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The Colombis Partnership 30th Anniversary
Celebrations in Barranquilla and Dayton
June – July 2026



Over the past month five churches from Presbytery of the Miami Valley celebrated the 30th Anniversary of our Partnership with their sister churches from the North Coast Presbytery. This is a major feat in our presbytery and can be seen as an example of how true partnerships can endure and thrive over the decades. During these weeks there were two different celebrations planned: one in June in Barranquilla, Colombia, and one in July around Dayton, Ohio. While these celebrations had moments of church-to-church fellowship and worship, the majority of the events on both sides focused on the presbytery-to-presbytery relationships.

18 participants travelled from the Miami Valley Presbytery to Barranquilla in June. They traveled with members of the other four church partners, as well as Executive Presbyter Terry Kukuk, representing the Miami Valley Presbytery, and Executive Presbyter Chip Hardwick, representing the Covenant Synod. We had many events planned, including a tour of Barranquilla which focused on the new art scene developing in one of the districts; a tour of the colonial town of Cartagena; meals with our hosts; and two liturgies. One was a celebration, church-to-church, in which each sister church was visited.

During the tour of Barranquilla, we learned that local artisans have begun taking ownership of portraying the culture of Barranquilla and by extension Colombia. They have started creating two streets of murals, with paintings done voluntarily by local artisans which showcase the different aspects of Colombian culture. The group visited many important sites in the life of world-acclaimed author Gabriel Garcia Marquez during their tour as well. In Cartagena the group witnessed both the Spanish influence of Colombia by the walled city, as well as the local indigenous tribes as they visited the Gold Museum and got to witness the exquisite pieces that the local tribes were making prior to the Spanish arrival.

We had many times to eat and visit with our local hosts, including some time on the beach as well as a leadership meeting between Terry Kukuk and the Leadership Council of the North Coast Presbytery. One of our most exquisite meals was Friday evening, where we ate at a rooftop restaurant with many of our hosts and looked out over the Barranquillan skyline.

The major event of our Colombian events was shifted slightly as Colombia had a run-off election while we were there. This meant that Sunday night's liturgy service had to be moved to Friday night, but it all worked out in the end. The service was a great celebration of the partnership. Rev. Chip Hardwick gave the sermon where he talked about not spending all of our time looking backwards on the last 30 years, but also looking forward into the next 30. There was lively music, and a joint communion service during that event, even a conga line to finish the service. Our hosts gave us gifts of a plaque, currently on rotation through our various churches; they gave all the pastors a new stole, made specifically for the occasion; and they gave each visitor a pin with the 30th Anniversary symbol that they had created.

Two weeks after visiting our brothers and sisters in Colombia, we welcomed a delegation of 12 from the North Coast Presbytery to the Miami Valley Presbytery. We continued the celebrations with some leadership led outings to the Armstrong Air & Space Museum, a co-operative farm near Sydney where we heard about what the Springfield church is doing to help their Haitian community members, as well as a visit to Kirkmont where we had a cookout with the campers there. As many of the Colombian delegation had either attended Kirkmont themselves, or had family members who had participated, this was an important trip for them to make.

Saturday morning, leadership meetings were held with our Colombian delegation, sister church leadership, and members of the Miami Valley Presbytery Leadership Council. This was a wonderful way to get the conversation started on not only reminiscing on the past 30 years but also looking forward to the next 30 years. The latest agreement that we can find is from 2008, so it was decided that we need to update this; and as good Presbyterians, we

decided to send it to the committees to continue that work, as it will take multiple discussions. During our time together, we reminded ourselves that God was also part of this conversation and therefore welcomed everyone to the table in the sacrament of Holy Communion.

The events finished Sunday evening, with a liturgy and dinner at Covenant – Springboro. As with every event over the celebrations, we had bilingual prayers and songs, as well as a time to remember those who paved the way at the start of this partnership but who have passed on, as well as a reaffirmation of Baptism. Our Colombian partners began confused by this piece as this is not part of their practice, but upon reminding us all that we are one body of Christ, joined together through our shared baptism, many remarked that they were going to take that back to their churches to do as well.

While both trips were short and jam packed with events and outings, they were also full of meaningful time together. We laughed together and shared stories of the past 30 years. We agreed that both countries are in troubling times, but we will work together to make things better. Most importantly, however, we reminded each other that we are not in this alone. None of our sister churches walk alone, but are loved by both God and their brothers and sisters in Christ, despite our differences...