

ALUMNA ENCOURAGES CHURCH TO BECOME MISSION MINDED

As a student at Pittsburgh Seminary, Sarah Ott '10 relished the opportunity to participate in international mission work through the World Mission Initiative. Financial scholarships enabled her to go on annual WMI trips that allowed her to discover “how vast God’s kingdom truly is and how I can be a part of the work God is doing” in the world.

Now as pastor of First UPC in Dubois, Pa., the Rev. Ott sees a large part of her leadership role as “help[ing] my congregation develop an understanding of mission that goes beyond their church walls, and even beyond their community.” Recognizing both local service and national and international mission work as faithful and important, she guides her congregation in forming relationships with Christians near and far to take the gospel to “all nations.”



And she guides them not only in word but also in action: Sarah recently co-led a WMI trip to the U.S./Mexico border that included church members and PTS students. “During my first WMI trip to Mexico,” Sarah reflects, “I was deeply touched by the situation along the border for migrant workers . . . I knew then that [when I became a pastor] I wanted my congregation to hear the stories of immigration first hand . . . to form an opinion not dictated by media, but by one-on-one conversations with those directly affected by the issue.” The opinions of the full-time theology students and Sarah’s parishioners matured through their mutually enriching discussion.

“We spent a week with Frontera de Cristo, a PC(USA) mission site, connecting with people and organizations working along the border. We met with the staff of Just Coffee, a cooperative created from a micro loan that eliminates the ‘middle-man,’ allowing 100 percent of the profit to go directly back to the growers. This form of business provides thriving incomes that include retirement benefits and health insurance. When people can provide adequately for their families, the pressure to cross the border illegally for work is eliminated.”

From experience, Sarah advocates that “speaking to people, building relationships, and getting involved with a need is how we best learn.” After the trip, for example, a member of their team randomly learned about aquaponic gardening. John (pictured right with Sarah) immediately thought about his new friends in Mexico doing community gardening. He started an aquaponic garden at First UPC to provide fresh vegetables to their community and now wants to teach this technique to his new friends in Mexico. “The greatest blessing is to watch the Holy Spirit work through John and not necessarily through me . . . to watch his leadership skills develop and see him use his God-given gifts and abilities,” says Sarah.

Since the WMI trip, Sarah’s church has also become a partner with Just Coffee. “We recently co-hosted a fair trade market featuring Just Coffee and other gifts from around the world. Soon we’ll be producing a series of cable TV programs about our garden. And this fall we’ll send another group to the border to continue working and building our relationships”—to continue bridging the Word and the world.

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