

International Peacemaker Rev. Nini Castanheira Visits NCP

“How to Build Peace in Changing Communities”

The Rev. Maria “Nini” Eduarda Castanheira visited National Capital Presbytery, October 13-17, 2008 as a PC(USA) International Peacemaker from Portugal. Rev. Castanheira--or Nini, as she prefers to be called—has a strong ecumenical sensitivity having grown up attending both Baptist and Presbyterian churches and spending holidays at an interdenominational summer camp. After university, she opened a school to teach Portuguese to foreign missionaries for 11 years before deciding to enter seminaries in Portugal and Spain. She is now pastor of a small Presbyterian church in Portugal that welcomes and includes a new immigrant population. This welcoming of immigrants, and in her words, “the other,” is the focus not only of her ministry, but also her peacemaking message. Rev. Castanheira presented her message through a multimedia presentation of music, photos, scriptural quotes and commentary.



With day laborers in Herndon

During her visit, Rev. Castanheira took part in an interfaith dialogue with the All Dulles Area Muslim Society Center and gave multi-media presentations to the Day Laborers in Herndon, VA at Trinity Presbyterian Herndon’s Lunch for the Soul program, and to the War, Peace & Justice Forum at The New York Avenue Presbyterian Church. She met with Rev. Carla Gorrell, NCP’s Associate Presbyter, and they shared their experiences of building and supporting new congregations and welcoming the stranger. The National Capital Presbytery’s Peacemaking Team sponsored her visit through a Peacemaking grant.

Rev. Castanheira’s presentations provided the history and background of both Portugal and the Church in Portugal as well as the story of “welcoming the stranger.” The Igreja Evangelica Presbiteriana (Evangelical Presbyterian Church) in Portugal numbers about 1,500 and is working with the Methodist Church in Portugal to form a Uniting Church. Immigration has made the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Portugal stronger through welcoming the immigrant population into the “Body of Christ” where there is celebration, shared stories of hardship, and emotional and spiritual comfort. In a country that is predominantly Roman Catholic, the program to integrate immigrants within the Evangelical Presbyterian Church has been immensely successful.



At NYAPC War, Peace & Justice

African Angolan and European German and Portugese Pastors minister to small churches spread around the country. Their congregations are a mixture of Africans from the former Portugese colonies of the Cape Verde Islands, Brazil, Guinea Bissau, Angola and Mozambique and more recent arrivals from Ukraine. There are 10 million Portuguese and among the 400 thousand immigrants, there are 44 thousand Muslims living peacefully alongside their Christian neighbors.

When Portugal formed a democracy and liberated its colonies from Portugese rule in the 1970's, life changed dramatically. Strife broke out in the former colonies and unwelcome white colonists returned home to Portugal along with Africans who had fallen out of favor with the dominant tribal leaders. In addition, many Africans from the former colonies migrated to Portugal to earn a better living and hoped that their children would benefit from greater opportunities. The influx of immigrants brought a time of economic development to Portugal, but only because immigrants were willing to work for lower wages and no benefits. As long as the economy was booming, immigration was not a problem. Obtaining citizenship in Portugal is costly. There are many bureaucratic hoops to pass through and it is a long and onerous process. Children born in Portugal to immigrant parents are not automatically granted citizenship. Aliens in Portugal are paid lower wages, discriminated against and their families often live in the poorest conditions without access to basic health care or educational opportunity.

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