



# EXTENDING BEYOND

At the Ecuador Partnership meeting held in Quito, all voices are heard around the table

## Post-colonial mission

A message from Stanley W. Green, executive director



The modern missionary movement's greatest advance came during the period when colonial powers were engaged in a massive land-grab in the global south. To be sure, many missionaries were actively engaged in resisting some of the heinous, even brutal, excesses of colonial expansion and rapacious greed that dispossessed people of their lands, livelihood, and cultural treasures. At the same time, waves of missionaries sailed from their home countries, with a deep sense of obligation that too often made little distinction between communicating the gospel and conferring the benefits of what they considered a superior civilization upon the unenlightened (sometimes referred to as savages) in the colonial territories. Many tragic outcomes resulted from these beliefs. Whole cultures were infantilized, and local agency and initiative were destroyed. The locals were rendered

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dependents of the outsiders and were themselves made to feel like outsiders within the very places that had been their homes.

It is, indeed, a mystery of unfathomable proportions that the church of Jesus Christ grew and flourished in the global south, especially in Africa, which experienced the compounding atrocity of the slave trade that killed millions even before they arrived in the slaving nations, many of which claimed a Christian identity. For the mystery of this growth we give thanks, even if the Christian faith that was imposed bore little resemblance to Jesus of Nazareth. Along with giving thanks it is imperative that we repent of the harm and the suffering that was caused by mission. We are duty bound to change our approach so that the good news we seek to proclaim is consistent with the "fullness of life" that Jesus promised to all those who responded to God's reign.

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"If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won't he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it?"

—Luke 15:4 (NLT)



Photo by Jerrell Ross Richer

Jane Ross Richer, Rubén, and Elena Grefa who, along with her husband and family, invited Rubén to live with them while he is in high school and has received him like one of her own sons.

# A young boy finds a home

By Zachary Headings

*In Ecuador, the Ross Richers support indigenous pastors and leaders in themes of creation care, economic justice, inclusion of women and children, youth empowerment, and community development initiations. Their commitment of creating deep roots and relationships gives them opportunities to respond in appropriate and loving ways to the needs around them.*

As Christians we pray ... “on earth as it is in heaven.” However, there are times when it is difficult to know how heaven should look. In these moments we look for guidance from Scripture, through prayer, and from our brothers and sisters who surround us.

Jane and Jerrell Ross Richer serve in a two-way mission: They accompany indigenous communities and churches in the Amazon rain forest in Ecuador half the year, and then return to the United States where they are intentional about sharing in educational and church settings what they learn from brothers and sisters in Ecuador. Recently, they navigated a complex situation in Ecuador where they felt led to care for a 14-year-old Cofán boy, Rubén.\*

Ross Richers released a prayer letter on May 3: “Last month, a day before we left the village of Zábalo, Rubén’s aging father passed away, and we believe the Good Shepherd brought the boy to our home.”

The Ross Richers have known Rubén for four years. He often arrived at their home early in the morning and stayed until late evening. In that time, Jane said, they have found that he contributes much to the world. “He has a profound understanding of the rain forest and what it takes to survive. He is a hunter and a fisherman. These skills are core to his indigenous identity.” The Cofán of Zábalo call themselves the



Photo by Jerrell Ross Richer

Rubén (second from left) joins students Segundo Requelme, Magaly Rivadeneyra, Jennyfer Gaibor, Lensin Waam, and Santiago Segarra during a time of worship at the *Instituto de Misiones Ninawachi* in Huaticocha, Ecuador.

\*Name changed for privacy.



Photo by Jordan Ross Richer

Rubén with Jane, Teresa and Naomi Ross Richer along the Pacific Coast at a retreat center in Same, Ecuador.

guardians of the rain forest. They possess the title to 160 thousand hectares (395,000 acres) of protected rain forest.

Several months earlier when the Ross Richers returned to Zábalo from the United States in January, Rubén no longer lived in the village. At the time that his father's health was deteriorating, Rubén faced the choice that many indigenous youth face: stay in his community or pursue a high-school education away from home. When his father passed, it was clear that he didn't have a support system to stay where he was. The Ross Richers felt God calling them to act, and so they received him into their home.

**He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.**

-Micah 6:8 (NIV)

They had sensed the presence of Christ within Rubén. "As Christ, through this beloved child, is teaching us, we are also loving and affirming him. Together, we are experiencing the kingdom of God, here and now."

The Ross Richer family returned to Goshen at the end of June. Before they came back, through prayer and discernment, they found Rubén a home that fit his goals. He was received by a foster family from a Kichwa indigenous church near a rural public school where he can study.

Jane said, "We trust that this new family and community ... will be equipped to guide and direct Rubén, while at the same time helping him to remain connected to the land."

In caring for Rubén, the Ross Richer family asks for prayer for Rubén that God's love will console his lonely heart and restore that which is broken.

While Sierra attends Goshen College, Jane, Jerrell, Naomi, Teresa and Jordan will return to Zábalo in January 2020, where they will continue their two-way mission—supporting and learning from the Cofán and other indigenous peoples as they serve Christ. ■

## Meet our mission workers



**Delicia Bravo Aguilar and Peter Wigginton** with their daughters, Ariana and Aliyah, serve as Ecuador Partnership coordinators and also in the church programs with their gifts in music, education, and children's and youth ministries. They serve with *Iglesia Cristiana Anabautista Menonita de Ecuador (ICAME)* through the Ecuador Partnership, which includes *Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Colombia* and Central Plains Conference.



**Jerrell and Jane Ross Richer** and their children, Sierra, Naomi, Teresa and Jordan, work half the year with indigenous church leaders in the Ecuadorian rain forest, and half the year as educators in the United States. They serve with *Iglesia Cristiana Anabautista Menonita de Ecuador (ICAME)* and *Consejo de Pueblos y Organizaciones Indígenas Evangélicas del Ecuador (FEINE)* through the Ecuador Partnership, which includes *Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Colombia* and Central Plains Conference.



**María Helena López** supports the leadership team of Quito Mennonite Church, sharing her gifts in ministry, providing encouragement, and coordinating volunteers serving in the ministries. *Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Colombia* is the sending partner for María Helena.

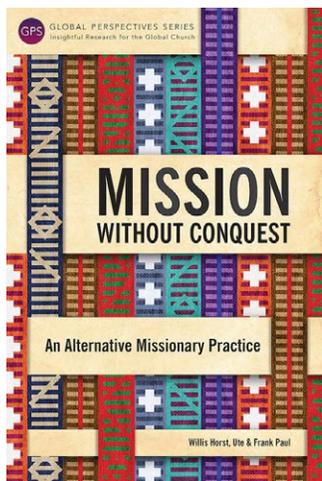


**Jaden Hostetter** will work with the Quito Mennonite Church in music and youth ministries, including both Ecuadorian and refugee youth. He will also serve in the broader work of the church in the *Vida Juvenil* after-school program and the refugee project.

## Post-colonial mission

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For the last several decades, Mennonite Mission Network (and our predecessor agencies) have been on a journey to move away from any form of mission characterized by imperialistic and denigrating paternalistic approaches. The title of a text published by three former long-term members of the Mennonite team in the Chaco (Willis Horst, Ute



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Mueller-Eckhardt, and Frank Paul), which is supported by Mennonite Mission Network, *Mission Without Conquest* (also published in Spanish as *Misión Sin Conquista*) captures our commitment to the form of mission in which we intend to be engaged. This alternative mode of being in mission is to walk in the way of Jesus, embracing weakness and vulnerability instead of with attitudes of superiority. Our priority is to respect the integrity, creativity and dignity of those with whom we work in a spirit of reciprocity and mutuality.

We give thanks for the ways the Spirit of God transformed our sometimes flawed and often faltering efforts in mission in the past, enabling a vibrant church to grow in the global south even despite the flaws in our efforts.

Thank you for joining us on this journey. We are grateful that you walk with us even as we seek to walk in the way of Jesus as we bear witness to the good news of God's reign before a waiting world. ■

Stanley W. Green  
Executive Director

**Thank you** for being part of what God is doing! How is God calling you to share in additional ways with Mennonite Mission Network?



Photo by Linda Shelly

Mesías Yasig from the new indigenous *Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Ecuador* (ICME), Shirley Kempf from Central Plains Mennonite Conference, and María Helena López from *Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Colombia* (IMCOL) enjoy visiting together after the first ICME worship service shared with a partnership delegation. María Helena López is now serving in Ecuador through the partnership.



Photo by Linda Shelly

Thaimary Favia (right), Ronald Rivera and their baby Flavia, refugees from Venezuela, receive handmade diapers from Delicia Bravo (left), a Mennonite Mission Network worker in Ecuador.



Photo by Linda Shelly

A multicultural worship team leads music at Quito Mennonite Church. (Names are withheld to protect the identity of refugees.)

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