

Accompaniment Program Report–August 22, 2016, Presbytery of Uraba
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Behold New Things Have Come.

It happens slowly. Visiting with strangers who soon become friends, a casual comment or question can produce a startling turn in the direction of the conversation.

How long did your family live on the finca?, I ask. The answer isn't so much the number of years or generations as it is a blinding revelation of the moment her life was forever changed. "Until they took my father away in the middle of the night," she said. Stories of violence come as a factual retelling now that twenty years have passed.

Many Presbyterian churches in Colombia are filled with families displaced because of this history. The whole country is filled with families like this – estimates are somewhere around 6 million citizens within Colombia. We wonder how our new friends have managed to make a life of relative peace and tranquility in light of this kind of trauma. When both of us are in tears we can only imagine what's going on inside the heart of the person telling us this story. We were called to be present, to accompany, and so we do our best to listen, ask questions, hold a hand and say a prayer.

Church families have good company. There are fellow members who understand because it's their story, also. A faith that says "...if anyone is in Christ, he/she is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come," can heal.

Ministers and elders who care and lead and serve can heal. Lay leaders who provide opportunities to join and listen and laugh together can heal. Music that soothes the soul on a path to joy and thanksgiving and praise can heal. The Word preached with strength and compassion and challenge can heal. Service to church and community creates ways to be outside of oneself, to give of oneself and to walk beside Christ in working on behalf of the least of these. And can heal.

All these were settled until yesterday when again out of the blue a comment was made in conversation by the pastor of the church we were visiting. He casually said that he had traveled eight miles down a road in the banana fields and had seen eight dead bodies. His mind had suddenly returned to another time. We followed up this comment with more questions, of course, and details continued to come. He had had two brothers killed in the fields from random violence. Apparently a group of armed militia had passed through and simply shot them on sight. There was no sign of struggle.

This pastor had preached a terrific sermon just that morning. The worship service had been energetic and the music inspiring and culturally relevant. The congregation was filled with people of every age group. Just what we wish we had in the USA!

We learned from him how he changed careers to study theology. He heard a voice. The voice told him to prepare himself. And he did. Gracias a Dios for those of faith who choose to be on God's side.

Comment [JT1]: