New World Outlook

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Theology of Mission Through United Methodist Lenses

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NEW WORLD OUTLOOK

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Cover illustration: Ron Underberg with photos by Jayun Jang. An 1835 Communion chalice from St. Paul and St. Andrew United Methodist Church in Manhattan offers the lens of tradition as a way of framing United Methodist theology.

Developing Your Own

As the mission magazine of The United Methodist Church, *New World Outlook* frequently considers mission theology as it emerges, changes and reinvents itself in practice. This issue presents viewpoints from missionaries, professors, pastors, deaconesses, mission executives and laypeople—and they are all different viewpoints. The quest is not to find the "right" mission theology, because such a thing does not exist. Theology, despite its lofty overtones, is personal. Some theologies, when put into practice, work better than others. Some ways of thinking about God may need to be reconsidered.

One concern about mission theology is that it has too long been an area dominated by US clergy—particularly white, male US clergy. Norma Dollaga, a deaconess of the UMC Philippines, introduces her article with this confession: "my religious training has alienated me from the world of theology" (see p. 18). She is still recovering from the trauma of having her thoughts about God criticized and invalidated by others in an academic setting. Her sister deaconess, Darlene Marquez-Caramanzana of the Philippines, presents us with a picture of the Western nations, particularly the United States, as empire builders—a picture that some readers may find hard to envision. Keep in mind, these articles are not written by outsiders but from within the United Methodist family. They speak volumes about how people in other countries view US foreign and political actions.

The Rev. George W. Baldwin, a United Methodist pastor, missionary, and professor, wrote a book called *A Political Reading of the Life of Jesus*. He says his book is available on Amazon.com, Barnes&Noble.com, or iUniverse.com. It is his credo, he says, that it takes "a lifetime of experience just trying to understand the gospel of Jesus Christ." Baldwin encourages everyone to develop his or her own credo, write it down, and ponder it. Figure out what you believe, why you believe it, and where it came from in your life's journey. This exercise can be quite revealing, a little scary, and sometimes painful, but I think God calls us to examine our faith.

"That's what I like about being United Methodist," my daughter once told me. "You're supposed to question your faith. You're supposed to ask, 'why do I believe this? Is God really leading me in this direction, or is someone else leading me in this direction?' If somebody tells me I have to believe what they say about God without question, I just can't take that seriously."

Yea—you go girl!

One final note: this issue contains an article by a Presbyterian missionary, the Rev. Harold Kurtz. If you are a long-time reader, you may remember that *World Outlook* merged with a Presbyterian publication called *New* to become *New World Outlook* in the early 1970s. We still have a few Presbyterian readers. If you are one of them, please let me know. I'd love to hear from you.

Christie R. House

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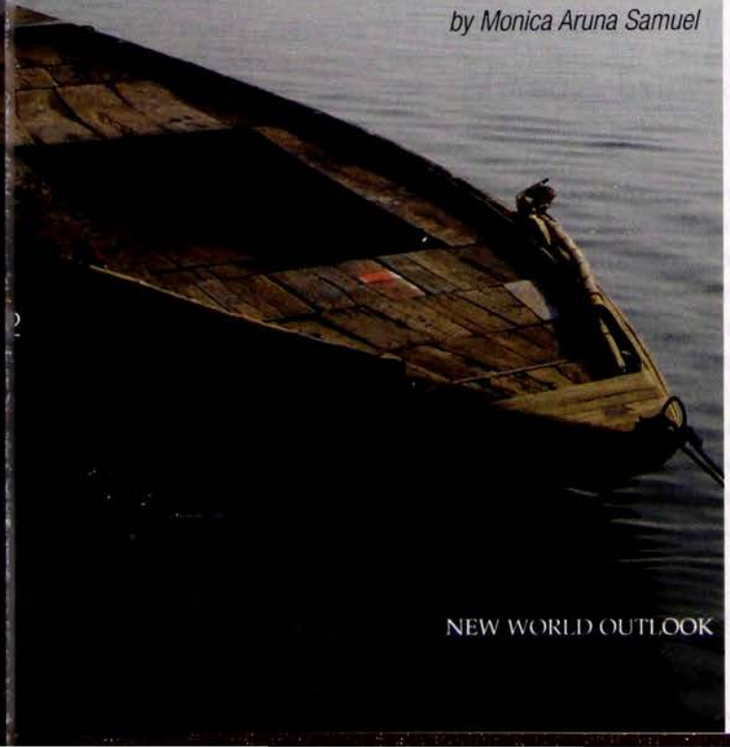

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Theology of Mission Through United Methodist Lenses

The elements of Communion at the Church of St. Paul and St. Andrew, United Methodist, in New York City.
Photos: Christie R. House and Jayun Jang.

by John Edward Nuessle

To see both near and far requires a combination of lenses—ranging from microscope to stellar observatory—with magnifying glasses, eyeglasses, binoculars, and telescopes in between. Each one offers a different perspective on reality; no one lens can do the whole job.

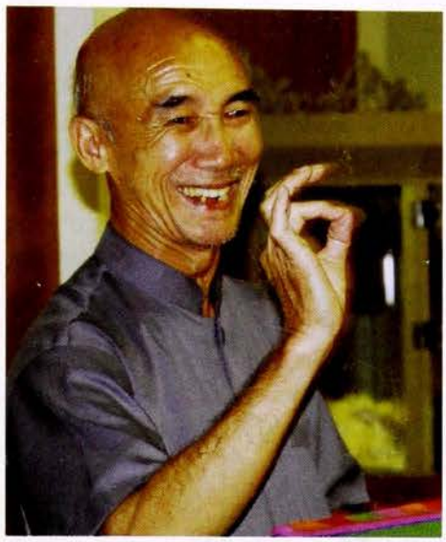
Understanding how to engage in mission as the Church of Jesus Christ requires a similar combination of lenses through which to view the past, present, and future of God's call to be witnesses to the gospel, throughout all the world, in all contextual life situations. To comprehend this vast presence in the world, we use the lenses of the "United Methodist Theological Task," as described in the United Methodist *Book of Discipline:* Scripture, tradition, experience, and reason.

The foundation of all mission theology is *missio Dei,* God's mission. This is the reality of God's presence in our midst, as well as throughout time—past and future. Mission is not primarily an activity of the church but is an attribute of God. God is a missionary God. We are called to participate in this

presence, not simply through events and programs of the church, but as a total expression of being the Body of Christ—here, there, and everywhere. This is what is called the global ministries of the church. The church must not think its role is identical to the *missio Dei*, for the church is participating in the mission of God. The church's mission is to be in connection with the larger whole mission of God, or *missio Dei*. What we do as the Body of Christ, the visible witness to our Christian faith, is to be connected to God's mission throughout the world, knowing that we can never be all of God's work in the world.

Through the lenses of our "United Methodist Theological Task," we can view the various aspects of God's mission and come to greater clarity concerning the pathways and methods needed to carry this mission into all the world. It all begins with grace, God's unconditional love and presence in the world. "For God so loved the world..." is the beginning of this well-known Scripture, John 3:16. The global ministries of the church are an expression of God's loving and caring for the whole earth and all peoples, an expression of God's grace and love for the salvation of the whole world. Grace upon grace is the foundation of mission and how we experience the present reality of the incarnation.

The *missio Dei*—God's mission—is the process through which we participate in the coming reign of God. (Luke 17:20-21: "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed....For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.") Through God's mission we are sent into the entire world, beginning right outside our own doors, and through this we connect with mission partners everywhere.



The Rev. Joseph C. Chan, General Board of Global Ministries missionary serving in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.
Photo: Mary Beth Coudal.

Just as Jesus is sent to the world through the Father, and Jesus sends disciples into the world, so we are continuing to be sent into all the world, living out this connection of mission (John 20:21-22). Mission is a vocational call for us to serve as Christ's representatives in the world, an incarnational theology of mission—mission expressed as the way of Christ. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church that we are treasures in earthen vessels, just common clay pots within which God has entrusted the gospel message (2 Corinthians 4). God's mission is presented to the unbelieving world through the faithful witness of missionaries and other persons responding to this call from God.

The Lens of Scripture

The lens of Scripture leads us to understand that we are in mission as witnesses to God's missional activity in the world, calling others to be leaders in this movement, caring for real human need in the way of Christ, and eliminating the barriers that prevent persons from fully expressing themselves as people of God.

Participation in God's mission is a matter of being witnesses to what God is doing in our midst by pointing toward the coming kingdom and making disciples—by *being* disciples. The first Christian community was called to discipleship through witnessing locally, nationally, and internationally, all at the same time (Acts 1:8). Jesus simply reminded the first disciples on several occasions, "You are witnesses of these things." (Luke 24:48). Witnessing encompasses works of verbal proclamation as well as physical presence and activity. All of this moves us to faithful efforts on behalf of God's mission now, just as in the biblical accounts of the early church.

Leadership development is the call to mission service and sending. As we develop mission leaders throughout the world, we strengthen, develop, and renew Christian community. Again, just as Jesus called the first disciples (Luke 5:1-11), God's mission continues to require spiritual leaders who live out their vocational gifts and graces for the advancement of God's coming reign, calling others into mission and ministry. This is both a personal and a communal call, as God revealed through the prophet Isaiah: "But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine" (Isaiah 43:1).

The call is often to be in servant leadership, with the least and the last, those of the world in need, who are all members of God's family. It is to care as we would care for Christ himself (Matthew 25: 31-46). Offering whatever we have that is needed by God's people, as simple as a cup of cool water, is rewarded as a measure and mark of God's immanent reign. (Mark 9:40-41). This servant leadership may

require sacrificial service, particularly to eliminate the barriers to the justice, freedom, and peace that God's mission identifies as the inheritance of all. (Amos 5:24). Just as early church leaders were sometimes subject to physical persecution and unjust imprisonment (Acts 16:16-24), witnesses to God's word of grace and acceptance for all may encounter persecution today.

We are created to be an inclusive church seeking to break down barriers and walls, fill in the valleys and bring down the mountains, building a straight highway for our God (Isaiah 40:3-5; Luke 3:1-6).

The Lens of Tradition

Through an understanding of the tradition of the Christian faith, we gain additional understanding of the contexts in which we engage in God's mission, the connections of the church that allow us to be witnesses everywhere. The importance of all persons—including children—engaged in God's mission and the call to servanthood to journey with God in mission have come through the ages.

Contextualization in mission is the call for the church to go from everywhere to everywhere as witnesses of Jesus Christ, to make disciples through involvement in the context of people's lives by "partnering with them," rather than providing "mission to them." Disciple-making is a geographically universal task. We are called to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...." (Matthew 28:19), in the totality of the gospel. We engage in this work as the complete Body of Christ, empowering every person and arena of the church, for "As it is, there are many members, yet one body." (I Corinthians 12:20). Our life in mission is organized for us to "abide" in Christ and one another, as the vine and branches of the living church (John 15:1-8). Connectionalism is the biblical organizing principle of mission in the United Methodist tradition that allows us to abide as the universal and global Body of Christ.

We have a strong tradition, in particular, of organizing care for women, children, and youth, knowing how Jesus specifically blessed the children and cared for them as the most vulnerable in society (Mark 10.13-16). This servanthood in God's mission, seeking justice, freedom, and peace through service in the world, is most evident among women organized for mission.

The Lens of Experience

Our experience in mission encourages us to learn about how our connectional church enables God's mission to be more visible and accessible, particularly with global mission partners. Through interdependence and mutuality of effort, the church offers hope and wholeness to all as its members work for justice and reconciliation.

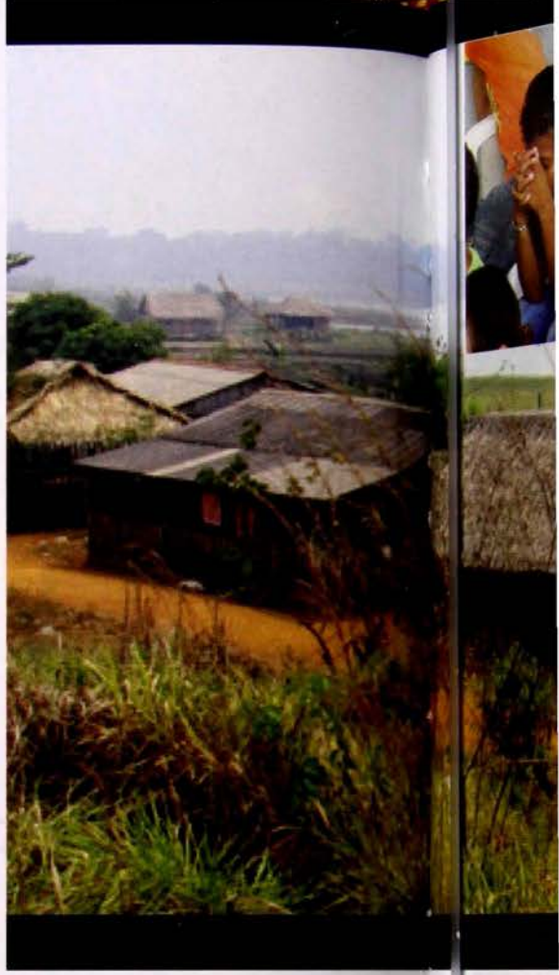
Through the organized connection of the church, we experience the church in mission through programs that move us to be the Body of Christ and allow us to make disciples by building up the whole church through mission education. There are specific methods and processes "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12) with prayer, study, experiential travel, and interaction with partners in mission. We use the various gifts we have from God, organizing our work in God's mission accordingly (Romans 12:4-8).

When we, as mission partners, are joined together in interdependence with mutual trust, we learn to respect the integrity of our common confession of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. When we are working on behalf of those in need, we experience the reality of the abundant life here and now, reaching out to the future. Mission is our expression of God's love—known by the fruit we bear and assist others to bear for the benefit of all persons (John 15: 8-17).

We see in this experience of mission—in ministries of justice, freedom, and peace—that this work is not so much about setting an agenda for action but a relational understanding of those whose lives we are seeking to impact and with whom we walk on the face of the earth. We experience what God requires of all who live by faith: "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8).

The Lens of Reason

It is God's gift of reason that enables us to engage in "reasonable" responses and "responseable" reasons to work for all of



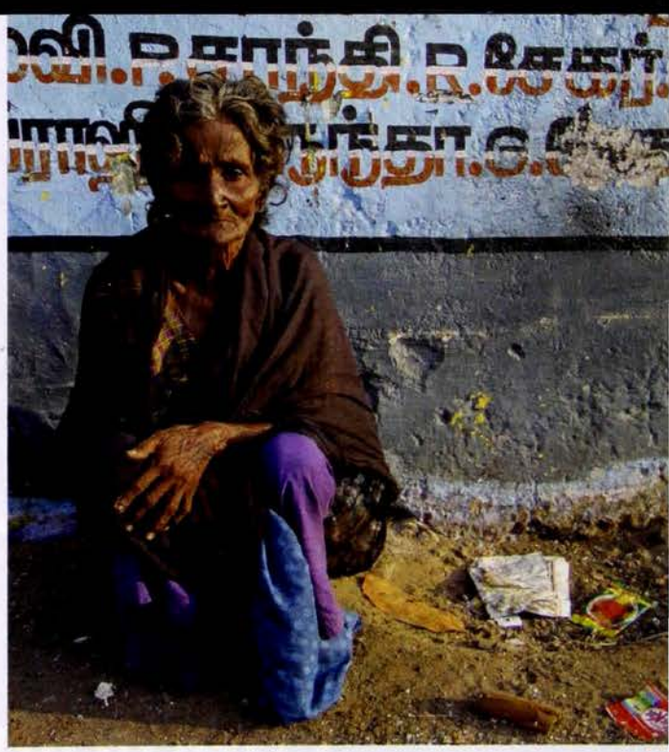
Inset: Children attend a local church to pray and participate in the Shade and Fresh Water Project, Ji-Parana, in the state of Rondônia, Brazil. ***Top:*** *Typical buildings in the countryside of Rondônia, northwestern Brazil.* Photos: Shawn Bakker/The Advance. ***Above right:*** *Children in the Democratic Republic of Congo.* Photo: Ray Buchanan/Stop Hunger Now. ***Below right:*** *An older woman in India. Much of the world's population lives and dies in extreme poverty.* Photo: Paul Jeffrey.

God's mission, using methods that engage us as faithful witnesses to all that God is doing in our midst.

Support for missionaries is one such method of faithful witness. All persons are called through the church to go from everywhere to everywhere in God's mission. Missionaries are sent out into the world with not much more than faith and the church's support for the profound work they do. (Luke 9:1-6; 10:1-12; 17-20).

This support begins in worshiping faith communities each Sunday and continues throughout the week with prayer and study. These are the foundations of a missional congregation, creating a Christian body that prepares and shares food for a journey into the world. (Colossians 3:16-17). All mission is local mission carried out on a global scale—the global ministries of the whole church. To think and act globally and locally at once is to be a community of faithful witnesses. The stewardship of our financial resources for mission, the manna of God, (compare Exodus 16:11-21 and 2 Corinthians 8: 1-7, 13-15) is a matter of living into God's vision of bringing together the whole world into the kingdom with justice, freedom, and peace for all persons.

These are the lenses of theological inquiry that enable us to see clearly the vast and exciting magnitude of God's Mission. As we engage in this study, using the foundations of theology, we will be more fully prepared to move forward in faith with God in mission.



John Edward Nuessle is an assistant general secretary of the General Board of Global Ministries and author of Faithful Witnesses: United Methodist Theology of Mission, *a Global Ministries book available through Cokesbury.*

Members of the Office of Deaconess, a mission order recognized in 1888 by the Methodist Episcopal Church.
Photo: Global Ministries Archive.

Theology of Mission and Relationship With the Church Office of Deaconess

Deaconesses, who are lay women, and home missioners, who are lay men, are professionally trained persons who have been led by the Holy Spirit to devote their lives to Christlike service under the authority of the Church (¶1314.2). The purpose of the office of deaconess and home missioner shall be to express representatively the love and concern of the believing community for the needs of the world and to enable, through education and involvement, the full ministry and mission of the people of God. Deaconesses and home missioners function through diverse forms of service directed toward the world to make Jesus Christ known in the fullness of his ministry and mission, which mandate that his followers:

a) Alleviate suffering;

b) Eradicate causes of injustice and all that robs life of dignity and worth;

c) Facilitate the development of full human potential; and

d) Share in building global community through the church universal.(¶1314.1).

The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2008, ¶1314

Deaconess Diane Wood-Hassell is commissioned for service at the General Board of Global Ministries Spring 2007 directors meeting. Photo: Cassandra Heller.

Deaconesses are laywomen and home missioners are laymen who have answered God's call and feel led by the Holy Spirit to dedicate themselves to lifetime ministry, are approved by the General Board of Global Ministries, and are commissioned to the Office of Deaconess or Home Missioner by a bishop at a session of the Global Ministries board of directors or at a setting approved by Global Ministries. The Deaconesses' and Home Missioners' commission is to a continuing relationship with The United Methodist Church through the General Board of Global Ministries. The act of commissioning is an outward and visible sign that deaconesses and home missioners are being sent into the world on behalf of and under the authority of the church, as representatives of the church's love and concern.

The early deaconess movement in the United Methodist tradition was built on a strong heritage of activism and social renewal in denominational work and in partnership with secular organizations. A strong motivation in the early deaconess movement was the desire to meet the physical and spiritual needs of people marginalized by society: individuals/families in isolated places, such as coal-mining areas; immigrants and migrants in inner cities; persons facing discrimination, especially those most neglected, such as women and children. From the beginning of the deaconess movement, deaconesses worked on the margins of society; today they still engage in cutting-edge ministries. God's presence is still found on the edges of society where deaconesses and home missioners continue to join the struggle to promote healing and overcome injustice.

The first deaconesses in the United Methodist tradition in the United States sought recognition and a more formal status with the church. Just as the deaconesses of today, they traced their roots to Phoebe, the woman whom Paul describes as a "benefactor of many" (Romans 16:1). The churches in the United Methodist tradition recognized the call of deaconesses by setting them apart, which was also a recognition of their willingness to go. All denominations that joined to create The United Methodist Church had some form of deaconess service; however, the Office of Deaconess was first officially authorized by the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1888.

Deaconesses and home missioners understand themselves to be called to a servanthood rooted in Scripture, where Jesus, through his life and work, modeled mission partnership with God by emptying God's self of divine status, taking the form of a servant, and accepting the struggles, risks, challenges, and satisfactions of servanthood.

In the Wesleyan tradition, partnership in God's mission is personal and social, inseparably combining evangelism and social action. The mission of the church to which deaconesses and home missioners feel called is described in Luke 4:14-30. In this passage, Jesus talks about social reversal—the poor, whose lives have been a succession of terrible events, will get good news; the captives, whose lives have been bound, will be released; the blind, who have been denied sight, will see again; and the oppressed, whose lives have been enslaved, will be liberated.

Deaconesses and home missioners feel that being asked to describe their call and relationship is like being asked to articulate a sacred mystery. The deaconess and home missioner relationship means different things to different people; however, there is for all of them a strong sense of belonging to something that is beyond them, yet common to all deaconesses and home missioners. It is this common calling that binds deaconesses and home missioners together in community.

The deaconess and home missioner relationship connects a community of men and women who have a shared vision and commitment to the ministry and mission of the church. The web of diverse relations shared by deaconesses and home missioners nurtures and deepens their call to lifetime servant ministry and enriches their community and its collective ministry. This strong sense of community undergirds, empowers, and supports deaconesses and home missioners in their ministry. It calls them into accountability, affords them opportunities to struggle together to find answers to critical problems, and supports them in their personal and professional struggles.

Deaconesses founded many of the institutions, such as community centers, residential child-care centers, and schools, that continue to relate to the General Board of Global Ministries. Deaconesses and home missioners today, as throughout their history, serve in many areas of need, such as social work, health care, education, and in ministries with women, children, youth, and older adults. Wherever they serve, and regardless of the task, they find and represent the presence of God in the midst of those with whom they serve. Their daily task of serving and empowering is, for them, a visible symbol of the link between the church and the world.

To enter the deaconess or home missioner relationship is to be a part of an incarnational ministry. It is to be in the world because God is in the world, doing the kind of ministry to which each person feels called, ever alert to the signs of God through what is being done individually and collectively. Deaconesses and home missioners function as a lay order, always struggling with and trying to appropriate to themselves emerging forms of Christian discipleship. This kind of commitment and obedience requires structure, culture, relationship, and community. They form a covenant community that is characterized by a common call rooted in Scripture—a commitment to the mission of the church informed by history, driven by mission, ecumenical in scope, and global in outreach.

By assuming the Office of Deaconess and Home Missioner, lay women and men become part of an extended community with diverse gifts and responsibilities. This community enables them to form relationships among themselves that have been shaped by similar training and shared experiences of fellowship, resulting in a sense of community built upon and spiritually nurtured by the connectional life of the church. "What a fellowship, what a joy divine" are words to a familiar hymn that aptly describe what it means to be a part of the deaconess community. It is that sense of community that undergirds, empowers, and supports deaconesses and home missioners in their ministry and provides them with the courage to accept the risks and challenges necessary to address

Deaconess class, Spring 2005. Photo: Mel Wright.

Deaconess and home missioner class, April 2007. Photo: Cassandra Heller.

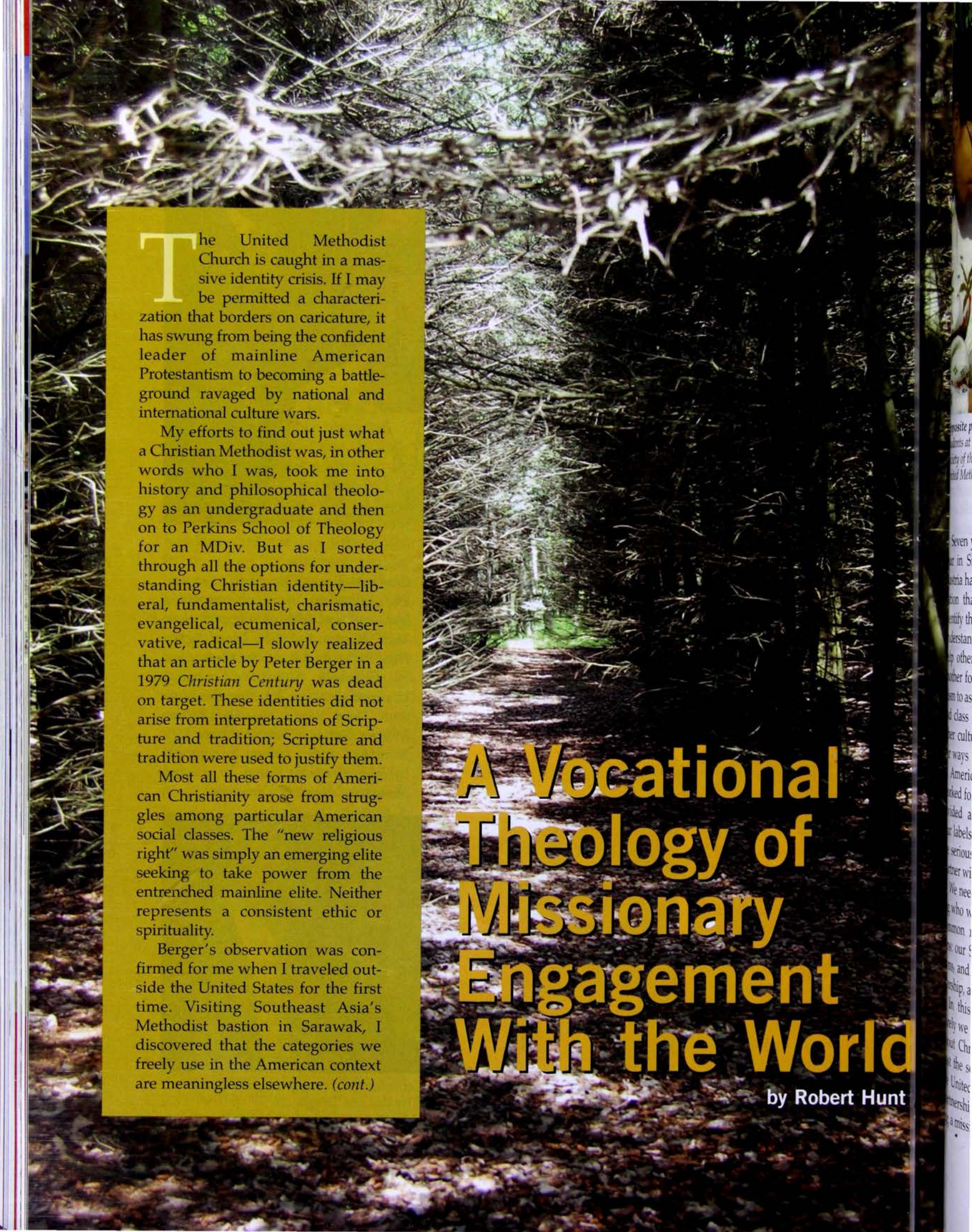
controversial issues in the world in which they live and serve.

Active deaconesses and home missioners hold membership in a local church within the annual conference where they are appointed to serve and are voting members of the annual conference. Retired deaconesses and home missioners retain membership and have seat and voice, but no vote, in the annual conference from which they retire.

Deaconesses are linked ecumenically and internationally through DIAKONIA: The World Federation of Diaconal Associations and Diaconal Communities. Organized following World War II, DIAKONIA seeks to further the ecumenical unity of diaconal work in several countries, to strengthen its member associations, to increase the sense of the significance of the ministry of women and their tasks, to develop mutual aid, and to unite in common projects. Deaconesses are also linked ecumenically and regionally through DOTAC (DIAKONIA of the Americas and the Caribbean). Deaconesses and home missioners from the United Methodist tradition have taken major roles in both regional and international organizations.

This statement is a "living" document developed by the Deaconess Program Office of the General Board of Global Ministries in collaboration with the Committee on Deaconess Service. The following resources provided historical and biblical interpretation: My Calling to Fulfill *by Mary Agnes Dougherty,* As Among the Methodists *by Elizabeth Meredith Lee, and* Unexpected News: Reading the Bible with Third World Eyes *by Robert McAfee Brown. This document may be revised and is subject to approval by the General Board of Global Ministries' Board of Directors.*

United Methodist deaconesses Kumja Lim, Catherine Kim, Bong Jo Lee, and deacon Sharon Rubey attend a DOTAC meeting in Trinidad and Tobago.
Photo: Courtesy the Office of Deaconesses and Home Missioners.



A Vocational Theology of Missionary Engagement With the World

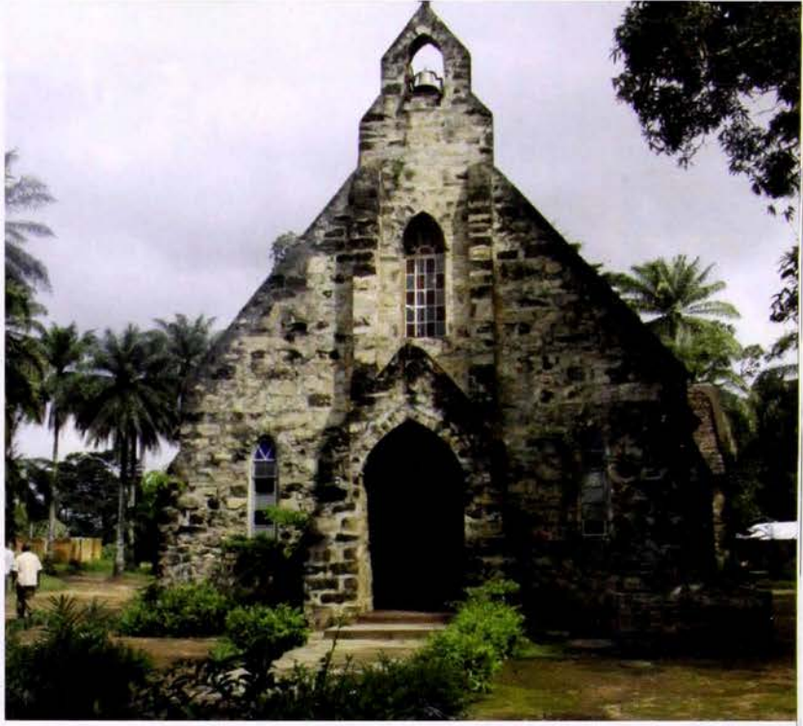
by Robert Hunt

The United Methodist Church is caught in a massive identity crisis. If I may be permitted a characterization that borders on caricature, it has swung from being the confident leader of mainline American Protestantism to becoming a battleground ravaged by national and international culture wars.

My efforts to find out just what a Christian Methodist was, in other words who I was, took me into history and philosophical theology as an undergraduate and then on to Perkins School of Theology for an MDiv. But as I sorted through all the options for understanding Christian identity—liberal, fundamentalist, charismatic, evangelical, ecumenical, conservative, radical—I slowly realized that an article by Peter Berger in a 1979 *Christian Century* was dead on target. These identities did not arise from interpretations of Scripture and tradition; Scripture and tradition were used to justify them.

Most all these forms of American Christianity arose from struggles among particular American social classes. The "new religious right" was simply an emerging elite seeking to take power from the entrenched mainline elite. Neither represents a consistent ethic or spirituality.

Berger's observation was confirmed for me when I traveled outside the United States for the first time. Visiting Southeast Asia's Methodist bastion in Sarawak, I discovered that the categories we freely use in the American context are meaningless elsewhere. *(cont.)*



Opposite page: *The pine forest of Kingswood Methodist Camp in Hancock, New York.* Photo: Christie R. House. ***Above left:*** *Students at Isabella Thoburn College in Lucknow, India. Isabella Thoburn was an American missionary sponsored by the Women's Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church.* Photo: Paul Jeffrey. ***Above right:*** *Miller McAllister United Methodist Church at Ganta United Methodist Mission Station in Liberia.* Photo: Jane Malone/UMNS.

Seven years living in Malaysia, four in Singapore, and seven in Austria have confirmed my observation that the ways Americans identify themselves do not help us understand others, nor do they help others understand us. It is another form of American imperialism to assume that our categories and class warfare apply in every other culture and clime. In truth, our ways of identifying ourselves as American Christians haven't worked for us: witness our deeply divided and stalemated church. Our labels are utterly worthless if we seriously want to engage and partner with the global church.

We need a way of understanding who we are that draws on the common resources of all Christians: our Scriptures, shared traditions, and common life of prayer, worship, and praise.

In this age of globalization, surely we can find ways of talking about Christian identity that get past the so-called culture wars in the United States and enable real partnerships abroad. Rediscovering a missional identity is the key.

The Problem of Categorical Thinking

When I became a local church pastor, I quickly realized that most Christians are not interested in categorical, hierarchical thinking. They want to know how to follow Jesus. They want to know their vocation. For most of my parishioners, Christian identity didn't consist of a set of beliefs. Christianity was a story they told about themselves and their church as it engaged the world with the gospel. The problem was that often they told the wrong story, filled with American middle-class dreams and anxieties instead of God's reign.

The theological battleground characterized as evangelical versus liberal is not relevant. Theological categories will never provide us with an identity.

There are no unchanging dogmas or doctrines by which we can be identified and no universal categories that will show us how we are both related to and different from every other Christian or religion. Every statement of faith and every affirmation of belief is located in a specific worldview and culture. What makes us Christians cannot be captured by specific affirmations of faith any more than a marriage can be captured by a set of vows and promises.

Every four years at General Conference we can hope to find the jackpot combination that will turn around our steady decline. After General Conference, we will find out how many of our members we've alienated this time around. We don't need a compelling hierarchy of unchanging theological claims or ethical standards. We need a compelling story that all of us can tell and live out.

Narrative and Identity

Calvin Shrag, in his wonderful book (*The Self After Modernity,* Yale University Press, New Haven, 1997, p. 98), points out that in those cultures that understand the fluidity and interrelatedness of human persons, identity is best understood in terms of narrative rather than core characteristics or beliefs.

The first session of the Siberia-Manchuria Mission headed by Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Bishop W. R. Lambuth (bottom, center) included unnamed indigenous members—always key contributors in the United Methodist mission story.
Photo: United Methodist Archives, Madison, NJ.

United Methodists have two real problems. We continue to try to define ourselves with core beliefs, organizational structures, and vague ideologies like "inclusiveness," or "passion for the gospel." Even if we granted the Articles of Religion real authority to define what a Methodist believes, there would be a dozen different interpretations of them.

The second problem is that we have nostalgia for stories that are not adequate. It isn't enough to retell the story of John Wesley and his passion, or the circuit riders and their courage, or earlier generations of missionaries and their commitments. Nostalgia for the glory days can't tell us who we are today, or who we should strive to be.

The only story that can give us an identity is one that accounts for the whole of our lives and makes sense of each part therein. For Christians, it must be a story that we share with all Christians, which encompasses who we are today, and which can shape our future.

The Story

The Methodist story doesn't account fully for our Christian identity. But surely the story of Jesus and his love, of God and God's grace, is a universally shared Christian story.

The story of Jesus and his love is both a story we don't really know, and yet one that even nonChristians can tell. Even if we accept every word of the New Testament as an accurate historical account of Jesus, we know far less about Jesus than we think. The New Testament isn't the story of Jesus alone. It doesn't present us with his inner psychological development from childhood onward, nor, beyond telling us of his pity or anger, does it express how outward events shaped his inner life.

The other possible story, the entire story of God's salvation as presented in Scripture, is equally problematic in relation to Christian identity. Knowing and telling it in no way distinguishes Christians from people of many other religions. Although salvation is a shared story, it doesn't have a shared ending. The Paradise of Islam is not the New Jerusalem of Christianity, the infinite ocean of being that Hinduism called Brahman, or the Nirvana of Buddhism.

The New Testament isn't really the story of Jesus in relation to himself. It is the story of Jesus with others, Jesus engaging individuals and society with the gospel. Apart from John's metaphysical prologue to the gospel, all of the gospels begin with the people for whom the birth of Jesus will be a transforming experience. The gospel story is of Jesus engaging with his parents, relatives, disciples, apostles, scribes, Pharisees, poor people of the land, tax collectors, the demon-possessed, the sick, the rich, and those who walked in darkness. It is the story of these people encountering Christ's good news, of all these people facing choices that the nearness of God's reign demands. Without people, the story of Jesus has no plot. Understood in this way, the New Testament is our story, humanity in all its variety, engaging with Jesus.

There are many stories in the New Testament—more in the Bible as a whole. But there is only one, in my view, that unifies Scripture—the story of Jesus calling his apostles to join him in his mission of declaring the good news of God's reign. Other disciples and various enemies of the gospel appear only briefly. I include among them the women who were with Jesus from beginning to end as witnesses. What follows Jesus' death and resurrection is the book of the Acts of the Apostles, letters from apostles to an apostolic church. Even at the very end of the Book of Revelation, the apostles form the walls and foundation of the New Jerusalem. Jesus is present among them in the flesh and always in the spirit. The story that we are given as our story in the New Testament is the story of the apostles and the apostolic church that they founded. If we are looking for a Christian identity that unites us with the very first followers of Jesus and every generation of Christians since, we need to look at the story of the apostles with Jesus. Their story is the Christian story.

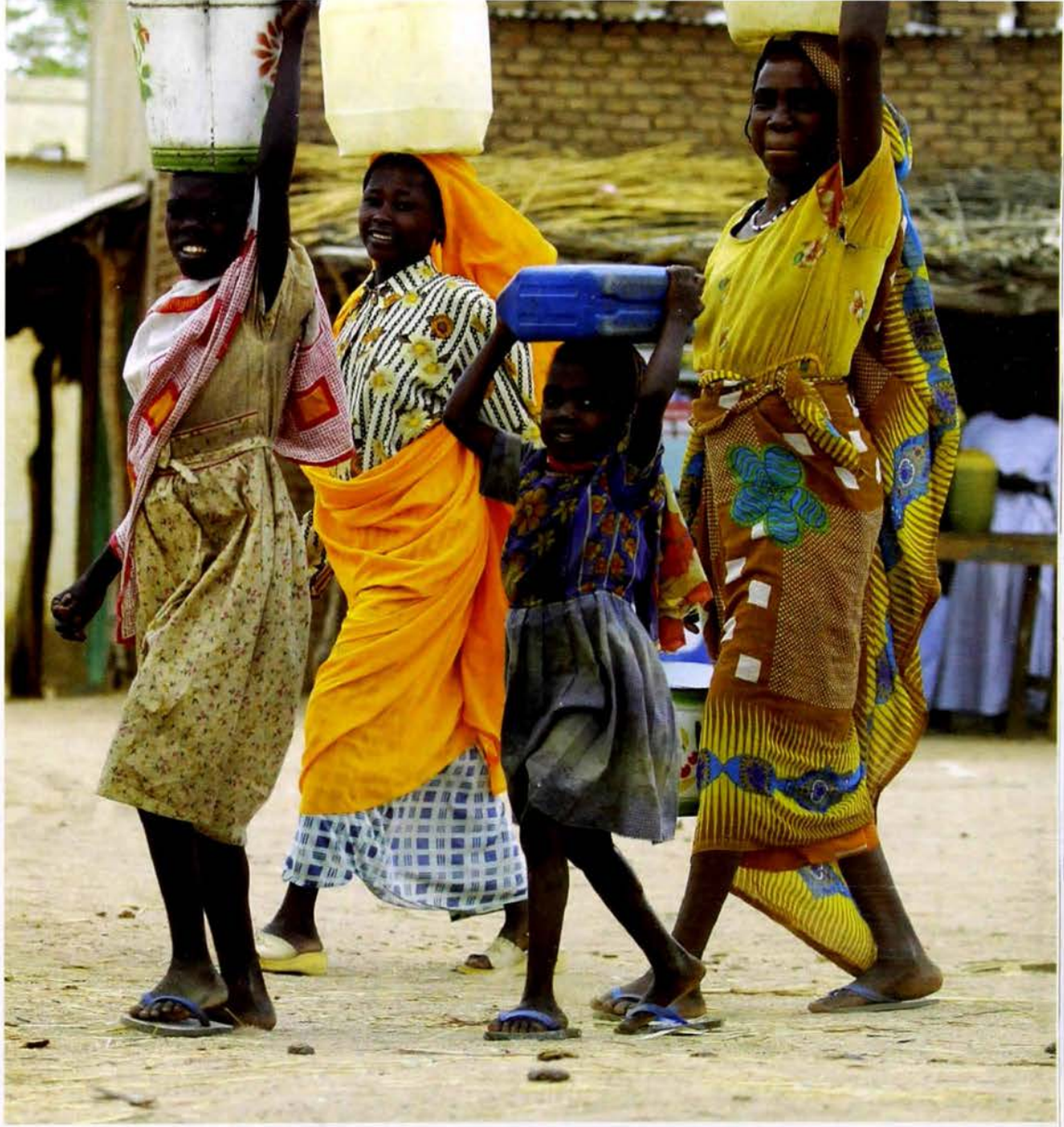
It is a simple story—the story of Christian mission. To a people walking in darkness, Jesus is sent by God to announce the good news that God's reign is near. That

announcement isn't just talk. Jesus enacts the nearness of God's reign with healing, exorcism, reconciliation, and teaching. And Jesus calls upon the apostles to do the same thing. They obey the command of God to heal, teach, reconcile, set free, forgive, and give God praise when they recognize God's presence. Then after Jesus' resurrection, the apostles continue to do what he taught them. His resurrection is a sign that indeed the reign of God, with its promise of the defeat of death, is near. The apostles have seen that wherever Jesus is present, God's reign is near. Only the actual, enacted, nearness of God's reign is good news: manifest in praise and worship, liberation and reconciliation.

The apostolic mission requires the whole church, not just a handful of missionaries. It takes a community gathered in praise, fellowship, and service to fully enact the nearness of God's reign. Eventually Paul and Peter realized that it took the full range of human society to represent the reality that God's reign is near. God's reign is bigger than the differences between Jew and Greek, slave and freed, man and woman, sick and well.

The apostolic mission seeks conversion—*metanoia*. The natural response to the nearness of God's reign is to turn toward and embrace that reign. But we cannot manage that metanoia and shape it to our institutional purposes.

The apostolic story is not a story of dogmatic assertions, but of being called to enact, to realize, the good news that God's reign is near in Jesus Christ. The apostolic story means living so attentively to Jesus' presence in our lives and in the church that everyone can see that God's reign is present in its risen Lord. The story that shapes the identity of an apostolic church is of answering Jesus' call and going where he sends us—to the nations.



For Sudanese outside Zalingei, West Darfur, a daily task is fetching water.
Photo: Paul Jeffrey.

A Story Within a Story

At the end of the gospels, the resurrected Jesus appears to his disciples and tells them to go to "all nations" (Matthew 28:19). They are to go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). They discover this is far more than a geographical destination. The nations are neither simply peoples nor places. They are key characters in the story of God with the world. The Christian story of the apostles with Jesus is part of the bigger story of the nations with God.

If we are to understand our own Christian identity, we must understand that larger story. We are Christian insofar as we tell "with our lives" the story of the apostles with Jesus Christ—enacting and proclaiming the nearness of God's reign. But we are also Christian only insofar as we tell that story within the story of God among the nations. It is that latter story that Christians have frequently misunderstood.

As God's apostles to the nations, we can best live our story by understanding that it is part of a bigger, multifaceted story. It is just one story of God with the nations, of God with the whole of

creation. Called by God and led by God's spirit, we, like the first apostles, can also be evangelized. We can discover the good news of what God is doing among the nations even as we witness to the good news that God's reign comes near in Jesus Christ.

I think we Christians have always had what modern psychologists call boundary issues. We don't know where our story ends and the stories of others begin. Well, if we can understand that our story is one of countless others, part of that great story of God among the nations, which is part of the greater story of God in creation, then we possess the parameters that are necessary to form any real identity. We can claim the boundaries that allow us to relate to others without excluding their experience of God's grace, or claiming that their experience is already part of our own identity. If we do not claim to encompass all that God has already done, then we can participate in what God is actually doing.

If we place our Christian story alongside the stories of God among the nations, as the apostles did, we will realize that our story is neither the end of the story, nor the whole story—at least not according to Scripture. According to John's Revelation, there will be a New Jerusalem bounded by its 12 walls (12 for the apostles on whom it is founded). There will also be 12 open gates. Why would there be walls, and gates, and especially open gates, if God's story was finished when we finally gathered around God's throne? The New Jerusalem is bounded, but God is not. What goes beyond those gates is not for us to know. We know only that when our story is finished, God's story goes on. God's story with the nations, indeed with the vast universe beyond our earth, goes on.

And that, I think, is good news. The walls and the gates of the New Jerusalem let us and our neighbors live with blissful humility. We don't have to be the whole story, and we don't have to be the end of the story. We just have to live the story of the apostles with Jesus, the story of God's reign come near in Jesus Christ. We have a story to tell *to* the nations if we have a story to tell *with* the nations, until finally we all become part of that unimaginable ancient and utterly transcendent story told by God.

And then we will know who we are.

Dr. Robert Hunt is the Director of Global Theological Education at Perkins School of Theology. He and his wife, Lillian, served as United Methodist missionaries for nearly 20 years in Malaysia, Singapore, and Austria.

A fishing boat in the Ganges River in India. **Photo: Paul Jeffrey**

missionmemo

On September 15, 2008, General Board of Global Ministries staff and directors welcomed Global Ministries' new general secretary, the Rev. Edward W. Paup, at the Interchurch Center in New York City.

The Rev. Paup called for a mission agency embodying "grace, grit, and gumption," and covenanted with Global Ministries' staff to strive to be faithful to the work entrusted to the board. The former bishop also stated that those participating in every level of mission must be concerned with the ecology of the earth, peace among its inhabitants, and alleviation of poverty.

UMCOR Hurricane Response

United States

Hurricane Ike made landfall in Galveston, Texas, and along the Gulf Coast on September 12, 2008, leaving many people homeless and about 1.5 million without power. The devastation caused by Hurricane Ike has resulted in the largest recovery effort in Texas' history. Donate to Hurricanes 2008, UMCOR Advance # 3019695.

In preparation for Hurricane Gustav, many Baldwin, Louisiana, residents, including staff at UMCOR's Sager Brown Depot, evacuated. The relief-supply warehouse has returned to normal operations and is calling for flood buckets. See UMCOR's flood bucket webpage for specifications; or donate to Material Resources, UMCOR Advance #901440.

Even as UMCOR responds to this season's hurricanes, which devastated Florida, Iowa, Texas, and other parts of the United States, its work continues with survivors of Katrina. Working with the Mississippi United Methodist Katrina Recovery and volunteer teams, United Methodists have rebuilt or repaired nearly 32,000 homes in hurricane areas of the Gulf Coast.

Haiti

UMCOR and its partner Action by Churches Together are responding to the needs of Haitian children who are survivors of four major hurricanes that swept across their island this season.

UMCOR is providing emergency relief to 500 orphaned or hurricane-affected children in Cabaret, Haiti, where communities were destroyed by massive flooding. UMCOR Haiti, Cabaret's mayor's office, and the Office of Civil Action are distributing food packages, hygiene kits, and small toys to help alleviate the children's trauma. Give to Haiti Emergency, UMCOR Advance #418325.

DEATHS William Macke, retired missionary with nearly 2 years of service in Nigeria, died April 26, 2008...**Mary Queen,** retired missionary with 2 years of service in Agra, India, died May 22, 2008...**John Mallery,** retired missionary with nearly 3 years of service in Nigeria, died May 30, 2008...**A. Ruth Kern,** retired deaconess with nearly 26 years of service in the United States, died July 31, 2008...**Doris N. Blake,** retired missionary with nearly 13 years of service in Angola, died August 5, 2008...**Norma Harris,** retired missionary with 8 years of service in Sierra Leone, died August 6, 2008...**Oma Mae Gee,** retired deaconess with 14 years of service in the United States, died August 18, 2008...**Paul W. Diener,** retired missionary with 16 years of service in the Philippines, died August 29, 2008.

Bishop Ernest Newman, the first African American elected bishop in the southeastern United States, died on August 28, 2008, in Atlanta, Georgia. He supported the black church and the Black College Fund. He had served in the United Methodist Florida Annual Conference as a district superintendent.

Bishop Ralph Dodge, the last US missionary bishop to serve as the episcopal leader for Zimbabwe and an advocate for justice during Zimbabwe's colonial era, died on August 8, 2008, at the age of 101. After leading the church in Rhodesia for eight years, he was expelled in 1964 for advocating for an inclusive church and representative rule for the country. He was re-elected in exile and served another four years. He returned as interim bishop in 1979 at the request of Bishop Abel T. Muzorewa, who was tapped by the independent Zimbabwean government to serve as the country's first black prime minister.

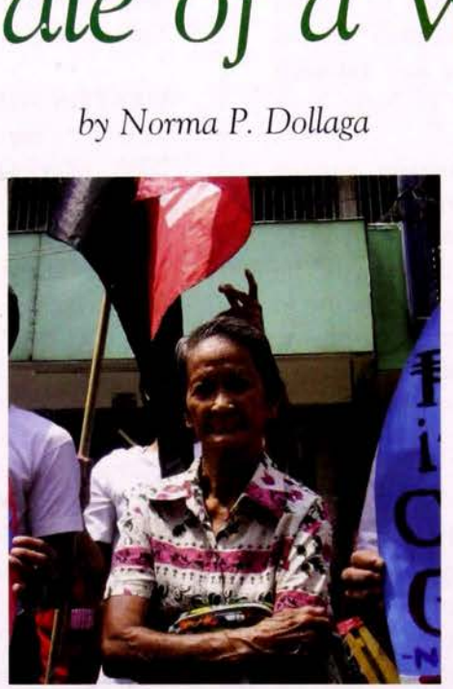
Dr. Ainor Fergusson, director of Kissy United Methodist Eye Hospital in Freetown, Sierra Leone, died of heart failure on September 18. He had served as doctor-in-charge of the hospital for 17 years and last year had been commissioned as a United Methodist Global Health missionary. Committed to the preservation of sight, he participated in outreach programs, treating eye-clinic patients in rural clinics.

This article first appeared in the Union Seminary Bulletin, January 2007, year two, vol.1. Edited and used by permission.

The Tale of a Widow

by Norma P. Dollaga

What I will be sharing with you is more of a reflection than a theological discourse. I am not a theologian, for somehow my religious training has alienated me from the world of theology. My theological "trauma" is still troubling me. The orientation given to us is that to be theological is to be academic, logical, and intellectual—a domain traditionally presumed to be reserved for men. While there is nothing wrong with being academic, logical, and intellectual, there is something wrong with using misogynistic attitudes to invalidate the credibility of someone else's theology. I must honestly say I still have to recover from the "trauma" of being on the receiving end of these attitudes.



I have chosen a passage from the Bible as I reflect on the stories of two simple and ordinary women of today whose lives have made a tremendous impact on others. My immersion with hundreds of women in the churches and communities of the Philippines gives me the courage to reflect and write as I painfully but joyfully try to understand the Bible from the

Top: *Nanay Mameng, also known as Carmen Diunida.* Photo: Arkibongbayan. ***Above:*** *Girls play in Nalapaan, Philippines, a "space for peace" village where peacebuilding, conflict resolution, interfaith dialogue, and harmony are emphasized.* Photos: Paul Jeffrey / Response.

perspective of women and from a liberating point of view.

Scripture: Luke 18:2-5

He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming."

With this passage in mind, come walk with me through the stories of these two ordinary and simple women.

United Methodist Pastor Leslie Dela Cruz (right), teaches literacy to Janet Tamtan, an indigenous Aeta woman in Camachile, Philippines, where The United Methodist Church has had a pastoral presence among Aetas displaced by Mt. Pinatubo's eruption in 1999. Photo: Paul Jeffrey/Response.

Nanay Mameng

Nanay Mameng is the current national chairperson of the Kalipunan Ng Damayang Mahihirap (KADAMAY), an alliance of urban poor peoples' organizations.

Nanay Mameng does not know me personally, but I have witnessed how her life has made a powerful impact on others. She is a living example, a symbol of undying love and passion for justice and peace. Nanay Mameng is a poor laundrywoman who is not afraid to speak her mind to expose social injustices, oppression, and exploitation that deliver deadly blows to the lives, limbs, and dignity of the impoverished majority of our people.

In a letter to Nanay Mameng, I wrote: "We do not know each other personally. But I am one of those who admire you. You do not have the glamour of an urbanized woman who 'shops 'til she drops.' You are a woman who has been bent over for many years and yet has found transformation through an organized will of the people to liberate themselves. Coming from an urban poor community and having suffered violence and extreme poverty, you have gained much character, an eagle-like strength, wisdom, unselfish love, and commitment to build, for coming generations, a future with peace and justice.

"Rather than passively watching events unfold in demolition and militarization of communities, you have stood firm and emerged as an empowered woman blaming neither God nor fate for the suffering you and the rest of our people are now experiencing. You have aptly and sharply analyzed that our situation represents the injustices inflicted by an oppressive system. You have articulated well that there will be poverty as long as powerful blocks of a very few people and a small number of nations hold monopolies and control the vast resources of the earth—a human practice that undermines the agenda of equality, justice, and abundance for all.

"This is what academicians, politicians, and religious leaders fail to explain. Yes, you have emerged as a transformed woman, able to synthesize personal experiences of daily tears, pain, and persecution into a joyful journey of struggle and of joining other people who suffer. You have shown the world that your organized anger, compassion, and devotion to liberation can lead people to the dawn of freedom. The fire and passion that mark your speeches have brought you popularity.

"You have remained steadfast. Your integrity has earned you the respect and admiration of people from all walks of life. (Because people thought that you earned silver and gold from that popularity, a snatcher has slashed your bag, only to get an old worn-out pair of eyeglasses for his efforts.)

"You are a symbol of power living a dangerous life—the life lived by those who shaped the past and continual herstory/history.

"You are one of those who has meaningfully challenged and contributed to the process of transforming our society. You share your life story with other women, named and unnamed, who risk

Left: *A woman washes her laundry in Nalapaan, whose residents have boldly asked the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the Philippine military to cease all military activities in their community.* Photo: Paul Jeffrey / Response. ***Right:*** *Nanay Maxima.* Photo: National Council of Churches in the Philippines.

their lives and dare to fight for life.

To you and to them my highest salute . . .

...always in danger but never losing faith

...always threatened but never worn down

...always despised but holding on to integrity and dignity.

"And while reflecting on your life and on the lives of women who have dared to overcome the stereotyped roles assigned by a patriarchal society, I remember Jesus' parable of the widow and the unjust judge.

"You have inspired me to read this text in the light of your struggle and the struggle of other women and the Filipino people."

Nanay Maxima

Ito po ang aking anak, "This is my son." She shows the picture of her son whenever she shares her testimony—her voice so soft, her face marked with pain and agony.

If tears could only ease the pain, we would have shared ours with yours.

But when you speak of the death of your son,
Our tears would not be enough.
At the moment they killed your son,
Even the angels must have wept
And God the creator must have wailed!

At the heart of our faith journey, we believe in a God who knows the agony and anguish of many mothers, fathers, and other family members and friends over the unjust and brutal deaths of their loved ones. We hold the current president of the Philippines, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, whom we expect God to judge at the end of her life, responsible for these deaths.

Who is Nanay Maxima Punzal? Nanay Maxima is a 71-year-old vendor in Payuma, Norzagaray, Bulacan. She is quite old and fragile, so she lived with her son Leodagario Punzal, who looked after her. Leodagario was a member of the Anak Pawis Partylist, a legal political party representing peasants and workers.

On September 13, 2005, while her son was making a streamer inside their house, Nanay Maxima suddenly heard a blast. She immediately looked up at the ceiling, thinking at first that it was an electrical explosion. When she looked down, she saw her son with a gunshot wound to his face. She hurried to her son, embraced him, and held him on her lap: "I raised his head, but he was shot again in the back," she explained. She cried out, even while the guns were still aimed at her and her son, and said: "Why? Why did you shoot my son? He did nothing wrong. Is it a crime to earn a living in our house?" When the assailants noticed that a lot of blood was oozing from the body, they knew

Leodagario was already dead and they left the house.

Leodagario is gone. He can no longer feel the warm embrace of his mother. The lullaby of Lucio San Pedro and Levi Celerio's *Sa Ugoy ng Duyan* can no longer soothe his wound. His life was senselessly snuffed out because he was a humble servant of the people in his lowly community.

Policemen came and asked Nanay Maxima what happened. She told her story while her son was still on her lap. Then she pleaded with the policemen to please get a vehicle to take her son to the hospital, but a policeman replied, "He is already dead." Her son was taken to the morgue.

Whenever Nanay Maxima shares her story, she bursts into tears and is almost voiceless as she remembers the goodness and kindness of her son. She tells people that her son committed no crime and offended no one. She has shed so many tears that the anguish has deeply marked her face. When you look into her eyes, you see her deep pain.

Certainly God's heart is crushed with the story of Nanay Maxima.

The Tale of a Widow

In Luke, a widow's persistence, vigilance, and militancy were characteristics that challenged even the most heartless, unfeeling, and callous of judges. She banged the walls of a court dominated by men of power and influence. She raised her voice so loud that they could do nothing to make her quiet.

Who would not be afraid of such a widow? The first impression she gives is that of a woman full of rage and anger. Those are negative emotions that should be suppressed and met with antagonism. But looking deeply into the story, we can see that her life was filled with love and hope. What she fought for was right and just. Her life was not filled with anger and rage but love and life. One cannot fight for life and justice without hope and love.

Patriarchy has taught women to be meek and patient, virtuous and plain. And when confronted with crisis and contradiction, they are taught that the best thing to do is to wait and be passive.

The widow in Luke's story contravened and subverted the tradition and role assigned to women. She became dangerous and subversive, but by her being dangerous and subversive, justice was served.

The tradition of women who subvert the partriarchal mold is an important reminder to women today. The ability to resist and defy patriarchy shows that a woman's place is not only in the kitchen, the bedroom, and the market—a woman's place is in the struggle! Only those who struggle can hope, and those who hope can struggle.

Nanay Mameng, poor and unlettered as she is, is able to speak out loud about people's lives, struggles, and hopes.

Nanay Maxima, though in great pain, did not allow her pain to immobilize her. She tells the story of her son; she demands justice.

Nanay Mameng and Nanay Maxima are senior citizens, but they inspire youth and young adults. Their wisdom is not less powerful because of their age. They may look fragile and old, but the experience that has marked their lives is not wasted. In the midst of turmoil and distress, they have been able to rise above the storm. They are the crones whose shining strength and hope encourage both young and old to form a movement for the cause of justice. They can bang and bash the judicial system and whether they are heard or not, this we know: they have not let up in their struggle. Nanay Mameng struggles for the urban poor, and Nanay Maxima, pursues a quest for justice for those who have been extra-judicially killed by government forces.

Like the widow who was marginalized but pursued what was justly hers, these women went out and participated in causes that truly count. With inner strength like a river that never runs dry, they have been consistent and persistent.

Thousands of Women

- Women workers around the world agonize over the denial of their rights to living wages and equal pay for equal work.
- Poor urban women suffer from the violence of the demolition of their homes and the denial of social services.
- Peasant women, along with their husbands and children, lament the buildup of militarization amid their struggles for land and life.
- Women experience horrible stories of being forced to work in strange lands and finding themselves victims of sexual abuse.
- Women experience painful and deliberate economic marginalization, even among professionals and those who are self-employed businesswomen.

Like the widow in Jesus' story, who militantly and persistently demanded justice of the unjust judge, women today militantly expose and denounce the representatives of a corrupt, fascist, and oppressive system. They will not stop until justice is served. May the example of the widow and these two ordinary women continue to inspire us to persevere and weave our herstory/history until we give birth to a society of shalom.

Norma P. Dollaga is a deaconess serving The United Methodist Church in the Philippines.

Let the Carols Continue In Bethlehem

by Alex and Brenda Awad

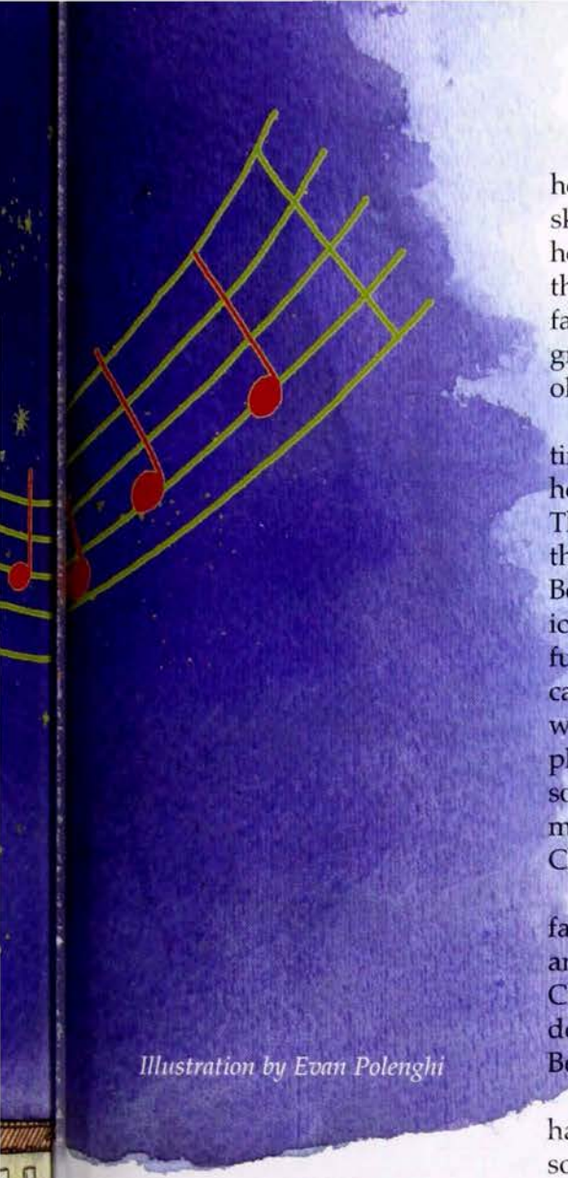


Illustration by Evan Polenghi

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us."
(Luke 2: 13-15)

Bethlehem did not only give the world the incarnate Son of God, Emanuel, the Prince of Peace and Savior of the world, but also the first Christmas carols. The shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem heard the choirs of angels sing in the sky above them, "Glory to God in heaven and peace on earth." Since then, throughout the world the faithful have been celebrating this great and divine visitation with carols, songs, and hymns of praise.

Will the carols of Christmas continue to be sung in the churches, homes, and streets of Bethlehem? This obviously depends on whether the faithful continue to live in Bethlehem. If political and economic factors continue to force the faithful to migrate out of Bethlehem, the carols of Christmas will disappear with them. Bethlehem, the very place of the birth of Christ, may soon become a city without Christmas song, not even a carol on Christmas Eve.

Only peace could keep the faithful from deserting their city and hence keep the carol going. Christians around the world must do their utmost to seek peace for Bethlehem and its surroundings.

Yet, it would be impossible to have peace in Bethlehem without solving the bigger issues relating to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. If not for the sake of Israel or for the sake of Palestine, for Bethlehem's sake let us double our efforts to bring an end to this quarrel that has caused so much turmoil and bloodshed in the last 100 years. Let us end the conflict before the conflict hushes the song and quiets the hymn. Silence on Christmas in Bethlehem will signal the death of Christianity in the birth place of the Christian faith. God forbid!

Where to begin? Start by learning more about what is going on today in Bethlehem. It is easy for the diligent to google the truth and it is cheaper than making a trip to Bethlehem. But if you wish to visit Bethlehem, you will be most welcome.

The next step is to say a prayer and intercede on behalf of all those who are affected by the conflict—but especially pray for the survival of the Christian community in Bethlehem. Pray for those who, in spite of all the oppression and evil around them, continue to sing the carols.

Then act in faith and advocate by:

- Writing a letter to your local newspaper.
- Sending an email message to your government representatives.
- Teaching a class and educating the people in your church and community.
- Finding out what other peacemakers are doing and supporting their efforts.

As millions worldwide have done for ages past, this Christmas and all through the year, "Come to Bethlehem" in spirit and in song. It is the hope of the contemporary faithful in Bethlehem that the challenges faced by the city will occupy the hearts and minds of true seekers until the bells toll louder and the Christmas carols of old resound with renewed fervor and passion. Let the carols go on in Bethlehem.

From Bethlehem, we wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

The Rev. Alex Awad and his wife Brenda have served as Global Ministries missionaries in Bethlehem since 1989. Alex Awad is pastor of the East Jerusalem Baptist Church and both he and Brenda work with Bethlehem Bible College in Bethlehem.

For more information and ideas, visit: http://www.openbethlehem.org.

A Message from the New General Secretary of Global Ministries

Mission Is the Work of Faith

by Edward W. Paup

It is with humility and excitement that I assume the post of general secretary of the General Board of Global Ministries, the mission agency of The United Methodist Church. Humility reminds us that we serve a God who freely loves us, a God who in Jesus Christ gives us grace upon grace for redemption, restoration, and reconciliation; humility, too, because the Global Ministries directors have entrusted me with the welfare of a powerful instrument of grace, an organization that embodies the past, present, and future mission commitment of our church.

Yet, what an exciting opportunity: the chance to relate to and build partnerships with the strong streams of mission in our denomination and the Christian family at large; to promote the welfare of God's planet Earth; to work against poverty; to speak and act for peace; and to help carry, in the name of Christ, the banner of United Methodist mission.

MISSION

Mission for Christians is the work of faith, the measure of our personal and collective discipleship, the action that follows our acceptance of God's grace and love by membership in Christ's church. Mission is evangelism and humanitarian service—church extension and the increase of justice. Mission is firmly rooted in Scripture:

- In the Great Commission—"Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations..." (Matthew 28:19).
- In the Great Commandment—"'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself'" (Luke 10:27).
- In Jesus' ascension mandate—"...[Y]ou will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

The mission statement of The United Methodist Church and the first goal of Global Ministries are the same: To make disciples of Jesus Christ. The 2008 General Conference added a phrase suggested by the Council of Bishops, so that the statement reads: "To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." Such transformation is an intention reflected in Global Ministries' goals of developing churches and communities, alleviating suffering, and promoting peace and justice.

The transformation of the world is God's mission, and it becomes ours as we open ourselves to the fullness of God's grace, receive life from God's living Word in Christ, and are called by faith to participate in God's work.

COMMITMENTS

In the immediate future, my priorities and commitments include:

- Enthusiastic endorsement of Global Ministries' pioneering ministries with the diversity of God's people and their cultural and social contexts.
- Strengthening our United Methodist understanding of what it means to be a Wesleyan people in the 21st century. This understanding has strong implications for the ways in which we approach and carry out mission. As a director of the board, and as president of the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) for the past quadrennium, I have firsthand experience with the inherent strengths of Global Ministries and the challenges it faces.
- Affirmation and implementation of the four United Methodist focus areas for collaborative ministry—leadership development, church growth, global health, and ministry with the poor. Each of these themes is part of our Wesleyan DNA.

- Continuation of efforts to forge strong mission partnerships for the sake of the gospel with annual conferences, mission initiative networks, the agencies of the general church, affiliated autonomous Methodist churches, and world organizations that can be our partners in the quest for peace and justice. The world needs to see the leaders of its religious bodies working together for peace.
- Promotion of mission communications that can reach all of our constituents in creative, cost-effective ways, and encouraging the greater use of technology in both program and communications.
- Providing a mission presence within our United Methodist connection, as one—but not the only—face and voice for our mission.

APPRECIATION

Another commitment is to spend considerable time in the office in my early months, becoming better informed about systems and evaluating our operations and patterns. In order to do this and also tend to pressing international matters, I have invited Bishop Felton E. May, interim general secretary for the past nine months, to stay with us as a consultant on Africa for a few additional months. He is eminently qualified, having chaired the General Conference-mandated Holistic Strategy on Africa committee. Bishop May has been a competent and vigorous interim general secretary, and I am indebted to him for his diligence and skill.

Global Ministries is called to be a vibrant and dynamic agency, ready to act in this fast-paced world in ways that offer effective and efficient mission and ministry in the name of The United Methodist Church. By God's grace, this will happen.

The Rev. Edward W. Paup is the General Secretary of the General Board of Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church.

***Top:** Children in Lithuania attend a United Methodist summer camp. **Bottom:** In the coastal village of Moawo, Jefrin (right) and his brother, Fajrin, plant mangrove seedlings. A YAKKUM Emergency Unit (YEU)/ACT-International project on Nias Island, western Sumatra, Indonesia.*
Photo: Paul Jeffrey / ACT-YEU.
Opposite page, photo: Jayun Jang

A new look for *New World Outlook!*

The January-February 2009 issue will introduce a new design for New World Outlook. It will still have the same great contents that readers look for—stories about the heart of United Methodist mission, its people, the places they live,and the work they feel God calling them to do.

Ninety-eight years of publication and still going strong.....

New World Outlook

The Fullness of Life

by Monica Aruna Samuel

I came that they may have life,
and have it abundantly.

John 10:10

In light of the treatment meted out to the women of the world, the above statement may sound most ironic and out of place.

During the world YWCA/YMCA Week of Prayer and World Fellowship, I had the opportunity to pause and focus intently upon this subject. The booklet *Leading Change* threw light upon this issue with reference to the story of the daughters of Zelophehad.

The worship service focused on "the power to act" and "love your enemy." I reflected upon these two phrases and found that they grew in proportion and significance when considered as links in the rest of the chain of topics proposed for discussion throughout the week.

A thorough study of the material revealed to me a spectacular blooming of womanhood; I could almost see an unknown, faceless, nameless, veiled woman slowly lifting up her veil to show the full stature of her individuality. Beginning from the injustice of invisibility, she almost emerged right in front of my eyes as a beautiful, confident, and brave woman, stepping into the promised land.

I bonded with her almost immediately; we stretched out our hands to hold each other. In that touch, I could feel the sorrow of generations of women. In the trembling of her hand, I could sense the trauma of her harrowing experiences. In that face, I could see the terror of an abused girl-child, the shame of a rape victim, the horror of a dowry victim, the helplessness of a poverty-stricken mother, the plea of a haggard victim of witch hunting. Yet upon that wrinkled and frightened face, there fell a light—the light of the love of God. The scars and wrinkles slowly vanished and the glow of victory settled upon her face. There was the silent dignity of the still seas upon that face. The gentle smile of hard-earned success in her expression was magical.

We sat together hand in hand. I asked her to tell me her story, to unburden her heart. I told her that I could feel every pain she had suffered, and I knew the value of each precious teardrop and each silent cry.

She looked deep into my heart, searched my soul, gazed into my eyes; then she spoke because she trusted me. She said that she was kept tightly wrapped up in thick blankets of tradition and customs that she could never understand. The chain of superstitions restricted her movements and she was blindfolded by ignorance. Her keeper would not let in a single ray of light or breath of air. She was made to toil, she was hungry, she was beaten. Sometimes the wounds were so deep that her soul would writhe.

It was past midnight—the darkest hour of the night. She heard a gentle voice call her, "Daughter, I have come to help. Look up and see." She said, "I cannot see you." Then the voice said, "You can see. Remove the blindfold." She said, "I cannot move my hands." The voice said, "Break the chains and come to me, move your hands and cast away the blindfold. Open your eyes and see. Awaken your mind and think. March out of this enslavement and claim your inheritance. For, dear daughter, I have put my stamp on you; my image lies within your innermost being. Come out into the light of day and enjoy the fullness of life."

Timid, reticent, and fearful, she opened her eyes and saw a new dawn upon the horizon. She had to gather every ounce of strength and begin to walk. It was a journey of trusting God for justice, and with the thrill of new-found identity, she had the power to act, along with the wisdom to choose her action. She claimed her inheritance—the image of God within. It gave her the capacity to love her enemies. The road was arduous, full of backlashes and adversaries. Every time she took two steps forward, she felt herself being dragged back.

She did not give up; trusting God she moved on with superhuman strength. With every step she took, she became wiser, more

Illustration by Evan Polenghi

mature, more tolerant. She had the inherent capacity to live with dilemmas for the sake of peace.

And now finally she said, "Sister, I have reached the promised land, but I cannot rest; I must go back to get the others for they do not know the way. The promised land is meant for all my sisters. I want to bring them here." When she rose to leave, she looked stronger, revitalized, and determined. She looked back at me silently. Then she took a deep breath and set her face toward the world. She was beautiful like a soldier. With her head held high she walked with the grace of a Queen—determined to set her sisters free.

"What is your name? Where can I meet you again?" I called out.

"My name is the same as yours," she said.

"You can meet me everywhere—in the streets, in the offices, in the kitchen, in the brothel, in the fields, in the factories—in your heart. I am the precious daughter of God."

I stood rooted to the ground, mesmerized by the sheer grandeur of this heroine. How insignificant I felt in my comfortable and secure pocket of existence. Ashamed and humbled, I debated, "Should I stay back in comfort or step out in solidarity?"

Monica Aruna Samuel serves as the president of the Deaconesses Conferences in the Bombay Episcopal Area, Methodist Church in India (MCI). Her husband, Bishop E. P. Samuel, is General Secretary of the Methodist Church in India.

The Growth of Methodism in Africa

A Contribution to Methodism in the United States

by Kalaba Chali

During the 2008 United Methodist General Conference, clergy and lay leaders reminded participants about the growth of The United Methodist Church in Africa and the decline in membership in the United States and Western Europe. The 2008 North Texas Annual Conference, which I attended as a clergy member, also dedicated much time to discussions regarding membership.

Some predict that in the coming years, the majority of United Methodists will be African. The fact that the church is growing in Africa does not imply that the church is not facing other challenges in the region, such as sexism, poverty, classism, tribalism, nepotism, and heterosexism. The good news is that we are blessed with a church that is global in nature. Just as the church in the United States can learn something about growth from the church in Africa, the African church can also learn from our sister and brother United Methodists in the United States.

The kitchen crew at the West Angola Annual Conference teaches Linda Savarese, a Global Ministries visitor, how to balance a load on her head. Photo: Mike DuBose/UMNS.

African Congregations

We need first to understand what an African congregation looks like. In Africa, the understanding of ecclesiology, or nature of the church, is grounded in African family ideals. The Swahili word *ujama* may best describe the concept of family among African peoples. In addition to close family members and relatives, members of the community are also regarded as family. Visitors are generally welcomed and highly valued. The community that forms an African congregation is inclusive and invitational in nature; it welcomes strangers and visitors. Every time people gather, they share food and stories and discuss different issues faced by the community. Stories shared among the members of a community inform, teach, and transform lives.

I see the church as a community of both believers and nonbelievers. The church should therefore be open to those who have not yet responded to God's call, presenting transformative potential for nonbelievers. (Walker Kasper, *Theology and Church,* The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 1989, p. 113.) Walter Kasper understands the church as open to strangers—invitational and unitary in nature. Charles Wood states that to believe the church is a sacrament or a means of grace does not preclude salvation outside the visible church.

It is important to note that poverty is a factor that contributes to the growth of churches in Africa. People come to church because they are looking for miracles. For someone in need, a miracle can be receiving help unexpectedly from other worshipers—a miracle for both the recipient and the giver. For the one receiving the gift, God works through Christian sisters and brothers to provide blessings. When people face difficulties, the church provides solutions. People come to church to pray; God answers people's prayers by finding someone to help them or by surrounding them with acts of love, hope, compassion, care, and faith. Not all those who come to church find solutions to their problems; but they do find a community that supports them emotionally and reminds them that they are not alone. Christ shares in people's suffering by way of the caring community that surrounds them.

For many African congregations, hospitality is as central to worship as the sermon. In some congregations, visitors are asked to stand and share their names and testimonies with the congregation during the service. Other congregations simply ask visitors to stand so that they can be recognized and welcomed. As visitors stand, the congregation and choir sing a welcoming song while people shake their hands and embrace them. This is an essential part of worship, because everyone is given an opportunity to serve by greeting, welcoming, and extending a touch of love to new members of the family. I have seen many first-time visitors return because of their initial experience of hospitality in an African congregation.

John Mbiti, a prominent African theologian, says, "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore, I am." (*Africa Religions and Philosophy,* Heinemann Educational Publishers, Gaborone, 1990, p. 106.) Although this proverb has been interpreted to mean that one cannot live without the existence of the whole community, it has a deeper meaning for Africans. In addition to the importance of the community as a whole, there is a profound sense of love, solidarity, care, and mutual assistance that binds the people who live in community. When a child is born to one family, that child belongs not only to that particular family but to the whole community. When a child misbehaves, every member of the community takes responsibility for its discipline.

Some African congregations also make a point to welcome members back who have not attended worship for three or four Sundays for health or bereavement reasons. Recognizing these members means sharing in their pain, suffering, and grief. In so doing, the whole congregation has the opportunity to

Toward the end of a school day, students at the United Methodist Galilea School in Luanda, Angola, sing the Angolan national anthem. Photo: Mike DuBose/UMNS.

contribute to worship. Worship becomes more than just a service; it is an experience for every congregant. For the visitors, the experience is like a melody they can't forget once they return home.

Helpers in the Mission

For many African churchgoers, belonging to a congregation means doing something within or on behalf of that congregation. The growth of the congregation depends on the involvement of its members. The more the members are involved, the bigger the congregation grows. This practice stems from a time when missionaries were actively serving on the continent of Africa. The work of the missionaries increased rapidly and significantly because indigenous people became involved in the mission. Local people had contact with the first missionaries and learned their languages, which facilitated the spread of the gospel. These local people became missionaries' helpers. They knew where and when to find the people and how to interpret the message into their own contexts. Harold Recinos refers to the missionary helpers as "key informants." (*Jesus Weeps: Global Encounter on Our Doorstep*, Abington Press, Nashville, 1992, p. 125.)

Missionary helpers laid the groundwork and became the foundation for missionaries to preach the gospel; they facilitated communication and served as mediators between the evangelists and the evangelized. Some of them later became local preachers. Others started their own movements within missionary churches. Unfortunately, many of these indigenous helpers are never mentioned in the histories of mission. Their contributions have, for many years, been forgotten.

The idea of missionary helpers continues today in different forms. Although there are fewer ordained and educated ministers in the African United Methodist Church, laity are doing a tremendous job of reaching out to the unchurched. Laypeople in Africa consider the ministry of evangelism as their work. They are at the forefront of mission projects. The pastor's role is to equip them, but the work involves everyone in the congregation. In some churches in rural areas or villages, members get to see an ordained minister only once every three months when she or he comes to give communion. But these congregations keep growing in number and increasing ministry to those in need. The joy that comes with the idea of equipping lay people to serve is that they, too, have the opportunity to respond to Jesus' call.

When members get involved in the ministry of evangelism and mission, they begin to share their experiences of Jesus Christ with others. Sometimes we clergy "imprison" Jesus in the small boxes, confined to what we ourselves can share. We mystify our work as clergy to the point where others, especially laypeople, are afraid even to open their Bibles and share biblical stories with one another. We often cause laypeople to believe that the ministry of teaching and preaching is only for the clergy.

In Luanda, members of The United Methodist Church's West Angola Annual Conference welcome Global Ministries visitors to the Icolo e Bengo United Methodist Church. Photo: Mike DuBose/UMNS.

In his book entitled *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 2004, p. 220), Daniel Migliore calls on the Christian church worldwide to listen to the confession of Christ heard from local churches. For Migliore, local confessions of Christ and his work of salvation offer particular and concrete witness; thus we need to listen to these voices. Migliore acknowledges the inevitability of having a theology of one-sidedness, but one thing he warns against is the failure to listen to other theologies. (Ibid, p. 221.) I think it is important to listen to the voices of ordinary people. Listening to members' stories of faith can enrich and broaden our understanding of Jesus.

Western Church Contexts in Comparison

In working with Western churches in Dallas, Texas, I have found that we focus too much on sermon preparation, music, and other liturgical activities—specifically how we deliver these acts of worship. While all these elements are important for a dynamic worship service, they do not offer an atmosphere whereby congregants, especially new members and first-time visitors, feel that they, too, belong—that the service is not just for the pastors, choir members, and liturgists. Unless people experience a deep sense of belonging, they may not be able to respond to good sermons and beautiful music. People need to feel welcomed in order to join the church. We long for a community that values and accepts us.

The profession of Christ as Lord and Savior of the whole of humanity is expressed in various ways among Christians worldwide. Our different social and cultural contexts play a vital role in the way we interpret who Christ is. Celebrating our cultural differences as gifts from God enhances our understanding of Jesus Christ. I have found this to be true from my experience serving as a minister in Zimbabwe and in the United States.

Today, I serve as a minister of the African Fellowship at Lovers Lane United Methodist Church, Dallas, Texas. The fellowship has about 18 African nationalities represented and it includes a few Anglo-Americans. The temptation is to think of Africa as a continent where all share the same culture and speak one language. This isn't the case. It is important to recognize and acknowledge our differences as we form the body of Christ. At this point in my ministry journey, I can't think of a richer worship environment than one expressing such diversity, not only because this worship community is multiracial, multicultural, ecumenical, and international, but because it incorporates and celebrates all these differences.

What does this African fellowship have to say to The United Methodist Church in the United States? US society is evolving. Many communities are now multiracial and multilingual. Hispanic and Asian-American populations are growing rapidly. Thus, congregations that used to be known primarily as Anglo-American or African American need to be intentional about accommodating different cultures. The time has come for many of our congregations to redefine worship. I think attendance and membership is declining in the United States, in part because people who come from different cultural experiences cannot identify with most of what we do in our churches. More importantly, visitors do not feel welcome. Many come from backgrounds where the sense of community is greatly valued but they don't find that same sense of community in US churches. The church is a community unlike other communities, where acts of faith, hope, justice, and love are lived out.

At the Igreja Metodista Unida in Luanda, members of the United Methodist Church's West Angola Annual Conference welcome Global Ministries visitors with song. Photo: Mike DuBose/UMNS.

Church leaders must remember their responsibility to equip their members to carry out Jesus' commission to spread the gospel. If the church is to survive, then everyone, clergy and laity, should engage in the mission and evangelism of the church. It would be rewarding to see our Sunday schools and discipleship classes offer lessons that help members in a ministry of hospitality. It is only when we begin to appreciate other people's cultures, listen to their stories of faith, and pay attention to the way Jesus Christ works in their lives that we will be able to build a church environment that is hospitable, where all feel welcome and a sense of belonging. It is crucial to remember that this is not the work of the ministers alone, but that it is the work of the whole congregation.

The Rev. Kalaba Chali is originally from the Republic of Zambia, grew up in the Democratic Republic of Congo, attended Africa University and Perkins School of Theology, and was ordained as an elder in The United Methodist Church in June 2006. He currently serves as an associate pastor at Lovers Lane United Methodist Church in Dallas, Texas.

MISSION VOLUNTEERS

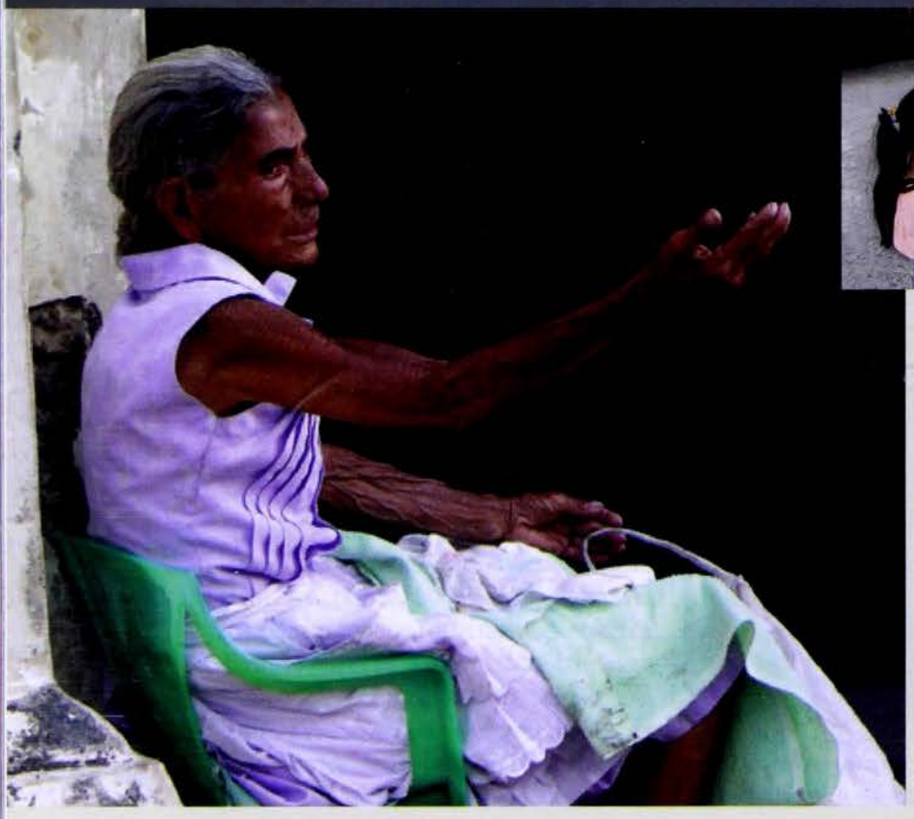
by Clinton Rabb

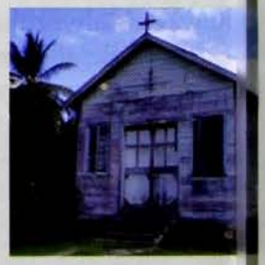
From the time Jesus said to Simon and Andrew, "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Mark 1:17 [NIV]), people have been called from the activities of their daily lives to serve Christ.

The ministry of the laity has always been at the core of the Wesleyan movement. From its beginnings in the late 18th century, as today, the laity of the predecessors of The United Methodist Church (UMC) have been active in ministries with the poor, higher education, church planting, health care, advocating for the rights of women and children, organizing against slavery, advocating for those in prison, and seeking justice. Laypeople have taken the lead in building hospitals, institutions of higher learning, and community centers.

United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM) emerged out of a tradition of lay ministry epitomized by campground meetings, church raisings, youth caravans, work camps, and lay-witness missions. UMVIM is a grassroots movement that officially organized in 1976 through collaboration between leaders of the Southeastern Jurisdiction of The UMC and the General Board of Global Ministries. Each jurisdiction of The UMC now has a Volunteers-in-Mission office. The Mission Volunteer office of the General Board of Global Ministries networks with jurisdiction volunteer

UNITED METHODIST VOLUNTEERS IN MISSION PARTICIPATE IN SACRAMENTAL ACTS OF SERVICE IN REMEMBRANCE OF JESUS CHRIST.

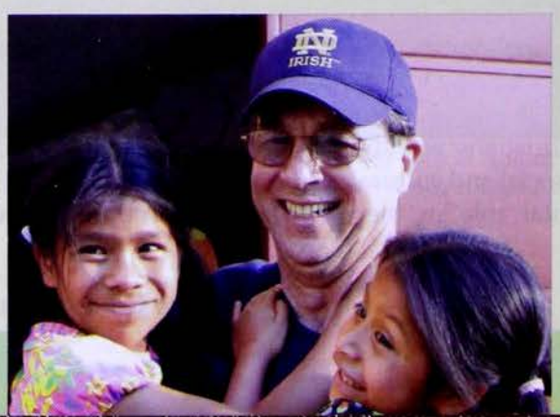




I did not come to be served

but to serve others....

Mark 10:45



offices, which in turn coordinate with annual conference UMVIM offices. The challenge for the UMVIM network is to remain a grassroots movement while, at the same time, offering guidance and training for more than 125,000 volunteers serving the poor, building churches, and assisting in disaster response, community health, and leadership training each year.

The number of people participating in UMVIM has increased from just under 20,000 in 1992 to more than 124,000 in 2007. As the numbers have grown, the need to understand the movement has grown. Research on short-term missions was the topic of a special section of the October 2006 edition of *Missiology—An International Review.* Edited by Robert J. Priest, a supporter of and participant in the short-term mission movement and professor of Mission and Intercultural Studies at Trinity Evangelical Seminary, it presented some of the first available academic research on the short-term mission movement. While generally supportive of short-term mission, the research suggests the need for growth in a number of areas.

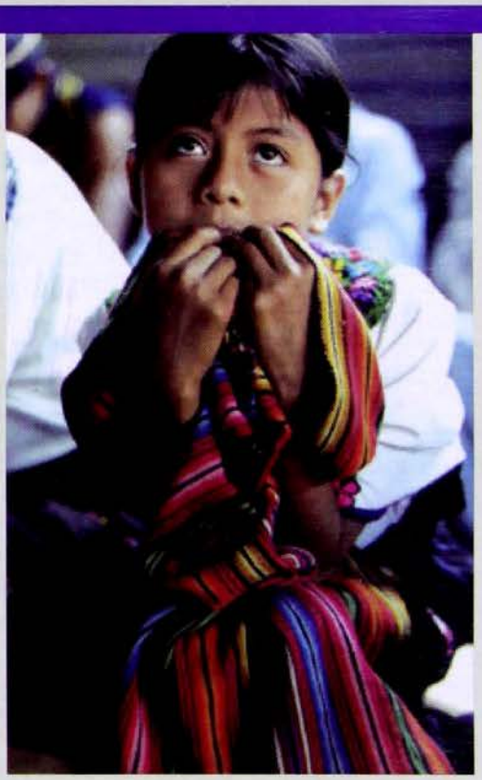
Greater Cultural Understanding

Some of the research suggests that short-term mission trips can contribute to the *strengthening* of cultural stereotypes rather than the hoped-for *softening* of stereotypes. If the mission is too short, there is not enough time to get past the "They're just like us!" phase to the "They are nothing like us!" phase and on to the place where we can say, "I can see how we can work together!"

Partnerships and Collaborative Enterprises

For short-term missions to bear fruit, there must be true partnership. This requires allocating the time and effort needed to achieve deep conversations across language and cultural barriers. It requires a large investment in community building and consultation. So often, the efforts of a UMVIM team are so focused on its work project that there is little time and space for building relationships into partnerships that can bear fruit

The light of recognition in the eyes of those returning to serve signal those who once arrived as strangers, but left as family.



"I will pray for you."
Old Haiti woman

We've met you, the Body of Christ: in good times; in the streets; in the valleys and on the mountaintops; in the school; in the clinic; in the community; in times of building; and in times of rebuilding.

"The UM are still here, the others have left."

Louisiana

Jesus said,
"Do this in remembrance of me."
Luke 22:19

A family and home in Guatemala. Photo: Anita Mays.

for years to come. The need for collaboration also calls for volunteer coordinators at mission sites to go beyond the traditional role of work project management—coordinating food, housing, and transportation. It is important for local volunteer coordinators to be adept at orienting UMVIM teams, leading discussions on mission development, and laying the framework for the development of partnerships that become ongoing.

Strategic Use of Mission Volunteers

Short-term mission can be powerful when volunteer teams are engaged in critical areas of God's mission. While at the same time offering a wide array of mission opportunities for UMVIM teams and individual volunteers, the church is calling all of us to be more strategic in the mission work that we do. As we go forward over the coming quadrennium, it will be important to focus on strategic areas of ministry that are at the heart of The UMC.

Four Focus Areas of Ministry

The Council of Bishops, the Connectional Table, and the General Conference have done a service to The UMC and the UMVIM movement by offering the Four Focus Areas of Ministry. The General Board of Global Ministries has adopted these areas of focus for the new quadrennium, 2009 to 2012. The role of Mission Volunteers in the new quadrennium will be to engage and deploy United Methodist volunteers in the mission of The UMC as outlined in the four focus areas of ministry.

1. DEVELOP PRINCIPLED CHRISTIAN LEADERS FOR THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD.

Mission Volunteers can assist in leadership development by increasing mission-service opportunities and placing and training young people in mission-volunteer settings. Volunteer service provides leadership training for individuals of all ages in central conference settings to enable them to provide support for the coordination of mission volunteer programs.

2. CREATE NEW PLACES FOR PEOPLE BY STARTING NEW CONGREGATIONS AND RENEWING EXISTING ONES.

Mission Volunteers can enhance the support and development of new churches and faith communities in the United States and around the world by sending individual volunteers as preachers, teachers, and administrators; developing strategic church building projects; creating opportunities for teaching teams; and establishing church partnership teams.

3. ENGAGE IN MINISTRY WITH THE POOR.

The network of mission agencies, institutions, and conferences of The UMC can address the conditions of poverty, while volunteers can supplement the capacity of local churches to address its causes. Volunteers can participate in building a global community that makes a place for all, especially those who most often find themselves on the fringes. They can also engage in ministries for justice and mercy. Volunteers can help to develop relationships between community groups and organizations that work with "the least of these" through UMVIM. The Mission Volunteers office can support opportunities for persons to serve as volunteers with local community organizations that engage in advocacy and organizing for systematic change.

4. STAMP OUT KILLER DISEASES BY IMPROVING HEALTH GLOBALLY.

Mission volunteers can enhance and strengthen existing ministries that address the prevention and treatment of the killer diseases of poverty. A network of medical mission volunteers can be used to supplement the capacity of hospitals

and clinics to address medical needs. Disaster hurts the poor disproportionately harder than anyone else. The poor do not have the capital reserves to regain their footing. After natural disasters, UMVIM teams collaborate with annual conference disaster-response leaders, volunteer coordinators, and UMCOR staff to get the right kind of help to places where it is most needed.

UMVIM teams are collaborating in Colombia with UMCOR staff, Global Ministries health-care missionaries, the leaders of the Colombia Methodist Church, and the leaders of the Sincelejo village to serve the needs of a small village named Brisas del Mar. The poor people of this small village were brutalized by a Colombian paramilitary group that was encamped a kilometer away. With the contributions of UMVIM teams, clean water has been supplied to the village from a new well, a village leadership team has been trained and equipped to oversee the well, a community health-care plan has been established, and a clinic is under construction.

In Mission Together church partnerships exist to support and sustain emerging churches in Europe, Africa, Asia, and Central America. UMVIM has played an important part in such partnerships by sending teams to renovate church buildings, establish Vacation Bible Schools, develop church camps, and teach church administration.

Global Ministries Health and Welfare office and UMVIM are working closely to develop new volunteer mission opportunities related to the United Methodist hospitals in Africa as they focus on the killer diseases of poverty: HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis. A new resource for health-care volunteers can be found online at:
www.umvim4health.blogspot.com

Volunteer Opportunities for Young Adults

Young adults can develop their leadership skills, explore the meaning of mission, and build relationships with other communities through the Global Justice Volunteers program. Mission Volunteers also offers young adults individual volunteer opportunities. Volunteers have been placed in an amazing array of assignments in a variety of places. These include developing micro-credit business opportunities for women living with HIV & AIDS at the West Africa Aids Foundation in Accra, Ghana; assisting migrant workers at Bethune House in Hong Kong with court proceedings; and providing support for people still struggling to recover from Katrina. These cross-cultural experiences are grounded in biblical principles of service, justice, and advocacy. They provide the framework for developing new leaders with a life-long commitment to God's mission.

In the mainstream media there is talk of "compassion fatigue," as disasters, war, and poverty dominate the news but donations to these causes seems to be decreasing. Media pundits suggest that people are tired of giving. Yet compassion fatigue is a secular term, suggesting that people have given too much and cannot give any more. Christians are called to give of their time and money as they are able out of gifts that God has bestowed—nothing more and nothing less.

When we serve from a place of our own will or emotion, we may eventually burn out and suffer compassion fatigue. Yet those who perform acts of service and justice in remembrance of Christ will be lifted up and energized. As Jesus served the poor, the broken, and the broken-hearted, United Methodist Volunteers in Mission serve to restore the broken Body of Christ. Similarly, Jesus anticipated the giving of his body on the cross at the Last Supper and symbolically offered his body and blood to the disciples. When he did this, he said, "Remember me."

The Rev. Clinton Rabb is an assistant general secretary and director of the Mission Volunteers Office of the General Board of Global Ministries.

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Nourishing a Spirituality of Resistance in the Era of Empire

by Darlene Marquez-Caramanzana

Southern Philippine residents in Cagayan de Oro, Mindanao, take a break after marching to protest the presence of US troops on their island. Photo: Paul Jeffrey / Response.

Proclaim this among the nations:
Prepare war, stir up the warriors.
Let all the soldiers draw near, let them come up.

Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weakling say, "I am a warrior."

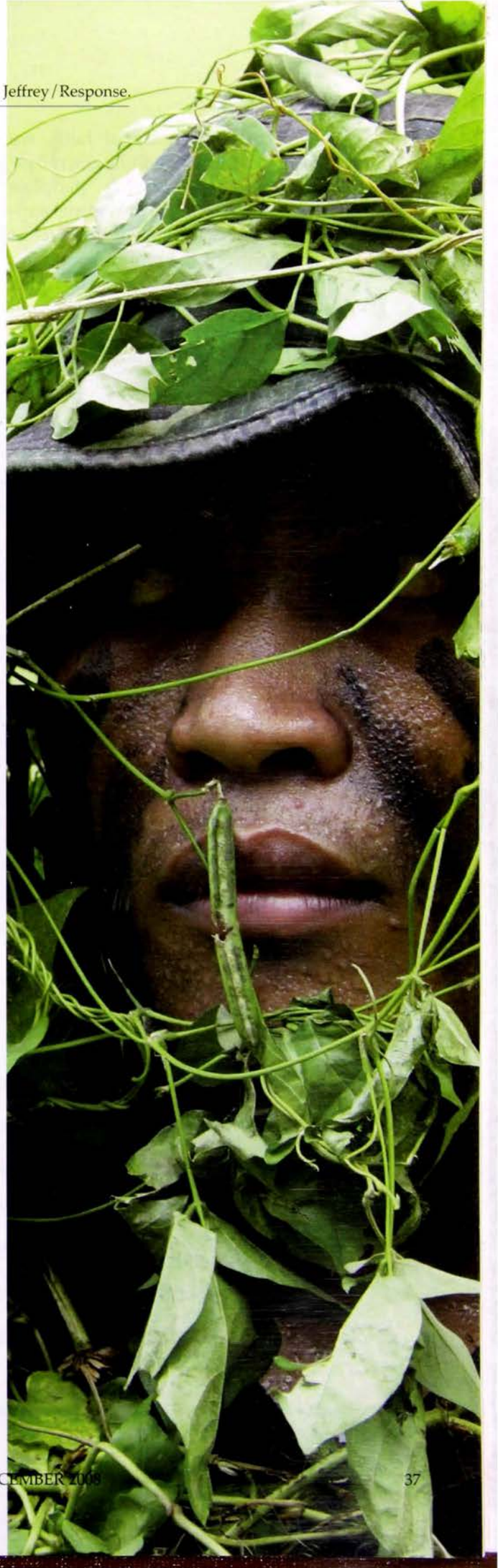
Come quickly, all you nations all around, gather yourselves there.
Bring down your warriors, O Lord.

(The command of God to the people of Judah, Joel 3:9-11)

As a deaconess and a laywoman with simple hopes and dreams, I am committed to God's vision of peace based on justice. I thus share with you my own personal reflections regarding this passage in Joel as well as some of my thoughts on how people of faith are being challenged to live out a spirituality of resistance.

Joel 3:9-11 was written when the people of Israel were besieged by aggressors and the countryside was harassed from the south by Egypt and from the north by Tyre, Sidon, and Greece—just as the poor peoples of today are being terrorized by a "coalition of the willing." Joel 3 specifically spells out the lamentation of God for having seen his people suffer drought and become "dehydrated" of resources after having been plagued by foreign armies under the leadership of the Hellenic empire. In this lamentable situation, God executes judgment on the empire and metes out justice to the victims of the empire.

At first glance, it seems hard to untangle the complexity of empire rule in Joel 3. The call seems to be simple—for the peasants to trans-



A cadet at the University of Southern Mindanao practices military maneuvers. Photo: Paul Jeffrey / Response.

form their instruments of production to instruments of war. Verses 9-11 are actually a call to resist the Hellenic empire. All citizens of the land are to take part in the resistance, even the weak. They are to do their share in the resistance. They are to use whatever is in their hands, be it a plowshare or a pruning hook, making all into instruments of resistance. They are to use these instruments to defend life and their nation. No amount of military might will overtake the people of God because God has endowed the people with the strength and ability to resist. The metaphor used, much as the plague or the swarm of locusts afflicting Judah in Joel's time, gives us an insight into how severely devastating the empire had been to the people of Israel.

Understood in this context, the call to resist is a legitimate call to guard and defend the sovereignty of a nation, to defend the life and dignity of the people, and to give birth to a society that is endowed with freedom.

A vital component of empire building is the stockpiling of military might. The Hellenic empire employed not only political, economic, cultural, and social might, but to solidify its oppressive stance in conquering Israel, it employed its military power to seal its colonization.

Today, more than ever, the Philippines is confronted with the forces of death, as we witness the return of US troops on our soil under the guise of joint military exercises. Under the banner of "a global war on terror," the militarization of nations with a perceived threat of "coddling terrorists" has become the rule of the day. What makes it more frightening is that such wars are directed at the poor and the powerless, the weak and smaller nations that would not otherwise easily accede to the caprices and whims of bigger and stronger nations. Military installations built and maintained by foreign powers ensure the steady flow of natural gas, mineral, and oil reserves to the territories of the empire.

Confronted with the threat of death, are we to remain silent and cowed? The answer is a resounding NO!

Using the resources of our faith, we are directed to live out a spirituality that resists the force of destruction in our midst. We are called to be a church that does not provide moral justifications to prop up the actions of an empire. Our church history and theologies are full of actual accounts of Christian churches that sided with empires in their acts of conquest and plunder of weak and smaller nations. May this history never be repeated.

Today, I see true spirituality when people of different faiths forge a "holy alliance" to continue to work in ways that will bring about the fullness of life. Militarization, state terrorism, and wars of aggression have no place in the reign of God.

The goal of this spirituality of resistance is genuine liberation. And since this is so, perhaps it may help us to realize that the journey from resistance to liberation is long and arduous. In the same manner, the Promised Land was not reached by the Israelites in an instant.

There is a need for us to embrace the call found in Joel 3 with the same intensity, zeal, and enthusiasm as the Judahans—resist the empire!

A major component of resisting an empire is to build alliances with one another to make resistance more powerful. We need to widen our circle—join our voices with other voices; join our footsteps with other footsteps—to end the reign of the empire.

As a community of faith, we form part of a much larger movement—the worldwide people's movement that is providing support and sacrificing lives to resist and confront the empire. So many peace-loving people, human-rights workers, peace activists, church workers, professionals, peasants, workers, and women have given their lives at the altar of sacrifice. Let us not waver in our commitment to complete what they began.

Be that as it may, this spirituality of resistance may be our humble contribution to humanity's struggle against the empire. Active resistance in our common journey with the people is demanded from us at this time. It is the imperative of our faith to journey with and not apart from them.

As a community of faith, we are challenged to mobilize the forces and resources of our faith so that we contribute our strength to the overall strength of the people's movement worldwide.

Darlene Marquez-Caramanzana is a deaconess in The United Methodist Church in the Philippines.

Roman Catholic nuns, members of the Sisters Association of Mindanao, lead 4,000 demonstrators in a march protesting the presence of US troops in Cagayan de Oro, Mindanao. The sisters' association addresses justice and peace issues. Photo: Paul Jeffrey/Response. *A family eats in a Mindanao village that has declared itself a "space for peace."* Photo: Paul Jeffrey/Response.

Challenge

I would like to end this article with a challenge to everyone by paraphrasing Joel 3:9-11:

People of faith, prepare to resist with the peoples of the world!

Turn your churches into sanctuaries of peace and refuge to the victims of the empire;

Turn your theologies into reverberating sounds of the people's deep longings, protests, and hopes;

Turn your rituals into songs of liberation, echoing the message of peace, justice, life, and liberation;

Bring an end to the breathing of the empire!

Onward with our journey toward the Promised Land!

May the God of justice and peace lead us through. Amen.

This article first appeared in the *Union Seminary Bulletin*, January 2007, year two, vol.1. Edited and used by permission.

The Power of the Kingdom in Arssi Country, Ethiopia

by Harold Kurtz

Dr. Urgessa Biru, director of Light of Hope Ministries, with children from a Light of Hope school. Photo: Bill Young.

The Arssi Oromo are a Muslim ethnic group of 8 to 10 million people living in southern Ethiopia. They are a major, clearly defined "division" of the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, the Oromo, who also spill over into Kenya and Somalia. Another large segment of the Oromo people live in western Ethiopia and are Christian, relating mostly to the Ethiopian evangelical church, Mekene Yesus. The Arssi people still carry out the traditions of their mother culture. They embraced Islam more as a political move than a religious one when the armies of the Amhara (the Semitic kingdom) moved in to subjugate them. The Ethiopian Orthodox priests who came with the Amhara army forcibly baptized Arssi Oromos in local rivers and lakes and told them that they were now Christians. In reaction, they turned to Islam.

The Arssi Oromos face consistent pressure from two directions. On the one hand, they always face pressure to give up their ancient traditions and become much more a part of the Christian Amhara and Orthodox culture. On the other hand, in recent times pressure has increased for them to become better Muslims. Both Christians and Muslims denigrate the ancient Oromo way of life and tell the Arssi people that their traditions are inferior.

Oromo Acculturation

The Arssi Oromo people are in deep pain from within and without.

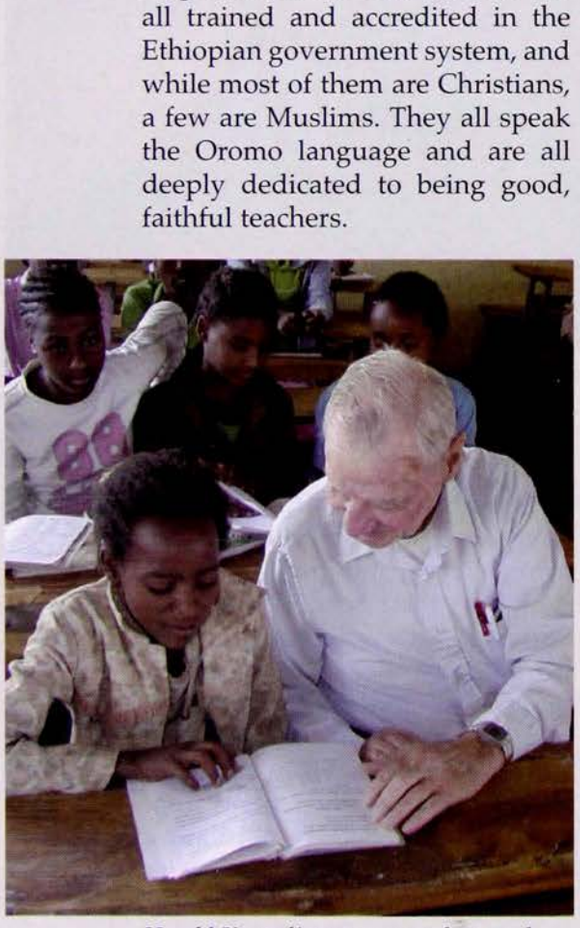
A small but important segment of the Arssi youth were sent to schools outside their communities by parents who wanted the best for their children and wanted them to help modernize the Arssi Oromo people. These young people have, all too often, succumbed to the social pressures of their schools and have become "deculturalized," rejecting the culture of their parents and grandparents, drifting into the cities, and losing their family ties.

Some of those young people have come into contact with the evangelical communities represented in their schools and converted to an evangelical form of Christianity. Because of a lack of biblical understanding, most of those young Christians also consider their traditional culture inferior and separate themselves from their families and communities. Other young people who were drawn to Islam and were invited to study abroad, mostly in Saudi Arabia, are seeking to replace the traditions of their elders with Qur'anic culture.

Light of Hope

A son of the tribe, Dr. Urgessa Biru, was touched by Jesus in his youth and forced to leave his family and clan. Years later, as a Canadian citizen, husband, father, and successful professional, he felt God calling him back to his people. He submitted himself to his elders in the tribe and was reconciled to his family and clan. He asked permission to help them move into the changing world around them. He established Light of Hope Ministries and began working with community leaders to establish schools in villages that had never had an option for education.

There are now 91 teachers working in community schools built and organized by Light of Hope Ministries. The teachers are all trained and accredited in the Ethiopian government system, and while most of them are Christians, a few are Muslims. They all speak the Oromo language and are all deeply dedicated to being good, faithful teachers.



Harold Kurtz listens as a student reads at a Light of Hope school in Ethiopia. Photo: Courtesy Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship.

Light of Hope Ministries has become one of Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship's projects in Ethiopia. I spent a week in Arssi country with these teachers to share insights into the biblical message of cross-cultural gospel communication and a deeper biblical understanding of God's desire for the world and Jesus' message of the kingdom. These lessons I had learned from my own painful journey of missionary failure.

Gentile Pentecost

I began teaching from the 10th chapter of Acts, the most critical and revolutionary chapter in the Bible outside of the teaching of Jesus. God came to Peter in a vision and told him that all cultures are acceptable to God. "What I have called clean, don't you call unclean," God said to Peter three times, and sent him off to share the message of Jesus with a man regarded by Peter's Jewish community in the worst light possible—a Roman officer of the occupying force enslaving their country! Peter, for the first time in his life, entered a Gentile home and ate there. He shared with that Gentile the message of Jesus. Before he even finished talking, the Holy Spirit came down on the household of listeners—this is the Gentile Pentecost. I told those teachers, with their hungry and aching hearts, that their mother culture was given to them by God and blessed by God. Peter understood, following his vision, that "God does not show favorites" with regard to cultures. Our cultures are God's gift to us and God's gift to the world. We are all enriched and challenged by the amazing kaleidoscope of God-given, God-inspired cultures of the world.

I followed up with teaching from Matt. 5:17. Jesus said to the Jewish people that he hadn't come to destroy the law and the prophets but to fulfill them by bringing among them the Kingdom of God. Jesus did not come to destroy what people already understood about God but to augment beliefs which were faulty or incomplete. He came to challenge those things in every culture that destroy life, and he affirms and fulfills those things, inspired by God, that make up the enduring and humanly fulfilling parts of life. Each culture is to be honored, for Jesus came to fulfill each culture in its own unique way. As the destructive side of every culture is brought to the light and transformed, each culture makes its contribution, not only to the wonderful diversity of the human race, but also to our understanding of the kingdom of God.

Singing God's Praises

As an illustration for those teachers, I spoke of how they had been singing "church culture" songs in their opening worship times. I told them it is good that they sing in their own Oromo language, but I challenged them to think about how their Arssi ways of singing and expressing joy and sorrow, celebration and mourning, could be used to praise and honor God. That traditional way of singing would be much more meaningful than generic "church culture" music. It could also be one of the most effective methods of sharing God's love for their people and the call of Jesus to follow in the ways of the kingdom.

These young adults surprised me by understanding immediately what their own heart music, turned toward Jesus, could mean in worship. One young woman got the women together, and before the rest of us knew what they were doing, they had composed a song

Harold Kurtz and students at a school in Ethiopia. Photo: Courtesy Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship.

of praise to God and were singing it in the Arssi way, dancing in a circle. The whole room erupted in applause and appreciation! Then the men responded—they have a different style of singing, and before long, they had composed a song and were singing in the men's traditional style of verse and group chorus, back and forth. I have taught these things before in other places and have seen them gradually accepted, but never before have I seen such an immediate application. As Urgessa said, it was like watching sowing and reaping all at the same time!

On Sunday, the teachers asked me to preach at the small church in town, to share my biblical understanding of the need to turn the gospel loose in the mother culture of every people. In Matthew 16, Jesus said to his disciples, the community which was the church at that time, that he was giving them the keys of the kingdom. According to Jesus then, the primary purpose of the community of faith in that Arissi Oromo town is not to establish a church, but to become an expression of the kingdom of God. What is needed in terms of fellowship and worship and instruction, the functions of what we think of as the church, can grow naturally and logically from people's own cultural context.

Then, for the first time ever in church, the young teachers sang their new Arssi praise song in the traditional way. The whole congregation erupted in cries of joy, and began singing, clapping, and dancing in the traditionally appropriate response to the musical pattern of the women. We witnessed people who had been living for generations in deep, deep pain—fractured and broken, despised and insulted—realizing that they were created and loved by God. From that moment on, they could walk with confidence and honor out of a historic, human-imposed, spiritual slavery into the promised land of healing that the kingdom of God in Jesus had brought.

Please continue to pray for these young teachers as they seek to become true and faithful people of the Way, unlocking the doors and windows of the kingdom for their people. We from the outside can explain the principles of God's desire for every people as they are illustrated in the Bible, but it is those on the inside who must walk the path. Outsiders cannot do it and must not presume to try. Only insiders have an adequate grasp of their cultures to know which practices are life-giving and will be fulfilled in the kingdom and which are destructive and need to be set aside. The teachers, now called to live out their own Book of Acts, need our prayers and our ongoing support of love.

The Rev. Harold Kurtz is a senior staff member of the Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship.

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Christie R. House, Editor, October 1, 2008

Children of Brisas del Mar.
Photo: Nile Sprague/UMCOR

ou may use the next two pages as bulletin inserts about mission. Remove this page; cut off these instructions, and duplicate the ge freely, printing front and back; fold in the middle, along the black line; and slip the copies into your Sunday bulletins.

Today All the People Laughed

Eluzinete (Lu) Pereira Garcia is a General Board of Global Ministries public-health missionary. Based in Brazil, Lu coordinates and promotes Comprehensive Community-Based Primary Health Care programs in Latin America and the Caribbean in cooperation with the Council of Evangelical Methodist Churches of Latin America and the Caribbean (CIEMAL).

With tears in his eyes, Bishop Juan Cardona of Colombia said to me, "Lu, ...for three years we have been coordinating recreational activities with the children, bringing [in] psychologists and clowns, and we were never able to make them smile. ...I couldn't understand what was happening when today all the people laughed!"

Brisas del Mar (Breezes of the Sea), a mixed community of Sinu Indians and African-American Colombians on the Atlantic coast of Colombia, is home to 120 families. Between 1999 and 2005, a paramilitary group set up camp at the entrance of this small community. The soldiers based at that camp terrorized the town.

Many young men, accused of violating paramilitary "laws," were forced to join their ranks. Girls and women were kidnapped, sexually assaulted repeatedly, and then murdered. Three mass graves have been found in the vicinity and, today, children are still afraid to travel alone outside of Brisas del Mar for fear of finding a corpse.

At the request of the Colombian Methodist Church, UMCOR, and the General Board of Global Ministries, I went with a group to Brisas del Mar to facilitate health-promotion workshops with its residents.

When Bishop Cardona asked, "What did you do, Lu, to make them laugh?" I responded, "I put into practice what I ask God every day, and that is to teach me to love, respect, value, affirm, and give loving care to all people."

Children of Brisas del Mar.

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connecting the church in mission

Chelsea's Gift

Pam Buzbee is a United Methodist Volunteer in Mission working with Mountain T.O.P., a mission organization dedicated to rural ministry in the Cumberland Mountains of Tennessee.

Chelsea is nine years old, the big sister of an eight-year-old brother. She and her brother sleep in bunk beds in a 7 ft. x 12 ft. room they share. A team prior to ours added another room to the side of their house to create two small bedrooms for Chelsea and her brother. One of our jobs on the first day at Chelsea's house was to hang drywall in the children's bedrooms. Although her brother's was done first, Chelsea didn't complain.

The second day, when we started putting the drywall up in her bedroom, she shyly asked if she could help. She was so excited that her room was almost completed and shared plans of painting it light purple and decorating it like a girl's room.

One day Chelsea gathered walnuts and sat on a concrete slab in her yard, broke them open with a hammer, picked out tiny pieces of nut meat with a nail, and placed them in a small plastic toy dish. Then she offered each of us volunteers some nuts.

Accepting Chelsea's gift, I realized that I have been given the gift of Jesus Christ, the love and fellowship of a family and a church community, and more blessings that I can count. Do I serve others because I "owe" that back to God? I don't see it that way.

The gratitude I feel for what I've been given is why I give of myself, not because I "should," but because I can't help but express my gratitude through doing.

Church Leaders Call for Fair Treatment of Relief Workers

Linda Greene is a United Methodist News Service writer based in Nashville, Tennessee.

Concern about safety, working conditions, and human rights issues compelled United Methodist Bishop Gregory Palmer, who just finished his term as Iowa Conference bishop, Bishop Alan Scarfe, Episcopal Diocese of Iowa, and the Rev. Rich Pieva, Iowa Conference of the United Church of Christ, to call for just treatment of day laborers who were hired to clean up flood-ravaged areas of Iowa.

The Rev. Catherine Quehl-Engel, an Episcopal chaplain at United Methodist-related Cornell College in Mount Vernon, Iowa, reported incidents of laborers traveling on a bus for 14 hours without food, tetanus shots, bedding, or towels for showering. Rev. Quehl-Engel said that these men and women who tended the wounds and grief of residents of flooded areas should have received appreciation for their labor.

One worker suffered a heart attack after a 14-hour workday. Some workers were housed several to one room. Inadequate health and safety measures and a lack of insurance coverage, gloves, and face masks essential for working in post-flooding conditions, were reported. The three religious leaders in Iowa released a statement saying that communities must work together to "ensure recovery does not come at the expense of human dignity, safety, health, or basic human rights."

After attention was called to these reports, workers were vaccinated, paid Iowa's minimum wage for their labor, provided with food, and housed in hotels and apartments.

In the words of Rev. Quehl-Engel, "Amidst the chaos of the flood, don't lose sight of enforcement of state labor laws and standards of basic human decency, not to mention the biblical mandate to care for the poor and marginalized."

Barry Cuvelier (right) talks with (left to right) Bishop Gregory Palmer, Bishop Alan Scarfe, and Sandra Kennedy-Owes, UMCOR executive, in New Hartford, Iowa.
Photo: Marta Aldrich

Safe and Secure in South Africa

Ted Warnock is a General Board of Global Ministries' missionary serving as a missionary for special projects for the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR).

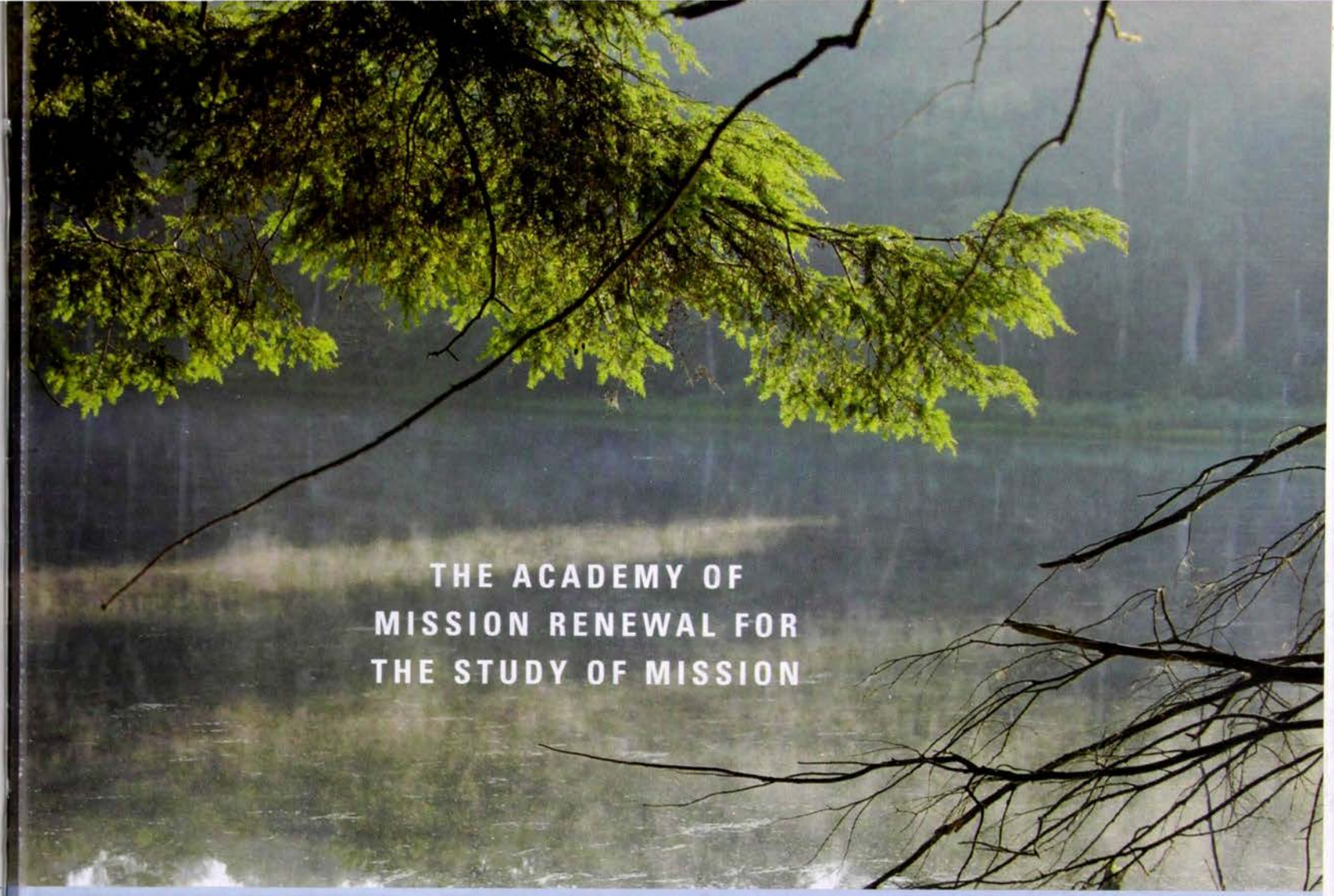
In Johannesburg, South Africa, more than 800 men, women, and children huddle next to each other every evening, looking for a place to sleep. Finally, they have found a welcome home where they are protected from the struggles that refugees face as they try to find a new life.

The Central Methodist Church in Johannesburg, South Africa, has transformed its place of worship into a different kind of sanctuary, one that provides refuge for displaced people from various countries. Refugees come to Central Methodist Church hoping to find a secure environment for themselves and their children.

With numerous families occupying Central Methodist Church, the need for education became apparent. Despite seemingly overwhelming obstacles, the Albert Methodist Church (formerly St. Paul's School) in Johannesburg has opened its doors to 60 refugee children. Most of these children are orphans who have found refuge in the sanctuary. Led by refugee teachers and an administrator from Zimbabwe and with the help of Bishop Paul Verryn, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, this school, which was shut down by the apartheid government in 1958, has renewed its mission.

God has blessed this ministry by providing assistance through the South African Methodist Volunteers in Mission, World Missions Possible (a non-profit agency located in Texas), and Rotary International's local district in Bedfordview, South Africa. Rotary's local district has a warehouse of free educational books and school supplies to promote literacy and assist with the education of children.

Children at Central Methodist Center in Johannesburg, South Africa.
Photo: Ted Warnock.



THE ACADEMY OF MISSION RENEWAL FOR THE STUDY OF MISSION

The Academy of Mission Renewal is neither a place nor a program. It is an opportunity for United Methodists to expand their understanding of mission theology within a United Methodist framework. The academy empowers its participants to engage their congregations in God's mission.

In partnership with the church, the General Board of Global Ministries' Mission Education unit publishes resources for use in organized settings of continuing education for reflection on mission and mission theology. These settings may be local congregations, districts, or annual conference agencies.

As a continuing education experience, academies may be implemented by various church bodies or committees or by interested participants themselves. Mission renewal events are available in varying lengths of time and occur within the conference, district, or local arena utilizing local and regional leadership. The events are tailored to the needs and interests of each group, recognizing the great diversity in style and level of mission involvement of United Methodist churches.

These ongoing programs benefit the whole church by acting as a medium for theological understanding and mission education, enabling congregations to have greater mission interest and involvement.

Faithful Witnesses is the first resource book published for the Academy of Mission Renewal. The book explores the theology and practice of mission and seeks to assist participants in developing a sound theology of the *missio Dei*—that is, what God's mission is and why we are called into mission. *Faithful Witnesses* is the how-to book for congregations in what it means to be the faithful witnesses of the gospel through the church in mission.

The Academy of Mission Renewal...for the study of mission.
For more information, visit our website at: http://academyofmissionrenewal.org

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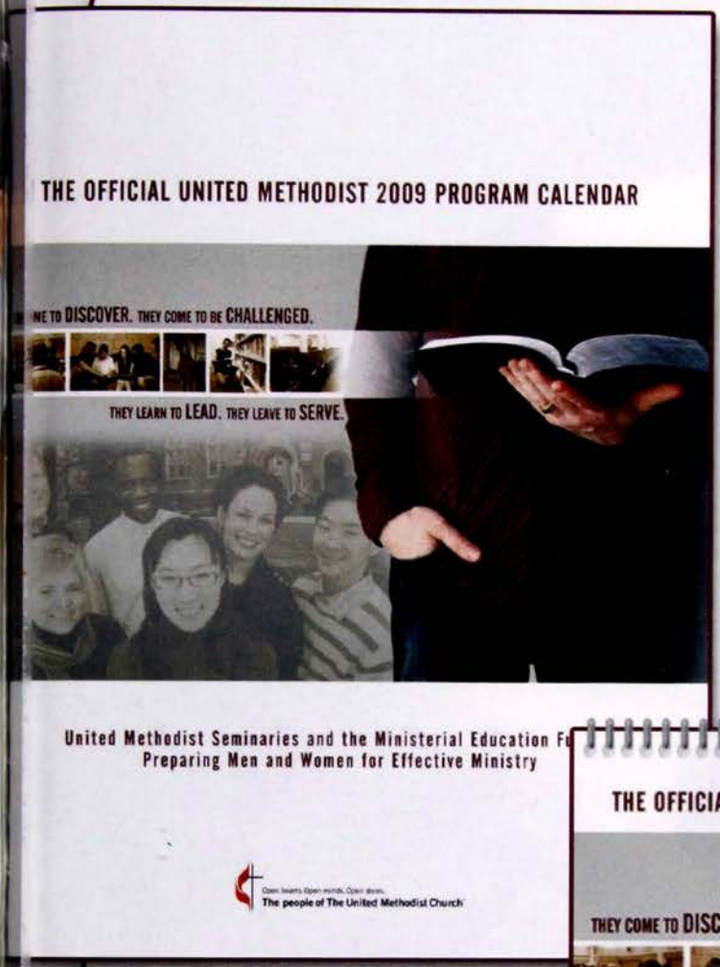

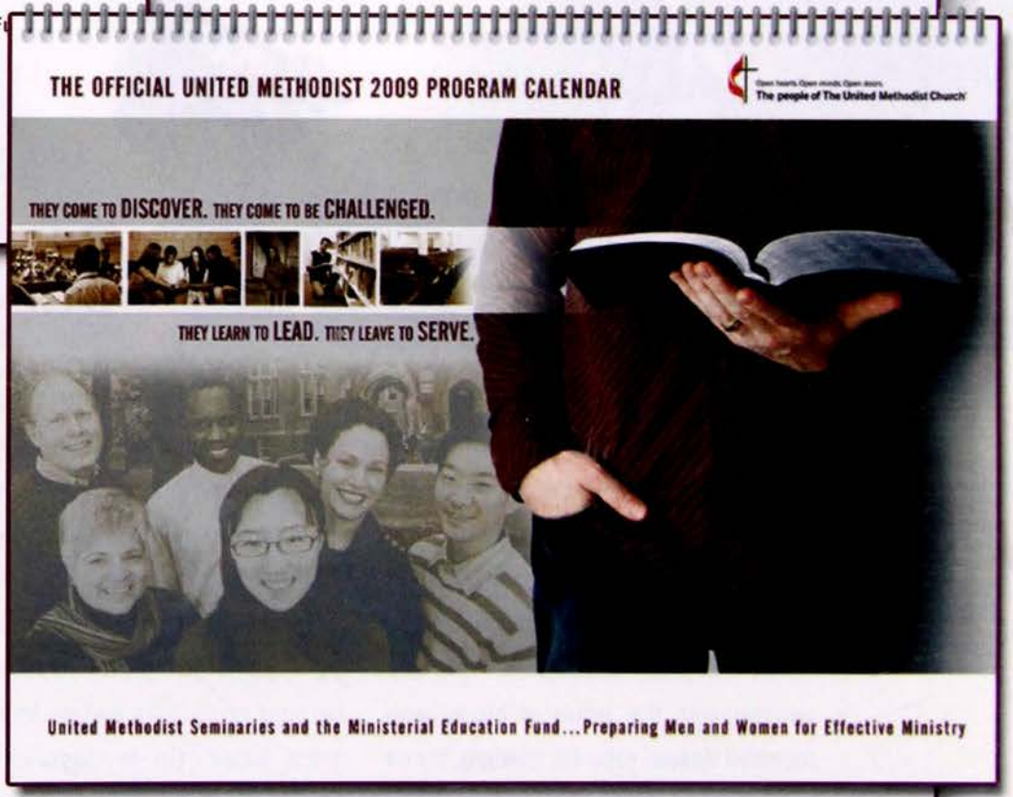

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One fistula repair costs $150. Your gift t UMCOR Advance #982168 - Hospital Revital ization Program, Ganta helps UMCOI continue to provide a wide range of primar and preventative healthcare services.

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