

From the Proceedings of Salem Presbytery – Eighty-Second Stated Meeting on April 21, 2009
Approved an official covenant relationship between Tzeltal Synod
and Salem Presbytery for a period of five years.

**A COVENANT OF AGREEMENT BETWEEN
THE TZELTAL SYNOD OF THE NATIONAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF MEXICO
AND
THE PRESBYTERY OF SALEM OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)**

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

As Christians, we are called to be a Church of Pentecost. On the day of Pentecost, the Jewish celebration of renewing their covenant with the sovereign lord of creation, people from nations all over the world gathered in Jerusalem. (Acts 2:1-12) In a reversal of the divisions of the world reflected in the story of the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9), these people, while continuing to speak each in their own language, were united by the singular message of God's love that both respected and transcended their distinct languages and cultures.

The Tzeltal Synod and the Presbytery of Salem, guided by that same spirit, seek to give witness to our common Lord by reaching across the barriers of language and cultures and being enriched by our distinctiveness while being united by God's reconciling love. We enter into this relationship not only for our mutual benefit but also as a testimony to the world of shalom that God seeks for all of us.

We acknowledge that Christ's redemption is for all ethnicities. This is evident in John's vision (Revelation 7:9-10) as every language is valued. Thus the values of all cultures and peoples and languages may contribute to the Reign of God.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

From the Perspective of the North Carolinian Presbyterians

Salem Presbytery has been sponsoring short-term, cross-cultural mission trips to Mexico since 1994 and to Chiapas since 2002. Salem's goal has been to offer an opportunity for both those experienced and inexperienced in international mission to join others from the Presbytery in service and worship across cultural boundaries. Over 450 members of approximately 25 Salem churches have made one and sometime multiple visits over the past 15 years to 16 cities and villages in Mexico. Salem construction and medical teams have worked side by side with Spanish and Indigenous Presbyterians to build or update clinics, sanctuaries, schools and church buildings and they have treated over 7,500 clinic patients.

Since 2003, Salem's focus has been to work with the Tzeltal Presbyterian church in Chiapas. More than 20 mission teams have visited, worked and worshipped with churches from the three Tzeltal Presbyteries which make up the Tzeltal Synod. Through these trips, relationships have been formed which have transformed lives on both sides of the Mexican border. Members from Salem Presbytery pray daily for their brothers and sisters in Christ in Chiapas. We seek God's will and His blessing on the establishment of a covenant relationship between Salem Presbytery and the Tzeltal Synod.

From the Perspective of the Tzeltal Presbyterians

The Tzeltal Church of Bachajon in Chiapas was founded in 1950 thanks to the work of Wycliffe Institute missionaries Florencia Slocum and Mariana Gerdel of the Wycliffe Institute who had moved to the area. A translation of the New Testament into the Bachajon Tzeltal was dedicated in 1965. At that time the Reformed Church began its ministry among the Tzeltal people. Presbyterianism was finally embraced by our people in the 1980s; and in the 1990s we came to realize the full extent of the Presbyterian tradition outside Mexico. A relationship with Salem Presbytery was begun in 2003 after Tzeltal congregations worked in partnership with Presbyterians of a different language and culture. These short term mission trips sponsored by Salem Presbytery have proven to be a blessing in opening our eyes to the realities of other Presbyterian churches. Our faith has been strengthened by worshipping together with Presbyterians of other lands with whom we have been able to worship God together and fulfill the Great Commission working side by side.

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF THE COVENANT

In the name of God our Creator, Christ our Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit our Sustainer:

- We affirm our mutual call to give faithful witness to the unity of the Church that is beyond any human boundaries.
- We state our conviction that by engaging in mission together we will share with one another God's love and grace that crosses all national, political, cultural, and economic barriers.
- We express our hope that the partnership between Tzeltal Synod and Salem Presbytery will contribute to further the Kingdom of God among all our constituents.

We believe that in Jesus Christ God calls all Christians into a covenant relationship with God, and with brothers and sisters in faith, not only individually but as congregations and governing bodies. The broad purpose of our covenant relationships is to respond to God's grace in Jesus Christ, and to glorify God while enjoying all the promises of God that are set before us in the Scriptures. Within the church, God has given us this great commission: to make disciples of all nations, baptizing all those whom God calls, and teaching them to observe all that Jesus commands. In fulfillment of our commission, we rely solely upon the grace of God. By the power of the Holy Spirit at work within us and through us, we believe the promise of Jesus Christ, namely, that he is with us and will continue to be present to us to the end of this age.

We believe that God is calling the Presbytery of Salem and the Tzeltal Synod into a particular covenant relationship, one that will glorify God, build up the Body of Christ in both North Carolina and Chiapas, and wherever the Spirit leads us in mutual service and that will serve to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Specifically, we promise before God and to one another, and intend to fulfill with God's help, certain mutual endeavors, as partners in the gospel of Jesus Christ. In fulfillment of these endeavors, we acknowledge our mutual sinfulness and need of grace, our mutual desire to serve God as faithful

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disciples of Jesus Christ, our call from God to submit to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, holding each other accountable for our service and partnership. We pledge to be truthful to one another, always speaking the truth in love. We pledge to seek mutual understanding, knowing that cross-cultural ministry requires patient listening and prayerful discernment. We pledge to be gentle in the Spirit with one another, believing that through humility and kindness the barriers that arise from cultural differences and the barriers that arise as the result of our human sinfulness and limitations can be overcome. With God's help and our active service, we believe that this covenant can produce an abundant harvest for the kingdom of God.

OUR MUTUAL ENDEAVORS

A. Mutual Prayer and Encouragement

Both the Tzeltal Synod and Salem Presbytery will provide a means for churches, congregations, missions, and pastors to establish particular relationships in which we may pray for one another, making a point when possible to know each others' particular needs, joys, and concerns.

B. Mutual Education of Pastors and Congregations

1. The Presbytery of Salem will seek to be a partner in the continuing education of the Tzeltal Synod pastors, and as doors open in ministry, the continuing education of Tzeltal elders, churches and congregations. The Tzeltal Synod officers will be responsible for identifying the specific topics and needs of its pastors, lay pastors, congregations and elders.

The Presbytery of Salem will seek to support the continuing education ministries of the Tzeltal Synod by sending teachers and facilitators from the US. It is Salem Presbytery's desire that these teachers and facilitators be introduced to ministry in Chiapas through hands-on participation at the congregational level during their tenure in the Tzeltal Synod. It is the testimony of past teachers from North Carolina that they return to Salem Presbytery from Chiapas as better equipped and more faithful servants of Jesus Christ in the PCUSA.

When local educational initiatives better serve the Tzeltal Synod, Salem Presbytery will seek to lend financial support to those local ministries.

2. The Tzeltal Synod will seek to identify individuals within their presbyteries who can travel to Salem Presbytery, facilitated by the presbytery, and educate the PCUSA pastors and congregations on life and ministry in Chiapas, including topics that are of particular importance to understanding cross-cultural ministries, both in Chiapas in the PCUSA. For example, it would be of great benefit to the USA Presbyterians to better understand:

- i. Life and Ministry of the Indigenous Church in Chiapas
- ii. The Impact of the USA Migrant System in Southern Mexico, on communities and churches
- iii. Models of Evangelism in Chiapas and Ministry in the Tzeltal Cross-cultural context

C. Mutual Mission

1. The Tzeltal Synod and Salem Presbytery will continue to serve together in cross-cultural ministries through the sending and receiving of medical mission teams and construction groups in the late spring and summer months.
2. Both the Tzeltal Synod and Salem Presbytery will be open to the Spirit of God in discovering areas of ministry and outreach, both in the USA and in southern Mexico, where our partnership can serve to extend the reach of Jesus Christ into the world.
Examples of possible mission endeavors:
 - i. Latino ministries/outreach/evangelism in Salem Presbytery
 - ii. Cross Cultural Mission in other parts of Mexico.
 - iii. Building or strengthening ministries for, by, and with women in our presbyteries and churches.
 - iv. Ministry with youth: strengthen and train youth of our congregations in their understanding of the mission and vision of the church (United States-Mexico)

In light of these declarations and with these hopes we propose to establish an official covenantal relationship between the Tzeltal Synod and the Presbytery of Salem for a period of five years beginning in February, 2009.