

They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat,
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. *Isaiah 65:22*

Good Work

Kristen Gaydos from the national church staff accompanied Jihyun Oh and Jermaine Ross-Allam last weekend, as we celebrated the return of Siban'gna to the Gabrieleno-Tongva people. Kristen came to document the event, and she shared the article from the Presbyterian News Service and a shared folder of her great photos. So I want to share some last thoughts and images of this moment in history.

The [Presbyterian News Service article](#) was based on the eloquent press release written by Mona Morales Recalde. There were so many people who contributed to this action, but Mona was the engine that drove it home. Like most Indigenous Christians I know, and many Christians whose roots lay outside of Western Europe, Mona holds within her two sometimes competing identities; in Mona's case, that of **Indigenous leader** (enrolled member of the Gabrieleno Tongva San Gabriel Band of Mission Indians and elected Commissioner of the Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian Commission) and **Christian presbyter** (ruling elder member of La Verne Heights Presbyterian Church and member of this presbytery's Justice Peacemaking and Mission Committee). As committed as she



is to love and justice for her tribe, it was Mona who first pushed me to get to know the Clergy Community Coalition, the ecumenical group in Pasadena that has since become one of the most significant driving forces for the rebuilding of Altadena, and through her connection with the CCC we learned of the immigrant families who were living in the severely damaged apartment building in Altadena, allowing us to provide support for them. I love this photo that shows several generations of faith and tradition and joy for the Tongva people.

I am thankful for the presence of Jihyun Oh and Jermaine Ross-Allam. Both of them were truly moved by the event, and another national staff person told me later how back in Louisville (the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s headquarters), they shared the news of San Gabriel Presbytery's good work. Jihyun had to walk a difficult line in her sermon, because while she accepted my suggestion of Isaiah 65:17-25 for the Scripture lesson, she was painfully aware that this text has been used to justify Israel's human rights abuses against the Palestinian people. Personally I am saddened by this, because the concept of people being able to use the products of their labor is used in multiple ways throughout the Hebrew Bible to describe justice. In fact, while God pointed out to the people of Israel that they are being given "a land with fine, large cities that you did not build," (Deut. 6:10b) that gift can be taken from them, as in Amos 5:11:

because you trample on the poor
and take from them levies of grain,
you have built houses of hewn stone,
but you shall not live in them;
you have planted pleasant vineyards,
but you shall not drink their wine.



Isaiah 65 uses this concept to demonstrate what I consider true shalom—the completion of God's plan for justice and restoration, a plan not for leisure and luxury, but for the sovereignty of work.

As I read some of the articles about the event, they all seem to repeat an aside I made, that La Casa de San Gabriel was established to serve primarily the Latino community. While this is true, the lack of context makes it sound like the land was taken from one oppressed people to give to another. For that reason, I am most grateful for Elder Al Juarez of Pasadena Presbyterian Church, who spoke so movingly last November as a proud Latino alum of another house of neighborly service. He spoke of his gratitude for growing up with this Presbyterian ministry, and how to this day he is Presbyterian, but that there are now Latino churches in San Gabriel Presbytery, and it is time for another people to rise up at this site. And I was thrilled with the enthusiastic presence of the Lizárraga family at the celebration, with Michael speaking so beautifully about his grandparents Rev. César and Angelita and their ministry, and his family's unequivocal happiness that the land has now been returned to the Tongva people. This picture includes the family and Denise Menchaca, Mayor of San Gabriel and Chair of La Casa's Board of Directors; her unwavering support made the transition all the more joyous. They all embody the true sense of stewardship, as they and the Tongva people see the gift of Creation not as something to be hoarded and controlled, but to be cared for and utilized and shared as together they live and serve God.



Last but certainly not least, I want to share the pictures of the most joyous of administrative commissions: Moderator N'Yisrela Watts-Afriyie, Amy Mendez, Mona Morales Recalde, Patrick Perry, and Dave Tomlinson. N'Yisrela shared that the AC represents the "mosaic of Godly diversity" that San Gabriel Presbytery seeks to be, not only in culture but in gifts and expertise that enabled them to accomplish the many tasks required for the smooth transfer. Dave is holding up the declaration that was created thanks to the calligraphy skills of Rebecca Prichard.



We are living in terrible times. May we not forget the moments of light, and hope, and justice that God offers to and through us. May we continue to strive to be that light, and hope, and justice for others.

Blessings,
Wendy

