



common lot

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Lives & Aspirations

OF WOMEN AND GIRLS AROUND THE WORLD



values



hope



faith



love





common lot

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Sharing Our *Common Lot*



Women's Ministry is richly blessed to bring you this issue of Common Lot in collaboration with our colleagues in Wider Church/Global Ministries. This issue offers us the opportunity to learn about women and children around the world and ways we can be in mission with our global community. —Deborah Bailey, Editor

It's a great joy for me to welcome you to this edition of *Common Lot*!

I want to tell you that I have an absolutely wonderful husband—he's my favorite person on earth, the one I most enjoy being with. I marvel at the ways he has supported me in the ministry to which God calls me. My most significant mentor in ministry was the Rev. Reuben Sheares. And I have a loving 90 year old father, and a number of outstanding and very special male colleagues in ministry.

I do know that God loves us all, male and female. Nevertheless, I have to admit that learning about the lives of women and girls is more interesting to me than learning about men and boys. So I'm delighted to have this opportunity to introduce this edition of *Common Lot* which highlights the lives and faith of women and girls around the world!

As your Executive Minister of *Wider Church Ministries*, I am also the co-executive of *Global Ministries*—the name for our work with partners and mission personnel around the world which is done in common with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). It has been my incredible privilege in my first year, to meet some amazing women in a variety of places and situations. I give thanks for the opportunity to have met people like:

- A female prisoner in Peru whom we visited in jail turned the tables, literally, to make us feel welcome. She spread a lovely hand-made cloth on which she placed glasses, juice, plates, (and we thought we were ministering to her!). After telling us her story, she asked us to share our spiritual journeys. Then she gave us gifts—mine was a pair of hand-made earrings! As we prepared to leave, she invited us to pray together.



- The Palestinian woman who cleaned and bandaged my badly scraped elbow. I had fallen as we climbed up the dusty, rocky path to her village. She had every reason to be bitter and inhospitable to me. She lives in a village which has long been part of the West Bank. She has her residency papers there but had recently been cut off from her former neighbors by the wall separating Israelis and Palestinians. Ironically, in an expansion of city limits, her village had just been made part of Jerusalem. But she had no papers permitting her to visit Jerusalem. Now she and her family are told they are living illegally on their own ancestral land.
- The Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina who still search for their missing grandchildren, twenty five years after their children and grandchildren “disappeared” under a brutal military dictatorship. Thanks to billboard campaigns and DNA testing, the grandmothers recently found yet another missing child, now in her late twenties! Our church partners in Argentina have supported the witness and mission of these grandmothers for all of these years!
- A single mother in old Cairo is one of many who have few rights and fewer opportunities to earn an income. She was struggling just to feed herself and her child. Yet, she was able to receive a \$100 micro-credit loan from our church’s gifts to our Egyptian partner Protestant social service agency (CEOSS). She opened a tiny shop, the size of a closet, to sell household items. Six months later she repaid the loan and had gotten another in order to expand her merchandise. At last, she was able to not only provide food, but even afford to send her daughter to school.

The lives and aspirations of women and girls around the world are not very different from our own in terms of values and hopes, faith and love. I am certain that you will be enriched by reading in this issue, the stories of strong women of deep faith.

May God bless you and keep you.

Cally Rogers-Witte

Executive Minister, Wider Church Ministries

It has been my incredible privilege in my first year, to meet some amazing women in a variety of places and situations.



Cally Rogers-Witte and the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo



A single mother in old Cairo



Global Agreement Among Women and Girls

By Mary Mikhael

Atending the Women’s Gathering called Mix in ’06 last summer, I listened to stories by women from all over the world; stories of faith, of struggle for a better life, of successes and failures, of sadness and joys. It was a time to “mix-in” with Sisters with whom there is a holy bond. Their names are easily forgotten, and even faces are just vaguely remembered, yet the bond mysteriously is there.

I left Mix in ’06 to go to the Presbyterian Women’s Gathering. It was a week of reflection on the creation story. I felt it completed the circle where one can see women dancing at every point, like a key ring with different keys, big, medium, and small ones of all colors and shapes all touching and making a melody together. One can never experience such gatherings and not feel changed, a transformation in the depth of one’s being. What happens to one sister is happening to all. It is the mystery of bonding.

My journey back to Lebanon took much longer than

expected. I was in the Amsterdam airport when I learned that I could not go to Beirut because Israel had attacked the Beirut airport. Lebanon was at war again. Old and sad memories of the civil war of the seventies and the eighties came to mind, just when I was convinced those experiences would never be repeated. I was determined to go back to Beirut and I did, even though the journey that should have lasted about 24 hours lasted five days.

For 33 days, from July 12 to August 14 the world witnessed an aggressive war waged against Lebanon by one of the strongest armies in the region. It destroyed Lebanon’s infrastructure, caused the death of 1,287 innocent people, wounded 3000, and displaced one million men, women, and children. It destroyed all the bridges, and caused damage to every port and highway. It is now clear that no nation, no country that is able to conduct such a war can claim to have any sense of morality toward humanity. (I do not mean in any way to undermine the sense of fear inflicted on the



ABOVE: Mary Mikhael

RIGHT AND FAR RIGHT: Destruction in Lebanon (photo courtesy of ACT International).



Israelis.) It is time to recognize that no power in the world can achieve security in the absence of justice and righteousness.

During the war days, when the displaced filled public schools and public gardens, the loving care they were provided by community members surpassed every expectation. So many youth and young adults got involved in the relief work. They created activities for the children who were frightened and disoriented. There were so many signs of hope.

Yet these signs of hope were covered by the clouds of political disagreements and assassinations, of demonstrations and counter demonstrations, and a continuous sit-in since December 1, 2006. All of this weighs heavily on everyone.

Most of us have to live and work as if life is quite normal. For many months now we have lived pretending that all is okay. But the scene in the center of Beirut looks like a camp for refugees. The economy is at a stand still, and on everyone's lips is the question, "What is going to happen?" or "For how long?" Depression can be seen on many faces, and those who could leave the country have left.

How can women create a change or make a difference in a situation that seems hopeless? Yes, we pray – but our

prayers must become active and visible. How can we do this? I need to be realistic, do I not? Often these days I feel that my realistic logic is nonsense. We in the Middle East seem to have exited the game, no more are we real players – have we ever been players? Have we not given up long ago? Of course many observers recognize that our problems are engineered and solved outside. Is not saying this is an excuse to give up? Is it not too easy to accuse the whole world and justify ourselves?

We must never give up trying to create needed change and to make a positive difference. Like the church, once it is negligent about justice and righteousness it loses its reason for existence. What we need in Lebanon, in the Middle East, and in the world, is for justice and righteousness to prevail. Justice and righteousness are very hard to achieve, and thus we are called to work hard, to love much, and to never give up.

Mix in '06 meant and still means that we all can work together to create the needed change in our world. We must be engaged to bring about justice, righteousness, and stand for the truth.

Mary Mikhael is President of the Near East School of Theology, Beirut, Lebanon and has served on the Common Global Ministries Board. ☞

Reflection questions

1. In what ways can women work together to create a change?
2. In what ways can Wider Church Ministries of the UCC become an agent for healing both locally and worldwide?





Du-Re-Bang (My Sister's Place)

by Susan M. Sanders

YOU Young-Nim sits quietly and listens. Korason cries as she tells her story. It is a story YOU Young-Nim has heard hundreds of times before at Du-Re-Bang (My Sister's Place).

Korason, 27, has run away from the Red Sun Club, almost four months after her arrival in South Korea from the Philippines. She says one of her customers sexually abused her while inside the VIP room of the club. Korason reported the abuse to the club owner, who simply replied that she should have known about the risks involved in working at the club.

Korason was recruited to be a professional singer by the Tenth Story entertainment agency, spending a year in rigorous voice training, for which she paid the agency, while waiting to be sent to South Korea. A monthly salary of \$600, ten times her Philippine salary, was promised. Spending two years as a singer in Korea, Korason reasoned, would enable her to substantially contribute to the household income of her elderly parents and younger siblings.

Upon arrival in South Korea, Korason and the others in her group were immediately taken to the Red Sun Club located next to the US military installation, Camp Stanley. She quickly discovered there would be no singing. Instead, she was given a quota for the number of drinks she had to sell each month and was forced to entertain customers in the VIP room. Her working hours were 7:00 pm until 3:00 am, seven days per week. She was not allowed a day off.

Korason is now staying with her GI boyfriend. She is destitute, having run away before receiving the salary due her. She will not return to the Red Sun Club, as she believes the owner permitted customers to abuse her for a fee. She does not want to be abused again. Her

boyfriend says they should get married. Korason is not so sure; she has heard bad stories about Filipino women who marry GIs.

Korason is also reticent to return to the Philippines because she wants to help her family. She really wants to find work in a factory, even knowing it is illegal and she risks deportation.

YOU Young-Nim offers Korason a cup of hot tea and an empathetic look as she begins to explain Korason's options and how Du-Re-Bang may be of assistance. Korason cautiously receives the gifts of tea and understanding and listens, quietly.



Signs for clubs where Filipina "entertainers" are employed, dominate the community surrounding Camp Stanley, a US military installation.



Du-Re-Bang (My Sister's Place) is a ministry of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea, a Global Ministries partner of the United Church of Christ. YOU Young-Nim, Dur-Re-Bang Director, reports the increasing feminization of migration with women constituting over 49.6% of the world's 191 million migrants. Du-Re-Bang has witnessed significant growth in the number of Filipino women migrating to South Korea in recent years. Consequently, plans are underway for Du-Re-Bang to open a center in the Philippines to educate women to the realities of migration.

Susan M. Sanders, Minister for Global Sharing of Resources and One Great Hour of Sharing Administrator, visited Du-Re-Bang in March, 2007. ☺

Reflection questions

1. What role does your community play in the global economy which contributes to worldwide migration?
2. How might you engage in efforts to address human trafficking?
3. What options do you imagine YOU Young-Nim was able to share with Korason?

announcement!

The Mix in '06 concert with Bernice Johnson Reagon, Holly Near and Carrie Newcomer will soon be released on DVD! Interspersed with the songs performed at the concert are clips of an interview session with the three performers talking about their work, their collaboration with each other, and the importance of song as a force for social change and community building.

This exciting and unique DVD will be available at General Synod this summer and can be ordered through UCC Resources soon (1-800-537-3394). Price TBA.

God is still
speaking,
and so are we!

PROTECT
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LIVES!

**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



www.UCC.org



Connecting Lives through Service: Hurricane Recovery Continues

by Mary Schaller Blaufuss

Debra Joseph and Dani Wagner from New Orleans, Louisiana and Linda Crowe from Spokane Valley, Washington are three UCC members who had their lives intertwined in ways none would have anticipated following hurricanes of 2005 on the United States Gulf coast. Debra and Dani's homes were among the thousands of homes flooded when the levees broke in New Orleans sending water gushing into the city after Hurricane Katrina. Linda was among participants in an adult mission trip engaged in disaster recovery who, like other groups working in New Orleans during the first year-and-a-half of the recovery effort, helped muck out houses that had been flooded. Linda's group was assigned to Debra's and to Dani's homes in February, 2006. Mucking out houses for volunteer groups is dirty, messy, work. Volunteer groups wear protective covering over their clothes and face masks to minimize dangers. It is heart-wrenching work. Having your house mucked out

with your belongings scattered on the ground in front of the house is too painful for most to watch, Debra and Dani included. But creating open spaces in a house where home-owners can envision new possibilities is also hope-filled work.

Hurricane survivors become living testimonies that new life is possible. Their trust in God to see them through this painful time reveals on-going faith that sustains. Volunteer groups become living testimonies that people are not alone and that God is there. Linda tells the story of finding a lace tablecloth in Dani's home; dirty but not completely destroyed. Dani's mother had made the tablecloth fifty years ago. The group took it back to the church where they were staying and ran it through the washing machine. It emerged with holes caused by the disaster, but clean and presentable to give back to the family. Linda tells the story of the transformation in her life as the tablecloth symbolized hope by again



Dani and Chuck Wagner with Linda and Randy Crowe stand next to one another in front of Dani and Chuck's home in New Orleans (photo courtesy of Linda and Randy Crowe).



Debra Joseph stands next to Linda Crowe with a disaster recovery work group from the Pacific Northwest Conference in front of Debra's FEMA trailer (photo courtesy of Linda and Randy Crowe).

“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

(Vs. 40) –Matthew 25: 31-40

becoming part of Dani’s family story. Debra Joseph tells the stories of how the presence of the wider church was a blessing. Immediately after the disaster as she tried to survive and pick up the pieces of her life and that of her loved ones, she knew she was not alone. And as time passed, she was able to continue to live the courage of work with her extended family members to bring them back, and in their neighborhood to shape community in life-giving ways.

Serving and being served. They are categories that get mixed up when transformation and empowerment happens in the spirit of Christ. They are categories that Jesus mixes up when he describes the reign of God and right relationship with God in the parable of separating the sheep from the goats as told in Matthew 25. It is impossible to tell the difference between those who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, or prisoners from Jesus because “as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family [says Jesus] you did it to me.” UCC Volunteer Ministries provides the opportunities for service and witness in a variety of settings in the United

States from disaster response to camp and conference ministries; from social service efforts to involvement in grassroots advocacy organizations. These are opportunities to get involved in this mixed up serving/being served ministry of God’s transforming action.

Disaster Recovery Work Groups are still needed on the United States Gulf Coast. Long Term recovery efforts continue. Sign up your group at www.ucc.org/ministries/volunteer/hurricane.htm. Individual volunteers with construction skills are needed for placements of 1-3 months as Crew leaders or for 6 months or longer as “Partners in Service” volunteers to help provide leadership with groups in the rebuilding. See the above website for more information.

Mary Schaller Blaufuss, Executive for Volunteer Ministries, has been instrumental in designing and recruiting volunteers for the UCC Hope Shall Bloom Disaster Response Work Group program. ♪

Reflection questions

1. What were Linda, Debra and Dani empowered to do for others? What would you say empowerment feels like?
2. How would you describe a transformation experience you have had?
3. Do you have your own story to tell of service to “the least of these”?



UCC Disaster Recovery Volunteer Groups work in homes one year after Hurricane Katrina (photo was taken by Evan Golder in September 2006).



The Definition of Success

by Debra Frantz

“Success” is defined in many ways around the world according to the local culture, economy, faith and tradition. In Malapattai, India, a rural village surrounded by the lush green of rice fields, banana farms and coconut palms, you might expect families to be thriving. The truth is that few families own any land and those who do own only a few acres. The single crop they grow each year is not enough to live on. Many individuals leave their families behind and migrate for work when the rice is harvested, so their families can have enough to eat until the next crop comes in.

When families are struggling to have enough to eat, they often forgo education for their children (particularly for girls) and medical or dental care. Although the government guarantees education for each child, the cost of uniforms and supplies are often more than poor families can afford. In Malapattai, many children go to school through fifth grade and then go to work. A few complete 10th grade. For low caste families like these, education is a luxury.

For girls, “success” includes marriage. In India, despite laws forbidding dowries, the custom requires a bride’s parents to pay a dowry to the groom’s family to secure a marriage. Sometimes dowries are as much as the annual income of a family or more. An education and a career might bring great value in life, but it is very costly and when compared to the necessity of providing a dowry to secure a marriage it seems less important. In Malapattai, girls dream—just like girls everywhere. Alagu dreams of becoming an engineer; Lakshmi and Sundavi would like to become doctors and provide medical care in the villages; and Malathi would like to work in community development. These girls, however, are not continuing their education. At the age of about 13 these girls were sent to work in a cloth factory. They work 8 hours a day, seven days a week. Each girl gets one 5-day vacation to return to her village each year.

They do this to earn their dowries. After 3 years of service the girls return to their village and the parents are paid about \$600 for their 3 years of labor. This \$600



Washing Dishes in Malapattai



A woman preparing dinner in Malapattai



A woman building a cooking fire



Young women of Malapattai



Jyammal, Lakshmi & Alagu—young women of Malapattai on home visit from the factories

is enough to secure a marriage. Although the girls claim that they are “safe” at the factories, there are reports that sexual assaults are common. The girls cannot report sexual assault without risking the loss of their job and the loss of their opportunity to marry. Any girl who admits to having been assaulted is considered unworthy of marriage. Most girls marry at 17 or 18 and then go to work as farm laborers in the fields just as their parents have done. When they marry they go to live with their husband’s family. Most of the houses have only 2 or 3 rooms that are about 10 feet square. Cooking is done outside. Each family has a few animals—goats, chickens or a cow. There is very little furniture.

Healthcare is supposed to be free for women, but for the women and girls in Malapattai it is not free and it is difficult to get access to it. There is only one clinic for 6 villages. Child care, too, is only available in the larger villages, so the women of Malapattai have to walk 2 or 3 miles to the child care centers and from there to work. The poorest families are eligible to receive an allotment of free rice provided by the government. However, families have to pay a bribe to be put on the list of eligible families, so the poorest families cannot afford to claim the assistance that they should be first to receive.

“Success” in Malapattai is survival. It is having the good fortune to have food to eat, to be healthy and, for girls, to secure a *good* husband. Bad husbands take the dowry and then discard or abuse the wife. Wives are

considered to be property. Domestic violence is very common and rarely prosecuted. Life in Malapattai is hard, but it’s all they know. These girls’ dreams seem like fantasies. Without a good education; without good literacy; and without access to information about (and access to) their human and civil rights girls are destined for lives of hard labor and will be rewarded with only the bare essentials for living. Hunger; disease or injury that cannot be treated (for lack of access and funds); and the risk of losing ones’ livelihood are ever-present threats that these families and communities face.

Debra Frantz, Global Ministries Administrative Associate for Partner Relations, visited Malapattai in December, 2006. Since then, several women in Malapattai have formed a dairy cooperative, funded by Global Ministries, One Great Hour of Sharing and Foods Resource Bank. ♀

Reflection questions

1. How do you define “success” for your life?
2. What are some of your ideas to advocate for women whose rights are abused?
3. Malapattai is only one village of many we might pray for. What specific **hope** would you name as a prayer for the women and girls of Malapattai?



Outside the Fence

by Holly McKissick

We have chapel service at 7:30 a.m. every morning—except Friday and Saturday. On Friday, we still gather in the chapel, but young women from grade eleven read news stories they have selected covering current events.

Goodness. In South Africa, as in the United States: what bleeds leads. And, in this country, there is a lot of bleeding.

The first story is about the increase of domestic abuse, specifically, the murder of a mother of eight at the hands of her husband. The next story details the strike of security guards across the country. Troubling, on many levels, as they loot and burn and attack. The next covers school shootings: a girl shot in the hip, a boy shot through the head. I am grateful for the last story which describes the soccer game.

Listening to the girls, I think of our protected school inside the electric fence. You can be so close and yet worlds away. Inanda Seminary, started 150 years ago to educate “native” African girls, is now surrounded by the township of Inanda—a tough place to live. Many of these girls come from tough places, too. Families, like theirs, that can scrape up the money to send their daughters to boarding school do so, not just for the education, but for the safety. In a country where 1 in 2 women will be raped at some point, the girls need protection from strangers, and, too often, family members.

Of course, the news is not all bad. Two of the girls choose articles that speak of resurrection, hope, victory: the obituaries of strong and generous women. You can feel the anxiety in the chapel lessen and the hope rise as the life story of a 91 year-old becomes our morning offering.

The obituary tells how the woman owned a business before a law was passed declaring it illegal for blacks to live in a certain area and own property. She was moved to a homeland, but she resisted. Not just for herself, but

for all South Africans. After democracy was achieved in 1994, she was elected to Parliament.

Listening to the girls read, watching the faces of the girls around me, I know, and they know: in the community God calls us to build; our protection does not come from electric fences. Moats, fences, iron curtains—in the end they do not work. Those on the outside, denied too long, find their way in.

No, in God’s world, our protection and direction come from the saints, living and gone before us. The 91 year-old woman, the great-grandpa, the second grade teacher...those who have lived bold, courageous, selfless lives; those who have faced challenges far greater than ours and pressed on with dignity and perseverance, they are our hope for a new day. That God has given us teachers, guides, leaders, parents to show us the way: what genius, what hope, what promise.

May the God of Good News wake us each morning with thankfulness for the freedom, shelter, safety we enjoy, and the wisdom and passion to spread those gifts near and far. Amen.

Holly McKissick, Pastor of St. Andrew Christian Church in Olathe, Kansas served as a Common Global Ministries Board member and short-term volunteer at Inanda Girl’s Seminary in Durban, South Africa. ♀

Reflection questions

1. Where do you find your protection and safety?
2. What are the real life safety issues faced by young girls in your community and how can you help address them?
3. Who has been your model for living a bold, courageous life?

Rural Women AGENTS OF CHANGE, NICARAGUA

by Church World Service

Consejo de Iglesias Evangelicas Pro-Alianza Denominacional (CEPAD)
The Council of Evangelical Churches for Denominational Alliance

Leonor Velásquez, 43, lives in the community of Guadalupe #2, about 12-1/2 miles northeast of the city of Matagalpa. She is married and the mother of two girls and two boys.

In their early years together, she and her husband worked as administrators of a farm, and with great effort were able to acquire their own house and furnishings. Her husband worked as a farmer, growing their own basic grains. She dedicated herself to family responsibilities and keeping the patio garden.

Velásquez was selected by her community's development committee to receive training in a Council of Evangelical Churches for Denominational Alliance (CEPAD) patio project, giving her the opportunity to develop her skills and abilities.

After taking part in patio project workshops, Velásquez felt motivated to diversify her patio garden by growing a variety of fruit trees such as mango, mandarin orange, jocote, avocado, cashew fruit, and banana. She also grows squash, spearmint, cilantro, etc. The fruit trees and plants were provided through the project or exchanged by project participants from other regions.

The hens in her patio do not wander around, but are kept in hen houses that help to guarantee their health and security. Velásquez is thankful for the animal health and hygiene workshop in which she participated.

Her outlook and faith in herself has changed.



Leonor Velásquez

Velásquez says that being a beneficiary in this project has helped her develop her leadership skills, and has allowed her to be recognized as a person with the will to work for her community's development.

"Now I am not one of those people who wait for others to do things, but I do them and invite people to follow along, watching me," she says.

She has also become a faithful defender of the environment, a fact she makes quite clear when she speaks at workshops she attends. At home she has raised the awareness of community members about not burning their fields and has, along with her neighbors, lobbied governmental organizations such as the Ministry of Natural Resources to stop giving unlawful permits for cutting trees.

Velásquez is always working in different community development projects. She says that women contribute to community development and can be agents of change. In the same way she has received training and has used her knowledge to make her patio more productive, she helps other women to learn about the environment and natural resources, and how to take action.

This multi-year program seeks to empower and equip 170 women from 30 rural communities so that they and their families can be more self-reliant and food secure. In their second year, participants received small loans

(continued on page 14)



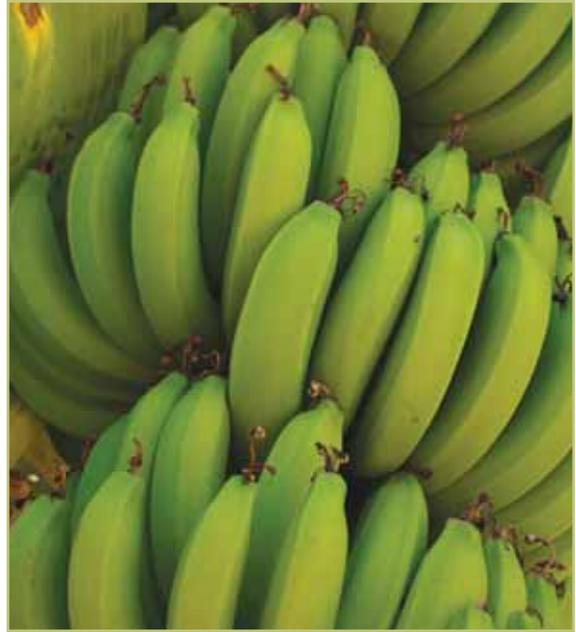
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to improve their gardens, buy more livestock, and start small businesses.

One Great Hour of Sharing, Church World Service and the Foods Resource Bank work together with CEPAD to support this food security initiative. ♪

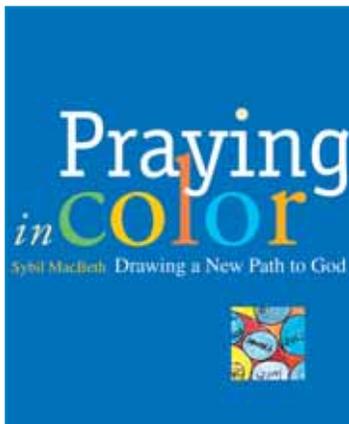
Reflection questions

1. When have you felt motivated to broaden your horizons?
2. What are the environmental issues in your community about which you are called to speak out?
3. What does it mean for a family to be “food secure?” How might Leonor’s children benefit from the family achieving food security?



These bananas were among the many fruits Leonor was able to grow as part of her patio garden

— b o o k r e v i e w —



Paperback
103 pages

Publisher
Paraclete Press (MA)

Praying in Color: Drawing a New Path to God by Sybil MacBeth

Sybil MacBeth helps her readers understand that anyone with a box of colors and paper can have a conversation with God. Frustrated by a laundry list of what she calls “prayer dilemmas,” and several friends and family members on



her “prayer list” MacBeth, a math professor, spent an afternoon doodling before she realized she’d spent the afternoon in prayer. With great care she explains her method for intercessory prayer. She assures readers her approach requires no skill, merely a desire to connect with God. Through personal anecdotes, MacBeth illustrates each step of the process, providing both instruction and inspiration by sharing her own prayer pages as well as those of her students. Readers of all ages and experience will enjoy spending time both with themselves and their Creator.

WOMEN IN INTERNATIONAL MISSION

Global Women Sponsoring Global Children

by Ana Gobledale

“As apostles of Christ, ...we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children.”
—1 Thessalonians: 2:7 NRSV

When you think of “global women” involved in international mission, of who do you think?

Do you think of international missionaries? I know I do... I think of the older generations, women like Global Ministries missionary Betty Frank who has worked and lived in Turkey for many years. Or Xuyen Dangers who grew up in Vietnam and lives and works in Laos. I think of the younger generation, women like my niece, Lucy, who grew up in Chicago and San Salvador, speaks English with a Spanish accent, and is currently studying in Brazil... in Portuguese! I think of my daughter, Thandiwe, who grew up in South Africa and Zimbabwe and currently lives and works in India.

But these well-traveled women represent only one group of “global women” involved in international mission. There is another entire network of “global

women” who do not necessarily ever leave their home state. Instead, they reach out around the globe from their homes and churches in the USA, with love and commitment, and impact the lives of hundreds of children. I am thinking of the women who sponsor children through the Global Ministries Child Sponsorship Program.

I am going to share some of the voices of these “global women” who sponsor “global children.” We will also hear from Thandiwe, currently a Global Mission Intern living and working at the Family Village Farm where many Global Ministries sponsored children live.

Stepping up—Why?

The reasons for stepping up as a child sponsor vary. My family took on a child through sponsorship in 2000 when I joined the Cleveland Global Ministries staff, so I could see how the system worked. For others, there may be a connection with a place or a person.

One sponsor explains how her personal roots influenced her decision, “When the opportunity came up for me to sponsor an Armenian girl, I became involved. I am a physician and grew up with strong Armenian heritage through my mother. I am well aware of the history of the Armenian people and the country and wanted to give back to a disadvantaged Armenian girl.”

Another sponsor writes of a personal connection with the founder of the Family Village Farm in India, Dr. Pauline King. “I knew Pauline from the mid-1960’s when The Family Village Farm was just





a dream. Pauline stayed with us for ten days while visiting churches. I kept up with her until her death. My joy has been in continued contact with the institution that she founded and of which I've been a supporter from the beginning. I have used Pauline as an example in many a sermon; so it's natural that I have encouraged Child Sponsorship there."

A third sponsor describes a life-transforming experience of her own that motivated her to sponsor a child in China. "It [child sponsorship] always sounded like a neat idea, but I never actually wrote the check until [my daughter] and I went to China with a Global Ministries women's group, and visited the dedication of a new school sponsored by Global Ministries in Chengdu, Henan; an area that's been devastated by AIDS (acquired from donation/selling blood). These children and their families have so little! And they honored us with songs, dances, and speeches, and were excited and happy like all children everywhere when good things happen. All I could think of was how many of these kids I could give a chance in life, just by writing a check. They were all so eager to work hard and valued the chance to stay in school. It was exciting and compelling to be with them."

Getting Involved...How Far?

International Child Sponsorship is a tricky business. Financially, the Global Ministries Sponsorship Program is set up brilliantly, with 100% of the sponsor's donation going directly to the sponsorship center where the child lives; the

For the children, knowing they mean something to someone...means a lot.

sponsorship program staff in Cleveland is supported by other funds. But there are other ethical dilemmas. How involved should the sponsors be in the lives of their sponsored children? Is hands-off the best policy? "I've been hesitant about writing to her [the child I sponsor]. I'm uncomfortable with the role of benefactor. I don't want to make her feel like she owes me gratitude, because I'm just helping her do what she has a right to," comments one sponsor.

Or should centers encourage correspondence and even visits? Thandiwe, working at M.B.K.G. Pannai (Family Village Farm) in India writes, "I have been very surprised by how present the sponsors are here. For the children, knowing they mean something to someone and that someone is thinking about them means a lot. When I first arrived the questions most frequently asked of me by the children, other than my own name, were my parents' names and, for those sponsored by individuals in the United States, whether or not I knew their sponsors. One boy, who is now grown up and studying for his Master's degree in Pharmacology, has a file full of long letters and colorful cards from "Aunt Betty and Uncle Roger" in the U.S. sharing their lives and experiences with him. In almost every prayer, children, mothers, wardens and the Director lift up sponsors around the world. Sponsors matter, and they are not just a signature on the bottom of a check. This has come as a real surprise and pleasure to me."

Some centers make sure the children write, at least annually, to their sponsors. At the MBKG Pannai (Family Village Farm), Reena, the Sponsorship Coordinator and Homes Supervisor, is a committed Christian who finds her faith very important. Reena "corresponds with the sponsors, ensures that letters are delivered to sponsored children, distributes gifts sent by sponsors, signs forms regarding money needed for and by the children and mothers who

Financially, the Global Ministries Sponsorship Program is set up brilliantly, with 100% of the sponsor's donation going directly to the sponsorship center where the child lives...

live here, meets regularly with the cottage and nursery mothers as well as the wardens." Other centers, perhaps simply because they do not have the personnel or finances to support someone like Reena, do not ensure regular communication.

So some sponsors "get lucky" and benefit from a deepening relationship with the child they sponsor. Some even manage to visit their sponsored child. Others feel frustrated at the lack of contact. And yet others wish to remain anonymous. But, whatever the case, each sponsor represents a high level of commitment to make a difference in a child's life, a commitment that motivates them to enter into uncertain relationships with strangers and continue writing checks and letters, often unanswered, through the years. As one sponsor shared, "My family and I are not currently involved with the church. (It has been years since we attended.) But my commitment to the Child Sponsorship Program has continued."

One sponsor shares candidly, "My hope had been to correspond with the child but that has proved to be too difficult. This has been challenging and not rewarding the way I had hoped it would have been. To be honest, I don't feel that the program has met my needs, but I continue to sponsor the child as I don't want to let her down. In my heart, whether I hear from her or not, I know I am helping a life far away and different than my own or my own two children." Another shares, "The one disappointment is that Delina*, the girl I sponsor, never acknowledges our letters or gifts. We assume she receives them, but we never know. I completely

realize the huge logistics of helping sponsors keep in touch, and they do a wonderful job [sending out] regular letters, pictures, and drawings from Delina, plus the newsletter from the home." (Note: some centers distribute gifts amongst all the children, sponsored or not, so no one is left out, often waiting until there is something for every child. This means the sponsored child might not personally benefit from a sent gift, but even more children will be impacted by a generous sponsor. Thandiwe explains, "Some of the gifts may be given to the child on their birthday or another special event, but only if each child can receive a gift. Clothing may be reserved for Christmas or another holiday when all the children receive new clothes.")

The "Global Girls"

And who are the children sponsored by these "global women"? Who are these "global girls" and boys whose pictures hang on hundreds of USA refrigerators? Thandiwe introduces two of the girls at M.B.K.G. Pannai (Family Village Farm)...

Nisha* is a tiny boisterous five-year old. She and her twin sister stay in the nursery and during playtime they are inseparable—sharing a swing or a seat on the merry-go-round. Nisha and her sister come from a Muslim family, unusual here as most of the children come from Hindu or Christian families. As a single parent, Nisha's mother sought assistance so her daughters will get three meals a day, new clothes two or three times a year, shelter, medical care and an education. This is far more material security than she could ever offer them. Nisha and her sister attend Upper Kindergarten (the equivalent of a second year of preschool) where they bring their energy!

Amitha* laughs and bickers with the other children as she swings on the cheerful yellow swing set. When Amitha was two, her father abandoned the family. Her mother, who works as a part-time manual laborer, has to leave the children alone when she goes to work, so she applied to have Amitha admitted here. Now six years old, Amitha lives in

**Names and identifying details have been changed for publication.*

the 6th Cottage with Amudha Amma (amma means mother) and six other children, and she attends first standard at King's Matriculation School.

Thandiwe writes, "One of the things I enjoy most is catching the moments of tenderness and care between mothers and children and among the children themselves, when I watch a mother putting a flower in one of her cottage girl's hair or I see an older child pick up a nursery baby, and there is such affection and love in those actions."

Going Global Together

In many cases, as at Faith UCC in Altoona, Pennsylvania, the entire congregation, or a group within the congregation, sponsors a child, sharing the global experience throughout the membership. A comment from Altoona's minister demonstrates the importance of this global mission project, "The Child Sponsorship Program is very important to me. Besides my own church, I've 'steered' the Women's Fellowship of the Association and Conference to sponsor a child or children." My church in Australia shares a "Blessing Bowl" each Sunday, into which anyone who has a joy or concern to share places a dollar or two when sharing. This simple community act brings us together and financially supports two boys in India. For ideas on how to benefit as a congregation through child sponsorship, contact Linda Lawrence at 216-736-3222, or email, lawrencl@ucc.org.

The Rewards

Why do women go global and sponsor children on the other side of the world? Perhaps it's the same faith that inspired Pauline King, the founder of Family Village Farm to say, "I can't do everything, but I can do something." When asked, "What has been for you the most rewarding part of sponsoring a child?" one sponsor replied, "Seeing her picture on the fridge every morning and knowing she'll go to school today." And it is knowing that behind that picture is a place, supported by the church, full of people who provide a home of love for the children.

As one sponsor shared through her favorite Bible

verse, "We know all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to God's purpose." (Romans 8:28 NRSV)



Ana Gobledale has served our church through Global Ministries in South Africa, Zimbabwe, the USA and now Australia where she and her husband, Tod, are chaplains and lecturers at Churches of Christ Theological College.

Prayer requests

- 🙏 For all the women, families and church groups involved in international mission through child sponsorship;
- 🙏 For the staff at the centers, especially for Reena at MBKG Pannai (Family Village Farm) who has completed a Masters in Biochemistry and is currently pursuing a Masters of Psychology through a correspondence course;
- 🙏 For all the children supported with love and money through Child Sponsorship programs;
- 🙏 For Linda Lawrence who oversees the Global Ministries Child Sponsorship Program.

Reflection questions

1. What have your experiences been with Child Sponsorship?
2. How might your congregation benefit from Child Sponsorship, or, if you are already sponsoring a child, how might you share that joy and commitment more widely through your congregation?
3. While sponsorship helps to feed, clothe and educate a child, consider what you can do to help eradicate the situations in our world that lead to poverty.
4. What are the needs of children in your community and how can you have a positive impact on them?

Justice for Women

By Loey Powell



He sat there in his crib, quiet until we entered the room. Then he started crying, looking at us and crying with big brown baby eyes that followed us around

the room. The nurse told us that he does this every time someone comes into the room. He just wants to be picked up and held. Then he stops crying.

This baby boy, less than a year old, is HIV positive and lives in a wing of the Tygerberg Hospital in Cape Town, South Africa—a wing dedicated to mothers and babies living with HIV and AIDS and administered by the HOPE program. His mother comes occasionally to see him but she has other children to tend to and very little money to support them or herself. His father is not around at all. So the health workers, nurses and doctors who care for the women and children in this wing often pick him up and hold him, talk with him, make him giggle, and reassure him that he is loved.

I was in Cape Town in March of this year to visit an outreach program of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice aimed at providing sexuality education through the churches there. Hundreds of teens have benefited from honest conversations about sex, sexuality, pregnancy prevention and decision-making because of the “Keeping It Real” (KIR) program. HOPE has sixteen outreach health workers doing HIV/AIDS education and prevention programs in the townships in Cape Town and they provide health care as well. They contacted Cindy Le Roux, the KIR program director, for help. While the HOPE workers can teach facts about health and prevention, they realized they were missing the component of talking about morals,

values and ethics. So Cindy is working with them because this is the strength of the KIR program just as it is with the UCC’s “Our Whole Lives” faith-based comprehensive sexuality curriculum used in our churches.

Many women in Cape Town who are living with AIDS don’t know why they are sick. They don’t know why their children are sick. The silence and misinformation, the social and cultural restrictions on talking about such things, and the unequal status of women prevent public prevention programs from taking hold. Additionally, the lack of access to affordable medicines as well as to information about what steps HIV positive women who are pregnant can take to keep their babies from being born HIV positive keep the pandemic spreading rapidly. Right now, girls and young women between the ages of 14-24 represent 80% of all new cases of HIV infection in South Africa.

What are we doing? Through the UCC and Disciples Global Ministries, we are providing support for many families living with HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa, getting information to those who need it, taking care of children orphaned by the pandemic, and much more.

LEFT TO RIGHT IN PHOTO: Brenda Joyner, Pauline Joost, Carlton Veazey, Roshanny Silvester, Cindy Le Roux
Photo: Loey Powell



(Go to www.globalministries.org and click on "Africa" to find more information about HIV/AIDS programs we support.)

What can you do? Keep informed about the AIDS pandemic here and abroad. The Rev. Michael Schuenemeyer, Minister for HIV/AIDS Ministries in Wider Church Ministries (schuenem@ucc.org) has extensive information for our churches. Contact him and receive regular email newsletters. Invite the Rev. Adora Iris Lee, a Global Ministries missionary who lived in South Africa working on HIV/AIDS issues, to come and speak to your congregation or women's group (adoracrj@aol.com).

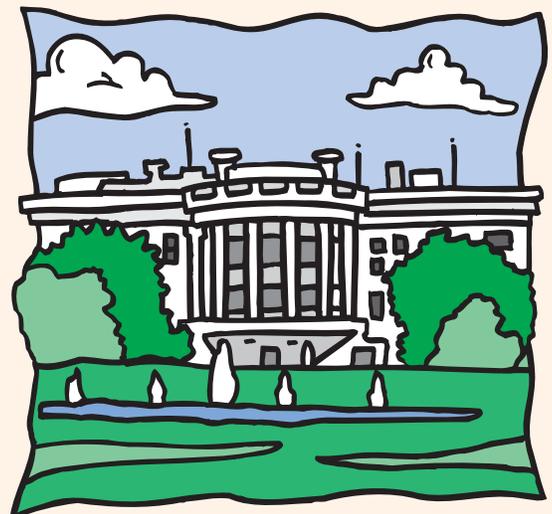
What more can you do? If your congregation has not yet engaged in faith-based comprehensive sexuality education, consider proposing that you do. Your young people (grade school through high school, and now also young adults) and their parents and guardians will have a chance to talk frankly and safely in the context of the values of faith about matters that will affect them for the rest of their lives. We know that people who have good and accurate information and who know themselves as moral decision makers will make better decisions for their lives. Contact Ann Hanson, Minister for Sexuality Education and Justice (hansona@ucc.org) for more information.

As we sat over dinner the night before leaving Cape Town, Brenda Joyner, my partner, and Carlton Veazey, President of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice who was responsible for setting up the program in Cape Town, reflected on what we had experienced. We met dozens of teenagers actively and energetically engaged in the KIR program in several churches in the area. We were encouraged by the fact that the public schools have also invited the KIR program to be introduced to students as well. We were discouraged by the lack of any visible efforts to educate the public on prevention. I had been in Uganda in 1998 and the country was filled with bulletin boards, pamphlets and public discussion about how to prevent transmission of HIV/AIDS. No such campaign is apparent in South Africa.

But above all, it was the baby boy in the crib who haunted us. We must do something. 

THOUSANDS TO GATHER IN WASHINGTON TO LAUNCH RENEWED MOVEMENT TO END HUNGER AND POVERTY

United Church
of Christ Women
to Provide Leadership
at Bread for the
World's Gathering 2007



FROM JUNE 9-12, Bread for the World's *Sowing Seeds: Growing A Movement, The Gathering 2007*, will bring together thousands of people of faith to participate in God's liberating action to end hunger and poverty.

Women of the UCC are invited to participate in a special pre-conference meeting of women leaders from many Christian denominations. This group will:

- explore how their organizations are responding to hunger and poverty;
- develop new and deepen existing connections; and,
- strengthen their advocacy efforts.

Join Edith Russell, Minister of Labor Relations and Community Economic Development, Justice and Witness Ministries, at this event on **June 9** from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. at American University. The meeting will include brunch, panel presentations from women leaders on anti-hunger and poverty work, and inspiring worship. You can register for this session (\$50) when you register for *Sowing Seeds: Growing A Movement*.

The Gathering 2007 —the core event—will feature cutting-edge thinkers and leading theologians. Through the presentations and interaction with one another, participants will develop the skills they need to be powerful advocates for hungry and poor people.

Highlights of The Gathering 2007 include:

- The second **Interfaith Convocation on Hunger** at the National Cathedral on **June 11**. Featured Speaker Dr. William J. Shaw, President of the National Baptist Convention, USA will join leaders from major faith traditions as well as representatives

of the millions of volunteers who feed hungry people in this country and worldwide. National leaders of Roman Catholic, Orthodox, evangelical and ecumenical Protestant, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, and Jewish traditions, along with leaders of other faith groups, will call on the president and Congress to join them in renewing the national commitment to end hunger

- **Lobby Day on June 12**. Concerned citizens will visit their members of Congress on Capitol Hill to call attention to issues that affect hungry and poor people.

The Gathering 2007 is organized by Bread for the World, Bread for the World Institute and the Alliance to End Hunger in partnership with denominations and religious organizations across the United States.

To register, visit www.bread.org/gathering2007 or call 1-800-937-8728.

Scholarship assistance to attend *Sowing Seeds* is available for UCC members from Wally Ryan Kuroiwa (contact: ryankurw@ucc.org; 216-736-3707).



One Great Hour of

Women and children around the world receive and offer blessings through their engagement with the ministries supported by your Blessing Box gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing, the refugee, relief and development fund of the United Church of Christ.



Liberia

Women are leaders and participants in civic education courses and empowered to vote.



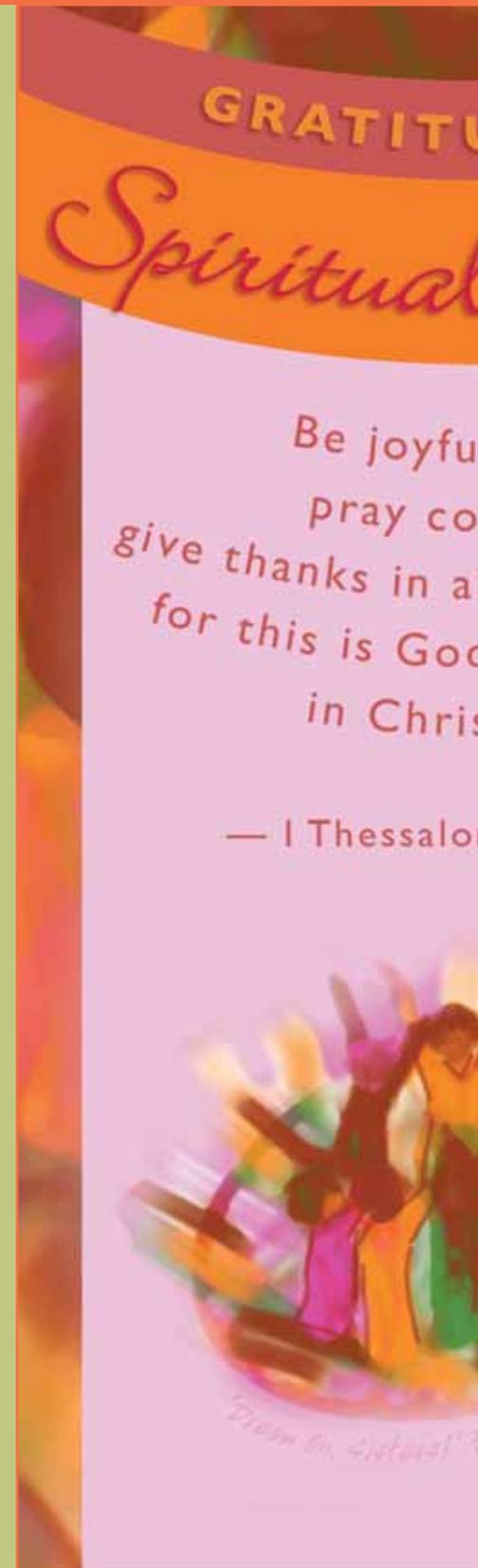
United States

Refugees from around the world are welcomed and resettled by UCC congregations to begin a new life.



Pakistan

Village health workers are trained through Church World Service to provide reproductive health care education and well baby training.



Sharing and the Blessing Box

...UDE IS A

...Practice

... always,
... constantly,
... all circumstances
... d's will for you
... st Jesus.

...nians 5:16-18



China

HIV+ orphaned children receive nutritious meals, medical care, education and shelter.

Bosnia-Herzegovina

Stano Kukobat and her son are rebuilding their war damaged home in the village of Rore.



Egypt

Young girls and their families are enabled to participate in community health education seminars designed to combat the practice of female genital mutilation.



Guatemala

Antonia Tzul, a human rights supporter, is assisted in her work to improve food security and protect the rights of Mayan women and children.



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