

First Week Accompaniment Report for Sue Cossey and Jeffrey Todd – Urabá,
Antioquia (August 16, 2016-revision #2)

“A Tale of Two Churches”

Our first week in Urabá found us visiting Presbyterian clergy and congregations in Chigorodó, a city of 28,000 about 24 miles south of Apartadó, our home base. Initially, we were hosted by Rev. Bernardino López and his family. Rev. López is pastor at the Iglesia Presbiteriana Emanuel. For two days we visited with congregants in the church and in their homes. After that, we moved across town to spend time in the home of Elder Jesús Vargas and his family. They are active members of the Iglesia Presbiteriana Manantial de Vida, a second IPC church in Chigorodó, but this one on the east side. That’s right – two Presbyterian churches in a small town in Urabá. The churches are only a short walk or taxi ride apart from each other, but they are on opposite sides of the main highway which bisects town. Curiosity compelled us to ask Rev. Edilberto Hernandez, the pastor of Manantial de Vida, how did two churches come to be in such close proximity to each other. As it turns out, even church development in Urabá reflects an unsettling and violent past.

As Pastor Hernandez related, many people from the Chocó region were forced by threats of violence to relocate to Chigorodó in the mid to late 90s. Many settled in a part of town named for the lagoon it was built on. Having worshipped at a Presbyterian church in Chocó before losing their homes and farms, folks from Chocó were comforted to find a Presbyterian church in their new home. They were warmly welcomed. To attend services, however, it required the new arrivals from Chocó to walk from the east side of town to the west side of town, where the sole Presbyterian church was located. Keep in mind it is not uncommon in Colombia to attend church activities 5 or 6 times per week, often after dark. Unfortunately, this new home was not immune to the violence the Chocó desplazados tried to escape. Though the distance between the area of resettlement and the church was relatively short, it was a risky walk, with frequent threats.

To address the spiritual needs of the new residents while reducing their danger, the session of the Iglesia Presbiteriana Emanuel voted to endorse the formation of a new church on the east side of town. Thus, the Iglesia Presbiteriana Manantial de Vida was borne out of a deeply held conviction to serve God’s children even in the face of danger and persecution. Even today, the vast majority of Manantial de Vida’s congregation is displaced persons. This is an example of true discipleship, not unlike that exhibited by Paul and the other apostles, as they bravely proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ in a hostile world. We pray that this example of selflessness and faithfulness inspires us to find new ways to be of service to those in need in our own communities.