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Field Education Report
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On September 1, 2005, I attended an all day training event on behalf of YPM (Yucatan Peninsula Mission) for first time supervisors who intend to participate in the PTS (Princeton Theological Seminary) Field Education Program. Mark and Sandy LaGree, our Mission Officer and Manager, attended with me. We traveled to Princeton, New Jersey, the day before, and we were housed at the seminary.

Princeton Theological Seminary

Princeton has a strong, well-developed field-education program, and one that has been in place for many years. When you learn they have been training Presbyterian ministers for close to 250 years, you gain perspective on some of the reasons they are so highly respected among our ten seminaries. They have the largest library of any seminary in the U.S. PTS has several international field education training sites, and several more, like us, seeking to become involved, some with sites as far as South Africa and Australia. So they are well prepared to work with YPM.

The Field Education Training Orientation

The faculty of the Continuing Education Department of the seminary warmly welcomed us. The day started off with an overview of the issues involved in field-education. Many of those present were pastors within an hours drive, whose work with a student would be in their own church, generally 10 hours a week, during the course of the coming school year. Our situation at YPM would instead be a student working 35 hours per week for 10 straight weeks, beginning in the third or fourth week of May, or the first week of June, and ending in August. We discussed a nine to twelve month placement with them, but that is not available at this time. The types of ministry work the seminary looks for the student to be involved in is meant to prepare them for their future work in church ministry. This helped us to determine parameters for our field education placement, since we are also involved in medical missionary work, church construction with short-term mission American teams, and Downs Syndrome Therapy Center. Though these will provide extra education to the interested student, these are not part of the work required in their 35 hours per week. Our day ended as a class before 4:00 PM. The two professors (Rev. Harry Freebairn and Rev. Chester Polk, Director and Asst. Director of PTS Continuing Education) who lead the training then sat down with us for another hour and a

half. They had many questions and listened intently. It seemed they were pleased with responses, and our preparation. Mark LaGree had anticipated their questions, and prepared answers for much of what they asked on the logistics side, some being already posted on our website. I was able to address more of the pastoral training ministry issues. I conveyed my feeling that YPM has exciting days ahead. I related our recent developments in casting a vision and new direction for our organization as we look to the future. I shared about our desire to work among the poor, about our desire to strengthen the spiritual level of the people in these mission church outposts, and to appropriately help them economically. The Professors went over our application with me, and we then submitted the application for becoming a host site. So at this point, we are awaiting a decision from PTS to invite us to be one of their Field Education Sites.

My Personal Reflections

This felt like such a good fit, as we began to have a more specific idea of the kinds of ministries that PTS wishes to see their students involved in, and the work of YPM. Through the field education program, YPM has the opportunity to impact several areas at once. We will be able to address the need of a Seminary student in ministry training; provide assistance to the mission church starts which are in a 2 hour radius of the YPM base; connect with our PC (USA) denominations strongest and most historic seminary; serve the larger church denomination in yet another ministry; allow young ministers to learn about our ministry in Mexico; increase our ability to strengthen the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico; follow in a ministry that our founder, Ramon Celis, began in his earlier days; and lay foundations for future training of Mexican Presbyterians in church work and ministry at our mission site. I personally felt like I received much from this time that applies to my work as a pastor. Whether supervising seminary students, or church volunteers, many of the same issues apply. I regret that Rev. William Cen was unable to attend, because this is a one-time event. We will not have to repeat this training. The faculty did supply us with an additional packet of information for Pastor William, and they look forward to his regular reports on his work with the students. A clear picture of the students' needs and the learning areas helped me personally to decide how I might interact from a distance through e-mail. I will prepare an outline of their 10 week itinerary and provide some forms to direct the student. Through regular correspondence, there are several issues I will be able to assist Pastor William and the student in. But it was made very clear that the on-site supervising pastor takes on great responsibility to lead and direct the student, as well as to observe and critique their work. That pastor becomes a day-by-day teacher, as Jesus was with His disciples, letting them into his life and his prayers, as well as explaining the musts of ministry that honors our Father in Heaven. It will require Pastor William to accompany the student to the ministry site, to be a role model in doing ministry, but then to also observe the student as they engage in ministry, and then to later, sit with the student and help them reflect and learn from the activities. For example, when he accompanies the student to a church to preach, it will mean listening to the sermon, taking some notes, and then meeting with the student later to help them improve their preaching. Of the 35 hours a week that the student is required to work, it will take 30 or more hours of Pastor Williams' time, because of the need to be with the student in their entire ministry, write reports, and plan the training, as well as to include them in some of his personal life. I am even more excited now after the training, about the possibilities for my brother in Christ, Pastor William, as he takes on this responsibility, about working with him in this and for YPM as we move forward in the direction we sense our Lord is leading us!