterians on the Frontier*, 95-96.

prior to construction while the planning team wanted to “start per faith.” After a year with no action and no collection of funds, the Board decided visiting mission teams could help with the construction and they completed the ground floor. Having reached the goal of completing the first level, the planning team celebrated the opening of the center and felt content to wait before construction of the second story. Conversely, while the Mexicans wanted to wait a year before proceeding, the Board and people from the USA who had been involved in construction wanted to finish the structure. Gallegos shared, “We finished, and we had so many education classes for kids and for adults too.”<sup>540</sup> With the additions and improvements, the center stood two stories tall and functioned as a nerve-center for both *Frontera de Cristo* and the church’s community outreach and extensive programming. Along with health and dental services, many of the classes for adults and children, initially offered at the church, moved to the center. Visiting delegations used the facility for classes and overnight accommodations.

The *Nueva Esperanza* community center offered a variety of skills-development classes for youth and adults, based on the interests of the surrounding community. Adults attended specialized classes such as sewing, cake decorating, English language, welding, carpentry, and hair cutting. For some, this was preparation for a challenging job market. The Micro-Credit program supported graduates of some of the courses in launching new businesses and further assisted them with business and entrepreneurial training.<sup>541</sup> The center also offered varied programming for youth and children, some designed for pure

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<sup>540</sup> Reverend Jesus Gallegos discussion with author, 8.

<sup>541</sup> “Highlights from the History of Frontera de Cristo,” 22.

fun but also providing developmental growth opportunities in art, music, and physical education. They made tutoring available to children and youth struggling with schoolwork. In 2007, *Nueva Esperanza* opened a computer lab and offered training to youth and adults.<sup>542</sup> For decades, *Nueva Esperanza* has served as an extension of *Frontera de Cristo, el Lirio de los Valles*, and the many partnerships, opening its doors to the area community and to the many delegations traveling to *Agua Prieta* to engage in relationship, learning, and service.

Mark Adams shared that activity at *Nuevo Esperanza*, “went really, really strong for many, many years. When Chuy (Reverend Gallegos) and Rosario (who served as the *Directora* of the Community Center) left, that aspect little by little kind of fell by the wayside.”<sup>543</sup> With time, the center was used for Saturday bible school and a place for delegation housing. Adams elaborated, “It became kind of like a white elephant of our ministry because it was this big building that really didn’t have much of a purpose.”<sup>544</sup> Through a reevaluation process, both the Board of Directors and the community-at-large asked for programming that addressed the very real need of keeping children out of the drug culture. “One of the things that came out of the survey was the importance of working with children who were at risk of dropping out of elementary school at a very early age. The thought was that their career path was pretty clear.”<sup>545</sup> The children would follow the money and become drug runners for the cartel. “Now, to work at all the

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<sup>542</sup> *Frontera de Cristo Informe de Coordinadores*, May 25, 2007.

<sup>543</sup> Adams discussion with author, Part 3, 2 -3.

<sup>544</sup> Adams discussion with author, Part 3, 2-3.

<sup>545</sup> Adams discussion with author, Part 3, 2-3.

factories here you really must have a high school education at least to get hired. So, the vision was to develop a children's enrichment ministry, in partnership with the local school just down the street, to focus on kids who were at risk."<sup>546</sup> The success of the programming was immediate, and the Elementary Education Director in *Agua Prieta* approached *Nueva Esperanza* about providing the service across the school district.<sup>547</sup>

Along with the many ministries that grew out of *Nueva Esperanza*, the partnerships with CRREDA and *Café Justo* expanded as well. Pastor Jesus Gallegos reached out to a local Catholic church, *Sagrada Familia* (Sacred Family) and formed a positive bond between their congregations, an unfamiliar affiliation in Mexico. Together, they collaborated to serve the many people traveling to and through their community. In fact, the three organizations focused heavily on migrant needs. CRREDA developed *Agua Para la Vida* (Water for Life), a border ministry in Mexico that set up water stations along migrant trails south of *Agua Prieta* and regularly visited the station sites to replenish the water supply. Embracing Isaiah 49:10, "*They will neither hunger or thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat upon them. One who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them beside springs of water,*" *Frontera de Cristo* joined CRREDA to service the stations and participate in occasional sojourns carrying food to migrant camps.<sup>548</sup>

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<sup>546</sup> Adams discussion with author, Part 3, 2-3.

<sup>547</sup> Adams discussion with author, Part 3, 2-3.

<sup>548</sup> "Highlights from the History of *Frontera de Cristo*," 24; "Coordinators' Report; *Frontera de Cristo*," May 18, 2001, 1-2.

In 2006, several organizations and churches (*La Iglesia Metodista Fuente de Vida*, *La Iglesia Presbiteriana el Lirio de Los Valles*, *La Iglesia Católica La Sagrada Familia*, plus churches in Douglas) established the Migrant Resource Center (MRC). The beginnings of the MRC started years earlier with a dinner party that went awry. Miriam Maldonado, PCUSA Mission Co-worker, recalled the first time they reached out to the repatriated migrants. Miriam and her future husband, Mark Adams, had planned a dinner gathering inviting people from the church. No one came. It was a frigid winter night and, left with lots of food, they decided to share at the border. Miriam said, “I remembered a bible passage about a rich man who invites his friends, but his friends don’t arrive. The rich man begins to think, I will go to share the food with the poor. So, I said to Mark, why don’t we do what the Bible tells us to do? Share with those who really are in need.”<sup>549</sup>

They contacted a friend in Douglas, Brother Bob, and he joined them bringing blankets that people had donated to his church. They set up just outside the entrance to the immigration office on the USA side where the Border Patrol dropped off busloads of migrants, most often in the middle of the night. Unfortunately, that first night, the unexpected appearance of people with food and blankets concerned the border agent so she called in the Douglas police. Miriam had to go back into *México*, as she did not have the proper documents. At two or three in the morning, she was a woman alone on the dark streets. In that vulnerable situation, Miriam shared, “I saw a group of men coming

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<sup>549</sup> Maldonado discussion with author, 8-10.

towards me...then, one of the men said to me, ‘Don’t be afraid. We are from the people you helped; we are here to protect you.’ I felt much peace and I recognized God.”<sup>550</sup>

For five years, they continued this late-night, winter ministry of hot food and blankets until it became clear that they couldn’t handle the situation alone. The migrant repatriation numbers through Douglas into *Agua Prieta* grew. People arrived disoriented, afraid, injured, and sick, and some were desperate, having lost a family member in the desert. Miriam said, “We realized it was necessary to provide a supply of food and blankets, but also much more.”<sup>551</sup>

Miriam stated, “We saw the need to knock on the doors of the churches, with the faith community, to provide more complete services. We began to work with the Catholic parish of La Sagrada Familia.”<sup>552</sup> The number of partners and supporters grew quickly.<sup>553</sup> The city of *Agua Prieta* provided a well-located facility just south of the border and a few feet from the gateway. At times, the Border Patrol transported hundreds of migrants to Douglas and released them back into *México*. There were nights that the Migrant Resource Center (MRC) processed as many as three to four hundred people – men, women, and children of all ages. The MRC received the migrants, offered water, coffee, and something to eat, and provided much needed supplies from shoestrings and belts to

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<sup>550</sup> Maldonado discussion with author, 8-10.

<sup>551</sup> Maldonado discussion with author, 8-10.

<sup>552</sup> Maldonado discussion with author, 8-10.

<sup>553</sup> “Highlights from the History of *Frontera de Cristo*,” 26; “The ‘New Fronteradecristo.org,’ ‘Join Us on Facebook and Twitter,’ and ‘Migrant Resource Center Update,’” *Frontera de Cristo: A Presbyterian Binational Border Ministry* (April 2010) 2-3. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

pants and coats. The MRC offered comfort and helped the migrants as each decided their next steps, whether to stay in *Agua Prieta* perhaps at a local shelter, connect with family, or even purchase bus tickets home. Over the next three years, the MRC served almost forty-three thousand people with a meager cash outlay of fourteen thousand dollars.<sup>554</sup> The power of relationships between faith communities, supporters, and countless volunteers combined to give support and hope where none had existed before.

After years of witnessing the injustices of poverty including the horrors of the migration experience, *Frontera de Cristo*, along with the rest of the Presbyterian Border Ministry, certainly qualified as an informed advocate for the people of the border region. Reverend Mark Adams shared that his understandings and experiences as being a border region missionary meant that part of his job was to share the story, to be a witness to the goodness and the despair that defines the border region. He wrote, “We are grateful to God for the opportunity and the responsibility to be in ministry at the intersection of life and death.”<sup>555</sup>

*Frontera de Cristo* began intentionally advocating for migrating people in 2001 through a variety of opportunities from meeting one-on-one with influencers, to producing articles for print media or standing before a congregation sharing the border story. The organization hosted countless events at the border, inviting people from the USA to visit, to learn, to experience with and to pray alongside the people of *México*.

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<sup>554</sup> Jordan Bullard, Intern, “MRC Celebrates 3<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary,” *Frontera de Cristo: A Presbyterian Binational Border Ministry*, (August 2009) 1-2, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>555</sup> Mark Adams and Miriam Maldonado, “Ministry at the intersection of life and death; A PCUSA mission letter from the U.S.-Mexico border in Arizona.” *PCUSA News Service*, <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2013/12/17/ministry-intersection-life-and-death/>.

Over the years, thousands of visitors have stood at the ever-enlarging and ominous border wall, placed their hands on the dirty, cold metal, and offered private thoughts and prayers for an end to the division, hostility, and racism.

In 2005, a media frenzy descended on Cochise County, Arizona when so-called minutemen came from many states to ‘assist’ the Border Patrol in capturing people entering the USA without legal documents. In part due to the media focus, fears abounded in both countries – fears of Mexicans and Central Americans, who, from the perspective of the border ministry were, “entering and seeking jobs in our meat packing plants, in our construction and landscaping industry and, most ironically, in our hospitality industry....”<sup>556</sup> Locals who regularly crossed into the USA to shop, stopped coming for fear of being chased down by ‘migrant hunters’ and being abused or shot because of their brown skin. In response, *Frontera de Cristo* invited people to the border to celebrate with an event in response to the vitriol swirling around the southeast corner of the Arizona desert.<sup>557</sup> In April, an evenly divided, binational group of six hundred and fifty people gathered to worship in the shadow of the twelve-foot metal fence. The media failed to report on the event, a time when people, “divided by linguistic, cultural, economic, political and religious barriers came together to witness to the peaceable kingdom of God in the midst of the violence and division.”<sup>558</sup>

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<sup>556</sup> Mark Adams, “Mexican and US Presbyterians Join Hands Across Dividing Wall of Hostility,” *Nuestra Frontera Nuestros Vecinos* (July 2005) 1-2. Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>557</sup> Mark Adams, “Mexican and US Presbyterians Join Hands Across Dividing Wall of Hostility,” 1-2.

<sup>558</sup> Mark Adams, “Mexican and US Presbyterians Join Hands Across Dividing Wall of Hostility,” 1-2.



The organization engaged in the political fray as a voice for people suffering the results of trade agreements and corporate abuses. They wrote letters to state legislators and congressional representatives and senators calling for immigration reform – making the drafts available for replication and use to anyone interested in taking a political stand.<sup>559</sup> Adams drafted articles, regularly published by the Presbyterian News Agency, that shared the harsh truths of political and economic actions for countless numbers of people. One story, published in 2013, shared a conversation with Ernesto, a friend and recovering addict. Ernesto explained that when he leaves the security of the rehabilitation center, drug sellers try to get him to use, “*ellos me ven como su banquito,*” (They see me as their little bank). Considering the truth of Ernesto’s story, Reverend Adams reflected on the USA drug policy and its connection to the growth of the private prison industry. He posited, “Do private prisons see addicts and incarcerated low-level offenders as thousands upon thousands of ‘*banquitos*’?”<sup>560</sup>

In 2010, the State of Arizona enacted Senate Bill 1070 (SB1070), at the time, the most stringent, anti-immigration measure passed in the USA – so much so that it received international attention and created considerable controversy. *Frontera de Cristo* received countless inquiries, people turning to the ministry for understanding and explanation of the Arizona situation. Ironically, the day SB1070 passed, two hundred people, many of them the religious leadership of a variety of USA denominations, gathered in Phoenix, Arizona. They considered biblical understandings of immigration, living in a cross-

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<sup>559</sup> “Highlights from the History of *Frontera de Cristo*,” 26.

<sup>560</sup> Mark Adams and Miriam Maldonado, “Ministry at the intersection of life and death; A PCUSA mission letter from the U.S.-Mexico border in Arizona.” 2.

cultural society, and eliminating injustice and fear. Back in 2006, in a presentation to a separate set of religious leaders, John McCain had asked, “Where is the voice of the church? Aren’t you supposed to care about the immigrants?” His point was that the voices of fear and anger were much stronger than the voices of faith. As a politician favoring immigration reform, he did not receive the support he needed from the churches. The time had come for ecclesiastical action on the issues of immigration, speaking out about the suffering and the deaths.<sup>561</sup> Compassionate and prayerful engagement is difficult to publicize. Prayers and weekly vigils that call out the names of the migrant victims lost to the desert do not make headlines.<sup>562</sup> The volunteer’s kind words spoken to a frightened child, a desperate mother, or a despondent father are not heard in the seats of government.

Frontera de Cristo has initiated and nurtured the six ministry areas, binational worship experiences, partnerships, Spanish/English prayer gatherings, weekly vigils, community connections, outreach and advocacy, and more. The success of the ministry is due to the collaborative, relational programming they have sustained over more than three decades. The commitment, faith, wisdom, and cultural awareness of the Mexican

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<sup>561</sup> “Frontera de Cristo and SB 1070,” *Frontera de Cristo: A Presbyterian Binational Border Ministry*. *Frontera de Cristo*, (July 2010) 3, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection. Conference attendees: Reverend Janet DeVries, Executive and Stated Clerk, Synod of the Southwest; Reverend Raafat Girgis, FA Mission Council; Reverend Bruce Reyes-Chow, Moderator 218<sup>th</sup> PCUSA General Assembly; Reverend Saul Feria, Moderator, INPM; Dr. Minerva Carcaño, Bishop, Desert Southwest Conference of United Methodist Church; Dr. Claudio Carvalhaes, Assistant Professor, Louisville Seminary; Dr. Carlos Cardoza-Orlandi, Professor, World Christianity, Columbia Seminary and Staff of Racial Ethnic and Women’s Ministries/PW ministry area, General Assembly Mission Council.

<sup>562</sup> Note – Despite inclement weather or a special holiday, *Frontera de Cristo* has offered a weekly, Tuesday night vigil for more than twenty years. The participants call out the names of more than three-hundred migrant who died on the deserts of Cochise County. It is a lament for the deceased and their loved ones. In many cases, the individual is not known by a name and is simply “desconocido/a.”

and USA leadership served the ministry well, even when the binational and denominational leadership fell away.

The neighboring ministry sites in the *México/USA* border region shared by *Sonora* and Arizona are two of the most effective programs in the PBM. They supported the construction and growth of Presbyterian churches in their areas of service, and in the case of *Compañeros en Misión*, exceeded expectations as they launched a total of five churches and programs at various locations in the state of Sonora. The program development in each location focused heavily on neighborhood concerns, particularly medical and public health needs. Both locations developed public health programming that served locations in the ministry regions. The site leaders and volunteers responded to migration concerns and migrating people's needs over the many decades. They responded to immediate needs of hunger and respite, but also addressed root causes of migration through economic programming and advocacy work.

Similar work occurred at *Pueblos Hermanos*, the focus of Chapter Six, established in the early years of PBM in the twin-cities of *Tijuana, Baja California/San Diego, California*. Unlike the experiences at the other ministry sites, Protestant and Presbyterian ministries in the California's had already begun the work of building churches in *Tijuana*, and it was incumbent on the *Pueblos Hermanos* leadership and volunteers to discern the best ways to integrate into an existing system. They certainly wanted to be part of new church development but, also had designs on finding the most needed services that they would be able to offer. Again, the early ministry leadership, in collaboration with their Board of Director's knowledgeable about the area, was

particularly adept at engagement with local denominational opportunities and presbytery and synod support systems.

## CHAPTER 6

### ESTABLISHING MINISTRY SITES

#### TIJUANA (SAN DIEGO)

The border ministry in *Tijuana/San Diego* experienced different opportunities with its local area as it established and maintained new church development and launched regional programming. Named *Pueblos Hermanos* (*Hermanos* (brother/sister cities)), it began in an existing environment with active mission engagement and new church development by several Protestant and Presbyterian denominations in *Baja California* and the border cities and towns. The first order of business for *Pueblos Hermanos* was to learn about the existing missions and figure out how best to integrate into or collaborate with the local ministries. The new ministry formed alliances with other Presbyterian ministries in the area focused primarily on planting new churches in collaboration with the INPM. One mission organization came from South Korea, making *Pueblos Hermanos* the only tri-national ministry site in the PBM. *Pueblos Hermanos* utilized its PBM contacts to build its outreach to USA churches desiring short-term mission experiences thus strengthening the local new church development programming.

The modern *Tijuana/San Diego* twin cities straddle the *México/USA* border between *Baja California* and California, respectively. The Kumeyaay nation (known as *Diequeño* by the Spanish colonizers) lived in the area when Spanish exploration advanced into the California's in the sixteenth century. The Spanish established the first permanent mission in *Baja California* in 1697. Over decades of northward expansion up the *Baja* peninsula, Father Junipero Serra planted the San Diego mission in *Alta California* in 1769. Settlers founded the Mexican town of *Tijuana* more than a century

later, in 1889. The coastal area and twin cities grew as part of *Alta California*, under Spanish authority and then Mexican rule with its successful bid for independence from Spain in 1821.<sup>563</sup> In a few decades, following the Mexican American War, the lands, the cities, and the people divided along new national boundaries.

During and immediately following the Mexican American War, USA Protestants moved westward establishing churches all the way to the Pacific coastline. Presbyterians were not the first Protestants in the San Diego area; they planted their first church in the late 1870s.<sup>564</sup> While likely that people and worship communities moved easily back and forth across the national border, it was a century later that history documented a Presbyterian presence in *Tijuana*. The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of *Tijuana*, established in 1874, like the Catholic Church throughout *México*, functioned with considerable latitude and authority. The slow influx of Protestantism into Tijuana caused little concern until the latter half of the twentieth century when the number of missionaries and congregants grew enough to trouble the Catholic Church.

In the 1980s, while *Pueblos Hermanos* established roots in the border region, tensions between varied religious denominations and leaders spilled out into the public arena. On one occasion, Southern California newspapers reported a contentious public conversation between clergy – in this case, Catholic and Protestant leaders. Sergio de la

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<sup>563</sup> “Kumeyaay History,” <http://web.archive.org/web/201212010442553/http://www.viejasbandofkumeyaay.org/>; “Tijuana-San Diego Border Facts: An overview of history, trade and social/demographics of the region,” Crossborder Business Associates, [www.crossborderbusiness.com](http://www.crossborderbusiness.com); “Spanish Missions in Baja California,” *Wikipedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish\\_missions\\_in\\_Baja\\_California](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_missions_in_Baja_California).

<sup>564</sup> [www.fpcsd.org/aboutus](http://www.fpcsd.org/aboutus). Accessed August 26, 2020; [www.sandiegohistory.org/archives/books/smythe/part6-1/](http://www.sandiegohistory.org/archives/books/smythe/part6-1/).

Cerda, Monsignor of the Catholic Archdiocese of *Tijuana*, pointed at groups, particularly Protestant organizations, that promised food, clothing, and housing to bring potential converts to their ministries. In his assessment, the handouts made dependents of the poor. Contrasting perspectives by non-Catholic clergy denied the work focused on conversion and pointed at the similar provisions provided by the Catholic church. One pastor stated, “the conditions facing *Tijuana*’s poor are so bad that any outside aid merely helps people survive.”<sup>565</sup> After the issue emerged, even the *Tijuana* City Council considered stricter regulations on the influx of religious groups arriving, ostensibly, to proselytize and serve the poor.<sup>566</sup> The issue is a cogent one once the players sift out the matter of interdenominational competition. Religious engagement straddles lines drawn between the importance of building and sustaining a faith community and the importance of responding to the physical needs of the community. The bi-denominational Presbyterian Border Ministry and the individual ministry sites grappled daily with the simultaneous offering of faith support and the provision of social services. The two denominations, INPM and the PCUSA, struggled with the different perspectives – navigating the line between evangelism, church growth and offering social services. It was a question of administrative priorities – where to spend the available time, talents, and funds.

Presbyterian leadership frowned on the fostering of dependency and promoted self-

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<sup>565</sup> “Tijuana Catholics Criticize Evangelists,” *Times-Advocate* (May 23, 1986) 20, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/570235524>.

<sup>566</sup> “Tijuana Catholics Criticize Evangelists,” *Times-Advocate*. 20; “Catholics in Tijuana are battling U.S. groups,” *The Desert Sun*, Palm Springs, California, (May 24, 1986) 15, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/242330589>.

sufficiency in the programmatic goals and objectives, for individuals, churches, and programs.

Around that same time, the press shared a darker, more insidious backdrop to the day-to-day concerns of the needs of the impoverished. This was a time when the Catholic leadership increasingly spoke disparagingly of the growing number of Protestant and religious “sects,” not only in the border region but throughout *México*, and Central and South America. The 1990 census indicated 89% of the Mexican population considered themselves Catholic while the national average for evangelical Protestants (denominational Protestants and Pentecostals) hovered around 5%. Of course, the numbers varied across the country and were higher in border cities such as *Tijuana* and *Ciudad Juárez*.<sup>567</sup>

Though tensions with the Catholic church continued for Presbyterians and Methodists, their presence did not represent the primary focus of late twentieth century Catholic ire. The growing numbers of Pentecostals, which as of 1997 outnumbered all other non-Catholic worship communities, and the influences of other religious groups including Baptists, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and even Hare Krishna, suggested a trend the Catholics articulated as an assault on regional culture and national identity.<sup>568</sup> In 1992, reacting to the increase in Pentecostalism, Pope John Paul II, “often a voice for religious tolerance, bitterly attacked the ‘evangelical sects’ as

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<sup>567</sup> Carlos Garma Navarro and Víctor Cuchi Espada, “Pentecostal Churches and Their Relationship to the Mexican State and Political Parties,” *Journal of Ritual Studies*, 2001, 15, no. 2 (2002) 1.

<sup>568</sup> Navarro and Espada, “Pentecostal Churches and their relationship to the Mexican State and Political Parties,” 1.



‘voracious wolves’ (Miami Herald 1992).”<sup>569</sup> Consistent with years past, some condemned Protestant missionaries as “beachheads of U.S. Imperialism.”<sup>570</sup> In an environment of growing religious pluralism, increased border region missionary influence, and competition between denominations, the expressions of distrust and dislike seemed on the rise in the 1980s and 1990s. It was a challenging time for a new ministry to understand fully the context into which they were stepping. Not only did the leadership need to navigate the internal tensions of binational Presbyterian culture and theological differences, international political and economic disparities but, also the centuries of religious history and related tensions in the large border cities.

Reverend Arturo Vázquez, pastor of *Iglesia El Buen* in *Tijuana*, recalled his experience during the first weeks when opening the church. People from the surrounding neighborhoods flocked to *El Buen* expecting handouts after the service. When that did not happen, many quit coming; clearly, they based their interest in the church on important needs other than joining the faith community. Though the practice of handing out food, clothing, shoes, etc. had occurred across the region, it did not fit with the policies nor the theology of the INPM. The juxtaposition of Catholic condemnation and non-Catholic worshipping communities reaching out for converts with promises of necessities brought one of the key challenges of the binational ministry into sharp relief. The INPM promoted evangelizing and new church development as the primary work of the border

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<sup>569</sup> Rodney Stark and Buster G. Smith, “Pluralism and the Churching of Latin America,” *Latin American Politics and Society*. 54, no. 2, (Summer 2012) 1.

<sup>570</sup> John Ross, “Protestant Sects Gaining in Mexico: Some Catholics See Attack on Culture,” *The San Francisco Examiner*, San Francisco, California (September 25, 1988) 9. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/461507195>.

ministry and while the PCUSA valued the same, it also placed value on aspects of social services. The border ministries struggled with the tensions between the two approaches to *Pueblos Hermanos*; the ministry found ways to navigate the conflict.

Presbyterians in the *Tijuana/San Diego* twin city area shared a history of worship and mission service that pre-dated the Presbyterian Border Ministry and the formation of *Pueblos Hermanos* in 1984. The Baja Presbyterian Mission (BPM) chartered in 1964 as Native Missions (later Baja Presbyterian Mission), a non-profit religious organization, invested in new church development in the region. Focused on strengthening the Protestant presence in the *Baja*, the BPM spent much of its early years collaborating with Mexican pastors who had Pentecostal backgrounds.<sup>571</sup> In time, they worked closely with the *Presbiterio de la Frontera Noroeste de México* (Presbytery of the Northwest Border) to build and support churches in *Tijuana, Mexicali*, and other cities along the border to the east and south into the interior of *Baja California*.<sup>572</sup> When the BPM started, there were no Presbyterian churches in northern *México*. The BPM funded land purchases, church construction, and maintained pastors' salaries until the churches became self-sufficient.<sup>573</sup> Eventually, they turned over all new church properties and structures to the INPM. As a collaborator with the newly formed *Pueblos Hermanos* ministry, the BPM proved to be a valuable funding partner over the years.

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<sup>571</sup> Parrish W. Jones, *Presbyterians on the Frontier*, 102.

<sup>572</sup> "Our History for Ministry," <https://www.rbcommunity.org/blog-Update:-Baja-Presbyterian-Missions>.

<sup>573</sup> "About," <https://www.linkedin.com/in/baja-presbyterian-missions-inc-0b999538>.

As part of the ministry expansion program of the JMC, *Pueblos Hermanos* received immediate support from the two denominations with the assignments of Reverend William and Sue Soldwisch in 1984 and Elder Juan Daniel Espitia and Main Espitia in 1985. Born in Pasadena, California, Bill Soldwisch served three years in the Peace Corps in the Philippines before attending San Francisco Theological Seminary. While in the Philippines, he met Susan, a biology teacher, at a church leadership training conference; they married in Pasadena in 1970. Until 1979, Bill served as pastor in Washington; Susan served in the Christian Education Department of both the Presbytery and the Synod of Alaska-Northwest. She also taught Spanish in the local high school and worked as a lab technician at the Washington State Shellfish Laboratory. In the early 1980s, they moved to *Guadalajara, México* where Bill served an interdenominational English-speaking congregation and Susan taught at *la Escuela de la Lengua Española* (Spanish Language School). From *Guadalajara*, they moved to the border region after ten months of language training in *San Jose, Costa Rica*.<sup>574</sup>

Elder Juan Daniel Espitia and wife Main, a lay couple and the first *México* Co- Coordinators for *Pueblos Hermanos*, arrived from *Ciudad México* (México City) as part of the ministry launch team. Reverend Soldwisch recalled that together, they “conducted services and offered community health programs from a tent church in the *El Lago* neighborhood.”<sup>575</sup> Mr. Espitia knew English, was able to comfortably translate, had worked in an ecumenical environment, and had some experience with USA culture. His

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<sup>574</sup> “Where are they now? William A. Soldwisch and Susan Monte de Ramos Soldwisch,” *Tijuana, Mexico/San Diego, California*, (c. 1987) 3-5.

<sup>575</sup> “Where are they now?” 5.

skills meant a lot for the new ministry and facilitated understanding among the many ministry constituents. In 1988, Reverend Enrique Romero and wife Delfina took over the Co-Coordinator position in *Tijuana*. The border ministry incorporated June 3, 1986, under the name, *Pueblos Hermanos, Inc.*<sup>576</sup>

At the outset, the binational denominations charged the new Co-Coordinators with establishing the foundations and formulating the programming of the new ministry.<sup>577</sup> As with other twin-cities along the *México/USA* border, local *maquiladoras* drew large numbers of desperate migrants from southern and central *México*. *Tijuana* was not different from the rest of the cities and towns across the border region in that the numbers in the northward migration exceeded the need for workers and the city, local churches, and non-profit services could not keep up with the basic needs of a growing population. Those who found work, particularly women, often faced abuses in the workplace, and large numbers of people lived in impoverished and unhealthy conditions.

As the Co-Coordinators built their local board and established an administrative office, they assessed the area and learned about the mission services already underway. They connected with Native Missions and, in 1986, welcomed Reverend Sung Gyun Lee, missionary with the Korean Presbyterian Church, also charged with new church development. The Korean mission ministry founded two churches in *Tijuana*, Mt. Sion and Mt. Sinai, which, once completed, also were turned over to the INPM. Unlike their

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<sup>576</sup> “Statutes of the Association of Towns Brothers, Inc.,” *Pueblos Hermanos, Presbyterian Border Ministry, Tijuana, Baja California/ Chula Vista, CA*, (June 3, 1986), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>577</sup> “Pueblos Hermanos (Brother or Sister Cities)” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Newsletter* (c. 1985), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

colleagues under the PBM umbrella, *Pueblos Hermanos* was the only ministry given the opportunity, and the challenge, to build a tri-national coalition.<sup>578</sup> The large coalition of Synods, Presbyteries, churches, and the many supporters, all coalesced around the work of *Pueblos Hermanos*. The varied and diverse understandings each partner brought to the ministry required skillful communication between the players to ensure a forward, progressing, common vision.<sup>579</sup> Bill Soldwisch was up to the task. Likewise, Susan Soldwisch, with Nurse Marta González Rojas, was very capable of navigating the tension between evangelism and social concerns. Her leadership in the health ministry proved it could not only serve the immediate medical needs of a community but also draw people to the church.

Because *Pueblos Hermanos* quickly partnered with BPM and the Korean Church, the organization launched on a stable footing. While BPM and Pastor Lee focused on church planting and pastoral support, *Pueblos Hermanos* focused on strengthening the congregations, outreach, and programming. The visiting mission groups contributed regularly, and the PBM funding and designated funds through the PCUSA continued. While California churches maintained their history of supporting the work in Baja, by the end of the 1990s, *Pueblos Hermanos* expanded its requests to churches throughout the country to add the ministry to annual budgets as they worked to create a dependable and consistent funding stream.<sup>580</sup>

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<sup>578</sup> Parrish W. Jones, *Presbyterians on the Frontier*, 108-109.

<sup>579</sup> Parrish W. Jones, *Presbyterians on the Frontier*, 106.

<sup>580</sup> “Annual Report of Pueblos Hermanos to the Presbyterian Border Ministries Council based on the Pueblos Hermanos Plan for 1997 for the Council Meeting of April 2, 1998,” 1-5, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

William and Susan Soldwisch retired in 2010 and Reverend Rachel Anderson, a graduate of Columbia Theological Seminary, moved to *Tijuana* in April 2010. Her tenure lasted just two years as she resigned in 2012. She was the last Co-Mission Worker assigned by PCUSA and PBM to *Pueblos Hermanos*.<sup>581</sup> Throughout the years of ministry in *Tijuana*, *Pueblos Hermanos* supported four primary areas: church development and support, health ministry, “mutual mission” teams, and an orphanage.

New church development for *Pueblos Hermanos*, with BPM money backing the effort, meant the ministry was steps ahead its Presbyterian colleagues. Within a short span of time, binational teams with *Pueblos Hermanos*, constructed *La Iglesia Presbiteriana Dios Habla Hoy* (God Speaks Today) in the middle-class neighborhood of *El Lago*. Reverend Enrique Romero served as the first pastor. The ministry hoped that a church, planted in a middle-class neighborhood, would move quickly to self-sustainability while developing a good foundation for “planting” additional churches in poorer communities. Indeed, members of *Dios Habla Hoy* joined *Pueblos Hermanos* in their outreach efforts to other *Tijuana* neighborhoods, offering worship services and bible studies. The strategy worked as a network of new congregations started up in the poorer neighborhoods of *El Pipila* (*La Iglesia Presbiteriana La Nueva Vida* – New Life) and *La Planecia* (*La Iglesia Presbiteriana Dios Es Amor* – God is Love) without negatively impacting *Dios Habla Hoy*. A fourth collaboration resulted in completion of *La Iglesia Presbiteriana Dios Con Nosotros* (God With Us) in the *Otay/Universidad* neighborhood

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<sup>581</sup> “Bill Soldwisch Retires, Rachel Anderson will Start Work in April,” *Baja Presbyterian Missions Newsletter: Tijuana, Mexicali, Tecate, Enseñada, San Jose del Cabo* (Winter 2010) 1, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

of *Tijuana*. Each church construction project received significant funding support from BPM.<sup>582</sup>

After decades of mission ministry in the *Tijuana*/San Diego border region, the Presbytery of San Diego formed the Hispanic Ministries Task Force in May 1990. The Presbytery charged the group with evaluating the current work by the church in support of Hispanic populations in San Diego and Imperial Counties and *Baja California* and making recommendations and projections for the future. *Pueblos Hermanos* representatives served on the task force. In the assessment, they reported on two churches and one mission in *Tijuana*, one congregation in *Ensenada*, and another in *Mexicali*. *Pueblos Hermanos* supported *Iglesia Dios Habla Hoy* in *Tijuana* and Native Missions of San Diego supported the other four churches. At the time, Native Missions was restructuring due to the retirement of the current leaders and plans were in place to sign a Memorandum of Understanding between the Presbytery of San Diego and the reformulated Native Missions program.<sup>583</sup>

It was a challenge for the INPM to find ministers for the new churches, especially in the early decades. Many people did not want to move north to the border region; not only did they dislike the desert climate, but they also reacted in fear to the same headlines of violence and poverty published in the USA. The ministry called on lay pastors to serve the churches, some of whom failed miserably due to poor interpersonal skills and, in a

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<sup>582</sup> Jerry L. Van Marter, "A Seed Grows In Tijuana: Bill Soldwisch's 25-year Mission Career Inspired While A Teenager," <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2009/10/16/seed-grows-tijuana/>; Parrish W. Jones, *Presbyterians on the Frontier*, 102-104.

<sup>583</sup> "Summary Report of Hispanic Ministries Task Force of the Congregational Support and Development and Greater Parish Ministry-Intercultural Committees," (February 1991) 1-3, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

few unfortunate situations, sexual misconduct.<sup>584</sup> Reverend Romero, a strong pastoral leader, left *Dios Habla Hoy* and the church called Reverend Luis Lugo (formerly at *Lirio de los Valles* in *Agua Prieta, Sonora*).<sup>585</sup> In 1997, Romero was installed as pastor to *Iglesia Nueva Vida* in *El Pipila*; the Presbytery had suspended the former pastor due to a crisis (unpublished) that disrupted the congregation and took months to calm.<sup>586</sup> Because of the string of disruptions, the ministry made some changes to the program goals they hoped would stimulate positive growth toward autonomy beginning with training for pastors and laity. Goal setting for the churches also included development of measurable plans in outreach and service program. The Co-Coordinators supported the churches through this challenging growth period.<sup>587</sup>

As all the planning and construction was underway, *Pueblos Hermanos* committed considerable time and energy to developing and maintaining a medical and health program. In 1987, Susan Soldwisch, through a granting process, received funding for the start-up of a community health program, *Salud y Vida* (Health and Life), in *Tijuana*. She developed a health personnel team, conducted community outreach to engage partners, and coordinated the program for several years. In subsequent years, Reverend Dr. Jorge Pazos, while serving as a Mexican Co-Coordinator from 1992, took

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<sup>584</sup> Parrish W. Jones, *Presbyterians on the Frontier*, 107.

<sup>585</sup> “Annual Report of Pueblos Hermanos to the Presbyterian Border Ministries Council based on the *Pueblos Hermanos* Plan for 1997 for the Council Meeting of April 2, 1998,” *Pueblos Hermanos*. 1-5, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>586</sup> “Annual Report of Pueblos Hermanos to the Presbyterian Border Ministries Council April 2, 1998) 1-5, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>587</sup> “Annual Report of Pueblos Hermanos,” (April 2, 1998) 1-5.



over management of the health program.<sup>588</sup> In an interview, Nurse Marta Gonzalez de Rojas shared,

We did consultations and examinations, taught classes on hygiene, birth control, sexuality, infant care, self-esteem, drug addiction, sexually transmitted diseases, and nutrition, but always read the Bible, prayed, invited people to accept Christ. Many times someone would be in crisis and we would call a pastor or elder to come and counsel with them. We always said, ‘Marta did not do this, the church did not do this, God did this. All we do is because God loves you...’<sup>589</sup>

Early in the life of the ministry, *Pueblos Hermanos* received a donation from the Church of the Beatitudes in Phoenix, Arizona – a fully outfitted trailer for the medical ministry. They placed it in a ‘squatters’ neighborhood, *Colonia El Pipila*, a new barrio developed randomly by migrants, often building homes of cardboard, old corrugated metal sheets, and waste lumber. The trailer became the *Salud y Vida* medical center.<sup>590</sup> Later, *Pueblos Hermanos* constructed a church and a house on the site. The house was used for childcare while mothers attended one-hundred hours of *promotora* training.<sup>591</sup> Parents in nearby neighborhood elementary schools asked Nurse Marta to provide classes in health, nutrition, and hygiene, along with sex education for the sixth grades.<sup>592</sup> Visiting mission teams often worked at the *El Pipila* location and, amid the many people

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<sup>588</sup> “Where are they now? 6.

<sup>589</sup> Parrish W. Jones, *Presbyterians on the Frontier*, 107.

<sup>590</sup> “Project Highlights: Pueblos Hermanos,” *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (May/June 1993), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; Presbyterian Border Ministry; *Nuestra Frontera: A Newsletter of the Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Nov/Dec 1992), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>591</sup> *Nuestra Frontera* (Nov/Dec 1992).

<sup>592</sup> Progress in the La Planicie Mission Tijuana, Mexico,” *Nuestra Frontera; The Newsletter of Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Spring 2002) 1-3, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

struggling to begin a new life, witnessed through direct exposure the extreme need of so many and the extent of political and economic injustices. *Pueblos Hermanos* integrated a program of self-development of families and, in 1997, Susan Soldwisch expanded training in family counseling ministry to the border churches in *Tijuana* and San Diego with plans to implement the program to all the PBM ministries.<sup>593</sup>

The engagement of mission teams was another valuable part of *Pueblos Hermanos* programming. Drawing from his years of experience with mission teams, Reverend Soldwisch shared, "...we learn a lot more about God and ourselves when we interact with Christians from very different places. It helps us focus more on who God is and what's really essential and what's peripheral."<sup>594</sup> Mission work groups required considerable time and attention especially during the heaviest season – the summer months.<sup>595</sup> The Co-Mission leaders spent countless hours preparing for and working with the teams to ensure the experiences connected people, fostered relationships and understanding that could only grow out of human-to-human contact. With attentiveness, they introduced the border region and her people, breached language barriers, and shared common ground in worship and prayer. In addition, Susan Soldwisch envisioned similar groups working in the other direction and implemented programming that supported mission teams from *México* to the USA. She remarked, "I believe that Mexican Presbyterians can also deepen their faith as they risk experiencing mission in the US.

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<sup>593</sup> "Annual Report of Pueblos Hermanos to the Presbyterian Border Ministries Council (April 2, 1998) 1-5.

<sup>594</sup> Jerry L. Van Marter, "A Seed Grows in Tijuana," <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2009/10/16/seed-grows-tijuana/>.

<sup>595</sup> "Where Are They Now?" 2.

Moreover, their service can be highly enriching for Americans, as it is for Mexicans when American Christians come to *México*.”<sup>596</sup>

In 1997 alone, *Pueblos Hermanos* coordinated twenty-seven mission teams from twenty-one USA churches with more than three hundred and fifty people working with thirteen churches, congregations, and missions in *Baja California*. Generally, the mission delegates shared in construction, children’s ministries, evangelism, and fellowship. All groups participated in worship with Mexican congregations, facilitated by translation. Collectively, the mission teams contributed more than twenty-thousand dollars in building materials. Often, the local church women provide meals, a special treat, and an honor for the guests. Two mission teams went from *México* to USA – one went to Sacramento, California to work with Faith Presbyterian Church in service to hungry neighbors and area flood victims, and the second team traveled to Yuma to serve for and with a small, Spanish speaking congregation.<sup>597</sup>

Another focus for the mission teams was the plight of orphans of all ages in *Tijuana*. Newspaper accounts reported that by the mid-twentieth century, short-term missional activities showed particular interest in serving orphanages throughout the *Tijuana* area. In 1969, Christian Friends of Baja, Inc., a coalition of Catholics and Protestants, responded to the desperate needs of a group of more than fifty orphans uprooted from their makeshift orphanage – *Niños Para Cristo* (Children for Christ) on

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<sup>596</sup> “Where Are They Now?” 2.

<sup>597</sup> “Annual Report of Pueblos Hermanos to the Presbyterian Border Ministries Council (April 2, 1998) 1-5.

the outskirts of *Tijuana*.<sup>598</sup> In the late 1970s, several articles appeared in the *South Pasadena Review* about Calvary Presbyterian youth and their annual mission trips to work with children at *La Puerta de Fe* (Door of Faith) orphanage. The youth held fundraisers during the year to support their trips. Usually, they planned to refurbish the facilities, planned fun experiences for the children, and brought books and supplies for sharing.<sup>599</sup>

In 1974, María Bringas had established a new *Tijuana* orphanage, *La Casa de La Esperanza* (*House of Hope*), a home for sixty to eighty children, newborn to fifteen years old. It was a private facility incorporated under Mexican law. In 1988, the Presbytery of San Diego declared the orphanage a “designated mission activity.” The *Amigos de la Casa de la Esperanza* (Friends of the House of Hope) a free-standing corporation, with their own endowment, closely allied with many Presbyterian churches. In time, the *Amigos* hoped to be a part of the PBM.<sup>600</sup> Into the 1990s, mission teams traveled to *Tijuana* to support the orphanage and help with building renovations and playground construction.<sup>601</sup>

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<sup>598</sup> “South Bay Group Seeks Home for Orphaned Baja Children: Get Site South of Tecate,” *Chula Vista Star News*, Chula Vista California, (September 11, 1969) 18, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/118228480>.

<sup>599</sup> “Calvary Presbyterian’s Youth Readies for Baja Excursion,” *South Pasadena Review*, South Pasadena, California (March 24, 1976) 11, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/697213959>; “Calvary Presby. Caravan Readies to Roll To Baja Orphanage Apr. 4,” *South Pasadena Review*, South Pasadena, California (March 30, 1977) 13, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/607220159>; “Calvary Presbyterian’s Youth and Advisors Journey to Mexican Orphanage for Work and Play,” *South Pasadena Review*, South Pasadena, California (March 28, 1979), <https://www.newspapers.com/image/607457325>.

<sup>600</sup> J.R. Helland to Jerry Stacy, (December 23, 1988). Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Pueblos Hermanos (Brother or Sister Cities)” (c, 1985), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Presbyterian Border Ministry: An Historical Sketch,” 3.

<sup>601</sup> Don Martinez, “East Bay Students’ ‘Vacation’ Is Spent Helping Orphans,” *The San Francisco Examiner* (San Francisco, California, April 14, 1990) 4, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/461903648>.

The *Pueblos Hermanos* medical ministry worked with *La Casa de La Esperanza* offering preventive health and counseling services. In 1995, Susan Soldwisch completed training in counseling and within a year began work at the orphanage in a cooperation with *Directora Profesora* Alejandra de Lara. Soldwisch offered therapeutic programming for the children and *Pueblos Hermanos* provided a psychotherapist. The work was successful despite limitations – when necessary, they conducted therapy sessions under a tree on the facility grounds.<sup>602</sup>

With all the work *Pueblos Hermanos* was doing in *Tijuana*, news of the denominational split in 2010-2011 was difficult to grapple with. In September 2010, the INPM and the PCUSA leadership met with the PBM to resolve the process by which a binational ministry could continue at each site. Each border region Mexican Presbytery would decide on its participation in the relevant ministry site and each related USA presbytery must disavow Amendment 10-A. If both presbyteries agreed to proceed, they were to establish a covenant. Because the San Diego Presbytery had voted against Amendment 10-A, a covenant was drawn up with the *Presbiterio de Noroeste*, “Our two presbyteries covenant to continue the good work started some twenty-seven years ago, pledging to work together in partnership to proclaim and give witness to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord for the salvation of all. We are separated by a man-made border. We are

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<sup>602</sup> “Minutes, Presbyterian Border Committee, November 8, 1995, Hidalgo, Texas,” *Presbyterian Border Ministry Council binder* (c. 1996), Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Counseling Under a Tree at Pueblos Hermanos,” *Nuestra Frontera: The Newsletter of Presbyterian Border Ministry* (Spring 1996) 4, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection; “Annual Report of Pueblos Hermanos for April 1 2, 1998,” 1-5.

not separated by our faith in Christ. We have a lot in common, which will continue to allow us to be in ministry together.”<sup>603</sup>

The PCUSA and PBM did not assign a Co-Coordinator after 2012. With a strong board and solid relations with area Presbyterians and other partner churches and organizations, the *Pueblos Hermanos* programming continued though it slowed in its outreach and development efforts. As the ministry faded, Mexican Co-Coordinator Romero was able to continue, along with Nurse Marta Gonzales with the *Salud y Vida* health ministry, and the BPM continued to financially support church lands, building costs, and pastor’s salaries.<sup>604</sup>

Despite the years of successful engagement and new church development, the camaraderie shared by the Co-Coordinators and the Board of Directors, the volunteers, and the church members, the loss of leadership is related to the slow diminution of the *Pueblos Hermanos* ministry. Like their colleagues across the border region, the ministry had remained focused on the *serviglesia* work, addressing such challenging concerns as poverty and migration. The churches were sustainable with the support of ministries other than the PBM however, it is unclear if the ministry sustained services for the communities, other than medical and public health commitments. *Pueblos Hermanos* did not focus directly on the issues of migration and direct needs of migrating peoples. Their indirect engagement would have been through the commitment to those suffering the

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<sup>603</sup> “An Agreement Establishing a Local Covenant Partnership in Mission in Baja California and San Diego and Imperial Counties Between the Presbytery of the Northwest Border and the Presbytery of San Diego,” unsigned copy, (January 9, 2012) 1-5, Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

<sup>604</sup> “An Agreement Establishing a Local Covenant Partnership in Mission in Baja California and San Diego and Imperial Counties,” 1-5.

results of migration, particularly children abandoned to orphanages by families that could no longer care for them.

*Pueblos Hermanos* witnessed, daily, the impacts of migration in *Tijuana* and San Diego as did the ministry sites across the *México/USA* border region. Some of their ministry partners engaged in direct services to the migrating people and extended their work to include advocacy in both an ecumenical outreach seeking like-minded faith-workers, and in making political contacts with local, regional, and national governments. To take a closer look at the PBM's engagement with migration and migrating people, Chapter Seven addresses migration issues and the responsive work of the border ministries.

## CHAPTER 7

### FAITH AND MIGRATION: THE BORDER REGION EXPERIENCE

#### Introduction

In 1981, the USA Presbyterian denominations – United Presbyterian Church USA (UPCUSA) and Presbyterian Church US (PCUS) – published a report that, when approved by the leadership bodies of both denominations, became more than just a roadmap for their response to Mexican migration to the USA.<sup>605</sup> It established a foundation for a future, bi-denominational Presbyterian organization that addressed mutual missional concerns across *México*, including the shared region along their common border. The joint taskforce, representing a diverse coalition of invested parties including *la Iglesia Nacional Presbiteriana de México* (INPM) completed the report, “Mexican Migration to the United States: Challenge to Christian Witness and National Policy,” after two years of research, field work, study, and meetings. The taskforce envisioned “Presbyterians from both sides of a border joining in ministries of witness, service and advocacy...in cooperation so far as possible with other Christians, to serve people whose lives and destinies crisscross that border.”<sup>606</sup> The vision to join in ministry at the border came to fruition in 1984, as the Presbyterian Border Ministry (PBM).

The PBM grew over the decades, propagating new churches and new programming. An essential element of the work focused on the ever-present, critical

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<sup>605</sup> 193<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly, United Presbyterian Church in the USA and 121<sup>st</sup> General Assembly, Presbyterian Church in the US, *Mexican Migration to the United States: Challenge to Christian Witness and National Policy, A Report Commended for Study by the General Assemblies* (New York, New York: General Assembly, United Presbyterian Church in the USA and Atlanta, Georgia: General Assembly, Presbyterian Church in the US), 1981.

<sup>606</sup> UPCUSA and PCUS, “Mexican Migration to the United States,” 6.



needs of people moving north and south across the international border. This chapter focuses on the ministry's engagement with all aspects of migration. This migration history, interspersed with compassionate, faith-driven thoughts from people crying out for change, articulates a relational perspective of the complex world of the people moving into and across the border region. The cries from the ministry for justice convey a deep and very real passion, a commitment to metaphorically walk with people migrating, to grieve with people migrating, and to strengthen the people migrating.

Relationship has been at the center of this historical analysis of the Presbyterian Border Ministry, from building a binational organization to an intimate connection with a migrant. Using the term 'relationship' and considering relationship-building helps to bridge an existing, challenging gap for the historian between analyzing the faith community in the context of its historic time and place (systematic explanation of past events) and incorporating the influence and presence of deep faith (belief and trust with no proof) into the analysis. The concept of 'relationship' enhances the study of past societal impacts by religious institutions with an appreciation for and an understanding of the role of religious belief. It is a term that makes sense in both the academic and faith-based environments.

For more than twenty years, the PBM border ministry, *Frontera de Cristo*, has led an annual spiritual journey, a performative walk, a metaphorical journey that blends the migration experience and perspective with the last day in the life of Jesus the Christ. Called the *Via* (Way of the Cross), it is a mini pilgrimage based loosely on the centuries-

old Catholic Lenten tradition of Stations of the Cross or Way of the Cross.<sup>607</sup>

Traditionally, participants engage in the annual experience of discovering and rediscovering the last day of Christ's death.<sup>608</sup> In the pre-dawn hours of Good Friday, a shivering community of walkers join the vigil to connect, in faithful witness, to the migrating experience played out every day across the border region.

In Douglas, Arizona, participants walk in silence with the rising sun at their back, stopping periodically (at a station) to share a reading and a prayer. Between stations, together they experience the road, the wall, and the occasional Border Patrol truck. Though flood lights cast an eerie glow in the pre-dawn morning, the landscape becomes a sacred space. The *Via Crucis* interpretation envisions the migrant traveling north to cross the *México/USA* border and incorporates the encounters along the way: the road, other migrants, *cartels*, *la migra* (Border Patrol), ranch lands, church ministries, the desert, and more. The issues of Jesus' time, recorded in books of the New Testament and reread through the season of Lent, are relevant issues for the day. The ritual liturgy, provided in Spanish and English, articulates much of the complex and expansive witness of migration: the political, economic, cultural and religious dimensions but, also the suffering, indignity, marginalization, cruelty, detention and incarceration, and enduring faith, hope, and love.

By employing text from the first ten stations of the *Via Crucis*, the chapter outline is set by the overlay of a migration journey on the lessons from the biblical story of

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<sup>607</sup> Jim Perdue, Missionary, United Methodist Church, *La Via Crucis de la Frontera, The Border Way of the Cross*, 2017.

<sup>608</sup> Catholic Online, <https://www.catholic.org/prayers/station.php>; "Stations of the Cross," Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stations\\_of\\_the\\_Cross](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stations_of_the_Cross).

Christ's final day. Extrapolating from the *Via Crucis* text, the chapter builds the historical and sociological understandings along with the faith-driven interpretations of the migration experience. Since its inception, all the border ministry sites have witnessed the persistent arrival and suffering of the migrant, the frustrations and losses felt by the area ranchers, the struggles of border patrol agents, the cities and towns overwhelmed by the in-migration of desperate peoples, the angry and hostile reactors, the work of churches to respond to desperate needs, the implementation of governmental policies to manage and control, and the efforts of Mexican and USA people to assist or resist. The knowledge and experience of the border region presence, articulated in the Good Friday liturgy, covers many aspects of the migration story; it is both past and present and works as a strong outline for this analysis of border region ministry and the migrant. The text of the *Via Crucis* provides the framework for this chapter; drawing from the text at each station, this chapter will speak to the many migration issues and the PBM responses to those issues.

By the 1990s, some of the PBM ministry sites actively responded to the migration reality in two ways. First, they felt called to serve. Both the Mexican and USA contingents worked collectively with partners and volunteers and met people at a significant point on their journey. Some had arrived to cross the border, others had crossed, experienced capture and repatriation. Some migrants chose to stay in northern *México*, found work, and built new lives; some returned to their point of origin, others chose to try again and cross over the national boundary, hoping to avoid the watch of *la migra*. The Border Patrol caught northbound migrants and returned them to *México* while others made it through to their destinations; still others died in the desert or crossing swift

moving water. Each border ministry responded, many times in ecumenical collaboration, and, as they could, offered information, respite, and solace to their temporary guests. Second, the ministry sites advocated for the migrant in a variety of ways. They shared their knowledge and experience of border region reality across the denomination from teaching mission delegations and churches visiting the area, to communications with the church leadership and the Presbyterian Office of Public Witness in Washington D.C. They connected with government officials in both countries, local to national. They utilized many vehicles of communication, from local, national, and global media, to sending out newsletters and correspondence which, in later years, morphed into websites and emails. They lifted their voices as advocates, whether in quiet prayer or powerful admonitions, sharing human experiences and speaking out against the injustices they witnessed.

In this chapter, the *Via Crucis* text is a journey, of sorts. Just as the Good Friday walkers considered the many realities of the migrating people, the reader will learn from what the walkers are hearing and doing. Each section (or *Via Crucis* station) provides a combination of historical information and analysis, and an accounting of the work and perspectives of the binational border ministry of the Presbyterian Church. This is a witness to the religious understandings of migrations. The metaphorical journey begins.

### Migration Ministry Origins: Space and Place

*Via Crucis* - Station One - Responding to Matthew 26:36-41

We gather at the border in this desert today to *walk, stand, and pray*....  
We reflect along the border because it is a wilderness, a world between  
worlds, across which many come to risk a fate like that of Jesus. We *walk*

because they walk – both the living who search for hope, and the dead who search for peace. We *stand* because we need a moment to listen to the One who witnesses to life from both sides of the border of death. We *stand* with all who must stand along this border today, regardless of their station in life. We *pray* because each of them prays, and because no one’s prayers should stand alone. Jesus didn’t want to pray alone, so he took his friends along to keep vigil. May we keep vigil today as friends of all those who this day must walk, chase, or rescue. O God, cradle us all in your peace. .”<sup>609</sup>

*The walkers join in singing “Spirit of the Living God.”*

Station One takes on two discussions. First, it provides a brief overview of the early PBM responses to migration – how they decided to walk with migrating people. As the various ministries became established and familiar with each other and their *México/USA* border spaces, they learned to appreciate their location and its impact on all peoples in that space, particularly the travelers who moved through. Second, a discussion of place and space centers on the desert challenges as people of faith dealt with personal fears, their own or that for the migrating people.

Those serving at the PBM ministry sites grew in their understanding of the heavily contested space they worked in; for many, they witnessed the border region as a sort of wilderness zone for the many travelers. In response, they designed their work through connectional and relation-building practices. As witnesses to the steady migration streams, the economic impact of the maquiladoras, and the increasing substance abuses of the defeated, they became part of a demanding situation always asking the question, ‘how might we work with you to alleviate the suffering and to answer your prayers?’ The PBM could not find easy answers (in fact, the search for

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<sup>609</sup> “Voice 1,” *La Via Crucis de la Frontera, The Border Way of the Cross*. April 2, 2021, Douglas, Arizona, USA/*Agua Prieta, Sonora, México*, 6.

resolutions continues) but the compassion freely given gave people hope and assurance that someone saw them and would be with them.

In the formative years of PBM, mid- to late-1980s, and through the local needs assessments efforts at the ministry sites, it was clear that many newcomers numbered among the peoples of the border region. This was a population they could not ignore and though many travelers were temporary guests, they had become part of the community the ministries served. PBM Co-director, Jerry Stacy pointed out, "...Jesus was a migrant, we need to be sensitive to migrants, we're all migrants in some respect. [There are so many] people seeking asylum or in migration somewhere around the world. That means open your house, be hospitable, don't shut it down..." The history of hospitality, as demonstrated in the teachings of many faiths including Christianity, calls on all of us in this present time to welcome the stranger. Stacy continued, "The folks that are so hardened – to worry that somebody coming into our country is going to be a crook and robber and rapist. Down at the border, I've seen a bunch of folks. They don't look like robbers or rapists or anything like that to me. So why are we so afraid? What are we afraid of? That's what I guess is the larger question."<sup>610</sup> By 1990, the five, active binational projects of the Presbyterian Church were in operation at points of need and challenge along *México's* northern border. "Because of the proximity of the border, [USA] churches [had] discovered international mission in their back yards."<sup>611</sup>

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<sup>610</sup> Stacy discussion with author, 33.

<sup>611</sup> "Presbyterian Border Ministry Past, Present and Future as Seen from 1992," Presbyterian Border Ministry Manuscript Collection.

The political boundary between *México* and the USA, approximately two-thousand miles in length, crosses river gorges and deltas, valleys and mountains, and deserts. It begins at the Gulf of Mexico, moves northwest to *El Paso del Norte* along the Rio Grande, then cuts west to the Pacific Ocean. While much of the region along the modern border seems remote, even impassable, cultural remains have marked the landscape since the earliest peoples and reveal a human presence on the banded space dating back millennia. The earliest Europeans to enter the area reported the presence of indigenous hunter-gatherers, agriculturalists, even city builders. The European colonizers staked their claim on the landscape through conquest, settlement, subjugation, and interchange, creating a visual environment that reflected use of available construction resources from the natural environment, evidential remains of extractive processes, and a blending of cultures recognizable in the built environment. Later, an independent Mexican people continued to settle in the area that marks the modern border region and moved north across vast tracks of land.

The waves of migrants from the continental East, coupled with USA conquest of Mexican lands, eventually staked their claims on the land, now the western USA. This analysis characterizes the border region by the endless, historic movement of people into and across the land and, as such, it defies any single definition. The border region is a site of extreme contrast where rich and poor reside, where race diversity and cultural difference is the norm, where justice and graft compete, and where compassion and inhumanity simultaneously rule the day. We mark the border region by its aridity, a binational presence, economic disparity, authority and power, subjugation and injustice, a religious presence, varied languages, cultural differences, and more. For the Presbyterian

Border Ministry, it is a space of relationship and generous hospitality amid the contradictory and complex realities. With all the representations of the border region, what is it to the traveler?

In 1993, the Border Patrol implemented Operation “Hold the Line” in El Paso/*Juarez*, followed by “Operation Gatekeeper” (1994) in San Diego/*Tijuana*, and “Operation Safeguard” (1996) across Arizona and “Operation Rio Grande” (1996) in East Texas. The federal agency situated each action in large border cities where they, “intentionally funneled the flow of people to less populated areas.”<sup>612</sup> As more border crossers moved away from crossing near urban centers and into the remote areas, the migrant death toll rose. The deterrence efforts did not curtail migrant passage north unless one counts the many deaths on USA soil. The business of smuggling people, along with drugs, grew on a parallel course with the increased border deterrence.

For the undocumented migrant, once they crossed the border, their efforts focused on traveling undetected to their destination; they move through remote lands, across treacherous waterways, and rugged mountains. While migrating people respect the desert and most have heard of the perils, the compelling reasons to push forward fortifies them with resolve. For many, the journey north had been a series of challenges, perhaps mishaps yet, they pressed forward. Whatever motivated a person to migrate north, they know it is a dangerous decision and as they move across the *México*/USA border, they step into another danger among the many on their journey.<sup>613</sup>

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<sup>612</sup> Mark Adams, etcetera, *Bishops on the Border*. xxvii.

<sup>613</sup> Hagan, *Migration Miracle*. 30.



An important part of the migration story is the presence of churches, migrant centers, and migrant encampments on the landscape that helped to further define the landscape as a location of human movement. In her research, Hagan discovered that at least a quarter of the individuals, Protestant or Catholic, sought refuge at churches or shrines during their northward trips and a greater percentage, “turned to the church and religious workers and clergy for material and spiritual sustenance.”<sup>614</sup>

On a trip into the desert with the Samaritans, an organization that provides support to people in the desert, one volunteer recalled a trek up an *arroyo* (dry stream bed),

I spotted a little makeshift shrine in the branch of an old mesquite tree, complete with a picture of the *Virgen de Guadalupe* and a cross. The faith of the migrants astounds me. Instead of forsaking God, they embrace their spiritual life even more. The prayers are intense. When the chips are down and all else is lost, there is that moment of truth for these pilgrims. “*Vaya con Dios*,” I whisper at the little shrines and wonder what has happened to the people who passed by this sacred spot.<sup>615</sup>

The spaces through which the migrants sojourn are, for many, transient sacred spaces.

That perspective stands in stark contrast to such labels as ‘America’s Killing Fields’ or a ‘militarized zone.’<sup>616</sup> In any event, because migrants have moved through the border region, they have imbued the landscape with meaning.

The presence of the travelers from the south marked the desert landscape.

The Border Patrol vehicles, in search of unauthorized migrating people, tear up the desert

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<sup>614</sup> Hagan, *Migration Miracle*. 118.

<sup>615</sup> Peg Bowden, *A Land of Hard Edges: Serving the Front Lines of the Border*. (Tucson, Arizona: Peer Publishing, 2014), 57-58.

<sup>616</sup> Margaret Regan, *The Death of Josseline: Immigration Stories from the Arizona Badlands* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2010), xxi; Todd Miller, *Border Patrol Nation: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Homeland Security* (San Francisco, California: Open Media Series / City Lights Books, 2014), 39-40.

floor. Construction efforts, particularly on the border wall, change, even destroy, the natural environment and indigenous religious sites. Towers that support detection systems gleam in the sun. There is trash spread across the desert floor, discarded food containers, water bottles, articles of clothing, and items that were once precious but migrating walkers cannot carry farther due to exhaustion. There are shrines, reliquaries and crosses hung on bushes and fences, erected memorials and remembrances, and crosses as markers of remembrance planted across the desert. Jacqueline Hagan shared the words of a border missionary, “Migrants always carry something with them.... A religious artifact represents companionship. It keeps them close to God on the road, especially in times of despair....”<sup>617</sup> Tragically, there are human remains.

Experiencing and recognizing the landscape supports the walkers on their *Via Crucis* and prepares them to face the next step. At the second station, the conversation turns to understanding the continued hardship of the trip, the sense of failure when captured after crossing the border.

### Who Are Really Threatened?

#### *Via Crucis* – Station Two – Responding to Mark 14:43-46

The border ministries witnessed the results of betrayal, arrest, and detention; a daily occurrence in the *México* /USA border region. “To be betrayed is to see our lives unravel before our eyes. A situation or person on which our life depends suddenly shocks and disappoints us, exposes us to harm, and hands us over to those with the power to undo us. To be arrested is to be detained from the lives we would pursue. It’s the involuntary side of repentance, for we are forced to change the direction of our lives. Unauthorized immigrants are arrested daily by border patrol agents and sometimes by the desert itself. Businesses are arrested at the border as their trucks sit helplessly in line. Ranchers and residents on the

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<sup>617</sup> Hagan, *Migration Miracle*. 126.

border are arrested daily, blocked from a sense of security and normality.<sup>618</sup>

*As a sign of humility, the walkers receive a kiss on the cheek, then cross their wrists as if handcuffed until conclusion of a prayer.*

Most of the people migrating north from *México* and Central America are traveling toward a resolution. Perhaps their families are struggling, and they are seeking work out of desperation, perhaps they are fleeing violence and threat of death to themselves or their loved ones, or perhaps drought or floods have destroyed their homes and lands. Desperation pushes them and hope pulls them. At Station Two on the *Via Crucis*, the walkers consider the predicament of betrayal – betrayed by circumstances at home, on their journeys, and in their capture. They feel a profound sense of failure.

The USA system of capture, processing, court appearances, and convictions interrupt the migrants' journeys. The situation forces them to reconsider their goals, prayers, and hopes and in the process, migrants reframe how they view themselves. The situation cast them as offenders for acts they did not perceive as sin. The system of border enforcement labels them criminals, treats them accordingly, and in alignment with the dictates of USA migration policy, calls unauthorized migrants to involuntary contrition for the "sin" of traveling on foreign soil. This section considers the notion of migration threat, and the role USA policy has played in developing the immigration structure that persists as unauthorized entry.

Leo Chavez, Anthropology professor and scholar of international migration stated, "The Latino Threat Narrative is a social imaginary in which Latinos are virtual

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<sup>618</sup> "Voice 2," *La Via Crucis de la Frontera, The Border Way of the Cross*. April 2, 2021, Douglas, Arizona, USA/*Agua Prieta, Sonora, México*, 8.

‘characters.’ They exist as “illegal aliens,” “illegitimate recipients of organ donations,” “highly fertile invaders,” and “unassimilable separatists bent on a reconquest of the US Southwest.” Their lives are part of a virtual reality, one that is not necessarily tied to empirical evidence.” He continues, “The virtual lives of “Mexicans,” “Chicanos,” “Illegal aliens,” and “immigrants” become abstractions and representations that stand in the place of real lives.<sup>619</sup> This threat narrative is not new; it has been part of the public and political discourse at least since the late nineteenth century. The illegal status placed on migrant bodies that traveled from *México* and Latin America grew out of the perceived threats that they posed. It took decades for political posturing, social theory, protectionism ideologies, and greed to develop the anti-immigrant policy that labeled migrating people as if based on truth.

As the USA entered a second world war, the desperate call for workers prompted a very public-facing look outside the country for laborers. In 1942, the US Employment Service verified the need for large numbers of additional workers and, the greatest numbers of contract workers came from *México* under the binational Bracero Program – USA Public Law 78, the Migrant Labor Act – and the first workers (Braceros) arrived in 1942, in time for the sugar beet harvest. Mexican laborers also worked for the Southern Pacific Railroad, helping to shore up the infrastructure needed for the wartime footing. The Bracero Program extended well beyond the original wartime purposes, ending in 1964, more than two decades after its launch.<sup>620</sup> Historian Ngai stated, “The old

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<sup>619</sup> Leo R. Chavez, *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 46-47.

<sup>620</sup> Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*. (Princeton University Press: Princeton and Oxford, 2004), 138-140.

plantation class and its modern cousins in agribusiness in the South and Southwest succeeded in molding the modern agricultural workforce into modes of racialized labor....Mexican workers in the Southwest and California were racialized as a foreign people, an “alien race” not legitimately present or intended for inclusion in the polity.”<sup>621</sup>

Douglas Massey and Karen Pren, in their article, “Unintended Consequences of US Immigration Policy,” point at the Bracero Program as the culprit for post-1965 increases in unauthorized Mexican migrant entries.<sup>622</sup> As the program ended, the circular flow of migrants – north for temporary work, then south to be home again – and the migrant networks that formed between the sending and receiving communities persisted. “With opportunities for legal entry constrained, the well-established migratory flow simply continued informally, without authorization.”<sup>623</sup> For the period, mid-sixties to the end of the 1970s, unauthorized migrations increased but, leveled off and even decreased into the 1980s and 1990s. Nevertheless, during that period, the migrant threat narrative grew.

The negative immigration narrative, increasingly referred to as a “crisis” for the country, escalated. The persistent descriptions of overwhelming numbers of entries in the USA along with the threats that migrating people posed, often sounded as if the country was at war.<sup>624</sup> Not only did such inflammatory rhetoric appear in the media, government

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<sup>621</sup> Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*. 138.

<sup>622</sup> Douglas S. Massey and Karen A. Pren, “Unintended Consequences of US Immigration Policy: Explaining the Post-1965 Surge from Latin America,” *Population and Development Review* 38, no. 1 (March 2012) 5.

<sup>623</sup> Massey and Pren, “Unintended Consequences of US Immigration Policy,” 21.

<sup>624</sup> Massey and Pren, “Unintended Consequences of US Immigration Policy,” 6.

officials and politicians employed the same derogatory and incendiary posturing. Consequently, they “transformed what had been a largely invisible circulation of innocuous workers into a yearly and highly visible violation of American sovereignty by hostile aliens who were increasingly framed as invaders and criminals.”<sup>625</sup> The court of public opinion followed. As conservatism rose so too did the demand for more restrictive laws and increased enforcement mechanisms. Massey and Pren advanced a migration paradigm they labeled a “feedback loop” – a causal chain connecting apprehensions, public attitudes, legislation, and enforcement – that built on itself into the 1990s and 2000s.<sup>626</sup> Terrorist attacks in the 1990s, in-country and abroad, served to exacerbate the growing national anxiety. After September 11, 2001, the subsequent passage of the Patriot Act, and the launch of a ‘war on terrorism,’ the government implemented stronger border enforcement measures. The perception of Mexican-as-threat had become embedded in the public lexicon. Though they had not been involved in terrorist acts and terrorists had not entered the USA through *México*, Mexicans played the role of the proverbial ‘fall guy,’ comprising seventy-two percent of all deportations by 2009.<sup>627</sup>

The country continued building a negative image of *México* and Mexicans, Hagan noted, “Too often we cast the immigration experience solely in economic or deviant terms, dehumanizing these desperate and dignified people, making it easier to attack and criminalize them, and to see them as different from and not part of or like us.”<sup>628</sup> The

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<sup>625</sup> Massey and Pren, “Unintended Consequences of US Immigration Policy,” 8.

<sup>626</sup> Massey and Pren, “Unintended Consequences of US Immigration Policy,” 13.

<sup>627</sup> Massey and Pren, “Unintended Consequences of US Immigration Policy,” 9-16.

<sup>628</sup> Hagan, *Migration Miracle*. 19.

PBM border ministries shared her perspective. They were on the ground, participating in mutual ministry, shared constructive work, and compassionate outreach, in the border region. The din made by media sources and politicians drowned out voices of justice and compassion. Around 2008-2009, cartels and gangs along the border launched their own version of terror, particularly notable was the gruesome murders of hundreds of women and girls in *Juarez*. Because of all the negative news, USA congregations and social service workers, formerly committed to the work of the border ministries, veered away from the border region despite the continuing presence of the PBM. Fear of personal bodily harm effectively stopped people from coming to the border region to work with the ministry sites.

The border ministries are also aware of the Border Patrol presence and some of the unfortunate circumstances that have occurred for those unauthorized border crossers who have landed in Border Patrol custody. For more than a century, the Border Patrol has worked on the frontlines of the USA immigration control and management. What began as a protection agency has transformed to a military force. The next section of the *Via Crucis* considers the history of the Border Patrol a key, even central player, in the persistent promotion of notions of national threat in the pursuit of enforcing the law.

### Border Patrol and the PBM Approach

*Via Crucis* – Station Three – Responding to Luke 22:66-71

“...there are attempts to get the arrestee to admit to his or her guilt, to quicken the judicial process. Today, it is only an administrative infraction to cross this border illegally to find work; but if a Border Patrol agent

could lie and convince a migrant to sign a confession to a felony just by saying that he or she could “be released back in *México* immediately,” the agent would do it.”<sup>629</sup>

Very quickly, the PBM ministry sites recognized that they lived and worked in a complex, shared space with cultural crossover, political tensions, and economic challenges. Border Patrol agents and their families counted among their neighbors; some had been part of the community longer than the ministry personnel. The ministries quickly understood that their responsibilities to serve included all people, not just the poor or those who knew first-hand the pain of injustice. The border became a place to work for community, not division, and required an appreciation for the individuals they encountered: the repatriated detainee, the child needing a hug, the taxi driver waiting for a fare, or the border patrol agent weary after a long, arduous day on patrol. The following history of the Border Patrol is about an organization, not an individual.

The expectation of fortifying a two-thousand-mile-long border through rugged mountains, along unpredictable rivers, and across wicked (albeit spectacular) deserts began with formation of the Border Patrol. The importance of immigration control grew out of a growing public concern with and reaction to the growing numbers of immigrants to the USA, the new arrivals who were not the typical white Protestant Europeans. As philosopher and theologian Sam Keen points out, “Sadly, the majority of tribes and nations create a sense of social solidarity and membership in part by systematically creating enemies.”<sup>630</sup> The leadership could not curtail newly declared, unwanted in-

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<sup>629</sup> “Voice 3,” *La Via Crucis de la Frontera, The Border Way of the Cross*. April 2, 2021, Douglas, Arizona, USA/*Agua Prieta, Sonora, México*, 10.

<sup>630</sup> Sam Keen, *Faces of the Enemy: Reflections of the Hostile Imagination*. (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1986 and Preface copyright 1991), 17.



migration without a police force of some sort. Among the varied immigrant groups, the Mexicans and Latin Americans who had moved freely across the *México*/USA border increasingly became one of America's enemies against whom the country needed to defend.

When the Eighteenth Amendment passed in 1920, the need increased for border enforcement in response to the illegal transport of alcohol across USA borders. Once Congress passed the Labor Appropriation Act of 1924, it designated a U.S. Border Patrol, for the purpose of securing the borders.<sup>631</sup> Along with immigration law, this “hardened the U.S.-*México* border against informal border crossing and transformed *México*'s labor emigrants into America's illegal immigrants.”<sup>632</sup> Subsequently, Mexican authorities established its own Department of Migration and worked to prevent their citizens from crossing into the USA.<sup>633</sup> While the USA dominated policing of the international border, they did not do it alone and the migrant population found they increasingly contended with enforcement on both sides of the nation-state divide.

Once the authorities required passports and visas, a new and lucrative industry of human smuggling emerged with “*coyotes*” offering a much less costly way to get into the USA. From the outset, once a migrant cut a deal with a *coyote*, they entered an unknown

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<sup>631</sup> Ben Railton, “Considering History: Myths and Realities of the Mexican-American Border,” Saturday Evening Post, January 3, 2019, <https://www.saturdayeveningpost.com/2019/01/considering-history-myths-and-realities-of-the-mexican-american-border>; “Border Patrol History,” U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Official website of the Department of Homeland Security, <https://www.cbp.gov/border-security/along-us-borders/history>.

<sup>632</sup> Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *Migra! A History of the U.S. Border Patrol*. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2010), 84.

<sup>633</sup> Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *Migra!* 6-7.

future of exploitation and potential danger. In a 1924 circular from the *Departamento de Migración*, the *Secretario de Gobernacion* warned that “illegal immigration ensnared *México*’s migrants in a world of crime, exploitation, and danger that threatened to literally drown the Mexican family. And, if migrants successfully crossed into the United States, they lived as fugitives ‘at the mercy of their employers.’”<sup>634</sup> While the Mexican government underfunded its migration agency, rendering the program of emigration management ineffective through the 1920s and 1930s, it represented a shift in policy and international influence that reemerged repeatedly in later years.<sup>635</sup>

Along the southern border, the 1940s to the 1960s became a period of growth for the U.S. Border Patrol with increased Mexican migration. As the global war advanced, a renewed, critical need for labor in the USA meant that agriculture and industry, once again, looked beyond its borders for support. Implementation of the Bracero Program (discussed above) translated to large numbers of people entering the USA without documentation, also to work as farm laborers.<sup>636</sup> In 1945, the INS initiated a new method of border control in response to the significantly larger numbers of migrants moving from northern *Baja California* into southern California. Utilizing chain-link fencing from a former Japanese internment camp, they erected an approximate five-mile fence near Calexico, California. The fence either temporarily slowed people with wire cutters or forced migrants to circumvent the barricade and travel deeper into the desert. With the

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<sup>634</sup> Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *Migra!* 91-92.

<sup>635</sup> Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *Migra!* 97.

<sup>636</sup> Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *Migra!* 109-113.

shift in travel patterns, the Border Patrol added traversing the deserts to their duty assignments while finding increased number of bodies that had succumbed to the harsh environment. This represented another turn in the history of the Border Patrol – a time when armaments for migrant control and threat of death shifted to include enforcement by natural landscape.<sup>637</sup>

In 1954, the Border Patrol launched a military operation – Operation Wetback – to catch and deport unauthorized agricultural workers from the Southwest. INS Commissioner General Joseph Swing justified the operation, framing it as a direct attack upon the hordes of aliens, the “alarming, ever-increasing, flood tide,” the “invasion” of Mexicans.<sup>638</sup> Reportedly the INS apprehended more than eight hundred thousand Mexican migrants, repatriating a few by air but primarily by bus, train, and boat. The program shipped more than one-quarter of the people by boat from Port Isabel, Texas to the costal state of Vera Cruz. A subsequent Congressional investigation stated that one of the hired cargo ships seemed more like an “eighteenth century slave ship.” The large numbers of people delivered at the border flooded border towns, crippling any opportunity for government response by *México*.<sup>639</sup> While, in the short-term, one might deem the campaigns successful, they did little to curtail unauthorized migration.

In the 1960s, the country experienced an increase in migrant visibility as people began to respond to calls for labor in new rural and urban areas in the interior of the

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<sup>637</sup> Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *Migra!* 132

<sup>638</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 155.

<sup>639</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 156.

country where residents were unfamiliar with Hispanic peoples and cultures. Fears of the unfamiliar, exacerbated by decades of anti-Mexican rhetoric, unnerved locals. With each decade, as migration numbers increased, the Border Patrol grew in response, building up workforce numbers, expanding infrastructure, and deploying modern technology.<sup>640</sup>

After September 11, 2001, the USA grew increasingly isolationist, nationalist, and racist. In 2003, resulting from passage of the Homeland Security Act, the federal government formed the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Border Patrol became part of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), a component of DHS.<sup>641</sup>

Since its inception, the US Border Patrol served as the federal agency responding to an ever-increasing notion of the southern-border-crossing-migrant as enemy, a threat to the security of the nation. The agency's reach has grown from a small contingent with minimal responsibilities to one of the largest law enforcement agencies in the country.<sup>642</sup> Arguably, the Border Patrol with all its experiences and advances, proved ineffective except to feed the political, social, and economic agendas of a country.

In his book, Sam Keen speaks to the human tendency to act as “hard-hearted,” “enemy-making” people.<sup>643</sup> Beginning with the earliest years when locals, burdened with their own regional racist sentiments, served as border guards, up to the present with the

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<sup>640</sup> Bill Ong Hing, *Defining America Through Immigration Policy* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 2004), 98; “Border Patrol History,” U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Official website of the Department of Homeland Security.

<sup>641</sup> “Border Patrol History,” U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Official website of the Department of Homeland Security.

<sup>642</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 56.

<sup>643</sup> Keen, *Faces of the Enemy*, 10.

‘Border Security Industrial Complex,’ the agency has operationalized enemy-making of the migrant.<sup>644</sup> It is difficult to create an enemy of someone we are in relationship with, someone who is seen as an equal despite the differences of race, economics, nationality, or culture. Keen states, “The hostile imagination begins with a simple but crippling assumption: what is strange, or unknown is dangerous and intends us evil. ...the tribal mind forms an entire myth of conflict. The mythic mind, ...still governs modern politics...”<sup>645</sup> Certainly, over the decades, the Border Patrol formed an almost tribal definition of the migrant-as-enemy and with added input from others, including politicians, the so-called tribe has spread to include a broad group in the USA.

The PBM offered a different approach – numbering among the many organizations and individuals who chose to step out of the blame-game, the paranoia, the dehumanization, and the othering of all players in the border region. Much of Sam Keen’s thesis asks us to consider our own responsibility in the collective efforts to find the enemy. He argues that to engage in blaming eliminates personal responsibility and reduces one’s effectiveness.<sup>646</sup> As a binational, multi-cultural collective, PBM focused heavily on the people who experienced injustice and cruelty, but they did not ignore others. While they showed faithfulness to the most vulnerable, they worked to learn from and relate with all peoples of the community. Since inception in the 1980s, the PBM and the border ministry sites shared space daily with the Border Patrol. They lived and

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<sup>644</sup> For and in-depth analysis on the Border Security Industrial Complex, see Todd Miller, *Border Patrol Nation: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Homeland Security*, San Francisco, California: City Lights Books, 2014, Chapter One, 11-31.

<sup>645</sup> Keen, *Faces of the Enemy*, 18.

<sup>646</sup> Keen, *Faces of the Enemy*, 21.

worked in the same border region and in some cases attended church together. Believing in the value of a well-rounded understanding of the complex nature of the border region, the ministry sites presented each visiting delegation with all perspectives including working with the Border Patrol to provide a representative from the local station for an orientation about its work and responsibilities. Often the delegations were able to tour a nearby facility. It was at the border that the PBM witnessed the depth of the challenges and the breadth of perspectives that Border Patrol agents and their families represented. In the contested space of the border region, the PBM ministries and the many mission representatives from churches across the USA engaged in communication, learning firsthand the art of listening, even compassionate listening. They provided the delegations with a variety of encounters and many opportunities to reflect on, to question, to engage with, and to witness the difficult realities that defined the daily experiences of life at the place where two countries met. It is in the context of the border region that one might spend the morning comforting a migrant mother weeping at her failure to reach her daughter then, fill an afternoon witnessing an expansive, fortified Border Patrol station and agents at the ready to chase down the next mother who crossed into the USA without proper documentation.

Another complicating situation in the migration story is acquiring the requisite identification needed for authorization to enter the USA. The need for proper individual identification challenges people seeking to migrate in a variety of ways. The trend is to provide travel documentation to people of means while those on the lower end of the economic scale face long waits, assuming they will eventually qualify for a visa of some

sort. When people either do not qualify or cannot wait, they face tough decisions. Station four on the *Via Crucis* addresses just a few aspects of the official identification story.

### Authorized Identification

#### *Via Crucis – Station Four – Responding to Matthew 26:69-75*

“Along the border, those who lack official identification hide, while those who feel safer because they carry their identification walk freely and openly... Authorized identification has become the most common personal information shared across the world, and yet more than two-thirds of the world has nothing but their own bodies and voices to identify them. Like individuals, churches maintain a variety of forms of identification, some granted to them by Christ and others by governments and other earthly powers. Each earthly form of identification can act as permission for, or restraint of, the church’s ministry. We are charged to be vigilant, lest an important moment of ministry be denied, to protect an earthly form of ID. The church always needs to learn when it is time to speak for and with those who suffer, as well as when and how to advise or chide national and local leaders.”<sup>647</sup>

*As the group prayed, each held up a form of personal identification.*

During a visit to *Hermosillo* with a delegation through *Compañeros en Misión* (*Ambos Nogales*) Co-director Dave Thomas and the group accepted an invitation to dinner at the home of a Chiapanecan family that had recently tried to migrate to the USA. Failing to reach their destination, the family had decided to stay in the north of *México* and build a new life. As everyone sat together in their home with dirt floors and tarps for the roof, the conversation turned to migration experiences. One man shared the family story at the border and how the officials turned them back. He could not understand why the authorities would refuse them admittance to the USA since he carried documentation.

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<sup>647</sup> “Voice 4,” *La Via Crucis de la Frontera, The Border Way of the Cross*. April 2, 2021, Douglas, Arizona, USA/*Agua Prieta, Sonora, México*, 12.

With that, he reached into his pocket and pulled out his wallet and produced his membership card in the Presbyterian Church.<sup>648</sup> The disconnect between his personal, documented identity and that of the USA immigration policy proved breath-takingly sad for the dinner guests. The Presbyterian man from Chiapas proudly carried his church membership card, believing it gave him credibility and connected him to an unbounded community of faith. At the *México/USA* border, his identity shifted.

The 1924 immigration law set up a documentation system that required travelers to obtain a visa at the USA consulate in their country before gaining admission to the USA. For most Mexicans at the time, the individual cost of the new ‘consular control system’ for the required visa and the new head tax was prohibitive (the equivalent of several days’ wages). In addition, the cost of a reentry permit created added burdens due to the circular nature of the worker migration process in place at that time. Consequently, Mexican laborers and their USA employers generally ignored the new regulations and the informal migration pattern persisted.<sup>649</sup> The immigration laws of 1952 and 1965, though cleaned of overtly racist visa restrictions, continued with a system of privileging specific groups based on one’s region of origin, economic status, and level of education, with an increased emphasis on family unification.

In 1986, President Ronald Reagan signed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) into law stating that the new law was the humane way to “regain control of

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<sup>648</sup>Thomas discussion with author, 7.

<sup>649</sup> Daniels and Graham, *Debating American Immigration*, 22.



our borders” and reduce immigration numbers.<sup>650</sup> His prediction proved incorrect as immigration numbers almost quadrupled over the next two decades along with the number of deaths and injuries. During the period following enactment and implementation of the IRCA, the tendency of people from *México* and Central America to spend partial time in the USA ended. Their lives shifted dramatically from the circular traveling pattern of moving in and out of their families lives, “*ni de aquí ni de allá*” (neither here nor there), to avoiding potential capture or death by remaining at their jobs in *el Norte*.<sup>651</sup> Not surprisingly, the families reinvented their collective and individual identities and sought reunification the best way they could, often moving across the *México/USA* border to live together once again as a family.

Into the twenty-first century, millions of tourists obtained visas annually with a comparatively small but sizable number of people staying longer than the allotted time. Most of the unauthorized in-migration stealthily crossed into the USA. Historian Aviva Chomsky suggested that of those who entered without the required documentation either tried to obtain a visa and were denied, did not apply knowing it was hopeless, or did not know about the requirement. She wrote, “...while they may have many kinds of identification documents, they have none that specifically authorizes their entry into the United States [of America].”<sup>652</sup> One woman living in the Mexican city of *Culiacán*, *Sinoloa* talked about the need for her husband to travel north for work as there were no

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<sup>650</sup> Ana Raquel Minian, *Undocumented Lives: The Untold Story of Mexican Migration*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018), 183.

<sup>651</sup> Minian, *Undocumented Lives*, 183-184.

<sup>652</sup> Aviva Chomsky, *Undocumented: How Immigration Became Illegal*. Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2014, 71.

opportunities at home. Her fear was that he crossed without a visa, a risky decision but a decision. She explained that to acquire a visa, he needed to travel twelve hours to the consulate in Hermosillo, pay five-thousand pesos (three-hundred dollars at the time) knowing he could not pass because he was unemployed. Her wish was that more visas would be issued so less people would die. She believed many would not stay in the USA if given the opportunity to move freely back and forth.<sup>653</sup> Her husband and many like him, caught between his country's failures and the USA's documentation policies, felt they had little choice but to change how they self-identified in their home environments. All too often, they became the unauthorized, the undocumented, the illegal, and sometimes, the unidentified.

Regarding the migrant's decision to break the law and enter the USA without permission, a common question asked by people of the USA focused on why migrants do not do things the legal way. The answer lies, primarily, with the complicated and cumbersome process for obtaining a visa. The US Consulates processed most of the employer-sponsored work visas for professional and skilled labor while the unskilled workers received few visas, except for farmworkers through the H-2 visa program. Visas provided in support of family reunification had fixed date requirements that translated to extended wait-times of as much as twenty years. Those who decided to "jump the line," if

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<sup>653</sup> Lynnaire M. Sheridan, *"I Know It's Dangerous" Why Mexicans Risk their Lives to Cross the Border* (Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 2009), 37.

caught, received a ten-year penalty if they had been in the country for a year or greater thus extending their wait time an additional decade.<sup>654</sup>

Efforts to manage the documents of citizenship and statehood have been less than successful. Migrants acquire falsified social security numbers, needed for lawful employment simply to earn a salary; they numbers cannot apply for the annual tax refund, or seek Social Security benefits accorded USA citizens. The Social Security office flags any payroll taxes submitted by employers that did not match a name and moved the monies into its Earnings Suspense File. As of 2005, \$519 billion had accrued in the account with over 250 million unresolved records. In that mix, the numbers of undocumented workers range from an estimated three to six percent annually. Generally, no one wanted to correct the situation: business wanted illegal labor because it was “cheap and easily replaceable,” consumers wanted low prices, and no groups along the political spectrum wanted to tackle the concern as it was a complex policy issue that crossed over from an accounting problem to an immigration problem. In the meantime, migrants were carrying false documents, paying taxes without receiving the annual refunds, and contributing to Social Security without the benefits.<sup>655</sup>

Up until 2005 and passage of the REAL ID Act, it was legal for migrants to acquire a driver’s license in many states. The new Congressional Act required issuance of a new card for those in the country with at least two documents that proved citizenship.

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<sup>654</sup> Marie Friedmann Marquardt, Timothy J. Steigenga, Philip J. Williams, and Manuel A. Vásquez, *Living “Illegal,” The Human Face of Unauthorized Immigration* (New York, New York: The New Press, 2013), 46-48.

<sup>655</sup> Martin H. Bosworth, “The Earnings Suspense File: Social Security’s “Secret Stash,” “Money from Nowhere” Fattens Government Accounts,” *Consumer Affairs* (February 22, 2006), [https://www.consumeraffairs.com/news04/2006/02/ss\\_secret\\_stash.html](https://www.consumeraffairs.com/news04/2006/02/ss_secret_stash.html); Chomsky, *Undocumented*, 93-96.

The new driver's licenses acted as both state-issued documents and national identity cards, under the Department of Homeland Security. Rather than risking drivers on the road who had not passed a driver's test, a few states continued to issue licenses or, in the case of Utah, a driver privilege card. Fraudulent documents (birth certificates, driver's licenses, passports, and social security cards) have been part of the mix along with the array of illegal actions by covert actors engaging migrants in their nefarious money-making schemes. Unauthorized migrants can find 'false ID kits' on the black market, an industry that took off and expanded since issuance of the first USA visas.<sup>656</sup>

The story of the man and his family from Chiapas, introduced at the beginning of this section, suggested his church membership card gave him credibility and connected him to an unbounded community of faith. The PBM border ministry recognized his identification card and affirmed that, despite the USA laws to the contrary, he and his family are a valuable part of the people of faith. Such an affirmation, given and received, suggests a tension between state laws and the laws of love. Station five grapples with finding a balance between citizenship responsibility to the state and moral responsibility to the biblical teachings that clearly call for justice and compassion for the sojourner among us.

### Citizenship and Moral Responsibility

*Via Crucis* – Station Five – Responding to Mark 15:1-5, 15

Throughout the earth's history, people have been ruled by power or by law. It wasn't until around the time of the birth of the United States of America that the rule of law became the cornerstone of the modern

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<sup>656</sup> Martin H. Bosworth, "The Earnings Suspense File;" Chomsky, *Undocumented*. 93-96.

state... Borders like this one test the long-term viability of concepts like modern statehood and geopolitical borders. Neither policing bodies nor fences can patch up the holes in these concepts. So, the border and all caught within its boundaries of influence must exist in a reality that will not be “solved” by the world as we know it... People will always be people and power will always be power, and those things will continue to pull us back into the polarity of borders. But there is a way to live through and beyond it all...in search of justice and love. Today’s governments have become impotent and can only be redeemed by acts of compassion and community. Like Pilate, governments can only try to balance the extremes against the middle, in search of short-term solutions that please no one, and often harm many...people are deported from the U.S. daily; and those deportations become the equivalent of a sentence of death, a broken life or a shattered family.<sup>657</sup>

*During the prayer, each person slightly elevates one leg and tries to maintain their balance with eyes closed as a reminder of how difficult it is to balance opposites.*

Daily, the PBM ministry sites struggled with finding a balance between upholding the law and living lives of compassion and hospitality. At the *México/USA* border, the organization witnessed the degradation caused by legal injustices which resulted in extreme poverty or the implementation of immigration laws that, at the least, stopped people’s movement northward and, at the worst, ensured many would die. Since its inception in the 1980s, Presbyterian Border ministry practices sought opportunities to actualize social justice and expressions of love through their work. The denominations directed, “a faithful interpretation of Christian responsibility will need to keep alive the tension between Christian identity and identity as a citizen of the US...”<sup>658</sup>

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<sup>657</sup> “Voice 5,” *La Via Crucis de la Frontera, The Border Way of the Cross*. April 2, 2021, Douglas, Arizona, USA/*Agua Prieta, Sonora, México*, 14.

<sup>658</sup> UPCUSA and PCUS, “Mexican Migration to the United States,” 51.

The 1981 PCUSA/PCUS report, “Mexican Migration to the United States,” addressed the biblical and theological foundations for consideration by the denomination and its collective response to migration and the border experiences of injustice, misery, and exploitation. The document acted as the roadmap for the PBM response to migration challenges as each ministry settled into the work at their particular locations. Citing the Old Testament book of Jeremiah, the report stated, “If God was not loved, neither was the neighbor; and mistreatment of the neighbor was an indication that the people did not worship the true God.” (Jeremiah 22:13-16)<sup>659</sup> The report conceptualized geographic borders as transitioning sites, replacing the notion of bordered locations to proudly defend with “military power” to “areas of covenant responsibility for assuring the life and peace, justice and wellbeing that God intends for the communities on earth.”<sup>660</sup>

The taskforce found historical evidence that people had engaged in othering of strangers – persons who seemed unfamiliar and culturally and ethnically different. Too often, people categorized those who migrated to the USA as threats to national purity and identity, or as political and economic risks. In response to the perceived threat risk, USA policy and public perceptions relegated Mexicans, and even Mexican Americans, to second-class status. The report emphatically stated that, “God demands justice for the stranger and alien, and this means the eradication of any sort of double standard. The law is not to be adjusted to gain advantage over the stranger.”<sup>661</sup> How, then, does the border

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<sup>659</sup> UPCUSA and PCUS, “Mexican Migration to the United States.” 43.

<sup>660</sup> UPCUSA and PCUS, “Mexican Migration to the United States,” 43-44.

<sup>661</sup> UPCUSA and PCUS, “Mexican Migration to the United States,” 46.

ministry stand against the exploitation they witnessed, particularly exploitation by government design?

The report laid out three general areas for engagement with the challenge before them: give help and render assistance.... “make visible the relative hiddenness of the suffering.”<sup>662</sup> 48; Extend love – “enter empathetically into relation with others.” 49; and do justice (a repetitive biblical theme). The report expanded on this third area of engagement. “Justice is the quality of personal and communal intersection that enables each person and the whole community to flourish, to have shalom of healthy wholeness, as God intends.” To be effective, the report suggested several foci for consideration. First the taskforce called for changes in immigration law, “to ensure fairness of treatment and protect the dignity and humanness of migrants.”<sup>663</sup> Second, they saw the need for revamping the job market, making work an opportunity with fairness as a cornerstone. Third, protection of basic human rights – rights accorded all peoples in a just society. Fourth, they recognized the importance of support international efforts to relieve economic stress points. Fifth, “be attentive to and protest vigorously any expression of racism, overt or covert.”<sup>664</sup> The taskforce discerned, and the denominations affirmed that it was most important to put faith at the core of the response to Mexican migration to the USA.

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<sup>662</sup> UPCUSA and PCUS, “Mexican Migration to the United States,” 48.

<sup>663</sup> UPCUSA and PCUS, “Mexican Migration to the United States,” 50.

<sup>664</sup> UPCUSA and PCUS, “Mexican Migration to the United States,” 50-51

Through her research, sociologist Cecilia Menjivar found that, “faith workers...relate scripture and biblical teachings to the conditions immigrants face and respond by advocating a clear political stance.”<sup>665</sup> Increasingly, in the face of immoral treatment of human beings, the more progressive worshipping communities were stretching beyond the confines of their religious structures to challenge the policies and perceptions that justified such treatment. Through her research on religion and migration, Sociologist Jacqueline Maria Hagan found that the response by religious leaders pushed back at the consequences of policies they believed to be, “...morally unacceptable... The conditions, they argue, threaten the basic human dignity and rights of the migrant. Thus, although both Protestant and Catholic churches recognize that sovereign nations have the right to control its borders, they do not condone such a right when it violates the human rights and human dignity of a migrant, regardless of legal status.”<sup>666</sup>

Often, faith workers have learned from their individual and collective border region experiences that people create both metaphorical and physical borders. Quoting Reverend Rick Ufford-Chase, long-time faith worker in the Arizona borderlands, “The border can help us understand what it means to be fully ‘church.’”<sup>667</sup> The experience of the border forces a reassessment of what our boundaries are and what opportunities and dangers they present.

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<sup>665</sup> Cecilia Menjivar, “Serving Christ in the Borderlands: Faith Workers Respond to Border Violence,” in Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, ed. *Religion and Social Justice for Immigrants* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 107-108.

<sup>666</sup> Hagan, *Migration Miracle*. 94.

<sup>667</sup> Menjivar in *Religion and Social Justice for Immigrants*, 115.



The PBM ministry workers, once they had witnessed life in the border region, could affirm the findings of the 1981 report. Indeed, it was a roadmap that helped them organize. They shared a sort of disruptive love, made “good trouble,” through the many ministry programs. As advocates, they lived at the epicenter of policy enactment and could articulate policy repercussions for the region. They learned about economic forces that, directly and indirectly, made impacts on the lives of people and the environment in which people lived. As members of their communities, they developed a sort of “social capital” that helped them engage with local governments, governmental agencies, varied worshipping communities and partners. As evangelists, they established churches with networks into the community for outreach and services. As teachers and facilitators, they provided training and education opportunities that supplemented family incomes and family futures. In their outreach to the greater church across the USA, they invited people to the border to be in relationship with, not only all the locals, but the realities of such a complex and transforming space. As ministry workers, they opposed the many iterations of violence against people and the land and dedicate their work to an embrace of faith through creating justice, showing compassion, and loving those unloved, “the least of these.”

A particularly difficult reality in the border region is the constancy of deaths in the desert. Station Six brings the walkers face to face with the punishment perpetrated against migrating people force to cross the rugged, arid lands of the USA Southwest. Journey. The question for the walkers, the faith-workers, each of us, is how are we a part of this scourging and how must we respond?

## Scourged by the Desert: Responding to Unacceptable Deaths

### *Via Crucis* – Station Six – Responding to John 19:1-3

In Roman times, the typical scourge was a whip that had several thongs fastened to a handle. Often the thongs had pieces of metal tied into them. To be scourged was to be whipped in a way designed to break through both the skin and the will to resist. It was the government's common response to political extremism. The focus of the thorns was on Jesus' head. For him, the scourge and the thorns were like the Jumping Chollas of the desert that destroy arms and legs, the heat of the ground that destroys shoes and then feet, and the extreme terrain that destroys ankles and knees. Such forms of punishment result in agony and extreme loss of blood. Jesus was scourged by duly appointed officers of the law. Times have changed a lot in terms of the severity of treatment of those who break the law; but today's undocumented migrants are first scourged by the desert, leaving them little strength of will when they are arrested by the law. Jesus' body was scourged from above, but undocumented migrants crossing the desert are scourged from below.<sup>668</sup>

In 2006, the *Colibri* Center for Human Rights formed as a non-governmental mechanism to search for missing loved ones.<sup>669</sup> The organization, one of several working in the border region, acts as a conduit for information needed by families of those who crossed the *México*/USA border and might be lost in the USA southwestern deserts. They report that since 1998, almost eight thousand people have lost their lives; they have received reports on more than three-thousand-five-hundred missing; and close to twelve hundred sets of remains recovered in Arizona are yet unidentified. *Colibri* (hummingbird) collected anthropological data including physical descriptions and information about articles of clothing the missing may have been wearing. Because the harsh desert environment renders the work of identifying people through non-genetic means difficult,

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<sup>668</sup> "Voice 6," *La Via Crucis de la Frontera, The Border Way of the Cross*. April 2, 2021, Douglas, Arizona, USA/*Agua Prieta, Sonora, Mexico*, 16.

<sup>669</sup> "Who We Are," *ColibriCenter for Human Rights* <https://colibricenter.org/>.

even ineffective, *Colibrí* Center began collecting DNA samples from family members across the USA in 2017. In collaboration with the Pima County Medical Examiner (PCOME), they send genetic samples to a private laboratory database. When the process identifies a person, *Colibrí* staff notify the family with the results, demonstrating great care and connecting them with support to repatriate their loved ones, arrange for funeral/memorial services, and assist with grief. Humane Borders, Inc. is a second non-profit partnership with PCOME, and together they offer a web presence that provides geographic information – spatial data regarding migrant deaths. It is a robust system that offers monthly updates and query information.<sup>670</sup>

The PBM ministry sites experienced the sufferings and deaths of migrating peoples from the outset. At some point, the need for active responses to unjust policies that resulted in deaths became essential. One such response was a vigil, held every Tuesday in the late afternoon since December 12, 2000. Pastor Mark Adams, *Frontera de Cristo* Co-coordinator, shared how the vigil began in Douglas, Arizona.

... in the mid-nineties, folks died in the drainage ditch here in Douglas. It was the first-time this community became aware that people were dying coming into the United States. Father Bob Carney went to the morgue and prayed with the bodies and was present in trying to help repatriate [the remains] to the family. Then, he and Sister Barbara started raising awareness here in Douglas and his parish and in the ministerial association and the community in general about people dying when they came into the United States. On December 12<sup>th</sup> of 2000 they decided to have a public prayer vigil (which is the feast day of the Lady of Guadalupe). They invited us, Chuy [Gallego, *Frontera de Cristo* Co-coordinator] and myself and some others--there were Quakers and some other folks from the community gathered with I think sixteen crosses of those who died here in Cochise County. ...it was just going to be one time and then it just kept

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<sup>670</sup> “Arizona OpenGIS Initiative for Deceased Migrants,” <https://humaneborders.info/>. While this information is limited regionally, I invite you to visit the website and consider the Map of Migrant Mortality.

going. Later it got a name called Healing Our Borders Prayer Vigil. So, since December 12<sup>th</sup> of 2000, every Tuesday, rain, snow, or shine, wind or no wind--it could be Christmas day, Christmas Eve, New Year's, New Year's Day--911 of 2001 was a Tuesday-- and there was a vigil. We gather to remember those who died, specifically those in Cochise County. We have three hundred and thirteen crosses [2019] which represent every known remain that has been discovered. Some names have not been discovered; those have "no identificado" on them.<sup>671</sup>

Over the years, the locals invite all visitors to Douglas to participate. The vigil begins in Linear Park and ends near the border gate into *México*. Because it is held at night, often the traffic is slowed, and they become part of the experience. The Governor, the City of Douglas, and a local concrete company contributed to Linear Park construction. Later, they dedicated the new park to the memory of all those who died crossing the border. The vigil begins with a time of silence and then, becomes a procession with participants calling out the names of those who died in Cochise County. After each name, the group responds with "presente." Adams shared,

It is a recognition that while over seven thousand remains have been discovered throughout the US. It's not numbers. It's human beings created in the image of God, beloved by God, that are dying and they're dying because of larger policies, economic and political policies, in place that have pushed them for whatever reasons to move away from their land. There's no legal mechanism for them to be able to come through the ports of entry like you or I. So, we call out their names, remember them, pray for their families, pray for our governments on both sides, pray for a better way, yeah.<sup>672</sup>

The vigil ends with a time of meditation, reflection and prayer as three crosses are passed around the circle. Each name is called out, a man or a woman, a boy or a girl, a daughter

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<sup>671</sup> Adams discussion with author, 1-2.

<sup>672</sup> Adams discussion with author, 1-2.

or a son and then, Jesus Cristo is called to the four directions. Again, Adams shared, “Our policy of pushing folks to mountains and deserts pushes Jesus to those places and Jesus is present in the deaths of our sisters and brothers in the desert.”<sup>673</sup>

As the vigil continues into its third decade, it has become more than a simple, weekly occurrence in the life of the community. Its meaning and importance has grown far beyond the cities’ edge, beyond the county, and into the countries that share the border. Adams has many stories of impact to share, this is just one of them.

We never thought that this simple liturgical act of public prayer would be a direct physical comfort to the families impacted by our broken border, and economic and immigration systems until Araceli’s cousin showed up one day. A young woman stopped one day and picked up a cross and with tears in her eyes she said, ‘Araceli was my cousin. She was pregnant. We did not think anybody cared. Can I take this cross to her mother?’ Araceli’s mother ended up coming to Agua Prieta to visit us at the Migrant Resource Center and shared a bit of her grief and gratitude with us and was comforted that her daughter was not forgotten.<sup>674</sup>

The daily loss of life in the Southwest deserts is the source of considerable grief. Yet, people continue to choose hope over the fear of death and leave their families and their lands to travel north. On the *Via Crucis*, as the walkers step away from their own collective grief for the desert scourging of others, they face another migration barrier – the border wall along the *México/USA*.

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<sup>673</sup> Adams discussion with author, 1-2.

<sup>674</sup> Kathy Melvin, “Healing Our Borders Prayer Vigil marks its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary: Online participation helps Presbyterians deepen their Advent Journey,” *Presbyterian News Service* (December 10, 2020), <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/story/healing-our-borders-prayer-vigil-marks-its-20th-anniversary/>.

## The Wall

### *Via Crucis* – Station Seven – Responding to John 19:6, 15-17

Unauthorized immigrants will complete three journeys in and around this border. *First*, is the desert crossing, fraught with dangers, pain, injury, and possibly death. *Second*, is the journey through the legal and prison systems. *Third*, is the journey that occurs once they are legally removed from the U.S. If their family is still in the U.S., or if a job is being held for them, they will likely head north again, tempting fate once more. If they are young and have no resources, they have nothing to lose by trying again. But if their resources are exhausted and their family is still in *México*, they may decide to head south toward home. To those with easy answers, it seems that the power of a dream can be delayed or destroyed by such endless transit. But, along each step of the way, there is no real choice for the migrant. They do whatever the next phase requires. Hope, no matter how slim, is still hope; so, they walk on.<sup>675</sup>

There are so many challenges faced by any migrating individual or family as they travel northward. Daily, those living and serving in the *México*/USA border region watched peoples' hopes and dreams "unravel." From the moment travelers decide to journey north, expecting their destination offers much needed resolutions (income, safety, family connections, and other), structures of power impede their trajectory. The aches and hunger, the treacherous lands, *la migra*, *los coyotes*, and the border wall are typical impediments. Such barriers are also restrictive for those living and working in the border region. On any given day, the tensions loom large and resolutions often seem unattainable. As the walkers of the *Via Crucis* consider the lesson of Station Seven, they have an opportunity to look up and consider the structure they have been walking next to over the past quarter mile. This section considers the USA border wall, in fact, the history

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<sup>675</sup> "Voice 7," *La Via Crucis de la Frontera, The Border Way of the Cross*. April 2, 2021, Douglas, Arizona, USA/*Agua Prieta, Sonora, México*, 18.

of walls, and while physically ineffective as barricades, they are remarkably effective as statements of power and authority.

After their journey northward, often a period when the migrants experienced fear, abuse, hunger, exposure, and pain, their arrival in the border region was a time of reckoning. They came face to face with a barrier much greater than they could have imagined; a wall that was a physical demonstration of unwelcome, despite the signs at ports of entry, *Bienvenidos a Los Estados Unidos* (Welcome to the United States). Increasingly, the border wall constructed by the USA government grew larger and more menacing, blocking ease of movement between *México* and the USA. The construction of walls seems to be a human need to make a distinction between ‘what is yours and what is mine.’ Humans have constructed walls to fortify and protect a place, to divide peoples, to make definitive statements of otherness and belonging. It is an implicit monument to the insider as citizen (constructor of the wall) and the outsider as alien.

Rev. Dr. Daniel G. Groody, C.S.C., in his book *Border of Death, Valley of Life*, opens with a comparison of walls, the Berlin Wall and the USA border wall with *México*. Groody points out that as the Berlin Wall came down, celebrated in the USA as a “crumbling” of its divisiveness, oppression, and injustice, the USA, simultaneously, constructed “an even more dangerous wall of separation.”<sup>676</sup> Groody continues describing this dichotomy, “As doors were opening to those who escaped the tyrannies of communism, doors were closing to those who were trying to escape the tyrannies of the

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<sup>676</sup> Daniel G. Groody, *Border of Death, Valley of Life: An Immigrant Journey of Heart and Spirit*. (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2002), 13.

unjust economic, political, and social structures of their own countries.”<sup>677</sup> In his research about walls around the world, writer Marcello Di Cintio shared,

I found more despair than hope. I found families shattered along the walls and bodies scarred. I learned of withered dead lying in deserts and saw hate boil hot and steady. Torn flesh and thrown stones did not stall the new Hadrian’s, nor did the tears of mothers and migrants and refugees dissuade them. The walls rise and grow and multiply. They are both human and inhumane. The walls are our compulsion. The walls are our chronic disease. The fragment [of the Berlin Wall on display] reminds us of the inevitability of our better natures and in this the constant thrum of hope. The walls will continue to rise, and we will continue to tear them down.<sup>678</sup>

The PBM faced the ever-growing, always menacing wall daily; their lives and their families lives unfolded in its shadow. While they could not tear down the physical structure, they could and did respond, broadening the extent of their relationships in the physical space of the wall through worship, prayers, vigils, celebrations, artistic expressions, and education. Pastors Nelsen and Gray, with *Pasos de Fe*, met their Mexican colleagues and friends at the border wall to gather in worship and prayer. Often, they took visiting mission teams to the wall, exposing them to the divisive political power a wall can represent, and giving them the opportunity to witness the expansive power of relationships through faith, something a wall cannot diminish. Dave Thomas, Co-coordinator with *Compañeros en Misión*, always took mission delegations to the wall at the conclusion of mission interpretation experiences; it was a space for considering the complexity they had encountered in the border region. The shadow of the wall, metaphorically speaking, became a contemplative space where the travelers considered

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<sup>677</sup> Groody, *Border of Death, Valley of Life*, 13.

<sup>678</sup> Marcello di Cintio, *Walls: Travels Along the Barricades*, (Berkeley: Soft Skull Press, 2013), 280-281.



not only the spiritual moments of their sojourn but also the darkness the wall cast on them and their Mexican brothers and sisters.

Guests of the border ministries talked about processing the border and the border wall. Part of their reasons for coming was their interest in seeing, experiencing, and understanding all that was going on in the border region. When standing in the space where the steel and concertina wire were in full view, tour leaders asked the visitors to talk about the meaning of borders. Adams recounted they typically used “negative connotations, us-and-them kind of connotations.” He went on to explain,

Our hope is when folks leave, they understand yes borders are that but borders also are places of encounter, places of coming together. So how we define borders is important. Our hope is that when folks come, they’ll experience a community that has sought to define borders as places of encounter, even as our government on this side of the border has sought more and more to see it as a place of division and fear and separation. From our perspective, our hope is that being here will help them see their borders in their own community and start thinking about how they define the borders in their own community as places of encounter as opposed to places of separation and division.<sup>679</sup>

For people living in the border region south of the border wall, they often responded to the structure with hope and resistance. The wall took on vastly different meanings when viewed from the south. Granted, much of the expanse crossed unsettled spaces – no towns, cities, or roads, just natural environs where the only evidence of human habitation would be remains of prior travelers and the wall. For the migrant, it stood as a monolithic obstacle, an impediment to their journey. For border region residents in the towns and urban centers, the wall took on new cultural meaning, as they denied any imposition to redefine the people of *México* and their northern spaces. There

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<sup>679</sup> Adams discussion with author, Part 1, 23.

was evidence of artistic expression and resistance, much of it calling for friendship or freedom, some of the art depicting religious beliefs or their pride in the community and country. The wall became a community gathering place where the people could celebrate festivals and religious holidays. In *Agua Prieta*, the community built a stage and painted the adjacent metal stanchions blue as if to make the wall disappear into the sky.

Municipal leaders join with Douglas' leaders to host an annual fiesta that takes place on both sides of the border wall. Musicians and dancers perform, politicians speak, children share poetry or perform traditional dance, and people eat and celebrate. During the official program, the politicians reach through the wall to shake hands with their political counterparts.

Jorge Espajel, Mexican Counsel stationed in Douglas, AZ, shared his thoughts on the border wall. "...okay you need wall? You need border? That's great but we have a different point of view. It's going to be very cultural for us ...and it happens when we start with the binational concert. You can see the Mexican side, the wall is painted but the US no, you can't do that because it's federal property. Okay, great but *México* is our people. They're doing it different."<sup>680</sup>

The PBM ministry works daily in the shadow cast by the border wall but, they are not alone. Other worshipping communities, faith-based non-profits, and service agencies have coalesced around border region concerns, particularly in response to the needs of migrating people wherever they are in their journey. Station seven shares a bit about

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<sup>680</sup> Jorge Espajel [Mexican Counsel] discussion by author, (Douglas, Arizona: Mexican Counsel office, May 29, 2018) 12.

some of the other support service groups that form a broad network of interconnected responses as a counterpoint to the realities of government policy.

### A Network of Compassion and Support

#### *Via Crucis* – Station Eight – Responding to Mark 15:21

We come to this station today from many places. Some are close by and some are migrants. Some of us have already been pressed into service to carry the cross. Along this desert border, many people get pressed into service because of the human needs of those condemned by circumstance to attempt to cross here. These are the Simon figures that we remember today. Some carry water, some offer bandages, socks, medicine or food. Others listen to the important stories that must be told. Some are first responders or rescue team members. Others offer shelter for the night or partial bus fare home for those removed from the U.S. These were once just passers-by. The needs of suffering life will press us into this service, if we but pay attention to them.<sup>681</sup>

Prior to 2010, when *Frontera de Cristo* started the Border-to-Border immersion trips from *Agua Prieta, Sonora* to *Salvador Urbina, Chiapas*, part of their programming was to introduce the participants to the Scalabrini Migrant Centers in the southern border region. The centers offered temporary shelter and food, as migrants from Central America cleared the *Guatemala/México* border and needed rest having finished the first leg of their long trip north. Established in 1866, the Scalabrini order has offered shelter to sojourners and continues to grow internationally. They have operated shelters along both the southern and northern borders of *México*, the first being *Casa del Migrante* (Migrant House) established in Tijuana in 1987. Sociologist and author Pierrett Hondagneu-Sotelo visited the shelter in 2005 noting the entrance sign, “*Yo fui extranjero*

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<sup>681</sup> “Voice 8,” *La Via Crucis de la Frontera, The Border Way of the Cross*. April 2, 2021, Douglas, Arizona, USA/*Agua Prieta, Sonora, México*, 20.

*y tu me acogiste*” (I was a stranger, and you took me in). At the time of his visit, *La Casa del Migrante* and the sister shelter for women and children down the street, *Casa Madre Assunta*, had experienced a significant decline in numbers as increased border controls pushed migrant crossings to the east into Arizona.<sup>682</sup> The Scalabrini moved east and established shelters all the way to *Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas*. At *México*’s southern border, Hagan spoke with Father Flor María Rigoni, a Scalabrini priest and director of a migrant shelter in *Tapachula, Chiapas*. He described *Chiapas* (the Mexican state that borders *Guatemala*) as a “cemetery without a cross.” A shocking statement until understanding that at the time Hagan reported, in 2000, one-hundred-twenty migrants died at or near the six-hundred-mile-long *Guatemala/México* border. In less than a year, the number had almost tripled. It was in 2001 that the Mexican government launched its own anti-immigrant campaign, *Plan Sur* (South Plan), pressured by the USA administration to extend the *México/USA* border farther south. In their efforts to avoid capture, many more migrating people died.<sup>683</sup> In 2009, Dan Abbott, a volunteer supporting several border region ministries and organizations, visited the Scalabrini shelter in *Tapachula*. While waiting outside the shelter with a gathering of people migrating from Central America, people in the crowd began to share story. Abbott explained to several of them that he was a volunteer with Humane Borders (described below). One of the migrants responded, “Oh, the Angels in the Desert.” Surprised that someone on the southern border would know about his volunteer work and even had a

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<sup>682</sup> Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *God’s Heart Has No Borders: How Religious Activists Are Working for Immigrant Rights* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2008), 141-2.

<sup>683</sup> Hagan, “The Church vs. the State,” 93-94

label for the organization, Abbott soon understood – posters depicting the Sonoran Desert with warnings of death hung all over the interior of the *Casa del Migrante*.<sup>684</sup>

In response to the continuing escalation in border enforcement and the growing numbers of migration tragedies, Catholic leadership in *México* and the USA, “who collectively shepherded more than 150 million Catholics in 2003, published a joint pastoral letter on migration, entitled *Stranger No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*.”<sup>685</sup> The letter confronted both governments on their actions concerning emigration and immigration.

The Mennonite Central Committee is another worshipping community committed to peace in the *México/USA* border region and with strong advocacy and legal support training with classes, seminars, and networking opportunities. In addition, they are collaborative partners working along the border with people from across North and Latin America, embedded in existing programs and communities and offering support in a variety of ways from program management to hospitality.

Jack Knox and Linda Knox number among the Mennonite faith workers in *Agua Prieta/Douglas*. Having volunteered at the Migrant Resource Center (MRC) through *Frontera de Cristo* and participated in the Migrant Trail (described in Station Nine), they decided on Arizona and chose Douglas as their retirement home in 2012. Since their arrival in Douglas, they purchased a second house and have offered hospitality to any

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<sup>684</sup> Dan Abbott discussion with author, Tempe, Arizona, June 16, 2021, 1.

<sup>685</sup> Hagan, “The Church vs. the State,” 99; *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Inc. and Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano*. “Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope,” 2003, <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/immigration/strangers-no-longer-together-on-the-journey-of-hope>.

visitors who need a bed (there is often a pot of soup on the stove) and that includes groups from the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). Linda is a retired teacher and Jack a retired Presbyterian pastor; they shifted to the Mennonite church explaining it was a peace-church, something not emphasized in the Presbyterian denomination. Each day begins with a prayer walk to the border wall, a short distance away, and every Tuesday they join (sometimes lead) the weekly prayer vigil, lifting up the names of people who have died in the desert while crossing Apache County. Jack shared a tender story of two men who made their way to the Migrant Resource Center in *Agua Prieta* after ICE (US Immigration and Customs Enforcement) dropped them off at the border gate.

One gentleman was tall and big boned, he obviously had done a lot of physical labor because his hands were thick and calloused. It looked like his fingers couldn't bend. He was carrying the other guy who was smaller. They had met in detention and were deported together. The guy who was being carried, we sat him in a chair, and I took his shoes off and peeled the socks off his feet. The bottom of both feet were just raw, he was obviously in pain. I started getting stuff together, the water and antibacterial soap. I had to go back in to get antibiotic salve, bandages, and stuff. When I came back, that big man was washing the other's feet. He was so gentle. I could not believe that those hands could be that gentle. I could not believe that the man whose feet were so bad wasn't just screaming in agony. It was one of the most touching things I ever saw. That's where I learned what foot-washing is; it's not just this nice little ritual we do in church.<sup>686</sup>

Non-profit organizations number among the supporters of migrating people as well, many based in Arizona. Alison Harrington, Pastor at Southside Presbyterian in Tucson, Arizona, posed the question, "Can anything good come out of Arizona? The land of Sheriff Joe Arpaio, SB1070, Operation Streamline, a militarized border, prowling patrol vehicles, private prison-operated detention centers, and deportations that tear apart

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<sup>686</sup> Jack Knox and Linda Knox discussion with author, May 28, 2019, (Douglas, Arizona: in their home), 42:30-44:20.

families and devastate our communities.”<sup>687</sup> Harrington points out that Arizona is also a place of radical resistance, stating, “...the only way to be church within this Empire is to enact love in ways that disrupt the machinery of the Empire.” Presbyterians have seeded many organizations in Arizona, each designed to, in some way, respond to the critical need for compassion and justice, to engage in disruptive love. It was in the late 1990s that a cluster of migrant-assistance organizations emerged due to the explosion of critical needs and soaring deaths as the new crossing points opened into remote desert environs.<sup>688</sup> Three of the groups are active fifty-two weeks a year, providing what they can to the sojourners moving across the desert floor.

Humane Borders, founded in the summer of 2000 and “motivated by faith and the universal need for kindness,” sets up and maintains water stations on migration walking paths through the Arizona desert.<sup>689</sup> The operation requires a fleet of trucks strong enough to carry a three-hundred-gallon tank of water and sturdy enough to navigate the rutted roads that crisscross the desert. The organization marks each station with a thirty-foot-flag and sets up at least two fifty-gallon-drums filled with fresh water. Collaboration with Grupo Beta, a Mexican government-supported organization, has helped Humane Borders provide locational information to people before they cross the border into remote lands.

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<sup>687</sup> Alison Harrington, “Can Anything Good Come from Nazareth?” in Rick Ufford-Chase, *Faith Resistance: Gospel Visions for the Church in a Time of Empire* (San Bernadino, California: unknown publisher, 2016), 25-26.

<sup>688</sup> Hondagneu-Sotelo, *God’s Heart Has No Borders*, 142.

<sup>689</sup> “Our Mission,” *Humane Borders/Fronteras Compasivas*, <https://humaneborders.org/our-mission/>.

In 2002, with leadership by Pastor John Fife, former moderator of General Assembly, members of five faith traditions: Quaker, Jew, Methodist, Catholic, and Presbyterian formed the Samaritans. Later, the group expanded and self-identified as a “people of conscience and faith.” The Samaritans offered an additional wave of support dispatching four-wheel drive mobile units into the Southern Arizona desert, loaded with essentials: food, water, and medical supplies. The collective provides immediate humanitarian aid for people they locate as they travel through the harsh deserts of Southern Arizona.<sup>690</sup>

A third group committed to stopping deaths in the desert, the No More Deaths organization, began in 2004 as a coalition of faith groups and community volunteers; since 2008, they joined with the Unitarian Universalist Church of Tucson. At its inception, No More Deaths crafted the “Faith-Based Principals for Immigration Reform,” a document that the Arizona Interfaith Network of pastors and church leaders, including the Arizona PBM ministries, submitted to the Arizona legislature. Since that beginning, the organization has continued to advocate for border justice. In addition, No More Deaths aids people in distress in the desert and, in a show of defiance, they “extend the right to provide humanitarian assistance,” an objective for which the Border Patrol has arrested some of their workers, charging them with aiding and abetting.<sup>691</sup> The border region is a place of encounter, also defined by the many people and organizations that

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<sup>690</sup> “Los Samaritanos: A Healing Presence Along the Border,” *Tucson Samaritans / Los Samaritanos*, <http://www.tucsonosamaritans.org/about-samaritans.html>; Hagan, “The Church vs. the State,” 101.

<sup>691</sup> “About No More Deaths,” *No More Deaths / No Más Muertes* <https://nomoredeaths.org/about-no-more-deaths/>; Hagan, “The Church vs. the State,” 101.



ensure the connection between people is also one of hospitality and kindness. It is a place where washing another's feet is an act of love and compassion.

Arizona also has been the site of a different sort of organization, one that draws people from around the world to the desert, to trek seventy-five miles along a migrant trail from *Sasabe, Sonora* to Tucson, Arizona. Sojourners from Canada, USA, *México*, Central America, and even Great Britain and Germany join together each June, and for a week, they learn a comparatively light lesson in the migration experience crossing the desert. The participants do not travel alone and have plenty of water, food, and support. Nevertheless, they begin to appreciate their own fragility as blisters grow bigger, noses bleed from the dryness, skin sunburns, and legs ache from the miles of walking. Station Nine considers the fragility of life as it recounts the experience of the Migrant Trail.

### The Migrant Trail: A Walk for Life

#### *Via Crucis* – Station Nine – Responding to Luke 23:27-31

Those in border ministry recognize the fragility of life, the fragile gift of life. A migrant's loved ones worry about his or her welfare and safety as they traveled "great distances to feed their families." Just as the women followed Jesus through the streets, "prepared to accompany dire circumstance with patience and love," the people walking the *Via Crucis* pray/call out for the same resolve. The women could, "...see a side of Jesus that the men couldn't see," and the modern walkers hoped for a "glimpse of the resolve of those who walk in this desert today."<sup>692</sup>

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<sup>692</sup> "Voice 9 and Prayer 9," *La Via Crucis de la Frontera, The Border Way of the Cross*. April 2, 2021, Douglas, Arizona, USA/*Agua Prieta, Sonora, México*, 22.

For twenty years, fifty to seventy-five people from across North America, Latin America, and Europe, participated in The Migrant Trail.<sup>693</sup> It is another type of ritual walk, a spiritual journey that extends for a week along a path that stretches from *Sasabe, Sonora, México* to Tucson, Arizona, USA. They walk, not to replicate a migrating experience, but to understand it. They walk as an expression of their worry for the people who seek hope and life in the USA, and they walk to understand the consequences of USA policy. Faith-based organizations and worshipping communities, including the PBM border ministry, supported The Migrant Trail through participation, financial donations, provisions of meals along the trail, and prayers-in-solidarity. The Migrant Trail was another way to be a witness to the intensity of experience felt by migrating peoples. The trail has been a traveler's space across the centuries, often dangerous and deadly. Now, during that one week a year, it is a place for sharing knowledge of the present with the storied and spiritual past, a place of learning, remembering, and honoring. For many, it is a sacred space.

In early summer, when the intensity of the sun promises a season of soaring heat, a group of walkers committed to a 75-mile journey across Arizona's southern desert.<sup>694</sup> The walkers were *diverse* in spirit, ethnicity, and culture. They came from across the USA, Canada, *México*, with a few from Europe. They gathered in Sasabe, Sonora,

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<sup>693</sup> The Migrant Trail walk has continued up to the present, including two virtual Trails during the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 and 2021. Many others join the founders, committed to continuing the annual walk "to express solidarity with the migrants and to advocate for positive change in the borderlands." <https://azmigranttrail.com/>.

<sup>694</sup> Catherine L. May, "*Presente* in the Borderlands," Arizona State University, REL591: Collective Memory and Identity, May 2011. Research included interviews with several of the founders and walkers; this excerpt from the paper includes quotes from Founders Todd Miller and Kat Rodriguez, and long-time walker, Dan Abbott.

*México* to walk the Migrant Trail in solidarity with the migrants who have been suffering and dying along the same path. For some, the walk embodies political action. For many, it is like a pilgrimage, a time of reflection and memory-formation. Much of the time, the walkers moved in silence across the desert as each step honors a life that ended too soon. The founders constructed the Migrant Trail event on the site of extremes—awesome beauty and excruciating death—where the names of the fallen are spoken and their lives are affirmed as they are declared “*Presente*.” It is a spiritual place infused with the glorious and the horror of both distant and recent pasts. During the seven days that it takes to get to south Tucson, the walkers’ personal and collective formulations of reality blur as they encounter daytime sweat and nighttime shivers, heat rash and sun burn, blisters, and bloody noses. They encounter thorny, aggressive plants that accentuate the deeply felt experience and settles into their memory forever tying them to an extraordinary place.

In 2004, the Migrant Trail program first stepped onto the Sonoran Desert. It began as an idea shared among friends, people who cared passionately about migrants and their struggles and who worked for immigration reform in the U.S. Through the individual and collective ritual practices of the seven-day, seventy-five-mile journey, the walkers’ lives joined the lives of the millennia who journeyed past sacred mountains, suffered the scarcity of water and harshness of the desert, and adapted to the rhythms of sun and moon. They moved through the landscape, learned, and remembered the lives of those who had walked along the same desert pathways.

Without fully understanding why, the first group simply wanted to “walk the walk;” to put themselves into that desert space—lands they had begun to refer to as

America's Killing Fields. [Todd Miller, May 9, 2011 and Kat Rodriguez, May 5, 2011]. Over the years, people with little experience of the *México/USA* borderlands came to the USA Southwest to understand the contested space. For most, the walk was an overwhelming combination of pilgrimage and protest: it was grieving, defiance, gratitude, solidarity, political, camaraderie, commemoration, spiritual, and challenging.

Ritual-like activities and performative acts symbolically connect walkers with migrants who had died on the sojourn north. Most walkers carry a small white cross imprinted with the name and age of a deceased person; some are labeled *desconocido(a)* for a man, woman, or child whose remains could not be identified. During the journey, the walkers tend to their cross; for seven days, they relate to the migrant that they carry, some meditate and pray, others write poetry and songs, recognizing that in this act and in this place, they may be the only one to grieve for the person who has died. As the walkers move northward, they periodically call out the name of the migrant they carry and the rest respond, "*presente.*" The collective act declares the dead to be present, to be real, to be remembered, to be a spirit and a force not to be over-looked.

For the first four days of the journey, the Baboquivari peak was ever-present, marking their direction and their progress. It was always on the walkers' left and ahead of them; it was an assuring presence that moved them forward just as it has been a beacon for all who traveled the trail. Baboquivari was a site that connected people with the desert place and with each other, past and present. The final morning of the walk, the Migrant Trail participants pack up one last time then climb a nearby butte to share in a blessing ceremony led by one of the walkers, a woman who devoutly embraces both her strong Catholic upbringing and her spiritual roots as a Native American. The ceremony was an

expression of gratitude for the safe borderlands crossing and of sorrow for those who have lost their lives in the desert. The community of walkers face south and witness the broad expanse of desert they have crossed and that was, at that moment, enveloping other walkers. They could see Baboquivari, a unique mountain formation, a timeless spiritual place, and a beacon for desert travelers. Todd Miller recalled, “It’s hard to describe all the energy that is there. I remember standing in the circle and looking across that desert landscape and suddenly crying, just crying... looking to the distance I couldn’t stop the tears.” Another walker shared, “...that spot on this ugly, ugly butte... to me is a holy place because of what we do there.” [Dan Abbott, May 7, 2011]

The linear desert space in which the participants encountered the unique desert sights, sounds, smells, and touch solidified a collective memory for The Migrant Trail walkers. The importance of place became paramount; the southern Arizona desert was where they began to experience a new reality and a sensory connection to people who had migrated across the perilous landscape and did not survive. The topography was simultaneously spectacularly exquisite and overwhelming treacherous. Repeatedly, the walkers recalled the rare beauty of the desert, the crescent moon over the mountains at sunset; the dizzying pinpricks of stars; the sound of their footsteps on the desert floor; the cactus cross silhouetted against Baboquivari and a vast blue sky; the unbridled and brutal desert heat. The Migrant Trail is a memory place. Presente!

The extraordinary beauty of the Arizona desert dissipates for the person who has crossed the border and is fearful with every step they take. There is the concern of staying up with their group, or how to walk with the pain they feel as the blisters begin to wear and bleed, or the exhaustion after a cold, unprotected night, or the glare of the sun as they

drink the last of their water. If they survive after crossing over, will their hope carry them to their destination, or will *la Migra* find them? Groody declares, “Even when they do not die physically, they undergo a death culturally, psychologically, socially, and emotionally.”<sup>695</sup> At Station Ten, the Good Friday pilgrims on the *Via Crucis* caught a glimpse of the grief migrating people understand all too well. The following section looks at the demeaning and dehumanizing actions in national policy and public perceptions and considers the racialization of migrating people.

### The ‘Alien,’ “Illegal,” Different Looking Person

#### *Via Crucis* – Station Ten – Responding to Luke 23:33-34

“Nailed to the cross; processed for deportation; victimized by natural disaster – three different ways that people can be marginalized and removed from a society. As people are returned to the south side of this border, they, too, are stripped of everything except the change of used clothes they are given to wear. They are dropped off beyond the gates of this land [USA], stripped of contact with family and community, stripped of any documents they may have been carrying along with all cash and possessions, and stripped of their saints and *recuerdos*. When they are finally “released” at the border, their only option is to “cross over;” and they will not even be welcomed with open arms by many people they are deemed to have forsaken. Each one crosses over now as *bare life, to be sacrificed*. Today, the border has become a cross, in the same way that the cross was once a border – each is a Passover.”<sup>696</sup>

At the end of the northbound journey, border crossers arrived in a country that has spent more than a century developing a false descriptive narrative about them, what Gregory Cuellar, Old Testament scholar, considers a sacralizing of state apparatus, a sort

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<sup>695</sup> Groody, *Border of Death, Valley of Life*, 32.

<sup>696</sup> “Voice 10,” *La Via Crucis de la Frontera, The Border Way of the Cross*. April 2, 2021, Douglas, Arizona, USA/*Agua Prieta, Sonora, México*, 24.

of “religious nationalism,” that validates government actions and consequently devalues, “desacralizes,” people who move across the border without state authorization.<sup>697</sup> In so doing, the travelers have sinned against the state and made to atone through the cruel and subjugating treatment afforded them.

Grappling with the biblical “alien” consistently challenges nationalist notions of the migrating people, particularly those that are unauthorized. Mexicans who migrate are people traveling with hope toward a future for themselves and their families; to label them ‘illegal’ or ‘alien’ takes away their humanness and they become the ‘other,’ someone undeserving of passage to the USA side of the national boundary. The Old Testament/Torah often repeats the call for justice and welcome for the stranger. For the Christian, Jesus’ teachings (Matthew 25:35-36) describe how the person how acts justly toward others should act. In the 1981 report on immigration, the Presbyterian Church stated that Jesus identified with the stranger, the hungry, the thirsty, the imprisoned, “the least of these.” It is not enough to stand against the poor treatment of the other, it is important to be caring, loving, compassionate – to see the face of Jesus as he identified himself with them. Jesus does not invoke the law but rather, called those who embraced his teachings to engage with compassion. In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), one becomes a neighbor to another (even if culturally despised) by showing mercy. So, it is not just that one sees the other as neighbor, it is that one is a neighbor. “... ‘neighbor’ breaks down all the walls and crosses all the borders that human pride and

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<sup>697</sup> Gregory L. Cuellar, *Resacralizing the Other at the US-Mexico Border: A Borderland Hermeneutic* (Milton Park, Abingdon, England: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2020), 3, 111, 115.

injustice can create.”<sup>698</sup> Being a neighbor is about being in good relationship with one another.

Mexicans and Central Americans became identified as “illegal aliens,” yet, in popular USA opinion, it meant more than crossing the border without authorization, they became a threat. Chavez stated, “Being an unauthorized ‘illegal,’ is a status conferred by the state, and it then becomes written upon the bodies of the migrants themselves because illegality is both produced and experienced.”<sup>699</sup> The notion that, by virtue of their assumed criminal status and thus a threat to the country, over a century and more, as Mexicans entered the country to work, they would not receive even the privileges accorded to laborers for USA companies and agricultural interests. Along with the identity disruption, the migrants that crossed the southern border received unjust, even inhumane treatment from their neighbors to the north. By virtue of the popular USA understanding of people who migrate across the southern border, they were made to atone for the transgressions of being Mexicans and Latin Americans (Hispanics) responding to the economic and violent threats to themselves and their families in the only way they knew how to respond – answer the call to work and live in the USA.

The 1981 Presbyterian study on Mexican migration to the USA recognized that faith calls for relationship with all people; to protect them from abuse and cruelty, guard their dignity, and share life with them.<sup>700</sup> Part of that call was recognizing and calling out

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<sup>698</sup> UPCUSA and PCUS, “Mexican Migration to the United States,” 47.

<sup>699</sup> Chavez, *The Latino Threat*, 28.

<sup>700</sup> UPCUSA and PCUS, “Mexican Migration to the United States,” 55.



the inequities people face when disadvantaged by stressful, confrontational situations. The Presbyterian migration report pointed out that “the majority of the Mexican population is a mixture of Indian and Spanish ancestry...” and with their prominent look and a distinct language, the Mexican worker is “...an easy target when economic conditions required a scapegoat.”<sup>701</sup> The report stated, “In the 1920s when Congress was hammering out a non-immigration policy, racism was obvious and overt in discussion about Mexico. Nativist – for whom “native” meant a white, Anglo culture – sought strict limitation of entrants from Mexico.” The report determined that while nativists focused on concerns for “the nation’s future racial integrity,” growers fighting to keep the Mexican laborers shared with the Senate Committee that “the Mexican is not any more a menace to our institutions than the pet dogs are in any other country.” Recognizing that presenters to Congress in 1981 would not articulate this type of blatant racism, they noted that “the spirit is present and obvious still.”<sup>702</sup>

In 1979, members of the Ku Klux Klan held an open demonstration at the California-Mexico border to protest what they called “the brown tide.” Reports persist of Klansmen in Southern California acting as vigilante groups to apprehend and expel illegal Mexican migrants. Also, in the last congressional election, the Democratic Party nominee for the district that includes almost 90% of the California-Mexico border was the local Grand Dragon of the KKK.<sup>703</sup>

At the time, the research found that the INS clearly focused its efforts on deporting Mexicans while Canadians and Europeans working illegally in the USA, “probably in

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<sup>701</sup> UPCUSA and PCUS, “Mexican Migration to the United States,” 27.

<sup>702</sup> UPCUSA and PCUS, “Mexican Migration to the United States,” 28.

<sup>703</sup> UPCUSA and PCUS, “Mexican Migration to the United States,” 28.

more direct competition with the United States workers,” received little attention. The racist attitudes, “may be less blatant than in the past, but [they are] real nonetheless.”<sup>704</sup> As the PBM entered ministry along the *México*/USA border, and shared information about border region issues of justice across the USA, they would have been aware of the racist attitudes they would encounter.

As the gradual shift toward legal immigration enforcement continued to expand, it shed a light on the ugly, cruel side of the migration experience in the USA. Enactment of immigration laws and policies illuminated racial and cultural prejudices. Prejudicial treatment became codified in law as one’s nationality became succinctly defined as “residency in one place, fluency in the official language, and membership to an ethnically defined people.”<sup>705</sup> Congressional passage of the immigration quota system, established in law in 1924, was founded on notions of race, thus “reclassifying Americans as racialized citizens.”<sup>706</sup> In the meantime, the Mexican laborer, valued when needed and expendable when not needed, became a segregated, “devalued caste” with little to no legal rights or recourse in response to systemic abuses.<sup>707</sup>

In the book, *Impossible Subjects*, Ngai points out a curious paradox in the racialization of Mexicans. A 1924 Congressional Act exempted *México* and other Latin American countries from the quota laws due to international interests and relations in the Western Hemisphere. In addition, by binational treaty, the USA could not exclude

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<sup>704</sup> UPCUSA and PCUS, “Mexican Migration to the United States,” 28.

<sup>705</sup> Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries*, 27.

<sup>706</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 36.

<sup>707</sup> Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries*, 27.

Mexicans from citizenship based on race because, under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848 and the annexation of Mexican territory, the USA deemed Mexicans as “white.”<sup>708</sup> In the Southwest, Mexicans and those Americans of Mexican descent, generally, fit into the lower-economic labor class while non-Mexicans continued to populate the region, and over time grew not only in numbers but as the middle and wealthy classes.

Immigration law of the 1920s responded to growing trends in scientific racism (eugenics), xenophobia, nationalism, and conservative ideology. The law reduced the numbers of migrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, essentially stopped migration from Asia and Africa, and encouraged migration from Northern and Western Europe. The circular migration patterns from Latin American, particularly *México*, and legalized under the Bracero Program, 1942-1964, ebbed and flowed around economic concerns and did not capture the broader political ire in the early decades. Immigration politics in the 1960s, followed the liberalizing trends toward civil rights, and removed the racist quota systems. At the time, immigration numbers were low, so issues of migration did not pose concerns or invoke fears for the public. However, for some, the Bracero Program “had come to be seen as an exploitive labor regime on a par with Southern sharecropping, and over vociferous objections from *México*, Congress voted to terminate it.”<sup>709</sup>

While race is clearly not the only driver of immigration policy development, it did play a role, at times a significant role, as needed by the power structures and policy

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<sup>708</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 50-51.

<sup>709</sup> Massey and Pren, “Unintended Consequences of US Immigration Policy,” 3.

influencers. Racializing migrants is not a new construct but has defined perspectives of immigrants with each new generation. In the Southwest USA, the Mexican and Latin American migrants have always been targets for bigotry but, for the early part of the twentieth century, the needs of agriculture and industry for this sector of the labor force protected them from the overt, racially driven policy. However, as the numbers of migrants from the south increased and spread northward and eastward, new racialized stereotypes followed them – “criminal, social burden, diseased, inassimilable.”<sup>710</sup> Efforts to stop the migration grew on a parallel track.

In her book, *How Race is Made in America*, History and Urban Studies Professor Natalia Molina argues, “...that one of the key ways to establish Mexican immigration as a problem was to use racial scripts to compare Mexicans to racialized groups already familiar to Americans.” For example, opponents of Mexican immigration, to portray them as less desirable, used “racial scripts as shorthand to construct Mexicans as inferior. It was common, for example, for white Americans to discuss Mexicans as ‘the Negro problem’ of the Southwest.”<sup>711</sup> Into the mid-twentieth century, the federal government employed racialized language further developing the racist lexicon by popularizing the term ‘wetback.’ The label “...had a broader and sharper impact and was used much more widely and loosely to describe Mexican immigrants and even Mexican Americans. The

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<sup>710</sup> Natalia Molina, *How Race is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts*. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2014), 21.

<sup>711</sup> Molina, *How Race is Made in America*, 21.

term thus had the power to racialize an entire immigrant group, even beyond the first generation.”<sup>712</sup>

While the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act removed race and nationality from federal law, the USA government and some states have not always followed in that same course. In 2005, H.R. 4337, introduced by Representative Sensenbrenner from Wisconsin, proposed to make overstaying a visa a federal felony and a federal crime to knowingly help any such unauthorized person. While the bill did not specifically target Mexican immigrants, activity swirling around the proposed legislation pointed directly at Mexicans living in the USA. The bill failed to pass in the Senate. However, subsequently, state legislatures introduced countless anti-immigration bills and successfully passed many. While the laws may have appeared to be race-neutral, “in practice American anti-immigration laws are applied overwhelming to Latinos.”<sup>713</sup>

In discussions with border ministry staff, amid the greater emphasis on handling differences in the interest of building relationships, the issue of racism and racist attitudes rarely came up. However, two people in El Paso, Texas shared some interesting observations about place-racism. In a comparison of racial tensions between Los Angeles, California and El Paso, Texas, Pastor Gray (having lived in both locations) stated, “...racism is very, very, very alive in LA. If you’re brown it is assumed that you are working in the kitchen. I’ve been to the South and so I’ve seen racism in another, different way. In LA and the San Diego/*Tijuana* border there is a negative connotation, a

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<sup>712</sup> Molina, *How Race is Made in America*, 113-114.

<sup>713</sup> Molina, *How Race is Made in America*, 147.

very large, negative connotation to those with Hispanic backgrounds, except within their communities.”<sup>714</sup> Gray found that *Juarez/El Paso*, where the city had existed for centuries before the USA border divided it and, where families still lived on both sides of the border, racism seemed less evident. “Racism obviously is still here but it’s buried, in different contexts, different reasonings, different locations... as a white, heterosexual male, I don’t always have the insight to see where that is.”<sup>715</sup> Omar Chan, former PBM/PBRO Facilitator, a naturalized citizen of the USA, and a first-generation immigrant from Guatemala, felt confused by El Paso when he first arrived. “El Paso, Texas has its own identity. It has its own culture.”<sup>716</sup> Chan shared that people “my color” in El Paso were quite different from those in other USA locations where he had lived (Florida, Indiana, and Kentucky). In El Paso, those of Mexican and Latin American descent, seemed more integrated into the fabric of the city whereas people he experienced in other USA locations were more isolated and spoke little to no English. While many in El Paso lived near their extended families (many in Juarez), similar people across the USA suffered great distances from family. Chan has lived in the USA since 1999 but has sensed a growing unease in public venues. In El Paso, in public, at his children’s school, and at church, he has felt a comfortable welcoming. During a visit to Louisville, Kentucky, Chan noted a Border Patrol presence, something rarely witnessed on the streets of the border city of El Paso.<sup>717</sup>

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<sup>714</sup> Gray discussion with author, 5.

<sup>715</sup> Gray discussion with author, 5.

<sup>716</sup> Chan discussion with author, 11.

<sup>717</sup> Chan discussion with author, 11-13.

As the *Via Crucis* walkers stepped silently forward toward the last four stations, they had experienced their own crossing over. The sun had risen behind them, and the light flooded their sacred space. The time had come to grapple with death and resurrection. In the hope of light, the group took a collective breath – an amen if you will. The experience of death was ending but, living with the aftermath lay ahead. The liturgy had pushed them into a time of reckoning and reflection as they prepared to become, once again, Easter people. Through their morning, the sojourners had witnessed power, greed, racism, and unjust - even inhumane acts toward people with whom they share their God. As the *Via Crucis* walkers reflected on the suffering, humiliation, and helplessness, they embraced the presence of light and breath and moved toward love and hope.

#### Conclusion

The *Via Crucis* is just one example of the interpretation of religious teachings through the lens of immigration. In his book, *Neighbor: Christian Encounter with “Illegal” Immigration*, Reverend Ben Daniel states that God “calls people to live an immigrant spirituality, to follow the pilgrimage of an immigrant’s journey, and to respond with compassion in the needs of those who have made their way to our shores...”

Using the literary vehicle of the liturgy employed by the *Via Crucis*, an annual, Good Friday pilgrimage, this chapter has considered just some of the issues that have swirl around the complex subject of migration, particularly the movement of people to and through the *México/USA* border region. The space is rugged, defined by mountains, deserts, and aridity, and it is a place that connects cultures and nations, with all the

inherent tensions and possibilities. Through relationships formed by PBM in the border region, the newcomers can be seen, not as uncredentialed threats from who military-like protections are needed but, as people with concerns, aspirations, and families. The network of support services, partners with the border ministries, have responded to the investments in the construction of walls, detention facilities, and high-tech militarized zones with simplified actions that offer respite and relief to migrating people. The network also advocates against policies that are unjust, policies that result in abuse, dehumanization, and the horror of desert deaths.

Historically, churches, religious organizations, and non-profits in the USA have played a pivotal role in supporting people who entered the country without authorization. Many religious organizations, including the Presbyterian Church, USA, have spoken up for the migrant, calling on nations to engage in just and humane responses to migrant realities. Religious workers speak out because they have witnessed the migrant's plight during every aspect of the journey, from the difficult decision to leave home, to the needs along a harrowing trip, and finally the despair and loneliness upon arrival or in the face of failure. Often, worshiping communities form coalitions or provide the foundation for secular organizations, to empower the efforts on behalf of migrants. A migrant's life is an exercise in exploitation, discrimination, danger, and injustice; religious workers often act as their voice.<sup>718</sup>

Just like the walkers on the *Via Crucis*, the PBM has been on a journey of faith that, over the first forty years, recognized the realities articulated in the 1981 report,

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<sup>718</sup> Hagan, *Migration Miracle*, 88-89.



“Mexican Migration to the United States: Challenge to Christian Witness and National Policy,” and embraced the recommendations of the denominations to reach out in support of migrating people. Together, in mutual mission, the ministry sites embraced their cultural and theological differences, and acted in relationship and compassion for each other and for the people they served, believing to the core in the healing and liberating power of faith.

## CHAPTER 8

### REALIZING SUSTAINABILITY

This concluding chapter begins with a general overview of the decades of the PBM/PBRO ministries discussed in detail in Chapters Four, Five, and Six. The review describes key points from the shared past that assess the last five decades of binational border ministry and help to discern a potential future for the PBM/PBRO. The insights gained from the PBM review inform future planning and development of binational or multinational programming, certainly by religious communities but also for organizations engaged in sociopolitical relations in arenas with disparate cultures and economic disparities.

The next section, “A Renewed Border Ministry,” discusses a 2017 gathering of border ministry site leaders expressly to determine the best, next steps for the PBM/PBRO. Representing four of the local ministries, the attendees arrived expecting to end the program and left with a renewed commitment to sustain their missional relationships with each other and to continue their collective outreach and advocacy efforts. Following the determination made by at the 2017 gathering is a series of three sections that discuss lessons extrapolated from the years of PBM/PBRO work. Each section suggests a take-away that transformed those engaged in this ministry and provides a potential look forward in this complex time and space of *México/USA* border engagement.

The chapter ends with a story about a successful, sustainable border region program that gives a glimpse of the future. *Douglaprieta Trabaja*, a farming cooperative, represents the best of PBM/PBRO ministry. The local community formed the program as

a cooperative, the border ministry supported but did not manage it, and the program addressed local needs while encouraging growth and opportunity for others. Importantly, the program developers designed it with an assured, sustainable future.

### Overview of PBM/PBRO Ministry Sites

When asked about PBM generally, Reverend Dr. Hunter Farrell shared,

It brought two different people separated by language, custom, political border, economics, and culture to get to know each other as human beings and that is an amazing work and very important. They have started new church work in many places in México. They have helped US Presbyterians understand some of the realities of the border in better ways. They have helped both churches to think more globally, open their hearts to another perspective. They gave a space where the two churches could collaborate a little more deeply in concrete ways. That's to be celebrated.<sup>719</sup>

There are some striking similarities between the border ministry sites as each faced comparable circumstances of poverty, migration, and injustice. Each site responded to building a version of *serviglesia* that best matched the needs of their specific regional spaces utilizing the skill sets of the Co-Coordinator, staff, and volunteers. In response to the interests of the INPM to rebuild a Presbyterian presence in northern *México*, every ministry planted at least one church that survived the years; others planted several churches, and several extended their evangelical reach into the interior of *México*. A disappointment shared by many of the ministries hinged on the inability of the individual churches to grow large enough and strong enough to realize full autonomy. Many of the missions began as “home churches” located in small, distressed neighborhoods usually on the outskirts of the towns and cities. Mission work teams, most from churches across the

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<sup>719</sup> Farrell discussion with author, 47.

USA, traveled to the church sites and assisted with construction. While a few churches became financially self-sustaining, regional poverty played a key role in hampering the congregations' efforts toward full independence. In addition, the northern Mexican presbyteries were not always able to provide the funding, or the pastoral staff needed to support new church development in a region unfamiliar with Presbyterianism.

The ministry sites' staff and local volunteers, generally, embraced a quality of engagement that respected and valued each other and the communities in which they lived and served. Each worked hard and trained hard to successfully implement a mutuality of purpose and service. The daily routines included time for worship, corporate prayer, collective discernment, and bible study. Such routine sharing of time and thought strengthened the foundation on which they worked and encouraged strong relationships. As people visited and migrated through the border region, contact with the Presbyterian *serviglesias* meant welcome and hospitality. Though difference often proved difficult, the embrace by diverse peoples of the border ministries ameliorated the challenges of religious difference, distinct languages and cultures, economic disparity, and even the ever-looming political divide.

Regularly, especially when new programming implementation was in consideration, the border ministries surveyed the people they hoped to serve. Since the first binational ministry, each site valued the perspectives of the people they served, engaging, and working with them to effectively enact needed change. Programming such as health and medical services, and education and training opportunities, consistently responded to local expressions of need and interest. In every case, the ministries did not work in a vacuum but developed partnerships and relationships with various

governmental groups and individuals, other denominations, and a variety of local, service-oriented organizations.

By the 1980s and formation of the PBM, congregations across the USA displayed a keen interest in finding destinations for short-term mission. In fact, across the USA, a multi-billion-dollar industry had been developing around vacationing while “making a difference.” Reverend Farrell posited, “I think a lot of folks are trying to live out their faith in tangible ways in a globalizing world where we’re all asking ourselves the question of meaning.”<sup>720</sup> While the visiting mission teams were key to constructing the early physical infrastructure of the PBM sites, initially, many participants missed the opportunity to connect in meaningful ways with their Mexican counterparts and the realities of border life, especially the monumental, daily concerns of poverty and migration. It was clear to the Co-Coordinator, staff, and local boards that the mission team approach lacked the most important components of traveling to the border region: relationship, understanding, a new vision of realities in the border region, and an interest and ability to articulate those realities once they had returned home. That disconnect began to change in the 1990s as the PBM and the local ministry leaders recognized the downsides of mission work teams focused on construction and transitioned to mission delegations focused on education, engagement, and experience. If given the opportunity, the visitors could find their voices so, when returning to their home churches and communities, they could share truths experienced in the border region with the people they encountered.

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<sup>720</sup> Farrell discussion with author, 8.

It was often difficult to bridge the barriers of culture, language, pre-conceptions, theology, poverty, even food preferences, and water safety concerns. Yet, for some who traveled to the border region for a short-term experience, the barriers did not make an impression. When the emphasis shifted from work and construction projects, more people learned to appreciate difference due to the oversight and encouragement of the leadership and the welcoming and generous spirit of the Mexican congregations.

Hunter Farrell articulated his view of the trap mission can fall into when dealing with short term mission engagement:

... to ignore the massive issues of justice in the US-Mexican relationship, ...to not ask the questions, what are our tax dollars and our votes doing that have led to this? That sisters and brothers are displaced from their land and having to cross the border, ...to ignore that and go down and frame ourselves as the benevolent ones who pass out candy or do a vacation bible school on the border, that feels to me to be less than responsible engagement in God's mission. I think God's mission requires us, God's self requires us, who God is, requires us to do more than that.<sup>721</sup>

In time, as the PBM ministry sites developed the short-term mission programming, they cultivated a strong expectation of their guests – almost all arriving from across the USA. While the infusion of money and the development of ministry-built infrastructure was helpful, the programming had failed to recognize the most important reasons for encouraging people to travel to the border region. This was an opportunity to serve and to receive, to build a new understanding of relationship, to experience the delights and frustrations of facing challenging differences in culture and language, and to expand one's own faith journey through the appreciation of God's wondrous variety. Guest mission delegations witnessed and engaged in partnering with people inside and outside

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<sup>721</sup> Farrell discussion with author, 36.

the church, in a binational context which responded effectively and appropriately to the specific complexities of the border region.

Unfortunately, each ministry depended financially on the mission groups and when they stopped coming, primarily due to the escalating fear of violence and insecurity in the border region, each site suffered significant loss, financially. The funds-development structure for the mission programming in *México*, and more specifically for the PBM, northern churches, and the ministry sites, primarily fell to the USA contingent. The plan was not sustainable. With time, the ministry sites and the PBM had grown dependent on a single funding stream, the mission groups paying to participate in border region experiences. In addition, fundraising by the individual ministry sites presumed leadership skills in that area and was volunteer-dependent as it often fell to the local Boards of Directors to take on the financial responsibilities. Unfortunately, despite monumental efforts by the PBM Corporation to find new opportunities for ministry funding, they could not generate adequate funds to support the ministry sites during lean times. The organization did not have paid staff to manage fund-raising and the PBM Corporation learned it was not possible to maintain a broad reach of volunteers that would consistently support nation-wide funding efforts. The donations the PBM could generate successfully targeted specific ministry needs such as a dental clinic, a vehicle, or capital campaign for a specific infrastructure need. General annual fund-raising did not work well enough to sustain the PBM/PBRO.

Denominational support played a key role in the early successes and the eventual collapse at some of the seven sites. In the earliest years, the developmental years, the PBM experienced a high degree of interest and validation from both the INPM and the

PCUSA. With their focus on mending the reasons for the schism in the 1970s, the denominations' leadership implemented a high-level management protocol that failed to work effectively for much of the border region work. The leadership may have designed a prescribed structure to create a stable organization, yet local level personnel, especially from *México*, often operated without the knowledge and training necessary to successfully build an interconnected organization. Overtime, the INPM and northern Mexican Presbyteries either could not or would not live up to their commitments of support, both monetary as well as placing pastors in the new churches or Co- Coordinators at the ministry sites. That placed a heavier financial burden on the PCUSA, the PBM, and the donor/supporters who championed the ministry. By the late 1990s, as the first wave of Co- Coordinators retired, resigned, or transferred from their positions, replacement became more challenging for the USA as well. This often left the volunteer local boards handling management of the ecclesiastical and service programs, positions they were hardly qualified to take on.

There are several factors that contributed to the waning, high-level denominational support of the PBM but the most significant was likely the deep theological tensions between the two denominations which eventually led to the fracture in 2011. The ministry sites responded to the initial expectations of a bifurcated call to evangelism and social service with the model of *serviglesia*. They built churches and rendered services, while simultaneously trying to meet expectations for fully autonomous church polity and mutuality in missional management, an impressive and ambitious goal. The complexity of the border region translated to local staff having to navigate the unknown and, sometimes, the unexpected. The ministry workers faced so many



challenges including: border region culture, funds development capability, salary equity vs salary equality, available and qualified missionary and pastoral personnel, the need for consistent training and retraining along with mentoring for staff and local volunteers, theological tensions, cultural differences, language challenges, economic disparities, and border politics. Perhaps most challenging was the importance of standing together on two different theological platforms, conservative and progressive. Eventually, that difference stopped the binational relationship at the denomination level, yet the local ministries persisted. Many in the local leadership had the sophistication needed to discern the best protocols when dealing with the strains that existed between their faith perspectives, particularly after the split in 2011.

As violence, femicide, and substance abuse escalated across the border region, most of the ministry sites and the denominations were ill-equipped to respond quickly to changes in the local needs of the communities they served. The staff offering border services could not be flexible enough to unilaterally shift their services from supplying food, medical support, and education to protection from drug trafficking and violence. Each day became an exercise in reviewing safety protocols, cancelling cross border travel, resorting to communication technology to maintain contacts, and trying to keep the business active and functioning. Then, the constancy of migration issues was always visible to the border ministries, requiring persistent consideration as they struggled to discern how they might respond in thoughtful and responsible ways. While serious issues like migration were ever-present, the ministry sites needed the necessary flexibility to roll with changes in national immigration policy and regional Border Patrol protocols.

The 2011 denominational split was different from the split that brought the denominations together after 1972. After four decades, increased clarity over the theological differences and values of the INPM and the PCUSA, led to a fracturing that likely will take decades to heal. Yet, in the border region, for most mission workers and volunteers, the fracture did not represent nor undermine the depth of commitment and camaraderie they embraced. However, the ministry sites that did not use the *serviglesia* model creatively and privileged just one aspect of the model, service or church/evangelism, were not able to adapt effectively to the challenges of a changing managerial environment. This is not to say that the work they accomplished, and the staying power of their programming was somehow diminished; it simply no longer fit the PBM model, nor the new expectations as articulated by the PCUSA Global Mission division.

At the outset, the denominations could not have envisioned the growing discriminatory and unjust practices that occurred, based on USA politics and policies. In the border region, the constant wave of new USA border policies hindered, even curtailed the movement of pastors and church workers back and forth across the international border. Mexican pastors were no longer issued visas and border crossings would back up for miles. The border fence turned into a barricade of monumental proportions, laced with razor wire – a powerful message of exclusion. What had been an easy flow of border region activity in the early years, changed to a grinding effort to persist in binational ministry despite the governmental ‘roadblocks.’

From the formation of the JMC to the planting of a mission in a poor Mexican barrio, the lofty goals embraced by people of faith joining together as one people, all

children of God, were formidable. Yet, thousands and thousands of people from two countries lived, worked, worshipped, and witnessed together in the border region. They successfully met missional goals: building churches; addressing poverty, hunger, and health concerns; building relationships some of which were for a lifetime; and advocating for justice, humanitarian engagement, and peaceful coexistence. In the face of change over four decades, discerning the next steps challenged the most capable among them. Some of the ministry sites were not up to the task though for others, the compelling hope for a future of unity, justice, peace, and human love/God love, persisted.

While the INPM has partnered with USA Presbyterians more closely allied with their fundamentalist religious values and perspectives, the PCUSA remains connected though minimally engaged in supporting the active PBM/PBRO ministries. Internal organizations such as the Presbyterian Women, Presbyterian New Service, Presbyterian Disaster Agency and the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship have continued to offer both monetary support and engagement when they could respond with their particular areas of expertise.

With the loss of money and strength over the last decade of the PBM/PBRO, and following the denominational split in 2011, the organization had to determine its best next steps. Each ministry site recognized that the need for *serviglesia* continued, and their task was to determine how, as individual ministry sites or as an organization, they would best respond as they looked to a future of border region work.

## A Renewed Border Ministry

In 2017, Donald Trump was the newly elected USA President and by the fall of that year, the PCUSA was reporting the quickly growing list of concerns resulting from recently implemented policies by the USA administration. Missionaries around the world and denomination-level staff were seeing signs of increased struggles because of the new policies advanced by the administration.<sup>722</sup> A loud mantra by the candidate and his followers during the 2015-2016 campaign had been to “build a wall and make *México* pay for it.” The anti-immigrant chant was a symptom of a much bigger socio-political situation in the country. Nevertheless, a significant segment of the USA population called for more restrictive, even harsh policies to address the migration of peoples into the country, an unwanted disparaged group. Keeping to his campaign promise, once in office the Trump administration requested almost two billion in the upcoming budget for construction on the border wall, an estimated total expense of twelve to fifteen billion dollars.

At the time, it was unclear to the ministry workers what such policy shifts meant to the border region, and more specifically to the border ministries. It was clear, however, that the ministry sites faced future challenges. That same year, 2017, the mission workers from the Texas and Arizona ministry sites met in *Agua Prieta, Sonora*, to determine next steps for the disjointed, fractured Presbyterian Border Region Outreach (PBRO, formerly PBM) organization. In November, *Frontera de Cristo* Co-Coordinator hosted a

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<sup>722</sup> Kathy Melvin, “Critical deadlines approaching in dialogue around immigration issues: Presbyterians urged to learn, pray and advocated for just immigration policies,” *Presbyterian News Service*, (October 20, 2017) 1.

gathering, “Discerning the Future of PBRO.” At that point, the *Baja California/California* ministry, *Pueblos Hermanos*, had disbanded, *Puentes de Cristo* in *Reynosa/McAllen* was struggling to stay active, and *Laredos Unidos* and *Proyecto Amistad* had united and located in *Nuevo Laredo*, led only by a Mexican Coordinator.

With seventeen in attendance representing both countries, the gathering at *la Iglesia Presbiteriana Lirios de los Valles* opened on Sunday evening with a worship service led by Valdir Franca, PCUSA Liaison for Latin America and the Caribbean. The group spent time in fellowship over dinner, then reviewed the organization’s history presented by Reverend Bob Seal, a name associated with the earliest days of the binational ministry formation.

The participants spent the next day and a half in breakout and plenary sessions, reflecting on the work, past, present, and future and their current organizational, political, and social realities. It was a surprise to most of those present that they decided to extend the life of the organization. Working together, sharing a common passion for the ministry at the border, appreciating the sense of fellowship and support among the attendees, no one present wanted to give up on the PBRO. Certainly, given the current political climate in both countries, they could expect future human need in the *México/USA* border region. As they came together, the disappointment, even sorrow they had felt over the future of PBRO dissipated and each sensed a new energy, a renewal of spirit by the gathering of colleagues. In an expression of hope, a shared call to serve, they planned the next steps in preparation of a possible organizational future. Having spent the first evening reviewing the decades of past border ministry work, Reverend Seal and members of the gathering offered lessons learned from the years of denomination-level engagement, and local-level

work, establishing Presbyterian churches, and reaching out to the border region communities with compassion and support.<sup>723</sup>

In retrospect, did it make sense for the two Presbyterian denominations to reunite in 1980? They had separated in 1972 at the request of *la Iglesia Nacional Presbiteriana de México* (INPM) due to the discord arising from the years of frustration over USA patronizing and controlling missionary engagement in *México*. Their theological and doctrinal perspectives had diverged, and each denomination had different expectations of the programming. As the leadership of both denominations worked toward a reunited and renewed relationship, they recognized the differences but focused on their common bonds: the history they shared despite the conflicts, the faith they shared despite the different theological perspectives, and the common purposes they shared though implementation preferences did not align. The idea of collectively engaging in mission emerged – an innovation for both denominations.

The innovative design for mission – mutual mission – translated well on the local level. Held together by their common bond of faith and passion for their work, ministry faith-workers engaged community organizing skills to help those in desperate circumstances and to support those seeking opportunity. As the staff and volunteers worked together, building relationships, and finding comfort in their differences and similarities, they learned how to play to their strengths. As each learned how to work and serve together, they also used their voices to advocate in their own countries and to reach out either as evangelists or to engage support in the ministry of service.

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<sup>723</sup> Author notes from November 2017 PBRO Gathering, (*Agua Prieta, Sonora: la Iglesia Presbiteriana Lirios de los Valles*, November 12-14, 2017).

The 2017 gathering reviewed the PBM past and its present with honesty, discussing the many pitfalls and unresolved issues, along with the challenges that they had conquered and the compassionate service they had rendered. In the process, they began to recognize the years of engagement as a legacy, whether the ministry had faltered or succeeded. The ministry workers had arrived in *Agua Prieta* believing the collective work in the border region would be ending and within a day, shifted to something different.

Their analysis of the denominations immediately went to discussions about the 2011 split, the subsequent requirement for the border region presbyteries to work in covenant with each other, and how the PBRO could best proceed given their respective obligations to the denominations. A persistent difficulty had been that northern Mexican presbyteries had little authority and received minimal funding from the denomination's central office in Mexico City. Several of the Mexican northern presbyteries objected to the decision of the INPM with the PCUSA, in part because the leadership had not consulted them. They supported the work of the border ministries recognizing, especially, the success of the new church development. Pastor Ramon Sanchez reported that the PBRO had been part of the construction and launching of ninety percent of the northern *México* churches.

The discussion about the PCUSA started with recognition of its earlier commitments to the PBRO but viewed its current engagement as informal, supportive but in word more than action. The concluding thought was that, just as children of divorce need to decide to respect both parents, the faith workers of the PBRO must also show respect to the denominations. Mexican and USA Presbyterians had worked together for

decades; the relationships along the border had not changed. Should the PBRO decide to proceed and not dissolve, there was no reason to expect assistance from either denomination.

As the participants discussed the work of the local ministries, they acknowledged their three-year attempt to reframe the border organization. In 2012, after considerable discussion, the PBM had elected not to fold but chose to reinvent the organization, changing the name to reflect the new goals. Supported by PCUSA World Mission, they hired a new facilitator/director but, after three years, the organization and the PCUSA did not renew his contract. For those who were unfamiliar with the situation, Seal shared that the expectations by the organization of the new manager did not align with his understanding of the work the PCUSA and the PBRO leadership had hired the facilitator to accomplish. At the time, PBRO was not in agreement about what it envisioned for the future.

During the 2017 meeting, the contemporary faith-workers realized that the ministry sites had become different enough that, in recent years, they had exchanged little of the particulars about their separate ministries. They did talk about practical, basic issues and common concerns such as the lack of available staff from either country or future funding sources. It was difficult to conceive of moving forward without either. Yet, they shared an important history that was part of the life of their respective denominations (INPM and PCUSA), a love for the work in the border region, and a love for each other as colleagues, as *hermanos y hermanas* in the faith. A final thought expressed by the group reflected on the changes in perspective on evangelism as the Mexican contingent recognized, after years of working together, that service was as



essential to the work of the church as saving souls. Pastor Jocabed Gallegos talked about her change in perspective,

When I was in seminary, you were able to have mistakes and even with those mistakes you were able to show Christ in your life. So, to evangelize is not about being tied to things and to the structures that church can give you.... It is about believing in the life... God is working through your life, and that is affecting and showing the love [to] others. So, that's the way for me [to] do more evangelizing... I've been able to be present. That's very different [from] what the church normally says. In the Mexican church, we have a lot of restrictions. I learned that not all restrictions are because of bad things. ...sometimes, it is way too restrictive. So, it is better just to start seeing what their needs are or what the roots [causes] of the situations are. I've been learning more freedom but also more understanding of the life that a person is living now. ...be more conscious about things and that's a way to service or evangelism.<sup>724</sup>

While the faith workers no longer used the term *serviglesia*, the model had staying power.

Of the many lessons people can learn from the history of the PBM, three seemingly simple take-aways collectively offer a profound message. The first take-away is that difference is difficult. When people in active communion encounter differences, they learn to appreciate what is unfamiliar and to stretch that appreciation for the others uniqueness. Often, one learns that differences can become assets. The second take-away is that faith produces tangible transformations. As the PBM/PBRO, in collective faith, faced all the theological and cultural tensions, along with the impositions of politics and economics, they gained strength and clarity when they could turn to their colleagues away from the divisions and toward a unity of spirit. Their shared belief that God is the God of all people, in all their diversity, transformed perspectives and encouraged richer interactions as they moved forward on their shared journey. The third take-away is that

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<sup>724</sup> Jocabed Gallegos discussion with author, 5.

genuine relationships create insight, particularly with the fostering of circumstances that allow for the discovery of shared aspirations and the building toward common goals. In a space made comfortable by mutual beliefs and prayerful moments, there was opportunity for the interpersonal frustrations and programmatic challenges to fade in the relational understanding that existed between people.

### Differences Are Difficult

The region along the *México*/USA border is comprised, geographically, of two nations divided by an international boundary. Despite the political division, historically, people who have lived in proximity to the border have developed a culture that is part Mexican, part American, part a local blend. Some have lived in the region for generations, back to a time when the entire area was part of *México* and people from the USA were the newcomers, the migrating people. For most of the history of colonization and settlement in the international region, when border crossing was simple, people moved fluidly between the two countries; members of families settled near each other though in separate countries, children crossed the border to attend school or play in the public pool, people shopped where the local market economy took them. Restaurants, churches, doctors, hair salons, all received citizens from both countries, and as they engaged in their daily tasks, they blended cultural differences in language, fashion, tastes of food, and engagement.

In more recent times, the focus on the Mexican and Central Americans as threats to the county's values and purity has been a repetition of earlier years in the USA. Despite all evidence to the contrary, people choose to devalue those who are different

looking, different speaking, or different acting. The work of PBM suggests the opposite response works better for all concerned. Recognizing an individual's gifts despite their difference, or perhaps because of their difference, and celebrating the rich diversity of varied cultures is to appreciate all creation – an incredible gift of life.

Pastor Jesus Gallegos recalled the days after the first Co-Directors retired from the PBM and their replacements, Stan deVoogd and Jorge Alvarado, had trouble in their personal relationship. Both shared with Gallegos that the other was mad, though they could not understand why. Gallegos' explanation hinged on an unexpected cause, "Jorge Alvarado writes to Stan in capitals every time." It was not until later, when working at a church in South Carolina, that Gallegos learned that writing in all capital letters suggested the writer was upset or taking a hard position to win their way. While Gallego's assessment may be a bit too simplistic, it points directly at the importance of recognizing and understanding differences, even seemingly small ones.

In *Ciudad Juarez*, Omar Chan spent considerable time during his last year with the PBRO, supporting building-construction at the *Barrio de Guadalajara* community center. He joined the *Pasos de Fe* Mexican contingent in their faith-driven progress toward completion of a facility they believed would provide much-needed support to the people in the surrounding area. It had been a time of change for the binational ministry as mission delegations decided to avoid *México* out of fear, and the PBRO engagement in cross-border projects slowed. After Chan left the organization, news of the situation in *Barrio de Guadalajara* filter north of the border and PBRO and the USA contingent of *Pasos de Fe* responded and support became available toward project completion. The point made by the tenacious colleagues in *Ciudad Juarez*, was that they believed in the

project, they had faith in the importance of its future. The Mexican faith-workers compelled by a deep belief in the daily presence of God in their lives inspired their counterparts in the USA with their constancy of witness to the power of faith in an outcome that supported the work of God through the border ministry. The USA contingent, transformed by the witness of their Mexican colleagues, grew in their personal journeys.

From the outset, the PBM has faced the challenges of difference. It was not something that they could resolve quickly even with prior training. Those who came to the ministry having served in the missionary field, were much more prepared to allow time to help with acclimation to the environment and to each other. Living with difference is a learned, experiential part of relationship-building. It takes time to recognize and appreciate the distinctive nature of the “other” and the gifts they share. For the PBM, the goal of binational work was to grow in respect of each other’s differences while on the path toward mutuality of purpose. It has been challenging, occasionally frustrating, navigating the reality of diverse cultures and different theological foundations. Difference is difficult but it does not have to be prohibitive. It was through their appreciation for each other and the compelling presence of their common faith, that the PBRO border ministries realized decades of successful outreach and service.

#### Transformational Faith

Many people have traveled to the *México*/USA border region to engage, short-term and long-term in ministry work. As people of faith, they likely made the decision to

travel and serve out of a desire to help, perhaps to make a difference in the lives of others. Often, they found that their time in the border region was personally transformative as well. For some, it was a time when the border crossing became a shared experience in a space made sacred by the people they encountered. Religious belief is at the center of the border region work, it compels faith-workers to find the mutuality necessary to respond to the scriptural lessons they have learned, lessons that call people to expressions of love and justice.

Recall the weekly vigil in Douglas described earlier, when everyone in attendance called out the names of the hundreds of people who had died crossing the Cochise County desert and declared them “*presente*” (present among us). Having completed the vigil walk, the ceremony ends in a gathering circle and in a state of prayer looks to the four directions declaring with passion, *Jesu Cristo*, “*presente.*” That time, in that space, becomes sacred, taking the small group closer to the person who brings meaning to their Christian faith. The experiential power of that moment is memory-making and transformative.

Pastor Rosendo Sichler Rubio described some of his experiences in ministry as he moved from what he called the “very conservative, serious, solemn services” of the churches in the south to the more liberal churches in the border region. “When I first attended a border church, I thought the devil was there. And, the US Church is very different, open to sexual preference.” Sichler’s experience was difficult for him to sort through but, in the embrace of the bi-denominational Presbyterian faith community of the border region, he learned that difference was ok and that it was possible to work together and to find shared community with other denominations. Though Sichler

worked in a variety of programs including as a church pastor in *Ciudad Juárez*, he loved the challenge of his work as a *Pastor Callejero* (street pastor). For him, the city was his church and he rejoiced in the call to engage face to face with all the people that he experienced daily.<sup>725</sup>

Pastor John Nelsen made many trips to the border region with parishioners from his church in Oklahoma. He along with many others experienced profound life-changing moments through the opportunity of engagement with others in mutual faith. With deepest sincerity, Nelsen shared, "...I still remember clearly (this was in Acuña), I was taking a break... just sitting there and, just as clear as a bell, I believe God spoke to me and said one word which was "well?" My wife and I tried to discern - what did that mean?" When the time came for Nelsen to seek a new call, he looked for a church close to the border where he considered, perhaps, he would be able to respond to God's question.<sup>726</sup>

Throughout the research, in the sharing of some of the personal stories and perspectives of many of the faith workers and volunteers, it was easy to appreciate the intentionality of purpose and the depth of their spiritual beliefs. Through the interviews, their commitment to their religion, their ministry, and each other was evident. The question is, what did they do that affectively responded to the work, bearing in mind the

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<sup>725</sup> Rosendo Sichler Rubio discussion with author, *Café Justo y Más, Agua Prieta, Sonora* (May 31, 2018) 9:40 to 16:00.

<sup>726</sup> John Nelsen [Pastor, PBRO President] discussion with author, University Presbyterian Church, El Paso, Texas (May 1, 2018) 2-4.

myriad of obstacles they faced and without engaging in the use of power, coercion, manipulation, or money?

Dr. Pasos described his fervent belief in the church work accomplished by the border region ministry and his commitment to ensuring the continuation of that ministry. He shared, “that the churches on the border march shoulder to shoulder with the [border] ministry. ...together or alone, we must continue. I came to the border believing that we would start large churches, but that did not happen. We have many little churches. We have to adapt to the conditions on the border. I believe that this work must go on, even though Mexicans, Americans, Presbyterians do not have official relations.”<sup>727</sup>

#### Relationships Create Insight

A common faith is trust in a shared vision, a belief that compassion and honesty supersede self-interest. It is a belief that, collectively, it is possible to contribute to a more just future for people. In such a context, it is possible to work along-side and even in opposition to outside forces, particularly harmful forces. In the border region, harmful forces include the power of USA border management practices and the economic inequality for which the USA bears much of the responsibility. For PBM/PBRO, acting with the conviction of binational, bi-denominational faith, the value placed on people superseded the powerful, unjust forces of politics and economics. In the context of faith, people formed bonds that had power. The Reverend Dr. Jorge Pazos spoke about his experience with PCUSA missionaries,

I think they had an advantage over us. PCUSA was able to train applicants and select those who could adjust most easily to our culture, styles, and

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<sup>727</sup> Pazos discussion with author, 11.

customs. This was something that we could not offer, *verdad*? What we have is the path (*camino*). I believe that they sent us people who were very flexible. Very amiable. They treated the Mexican as if they were equals.<sup>728</sup>

In a way, at each ministry site, the work at the border region fed the call for more work at the border region. Whether successful or not, daily the faith-workers were part of a community they grew with and supported. On the same day that one joined a small prayer circle, that was the day to greet a new delegation from Virginia and begin sharing the border ministry stories. There were days when one filled water stations for migrating people alongside a recovering drug addict then, taught math to a large group of grade-schoolers in an after-school program at the ministry's community center. Often, one had the opportunity to stand side by side with a nurse, assisting with a ruptured ear drum, an infected laceration, or a frightened pregnant teen. A faith-worker might have entered the migrant resource center with one-hundred-thirty repatriated people sitting and waiting, each in need of compassion and individual care, then spent the afternoon in the office attending to phone messages and paperwork. It was not uncommon to field a harsh word from a customs agent then, walk up to a smiling colleague and perhaps, hear a sweet story about their interaction with one of the priests at the local Catholic church. In the border region ministries, each day was full of the unexpected beauty of faith at work as the participants encountered each other, those they served, and the community they worked in.

What the PBM/PBRO revealed is that binational work is effective when a common context, such as the border region, and common goals, such as the *serviglesia*

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<sup>728</sup> Pazos discussion with author, 9.



model, transcend the impact of powerful outside influences like the impact of nation-state divisiveness. Christian practices, fellowship, and denominational relationship were the foundation of the PBM/PBRO and the binational ministry. Whether or not one is part of a worshiping community, “many of us have a sense that what we see around us – the violence, suffering, and meanness in the world – is not how things ought to be.”<sup>729</sup> Whether or not one responds to border issues from a faith-centered or a secular perspective, this dissertation proposes that there is value in applying the theological perspectives of love and justice to the political and economic practices which are negatively impactful on people’s lives.

There is no question that the work of the PBM over the decades fostered new and varied opportunities to experience people of diverse backgrounds and cultures and to develop greater understandings of the “other.” The border region residents, and the short-term visitors from throughout the USA, formed friendships and developed new understandings of the other’s hopes. Reverend Randy Campbell said it perfectly,

We provide opportunity to come and participate and experience the border region to some degree. They can see through all the hype and misinformation that is being pumped out. What works always and what keeps me coming back is just the wonder of relationship... there are things that you hope would work but that just don’t because it’s the nature of the culture. It is the cultural difference. Part of what works is being amazed at finding so much value in the cultural differences and the relationships that can be born in spite of all those impossible differences.”<sup>730</sup>

Once engaged and invested in border ministry, it is impossible to ignore the realities of economic injustice, the harsh intrusion on individual lives by international and national

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<sup>729</sup> Shannon Craigo-Snell and Christopher J. Doucot, *No Innocent Bystander: Becoming an Ally In the Struggle For Justice* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 72.

<sup>730</sup> Randy Campbell discussion with author, 18.

politics, cultural distinctions ranging from gender perceptions to time management, and, in this context the theological differences between denominations. Daily, this border region context imposes on the lives and work of the Presbyterian border ministries; and, simultaneously, it compels the work and the programming. The ministry sites are a bridge over the many issues and situations that divide people. Through mutuality of purpose, the ministry staff and volunteers exercised an intentional commitment to respect and relation-building. Often, the diversity in the organization resulted in new opportunities for building successful outreach and services. The creativity of programming improved through recognition of each other's varied skills: cultural understanding, sensitivity to regional language, gifts with teens or perhaps the elderly, or the many individual talents as public speakers, musicians, or project organizers.

At the 2017 gathering of the PBRO in *Agua Prieta*, one message emerged louder than any other, their relationships with each other were cherished, as colleagues and as brothers and sisters in faith. Their shared commitment to the mission of the organization bonded them to each other and encouraged them, as they celebrated the many connections they formed with the communities and the people they served. When faced with such overwhelming border issues like extreme poverty with all its ramifications, migration, cartel/gang controls and violence, national tensions, gender inequality and abuse, and more, a response seemed impossible. In relationship, the PBM/PBRO found a renewed strength and thus, formulated a collective hope for a future of continued programming together.

## A Sustainable Future

To demonstrate the best of border ministry programming, the story of *DouglPrieta Trabaja*, a recent program started in a community of *Agua Prieta* and supported by *Frontera de Cristo* and other partners. The new program exemplifies the best of PBM/PBRO programming, from earliest stages to its promise of a sustainable future. The developers came from the community and formed a network with the local Presbyterian border ministry. Together, with creative hearts and faith, they crafted a new program. As it struggled through the tough times and subsequently witnessed success, the participants formed lasting relationships. Outreach to the community continued successfully, and guests to the border region responded, and continue to respond, in celebration of the new organization. *DouglPrieta Trabaja* successfully addressed the economic realities of a community struggling with poverty and facing the tough decision to migrate across the border.

Sometime around 2005, in the community of *La Ladrillera* in *Agua Prieta, Sonora*, Jose Luis Ramírez had an idea. He was a member of a local church that constantly brought delegations from the USA, laden with medicine, clothes, and food for the community. Ramírez shared with the church leadership that he was not in favor of this, believing the church should focus on education and teaching, not only of the gospel, but how to build a better future for themselves and their children. Miriam Maldonado shared, “He began to dream, to envision, that it was necessary to teach the children to work the land with their own hands in order to be independent and to provide for themselves.” It was not until he met another member of the community, Maribel Webster, that the vision grew and solidified. It started with the desire to support a project in *México* that enabled people to find sustainable work so they could stay and not migrate to

the USA. The planned was to start their program in *La Ladrillera*, one of the poorest neighborhoods in the city. Most of the people who lived there made bricks (*ladrillos*), a product that did not assure a regular income due to the vagaries of the market.

The challenge to keep *Douglaprieta Trabaja*, the new program, going rested with the lack of funding and support. Ramírez and Webster, believing in the value of their vision, approached *Frontera de Cristo* to see if they would take over. The ministry Board of Directors was not able to approve their offer as presented but agreed to partner with them and, with available personnel, be a greater presence in the community. The new initiative began with inviting the community with the hope of motivating them to cultivate their own food. They focused heavily on the local women. Maldonado shared,

The program was to help single women, or women staying in the home caring for the children while the husband was working in the US or working in the city in a factory. The woman in *México* is always expected to care for and to educate the children at home and to have the food ready when the husband comes home from work. The idea, the vision was to help, to educate the women, creating the activities to teach women to do some kind of handcraft, in order to be independent, to be able to work, perhaps to find her talent, her own gift and develop it, to be able to bring income to the family. At the same time, she can care for the children in the home, without having to leave the children alone while she goes out to work.<sup>731</sup>

Just as *Douglaprieta Trabaja* was underway, the founders retired and Ramírez moved away but, he left behind some seeds he had wanted to see planted in *Agua Prieta* soil. Fortunately, a third person, Rosalinda Sagaste embraced the vision of a sustainable community and wanted to see the program continue. With Maldonado, and the support of her family, they studied how to grow vegetables in chemical-free soil and in February,

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<sup>731</sup> Maldonado discussion with author, 17.

built a greenhouse on her land. Maldonado recalled, “We planted the seeds and we prayed. We asked God to provide because these were the seeds of hope that we planted in the soil but also seeds of hope to be able to create and develop a beginning of something that we couldn’t see with our own eyes, but that God could see.” After three to four months, Maldonado reported the greenhouse had become a “jungle.” Once the greenhouse was full, she and Sagaste started visiting the neighborhood, door to door, and invited the women to check out the program, to see that it was possible to grow food in the desert soil. Interest grew and the PCUSA World Mission funded classes in permaculture training for Maldonado. *DouglPrieta Trabaja* has developed into a community center, a place where women were able to cultivate their food and so much more. Maldonado explained further,

DouglPrieta is also a place where the women come in order to have a time in which they can talk (converse) – to share their needs, share their sorrows, share their joys,... they find a place to listen and to be listened to, to pray together, and...it’s a place where the love of God is shared... Dreams are placed on the table during our meetings about how we can be a better center, a better community... that gives opportunities and helps the students, the children and more women to be part of this program.<sup>732</sup>

Innovative programs are constantly being developed at *DouglPrieta*: English classes, particularly for the youth, and crocheting, knitting, and sewing classes that have turned the women into entrepreneurs. They market their products but, also reserve some of their time and money to make “dignity bags” to donate to the migrant centers to fill with personal hygiene products. A recent venture has been a carpentry shop that transforms pallets into furniture. The workshop is available to the men and women in the

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<sup>732</sup> Maldonado discussion with author, 14.

community but also provides temporary employment for migrants. The carpentry shop, the sewing workshop, and the garden team, contribute a portion of their income to maintaining *Douglaprieta Trabaja* to cover any expenses and ensure future growth.

Speaking for *Frontera de Cristo*, Maldonado stated,

...we have worked very hard for the empowerment of the community itself. Empowerment for them to be leaders and promoters of this project; and in the process, [we want them] to feel that the project belongs to them, and that it is for them and for the community... that they will be able to continue with this passion... not only for their own well-being but also so that they could be used by God to serve their community.<sup>733</sup>

*Frontera de Cristo* has recently facilitated expansion of *Douglaprieta Trabaja* into one of the “*preparatoria*” schools in *Agua Prieta*. The school, in response to their youth struggling with poor nutrition, wanted to develop a garden and cooking program. They invited *Douglaprieta* gardeners to teach youth and teachers to support the school’s Ecology and Food Gardening programs. The gardeners started by visiting each classroom, sharing their vision, and inviting anyone interested to join them. “There was a good group of youth who were interested in working with us.... The majority of the youth were ones who needed the food while they were at school.”<sup>734</sup>

*Douglaprieta Trabaja* is an example of the future of the Presbyterian Border Ministry. It is a model for building economic opportunity, encouraging the value of mutuality of purpose, including care for others in its programming, and empowering people to envision the future just as Jose Luiz Ramírez had done.

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<sup>733</sup> Maldonado discussion with author, 13.

<sup>734</sup> Maldonado discussion with author, 19.

As a postscript, the work of supporting migrating people is as important, as essential, as it has ever been. In a 2021 email/newsletter, the “Good News from the Border,” on the work at the Migrant Resource Center in *Agua Prieta*, they summarized in numbers how busy it has been. “Over the past six months, 9,251 men, women, and children have found a welcoming place, a delicious cup of coffee, a filling meal, water, first aid, clean socks and underwear, and caring people at the Migrant Resource Center.”<sup>735</sup> In May alone, 3,077 received hospitality. Since December of 2020, we have seen a substantial increase in persons being returned to *Agua Prieta* by the Border Patrol.”<sup>736</sup> A woman who passed through the busy center spoke only of their kindness. Juana, a guest from Guatemala shared, “After being extorted on our trip through *México*, rejected in the US and thrown out, we never imagined we would be welcomed with a delicious cup of coffee and people who care for us. It's like receiving a big hug from a mother.”<sup>737</sup>

I posed the question earlier, with all the challenges it faced, did it make sense for the two Presbyterian denominations to reunite? Did the binational Presbyterian plan of mutual mission make sense? The voice of a woman from Guatemala, or the realized vision of an elderly man for the youth of his community provide the answer. There is so much that the PBM/PBRO, through their faith, has learned and experienced. For those of us, living in and visiting their border region, and learning from their ministries, we can

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<sup>735</sup> “Good News from the Border: We Choose Welcome,” *Frontera de Cristo: Cultivating Relationships and Understanding Across Borders*, email (*Agua Prieta, Sonora/Douglas, Arizona: Frontera de Cristo*, June 18, 2021).

<sup>736</sup> “Good News from the Border: We Choose Welcome,” email.

<sup>737</sup> “Good News from the Border: We Choose Welcome,” email.

envision a future of mutuality of purpose and relational respect in a world seemingly overrun by power and fear.



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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED IN SUPPORT OF DISSERTATION

Name	Language	Date
Dan Abbott Volunteer	English	June 8, 2021
Mark S. Adams, <i>Frontera de Cristo</i> Pastor, Mission Co-worker, Co-coordinator	English	May 28, 30, 2019
Trinidad Anguamea Brasil, <i>DouglPrieta Trabaja</i> Cooperative member	Spanish	June 1, 2018
Randy R. Campbell, <i>Companeros en Misión</i> Pastor, Mission Co-worker, Co-coordinator	English	May 3, 2018
Omar A. Chan, PBRO Facilitator	English	May 24, 2017
Daniel Cifuentes Perez, <i>Café Justo</i> <i>Director de Producción,</i>	Spanish	May 30, 2018
Amanda L. Craft, OGA, PCUSA Manager of Advocacy	English	May 24, 2017
Jorge E. Espajel <i>Consul de México, Douglas, AZ</i>	English	May 29, 2018
Reverend Dr. Hunter Farrell Former Director PCUSA World Mission	English	December 18, 2017
Jesus (Chuy) Gallegos, <i>Frontera de Cristo</i> Pastor, Co-coordinator	English	July 3, 2019
Jocabed Gallegos, <i>Frontera de Cristo</i> Mission worker, Co-coordinator	English	May 29, 2018
Adrian Gonzales, <i>Café Justo</i> Director of Customer Relations		May 30, 2018
Tim Gray, <i>Paso de Fe</i> Pastor, Board Member	English	May 23, 2018
Shirley Jewell, <i>Frontera de Cristo</i> Board member, Volunteer	English	June 2, 2018
Jack Knox Pastor, Volunteer	English	May 28, 2019
Linda Knox Volunteer	English	May 28, 2019

Febe Maldonado Escobar, <i>Café Justo</i> Manager	Spanish	June 1, 2018
Miriam Maldonado Escobar, <i>Frontera de Cristo</i> Co-Mission Worker, Co-coordinator	Spanish	May 26, 2018
Maria Gabriela Marcos, <i>Douglaprieta Trabaja</i> Cooperative member	Spanish	June 1, 2018
Jose Isaac Martinez Badachi, <i>Frontera de Cristo</i> Intern	Spanish	May 30, 2018
John Nelson, PBRO, <i>Pasos de Fe</i> Pastor, Board Chair, Board member	English	May 1, 2, 2018
Dr. Jorge Isaac Pazos Aragón, <i>Compañeros en Misión</i> Pastor, Co-coordinator	Spanish	May 31, 2019
Elvia Estela Llinas Pérez, <i>Frontera de Cristo</i> Intern, Philip (interns)	Spanish	May 30, 2018
Maribel Ruiz, <i>Douglaprieta Trabaja</i> Cooperative member	Spanish	June 1, 2018
Matilde Sagaste Chavez, <i>Douglaprieta Trabaja</i> Cooperative member	Spanish	June 1, 2018
Rosalinda Sagaste Chavez, <i>Douglaprieta Trabaja</i> Cooperative member	Spanish	June 1, 2018
Carmina Sanchez Cifuentes, <i>Café Justo</i> <i>Secretaria</i>	Spanish	May 19, 2018
Bill Schlesinger, Project <i>Vida</i> Pastor, Director	English	January 20, 2020
Rosendo Sichler Rubio, <i>Frontera de Cristo</i> <i>Pastor de la Calle</i>	Spanish	May 31, 2018
Gerald F. Stacy, PBM Pastor, Co-Mission Worker, Co-director	English	January 24, 2020
Kathleen Staudt, Ph.D, <i>Pasos de Fe</i> Volunteer, Board member, Professor	English	May 23, 2017
Phillip Storie, <i>Frontera de Cristo</i> Volunteer	English	May 30 2018
Dave Thomas, <i>Compañeros en Misión</i> Mission Co-worker, Co-Coordinator, Liaison	English	October 12, 2017

Robert Uribe Mayor, Douglas, AZ	English	June 2, 2018
Esther Verdugo, <i>DouglPrieta Trabaja</i> Cooperative member	Spanish	June 1, 2018
Leslie Vogel, PCUSA Mission Co-worker, PCUSA Liaison- <i>México</i> and <i>Guatemala</i>	English	September 6, 2019