



Women in International Ministry: A Life of Joyful Giving: Cally Rogers-Witte

By Ana Gobledale

"....Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your lives...."

— Philippians 4:6-7, *The Message*

SOME PEOPLE HAVE A KNACK for rolling out of the right side of the bed. They meet each day with joy and positive anticipation. Cally Rogers-Witte seems to be one of those people. About 10 years ago, I met Cally when I spent a week in the Southwest Conference. Her positive presence, buoyed by her commitment and faith, impressed me then. Her leadership as Executive Minister of Wider Church Ministries UCC and Co-Executive of Global Ministries has continued to impress me. While she may consider herself "a worry-wart," surely she has taken the words of one of her favorite scripture passages to heart, "Instead of worrying, pray." Indeed, "it is wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center" of our lives, and it has been wonderful to have Cally at the center of our Global Ministries. Now, as Cally has entered retirement, I would like to thank her for the excellent leadership and pastoral care she has provided the church. May her life story inspire you to be the best person you can be, looking with joy and anticipation to the rising sun to discover what opportunities God has prepared for you today!

SURROUNDED BY A FAMILY'S LOVE... THEN AND NOW

Cally grew up in Cocoa, Florida. Her parents were "pillars" of the Presbyterian Church where her mother served as the first female member of the church's governing body. The importance of working for the common good was stressed in their love-filled home.

Cally writes that her husband of 38 years, Frank Rogers-Witte, "was open enough nearly 38 years



Cally Rogers Witte and Frank.

ago to open to accepting my family last name, as well as my adding his." She continues, "I have a new appreciation for the beautiful ways over the years that my lay husband has supported our common understanding of God's call to me to be involved in a particular ministry (even when that meant for him leaving his own job and professional identity and moving across the country and starting all over). Now I wonder if perhaps it's my turn to support my husband in whatever God is calling him to do/be in the coming years!" Cally and Frank have two married daughters, Mary Ann and Beth, and a new grandson, Lee.

A JOURNEY IN MINISTRY...

Cally remembers "being captivated by the pictures and stories shared by a female medical missionary to the Congo at a pot-luck supper in my local church when I was a child. I never did fulfill my childhood dream of following in her footsteps, but..." Cally's first ministerial call was to the American Church in Paris, France, as Director of Christian Education. This position, Cally explains, "played a strong role in developing my global consciousness."

After ordination she was called by "one very special church," Community United Church of Christ in Raleigh, North Carolina, where she served as its pastor for 18 years. Then she, with her family, headed across the USA to Phoenix, Arizona, where she served as Conference Minister of the United Church of Christ's Southwest Conference for 10 years.

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When asked what led her to consider the positions of Co-Executive of Global Ministries and Executive Minister of Wider Church Ministries, Cally writes: "I was becoming more and more 'at ease' with my position in the wonderful Southwest Conference and expected to stay there until retirement, so I was definitely not 'searching' for a new call. However, when I realized that there was an unexpected opening at Wider Church Ministries (for a position that people had urged me to apply for a few years earlier and which I had rejected as impossible because of already being in 'just the right place' for both my husband and me), I remembered all the other times that God had given me a second chance after I had said no to something. And, knowing that 'this world which God so loves' has long been my passion and that I might be able to bring certain experiences and interests to the position at a time of transition when community-building would be so important, I decided to offer my application and leave it up to God and the committee to figure out."

SERVING WIDER CHURCH MINISTRIES & GLOBAL MINISTRIES...

Accepting the position in Cleveland meant sacrifice for Cally and Frank who managed a "cross-country commuter marriage" for the five years she held the position. Though she does not recommend such an arrangement to friends, Cally puts a positive spin on it, "The good thing about that is that each time we were together was such a huge joy and we did not take a minute of it for granted."

Cally's description of her role as Executive Minister of WCM and Co-executive of Global Ministries provides an intriguing insight into the workings of our church. She writes, "Sometimes I thought of my primary responsibility as either 'cheer-leader' or 'support staff' for mission partners and personnel around the world. They were doing the work of ministry; my part was to help provide support. Sometimes my part was extraordinarily fascinating and great fun (like visiting church leaders or missionaries overseas or volunteers and projects in this country). Sometimes my part was excruciatingly difficult (when facing dramatically declining income has meant laying people off, cutting the numbers of mission personnel, or slashing grants to partners around the world."

Cally does not hesitate to exclaim that the most rewarding aspect of her work was "People, people, people! The exceptionally gifted and hard-working staff I have been able to oversee, the delightful people who offer themselves in volunteer or funded



Cally Rogers Witte at Thai Burma Border Refugee Consultation.

mission, and, of course, the amazing people I have met in churches and partner organizations around the world."

MEETING CHRIST FACE-TO-FACE...

Cally writes, "So many times in my travels with WCM and Global Ministries I have seen the face of Christ in someone I meet."

"I remember the woman on a local church committee which was sponsoring a refugee family – she had given so much of her energy and time to drive them to various appointments and errands. She could have complained about the red tape she encountered and the impossibilities of helping a family to live on such a tiny amount. But instead she spoke of how grateful she was to have learned so much from the experience about how our economy and our society treat people who have not been privileged. She thought she was going to help change someone else for the better and she found that she was herself profoundly changed.

"I remember the older man I met in a church-supported refugee camp for ethnic minority people who had fled from Burma (Myanmar) into Thailand. He welcomed us and told us about their lives locked in the camp walls for more than 20 years. He spoke of his Christian faith which sustained him and many people in that camp. (The ethnic Karen people are predominantly Christian.) Over and over he mentioned "our missionary" as he spoke about his village life in Burma and the people's way of organizing life now in the camp, trying to make life better for each person. It sounded like the missionary had only recently left, but I had a feeling that time meant something different to that man than to me. So, I asked, "By any chance are you talking about Rev. Adonirum Judson"? He smiled broadly and said, "Of course!" I knew Rev. Judson was one of the first four missionaries commissioned

in 1812 by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, an earlier name for what is now Wider Church Ministries of the UCC! (I knew also that Rev. Judson, originally Congregational, converted to the Baptist understanding of faith. So today Protestant Karen people from Burma are almost all Baptist!) I saw the face of Christ's in that dedicated refugee who was offering leadership in that camp which flowed from his own understanding of the Christian faith: "May They All Be One", whether Baptist or UCC or persons of good will working for the common good as God would guide them!"

While she did not fulfill her childhood dream to be a medical missionary to the Congo, Cally realized a portion of that dream. "At least now I am working to support indigenous Christian leaders in the Congo and elsewhere around the world and to support faithful people from our church and country who offer to share their time, lives, and talent in some part of God's global mission. In Global Ministries we call it 'sharing life in Christ' and it is definitely a two-way calling."

STRENGTHENED BY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES...

"Journal writing, " Cally explains, "has been the staple, over the years, especially at times of turmoil. Often I write a "dialogue" with a wisdom figure from the Bible or from my own experience (a former mentor, Reuben Shears, often stars in my journal as my "wisdom figure"). I'm frequently amazed at what the wisdom figure has to say to my questions and comments. Yes, what I read that I have just written comes out of my own hand taking pen to paper but it often truly seems to come from some very deep place and I feel guided by God in a lovely and centering way."

Cally offers helpful examples of simple spiritual disciplines that provide calm and peace. As she writes notes on Christmas cards, she explains, " I found it a great joy to simply pray for each person as I stuffed and licked their envelope, to give thanks to God for loving that person." She listens to Taize chant music. And she notices God in the rising and the setting of the sun, "For the ten years I was in Arizona, I tried to be in a position each day to watch the sunset (or at least the western sky) and to simply 'sit with God.' Now that my husband and I have moved our home-base back to Cocoa, our hometown on the east coast of Florida, the sunrises beckon me to change my daily habits!"

LOOKING INTO THE SUNRISE...

Moving into retirement, Cally writes, " I realize that I have a new opportunity to be open to where God is calling me to minister each day, instead of understanding 'my call' to be to a particular position in or for the church over a number of years. I pray that each new sunrise offers me the opportunity to open myself to God's call for that particular day!"

Cally has requested that "I Sing a Song of The Saints of God' be sung at her memorial service. With genuine admiration and appreciation for the gifts she has shared with the church and all God's people, I can say, surely, she's already one in that saintly number, in my book!

Currently living in London UK, Ana Gobledale serves as co-pastor, with her husband Tod, at St. Andrew's United Reformed Church, Brockley. They are Mission Associates with Global Ministries, having previously served in Australia, Zimbabwe and South Africa.



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. How has someone in your family supported you in fulfilling your "call" as Frank supported Cally? Or how have you been the one to provide the support for another?
2. Where in your life might God be calling you, as God called Cally, giving you a second chance to step up and accept?
3. What does today's sunrise hold for you?

Prayer Points

- The staff of Wider Church Ministries and Global Ministries, especially Jim Moos who has replaced Cally as Executive Minister
- Cally and Frank, and other ministers and church workers transitioning into retirement
- Our international partners in Thailand, France and other countries

Opportunities for Action

- Learn more about Global Ministries and Wider Church Ministries and how your congregation can get involved as a Global Mission Church.
- Read some of the missionary letters on the Global Ministries website, then join the e-list to receive regular mailings.
- Write a letter of appreciation to Cally or another staff person serving the wider church.