

HEBRON USA

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

HEBRON de DESARROLLO TZELTAL

First Presbyterian
July 25-August 1, 2010 (Sunday to Sunday)
Chiapas, Mexico

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ

I am an elder at First Presbyterian Church in Virginia Beach and a member of the Board of Directors of Hebron USA, a non-profit mission organization headquartered in North Carolina. I am a veteran of five mission trips to Chiapas, Mexico through Hebron USA spanning more than ten weeks since July 2007. I am writing to introduce your outreach committee and church members to the wonderful mission work underway in Chiapas and to extend the invitation to participate in the first presbytery wide mission trip to Chiapas. My hope is to put together a team of 10-14 missionaries to travel to Chiapas in July 2010 drawn from churches in PEVA that have not sponsored adult oriented mission trips in the last few years and that are not large enough to send a team composed solely of their own members into the mission field. I intend to travel to Chiapas with the team and serve as the coordinator of the trip. This trip is based on the model of the Salem (North Carolina) Presbytery, which has been sending presbytery wide mission teams to Chiapas for more than ten years.

It is not too much to say that my mission service in Chiapas has changed my life. The same is true for adults and teens that have traveled to Chiapas over the last three years on trips sponsored by FPC-Virginia Beach and over the last ten years on trips sponsored by churches throughout the United States.

My purpose in organizing a trip of PEVA church members is to share the opportunity I have enjoyed in my own life with other people within the PEVA community. I have seen first hand the work underway in Chiapas and I have built relationships in Christ with people in my own church and from other churches with whom I have worked. This is not a nice service project but is a Christian endeavor that can only be understood as such. The ripple effect of going to Chiapas, or on any other Christian mission trip, is that when you return you will be ready for service here and now in a way that you would not otherwise have been.

CHIAPAS. Chiapas is the southern most state in Mexico. The capital is Tuxtla Gutierrez to which we would fly. The state of Chiapas is home to a number of indigenous people groups that speak their own language and have their own customs. Chiapas abuts Guatemala to the south and the Pacific Ocean to the west. Much of Chiapas is mountainous. Most people survive by being subsistence farmers. Chiapas contains several significant sites of Mayan heritage, Palenque being the largest. The Spanish colonial city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas is where groups often spend their free day.

TZELTAL. The word Tzeltal refers to the indigenous people group who speak the Tzeltal language. Short of stature and dark in complexion, the Tzeltal live in central Chiapas in the mountains and also in the lowlands near Guatemala. Although most Mexicans are nominally Roman Catholic, the majority are not practicing Christians. The National Presbyterian Church of Mexico is extremely active in Tzeltal areas. The Tzeltal Synod is comprised of three presbyteries. Tzeltal people worship in the Tzeltal language, led by Tzeltal pastors or elders, reading from the Tzeltal Bible and singing from the Tzeltal Presbyterian hymnal. Tzeltal worship services are robust celebrations of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the highlands, where Hebron USA works, most Tzeltal follow traditional farming methods to feed themselves. The Tzeltal people are unfailingly polite and kind.

HEBRON USA. This non-profit grew out of the mission work in Chiapas by Salem Presbytery. Its mission statement follows:

HEBRON USA MISSION STATEMENT

Hebron USA exists to *share* the love of Jesus Christ
by *walking hand-in-hand* in cross-cultural partnerships
and by *serving with* and *supporting* the servants of
the people in southern México

The work of Hebron USA is several fold. First, it supports Rev. Pablo Feliciano Cruz and his wife Jan in their mission work in Chiapas. Pablo is Tzeltal although college educated in the U.S. His wife Jan hails from Michigan. Second, Hebron USA is bringing to fruition the building of Clínica Tzeltal Manos de Cristo (“Hands of Christ”), the health clinic in Ocosingo, Chiapas that will one day serve the indigenous population that is now woefully under-served by the Mexican health care system. Third, it coordinates American mission groups that choose to work with the Tzeltal in Chiapas. Finally, through American pastors, it provides theological education to Tzeltal pastors and commissioned lay pastors.

HEBRON de DESARROLLO TZELTAL. This organization is the Mexican non-profit organized in 2009 that is Hebron USA’s Tzeltal counterpart in mission. It is headed by Rev. Pablo Feliciano Cruz and is an offshoot of the Tzeltal Synod. The name means Tzeltal Development. It works closely with the Tzeltal Synod to identify needed projects that American groups might play a constructive role in working with Tzeltal people to complete. It is also heavily involved in the construction of Manos de Cristo. The new organization was formed to provide flexibility in being able to tap into Mexican government sources of funding for development projects in the Tzeltal communities.

RELATIONSHIPS. The linchpin of the work of Hebron USA in Chiapas is building relationships. The primary relationship is that of mission travelers with Jesus Christ and it is through the active living out of loving one’s neighbor as one loves oneself by heeding the call of Jesus to “follow me” that this relationship is strengthened. Few people return from Chiapas without having been profoundly affected and without a recognition of a much deeper

personal faith. We build important relationships within the group by working elbow to elbow with people that we might recognize but whom we do not know well, relationships that last long after the return from Chiapas. For a presbytery wide trip those relationships are built from church-to-church and help foster a sense of community within the presbytery. Finally, there is the relationship built across cultural lines by working with, worshipping with, eating with and living in and around our Tzeltal brothers and sisters in Christ. For veterans of more than one trip to Chiapas, this means seeing old friends when one returns. For everyone this means coming to see Christ at work in people who do not look like us or speak our language while hastening the day when all people are one in Christ.

WHY CHIAPAS? The needs of this world are great. The tendency is to think that problems of social inequities and social justice, education, hunger, etc. are so vast that nothing we do will make a difference. The truth is that God calls us to action and demands of us that we do something. He does not call us to act everywhere but surely calls us to act somewhere. Some are called to service in Portsmouth or Hampton, some to serve in New Orleans. Some, however, are called to foreign lands. All are called as disciples to work to bring the kingdom into being. The question might properly be asked “why not Chiapas?”

THE CASE FOR HANDS-ON MISSION.

Read John 21: 15-17

“Feed my sheep. Tend my lambs”

Read Matthew 25:31-45

“As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me”

Read Matthew 19: 16-22

“Come, follow me”

Read Luke 10: 25-37

“You shall love the Lord your God...and your neighbor as yourself”

TYPICAL DAY.

- Breakfast, lunch and dinner family style. Some meals to include Tzeltal brothers.
- Construction work 7:00 am to 1:00 pm.
- Afternoon Bible school for children two days.

- Worship services two evenings in Tzeltal churches. One elder from group to preach at service. Group to sing one-two songs for congregation.
- Devotional.
- Free day at end of week: potential options include Toniná (the Mayan ruins south of Ocosingo), Palenque (the largest Mayan ruins in Chiapas) and San Cristóbal de Las Casas (Spanish colonial city near Tuxtla founded in 1528).

TYPICAL MISSION LOCATIONS.

- Clínica Tzeltal Manos de Cristo, Ocosingo.
- Alfa y Omega Instituto Bíblico, Ocosingo.
- Ejido Campet, village south of Ocosingo.
- Matzam, village in Los Altos de Chiapas outside San Cristóbal de Las Casas.

NITTY GRITTY.

- Randy DuVall will serve as the facilitator/organizer of the trip.
- We fly roundtrip from Norfolk to Tuxtla Gutierrez, Chiapas. Tuxtla is three hours from Ocosingo and two hours from Matzam by van.
- Lodging is at Alfa y Omega when working in Ocosingo and inside the church complex when working in Matzam. In other villages lodging is at the church.
- Meals are usually prepared by Jan Feliciano and her staff. Jan is meticulous about hygiene and sanitation. While we eat a lot of beans and rice, the majority of meals will look familiar to Americans. When staying in a village, the first and last meals of the week are prepared by the women of the church in the village but the women have been trained by Jan to observe the same hygiene and sanitation routine. There is always peanut butter and jelly.
- Hebron USA provides all construction materials and tools. Participants bring only their gloves. Americans are usually the laborers while Tzeltal craftsmen provide the expertise. This is subject to the

know how of the group.

- Hebron USA provides all transportation within Chiapas. All meals are included in the price charged by Hebron USA. Admission to Toniná or Palenque is included. Incidentals are the responsibility of the traveler.
- The group provides any Bible school materials.

COST.

- Roundtrip airfare runs somewhere in the \$900-\$950 range.
- Hebron USA charges a \$450 per person fee to cover all expenses.

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FURTHER INFORMATION.

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