

Stewardship Talk – Joining God’s Work in Our Community

October 18, 2026

“Come, now is the time to worship. Come, now is the time to give your heart.”

The sounds of this familiar praise song echoed down the stairwell of Posada La Merced as our small group arrived in Antigua Guatemala to begin our mission trip. That trip was followed by eight others to help Camino Seguro (Safe Passage), first in their schools in the church and house at the edge of the Guatemalan City dump, then in the building of their new school. Since then the project has opened a new preschool and middle school and provides a full-day holistic education for 550 students, preschool through high school.

Now, let me tell you a story about the “angel of the garbage dump.” Maine-native Hanley Denning took time off after graduating from Bowdoin College before starting graduate school to work for an NGO in Guatemala. A nun took her to the Guatemalan City dump where she was horrified by garbage pickers competing for the garbage dumped by the trucks, children not in school and toddlers playing amid the rats. She called her family in Maine, told them she wasn’t coming home, asked them to sell her belongings and to wire her the money. Then she launched the nonprofit Camino Seguro, first in a church and house on the edge of the dump and then in a new school. For the first time many “children of the dump” had three meals a day and full-day education. Sadly, Hanley died when a “chicken bus” drove head-on into the vehicle in which she was riding coming home across the mountain from Guatemala City to Antigua. The project, however, is thriving, providing one of the highest quality educations in Guatemala as well as health care, social workers and psychologists.

We were fortunate to meet Hanley on our trips. She shared with us Camino Seguro’s mission to provide a transformative experience for its students in a loving and supportive environment as well as to cultivate lasting change for their families. Her lasting influence on the children and families of the Guatemala City dump is why they call her the “angel of the garbage dump.”

Being present. That was what Handley was about. That was what our mission trips were about. It was about some work, of course, but it was more about our presence. About seeing the image of God in these children and families. About showing them that they matter, that they are important. Jesus understood the importance of being present. He spent his time being present with those in pain and need. Thersa of Avila understood this. Yesterday was her feast day. “Christ has no hands but yours, no feet but yours...” she wrote.

Money, though needed, is transactional. Presence is relational. It says “I see you. You are important.” Christianity is relational. It is about recognizing the image of God in the poorest and neediest among us.

Grace’s work in the community is relational. It is about being present for those in need around us, being Christ’s hands and feet on our community. We feed at Hope Crisis Ministry and at Bethel House Shelter. We house, feed and eat with the homeless through our participation in Family Promise. We support the children awaiting foster care at Isaiah House. We volunteer at Manna House food pantry. We are represented at Rock Hill’s Race and Reconciliation group. We are present. We listen to people’s stories. We let them know that they matter.

I can’t physically make the Guatemala trip anymore, but I have found joy and fulfillment through service on Grace’s outreach committee and preparing and eating dinner with Family Promise families. On Tuesdays I join a friend and fellow church member volunteering at the Hospice Care Closet where we provide free medical supplies to those in need. It is gift to be present with them and to hear their often painful stories.

Being present is a relational act. It is a giving, not of money, but of time and talents. I invite you to join God’s work in our community by giving your time and talents to one of our outreach ministries, to be present. I promise you will receive more than you give. At least that’s what I found. Riding home across the mountain on the “chicken bus” from the city to Antigua after a long day at the Project dog tired and fulfilled.