

ECUADOR PARTNERSHIP MEETINGS APRIL 2016

Don and I didn't have a lot of time to prepare for this trip after returning home from our winter get-away in Arizona. It was somewhat difficult to pin down the dates for this partnership meeting since it had to be coordinated with many different people's schedules. People attending from here in the states included Linda Shelly and Marisa Smucker from MMN, David Boshart, Doyle and Anne Roth, Don and me from Central Plains Mennonite Conference, Pedro Stuckey and Oscar Herrera from Colombia, as well as the personnel in Quito. It was hardest to coordinate with Darwin Villacis since he works two week shifts in the Amazon jungle. Some of the other people involved were Peter Wigginton and Delicia Bravo, and Jane and Jerrell Ross Richer.

We left home on Friday, April 1, at 8:30 in the morning. We had plenty of time to get to the airport area, park our car, catch the shuttle, and get through security. We were to fly from Omaha to Dallas and then on to Quito, with arrival time there being about 11:00 in the evening. Doyle and Anne met us at the airport and we flew together to Dallas where we were to have 2 hours to catch the next flight. That is when "April Fool's Day" caught up with us. We boarded our plane but sat there for over an hour because of hydraulic trouble. Finally, we were asked to de-plane. After another hour waiting in the airport, the flight was canceled. Another plane had been located, but no crew was available. So everyone on the plane needed to be re-booked, etcetera. Our checked luggage was not returned to us at that time. Finally, it was our turn to get rebooked and we were routed through Miami the next morning. So Doyle, Anne, Don and I were given food vouchers for supper and breakfast, and for the airport Marriot hotel.

We decided to eat supper at the airport and got some Chinese food at the food court. A man at our table, who had also been on our plane, began a conversation with us. We found out that his name was Rich Borman and he knows the Ross Richer family. His brother, Randy, lives in Ecuador and they have connections to the missionary families whose husbands were killed trying to make contact with the Auca (now called Warani) Indians back in the 50's. Their dad was one who went down to help bury the bodies. Don wondered if this man was one that was interviewed at the end of the movie "The End of the Spear" that told the story.

He thought he looked a bit familiar, but we didn't have a chance to ask that. Our visit was somewhat brief.

We waited a long time for the shuttle to the airport and finally got to our rooms after 11. We had to get up again at 1:40 to catch the shuttle back to the airport for our early flight to Miami. So we didn't get much good out of our fancy hotel. On the shuttle back to the airport, we met a man who is working in medical research of stem cell regeneration. He has a number of projects going in different hospitals in Ecuador. There was a pathetic drunk woman who had taken a liking to him and couldn't stop herself from talking to him and holding up the shuttle. As it turned out, we could have slept an hour longer because the security personnel at the airport didn't arrive until 3, so we stood there waiting for quite a while.

After boarding that plane, we sat for a long time while the mechanics did maintenance. Finally, we were asked to de-plane again. Eventually, we re-boarded and took off about 2 ½ hours behind schedule. We did have a very nice meal on board and arrived in Quito a little before 4 in the afternoon. However, we, along with many others on that plane, did not get any of our checked baggage. They were still back in Dallas, we were told. So there was a long line at the claim office until it was our turn to fill out the paperwork describing our lost articles, what was in them, and how to find us to deliver them. Our problem was that we were scheduled to leave for the jungle the next day after lunch, and it would have been somewhat of a disaster to not have our bags with our "hot weather" clothing.

Finally, we were ready to exit the airport where we were met by our driver who took us to the place in Calderon where there is a "church" for the refugees who live nearby. We were met there by Maria Elena who is a Colombian woman ministering there, Linda Shelly, Marissa Smucker, Pedro Stucky, Peter and Delicia and their 2 year old daughter, Aliyah. We had supper and then listened while Maria Elena talked about her work there in Calderon. It is discouraging work since she is alone there following the exit of Caleb Yoder. The refugees come and go, so continuity is very difficult. They had discontinued having Sunday morning services there for a while, but have resumed that again recently. Once a month, they meet with Jardines del Inca and the Quito Mennonite church for worship

together. Some of her activities include Bible classes for children, school support work with youth, and Bible studies for women. This serves from 12-20 women. Delicia helps out with some of the activities. There is one Ecuadorian elderly couple that attends there, too, and she enjoys relating to them. She does physical therapy for them every Monday. Maria Elena also helps with activities in the Jardines del Inca neighborhood. They have “after-school” programs each week day, Bible classes, English classes, and events to help pay the rent. They use the “Shine On” Bible story book (in Spanish) and some curriculum from Bolivia.

It was not very late in the evening, but we four were about sleeping on our feet, so we were taken to our host homes. Doyle and Anne were at Gloria Showalter’s home. She just recently arrived for a 2 year term with MMN in a supporting role for work in the church. Don and I were taken to Xavier and Yessenia’s home. They were not home, so Karen showed us our bedroom. After saying hello to her friend and to Julian (her brother), we excused ourselves and went to bed by 8:30. We slept pretty well, but had to get up fairly early the next morning to be picked up for church in Jardines del Inca. Yessenia made us breakfast. The floor of their dining room is caving in, so they are actively looking for a new place to live.

Sunday morning, the van picked us up with Pedro S already on board. We picked up Luis Tapia (the pastor at Quito) and Dave Boshart, who had arrived during the night on the flight from Dallas. Our baggage did not come with him! We learned that they were in Miami now and hope that they get onto the plane coming from Miami this morning. We had services up on the mountain top in Jardines del Inca, but it was too cloudy to enjoy the spectacular view from there this visit. The streets are completely paved all the way to the church and beyond now, so that is really nice. From there, we went to the Quito Mennonite church and joined the worship which was already in progress there. Luis’s sermons talked of Jesus resurrection. It is easy to believe in the resurrection, but more difficult to live the way Jesus wants us to live. We honor Jesus’s resurrection with our words and actions.

During the Sunday school hour, Don attended the discipleship class taught by Luis. I attended a class for newer learners taught by Gloria Showalter. She gave a very good object lesson on how the stories in the gospels were written, but may not be perfectly recorded. She asked Juan to leave the room. Then in front of the rest of

us, she took objects from a basket, briefly showed them to us, and placed them into a cloth bag. There were probably 15 different unrelated objects. When Juan returned to the room, Doris was asked to tell Juan what happened while he was gone. Then Juan was to write down what he heard and then read it to the rest of us. Gloria pointed out that this is how the gospels were written. Jesus did things. The disciples told others what they remembered about the time Jesus was alive and the events that took place. But they were written down by people who were not in attendance at the time. The authors wrote the things they thought were most important. They are stories of truth, but may not necessarily be historically accurate. We, also, understand through our culture, but we are far removed from the original.

After church, we ate at the restaurant in the hotel near the church. Our driver picked us up there with a nice 30-passenger bus to head to the jungle. We found out our bags came on the Miami-Quito flight, so we stopped at the airport to pick them up. That was about a 45 minute process, too. So we got a pretty late start to Tena. We arrived after dark to “Establo de Tomas” on the eastern edge of Tena, where we were met by the Ross Richer family. We are sharing a duplex cabin with Doyle and Anne. We have electricity, running water, single beds with mosquito nets, and good food for supper. The cabins are not soundproof. We can hear Doyle and Anne, especially in the bathrooms. So we are careful!!!

The next morning, we could see the beauty of our surroundings. There were beautiful flowers, butterflies, birds, and vegetation beside a lovely pond along the Tena River. After breakfast and devotions, we traveled the 3 kilometers to the parking lot near the Ross Richer home. To get there, we could walk over the river on a swinging bamboo bridge or we could ride in their vehicle and ford the river. After we got across, we walked up the hill through the cacao and coffee plants to their home.

Jane and Jerrell filled us in a bit on their lives here. They live on a cacao farm owned by the same man who has the Establo de Tomas. The farm isn't doing well economically, but is a nice place for them to live. They are slowly developing relationships with their neighbors without the baggage of knowing they are Christians. They are having the most luck through children. Jane and the kids go to the school most days at recess time and for crafts. They have discouraged the

efforts to make them into “teachers”. They are making an effort to integrate girls into the playground games without abuse and ridicule, which is so ingrained in the culture.

Women work very hard. Many are widows raising children and grandchildren. They don't seem to have many friends or have an outlet for emotional expression. They don't work or wash clothes together, and handicrafts seem to be a lost art. Men don't seem to live very long and drink a lot. This seems to be the only time they are allowed to express their emotions. It is hard for the men to figure out their role. They used to be hunters, but there is no longer big game. So after working, they bring back the money, and then have nothing else to do. Churches have not given a solution on how men can be macho without drinking and becoming aggressive. The first generation of evangelicals brought salvation and forgiveness, but haven't done much with applying Jesus words to their culture. The priest in their area seems more in tune with social issues. Jerrell and Jane see themselves being involved somewhat in furthering education of pastors, but also with women, and youth, and creation care.

Later in the morning, we walked further through the jungle to visit their nearest neighbors, Lourdes and Ceci. They are Kichwa sisters and raise their children together. They have two wooden houses up on stilts. One is used for cooking and the other for sleeping. We were invited, a few at a time, to visit the kitchen. But then we waited in the other house for the snack they prepared. We had cooked yucca, roasted cacao nuts, a tea, and a deep orange, dry fruit whose name I didn't get. The kids played at jump rope while we ate and visited. Then we walked back past the Ross Richer home and into town.

There, we were invited to another home that serves as a café. Keli and Ballardo served a meal of soup, roast chicken, yucca, palm hearts, broccoli, that dry orange fruit with pineapple jelly and tea. This home was one that was built by the government to replace the homes of the people who were displaced because of the construction of the roads. They are not totally satisfactory, although they seem nice enough. They are built quite close to each other and are missing some things that are culturally important, like outdoor space.

After lunch, we walked back to the Ross-Richer house where we met Clever, a Shuar evangelical minister. He shared with us of his call to the ministry at a young

age, despite the discouragement of his parents. Through miraculous circumstances, he came in contact with people who could help him with advice and support in order to attend seminary. He met and married his wife, who is a Kichwa. Because of this marriage, he was able to connect with leaders from both their tribes. He spent some time with Compassion International. But most of his efforts have been focused on walking with people from different tribes and helping them come together as Christians. His dream is to unite leaders from many cultures so that they can share solutions to their particular problems. He feels that there are only 2 groups who have not yet been contacted with the gospel. Most tribes have heard, but haven't really become transformed believers. He told us that being involved in the political process has some advantages because it is a way to earn monetary support. It is also a way to enter the school systems and Christian teachers can make a difference teaching spiritual values to young people. His passion is to teach the indigenous people to value the good things about their particular tribal cultures, and not negate all of it. He is organizing a convention for youth this June in which he wants to encourage them to be used by God to make necessary changes to their tribal life before the bad influences from outside cultures reach them. He feels that the future success of Christianity in the tribes will depend on the tribal people themselves and not on outside missionaries. He wants to concentrate his efforts on the youth because they may still be able to change their attitudes and outlook when the older people cannot. We were all quite moved by his presentation and sincerity. We gathered around him to pray with and for him as he continues to serve God in this way and in that place.

That evening, we crossed the bamboo bridge again and headed back into town where we were invited to the church building of Pablo and Marcela. He is from Quito and she is from Colombia and are affiliated with the Free Brethren church. They feel that Tena is where they have been called to ministry. Jane has worked with them in their lunch and after-school program. They have also done some door to door evangelism, started some women's clubs, some community service projects, and helped construct a house for a needy family. They served us a delicious meal of fish, cassava and salad. We spent some time singing together and were all intrigued by their accompaniment machine which can change key at the push of a button.

We all had a harder time settling down to sleep that night. We found out the next day that the tea that was served to us (made from the leaf of a native bush) is used as an energy drink. We drank it three different times during the day. So, besides having our heads filled with new and different information, we were also hyped up on whatever drug that plant had in it. It rained a lot during the night, which sounded beautiful on our cabin roof.

The next morning (Tuesday), we packed up and got on the bus for our journey further into the jungle. Until this time, we had been on the northern side of the Napo River, which is a large, fast running river that eventually becomes the Amazon River. To get to the other side, we waited our turn to cross a one-lane balancing bridge. I called it “balancing” because when we were waiting to cross it, I was sitting in the front seat behind our driver. Another vehicle was crossing in front of us, and I have the picture to prove that our end of the bridge was raised up about 6 inches. When the other truck exited on the other side of the river, our end of the bridge settled back down and we started across. We pulled into a narrow gate and down into a large churchyard where we visited Dorian Grefa, who is a young Kichwa minister with the Christian Missionary Alliance. This is the congregation that feels “the most like home” to the Ross Richer family.

Dorian is a young pastor who grew up in this vibrant congregation. The land for the church was given by early missionaries, and it is a model for self-sufficiency. It is surrounded by gardens, fields, and a fish pond that they use to feed their families and support their mission endeavors. It had recently flooded and they lost the gardens and the young cacao plants, but they were in the midst of a cleanup and replanting effort with hopes for a harvest in six months. We were invited out into the cacao plantation where a number of women were working, cleaning and harvesting cacao. They gather every Wednesday at 4:00 in the morning for prayer and fasting. Then they go out into the gardens and fields and work until noon time. This time together serves as a sharing and therapy time for the women, and needs of the people are then passed along to the pastor for his attention.

One special thing about this congregation is that it welcomes the participation of women in some of the leadership positions. They are also working with the youth to encourage new leadership. They are trying to find ways for the youth to make

a living in the area without needing to leave for the cities. That seems to be a common issue among all the communities that we visited.

Following this visit, we traveled further east, continuing on after the end of the pavement. The road led through a number of indigenous settlements, and we eventually stopped at Novo Paraiso which is a Kichwa congregation with a Baptist minister named Moises. He is also a teacher in the school system, so our bus transported many of the school children to the church building where they waited to perform for us. We were served a meal of steamed tilapia fish (made over a fire) in palm leaves, stuffed with palm heart, yucca, tomato salad, and lemonade in their outdoor lunchroom which is under construction.

Several different groups of children and adults presented songs or recited scripture verses for us. Dave Boshart gave a meditation on the scripture where Jesus sends out his disciples to be both disciples (learners) and apostles (teachers). We are all called to do the same. Pastor Moises also gave a meditation emphasizing the need to have Jesus as Savior, be baptized, and teach the Word of God and Christian values. He said that here on earth, we speak many languages, but when we arrive in heaven we will all understand one language (Kechwa!). He spent quite a bit of time pleading for someone to come to their community to teach English to their youth. He feels that the only future for their people is to have the youth learn English and go elsewhere to find good jobs.

After boarding the bus again, along with some of our new friends, we headed further east along the Napo River. We dropped school students off along the way, but the family of Moises rode with us until we came to the end of the road. We passed a few places where the jungle seemed to be suffering from “slash and burn”, but for the most part, it was jungle. We found out that the road only went a few miles further before it disappeared, so our bus needed to head back west after dropping us off at the river bank. He was to go all the way back, cross the Napo River again and come back east on the north side of the river where he would pick us up the next day.

Here, we loaded our luggage and ourselves onto a long motorized canoe and headed down river (east) after dropping off a few people at a stop upriver. We traveled 15-20 minutes on the river and then debarked at a small village on the other side. We loaded onto an open bed farm truck which was outfitted with

bench seats and traveled several kilometers to the Yachana Center run by Doug McMeekin who is a North American entrepreneur. He has been in Ecuador about 30 years, has purchased some virgin jungle which he is preserving, and has begun a tourism school to train Warani and Kechwa youth in the tourism industry. Yachana means “learning” and his goal, along with making a living at tourism, is to educate youth in English, in the tourism industry, and train them with a skill to make a living later on in life.

We were “pampered” that evening with luxurious food, cabins overlooking the scenic Nabo River, drinkable running water in the tap, warm showers, and large counters surrounding the bathroom sink. The jungle was a lot quieter during the night than I expected, but we woke up, as the jungle birds woke up to take in a beautiful, misty view of the river. After breakfast on Wednesday, we donned knee hi boots and went for a hike in the jungle. Some of the things that were pointed out to us were: ants that sting, miniature frogs developing in water caught in a palm branch, fungus, lichens, coca leaves, a giant grasshopper (on Dave Boshart’s back), huge earthworm poop, fruits, seeds, vines, flowers, and ceibo trees.

After the tour, we meandered on down the road in our “truck” to the classroom compound of his learning center. We saw how he is trying to become self-sufficient as far as food, water, resources, and energy are concerned. We saw his computer lab, classroom area, water treatment center, shop area, solar panels, tilapia pond, composting toilets, aquaponics tank, hydroponic forage production area, dorms, banana circles, and etcetera. He has plans for free range chickens, goats, cheese production and other endeavors to become truly self-sufficient.

After eating our meal with the students there, our bus and driver arrived and we began our long trip back toward modern civilization. We “forded” a river where the bridge was out and were entertained by a young boy who was swinging out from the river bank and dropping into the river. Our competent driver avoided two potential disasters for us. One occurred when a car load of adults and children veered out of control in front of us on a sharp curve. I was in the front seat and witnessed the whole thing, seeing how the driver slammed on the brakes and veered toward the right, avoiding the collision. I still would say it was a miracle! I had covered my face and was waiting to hear the crunch. Another time, near dusk, a truck passed us and tried to pull in front without adequate

space. We did, however, arrive safely, after dark to our hotel in the mountains of Papallacta.

Here, we swam in a hot springs pool after having supper in the restaurant up on the roof. The proprietor wanted to treat us, and brought shots of sugar cane liquor along with our supper. Wow! They were really stout! Not all of us finished our portions. We did, however, enjoy the hot pool after walking quickly from our rooms, through the rainy, 50 degree air, to the pool. It was so hot that you had to enter slowly in order to get your body used to it. It was quite an interesting experience to sit in such hot water while cool rain was falling on our heads. Some of us (enjoyed?) the opportunity to move from the cold pool into the hot pool and vice versa.

After our night's sleep, some breakfast, and some people's reentry in the hot pool, we prepared for our return to Quito and more meetings. It was very interesting to see where the hot springs came to the surface of the earth. There were various places where hot water and steam were spewing forth from the ground. We loaded the bus, however, and headed on west toward Quito. We were stopped by the police on our way in to town. There apparently were plans to stage a protest against the president and so they were not allowing busses loaded with people to enter the city. Daniela and Peter, along with our driver, were able to convince the police that we were tourists and had a legitimate reason to be entering the city that day.

Our next stop on Thursday was to visit with Randy Borman, whose brother we met at the airport in Dallas. His parents were Wycliffe workers in the 1950's, and he grew up in the Cofan tribe. He has become a white "chief" in the tribe and advocates for land rights for his tribe. The Cofan have lots of advantages over the Kichwa tribes. They have good family life, work hard, but have fun times with plenty of leisure for friends and family and have enough land for a sustainable way of life. The Kichwa community isn't a good life, he claims. They go a long ways to work, and come home to drink. The youth don't want to continue that life and are leaving for the cities where they are losing their culture and values.

He also said that many tribes feel that the jungle is theirs to use and do not understand the concept of conservation for a sustainable way of life. If the world needs meat, they go shoot it, and sell it, without thinking about whether or not

there will be game in the future. The government is also pushing to assimilate the tribes into modern life with education, roads, sidewalks, and etcetera. The Cofan are far enough away that they are more immune to this problem. His center in Quito is an institute for conservation and environmental training. One example of work they do is monitoring 20 – 60 “camera traps” which photograph the wild life throughout 420,000 hectares, half of which are under Cofan control.

He spoke of the problems of printing the first scriptures. At that time, the available printers would not publish anything that didn't refer specifically to Jesus. The older believers understand the spiritual and enjoy the security of the power of God, but the younger generation has more trouble since they have dabbled less with the spirit world. The Cofan do mix some culture with their worship (prayer chanting), but they are a stable group.

He is working some with other tribes as they face the government interference protecting the oil industries, lumberjacks, commercial hunters, and miners. This government wants to be friendly to the Indigenous tribes, but wants also to develop the economy.

After lunch in a restaurant, we went to the office headquarters of FEINE, which is the indigenous evangelical pastors' organization of Ecuador who originally invited Cesar and Patricia to work with educating their pastors. We met with Manoel and with Blanca. Manoel told us of FEINE's involvement in 18 provinces of Ecuador (2500 churches). They have 8 radio stations, educational institutions, and about 700 indigenous pastors. FEINE has at least 35 years of legal existence and is involved with influencing the government in the protection of indigenous rights. They are also interested in furthering the education of their indigenous pastors, but this, at times, is lower on the priority list, it seems.

They are also interested in the ministry and empowerment of women. Blanca spoke to us of her work in training leadership in women. They are planning a women's event this coming year and are asking for some support and probably some collaboration from Jane Ross Richer. We were all a bit travel weary by the end of this presentation, but we did enjoy a tour of the grounds and the housing facility that is in progress there. It will be used to house people coming in for training, and also could be rented out by others needing some lodging space.

Following this, our bus and driver took us to The Capital Inn which is a hotel a couple blocks from the Quito church. That was to be our home for the rest of our visit during the partnership meetings. So we took advantage of the evening to eat supper, talk over all that we had seen and heard, and prepare for the weekend meetings.

On Friday morning, following breakfast in the hotel, the Ecuador Partnership committee and program presenters gathered in the Quito Mennonite church. This, of course, included not only Ecuadorians, but also Colombians, Bolivians, Chileans, and North Americans. Marisa Smucker, from MMN, led our devotions and focused on the thought that the work we are accompanying is God's work. Following a prayer of thankfulness for all the various things that contribute to this partnership, we began to hear from our presenters.

Delicia Bravo spends time with the Vida Juvenil project in Jardines del Inca. She loves the country and the children and youth and finds joy in working there. Her husband, Peter, is the coordinator of ICAME, which is the conference of Mennonite churches in Ecuador. He is getting better acquainted with his role as coordinator, what communications are necessary, and how to work with FEINE. He uses his gifts in music in the churches and did a lot to plan the logistics for our visit and the church retreats they have from time to time. Their 2 year old daughter, Aliyah, is a joy and it was fun to see how she communicates in both languages already.

Gloria Showalter is starting a 2 year volunteer position with MMN to support the work of the church in Quito. She sees her role as facilitating other peoples' work. She assists Peter with music. She assists Luis Tapia (the pastor at Quito) and Maria Elena (the pastoral worker at Calderon) with Sunday School teaching, home visitations, and Bible studies. And she is involved with Delicia with Vida Juvenil (the youth program in Jardines del Inca).

Jane and Jerrell Ross Richer and family are located in Tena as an extension of Goshen College and his May term class in ecology and economics. They are in their tenth month in the country (only 6 months at a time), so they are still learning about their context, visiting their neighbors and neighboring churches, and trying to be an encouragement to Christians in the context of their location.

They are “walking alongside” their neighbors and trying to affirm the good that is already there.

Maria Elena is a Colombian who has been in Ecuador a little over a year. She is pastoring the congregation in Calderon that is almost totally Colombian refugees. There is one elderly Ecuadorian couple who also attends there and Maria Elena appreciates the continuity that they provide and does some physical therapy for them. The nature of a refugee congregation is very transient, so it is discouraging at times. They have had services there and then needed to discontinue them for a while. Now they are calling it a fellowship, instead of a church, but have begun worship together again on Sunday mornings. She works with Bible studies and with women’s groups. She is feeling lonely though, since Caleb Yoder left, and is planning to go back to her family at the end of this year.

Work was done that day on updating the covenant between the three partners and the vision of the partnership. One group worked on choosing the important points to preserve from the old covenant and the other group worked out a new mission statement.

Friday afternoon, Jane began our meetings with a devotional centered on the scripture where Thomas needed to “touch” Jesus in order to believe. And so we also have chances to “touch Jesus” through the work that is done in Ecuador (refugees, school children, youth, indigenous ministries, and etcetera) or wherever we may be located and have chances to touch people’s lives in partnership with Jesus.

Friday afternoon, we heard presentations from the Quito church members. The church budget was presented, discussed, questions asked, and ideas tossed around. Some legal questions will need to be addressed particular to Ecuador. Any future reporting may involve a different form since the formation of ICAME separate from Quito Church.

We also had a time of sharing with Jane and Jerrell, listening to their thoughts and encouraging them in their ideas. Since our original invitation to Ecuador was to be involved with the indigenous church leadership education, this project has not been lost. But, it is taking a new form now. They see that the theology of the indigenous churches is pretty simple and salvation centered and many pastors are finding that it is no longer working for them, especially with the youth. They

would like to seek a way to present the theology of God's kingdom happening here already. What does it mean to be a Cofan, or Warani, or Kichwa Christian in the present day?

In the evening, Xavier and Yessenia presented Quito Church's proposal for purchasing their own property. They explained the good things about their present facilities, the things they would look for in a different property, the area in the city where they wish to locate, and some of the options that they are considering.

Saturday was spent in further discussions on the budget, the covenant and mission statement, the work of Jane and Jerrell in relationship to Quito Mennonite church, the work in Calderon, the work in Venezuela, how to support leadership development, and how to help some members who are currently without jobs. A report was given on the legal process for Quito church. The work is completed now, but they are waiting on an official number that has to do with taxes. Once they get that number, they will be permitted to make contracts for work, buy land, and etcetera.

Other items discussed throughout the day were as follows: MCC has been supporting the work of a volunteer couple to work with the refugee project. They are planning to leave early and so a new proposal needs to be made to request a replacement for them in this work. The church retreats seem to be a good experience for the congregation to plan for their future mission. They would like to continue having retreats from time to time. Photos were shown of the Quito delegation's visit to Central Plains and the Mennonite World Conference last year. They were also able to make connections with Caleb Yoder and David, Eliana and Kaleth Shenk.

Sunday morning, David Boshart and Don and I packed our things and stored them in a room at the hotel. The church house was full of people as all three churches were meeting together, as they do once a month. Dave B presented the message on how our visits to Ecuador have changed us and the way we "do church". He stressed the need to have our work (our mission), our vision (what we want to become), and our values (what we care about) all supporting each other in a church. At the close of the worship, we all shared communion together followed by a meal which served as a money maker for the youth project.

In the afternoon, we joined a group who toured the Guasamin Museum of Art. We then had a lunch in the home of Darwin and Mirian. Following this, David, Don and I, along with Peter, Delicia, Aliyah, Oscar Herrera and Pedro Stuckey took Luis and Jennifer out for supper before we headed to the airport. Our van arrived just as we were picking up our bags at the hotel. So we said good-bye to Oscar and Pedro. Then we dropped off Peter's family and Luis and Jennifer on our way to the airport.

We were there in plenty of time. Security was easy for all of us. Our plane to Dallas was not full, so Don and I were lucky enough to each have three seats to ourselves and got to stretch out for a few hours of sleep on our way. Our immigration into the US also went well and we parted ways with Dave Boshart since he was heading to Cedar Rapids. Our flight to Omaha went well, too. Our bags all arrived. The van soon came to take us to our car, and our place looked great when we arrived.

Thanks be to God for an interesting and informative trip and for his protection as we traveled. Thanks for all the prayers! AMEN