

THIS IS THE DAY!

Dear Global Ministries Board of Directors, home based staff, missionaries, visitors, friends, sisters and brothers in Christ:

“This is the day that our God has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” (Psalms 118:24)

As you can imagine, this is a very special day for us, co-executives of this unique ecumenical common witness in mission of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ. It is a special day because this is the last opportunity we have to share our remarks at the beginning of a Global Ministries board meeting.

This is a very special day in our life; and we do rejoice and be glad in it.

This is a day in which we thank God for allowing us the opportunity to serve in and to be the leaders of what we consider the most exciting ministry in the life of our two denominations:

A ministry of critical presence at the point of deepest need in the midst of a fragmented and broken world;

A ministry of sending and receiving persons in mission to become Christ to others in areas of the world and in circumstances out of our comfort zones;

A ministry of ongoing “acompañamiento” to and with churches, ecumenical organizations, and brothers and sisters of other faiths in six continents, ... not only in times of peace, good accountability and prosperity, but also in times of war, repression, and natural disasters.

A ministry of education and in-depth interpretation of what our God, who *is still speaking*, requires of Disciples and UCC as we witness from our doorsteps to the ends of the earth.

And a ministry of advocacy for the sake of justice for the least of these in the midst of God's creation.

In this special day that our God has made, we thank God for this Board of Directors, for our home based staff, for our missionaries, for our international partners, ... and for each one of our predecessors whom God has inspired and used to dream, design, and conceive a ministry like this, which incarnates the passion for Christian unity of our two churches ... "so that the world (our broken world) may believe."

As we move closer and closer to a new transition, in this day that our God has made, your co-executives not only look at the past with profound gratitude and joy, ... but we also celebrate the capacity and the commitment of Global Ministries to face the realities of today's landscape for mission; a reality so well described in the information docket prepared by our staff, which you all received a few weeks ago and were expected to read before this meeting. Out of that vast landscape for mission, we would like to highlight this afternoon just a few details.

Today's landscape for God's global mission begins with an overview of persons engaged in mission on behalf of Global Ministries throughout the world:

- 42 fully supported missionaries;
- 12 long-term volunteers;
- 9 short-term volunteers;
- 2 global mission interns;
- and 47 overseas associates
- for a total of 113 persons in mission, without including those Disciples/UCC constituents who will participate in 105 People-to-People Pilgrimages already scheduled for 2011.

In Africa, the landscape for mission reveals ...

- The establishment of a partnership agreement between Global Ministries and the Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC), based in Nairobi, Kenya, with the purpose of expanding the ecumenical and missionary horizons of our two church entities, to assume responsibilities one for the other, and two learn reciprocally from each other's faiths. The Organization of African Instituted Churches brings together African instituted or initiated churches from across

the continent with a vision that is both Christian and African aimed at improving the lives of the poor, rural and urban member churches;

- The United Church of Christ in Mozambique has a savings and loan program for women of that church;
- The All Africa Council of Churches has been playing an important role in the negotiation of peace in southern Sudan before the referendum and; the National Council of Churches in Kenya is working with the civil society to organized voter education in preparation for the 2012 election in that country, in an effort to avoid a repeat of the post-election violence from 2008;
- The Women's Organization of the Disciples of Christ community in the Republic of the Congo collected an offering for the relief efforts of the UCC One Great Hour of Sharing and the Disciples Week of Compassion;
- Our missionaries Dawn and Jon Barnes will move from South Africa to Maputo, Mozambique to work in development with the United Church of Christ of Southern Africa; and missionary Scott Couper has written a book on Nobel peace prize winner Albert Luthuli, who was educated under the influence of the Congregational Church Mission.

In East Asia and Pacific ...

- We face the reality, as described by Xiaoling Zhu this morning, of a Japanese nation facing the effects of a devastating earthquake and tsunami, followed by nuclear contamination; but in the midst of that scenario, we celebrate the presence and witness of our church partners and three of our Global Ministries missionaries;
- In addition to the Japan tragedy, people continue to face the challenges of devastating floods in Australia, the New Zealand earthquake, and the effects of global warming throughout the Pacific.
- We continue to celebrate the tremendous growth of the Christian community in China, and the great news of the 80 millionth Bible being published in China by the Amity Foundation, in addition to the Foundation's assistance for social reform and infrastructural development.

- And we also celebrate the important work on church people's response for sustainable ecology and integrity of creation begun by the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea.

From Latin American/Caribbean ...

- We received the sad news that Haiti is still far from recovery from their devastating earthquake in early 2010, with over 800,000 people still living in tent camps, but we celebrate CONASPEH's dedication of their new national headquarters in Port-au-Prince; and House of Hope's acquisition of a new building to expand their programs to serve children living on the edge;
- We expressed our gratitude to JustaPaz and the Evangelical Council of Churches of Colombia for their publication of the fifth edition of "A Prophetic Call," continuing their report on human rights violations in that country during the past year, including the assassination of three pastors and two prominent church leaders. Our missionary, Michael Josephs, who accompanies our Colombia church partners in this painful time, will be present at the General Synod this summer;
- We celebrate with our only partner in Peru, ALAS – the legal and social service organization who works with families of political prisoners – the release of Lori Berenson after 15 years in prison; And we also celebrate with gratitude the testimony of the Pentecostal Church of Chile; a church that 10 days ago presented Felix Ortiz and me a check in the amount of \$2000 for victims of the Japan earthquake, when we know that Chile is still recovering from the last year's devastating earthquake.
- We join our brothers and sisters in Mexico in praying following the kidnapping and disappearance of Rev. Cutberto Martínez Flores, pastor of the Disciples of Christ Church in Reynosa, Mexico, a few days before Christmas 2010; and with our brothers and sisters of the Pentecostal Church of Cuba on the sudden death of their National President, the Rev. Rafael Combé, on December 23, 2010, only days after being with UCC and Disciples friends in New Orleans at the Church World Service/National Council of Churches General Assembly.

About the Middle East/Europe ...

- We just heard from Peter Makari this morning on the events in Egypt, Libya, Syria, etc., that have made for turbulent times for our partners in that part of the world. It is certainly inspiring to know that, in the middle of such a time of uncertainty and fear, for instance, the leadership of the Protestant Community of Egypt “affirm the rights of the people to free expression ... (and the hope) that Egypt would remain a state based on the rule of law, one that is secular, and not based on a religious framework.”
- It is important to note that the work of our Middle East/Europe area executive is particularly important during these times of stress and tension between people of different faiths. Peter keeps us closely connected with partners and personnel in that area, while at the same time works here in the US on deepening understanding between people of different faiths, serving as Vice Chair of the NCCC’s Interfaith Relations Commission. He is also the Co-Convener of the Christian side of the Jewish Christian Dialogue group related to the National Council of Churches and also is very active in the Muslim Christian Initiative. That work is especially important with the resurgence of Islamophobia in the United States.
- And once again, the two General Ministers and Presidents of our two churches issued a statement supporting a proposed United Nations Security Council resolution on Israel’s continued settlement construction in the occupied Palestinian territories, citing previous statements by United Nations and the world community which describe these settlement constructions as “illegal, an obstacle to peace, and not legitimate.”

And from Southern Asia, we receive ...

- The good news of a visit to India by the General Ministers and Presidents of the Disciples of Christ and the United Church of Christ, Sharon Watkins and Geoffrey Black, to meet church leaders, mission personnel and projects, and to participate in activities related to the 200th anniversary of the ABCFM (American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions), with their first mission work being in India. The group, which also included James Vijayakumar and Cally Rogers-Witte, visited church related medical work, school revitalization initiatives, sustainable development projects, tsunami relief response, and even had the opportunity to cut ribbons on the final phases of a tsunami housing project and a center for the elderly in southern India.

- We received the good news of the Church of North India's current emphasis on congregational revitalization through one of its new programs entitled Congregational Renewal for Effective Engagement in Mission;
- We also appreciate and affirm the statement by the Commission of Churches in Indonesia condemning sectarian violence by fundamentalist Muslims against members of another Islamic group, and their call on the people of Indonesia to avoid the ways of violence and vigilantism and to resolve all issues with dialogue, or if that fails, to seek legal recourse.
- And we thank God for the Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh's comprehensive poverty reduction program intended to serve more than 61,000 individuals known as "reference people," most of them indigenous and ethnic minorities living in very remote and underdeveloped areas. In the second phase of this program, the goal is to empower poor, disadvantaged and vulnerable people for people-centered development.

For the Disciples of Christ and the United Church of Christ, today's landscape for mission is not limited to just what is occurring beyond our national boundaries, but is also expressed in the passion and commitment of our congregations, regions, conferences, and individual members to engage in critical presence efforts through Global Ministries. In this sense, it is worth mentioning:

- The leadership provided by Global Ministries for the planning and implementation of a Border Conference on Immigration, held Feb. 10-13, 2011 in San Diego, in a joint effort with Disciples Home Missions, Disciples Central Pastoral Office for Hispanic Ministries and the UCC Justice and Witness Ministries.
- It is also worth mentioning the growth in dollars and numbers of children benefited through our Child Sponsorship Program, under the leadership of Linda Lawrence, especially a significant growth in the number of children being sponsored by local churches.
- We celebrate the good news, that, so far, a total of 1,100 Disciples/UCC members have been already trained as Ministry and Mission Interpreters (MMIs).
- A significant number of regional and conference ministers, racial ethnic executives, and other key leaders of our two denominations have participated in the last three years in immersion

pilgrimages to different areas of the world with a commitment to actively involve their regions, conferences, and constituency groups in the Be a Global Mission Church initiative.

- And in spite of significant reductions in the DMF and OCWM budget income, it is good to hear from our Resource Development office that \$2.4 million were received through WCM/DOM as special funds in 2010, representing an increase of \$500,000 from the previous year; that Critical Presence in Critical Times brought \$105,000 from 130 donors; and that the Challenge Grant that will match undesignated gifts to the 2011 Spring appeal reached \$104,400.

Friends, this is the landscape for God's mission through Global Ministries on the eve of a leadership transition. There is no doubt that in this landscape we find financial challenges and uncertainties, as well as much pain and suffering within the human family. However, in this landscape there are also beautiful and promising opportunities for a new co-executive team to lead this precious Global Ministries into a new day of accompaniment and witness throughout the global community.

We believe that Jim and _____ are the right leaders for that new day which is now just around the corner. We already thank God for that new day, ... and we are ready to rejoice and be glad in it.

As we conclude our final opening remarks to this board this afternoon, our desire and prayer for each of you, our beloved family, is

God bless you and keep you;
God make God's face shine on you
and be gracious to you;
God turn God's face toward you
and give you peace.