

Moments in Mission

Stories and Updates
from Global Ministries
Mission Co-workers



*"Stories have power.
They delight, enchant, touch, teach, recall, inspire,
motivate, challenge. They help us understand.
They imprint a picture on our minds.
Consequently, stories often pack more punch
than sermons.
Want to make a point - or raise an issue?
Tell a story."*

– Janet Litherland





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PRESENCE

Manifesting God's love by living in intentional, committed relationships

Presence provides a bold vision of togetherness. In many cases the most powerful witness we can offer partners, is the willingness to share personally in their times of challenge and of joy. We are also grateful for the presence international partners offer the Church in the United States and Canada, as they share their experiences and understandings of God.

Prasannam



Presence

Haití

DIANE AND TIM FONDERLIN

“Go where your best prayers take you.”
—Frederick Buechner



Tim and I were living and working in Asia when the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami tore a path of destruction across many countries in that part of the world. Tim was quickly asked to work with the rebuilding in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, the area closest to the epicenter of the underwater earthquake that set mountainous waves of water in motion. My work with creating partnerships between churches from around the world and churches within Asia and the Pacific took on a more intentional focus as countless congregations joined together in the rebuilding of homes and lives. It was a tremendous time of ministry and we were especially proud to be a part of Global Ministries' recovery efforts in Banda Aceh.



In the midst of our busy lives, we were taken aback when less than a year later we watched with the rest of the world the plight of those whose lives had been turned upside down by a hurricane called Katrina. Tim and I said to each other, “Look at New Orleans and the need of the people in our own homeland!” and we prayed there might be a way that we could help.



We returned to the U.S. in early 2007 for our itineration and as we spoke with various leaders from Global Ministries we learned there was an opportunity to work with the Katrina Recovery in New Orleans. Shortly thereafter, Tim was called to serve with the South Central Conference of the UCC while I was asked to serve with the Disciples Division of Homeland Ministries. Again, Tim and I were grateful to be a part of the Disciples and UCC's efforts in bringing hope to many who felt they had been "forgotten."



Remembering the words of the prophet Isaiah and the prayer we had made so long ago, "Here are we Lord. Send us," we began conversations with Global Ministries about serving in Haiti following the 2010 earthquake, which had wreaked such havoc on that island nation. This time, however, rather than building houses our focus would be on helping to build lives through education and projects such as micro-savings and micro-enterprise; developing business plans for pastors involved in a chicken cooperative effort; being invited to share in the celebrations of a ministry that removes children from domestic slavery situations; and introducing short-term mission teams to a Haiti that would capture their hearts.



Our time in the mission field has held moments of pure joy as well as times of almost overwhelming sadness. There have been occasions when we have seen as well as experienced "ah hah!" moments of learning. We also realized we needed to hush more and listen better. We went through periods of shaking our heads in disbelief but then reminded ourselves that there are many ways to deal with a given situation.

Has it been worthwhile? Were our actions merciful and conceived in Spirit-filled hearts? Have our lives pointed people to a God who is loving, compassionate, present, righteous, forgiving, generous, faithful, a keeper of promises, holy, sovereign...?



Philip Yancey writes in his book "Vanishing Grace: What Ever Happened to the Good News?" that many people "...view the church not as a change agent that can affect all of society but as a place where like-minded people go to feel better about themselves." He says, "That image of the church stands in sharp contrast to the vision of Jesus, who said little about how believers should behave when we gather together and much about how we can affect the world around us." Yancey goes on to say, "Faith...should have a contagious effect on the broader world" and he describes how Jesus used the images of "yeast...causing the whole loaf to rise, a pinch of salt preserving a slab of meat, the smallest seed in the garden growing into a great tree in which birds of the air come to nest."

Yancey's message encourages us to answer with a resounding "yes!" Living, learning, and serving with God's people around the world has been more than worthwhile, it has been life-changing. We are the ones who have come away with a fuller and richer understanding of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ and we hope that as we have shared some of our stories and experiences you, too, have realized that you have been a part of this ministry.

Your congregation's support of Global Ministries has helped to build bridges between all of us whom God has created and whom God loves. Your prayers have brought comfort and encouragement not only to us but to the people with whom we have lived and served all these years. Truly, "thank you" does not seem adequate but we say it from the depths of our hearts.

We ask prayers for:

- the people Haiti as they make decisions about the leadership of their country in future elections
- wisdom for those in Haiti who work in education, medicine, agriculture, water purification, engineering, the arts, development, local markets, tourism and business and as they strive to build a strong nation
- pastors and church leaders in Haiti as they minister, teach and disciple believers
- safekeeping and good health for Tim and I in our daily activities

In Christ's Peace,
Tim and Diane Fonderlin

Tim and Diane Fonderlin, served with The National Spiritual Council of Churches of Haiti (CONASPEH). Tim worked as a sustainable community development and micro-credit consultant. Diane taught theology at St. Andrew Theological Seminary.

Lesotho

MARK BEHLE



Outdoor School

Ever since he began teaching at Qiloane Primary School (QPS), Mr. Emmanuel Pitso (*right, in blue jacket*) has longed for a proper classroom building. With God's help, support from the local community and international friends, his longing may soon be fulfilled.

Whereas at most schools the words "Let's go outside", said by a teacher, would be music to the ears of primary school students, at QPS the students would love to hear the words, "Let's go inside"! That's because they always have classes outside --- their school is an outdoor school (*left*).



QPS is one of several primary schools of the Lesotho Evangelical Church in Southern Africa (LECSA) that I visited in May with the LECSA Education Secretary Mr. Samuel Senekal and his assistant Mrs. Adelaide Kotele (*addressing students, right*). The purpose of the visits was to scout for the next classroom building project after completing the one at Bolahla Primary School.

Although it is only about 50 miles by road from Morija (and only 15 miles as the crow flies), it still took about 3 hours to reach QPS. When we arrived we found classes being held outside. Small chalkboards leaned against trees. Students sat on pieces of canvas, stones or benches. Teachers marked students' work standing up as there were no tables for them! It





really was an outdoor school. There was an old stone *kerekana* (small church) that must date back many decades and has services on Sundays as it is an outstation of one of the LECSA's parishes.

A look inside the building made it easy to understand why classes were outside and students used their laps as desks. The school furniture amounted to one desk and two benches.



Last month we held a *pitso* (*peet'-so*), or outdoor community meeting, to discuss the possibility of putting up a classroom building. A *pitso* is called by the area chief whenever there is need to discuss issues affecting the community. The chief listens to the various speakers and then, as the last speaker, tries to summarize the views and build consensus for the way forward. The concept dates from the time of King Moshoeshoe I, the founder of the Basotho nation back in the early 1800's.



At the *pitso* to discuss the classroom project there were around 80 men and women gathered to hear the various speakers, including Mr. Pitso and Mr. Senekal. Men and women sat in small groups, men on one side and women on the other, as is the tradition. Besides the chief (*above right, speaking*), also present were the parish minister, the local village headman and the Member of Parliament for the area. The

community's support for the project was evident in that they had already begun working on the road. The last few miles of the rough track leading to the school are quite rocky in places and we noticed that some of the worst spots we encountered in May were noticeably improved. During the *pitso* the community promised to keep working on the road and also pledged to collect water for the project. Since the water source is several hundred yards away from the school site, this will be of great help. If all goes well LECSA hopes to break ground in September or October.



The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans, talks about the future hope we, as Christians, have waiting for us in heaven. He writes, *"For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently."* (8:24-25). While we wait for our ultimate hope to be fulfilled, we can each give evidence of God's love, wherever we are in this world, by helping others to see earthly hopes and dreams fulfilled. I pray that one day Mr. Pitso will no longer have to hope for a classroom building. He won't have to hope for it because it will be there!



Yours in Christ,
Mark Behle

MOROCCO

TYLER REEVE



A Church in Crisis

The Protestant Church in Morocco (Église Évangélique au Maroc, or EEAM) is a church in crisis. This is not a negative thing – a crisis is simply an important moment or a turning point, and that is exactly what the EEAM is experiencing right now.

After declining almost to nonexistence after Morocco's independence from France (and the subsequent exodus of many French citizens), the church began to grow again in the 1980's with the arrival of the first sub-Saharan African students coming to Morocco for their university and graduate school studies. It has grown steadily ever since as more and more students come from elsewhere in Africa and find a home in the increasingly diverse ranks of the only officially recognized protestant church in the country. A church started by European colonists is now more than 90% African.

In a time of personal crisis, one raises existential questions. Who am I? Where do I come from? What do I stand for? The same is true of the church.

After a change in leadership and important questions arising about how the church should function in the face of significant cultural changes and continuing membership growth, everyone is in a period of reflection and self-examination. The church is blessed to be growing in size and enthusiasm, but it is outgrowing the structures and resources that are in place. There are always growing pains in a situation like this, but it is generally understood that this is a chance to prayerfully and intentionally shape the future of the church.



Rev. Karen Thomas Smith, President of the EEAM, leading the congregation of Casablanca in the EEAM's declaration of faith following the 2015 Synod



The Al-Mowafaqa Ecumenical Theological Institute, started in 2012 in collaboration with the Catholic Church in Morocco, has among its students some who have received scholarships through the EEAM and have been working part-time as pastoral interns in various EEAM congregations around Morocco. The first class of these students will graduate next year, and the Church is currently looking for a solution as to how to afford to keep even some of them as full-time pastors after their impending certification.

All of this exists within the context of a country that is gradually becoming a very welcoming place to foreign Christianity. Last year, the National Archives of Morocco requested the archives of the EEAM to incorporate into the National Archives. This was received as a significant step forward in the level of integration and acceptance of the foreign Christian community in Moroccan society. These archives date back to the 1920's and trace the evolution of the Church through the years, and due to the magnitude of the project they are still being sorted through to be submitted.

There was also an event recently held in Morocco which will have repercussions throughout the Middle East and around the world. A conference of about 300 religious leaders and scholars from 120 different countries was held in Marrakesh to discuss the treatment of religious minorities in majority-Muslim countries, and the president of the EEAM, Rev. Karen Thomas-Smith, was invited to address the assembly. The fruit of this gathering was a document, simply called the Marrakesh Declaration, which discusses Islam's historical foundation for dealing with people of other religions and how it is best applied to the present. It refers frequently to the Charter of Medina, written by the Prophet Mohammed, but also discusses current events within the Muslim world. The abject condemnation of violence and the promotion of peace as a foundational principle of Islam, as well as the call to live in local and global community, are expressed in a way that Christians can wholly identify with despite the difference in source material.

The situation facing the Protestant Church in Morocco is different from what it has ever been. While all churches are called to evolve, the EEAM and its surroundings are going through a critical period of significant development. But crisis is opportunity, and the focus is on the future. There is a feeling of optimism in the face of the long-term implications of the decisions being made. With the hope and wisdom that comes from unity in Christ, the EEAM will emerge stronger than ever.

"Peace is the basis of compromise, trust, and coexistence between individuals and societies, irrespective of people's beliefs or socioeconomic status."

(Marrakesh Declaration)

Tyler Reeve

Nicaragua

MAGYOLENE RODRIGUEZ



Drought in Nicaragua

During 2015 I met a farmer; she is supported by the Interchurch Center where I am serving. This woman managed to overcome times of drought that affected Nicaragua and still affect the Central American region due to climate change. Her story impressed me so much as an agronomist and volunteer that I wanted to share her story with you.

Mrs. Marta Gutierrez lives in Vanilla, it is a small community located west of Managua in an area called the dry corridor of Nicaragua. She has dedicated her life to farming to feed her family with the fruits obtained at each harvest.



The drought of the last two years has strongly affected the community where Mrs. Marta lives. She has lost all the crops and harvest, but this drought has not caused her to lose hope in farming. The first planting season in Nicaragua is from May to August, but the rains this year were delayed and arrived two months late. Finally arriving in June, but with little intensity there was not water to plant her crops. For this reason and the poor forecast, Mrs. Marta decided to grow onions irrigated by hand. Later with the support of CIEETS, she received a pump to use water from an underground well and thus irrigate her onions.



A friend of Mrs. Marta gave her a few onion seeds, planting and caring for the seedlings. Through hard work she was able to start her first two hundred plants. She



managed to repeat this process in July, and during September transplanted them. Starting with a small experimental garden to test her new crop, she began watering the plants twice a day for two hours. She did this for three months – moving water with buckets from a watering hole a few hundred meters from the garden.

After this successful experiment, Mrs. Marta asked CIEETS for onion seeds to continue farming, and with their support cultivated five thousand plants. Mrs. Marta watered her plants for three months and was able to harvest a good crop - watered by hand and grown organically. With the onions, she managed to get money to buy food in the harvest she could not otherwise obtain. She wants to continue growing her onions or other crops, even if it requires the sacrifice of carrying every drop of water by hand, because she wants to stay on their land and hopes for further training and resources to support her family.



Dear brothers and sisters, let us pray for Nicaraguan families live off the land and water is an essential resource for survival, I encourage you to keep fervent in their congregations to pray for the volunteers who are serving around the world support the neediest families on the planet.

Durante el año 2015 conocí a una productora, ella es apoyada por el Centro Intereclesial de Estudios Teológicos y Sociales (CIEETS), donde estoy sirviendo. Esto marcó mucho mi vida como agrónoma sobre todo porque esta mujer logró sobreponerse a los tiempos de sequía que han afectado a Nicaragua y que dicho país sigue enfrentando desde hace un par de años debido al cambio climático. Es por esto que quiero compartir parte de su historia con ustedes.





Doña Marta Gutiérrez vive en la Vainilla, una pequeña comunidad ubicada en el corredor seco de Nicaragua. Ella ha dedicado su vida a cultivar la tierra para alimentar a su familia con los frutos de la tierra obtenidos cada cosecha. La sequía de los últimos dos años ha afectado fuertemente a la comunidad donde vive la señora Marta. Ella ha perdido todas las siembras y no ha podido cosechar. Ahora bien, esta situación de falta de agua no ha sido un factor para hacer perder sus esperanzas en lo que mejor sabe hacer, que es cultivar la tierra. La primera época de siembra en Nicaragua corresponde a los meses de mayo a agosto, pero las lluvias llegaron dos meses más tarde, iniciándose en Junio con poca intensidad y sin la cantidad suficiente de agua para sembrar. Por esta razón, y con este pronóstico negativo, la señora Marta decidió cultivar cebollas, regándolas a mano. Gracias al apoyo de CIEETS, obtuvo una bomba para sacar agua desde un pozo subterráneo y de esta forma regar sus cebollas.

Un amigo de doña Marta le regaló un poco de semillas. Con ellas realizó el almácigo, obteniendo doscientas plantas en su primer almácigo, de las cuales logró reproducir en el mes de julio, obteniendo doscientas plantas germinadas. En el mes de septiembre, cuando las plantas tenían tres hojas, comenzó a trasplantarlas a una pequeña huerta experimental para probar su nuevo cultivo. Comenzó regando sus plantas dos veces al día por dos horas, trasladando el agua con baldes desde su pozo de agua a unos 100 metros de la huerta.

Luego de su experimento positivo, la señora Marta pidió semillas de cebollas a CIEETS para continuar cultivando. De ahí, ella elaboró cinco mil plantas de cebollas. Doña Marta estuvo regando sus plantas durante tres meses y logró cosechar buenos frutos en sus tres manzanas cultivadas de manera orgánica, y regadas a mano. Con las cebollas, logró obtener recursos para comprar los alimentos que en la cosecha no pudo obtener. Ella quiere seguir cultivando sus cebollas u otros cultivos aunque sea sacrificado acarrear el agua para regarlas porque ella desea permanecer en su terreno y espera seguir capacitándose y obteniendo recursos para sustentar a su familia.

Queridos hermanos y hermanas, sigamos orando por las familias Nicaragüenses que viven de la tierra y que el agua es un recurso esencial para su sobrevivencia. Les aliento a seguir fervientes en sus congregaciones orando por los voluntarios y voluntarias que estamos sirviendo alrededor del mundo apoyando a las familias más necesitadas del planeta.

Magyolene Rodriguez

Magyolene Rodriguez served as a Long-term volunteer with the Convention of Churches Christian Mission of Nicaragua. She serves in environmental education, food security, and conflict transformation.



Palestine

FAYE AND JOHN BUTTRICK

**In the absence of all hope,
we cry out our cry of hope**



In a shadowed recess of the Palestinian church, a round, shallow, metal container filled with sand holds the lighted candles of worshipper and visitor to the Easter service. As more candles are lighted and placed in containers around the sanctuary, the darkness of the sanctuary fades. The service engages us with music, words, and movement. People enter, pause to light a taper, and briefly pray before finding a seat in the sanctuary. The pews are filled. The hymns sung slowly with strong voices, a few tunes sound familiar to our Western ears.



This image of shadows diminished by light illustrates the final statement in the Kairos Palestine document. www.kairospalestine.ps "In the absence of all hope, we cry out our cry of hope." (10.) Out of the darkness of hopelessness comes the light of faith, hope, and love. (1.5) Out of the occupied Palestinian territories comes "a document of faith and work." (A Message from the Authors).

The words of the Kairos Palestine document, written by clergy and laity of thirteen Christian communions, issue a call to local Christians, Palestinian and Israeli religious and political leaders and civil society, the international community, and to Christians and churches around the world. Now is the Kairos time, they write, God's time breaking in, to heed the reality of Palestinian daily life. This time set aside for creative resistance (4.2.3) to the issues of military occupation which dictate and control the lives of people residing in the occupied Palestinian territories.



Presence



The call to “engage in divestment and in an economic and commercial boycott of everything produced by the occupation” (4.2.6) recognizes that the investments of our churches and the products we buy define our values. While we may want a good return on how we spend our money, there are many avenues for us to use when making our investments and our personal purchases. To divest or boycott says we will not contribute to the restrictions of daily life placed upon the Palestinians. Rather, we accompany the Palestinians as they seek a just resolution whereby Christians, Muslims and Jews can live in the land as neighbors.

The second call of the Kairos Palestine document is to “come and see.” (6.2) Come and experience the hospitality of the Palestinians and walk with them in their daily lives. See the ancient places, the religious sites, but especially meet the people who live and work and farm in the occupied territories.

Meet the farmer who waits in line each morning for the barb wire and metal gates to open so he, his wife and dog can drive their tractor and cart to their fields, now on the other side of this barrier. Some days the gates stay closed or their pass is declared insufficient and they are refused entry. Accept an invitation from a village leader to a delicious meal finished off by a cup of Arabic coffee or hot tea. He shares how the farm land is intentionally polluted by refuse from the nearby illegal Israeli settlement and the children are harassed by settlers as they walk to school.



Meet the children at Rawdat el Zuhur in East Jerusalem where along with math and English they learn about Palestinian culture and form a dance troop. Visit a women’s group in a refugee camp where they share their handiwork skills and market their crafts, experiencing a sense of dignity and accomplishment. Come and see. End the shadows of occupation with the light of faith, hope and love.

Faye and John Buttrick

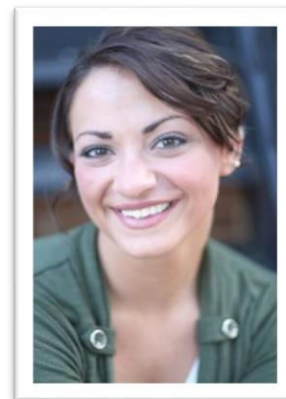
Faye and John Buttrick served as Long-term Volunteers in Palestine. Responsibilities included the coordination of and contribution of a monitoring project in consultation with members of the Kairos Palestine office based in Bethlehem.



Presence

Thailand

KRISTIN WOLF



Life in Thailand

It has been nearly five months since I left the United States to work as a Global Missions Intern in Thailand. I live in a beautiful northern city called Chiang Mai. I enjoy the day to day bustle of street vendors and children on their way to school. Monday through Friday I wake up to the sunrise and the subsequent intercom blasting Katy Perry's 'ROAR' that the children sing along to. I walk maybe a quarter of a mile to the Christian Communications Institute (CCI) office at Payap University. CCI is a Thai folklore biblical storytelling troupe that travels the world telling bible stories incorporating Thai culture, drama, dance, and music. When I arrived they were touring in the schools around Thailand performing 5 days a week, twice a day. They had one show geared towards elementary age children and another for adolescents. The shows included songs the kids would sing along to, a modern drama based on a story from the bible, a sermon by the CCI pastor, and prayer.



The country of Thailand is about .8% Christian, with 95% of the country practicing the Buddhist tradition. When CCI began, most of the team members were Buddhists. Some of these people began performing bible stories through Thai tradition and were able to understand and desired to become Christian as a result. The CCI team is now all Thai Christian members who are active in the local churches around their community.



The CCI team is travelling in northwestern Thailand performing Ligav a Thai folklore drama. Ligav is known for its extravagant backdrops, bright colored costumes, garish jewelry and embellishments, and yodeling song style. The music is made by hand drums, cymbals, and xylophone. Ligav brings communities together. CCI is intentional about performing at small rural churches throughout Thailand who willingly open the performance up to the entire community, Buddhist, Christian, or other. This draws people to the church that would normally never attend and they are told bible stories in a way they can understand and receive it openly.

There is food prepared and the people create Prung Ma Lai necklaces for their favorite actors. These necklaces can be made out of paper chains, or leaves, and have gifts or offerings of money attached to them. The audience members do what Western theatre people would call "breaking the 4th wall." The audience has free rein to interrupt and call things out to their actors, and the actors respond in character. There is no ignoring the audience, the Ligav performers always respond- sometimes verbally, with a gesture or with a laugh, and sometimes by heckling the audience back!



It's exciting and inviting. At whatever point a character strikes the heart of the people, you'll begin to see the people leave their seats with their Prung Ma Lai necklaces in hand. They walk to the foot of the stage and hold the necklace out for the actor that inspired them. Sometimes it is the comedian who gets the big adornment, and other times it's the ingénue, evil character, or person with the most elaborate costume or great singing voice that brings the people to the stage.

The local church will house the CCI team in a large room or provide space for their tents, give them buckets of water to shower and do laundry by hand in, and provide their meals for the duration of their stay for the performance. Once the sun sets, the local church pastor will begin with worship, and then the Ligav begins. What I witness are Thai Christians proclaiming and rejoicing Jesus Christ through their culture.

The CCI team members all have unique testimonies about their faith journeys and sense of calling from God. My hope is that you would keep this team in your prayers and on your hearts this year.

Kristin Wolf

*Kristin Wolf served as a Global Mission Intern
teaching English with the Church
of Christ in Thailand (CCT).*



Mutuality

Walking in hope with others in God's mission

Mutuality means sharing in the visions of partners instead of trying to guide them, and listening instead of lecturing. International partners offer unique projects and programs to serve the needs of their communities as they see them, and Global Ministries offers support of these visions, just as international partners in turn support the work of our denominations in the United States and Canada.

Acompañamiento



Guadeloupe

BETHANY GUY



Accompany

I met S two weeks after her arrival. She was scared. She was tired. She was frustrated. She was heartbroken.

It was her first time in prison. She was separated from her family (including her four kids) and her imprisonment was sudden and unexpected. Beyond that, she was in Guadeloupe – a place that is not her home and is far from her family and friends. She was entering a time of despair, wondering when light would shine through the darkness.

It was my first week on the job as a prison chaplain. I felt prepared and yet completely unprepared at the same time. I took deep breaths. She shared her story. I listened. And at the end of our brief first meeting, I offered to pray. We agreed to continue meeting as often as circumstances would allow.



We were two women sitting in an activity room in the largest prison in the French Caribbean. We were both starting on new (totally different) adventures. And we were both missing family and friends back home, but finding strength and confidence in that shared moment. For a year and a half now I have been meeting with S about once a week. She has shared her fears, her desires, her hopes, her downfalls, her anger, and so much more with me. Another chaplain and member of Men a Lespwa (the benevolent organization of the Reformed Protestant Church) has gone out of her way to search for clothing and requested hygiene products for S, in addition to also regularly checking in with her in the prison. In March, the



Mutuality



chaplains prayed and cried with her as one of her family members entered the prison as well. Later last year, Men a Lespwa worked tirelessly with her social worker to get the electricity in her house turned back on so that she could have the possibility to return home with an electronic monitoring bracelet. And, thanks to the chaplaincy program and Men a Lespwa, she has received Bibles and books full of encouragement and reminders of God's love.

In Global Ministries we like to use the word "accompaniment" quite a bit. It means journeying together. Walking together. Learning together. Loving together. Serving together. And so much more. That is exactly the model that the Reformed Protestant Church, Men a Lespwa, and the Protestant Chaplaincy use here in Guadeloupe as well. It is not a method of judgment or anger, but one full of love, compassion, and strength. The partner recognizes the need to journey together, and S's story is a perfect example of that.



Now, as she is just weeks away from returning home to be with her family, we celebrate with her. We cry tears of joy with her. And we pray for her continued resilience and newfound spirit of strength and desire to be the woman God created her to be. We know that the road she is about to take is not an easy one, but we remain hopeful for her future – knowing that God is with her.

I give thanks for the continued work of the partner and I give thanks for all of you who accompany us in your prayers and with kind, encouraging words. I am grateful that we are on this journey of sharing God's deep and great love together.

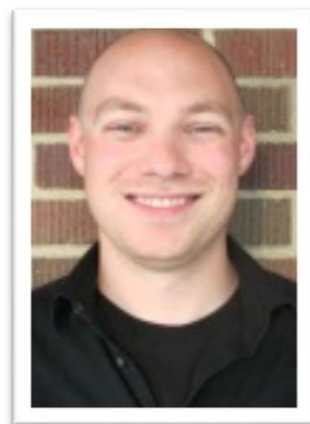
Beth Guy

Kenya

JOEL COOPER

A Visitor is a Blessing

Huriya is a student at Ainsworth Primary School in Nairobi, Kenya's volatile Eastleigh neighborhood. She and her family fled their nearby country of Somalia when Al Shabaab extremists gained power and began forcing them to follow their radical sect of Islam. Along with 90% of the girls at Ainsworth, she wears her school uniform accessorized with a flowing white Muslim headscarf.



But the vast majority of Kenyans are Christian and many now associate Muslim Somalis with the recent wave of terror attacks on Westgate Mall and various busses, markets, and cafes across the country. A pair of explosions killed 6 people in Nairobi on March 31, 2014, and ever since, police have allegedly been systematically terrorizing the Somali population. Eastleigh residents accuse police of banging on doors late at night asking for the occupants' national identification cards only issued to Kenyan citizens. When the refugees explain they do not have one, the police ask for bribes. If a sufficient bribe cannot be produced, they are arrested or worse. In March, Ainsworth had 1,500 students. Now, there are just 1,000.



Senior Teacher Mary Kiarie has been with her group of students from first grade through fourth. "I have a kid in my own class, the mother was caught, taken to Kasarani [Soccer Stadium for processing]," she retold. After a few weeks break between semesters, Mary talked to her student's older sister, who is also enrolled at Ainsworth. "Are you sure your mother is still at Kasarani?" Mary asked the older sibling. "Teacher, when we take food, the [guards] take the food, and we believe mommy is still there," she responded.

The situation is very hard on teachers, as well. For instance, classes are taught in Swahili and English, and Mary's refugee students rarely speak either when they first start school. "We have agreed to struggle with these



Mutuality



kids,” Mary pledged. “I always say when I get annoyed with kids—I always tell my God, ‘Let it be for a minute, and the next minute I should be happy with these kids.’ This kid left home to come to another mother—and sometimes I tell them that I am their grandmother—so why should I get annoyed?”

Mary and her colleagues’ devotion pays off. Some students are graduating and going to high school and on to college or polytechnic. Deeply disturbed students have rehabilitated with the help of educators and counselors. “We try to tell the teachers just to handle them, understand them, advise them that this place is safe—not like Somalia,” Head Teacher Abdi noted. “They have changed: not one or two—many of them.”

Huriya has numerous friends in the community who cannot attend school because they lack money for tuition and uniforms. Countless are orphaned and alone. Even the lucky few able to attend Ainsworth are not adequately shielded from insecurity. Church World Service and Week of Compassion helped build a wire fence that encloses the school on three sides, which somewhat protects the school. Unfortunately, pedestrians attempting to save time on their commutes have cut holes in the barrier. Strangers walk through during the school day; some use the toilets. Criminals have attempted to evade police by fleeing onto the school grounds.

“They came with [machetes]—very scary,” Deputy Head Teacher Charles Kiragu recalled of a particularly frightening episode. “And everybody was screaming. So as not to be shot by the police they would shield themselves with the children—looked like a movie.”

CWS and Week of Compassion also helped build an extremely effective concrete wall along the street to fully impede trespassers coming from the roadside. The wall dampens noise from the commercial area in front of the school and blocks dust kicked up by passing cars and busses. “Now that we have fenced that side, at least we feel a bit of safety,” Head Teacher Abdi acknowledged. CWS additionally installed two water tanks on the school grounds to improve hydration and sanitation. “[CWS has] also taken the teachers to a workshop,” Abdi continued. “They have also taken us to another school for benchmarking. We really appreciate Church World Service for what they did.”

Most teachers at Ainsworth are Christian native Kenyans, but Head Teacher Abdi is a Muslim Somali-Kenyan. It does not make him uncomfortable that his school is supported by an organization with “church” in its name. “The community is Muslims, but they know Church World Service is very important for them,”



Abdi clarified. "I explained to them: it is not there to convert you people. [Parents] don't mind about the issue of a church—no," Abdi concluded. "What they want is help."

Unfortunately, help is otherwise difficult to come by for Ainsworth Primary School. The government naturally focuses on maintaining schools populated by Kenyan citizens, and the students' parents are generally too monetarily poor to contribute. "So...we feel like we belong to Church World Service," Abdi conceded.

Every shooting, bombing, explosion, and kidnapping, regardless of whom the assailant is proven to be, seem to threaten the refugees' existence in Kenya. "When you have good people, you also have bad people," Senior Teacher Mary Kiarie reasoned. "It's a mix. So you cannot accuse all the Somalis, all the refugees, of being bad. There are also some who are good, and quite a number of them are good. They also fear [Al Shabaab]."

"I don't believe it is the refugees who are causing [terrorism]," Head Teacher Abdi argued. "I don't because refugees want peace, and they came for peace. They can't go back to their country...because it is insecure. The warlords are still there. The Al Shabaabs are there...you know there are those who are fundamentalist totally. They don't want to see any other religion in that area they live. And there are those people who are normal. They say we are all human beings. We can live together. Everybody should have his own faith. Like me, I cannot go to Somalia now because I will not allow people to be just killed like that for no reason—cannot. I have my faith, but I cannot allow people to say 'why are you Christian?' 'why are you...?' no!"

As I interviewed Head Teacher Abdi, he and his colleagues brought me tea and cookies.

He insisted that my colleague traveling with me, Peter, come inside and enjoy the refreshments with us. He kindly welcomed us with genuine sincerity, looked into my eyes, smiled, and declared: "A visitor is a blessing."

Joel Cooper,
Communications Intern, CWS Africa

Mozambique

KIM AND ERIK FREE

A November Update



Well, we are in the thick of the hot and humid season here in Mozambique. November has been an eventful month for us and our church partners in Beira. We have celebrated the National Synod of the United Church of Christ in Mozambique (UCCM) during which our friend, Pastor Lucas, was re-elected to serve another four years as denominational president. We returned to Goi-Goi to plant maize and beans in the training field and check on the progress of the new house. Interest continues to grow for the conservation agriculture training, which is very exciting. All things considered, we have much to be thankful for this year.



Unlike our stateside churches, the national synod is a yearly event in the UCCM. It takes place over three days, culminating in a worship celebration on Sunday morning during which the hard work of the church and its leaders is recognized. This year was particularly eventful since it was an election year for the denomination's president. The only hiccup in the vote happened when the power went out for a few hours and rather than vote in the dark, we waited for power to return. Thankfully, it did and the church was able to re-elect Rev. Lucas Amosse to another 4-year term. The UCCM is lucky to have such a dedicated and capable leader for another term. We were also able to share some of the accomplishments made on the Goi-Goi farm. Being able to show pictures and tell stories of that work is increasing interest in farming training in other congregations as well.





The Munhava congregation in Beira is one of those churches that has expressed more interest in the conservation agriculture (CA) training and invited us this month to host a seminar and help start a CA garden on their church property. The teaching went well and the garden was cleared and planted with lots of help from many church members. While some people seemed disappointed that there weren't more participants we were happy to remind them that one of the foundational ideas behind the Foundations for Farming program is to start small and keep your standards high. When you can have success in this manner, growth and increased interest is much easier to achieve. This is our hope for the Goi-Goi training field as well.



While the rains have been late in coming again this year, we decided to visit Goi-Goi and plant the training field before leaving for vacation. November 25th is a key deadline for planting in this part of the world as well and we wanted to get our seeds in the ground before that date to ensure the best chances for a good harvest. Since there wasn't sufficient rain yet, we hauled about 500 liters of water by hand from the well to get things started. It was a lot of work in really hot weather, but it will hopefully pay off come harvest time. Thankfully, about a week after returning to Beira, our friend texted us that they were getting rain in the Goi-Goi area. We will continue to pray for rain and healthy crops for the farmers of Mozambique and encourage you to join us.

God bless you for your continued prayers and support of our partners in Mozambique and our appointment here. We will be on vacation during December so we also wish you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Until January,
Erik and Kim Free



*Kim and Erik Free served with the
United Church of Christ in Mozambique.*



South Africa

NIA SULLIVAN



Hope and Transformation for Street Girls in Cape Town

When sharing the news of my move to Cape Town, I pause to take in the sheer excitement and awe that people convey to me. In response to this news, I'm often given a list of tourist activities to partake in and various sights to visit. Many tourists share their stories of unparalleled relaxation and breathtakingly beautiful accommodations while visiting the motherland. To them, Cape Town is paradise. However, scores of South Africans who struggle daily from the unaddressed injustices that flow from apartheid, see this land quite differently. Accordingly, travelers who look underneath the city's glamorous surface learn of the often-unreported realities of Cape Town citizens who live in unspeakably horrible conditions.

Among those in Cape Town who live in such condition are children, particularly girls of all ages and backgrounds who live on the streets. Having escaped from physical/emotional abuse and neglect, poverty, gangs, and many other deplorable conditions, these girls learned to survive by navigating the often violent and unforgiving realities of street life where they lived in fear and constant danger. Left to fend for themselves, many of these girls have found safety and security in Ons Plek, a Cape Town residential child and youth care center designed specifically to provide support and care for street girls.





Ons Plek provides educational, developmental and therapeutic services to Cape Town's former street girls. Since November 2016, I have had the honor of serving as a Global Missions Intern at Ons Plek. I begin my mornings with the girls at the intake shelter. During the weekdays, I arrive early in order to spend time with the girls as they prepare for bridging school, which is a program designed to enrich and advance girls who are currently not enrolled in school, and to help them gain admittance and perform at their proper grade level. I use the early hours to sit and enjoy the sunshine with them while sharing stories, laughing, and singing their favorite songs. This helps us to form and strengthen relationships with each other.

Once bridging school begins, two educators and I teach the girls math and English. The girls' behavior and their attitudes towards learning often change daily due to interpersonal difficulties and conflicts that flow from the fact that the population of girls is quite diverse in terms of ages, grade levels and learning styles. I have come to realize that teamwork among the staff in the bridging school is not just a lofty goal; it is essential as staff coordinate their work in order to work closely with the all the girls, particularly those who are struggling. Often times, the girls will themselves will display this teamwork by helping their peers understand the always challenging lessons. Although friction between the girls in the shelter is common, it is very easy to observe the unity and sisterhood that are operational in the bridging school.

In the short amount of time I have spent at Ons Plek, my life has been transformed dramatically. With each passing day my belief in the life-changing ability of God increases, and I feel more and more grateful to play a role in this process at Ons Plek. I am inspired daily by the strength and resolve of the girls, and the commitment and love expressed by the staff members. Although so many of the girls have endured injustice and trauma in their lives, I am pleased to report that their past does not prevent them from experiencing moments of laughter, learning and growth. Without a doubt, the redemptive power of Christ is at work in the lives of all at Ons Plek.

Sri Lanka

ANDY JEPSON AND LINDLEY KINERK

Change is Coming



Spending most of one's life in the northern United States makes it hard to focus on a spring newsletter when every day seems to be mid-summer! But we've had a bit of the rainy season that is about 6 weeks late in our part of Sri Lanka, and it has been cool enough some nights to turn off the fan after midnight!

It has been a busy season. The Oori after-school program where Lindley works has grown in the last year from under 100 to close to twice that. Typically, regular government schools have large classes, and teachers cannot spend needed time with individuals or on particularly challenging topics. Most students go to an after-school program for more work in subjects tested in the O-level exams to see if students are able to progress to the next level.

Snacks for poor children who may not have had lunch – or even breakfast – have enticed many children whose parents work to come to the Oori after-school program and, fortified with healthy calories, spend productive time on learning basics and even recently-added art, sports and music projects!

A new activity of another sort that is just gathering energy is an English language church service in Jaffna on Sunday afternoons, organized by the woman who directs the Christmas concert of Jaffna high school choruses. Lindley accompanies for this concert and now she also accompanies the church service. A wonderful mix of people gathers – Sri Lankans, Indians, Americans, lay folk, various kinds of ordained folk, old, young and otherwise – and somebody new each week!

Andy continues working at the seminary with women who are interested in leadership roles in the church. The seminary itself has a new principal and is reaching into surrounding communities to expand its offerings and to serve both church and community in meaningful ways.

Andy Jepson and Lindley Kinerk served as Long-term volunteers with the Church of American Ceylon Mission. Andy provided chaplain services and Lindley served as a teacher at the Christian Theological Seminary and Jaffna College.



Community

***Building interdependence
and unity among all of God's
children***

Communities can stretch across boundaries and borders, across cultures and languages, while providing mutual support and collective dreams for the future. By weaving our lives together with those of international partners, we find new ways to nourish each other's ministries.

Ubuntu



Community

Chile

LAUREN KABAT



A Thanksgiving to Remember

On Thanksgiving mid-day, we were four hours away from our home, weary from a busy week spent traveling with a delegation, and at that point without a single Thanksgiving preparation complete. By seven o'clock that night, our house was bright with chatter and laughter and the rich scents of bacon, onion and thyme, with a spread of food so delicious even remembering it now is making my mouth water.

In those few hours between, Elena Huegel, Global Ministries Missionary, and Bethany Waggoner and I, Global Mission Interns, who are all serving in Chile at this time, met up and together managed to clean the house, buy the groceries, and swap turns at the tiny oven to prepare all of our favorite Thanksgiving dishes. Previously, we had searched the aisles for that prized can of pumpkin, but without success - yielded to



the reality that this year's table would lack the delicacy of pumpkin pie. The house filled with the feel of Thanksgiving: children running around playing with toys, people in and out of the kitchen, and all the wafting scents of the delicious dishes we were preparing. We filled the table with stuffing, gravy, green beans with bacon, spinach salad with goat cheese, walnuts and nectarines, corn and butter, squash with maple syrup, and roasted carrots, sweet potato and red pepper.



Our Chilean guests arrived with the turkey in tow, which they had prepared by following the basting and infusing advice gleaned from carefully watching a US Thanksgiving cooking show. When our Chilean Dutch and Swedish American guests arrived with a pumpkin pie as their contribution, we nearly fell to the floor and wept for joy.

Elena explained the origin of Thanksgiving that the first pilgrims to North America

would not have survived had it not been for the generosity and kindness of the native people. Before dinner, each person started with two kernels of corn on his or her plate. While holding one, we gave thanks for something that happened within the last year. With the other, we expressed a desire for the coming year. Adults and youth shared their blessings, grateful for the birth of their healthy child, a school year of academic and athletic accomplishments, and for the difficult things too, a year of lessons learned and opportunities to grow in faith.

During dinner, I was impressed that the guests tried everything, mixing it all together on their plates in good Thanksgiving form and slathering with plenty of gravy. Of course, as one of the cooks, it gave me great satisfaction when our guests went for seconds and thirds. Our Chilean neighbor and police officer regaled us about how bizarre it was that on television she saw the president of the United States setting free a turkey. We all laughed when she imitated the confused turkey trotting off into freedom. Then, she had been enthralled with all the cooking shows, in one of which the cooks had prepared a pumpkin pie. She rehearsed each step that she had learned: making the crust, preparing the pumpkin filling, and serving it with whip cream. "And then," she exclaimed excitedly to the other guests, "you walked right in with a real pumpkin pie!" Everyone took the opportunity to again celebrate the unexpected blessing of this pie, listening intently to our guest as he told us the process of how he managed to find a pumpkin, and then prepare the filling and crust from scratch. One of the children was surprised that she liked the squash, and I told her that the special ingredient was maple syrup. When they





left, I gave each a little bottle. Growing up as a true New Englander, maple syrup is practically in my blood, so giving away the little bit that I had brought down to Chile was truly a gift from the bottom of my heart.

This Thanksgiving, I have much for which to be grateful. One of which is the blessing of being able to share Thanksgiving dinner here in Chile with people representing five different countries and speaking in three different languages. For the reminder that this is what Thanksgiving is all about: celebrating the joining of cultures and new relationships, the sharing of food and the blessings of fellowship. Today, I give thanks for all of these things.

Lauren Kabat

Democratic Republic of the Congo

LINDA JAMES

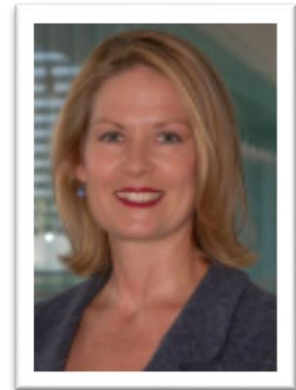
Building and Maintaining Relationships

Disciples' core values - Mutuality, Presence, Community, Justice, and Peace. All of these concepts come together in the word: Collaboration. It is the key to success as I build and maintain relationships and develop projects at the Congo Protestant University/Université Protestante au Congo (UPC).

Before I start, I must add one thought because it is ever present in my collaborations - resilience! Even while being constantly confronted with all of the complexities of daily life, the Congolese people persevere and keep moving forward. Those complications? A tropical rain causes the transportation system to come to a halt, so getting to work becomes a challenge. Or, the internet connection goes down because there is rain in the antenna. The regular

power outages result in food going bad, money being wasted, and additional time out of your busy day to replace what was lost. After all that, a new day always dawns over the Congo River as depicted in the photograph taken at Easter Sunrise service - 2015!

A wise soul once told me, *petit à petit* or as they say in English, little by little you will accomplish great things. I hang onto that philosophy as I begin each day. And one and a half years later, the University has hired a promising assistant for the new Development Department that is now established at the University. With a background in development work and a solid command of English, he is perfectly positioned to contribute to the University's growth. As a





department of two, we can keep the initiatives moving forward. One more step toward building capacity at this 8,000-strong University.

For the last six months, the Development Committee has been energetically revising the University's strategic plan. The collaborative effort and energy of these professors are amazing as we brainstorm ideas to support the University's mission – provide students with a quality education, lead research for the advancement of science and serve the community. Not only are we revising the strategic plan but we are also writing an operational plan alongside in order to assist us as we prioritize each of the elements in our plan.



The collaboration with Johns Hopkins and the University continues. It was exciting to host Johns Hopkins professor, Tamaki Kobayashi, in Kinshasa as the research team, led by UPC professor, Dr. Thierry Bobanga, prepared to head east to their field research sites in Kilwa and Kashobwe (two towns on the Congo border with Zambia). As the team surveyed individual families regarding their medical symptoms, malaria prevention measures, and their recent movements across the border with Zambia, they discovered an unusually high rate of malaria. The team took samples and ensured that each individual had access to treatment. The specimens that were gathered in the

villages will be transferred to Zambia for analysis and the data collected will return to Kinshasa for analysis. Talk about cross-border cooperation!

As the Business School gets ready to launch a full-time MBA program, I am in the process of helping to establish an International Development Business course. The program is including this innovative course as a part of the curriculum. It may be the first of its kind in Congo! The fresh eyes of an outsider can be helpful. Since arriving in Congo, I have noticed that the Humanitarian Aid sector and the Development sector have an enormous presence in this country. That said, I have also noticed that there is a separation between the local population's participation in the development activities and the development sector's execution of its activities. My idea behind this course is to provide students



with the opportunity to develop an understanding and gain insight into



the international development sector through an overview of this specialized market and its key players. The University is committed to preparing qualified students to enter the work force.

Let's not forget the Medical School laboratories. Back to the power outages. Oftentimes when the power goes out, so does the water supply. With a research laboratory, that might mean disaster. The U.S. Embassy in Kinshasa has committed to fund two large water cisterns to ensure that the flow of water is continuous. The foundations to support those 530 gallon water tanks are being poured as I type. Building research capacity will enable the students to improve their diagnoses when treating patients. UPC is building a healthy Congo.

All that and the little activities that take place like: Joining UCP Medical School graduates as they volunteer for Operation Smile activities, coordinating Fulbright donations in partnership with Congolese basketball star – Dikembe Mutombo, involving UPC students in the Nelson Mandela Day volunteer event, visiting rural hospitals where UPC Medical School interns are doing their clinical rotations, facilitating an American Theology professor's lecture series at UPC, constant improvements to the website, and coordinating management and leadership training for students with local businesses. The list goes on! To be involved in this process is amazing!

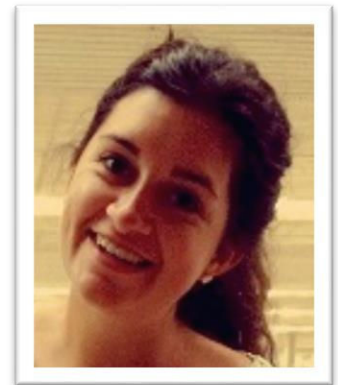
*"A good head and good heart are always a formidable combination.
But when you add to that a literate tongue or pen,
then you have something very special."*

— Nelson Mandela

Linda James

Hungary

KEARSTIN BAILEY



My Life in Hungary

I have been living in Budapest, Hungary for almost four months now, experiencing life, in all of its ups and downs, with the Hungarian people. I live in District eight, an area filled with stark contrasts as much of the city's Roma population calls this neighborhood home and glitzy new businesses and cafes pop up on each corner. The city itself and this neighborhood especially, is refreshingly authentic in its feel and ascetics – what you see here is what you get, and I love that.

I work with the Reformed Church in Hungary, and my job here is quite multifaceted. In the mornings, I work at the RCH Ecumenical Office doing English communications work like writing articles for the English website, editing final translations of articles that have already been translated from Hungarian, and doing other miscellaneous communications tasks as they arise. Two afternoons a week I work at an after-school program for Roma children, teaching them basic English lessons as we do crafts and working with them on their social skills. Two other afternoons per week I work as a volunteer coordinator with the Refugee Ministry of the RCH, interfacing with clients and making them feel welcome, getting other volunteers set up, and doing basic communications tasks for them as well. On Fridays my schedule is entirely different and I spend the day at a local Roma school in my neighborhood, assisting the high school English teacher there. I act as an English conversation partner in her classes and help the youth become more comfortable with their oral English skills.



As cliché as this may seem, the most vivid experience from my time here thus far happened during the Christmas holidays; a time that, for many of us who are living abroad, can be a tough period. A few days before the holiday, an



international group gathered at St. Columba's Scottish Mission in Budapest for an interfaith community celebration of Christmas. The event was organized by Dóra Kanizsai-Nagy, head of the RCH Refugee Ministry, and drew guests from all different backgrounds and life experiences. Each year she coordinates an event like this for the clients she helps in her work, as well as for other interested community members, this year culminating in a group of around 80 people.

Those in attendance were Muslims, Christians, and Agnostics; they came from around the world, from Guinea, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and beyond. People from every economic and social class came together during this beautiful time of community, from those who have stable jobs to those who are still looking for work, and even those who are living on a volunteer stipend. In this eclectic group, none of this mattered. The most important thing was the sense of community and love that was tangible in the very air.

The evening began with a conversation hour where guests mingled and caught up; introductions were made for newcomers and those who had been before chatted with old friends. A group of Muslims and Christians soon broke off from the rest to decorate the Christmas tree in the middle of the sanctuary; children danced around with tinsel in their hands and ornaments were hung with care. When the time came to gather for the Christmas meal, a delicious mixture of Bangladeshi and Turkish food was brought out for the main course, and then traditional Hungarian desserts and cakes were brought out later. Community members swarmed the table in an excited chatter and filled their plates with the colorful and nourishing food, handmade by clients that Dóra and her staff have helped along the way.

The meal lasted for hours as people milled about, talking and tasting all the delicious morsels that were available. The chairs in the sanctuary, where the meal was served, were set up in one large circle, making it easy for the conversation to continue to flow as people worked their way around the room. Children shrieked with joy and played with the new friends they made while their parents rested and watched from afar. Smiles abounded throughout the evening as new friends entered, old companions reconnected, and the joy of the holiday season spread.

It would have been easy to characterize the people in the room by their differences: their country of origin, the language they spoke, and the religion they followed. Instead, everyone came together and focused on all of the things they had in common: a love of good food, the infectious joy emanating from the little ones, and the desire for unity in a time where so many things in the world try to divide us.





The various ministries of the RCH have done a fantastic job of cultivating a rich community through their work, as exemplified at Refugee Ministry's holiday party, and it's now up to us to learn from their example and spread this to the wider world.

As we enter into spring, may this extraordinary night of ecumenical, interfaith, and international celebration continue to set the tone for these days of rebirth and renewal that are to come in the spring season. May we view those around us as new friends to greet and focus on all of the important ways in which we are all part of one, big, human family.

Blessings,
Kearstin Bailey

*Kearstin Bailey served as A Global Mission Intern
with the Reformed Church in Hungary.*

India

KAHALA CANNON



Through the Eyes of Children

The beauty of life is seen through the eyes of children all around the world. Just a short walk down the road from Christian Hospital Mungeli is the Rambo Memorial English Medium School (RMEMS). There, you have the vibrant energy of young people, from nursery to 12th standard. As you walk through the halls of the school, you can literally still hear the students' laughter and the pattering of feet, long after they have gone home and the classrooms are empty. Each day, students learn to cherish life, respect each other, and embrace the unique learning opportunities that are available to them outside, as well as inside, of the four walls of their classroom.

Monocytes... leukocytes...

eosinophils. These are all words that graced my ears one morning as I entered the laboratory of the out-patient department (OPD) at Christian Hospital Mungeli. With test tube in hand, Mr. Davendra Kuldeep, laboratory technician, was sharing information pertaining to the various components of the blood; red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets; the life giving fluid connective tissue that flows through every aspect of our body. It carries nutrients, oxygen from the lungs to the other cells of the body, and carbon dioxide from the body to the lungs. The blood...We cannot live without it.



Standing around the laboratory in a semi-circle was a 10th standard Biology class from the Rambo Memorial English Medium School. With their eyes gazing forward, the class listened intently on material regarding the blood grouping system as they eagerly awaited a demonstration on how to perform blood





typing tests and their opportunity to visualize how blood cells appear under the microscope for the first time. The students were excited as they together learned more about the blood and its integral part in the sustaining of life seemed fascinating.

Every avenue in which young people have the opportunity to grow and expand their horizon is a rewarding experience for them. It was a beautiful, sunny day; the perfect setting for an outdoors debate competition on the grounds of the Rambo Memorial English Medium School. It seemed as if the whole atmosphere was smiling as the rays of sun beamed down upon the school yard. As I took my seat at the judge's bench, along with the two other judges, I thought to myself, "Wow...Brand new mercies each day."



I could feel the energy of the audience which consisted of exuberant students, teachers, and staff as they eagerly awaited the debate to get underway. The topic: ***Should cellular phones be allowed in school?*** Debaters consisted of a total of sixteen students; four students each from 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th standard classes. Each student was allowed a maximum of two minutes in which to present their argument; whether for or against the allowance of mobile phones in school. A question and answer period was allotted for each debater after the conclusion of their speech. Each team, pro and con, consisted of eight students.

These students were very sharp as they presented convincing arguments on both sides. Members from the team against cellular phones presented arguments that were very thought provoking. One debater stated that it robs students of their memory and precious eye-sight due to the amount of time that you spend looking at the phone and relying on it to look up answers instead of relying on your own intellect and knowledge. Another referred to it as an "entertainment device," with availability to social networking and online games that would likely capture the student's attention and, therefore, distract them from school work and valuable information that is being taught in the classroom. Students were judged on content and presentation. Although all debaters did a noteworthy job; there were five winners. One student for first place, one for second, and three students tied for third.



Another momentous occasion for the school is the night the Rambo School dance team won first place at the Friends, Youth, Welfare, Society Interschool Dance Competition held near the Agar Club Purana Busstand, Mungeli. They were one of 12 schools in the city of Mungeli to audition and earn a coveted spot in the competition. Their theme was the Shooting in the Army Public School in Peshawar, a city in the northwestern region of Pakistan. This tragic event occurred in December 2014 in which many people, including 132 students, were killed by the act of terrorists. Their moving performance captured the hearts of everyone in the audience. It was the first time that a theme dance had ever been performed in the history of this competition. Mr. Avinash Prasad, Principle of the Rambo Memorial English Medium School, stated, "I was so happy that they could think on that track. It was their brainchild." The teachers helped, but it was the students that chose



their own theme, choreographed the dance, and selected a melody of songs to coincide with the action and emotions of the story.

Everyone was amazed at how expressive the students were in conveying the story through contemporary dance. The performance encompassed dance moves with a range of emotions and corresponding facial expressions that all intertwined to tell the full story, leaving the audience playing at school. It continued with the shooting

and the loss of lives with one student being spared because he did not attend school on that particular day. The scene then focused on the grieving parents, the fight between Pakistan and Hindustan, and concluded with the core values of a nation and culture to peacefully coexist with each other.

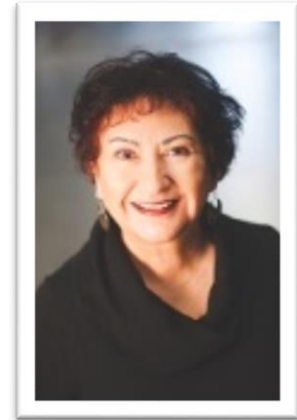
"As I was dancing, I was thinking about how the students must have felt at that time and how their parents must have felt," explained 9th standard student Srishti Bagh. "I would like to say to everyone that we should not fight. We are all the same and should live as friends."

Kahala Cannon



Israel/Palestine

NADYNE GUZMÁN



Mission in the ELCJHL Schools: Partnership for Peace

The Schools of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) are the educational ministry of the ELCJHL. They are designed to meet the needs of the Palestinian people as a whole. Teachers, administrators, and students are both Christian and Muslim with the student Muslim/Christian balance hovering around 50%-60% from each community. Muslim parents choose to send their children to these Christian schools because of their reputation for high educational standards. **Children learn about each other's religions** as part of the school curriculum. The schools focus on embracing and empowering students and families in the region from all religious, economic, and social backgrounds. Two of the major goals of the ELCJHL are served through the schools: 1) To integrate peace education and culture, reinforce democracy, and encourage tolerance, co-existence, love, and respect toward others and 2) To ameliorate the communication process and encourage exchanges with local and international communities.

I have been working with the teachers, administrators, and staff there for several years, developing leadership potential and guiding the improvement of communication among school professionals for more productive interaction with each other, with students, and with parents. Another focus has been to guide teachers toward the improvement of instruction through a Peer Coaching program that is designed to foster cross-disciplinary communication and an open sharing of ideas and instructional strategies.

The delights of working in Bethlehem, Beit Sahour, Beit Jala, and Ramallah are difficult to capture in a few words, but I'll try. Working with professionals who have a **passion for high quality education** is the first delight, coupled with the experience of working with teachers who joyfully serve their students. The scope and intensity of the curriculum in these schools is astounding. Schoolteachers in the US would be overwhelmed with the schedules the ELCJHL teachers must follow as



well as the numbers of students in each class-especially in the lower grades.

The **good humor** of Palestinians is reflected within the schools along with their **commitment to support each other in an attitude of strength** despite the many difficulties that present themselves as part of the Occupation. It is not unusual for electricity to be cut off in the middle of the day or for water to be diverted to the Settlements, leaving a school without these basic services. During one visit to a school, there had been no water at the school for two days, so disinfectant had to be poured into toilets to keep them running. Unfortunately, it was difficult to control the odor so I was advised to take a route through the school that by-passed the hallways where the student bathrooms were located. Even with such inconveniences, students and teachers continue their scheduled classes with attention and intention.

A final delight is the hospitality of the Palestinians: they are famous for welcoming strangers. This is reflected in the manner in which students greet visitors and the manner in which the adults open their classrooms to outsiders. I have enjoyed many class sessions in Arabic, German, and English as students are expected to become proficient in all three.

A final note: I expected the teachers and administrators to seize the opportunity of having an American in their midst to fill me with complaints and political concerns. Instead, those with whom I have interacted do not discuss the Occupation unless I ask direct questions about its effects upon them, and then it is only in private moments away from students.

Nadyne Guzmán

PHILIPPINES

ELEAZAR FERNANDEZ

A Year of Vibrant and Creative Activities

It has been a year of vibrant and creative activities. Let me highlight a few.

In line with UTS's goal of making theological education more accessible, portable, and affordable, we have pursued and fine-tuned our hybrid (online and face-to-face) offerings, which include both degree and certificate programs. For our Innovative Theological Education Program (a certificate program), we conducted two seminars for two groups: (1) Southwest Philippines Annual Conference (UMC) in Silang, Cavite (June 27-July 1, 2016) and (2) Bicol Philippines Provisional Annual Conference (UMC) in Daet (November 21-23, 2016).

We had a successful 109th Founding Anniversary and Annual Convocation (November 15-17, 2016). The event's substance was rich and diverse in expressions. In addition to presentations from invited speakers, including former Presidents of UTS (Bishop Emerito Nacpil, Rev. Dr. Mariano Apilado, and Rev. Dr. Romeo del Rosario) as well as the current one (Rev. Dr. Eleazar Fernandez) and the chair of the BOT (Bishop Danny Arichea, Jr.), we had the doctoral conferral of The Reverend Liberato Bautista and his delivering of the Reynaldo and Clarita Lopez Peace Lecture.

Conferral of Doctor of Divinity Degree

At the beginning of the year, we started our new partnership with Yushan Theological College and Seminary (Taiwan). A professor and three





students from Yushan came to UTS (January 6-25, 2017) to teach and attend classes respectively. UTS will also have its turn to send faculty and students in March 2017.

Immediately after our Yushan partners left for their homeland, we welcomed our visiting professor and lecturer, Dr. Rolf Nolasco, of Providence University College & Seminary, Calgary, Canada. Prof. Nolasco delivered/facilitated two workshop-seminars: The first topic was Compassionate Presence: A Radical Response to Human Suffering. The second one was The Contemplative Counselor: A Way of Being. He also taught Pastoral Care and Counseling 2 and Advanced Pastoral Care.

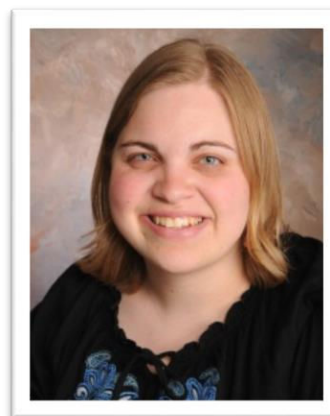
Lastly, one major and well-attended event that we just concluded was the Paghilom: Cavite Arts Camp and Festival. It was the first event of its kind that UTS launched. Participants were varied: from high school to seminary students and professional artists, and from Filipinos to other nationalities (Germans, North Americans, and neighboring Asian countries).



Eleazar S. Fernandez

Thailand

NICOLE BETTERIDGE



Sweet December

With a new year brings new energy to life in the village of Huay Ma Lai and Saha Christian Suka School in rural southwest Thailand. For Christian Karen people, December was an exciting time of the year preparing for the birth of Christ. Similar to Advent, Sweet December is celebrated throughout December as a time of harvest, family, and the joy and hope found in Christmas. On November 30 people stay awake all night singing songs, worshipping, playing games, and dancing to welcome in the month of December. Then, throughout December different groups from churches, villages, children's homes, and the refugee camps came door-to-door, singing Christmas carols. Often around ten or eleven in the evening, they were heard at the front of our house, flashlights and candles in hand, singing beautiful Karen Christmas songs. Throughout the year Thai people often go to bed early and arise early. So, with groups coming to sing late into the night, our village was radiating with extra energy and cheer.

December was also filled with many Christmas parties and worship services where groups joined in fellowship with one another. One Christmas worship I attended was in a small village on top of a mountain with Bible students from Gethsemane Bible School, near Sangklaburi, the nearest town to our village. One of my favorite Christmas events, however, was a celebration with the children, youth, and adults in our village and surrounding areas who have disabilities. The day of the Christmas celebration was planned in conjunction with International Day of Disabled Persons on December 3rd. The Christmas celebration occurred at the home of Jan, a nurse, and Jit, a Karen pastor, who live in Huay Ma Lai and work in supporting the children and families with disabilities in this area.

To get all the people there for the special Christmas celebration, some children arrived the night before. Those that came early joined in eating Guay Tiew, Thai noodle soup, crafts- making Christmas decorations (snowflakes) for the following day, and excitement of having a sleepover with each other at the home of Jit and Jan. The following day included games, singing Christmas





songs, lunch and a Christmas worship outside. The children and youth in attendance ranged in abilities. Some of the children cannot walk, while others have cognitive disabilities. Some of their family members came to join in the celebration and care for their child throughout the day. About 150 people of all ages came to this memorable 2014 Christmas celebration.

Sweet December really was a time of many merry celebrations!

For Karen Christians, Christmas is a time of remembering the joy of knowing Christ is with us always and that God loves us so much he sent Jesus to accompany within our spirits and lives.

One Sweet December song states:

"The time of joyful celebration has come already- the month of the birth of Jesus.

We bring blessings to you to receive Jesus in this night.

Come together to celebrate with us.

Sing songs of joy during December- the month of celebrating the birth of Jesus.

Let us not forget as we move into a new year the joy found in sharing and knowing about the life of Jesus."

For those of other faiths, December is also a time of rest, family, and celebration as Christmas occurs at the start of Karen New Year.

While Sweet December and Christmas 2014 has passed, the New Year carries with it a similar sense of joy and beauty.

The start to the New Year brings exciting times. Children's Day, celebrated in many countries, is recognized nationally in Thailand on the second Saturday of January, celebrated this year on January 6. Known in the Thai language as 'Vanh Dek', the day is a celebration honoring the large population of children living in Thailand. Children's Day was created with the intention of remembering the importance of simply giving children time to just have fun, as well as creating awareness of children's role in the future of Thailand. Thai children have curious minds filled with creativity and wonder. Giving them time away from the classroom is beneficial. Learning and growing through play and games is important for children. The day was filled with lots of laughter and fun!

Children's Day in our village was no different. It was a time for our students to just be children. Saha Christian Suksa School has over 500 students, so games were assigned to different and appropriate age groups to ensure everyone got a chance to play. Students were divided into groups based on their ages





and played games and relay races outside. Games included, but were not limited to, musical chairs, rice sack races, climbing bamboo poles, and vegetable eating contests.

Children are a vital part of Thai society and being a role model in helping them grow and develop is an honor. Thailand's recognition of Children's Day is important and I hope it continues on into the future for Thai children!

Nicole Betteridge

Justice

Living out God's radical love by confronting powers that deny the fullness of life and the integrity of creation

When partners voice their concerns and take action to confront injustice in their communities, Global Ministries joins with them in advocacy. Through statements, Bible studies, denominational resolutions, letter writing campaigns and educational events, we work to amplify the voices that often go unheard in our uneven world.

Gong Yi



Justice

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

HENRY BREWER-CALVERT

A Persistent Reality

"But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no one might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰ He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption..." 1st Corinthians 27-30 (NRSV)



Greetings to you from the Dominican Republic during this blessed Lenten season! As we prepare ourselves for Christ's death and resurrection, it is important to release all that we wish to give up to God and to accept a life closer to the one who gives us so much. This Lenten season I wish to surrender any negative thoughts that lead me astray and to encounter a spirit of acceptance; acknowledging that I am doing all in my power to assist those in my journey and that through prayer and perseverance God's peace will come to more here in Boca Chica.

Boca Chica is undergoing dramatic changes this decade as the population of child workers on the beach continues to fall. More youth are entering school due to the persistent work of Caminante's educators who emphasize the importance of education with children and their parents. As most of you know, Caminante was founded to ensure that all children are guaranteed their rights to not work, to recreation, and to education. These rights are inextricably linked to keeping youth active and engaged alongside friends and family in safe environments. Caminante encourages all youth to stay in school and has additional spaces for older girls to learn more about staying away from the dangers of the tourist zone.



The change that is occurring now is a result of the increased effort to combat a persistent reality.

Caminante finds itself at a crossroads, focusing some of its staff towards combating the resurgent commercial sex trafficking happening in Boca Chica and the surrounding area.

In addition to their efforts to reach the boys and girls in the community before they are placed at risk, Caminante is also putting pressure on tourist hotels to combat the sex trafficking of adolescents. To accomplish this Caminante has appointed a team of employees to travel to the hotels and speak about the "The Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism" that hotels are given the opportunity to sign. The Code of Conduct challenges hotels to make infrastructural changes by adding cameras, train staff to spot predators, and gives hotels a way to boost tourism of a safe nature. It is exciting to see many hotels sign on to this effort.

Lastly, Caminante is accompanying women who have left the industry by allowing them to enter La Casona's training courses as early as age 15 in some cases, providing logistical support to women looking for help, and offering counseling and a safe space for workers.

Global Ministries supports Caminante through your generous support, as well as by sending mission groups that we receive with great joy and an eagerness to impart our love of this work with each visitor.

I am happy to lift their work up and hope that it continues to inspire all of us to help out in some small way in stopping commercial sex trafficking. I pray that this work continues forward and that we can all join together in this struggle. Thanks for reading and have a blessed Lenten season!

Henry Brewer-Calvert

*Henry Brewer-Calvert served as a Global Mission Intern
with Proyecto Caminante in the Dominican Republic.
He worked with the children in Caminante's
Outreach Ministry.*

Fiji

NIKO TAPOKAI



To Embrace and Love

As we prepare for Easter this year, we cannot jump into a spirit and atmosphere of celebration and thanksgiving for the grace that has brought us salvation without acknowledging the pain and suffering around us. We cannot prostrate at the foot of the cross without looking up to see the viciousness of the nails that tore through our Savior's flesh. How then can we worship God freely and truly when vicious human desire tears through humanity as a whole?

As I sit here in my office on an island in the southern part of the Pacific Ocean, I looked out of my window and see green palm leaves waving wildly as they are battered by strong winds. There is a low pressure warning signaling a possible cyclone. The trees are so green that when you look at it you will see signs of life. However, looming over this sign of life and vibrancy is chaos, and possibly death.

While we are going to celebrate life in Jesus Christ in the coming weeks, some of our brothers and sisters are pained by war, hatred, discrimination, and narcissism. It is without a surprise that these things which causes others pain is practiced and supported by many who profess they have life in and through Jesus Christ. Here in Fiji, the government has just deported an Iranian man refugee who entered this country using false documents. This nation prides itself in being a Christian country; and yet, we fail to live up to the simplest of Christian command, love your neighbor. We fail to attend to those who are in need.

Although this tiny Island Nation called Fiji is thousands of miles away from the bigger nations that control the world's economy and affairs, we are no different in our response to those who need a space to live – the refugees of our time.

I am reminded of Matthew 4:11 where Jesus, after going through an intense degree of fasting, then having his humanity tested instead of fulfilled, the angels attended



to him. After the devil tested Jesus, Matthew wrote, *"Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him."*

In light of what I have shared above regarding refugees being turned away by us instead of embracing them and allowing them to live, and the way we do mission in the world today, I want to focus on two important words in this verse. First is the word "angels," and second is the word attended or in other translation "ministered." The word "angels" in the Greek also means a messenger. The word "*attended or ministered*" in the Greek also have a connotation of providing support from ones private means. The angels in Matthew probably were supernatural beings, or they could be humans who met Jesus and attended to his need out of love instead of deceiving him.

We deceive people when we want something in return. This is exactly the nature in which Satan tempted Jesus. Every offer comes with a deceiving "promise." We need to provide help without holding anything back. We need to embrace our brothers and sisters, without fear and doubt. Creating a safe environment for us to live in begins not with fear and doubt, but with love.

We will fight to stop our country from sending anymore refugees away from our airports. We shall embrace and love them. I know, if the refugee was a Christian, it would have had a different ending. Love without boundaries, is love from above.

Niko Tapokai

Hong Kong

JUDY CHAN



People on the Move

This month I had the chance to meet an extraordinary artist who is displaying some of her black and white photographs at an exhibition in Hong Kong. What's so special about her?

#1 – She's only 28 years old. #2 – She is a Filipina who studied nursing in college. #3 – She used to be a 'maid' for a rich Chinese family in Hong Kong.



Her name is Xyza (pronounced Zi-sa) Cruz Bacani. I heard her speak at my church in Kowloon at the opening of her photo exhibition of foreign domestic workers living in a shelter called Bethune House. For around 10 years Xyza worked for a



wealthy elderly Chinese woman living in the posh Mid-levels area as a nanny for the many grandchildren who came to visit daily. Though Xyza loved photography, she couldn't afford a camera until her employer lent her money to buy a professional one, and after that, there was no stopping her. Then her stunning photos came to the attention of a well-known Filipino photographer in the U.S., who forwarded them to the *New York Times*. Xyza's life completely changed when she won a 2015 Magnum Foundation Human Rights Fellowship in New York. She was able to quit her job, travel around the world and pursue her calling to give a voice to invisible people through her pictures. Hong Kong has around 300,000 foreign domestic workers who leave their homeland in search of jobs to provide for their families. They are mainly from the Philippines and Indonesia. Xyza considers herself one of the lucky ones who found a good employer. She still stays at her former employer's home when she comes back to visit Hong Kong. But many domestic workers are not so lucky, working an average of 12-16 hours a day, 6 days a week, 24 hours on call. Edwina Antonio, director of Bethune House, said on one of our radio broadcasts recently, "Obviously, because of debt bondage and the demand to escape from poverty in the



home country it is a put up or pack up situation. Put up with the situation where you have to endure all kinds of abuse from contract violations, verbal, physical and even sexual abuse or pack up your things. But this would mean loss of job, loss of potential income and loss of support for their families back home.”

The Hong Kong Christian Council will help promote concern for foreign domestic workers on International Migrant Sunday, December 20th. We are sending a bi-lingual prayer (Chinese and English) to all churches in Hong Kong for use in the service on the 4th Sunday of Advent.

Let me share that prayer as we honor all those laboring far away from home and loved ones seeking a better tomorrow. We acknowledge Bishop Ruperto C. Santos as author of portions of this beautiful prayer adapted below:

On International Migrant Sunday, we remember the migrant workers living among us in Hong Kong. May they labor in the city in safe and just conditions, and may we who benefit from their labor be truly grateful for what they provide. May migrant workers encounter caring and gracious employers. May they have decent and rewarding jobs. May they have a peaceful stay. May their sacrifices bear good and lasting fruits.

Watch over them and keep them away from harm and danger. Spare them from sickness and accident. Keep them from unscrupulous persons wishing to take advantage of their vulnerable situation. Protect them with strong laws that safeguard their rights and dignity. Watch over O Lord, those whom they leave behind. Let their love remain always faithful. And let what they earn be spent for good.

Empower the churches of Hong Kong and all who walk alongside migrant workers around the world. May we be filled with courage and joy to bless migrant workers and their families for a future filled with hope.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, pour on us your grace, that when we are called to solidarity – we may boldly respond by truly loving our neighbors as we love ourselves, Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

May I also take this opportunity to say thank you for your faithful prayer and financial support of Global Ministries that allows me to serve in the communications ministry of Hong Kong Christian Council. Let us continue to work together for healing and reconciliation in our world, our nations, our communities, our families and ourselves.

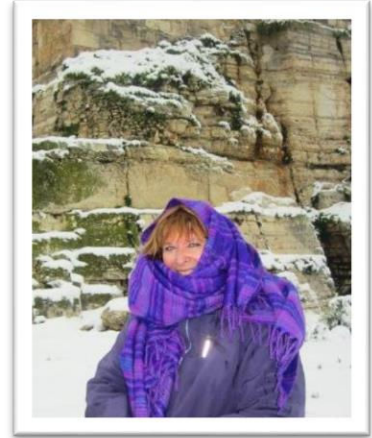
Judy Chan

Israel-Palestine

LOREN MCGRAIL

The Red Egg and St. Mary of Magdala: Sharing the Testimony and the Word

We first learn about Mary of Magdala as the woman who Jesus healed of seven demons. Some say she was also the one who anointed his feet. Some say she was the beloved disciple not John and that it is her in DaVinci's Last Supper with the tilted head. Others even say they were lovers or that she was his wife.



What we do know is that she became a follower of Jesus and that she was believed to be as close to Jesus as any of the disciples. Fragments from her lost Gospel indicate that he often had theological discussions with her about the Spirit which made the other disciples jealous.

In our Scripture readings for Easter, she was one of the women who stayed with Jesus at the foot of the cross along with Salome and the mother of James after the disciples fled. She is also one of the women who went to the tomb to anoint him. Later, in John 20, it is she alone who the risen Christ first appeared to and commissioned to tell the good news.

*The very first person to be commissioned was a woman.
And she was commissioned to go to men to share
her testimony...and then also to give His Word.
I know there are some people who will draw a line
and say I can give a testimony, but I can't share the Scripture.
But Jesus didn't make that distinction. He gave Mary Magdalene both
commissions, to share her testimony and to give out His word.*

**—Bible teacher Anne Graham Lotz,
Daughter of evangelist Billy Graham**

J. Lee Grady says that it is "through the redemption of Christ, that woman got her voice back." She lost her voice in that first garden story when through Eve she was relegated to second class citizenship, and made subordinate to man.



John 20 is the Great Reversal. Women are no longer subservient, relegated to suffer in silence in the face of abuse of power or their bodies. Jesus, now in another garden, calls women to be his missionaries and preachers. "Mary Magdalene was appointed to go and tell. She was commissioned to preach. Jesus did not limit her, restrict her or tell her to stay out of the pulpit. Instead, He ordained her to be a carrier of His glorious Gospel."

According to blogger Rachel Held Evans, "That Christ ushered in this new era of life and liberation in the presence of women, and that he sent them out as the first witnesses of the complete gospel story, is perhaps the boldest, most overt affirmation of their equality in his kingdom that Jesus ever delivered. And yet too many Easter services begin with a man standing before a congregation of Christians and shouting, 'he is risen!' to a chorused response of 'he is risen indeed!' Were we to honor the symbolic details of the text that distinction would always belong to a woman?"

For years Mary of Magdala or Mary Magdalene was depicted as a prostitute for how else could a woman have money then selling her body. Her power and authority was also held in check if she was merely his lover or even his wife. So it was with great surprise and joy that I discovered the story of Mary and the red egg and its depictions in Eastern Orthodox icons. In these icons we see Mary with a halo and holding a jar for anointing and a red egg. The story goes that after the resurrection, Caesar doubted that it was possible for Jesus to have risen from the dead and likened it to an egg turning red. Mary then picked up an egg which quickly turned red and folks in the Orthodox Church have been dyeing eggs red ever since.

In Christ there is no male or female, both men and women can serve as ministers. He has Risen, indeed! Let us celebrate the good news.

Loren McGrail

Mexico

SCOTT NICHOLSON

Border Convergence

Hundreds of people gathered on both sides of the border wall that separates Nogales, Sonora from Nogales, Arizona on October 8 and 9. The convergence was organized by SOA Watch to protest the militarization of the border that is causing so much suffering and death for our migrant sisters and brothers.

This militarization was started by Bill Clinton and has been further escalated by Barack Obama. A "crisis" of unaccompanied minors that were fleeing violence and poverty in Central America and seeking refuge in the U.S. occurred during summer 2014. The response of the Obama administration was to pressure the Mexican government to further militarize its southern border with Guatemala. Millions of dollars were given to implement Plan Frontera Sur (Southern Border Plan) which placed more immigration agents and checkpoints in southern Mexico.

Sister Guadalupe; of the Hermanos en el Camino shelter in Ixtepec, Oaxaca; told us that the militarization in southern Mexico has forced migrants to pass through more isolated, and dangerous, regions. She said that nine of every ten migrants arriving at the shelter have been assaulted, and more than half the women have been raped. Mexico is now deporting more Central Americans than the U.S., and this repression and violence have reduced the number of people arriving at the U.S. border.

"I very much appreciate Mexico's efforts in addressing the unaccompanied children who we saw spiking during the summer," said Obama in January 2015. "In part, because of strong efforts by Mexico, including at its southern border, we've seen those numbers reduced back to much more manageable levels."





The Nogales Wall was first built by the Clinton administration in October 1994 – just three months after he visited the site of the former Berlin Wall. The Obama administration built a taller, and stronger, border wall in the summer of 2011.

“We celebrate unity,” Clinton had said in Berlin. “We stand where crude walls of concrete separated mother from child, and we meet as one family. We stand where those who sought a new life instead found death. Berliners, you have proved that no wall can forever contain the mighty power of freedom.”

The Clinton administration created the Border Patrol’s first national strategy in 1994, “Prevention through Deterrence.” The goal was to “Raise the risk...to the point that many will consider it futile to attempt illegal entry... Illegal traffic will be deterred, or forced over more hostile terrain, less suited for crossing.” Since then, the bodies of more than 6,000 people have been found in the southern border region. The actual death toll is much higher because many bodies are never found.

Last month, we commemorated the 15th anniversary of the attacks of September 11 and I found myself reflecting on how we define terrorism. It seems to me that terrorism involves the use of violence, targeting civilians, to achieve a political objective. Thousands of civilians have now died after being forced over hostile terrain along the border in order to deter people from entering the U.S.

“No más, no more, tear down the border walls!” we chanted during the litany for those victims at the end of the convergence here in Nogales.

The photo is of a deported mother and veterans, followed by Veterans for Peace, leading the march along the wall in Nogales, Sonora.

In Love and Solidarity,
Scott Nicholson

Peace

Embodying reconciling relationships with God, humanity, and creation

Peace is more than the absence of war and violence; it provides a vision for finding new ways of encountering and engaging with the other. Joining with partners whose communities have faced decades of brutality, we lift up opportunities for reconciling relationships with God, humanity, and creation.

*Shalom
Salaam*



Peace

Chile

ELENA HUEGEL



Recycled Blessing

After the earthquake and tsunami of Feb. 27th, 2010, the members of the Pentecostal Church of Chile built "Blessing Cabins" to provide dry, warm, temporary, emergency housing for people whose homes were destroyed. One Blessing Cabin remained on the grounds of the central church in Curicó after all the others were shipped out; it provided emergency office space for the national church whose recently renovated building had to be torn down and then remained as a reminder of God's provision in the midst of the devastation.

Some of the Blessing Cabins morphed into permanent homes rebuilt in the years following the earthquake. Others were moved, after a couple of years, to church properties and used as temporary places of worship. Nearly six years after the disaster, we have lost track of many of the Blessing Cabins. Last week I spoke to a widow who received a Blessing Cabin when her house fell down on top of her; she escaped uninjured by crawling under the her bed. The government has built her a permanent home, but her Blessing Cabin is now a little shop where she takes in mending and sewing. This month, as the national church finally prepares to build a new office, the last intact Blessing Cabin has been taken down panel by panel and

trucked out of Curicó to make room for the construction.

Tucked beneath two oak trees and under the watch of the Sentinel Mountain, this Blessing Cabin will continue to bless people with dry, warm, temporary housing! Thanks to the offerings the Shalom Center has received through Global Ministries, this Blessing Cabin has been refurbished into a cabin to be used by the staff and participants





during its peace building, environmental education, and spiritual development

programs. God's blessing shared by those who cared about Chile in a moment of great need has been recycled into a blessing that will shelter many others in the years to come.



Elena Huegel

Photo: Patricia Gómez, the director of the Shalom Center, with her husband, Rodrigo Martínez, a facilitator at the Shalom Center, and their daughter, Rayen.

Elena Huegel

Hong Kong

BRUCE VAN VOORHIS

Seeds of Peace in Asia

Our interfaith youth network for justpeace, Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF), held our annual program committee meeting for several days in January in Siem Reap, Cambodia, to plan our activities for this year. The main activity once again will be the School of Peace (SOP) for three months beginning in July that will be held near Yogyakarta, Indonesia, for up to 20 youth between the ages of 20 and 30 from throughout Asia. SOP is the program that binds all of the ICF network members together as everyone in our network of 115 young people in 17 countries has been a participant.

In addition to SOP, we'll also hold a number of workshops throughout the year that will focus on developing a justpeace curriculum for children, community organizing, human rights, faith and justpeace, and tools for transformation that will emphasize the use of music for education and advocacy on issues that affect a community or society.



I will once again be responsible for conducting the two human rights workshops that we have planned this year. The first workshop that is scheduled for May in Thailand will be part of a series of workshops we're held since 2012 to train some of our SOP alumni to be human rights resource people. At the second workshop scheduled for September in either Bangladesh, Nepal, or Sri

Lanka, the participants will be from South Asia as we feel that this sub-regional approach helps us focus on the human rights issues that are most relevant to this part of Asia.





As well as make plans for ICF's work this year, the program committee members from several Asian countries—Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Nepal, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka—also shared about their work and/or their interfaith activities. Their interfaith involvement and commitment to justpeace, or peace with justice, included working with orphans created by the 2004 tsunami or the nearly three decades of civil war in

Sri Lanka; supervising 500 community-based groups, which include 15 popular theater groups with 150 members, to empower women in Bangladesh to uphold their rights; and leading an Islamic center that promotes good interfaith relationships in a community Mindanao in the Philippines where there are increasing tensions between people of different faiths and between Sunni and Shia Muslims as well as extremist propaganda in the mosques.

Several years ago ICF formed national forums in nine Asian countries where we have at least five SOP alumni, and it was inspiring to me to hear at the meeting in Siem Reap about the initiatives of some of these national forums in the past year, such as a workshop devoted to identity and peace in Bangladesh or shorter versions of ICF's SOP in Cambodia and an indigenous village in Indonesia. Moreover, the national forums in Bangladesh, Nepal and the Philippines plan to organize short-term SOPs in their countries this year.

All of this work at the national level reflects the commitment to interfaith justpeace among the SOP alumni as none of them receive a salary from ICF. For me, this level of enthusiasm, energy and dedication indicates hope for the future in a part of the world where poverty, human rights abuses and violent conflicts are too prevalent. ICF's work is largely planting seeds of peace and providing various tools and skills to respond to political, socio-economic, cultural and religious problems in Asia. It is rewarding to see these seeds of peace bear fruit through the efforts of the SOP alumni in their local and national context. Stories in the media often create despair, but the quiet work of many of our SOP alumni indicates that there is potential for positive change that affirms life and builds relationships among people



who perceive themselves to be different because of their ethnic, racial or religious identity.

In Hong Kong, where I live, people's attention is fixed on the selection of the city's next chief executive, or governor, in March from among four candidates. While a committee of 1,200 members will technically choose the next chief executive, the vote with the most influence is that of the Chinese government as it's common for figures from the pro-establishment camp on the committee to withhold their support from any candidate until they know through the subtle or not so subtle actions of the Chinese government who it supports. This phenomenon is not new since it's been a feature of life to some extent here since Hong Kong once again became part of China in 1997, but it seems to be more pronounced in the last few years.

With peace,

Bruce Van Voorhis





Japan

JEFFREY MENSENDIEK



Fresh Air Retreat

For the past several years, I have been involved locally here in Kobe with twelve churches that sponsor an annual Fresh Air Retreat for families from Fukushima. This year six mothers and thirteen children came for a week of fun and relaxation. Kobe City is far to the southwest of Fukushima, which means that mothers feel comfortable allowing their children to play freely outside. Now, five and a half years after the nuclear disaster, most Japanese have stopped thinking about the stark realities in Fukushima. What I share below is a summary of a conversation I had with five women who are involved in hosting the annual Fresh Air Retreats.



Yuri: "I have been involved for the past four years. It has been an eye opening experience for me to realize that these families live in such a different reality from my own. They lack that basic sense of safety which I have taken for granted my whole life. Mothers have to constantly worry about the health of their children. Each time I interact with the children they reveal to me how difficult their lives are back home."

Satoko: "My role as a yoga instructor has been to lead a yoga class for the mothers. I found that the mothers this year were much more stressed out than ever before. I think our relationship with them will gain in importance with each consecutive year. At first they were so tense. I tried to crack some jokes, but nobody laughed. By the end of our time together however, they were beginning to relax, and the expressions on their faces showed me that the class had been good for them. "

Hitomi: "For me, I think it is important to involve myself in the lives of my neighbors. Most people feel that as long as they don't go to





Fukushima, the realities there have nothing to do with them. But I think that as Christians we are called to see the lives of our neighbors as a part of our own lives. So I want to learn about their lives, and know what I can do for them. As I interacted with the mothers this year there were times that I found myself speechless, lacking the words to encourage and comfort. At such times though, they would reach out to me with kind words. I thought to myself that they shouldn't have to be comforting me!"

Nobuko: "I am a mother of one elementary school age boy. I grew up near a nuclear plant, and my mother was quite active in demonstrating against the presence of nuclear plants in our rural area. So I grew up sensitized to the dangers of the nuclear industry. For me it is a real blessing to be involved with the planning of these retreats. These mothers are raising their children in Fukushima, just as I am raising mine here in Kobe. They don't have the choices that I have to buy vegetables from safe areas. I always think about what I can do for them. I live so far away. I know I can show my support and solidarity in a monetary way. These retreats are a way that I can involve myself during the year in their lives. This brings me great joy."

Keiko: "I am a pastor, and I serve as the representative of the planning committee. I have not interacted too much with the participants, but rather have tried to make sure that the retreat runs as smoothly as possible. One mother told me how impressed she was that Christian churches continue to provide these retreats, and that they are open for anyone who wants to join. This year at the farewell party, I apologized to one of the mothers for not being able to do more for them. She responded by saying, "No, even though you live far away, it is so important for us to know that there are people like you who continue to think of us in this way."

Most parents in and around Fukushima are anxious to provide a safe environment for the health of their children. Some are more sensitive to the unknown dangers of radiation than others. They know that expressing their doubts and fears about the safety of their living environment can lead to jeopardizing relations with neighbors and friends. At the same time, these parents do not want to leave their homes, because that would mean starting their lives all over again. Such families are caught in a highly stressful situation, and are provided few opportunities to vent their frustration. Three mothers who participated this year reported that they are having difficulties in their marriage. One mother told us that she has had her child wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants all year round for the past five years.





These retreats provide a place for the mothers to share their deepest concerns. They are also greatly encouraged to connect with like-minded people.

The realities in Fukushima are so far removed from our daily lives. The women I spoke to who host the annual Fresh Air Retreats shared their own struggles to be mindful of the lives of those who continue to suffer because of the nuclear disaster. Again this Christmas, UCC and Disciples churches around the US will be sending Christmas cards to our partner churches in and around Fukushima, lifting them up in prayer during Advent. I am reminded of Jesus' mother Mary who witnessed the sufferings that her son faced, and "pondered these things in her heart." I am thankful for all people who have the vision and imagination to reach out globally through prayer. I hope Advent this year will be a time where we can "ponder these things in our hearts" as we pray for God's promise to all peoples "Peace on earth and good tidings to all."

Jeffrey Mensendiek





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