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Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Presbyterian Mission

Educational Opportunities for Women in Guatemala

October 11, 2021

A Letter from Eliane Menezes, serving in Guatemala

Summer 2021

Write (<mailto:eliane.menezes@pcusa.org>) to Eliane Menezes

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Dear siblings in Christ,

The opportunity to gain access to education is the door to empowerment for women in Guatemala. In developing countries, the education of women does not seem to be a priority. Illiteracy is still a significant obstacle preventing women from reaching their immense potential. When women do not have access to education, they are denied the chance to occupy their place in society.

The possibility of getting an education is crucial for those who hope to transform their own lives and the lives of their neighbors. Education encourages vulnerable women to dream of a better life for themselves, their families and their communities.

The National Union of Presbyterian Women of Guatemala (UNMP) has successfully created and managed a scholarship program to allow women to harness the transformative power of education. Every Presbyterian woman serving in her

community of faith has the opportunity to apply. The scholarship program offers two types of scholarships for Presbyterian women. One of the scholarships is the secular scholarship for Q'eqchi' women who want to obtain their basic education (primary and secondary school or elementary, middle school and high school). Then they could pursue their theological studies if they wanted to. Most Q'eqchi' women are from the northeast part of the country, from the Department of Alta Verapaz. The majority of their families survive by agricultural subsistence farming. This scholarship helps women whose primary language is Q'eqchi' to start their educational journey while improving their skills in Spanish. Since the patriarchal system is firmly entrenched in the Q'eqchi' community, women's education is not a top priority for this community. This scholarship is one of the tools Q'eqchi' women have to fulfill their dreams of getting an education.

I had the opportunity to talk by phone to five current students to get to know them better and offer support. Three of them are studying a course equivalent to primary and secondary school, and two are in high school. Contacting the students was challenging since they live in remote villages high up in the mountains where internet and cellular connectivity are not easily accessible. Let me share the stories of two current scholarship recipients and one scholarship student who has already graduated.

One of the current students is Jaquelyn Julissa Choc Caal, who is 16 years old and very excited to attend her high school. She lives with her parents in Limon Sur village, city of Chisec. They are low-income subsistence farmers. She travels by bus for about an hour and a half to get to her school. She said, "without this scholarship, I couldn't attend school. My family cannot afford to pay for my education. So, I'm grateful for this opportunity."

Another student is Maria Cuc Choc, who is married to a deacon of their church and has three children. She is studying at the secondary school level. It was very challenging to talk to her by phone since she lives in Sonora Village, located in the mountains near the Mexican border. She said that it was very hard to have a good cellular connection in her rural area. Before we could talk, she had to walk around her yard with her phone to find a spot with a good connection. After many attempts, she finally found a good point in the cornfield so that we could talk. She shared that she walks 20 minutes from her place to the bus stop and travels by bus for about two hours to get to her school. She said, "the scholarship gave me the chance to study, and I would make an effort to make it!" Maria is very active in her church and expressed her willingness to continue her studies after she graduates.

A great example of resilience and determination comes from Rosa Marina Tacaj. She was a beneficiary of the scholarship for three years. She is 47 years old, married, and has a great family of six children and two grandchildren. She lives in San Carlos EL Porvenir Village, city of Puerto Barrios. She said the scholarship opened doors for her because she didn't have the financial resources to pay for her studies. Maria said she had to start from the beginning and was initially enrolled in the primary course. Even though she was much older than her classmates, it didn't make her give up or be embarrassed; conversely, she felt blessed to be a reference for her classmates as a person who had the strength and courage to start and finish her studies. She continued her education by attending high school for three years taking classes every Sunday. She went to great lengths to achieve what she wanted. She mentioned that she had to walk one and a half hours from her village where her school was since there was no public transportation on Sundays. "I did it with enthusiasm because I had a goal to reach," she said. She managed to achieve her goal and happily graduated from high school in November 2019. She now wants to continue her journey and attend John Knox Theological Center at Antioch Church in Cobán as soon as it opens.

The theological scholarship for Presbyterian women offers financial help for students pursuing theological studies to serve in the church as pastors, preachers or educators. Currently, there are 12 recipients of this scholarship studying in three seminaries in various parts of the country. There are six students at Juan Mackay Theological Seminary located in Retalhuleu studying to obtain their Certificate in Theological Studies. There are two students at Western Theological Seminary (SETO) located in Xela, Quetzaltenango. One is taking her Associate Degree in Theological Studies, and the other is pursuing her BA in Theology. Studying at Reformed Theological Seminary in Guatemala City, three students are

studying for a Certificate in Theological Studies, and one is finishing her Associate Degree in Theology. All students are very active in their churches and are passionately involved in Presbyterian Women groups.

One of the recipients of this scholarship for the first time is Elsa Victoria de Sion. She lives with her parents in Champerico, Retalhuleu. She is involved in the ministry in her church called Iglesia Presbiteriana Luz y Verdad, where she is responsible for the social and other areas of her church. She attends Juan Mackay Theological Seminary and is studying to obtain her Certificate in Theological Studies. Her classes are in person once a week on Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. She is very enthusiastic about her studies and very appreciative of the opportunity to receive this scholarship, without which it would be extremely challenging for her to be studying.

The impact this scholarship program on the lives of the Presbyterian women in Guatemala is immense. It has changed the perspectives of our sisters and given them so much hope. They are not better able to fulfill their dreams and be equipped to follow their calling.

I encourage you to be part of this enlivening ministry! Come and see what God is doing here!

Many blessings,

Eliane

Please read the following letter from Sara P. Lisherness, the interim director of World Mission:

Dear partners in God's mission,

I don't know about you, but daily my heart grows heavier. News about the pandemic, wars, wildfires, gun violence, racism, earthquakes and hurricanes cloud my vision. It's hard to see hope; our world is in a fog. Yet we trust that God's light and love transcend the brokenness of this time.

God is at work transforming the world, and you, through your prayers, partnership and encouragement, are helping us share this good news. Thank you for your faithful and gracious support of our mission personnel.

How can we see through the fog? What will the church be after the pandemic? Could it be that God is doing "a new thing" and is inviting us to perceive it? Through all the uncertainty we know that God's steadfast love and care for all creation will prevail and that God's Spirit is at work in each of us.

We all have an integral part to play in fulfilling God's mission. As we seek to grow together in faithfulness there are three important steps I invite you to take in supporting our shared commitments to God's mission:

Give – Consider making a year-end financial contribution for the sending and support of our mission personnel. Your support helps mission personnel accompany global partners as together they share the light of God's love and justice around the world. Invite your session to include support for mission personnel in its annual budget planning.

Act – Visit *The Mission Yearbook for Prayer and Study* to delve deeper into the work God is doing through the PC(USA) and its partners in ministry around the globe: pcusa.org/missionyearbook (<http://pcusa.org/missionyearbook>).

Pray – Include our mission personnel, our global partners, and our common commitments to share God's grace, love, mercy and justice in your daily prayers.

Thank you for your faithfulness to God's mission through the Presbyterian Church. It is my prayer that you will continue to support this work with your prayers, partnership, and financial gifts in the coming year. We hope you will join us and our partners in shining a beacon of hope throughout the world.

In the light of hope,



Sara P. Lisherness, Interim Director

World Mission
Presbyterian Mission Agency
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

To give please visit <https://bit.ly/PCUSAmission> (<https://bit.ly/PCUSAmission>)

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:14-16



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“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?” — Job 38:4

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