

## **The Colombia Partnership of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ Celebrates Colombia's Peace Accord**

On August 24, the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) announced in Havana, Cuba that they had reached a final peace agreement that would end 52 years of fighting. On August 29, guns were silenced as both sides entered into the final bilateral ceasefire and cessation of hostilities. And today, September 26, 2016, Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos and FARC commander Timoleón Jiménez, signed the final accord, signaling the beginning of the end of the oldest armed conflict in the Americas.

*"After 52 years of war, and four years of peace talks - a peace agreement has been signed in Colombia. As a just-peace church, the United Church of Christ both celebrates this, and lifts up in prayers the good people of this country ravaged by decades of violence. Two generations have now been born into this war - and it is time they come to know the ways of peace. I am personally grateful for the Global Mission partners of the United Church and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) for their presence throughout - and the ways their gentle souls and abiding presence has brought comfort to so many while themselves helping to bring peace"*, stated **UCC General Minister, Rev. John Dorhauer**.

The United Church of Christ, in particular the Central Atlantic Conference and the Connecticut Conference, have been in partnership with churches and faith-based organizations in Colombia since hearing the call from Colombian churches to monitor the human rights effects of a massive increase in US military aid to Colombia, known as Plan Colombia, in 1998 and 1999.

In response to the announcement of the peace accords, **Connecticut Conference Minister, Rev. Kent Siladi** stated, *"The Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ joins with people across the world in lifting our voices and prayers in joyous celebration of the steps towards the long awaited peace in Colombia that are being taken through the signing of the historic peace accord. As disciples of the Prince of Peace we offer our support and prayers to those who will now embark on a new path to making peace in Colombia. 'Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called Children of God!'"*

Since 2007, through Global Ministries, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ have maintained partnerships and a permanent presence with mission personnel in Colombia.

Global Ministries Area Executive for Latin America and the Caribbean, **Rev. Angel L. Rivera Agosto**, responded to the signing of the accords by stating, *"Today we celebrate peace with a country that has paid a high price in terms of blood, tears, forced displacement, disappearances and victims. The winds of the Spirit have loosed the bonds of war and the*

*Spirit walks with those who have long awaited this peace. Today the sun shines on the people of Colombia. We share in your joy and will continue to walk with you until that day that all may be restored to the wholeness that God dreamed of for all humanity and creation. Congratulations Colombia!"*

Despite the general excitement for this step towards peace, we recognize that many challenges remain in Colombia, including the remaining ELN guerrilla and rightwing paramilitary groups. The **Interchurch Dialogue for Peace in Colombia– DiPaz**, put it this way, *"The conversation stage has ended and now we prepare for the implementation of the accords; a time where we seek the fullness of life, where the table is served and shared with all from every region and territory in Colombia; no exceptions, no discrimination, no violations of rights, no repeat victims, no more attacks on our shared home... As we affirm the step taken today we also recognize the need to go further and call on the Colombian government and the National Liberation Army – ELN to begin peace talks."*

As we celebrate with our sisters and brothers in Colombia, we also reaffirm our support for their ongoing peacebuilding efforts, recognizing that they will now play a more crucial role than ever as they work towards reconciliation and restorative justice in this new post-accords context. We also recognize that for the first time since the US Congress approved a massive increase in US military aid to Colombia that the Obama administration has asked Congress to approve a foreign-aid package that includes more funding for peace than for war. We will continue to work here in the United States to seek full US cooperation with the new Special Peace Tribunal in Colombia, including the Truth Commission, as well as for funding peace and reconciliation efforts.

Colombian American UCC minister **Rev. Lizette Merchán-Pinilla, of Tulsa, Oklahoma** stated it best, *"Peace today, war yesterday ... 52 years in the making ... thanks be to God!"*