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LSDI Executive Summary

“God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.”
Hebrews 6: 9-12

Instead of leaving home this summer, I decided to grow in a place both familiar and dear to my heart. My internship at West Rome United Methodist Church was just a short bike ride away from my home in Rome, Georgia.

The nature of my work requires a bit of back information. During the 1970's and 80's, WRUMC was one of the largest churches in Floyd County. A series of controversies and changing demographics has reduced the once-thriving church to a population of about 70 active members. Assessments by the Methodist Union projected that the church would literally die out before 2013 - with a population of elderly individuals, little hope remained for its existence today. However, numbers don't factor in God's persistent grace. The church has survived as a larger small church, but the Union wants to see it revived to its past size. Its order: minister to the surrounding community to spur growth.

My story connects to West Rome and the Lilly foundation at this very point. You see, most neighborhoods near the church house Guatemalan and Mexican immigrants whose indigenous heritage has made them the least respected of the Spanish-speaking nations. Though the Union's orders came as a shock to the primarily middle class, white members of West Rome, God's love worked in the hearts of the mission-oriented congregation and they resolved to share Christ's love with whoever needed a church home. I came to WRUMC to direct the congregation's efforts in effective ways to foster community.

Pastor Gary McWhorter supervised my efforts, referring me to Hebrews 6: 10-12 as the scriptural basis for my ministry. He taught me that ministry keeps churches alive and encouraged me to try out every possible idea in hopes that a few may prove effective and long-lasting. I combined my experience in Guatemala, Spanish-speaking skills, and research of similar churches to implement a Bread Ministry, garden collective, VBS, puppet theater ministry, and food pantry for poor families affected by cancer that aimed at fostering community among students of the church's ESL class. I was not originally very good at delegation. Maybe I mistakenly thought I could accomplish the church's goals myself, or maybe I was afraid of adding an extra burden on the church. Whatever the reasoning, it took me about three weeks to finally admit that I needed help. As it turns out, the church needed my help too! As women and men volunteered for projects, I noticed they became more intimately tied to the Hispanic ministry. Ladies noted that Guatemalan children were just “cute enough to eat” as one woman often said. Others enjoyed a renewed sense of purpose. Still others took joy in seeing young families use untouched classroom. We were set for community-minded growth!

Though our ministry did experience , as would any nascent endeavor, I can happily count our successes above any setback. God is good and He surely works through the Lilly internship!