The Communion Service on Sunday morning was a highlight for those of us who participated in the 2017 Partnership Meetings in Quito, Ecuador. The church was full with around 70 people, some sitting on the stairway. There were people there from at least 7 different countries. About one fourth of them were refugees. Peter Stuckey, from Colombia, preached on the theme of suffering and how Christ knows what it is like to suffer and that we can leave our suffering on the cross for Him to bear. Participants wrote about their burdens and pinned the notes on the cross after the sermon.

The refugee program continues with financial support through MCC Colombia. Jennifer Rey has been the coordinator along with Daniela Sanchez. Jennifer has resigned as she will be moving to the U.S. with her husband Luis Tapia. Alexandra Meneses will be taking Jennifer’s place. She is also a psychologist and will be able to offer sessions for the refugees. They interview an average of 20 families per week and 45 families receive basic food weekly. There has recently been an increase in the number of refugees who are not from Colombia. A number of families have arrived from Venezuela due to the severe economic crisis. There are also increasing numbers of asylum seekers from the Middle East, some of whom are of the Muslim faith. The church welcomes them all and sees this as an opportunity to provide hope as they represent the face of Jesus to them.
Other programs of the churches in Quito and Jardines Del Inca have seen changes over time. The Education for Peace program has been downsized so that they only have one group instead of two. At this time it serves mainly children of church members and refugees. ProPaz, the classes for Bible study and Anabaptist theology, have struggled with the lack of time and interest in recent months. The Vida Juvenil (Juvenile Life) program has focused more on after school help for children. In the future they would like to engage more with the parents in the community.

We were able to tour a property that appears to be ideal for purchase as a center for ICAME (Christian Anabaptist Mennonite Churches of Ecuador) and the church in Quito. It is not far from their present location, but closer to the old airport. It is near the northern end of the new subway that is being built. This makes its location in a prime area for future development, so it is likely a good investment in financial terms. The owner is still asking $225,000 for purchase. However, properties
continue to remain on the market with little sales activity at this point in time. The hope is that it can be bought for $200,000. Some research needs to be done regarding the soundness of the structure and possibility of future liens against the property. It is a large house with three stories. It has been divided into three apartments, one on each floor, so would have possibilities of rental income from a family living on one floor while the church and ICAME use the rest of the building.

Jane and Jerrell Ross Richer related their enthusiasm for the groups that have come to visit them to learn about Creation Care from the indigenous people. They have felt a call to minister along with a small remnant of the church in the Cofan community which is located near the Ecuador, Peru and Colombia border. The community is building a house for them and is excited to have them spend more time with them.

Julian Guaman, an indigenous scholar, has been attending Quito Mennonite church. He is associated with four indigenous congregations who consider themselves to be Anabaptist in their theology. He has proposed that his congregations be covered by ICAME, both spiritually and legally. These congregations are located in Riobamba, Guayaquil and Quito. This is an interesting development and there will be discussions about this in the future.

Another interesting development has been more openness among the other Mennonite churches connected to Rosedale missions to relate with ICAME. This is the result of changes in leadership for those congregations and could also be related to the cooperation with them to provide disaster relief for earthquake victims on the coast.

This is again a time of transition for the church in Quito. Luis Tapia has completed his three years as pastor. He has resigned and he and his wife, Jennifer Rey, will be moving to Elkhart, Indiana, as he attends AMBS the next couple of years. The church in Quito has called Fernando Perez and Rebecca Gonzalez, a
pastoral couple from Mexico City, Mexico, to be interim pastors for the next three months. Their mandate will be to help the church move toward a pastoral team approach to church structure instead of a pastor centered approach.

Always on our minds is the effect of providing outside resources and personnel on the sustainability of the local congregation. The tremendous and immediate needs of the refugees are always paramount and are impossible to meet with local resources. It is encouraging to see that people in the local church are aware of this and they voice desires to continue to reevaluate programs and their ability to carry them out.

We need to continue to pray for them as they share the love of Christ in a context where there is much suffering from the evils of this world.

Don Kempf