

## Out of the Darkness ... into the Light

### 2016 USA Mission Experience

#### San Francisco Bay Area - September 22-30

I was one of twelve women from PW Synods throughout the USA who were selected to participate in the 2016 USA Mission Experience (USAME) in the San Francisco Bay Area. We came from WA, MI, NE, TN, NV, KS, NY, UT, FL, AZ, OK, PA, and CA, The USAME CCT members and local planners brought our group total to twenty women.

I reminded myself of our goals during the flight from Oklahoma City to San Francisco. (hereafter noted as **SF**) We were going to witness the faithful work being done by our sisters in the San Francisco and San Jose' presbyteries. Their work and dedication to God's promise of a beloved community would prove to be the most amazing experience of this Mission trip.

The full scope of Human Trafficking in the US includes **sex slavery, forced labor, and domestic servitude, as well as consumer choices that impact exploitive child labor practices.**

Goals – Our goals were: (1) Learn about victims of sexual trafficking, human slavery, domestic violence, the homeless, and immigration issues. (2) Develop skills to advocate for these victims and (3) Explore personal stories to examine the myths and realities associated with these victim's experiences and (4) Identify resources to help eliminate these scourges against humanity.

Joan and Ron Fong met three of us at the SF airport and took us to the Mercy Center and Sisters of Mercy Convent and retreat in Burlingame, CA. Here, we slept, ate, studied, worshiped and shared thoughts and feelings during our Mission Experiences. It is a 42-acre international retreat. Each rooms had a bed, desk, sink, 18" closet with shelves, and a chair. This is a quiet place without telephones and TVs and no cell phone conversations after dark. There is an open-door policy and rooms were kept unlocked while we were away. Everything was clean, neat, orderly and quiet.

Nature surrounds a myriad number of hidden paths, benches, and statues, including a large labyrinth nestled among the trees. What a privilege it was to go there at the end of a busy day after discussions concerning the depravity of others.

Our group met after dinner for Cecilia Moran's welcome, logistics, etc. and to express appreciation for the Good News Bears we found on our beds upon arrival.

Day 2: The next morning we took the shuttle bus to the BART (subway). Twenty minutes later we exited in the middle of downtown SF. Nordstrom's and fine stores were across the street. Four blocks away we were in the "Tenderloin" district, stepping over 'street people' asleep on the sidewalk. At the **GLIDE CHURCH** we served 800 lunches cafeteria style in 1 ½ hours! A staff of 30 and eighty-five volunteers a day are needed for their **Daily Free Meals Program**. Started in 1969 as a potluck for fifty of the city's poor, homeless, and hungry, they now serve up to 2,400 meals a day, 364 days a year. It is a spiritual movement where all are welcome. Their motto: "We serve each other. We change the world." What an introduction to San Francisco!

Taking a wrong turn, we walked about 14 blocks **up** and down hills to the **Donaldina Cameron House**. She was a 23 year old sewing teacher at the Presbyterian Mission when she founded this house in 1874. She saved thousands of Chinese girls from indentured servitude and human trafficking at a time when there were 2000 men for each woman. Today Cameron House serves the needs disadvantaged and immigrant Asian youth and families in the community. It offers faith-based programs for youth in addition to social services for women. It is a marvelous place today as in the past.

Walking eight blocks back to a BART station, the rides back to Mercy Center were greatly appreciated. We had time to freshen up before dinner and then joined the PW Synod of the Pacific Gathering being held at Mercy Center. Introductions were made after the service and Rev. Young Me Morris discussed the Horizon Bible Study.

Day 3: we joined the Synodwide Gathering for a Bible Study. Three talks followed:

**Welcoming the stranger:** We listened to the 2008 founder of "**Mercy Beyond Borders (MBB)**, Sr Marilyn Lacey. She began in South Sudan because, in her words, "It was by far the most devastated place I'd ever seen in my decades of doing refugee work". Over 60% of the people are under 24 years old. She is educating girls and young women and encouraging them to develop positive ties between formerly hostile ethnic groups to contribute to the positive development of the country.

**Domestic Violence:** Beverly Upton, Exec Director of the **San Francisco Domestic Violence Consortium (SF DVC)**. spoke about the movement to end violence against women. SF DVC is dedicated to eliminating domestic violence and insuring the basic rights of the safety and well-being of victims and their children. They are having more success than they have had "in recent memory".

**Trafficking:** was addressed by Rev. Brian Wo, Co-Founder and Director of **Partnerships for the Bay Area Anti-Trafficking Coalition (BAATC)**. They make every effort available to equip and engage individuals, civic groups, and non-profits with the best practices to fight against human trafficking and beyond. The full scope of human trafficking is addressed by **over fifty non-profit organizations in the SF Bay Area working to fight human trafficking.**" BAATC works to serve the individual, community, and anti-trafficking organizations. This was the most positive talk I heard regarding the possibility of solving these problems in our society.

The USAME group" met after dinner for an evening of "Cultural Humility" followed by social time, music, activities and refreshments and sleep! Cecilia Moran will chair the evening meetings week and Betty Delaney will conduct four excellent Bible studies.

Day 4: Sept. 25<sup>th</sup> **ORANGE DAY**, - 'A Three Church Sunday'. SF has been multi-cultural for over 150 years. Few churches represent one culture unless the language is different than English; i.e. Russian Orthodox, Latino, etc.

**Lakeside Presbyterian Church** - Established in a middle-class neighborhood, had a traditional multi-cultural service with a modern twist that was enjoyed by all.

Betty Delaney introduced us at delicious lunch was that hosted by **Ingleside Presbyterian Church**, a well-established church for American's of African descent. It is on the list of SF "Things To see" due to thousands of newspaper and magazine pictures on the walls pertaining to their race. Clippings

are on the ceilings and walls of all rooms, including restrooms, offices, kitchen, and even in the basement.

Sunday afternoon included a bus tour of San Francisco. We actually walked a few blocks at Fisherman's wharf. Then Linda Lee and Cindy Joe shepherded us to the old **Chinatown Presbyterian Church**. Damaged in the 1989 earthquake, a lovely sanctuary has been built on the top floor.

A wonderful meal was provided at Chef Hung's Restaurant. It was full of excellent traditional Chinese dishes. Returning to Mercy Center, we learned that now we will meet each evening for debriefing from Cecilia Moran and four devotions by Betty Delaney.

Day 5: This morning we boarded a bus with Rosaleen Zisch and headed south to the San Jose Presbytery. A couple of hours after leaving Mercy Center, we arrived at the **Emmaus House** in Hollister, Ca. This 'safe house' was built in 2006 by the community to provide shelter and assistance for up to 25 victims of domestic abuse. The Presbyterian church, non-profit groups, volunteers and trained advocates keep the home going. Target donates over-the-counter items to be used by residents. Some rooms were large enough to include a baby bed and two beds. Emmaus House was a recipient of a PW Thank You Offering grant of \$20,000 that assisted during early stages of development.

The Contrast was noted when we had lunch at the beautiful San Juan Golf Club, especially since the temperature that day was 101 degrees. We did not see any farm workers.

Off to San Jose, Ca, where we visited **Immanuel House**, a transitional house for refugees that was funded by the Presbytery. This is part of a U.S. resettlement program in partnership with state and local governments. It provides care for refugees who have a "well-founded fear of persecution" until they become self-sufficient in their new communities. The first immigrants were welcomed in November 2015. It accommodates up to 14 men who are adjusting to life in the USA. There is a private apartment for the resident managers. Immanuel House Refugee Projects operates as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization under the Presbytery of San Jose.

Day 6: OAKLAND Now we go into a rough place in the SF Bay area. **Bay Area Women Against Rape "BAWAR"**. Formed in 1971, BAWAR is the nation's first rape crisis center to provide 24-hour comprehensive services for survivors of sexual assault. Due to an alarming increase in sexual exploitation in Alameda County, they implemented a new program to address the needs of both children and adult victims living with ever increasing trauma. Sexual Trafficking has increased to the extent that the drug trade has been reduced by half since more money is gained forcing one person to provide sex on a regular basis. Hospitals and/or police departments, and the court system work with BARAW to help all victims. This is a wonderful program that has stayed true to its purpose over the decades, supporting hundreds of thousands of survivors that can receive quality counseling and educating the community about issues surrounding sexual assault.

Lunch was at a neighborhood Hispanic restaurant. Oakland, CA like SF is a "Sanctuary City". This means that illegal immigrants cannot be arrested or prosecuted. We visited **Promera Iglesia Presbiteriana Hispana** after lunch, where services are conducted in Spanish. CRE Irma Hernandez Showed us the church and told of their services. Rev Deborah Lee, of the United Church of Christ, has worked at the intersection of faith and social justice for over 25 years as an educator and organizer on issues of race, gender, a just economy, anti-militarism, LGBTQ inclusion and

immigration. She is Senior Program Director of Immigration, with the **Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity** which believes that every person is sacred across all borders. She works with faith communities to engage, accompany and advocate for the fair treatment and dignity of immigrants.

Day 7: Today is a San Francisco day. Once again we took BART into the city and walked two blocks to the **San Francisco Department on the Status of Women**. The mission of this city and county department is to “promote equitable treatment and fosters the advancement of women and girls through policies, legislation, and programs, both within the City and County governments and the private sector”. SF also became the first city to adopt an ordinance for “LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN.” This was, and is, the guide through which they work. I am truly impressed with this undertaking to advance women’s human rights.

We had a self-guided tour of the interior of the beautiful SF City Hall. Then walked six blocks to the Ministries office where we had lunch in a conference room.

Next we were taken to the **San Francisco SafeHouse** by Doreen and Cindy. It is one of only six residential programs in the country devoted to supporting women in leaving the traumatization of prostitution. Ten women at a time are in a safe, sober, and confidential location for an eighteen month transitional program.

SF SafeHouse was founded in 1998 by Rev Glenna Hope, a Presbyterian minister who was known for decades of service to the poorest neighborhoods in San Francisco. Now 81, Rev. Hope came out of retirement to meet us. She began SafeHouse in response to a series of brutal murders and assaults of prostituted women in the mid 1990’s. She found a building but did not have the funding to get started. Upon someone’s suggestion that she ask Presbyterian Women for support, she quickly filled out a form, guessing at the requested amount needed, and sent it in the next day. Imagine her surprise when she opened a letter from PW that sent her \$500,000 from the Birthday Offering. This provided a financial base that enabled her to develop this wonderful organization. She said it was very important for her to come and thank us for all that PW does.

Day 8: MERCY CENTER – We slept in!

This last active day started with a talk by Rita Mancera about **Puerta de la Costa Sur** in Pescadero, CA. It is located south east of San Francisco in San Mateo county. This is a small city where Latino immigration is important. Yet, it is in a diverse county of the high incomes, education, (the Silicon Valley and Stanford for example) and this small community of lower-income citizens. Puerta de la Sur is often the first and only stop for 1,500 immigrants and citizen’s a year who need support while trying to survive.

Following lunch, we heard from Patricia Scott, Exec. Director of the new **BOOKER T. WASHINGTON Community Service Center** (BTWCSC). They are replacing the existing facility with a ‘state of the art’ mixed use facility that will include mixed income housing with 25 units for adults and 25 dedicated to transition-age youth. It will include a new community Center, gymnasium and playground. The low-income housing provide activities, counseling and educational programs for disadvantage youth. They have found a location considered ‘neutral ground’ by surrounding gangs and hope to help youth become healthy productive adults. This is a huge challenge. But, she is excited about the future for the families who will get to experience the services offered.

We had free time, de-briefings, and evaluations this afternoon. Tomorrow was a travel day for those returning home. So, Devotions and good-byes closed the day.

I want to complement the Cecilia Moran (Churchwide CT USAME Chairperson), Katharine Reeves, and the local planning committee\* for an outstanding experience from which we can build a base for program activities during the next two years. The sequence of experiences, speakers, times to rest, listen and learn, travel arrangements, variety of activities, education, and opportunity to think could not have been better planned and executed. Their active commitment and participation in the experience enabled us to have an opportunity for real growth. This is further reflected in their choice of Mercy Center as the base of our activities. That was wonderful!

All of the locations visited and speakers are supported by faith-based' groups to one extent or another and all are welcome. I did not feel animosity toward Christianity, even from government representatives. Separation of church and state does not appear to be an issue with anyone. The focus is on solving problems. Dedicated and caring Presbyterian women were involved with each of the non-profit organizations visited.

The work by those who help these groups address the challenges involved with the issues of trafficking and violence in our society is amazing. There is reason to believe that these vile scourges on humanity will be increasing in the future due to the growth of social media and technology. Thankfully, the people in our society who are working against its proliferation, really do care. We are ready to work beside them with faith in God's help to bring Love, Hope, Peace and ultimately, a 'quiet soul' to victims and society.

Thanks be to God.

Janet Theus

\*Connie Clark, Betty Delaney, Doreen Der-McCloud, Claudia Hamm, Jeanette Huie, Cynthia Joe, Diana Lim, and Cecilia Moran – Churchwide CT USAME Chairman