"You shall love your neighbor as Yourself" — Luke 10:27
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Sharing Our Common Lot

By Deborah Bailey

I HOPE by now all of you are familiar with the UCC Regional Women’s Ministry Consultants program; or better yet, have met one or both of the consultants assigned to your region. As Common Lot subscribers perhaps you have been following the consultants regional pages, blog sites or weekly devotionals on line at Women in Mission, www.ucc.org/women. They are a fantastic group of women, trained to support and nurture UCC women’s groups across the church.

Thanks to the generosity of Strengthen the Church offering dollars, the portion of the offering received to support women’s ministries, helps fund the work of the consultants. Each year the regional consultants gather for a three day training event. This year, the consultants met at Centro Romero in San Ysidro, California, (a facility sponsored by Justice and Witness Ministries focusing on issues of globalization and immigration). Meeting at the Center provided us the opportunity to include a border immersion experience with sisters in Tijuna as part of our annual training event. A special word of thanks to the staff at Centro Romero for the incredible orientation and hospitality provided as we prepared for this unique border experience. Three of the regional consultants involved in the immersion across the border agreed to share glimpses of their learnings in this issue of Common Lot. I hope as you read about their experiences you gain awareness not only for the complexity of the issues related to immigration, but also for the common needs and concerns women share regardless of where they live.

Change is good…at least so far the comments concerning last issue’s “face lift” have generated several positive responses. We are very excited to announce that beginning with this issue of Common Lot all feature articles will now be printed in both English and Spanish. It has been suggested this would be helpful to our readership and we are delighted to now have the opportunity to include this new feature in all future Common Lot issues. We are grateful and offer special thanks to Rev. Jeanette Zaragoza-DeLeón for translating the feature articles into Spanish for us (Le extendemos un agradecimiento especial a la Reverenda Jeanette Zaragoza De León por la traducción al español de los artículos destacados para la revista.)


PHOTO: LOEY POWELL
Ordinary Hope

By Debbie Hoogesteger

THE ONLY expectation I had when I went to visit The Daniel F. Romero Center for Border Ministries in San Ysidro, CA (Centro Romero) was that I would come face to face with powerlessness and despair in the people captured in the border struggles. What I didn’t expect to witness were the ordinary moments of hope rising up in all of God’s creation: the people, the landscape and the wildlife.

My experience began with a Centro Romero mailing to my home several weeks before my trip — Pre-Immersion Readings. The booklet contained articles about such things as North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), maquiladoras (factories), globalization, immigration and environmental justice. I consider myself an average, mid-western woman just surviving life as it comes at me. Such political type issues were like a foreign language to me. I asked myself: Was this social justice thing about me? What could I possibly do to help in the immigration reform and border issues? I felt so far removed from it in my middle-class life in Wisconsin. But these readings challenged me and enhanced my experience at the border.

The day before my border crossing experience the Centro Romero Coordinator, Dr. Carlos J. Correa Bernier, spoke to our group of United Church of Christ women on the United States side of the border about another group of women, Colectivo Chilpancingo, living on the Mexico side of the border. The Colectivo is a small group of approximately a dozen women committed to social justice and working to improve environmental and health conditions in their communities. It became clear to me that the Colectivo is a small, persistent voice that cannot be silenced by corporations or government — creating awareness about such things as contamination from the maquiladoras, NAFTA, labor rights and environmental justice. They are motivated by love for their children and by hope for their children’s future.

And aren’t love and hope universal motivations? I came from a middle-class family, was college educated, but I was poor in my young adult life: a single mother on state and federal assistance. But I always had a decent place to live and sleep and a wide community of support to transition me into a better, self-sustaining life. I always had hope for my family’s future. However, my brief experience with poverty is miniscule to the poverty smothering the lives in the shanty town communities across our southern border. Can you imagine yourself working 12-14 hours a day and you and your family are still living in a one-room shack made out of discarded,
old garage doors with no running water or electricity and next to a polluted river? This oppressive living is a gift of despair from the maquiladoras and the governments of NAFTA.

Before NAFTA and the maquiladoras, the river was fresh and flowed freely through Chilpancingo. Families gathered at the lush shoreline for picnics and fun. As one of the Colectivo women spoke to us about how the umbrella of God’s justice should cover all people, the now toxic river that trickled through Chilpancingo was in the background. At that moment, I spotted resilient children playing soccer in a dusty, open space next to this toxic river. I saw hope in the children playing. I heard hope in their laughter.

As I encountered my first border wall I was taken aback by its cold ugliness and the immensity of its size. And I wondered…what would this wall say if it had a voice? “It’s not my fault. I’m just a tool of something much bigger and stronger than me. I’m not here by my choice.” Then I noticed a beautiful, yellow flower rooted in Mexico soil finding an opening through the vast wall’s ugly, rusted surface and blooming in US airspace. The wall had given it an opening and it thrived with life. I saw hope in that wildflower. I saw hope in the wall’s small opening.

At the Pacific shoreline in Mexico, the wall disappears into the surf far enough off shore so no one can swim around it to enter the US. The wall is covered with a collage of white crosses — each cross representing the ultimate end and sacrifice of a life searching for life. The majority of people entering the US illegally across the desert are doing so because of need. They risk entering the wicked wilderness in search of the Promised Land because they want better, self-sustaining lives for their families. The wall is an unfriendly reminder of keeping people in Mexico at all costs, even death.

While I stood staring at all the crosses hanging like a beaded curtain over the wall, out of the corner of my eye I caught movement near the ground. I spotted dirt on the otherwise clean sidewalk and next to the pile of dirt, a small opening underneath the wall. I squatted to get a better look and a tiny critter partway in this tunnel scurried out of my sight and made its escape into American soil. My first thought — this wall can’t keep everything out or in. I knew that eventually, someone would sweep the sidewalk and fill in the tunnel. But I also knew that the persistent nature of an ordinary critter would dig the hole again and again and again as long as it had too. That is how change occurs — with the ordinary and with persistence.

I believe God breaks into the world for justice through the ordinary. The ordinary — like the Colectivo, the children, a wildflower, a critter, you and me — can do extraordinary things throughout God’s creation. After all, Jesus was an ordinary man who did extraordinary things. And this gives me hope for a world without borders.

Debbie Hoogesteger is a UCC Great Lakes Regional Women’s Ministry Consultant and a lay woman living in Wisconsin Rapids WI, where she attends First Congregational UCC. She recently graduated from a four year study with the UCC Wisconsin Conference Lay Academy Program. Debbie writes about her journey of blessings and struggles as a family caregiver in her blog found on the “Women in Mission” pages of the UCC website.

Questions for Reflection

1. When you see an injustice, whether at work, home or in your community, do you speak up and share your voice? If yes, in what ways was God part of the conversation? If not, what message does your silence send to yourself, others and God?  

2. Have you ever done something to serve others that places you outside your comfort zone, like go on a mission trip to Back Bay Mission in MS or Pine Ridge Reservation in SD? If yes, in what ways was God part of the experience? If not, in what ways are your reasons more about yourself and not who God calls you to be?  

3. What is your favorite scripture to help you with moments of despair and hopelessness? How does God speak to you through your chosen scripture?
LA ÚNICA expectativa que tenía cuando fui a visitar el Centro de Ministerios Fronterizos de Daniel F. Romero en San Ysidro, CA (Centro Romero) fue que estaría cara a cara ante la desesperación y la impotencia de las personas arrestadas en las luchas fronterizas. Lo que no esperé atestiguar fue los momentos comunes de esperanza que se asomaban en toda la creación de Dios: la gente, la vida silvestre y el paisaje.

Mi experiencia comenzó con una correspondencia—lecturas pre-inmersión—que recibí del Centro Romero en mi casa unas semanas antes de mi viaje. El panfleto contenía artículos sobre temas tales como: El tratado de libre comercio de Norte América (NAFTA, por sus siglas en inglés), las maquiladoras (factorías), la globalización, la inmigración y la justicia ambiental. Me consideraba una mujer promedio del medio oeste que vivía la vida según se le presentara. Estas clases de asuntos políticos eran como otro idioma para mí. Me preguntaba: ¿qué tiene que ver este asunto de justicia social conmigo? ¿Qué podría hacer para ayudar con los asuntos de la frontera y reforma migratoria? Me sentía tan lejos de esta realidad en mi estilo de vida de clase media en Wisconsin. No obstante, estas lecturas me retaron y contribuyeron a mi experiencia en la frontera.

El día antes de mi experiencia de cruzar la frontera, el coordinador del Centro Romero, el Dr. Carlos J. Correa Bernier nos habló—al grupo de mujeres de la Iglesia Unida de Cristo en el lado de los EE. UU.—sobre otro grupo de mujeres, el Colectivo Chilpancingo, localizado en México en el otro lado de la frontera. El Colectivo es un grupo pequeño de aproximadamente unas 12 mujeres comprometidas a la justicia social y a mejorar las condiciones ambientales y de salud en sus comunidades. Se me hizo evidente que el Colectivo es una voz persistente y pequeña que las corporaciones y los gobiernos no pueden silenciar. Éste concientiza sobre asuntos relacionados a la contaminación debido a las maquiladoras, NAFTA, derechos laborales y justicia ambiental. El amor por sus hijos e hijas y la esperanza del futuro de sus hijos e hijas, son su motivación.

Y, ¿no son el amor y la esperanza motivadores universales? Crecí en una familia clase media. Fui a la universidad, pero como joven adulta fui pobre; una madre soltera que recibía subvenciones estatales y federales. Sin embargo, siempre tuve un lugar decente donde vivir y dormir y una comunidad de apoyo que me facilitó la transición a una vida mejor y a ser auto-suficiente. Siempre tuve esperanza en el futuro de mi familia. No obstante, mi breve experiencia en la pobreza es minúscula a la pobreza que sofoca las vidas de las comunidades en los arrabales por toda nuestra frontera sureña. ¿Pueden imaginarse trabajar de 12 a 14 horas diarias y a vivir con su familia en un cuarto construido con viejas puertas de
garaje encontradas en la basura, sin agua potable ni electricidad y al lado de un río contaminado. Esta manera opresiva de vivir es un obsequio del desespero de las maquiladoras y los gobiernos del NAFTA.

Antes del NAFTA y las maquiladoras, el río era fresco y fluía libremente a través del Chilpancingo. Las familias se reunían a las orillas suntuosas para divertirse e ir de picnic. Mientras un miembro del Colectivo nos hablaba sobre cómo la sombrilla de la justicia de Dios debe de cubrir a todos(as), el ahora río tóxico que corría a través de Chilpancingo estaba en el horizonte. En ese momento, me percaté de unos(as) niños(as) que junto a un espacio abierto al lado del río tóxico jugaban fútbol sin vacilar. Vi esperanza en el jugar de los niños y las niñas. Escuché esperanza en sus risas.

Cuando me topé con la primera muralla en la frontera, su fría fealdad y la inmensidad de su tamaño, me impresionaron. Y me pregunté, si esta muralla tuviera voz, ¿qué diría? “No es mi culpa. Sólo soy un instrumento de algo mucho más fuerte y grande que yo. No escogí estar aquí”. Entonces noté una hermosa flor amarilla con raíces en tierra mejicana que había encontrado una apertura a través de la horrible y vasta oxidada muralla y que florecía en el aire estadounidense. Esa muralla le dio un espacio y estaba llena de vida. Vi esperanza en esa flor silvestre. Vi esperanza en la pequeña apertura de la muralla.

En la costa mejicana del Pacífico, la muralla se desaparece en las olas lejos de la orilla para que nadie pueda nadar alrededor de ella y entrar a los EE. UU. La muralla está cubierta de un collage de cruces blancas—cada cruz representa el fin último y sacrificio de una vida en busca de vida. La mayoría de las personas que entran a los EE. UU. ilegalmente por el desierto lo hacen así por necesidad. Se arriesgan a entrar al desierto malvado en búsqueda de la “Tierra Prometida” porque desean mejores vidas auto-sostenibles para sus familias. La muralla representa un recordatorio no amigable de mantener a las personas en México a toda costa, aun con la muerte.

Mientras estaba parada observando las cruces que cuelgan como una cortina de cuentas sobre la muralla, por el rabo del ojo noté un movimiento en la tierra. Vi que había tierra en medio de una acera limpia y al lado de un montón de tierra una pequeña apertura debajo de la muralla. Me acuclillé para ver mejor, y un pequeño animal a mitad de este túnel se escabulló de mi vista y logró escaparse a territorio estadounidense. Mi primer pensamiento fue: esta muralla no puede mantener todo afuera o adentro. Sabía que eventualmente alguien barrería la acera y rellenaría el túnel. Pero también sabía que la naturaleza persistente de un animalito común escarbaría un hoyo una y otra vez mientras necesitara hacerlo. Así es que ocurre el cambio—con lo común y ordinario.

Creo que Dios irrumpa en el mundo por la justicia a través de lo común. Lo ordinario—como el Colectivo, los niños y las niñas, la flor silvestre, el animalito, tú y yo—podemos hacer cosas extraordinarias a través de la creación de Dios. Después de todo, Jesús fue un hombre común que hizo cosas extraordinarias. Esto me da esperanza de un futuro sin fronteras.

Debbie Hoogesteger es una consultora de ministerios para mujeres en la región de los Grandes Lagos de la Iglesia Unida de Cristo. Es una mujer laica que vive en Wisconsin Rapids, WI; donde se congrega en la First Congregational UCC. Recientemente se graduó de un curso de estudios de cuatro años del programa de la Academia Laica de la Conferencia de la UCC de Wisconsin. Debbie escribe sobre las bendiciones y luchas de su peregrinaje como persona que cuida a otros en su blog que se encuentra en la página de Internet de la UCC: “Women in Mission.”

Preguntas para la reflexión

1. Cuando eres testigo de una injusticia, ya sea en el trabajo, en el hogar o en tu comunidad, ¿te dejas oír y compartes tu opinión? De ser así, ¿de qué maneras fue Dios parte de la conversación? De no ser así, ¿qué mensaje te envía el silencio a ti, a otros y a Dios?

2. ¿Alguna vez has hecho algo para servirle a otros que te ubica fuera de tu lugar de comodidad, como ir a un viaje de misión a la Misión Back Bay en MS, o la reservación Pine Ridge en SD? De ser así, ¿de qué manera fue Dios parte de la experiencia? De no ser así, ¿de qué manera son tus razones más sobre ti y no sobre quién Dios te ha llamado a ser?

3. ¿Cuál es tu pasaje bíblico favorito que te ayuda en momentos de desesperación y desesperanza? ¿Cómo te habla Dios a través de esa Escritura?
Our Neighbors Made Needy

By Elaine Blanchard

IMMIGRATION is a complex issue. While opportunities for jobs, home ownership and adequate healthcare are available in some parts of the world, even bare necessities are unavailable in other parts of the world. People move from one place to another with hope that their dreams can be realized in a far country. The United States, as we know it, was created by explorers and immigrants who came from other places. They came looking for wealth, power and freedom from oppression of various sorts. Immigration is a controversial issue in today’s United States. There are racial, economic, political, historical and religious points made in the debate about who is wanted and who must be deported. In the midst of the debate, human lives are being lost.

The ten United Church of Christ Regional Consultants for Women’s Ministries held their annual training event at the Romero Center for Border Ministries in San Ysidro, California. Professor and author Rosemary Radford Reuther joined us as one of our guest presenters. As part of the event, we also had an immersion experience across the border in Tijuana, a face-to-face encounter with women of courage and great generosity. Although the trip had been on our calendars for many months, none of us could have known what a powerful experience we would share south of the border. When we made our flight reservations in January, we had no idea that Arizona would be passing a law to defend itself from illegal immigrants as we flew through the state. We were guided by Dr. Carlos Correa Bernier. Carlos made sure we were well informed and oriented before we crossed the border together. We watched documentaries, read articles and listened to Carlos lecture about Mexico and its history, the people, the walls and those who try to get over and around them. But information fades when compared to the experience of meeting people face to face.

We had the privilege of meeting the twelve women of the Tijuana Colectivo. They are mothers who want a safe environment for their children. They are women who have devoted themselves to the struggle for justice. They are committed to exposing the illegal practices of the maquiladoras. Maquiladoras are factories owned by people in the USA and built just over the border in Mexico to take advantage of cheap labor. Maquiladoras deny the workers’ rights and destroy the air, water and soil of Tijuana. Globalization gives corporations the freedom to move around the world seeking cheaper labor and more lax environmental regulations. The twelve women of the Colectivo are at work every day, focused on cleaning up the environment by forcing the maquiladoras to change their practices. These women are poor; they live in an area they call shantytown with ten thousand other families. Their homes are made of discarded garage doors and other items discarded by wealthier neighbors to the north of them. Yet the women of the Colectivo are wealthy in their understanding of each person’s right and responsibility to find purpose. They are wealthy in their capacity to connect with other people. They are rich in their respect for hard work and its rewards. The women of the Colectivo see themselves as good stewards of the earth. They are training their children and their neighbors to respect the
earth and to recognize responsible care of the earth as everyone's sacred duty. The women have adopted as their slogan: "Tijuana is no trash can!" Supported by the San Diego Environmental Health Coalition, a cross-border group advocating for a safer environment, the Colectivo has an office building in Tijuana and a plan for the future.

We also had the honor of meeting four Franciscan sisters who run the Home of the Poor (Casa de los Pobres) in Tijuana. The sisters have been feeding the poor and hungry of the city for fifty years. They served 23,650 breakfasts in the month of April alone. They provide a free clinic and social services. The Home of the Poor ministers to men, women and their families who plan to take the dangerous journey across the desert, over the mountains into California. The sisters educate the travelers, warning them about the threats to human survival on that long, hot journey. The Franciscan Sisters feed and attend to the medical needs of people who have been deported, people whose dreams have not been realized in the United States.

In the process of helping these people, the sisters try to facilitate ways for them to be reconnected with their families and their homes. The Home of the Poor is not supported by the Catholic Church, nor does the ministry receive any government assistance. Everything depends on individual donations. It is a mystery to me how so many people are served and so many needs are met. Yet the work goes on and the sisters appear to be trees that are planted by the water. They will not be moved.

We visited what was once Friendship Park at the Pacific Ocean where the wall separates Mexico from California. By order of President George W. Bush, the park was destroyed and the wall was made longer and stronger. The new wall is an unnecessary second wall. It is being built at a cost of $1,325 per linear foot or $7,260, 960 per mile. There are crosses, white wooden crosses, hung along the wall. Each cross represents a life lost (a brother, son, father, daughter, sister or mother) in the effort to cross the border, in the journey toward hope for improved circumstances. 4,500 people are represented by those crosses, 4,500 individuals that we know of who have lost their lives since the year 2000. These are our neighbors, people who tried to cross the border at Tijuana. These are men and women who longed to have a job, a home and adequate health care for themselves and their children.

"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless tempst-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door."
(Emma Lazarus)

My father immigrated to this country when he was fifteen. He came from Canada. He came for education, work and a dream. Since birth I have been in a place where I belong. I have very little understanding of what it would be like to be unwanted, questioned by immigration authorities and deported. I am privileged in this way. That privilege does not purchase the right for me to deny my neighbors the opportunity to be wanted, to remain in the place where they long to be. All that I have is not mine to withhold from my neighbors. All that I have is mine to share, even as it has been shared with me.

Elaine Blanchard, a Women in Ministry Consultant for the West Central region, is ordained in the UCC, a professional storyteller, a writer and a performer. She lives in Memphis with her partner, Anna Neal and is a member of First Congregational Church. She has two web-sites: www.ElaineBlanchard.com and www.PorchSwingStories.com

Questions for Reflection

1. How many generations back does your family tree have to go before your family story is a story of immigration? What borders were crossed in order for you to belong where you now live?

2. Look at your television and find out where it was made. The chances are good that you own a television made by a woman in Tijuana. It is the television manufacturing capital of the world.

Nuestros(as) Vecinos(as) Convertidos(as) en Personas que Necesitan

Por Elaine Blanchard

LA INMIGRACIÓN es un asunto complejo. Mientras existen oportunidades de trabajo, de adquirir un hogar y de tener cuido médico adecuado en algunas partes del mundo, en otros lugares hasta las necesidades básicas no están disponibles. Las personas se mudan de un lugar a otro con la esperanza que sus sueños puedan realizarse en países lejanos. Los EE. UU., según lo conocemos, fue creado por exploradores e inmigrantes que vinieron de otros lugares. Vinieron en busca de riquezas, poder y libertad de opresión de varios tipos. La inmigración es un asunto controversial en los EE. UU. de hoy. Existen análisis raciales, económicos, históricos y religiosos en el debate sobre quién debe ser deportado(a) o aceptado(a). En el medio del debate, se pierden las vidas humanas.

Las diez consultoras regionales para los ministerios de mujeres de la Iglesia Unida de Cristo llevaron a cabo su adiestramiento anual en el Centro Romero para los ministerios fronterizos en San Ysidro, California. La profesora y autora Rosemary Radford Reuther se unió a nosotras como una de las presentadoras. Como parte de este evento, también tuvimos una experiencia de inmersión al otro lado de la frontera en Tijuana: un encuentro cara a cara con mujeres de valor y gran generosidad. Aunque el viaje había estado en nuestros calendarios por muchos meses, ninguna de nosotras hubiera podido saber la experiencia poderosa que compartiríamos al sur de la frontera. Cuando hicimos nuestras reservaciones en enero, no nos imaginábamos que Arizona aprobaría la ley para defenderse de los(as) inmigrantes indocumentados(as) mientras volábamos sobre el estado. Nuestro guía fue el Dr. Carlos Correa Bernier. Carlos se aseguró que estuviéramos bien informadas y orientadas antes de que cruzáramos la frontera. Vimos documentales, leímos artículos y escuchamos una presentación de Carlos sobre México—su historia y pueblo, las murallas y aquellos que tratan de saltarla o rebasarla. Sin embargo, la información se evapora al compararla con la experiencia de reunirse cara a cara con las personas.

Tuvimos el privilegio de reunirnos con 12 mujeres del Colectivo de Tijuana. Son mujeres que quieren un ambiente seguro para sus hijos e Hijas. Son mujeres que se han dedicado a la lucha por la justicia. Están comprometidas a exponer las prácticas ilegales de las maquiladoras. Las maquiladoras son factorías cuyos dueños son estadounidenses. Estas están construidas justo al otro lado de la frontera de México para tomar ventaja de la mano de obra barata. Las maquiladoras niegan los derechos laborales y destruyen el aire, agua y la tierra de Tijuana. La globalización le da a corporaciones la liberta de moverse a través del mundo en busca de mano de obra barata y reglamentos ambientales más laxos. Las 12 mujeres del Colectivo trabajan a diario enfocadas en limpiar el ambiente al forzar a las maquiladoras a cambiar sus prácticas. Estas mujeres son pobres y viven junto con miles de familias en un área que llaman el arrabal. Sus hogares están construidos con puertas de garaje tiradas a la basura y otros artículos que botan los vecinos al norte de ellas. Aún así, las mujeres del Colectivo son ricas en su entendimiento de los derechos de cada persona y la responsabilidad de encontrar un propósito. Son ricas en su capacidad de comunicarse con otras personas. Son ricas en el respeto por el trabajo fuerte y su recompensa. Las mujeres del Colectivo se ven a sí mismas como buenas mayordomos de la Tierra. Están adiestrando a sus hijos e Hijas a reconocer la responsabilidad de cuidar la Tierra y a reconocer la responsabilidad de cuidar la Tierra
como una tarea sagrada de todos(as). Estas mujeres han adoptado el lema: “¡Tijuana no es un bote de basura!” El Colectivo tiene un edificio de oficinas en Tijuana y tiene planes futuros con la ayuda de la Coalición de salud ambiental de San Diego—un grupo que trabaja en ambas fronteras en defensa de un ambiente más seguro.

También tuvimos el honor de reunirnos con cuatro hermanas Franciscanas que administran la Casa de los Pobres en Tijuana. Las hermanas han alimentado al pobre y hambriento de la ciudad por más de 50 años. Sólo en el mes de abril, han servido 23,650 desayunos. Proveen servicios sociales y una clínica gratuita. La Casa del Pobre le ministra a hombres, mujeres y sus familias que piensan tomar el peregrinaje peligroso a través del desierto, por las montañas hacia California. Las hermanas educan a los(as) viajeros(as) y les advierten desde las amenazas hasta la sobrevivencia humana en ese viaje largo y caluroso. Las hermanas Franciscanas alimentan y atienden las necesidades médicas de las personas que han sido deportadas; personas cuyos sueños no se han realizado en los EE. UU. En el proceso de ayudar a estas personas, las hermanas tratan de facilitar maneras para que ellos(as) se reencuentren con sus familiares y hogares. La Casa del Pobre no recibe apoyo de la Iglesia Católica ni tampoco recibe subvenciones del gobierno. El ministerio depende de donaciones individuales. Para mí es un misterio como tantas personas reciben servicios y tantas necesidades son satisfechas. Aún así el trabajo continúa y las hermanas parecen ser árboles sembrados cerca del agua. No se moverán.

Visitamos lo que una vez fue el Parque de la amistad en la costa del Pacífico donde la muralla separa a México de California. Por órdenes del Presidente George W. Bush, el parque se destruyó y la muralla se hizo más larga y fuerte. La nueva muralla es una segunda muralla innecesaria. Su costo fue de $1,325 por pie lineal o $7,260,960 por milla. Hay cruces—cruces blancas—colgadas a lo largo de la muralla. Cada cruz representa una vida perdida (un hermano, hijo, o padre, una hermana, hija o madre) en su esfuerzo por cruzar la frontera en un peregrinaje hacia la esperanza y para mejorar sus circunstancias. Las cruces representan 4,500 personas conocidas que han perdido sus vidas desde el 2000. Estos son nuestros(as) vecinos(as), personas que trataron de cruzar el borde en Tijuana. Estos son hombres y mujeres que anhelan tener un trabajo, una casa y seguro médico apropiado para ellos(as) y sus hijos(as).

“Dame tus cansadas, tus pobres,
Tus masas aglutinadas que anhelan respirar en libertad.
Los(as) desdichados(as) rehúsan tus orillas suntuosas,
Envía a estos(as), la tempestad sin hogar — tiramelas,
Levanto mi lámpara al lado de la puerta dorada”. (Emma Lazarus)

Mi padre migró a este país cuando él tenía 15 años. Vino del Canadá. Vino para estudiar, trabajar y realizar un sueño. Desde que naci he estado en un lugar donde siento que pertenezco. Tengo bien poco entendimiento de cómo sería no ser deseada, interrogada por las autoridades migratorias y deportada. Soy privilegiada de esta manera. Ese privilegio no me compra el derecho de negarles la oportunidad a mis vecinos(as) de ser aceptados(as) y quedarse en un lugar donde anhelan estar. Todo lo que tengo no es para mí ni es para retenerlo de mis vecinos(as). Todo lo que tengo es mío para compartir, como lo han compartido conmigo.


Preguntas para la reflexión

1. ¿Cuántas generaciones hacia atrás tienes que ir en tu árbol genealógico antes de que la historia de tu familia se convierta en una historia de inmigración? ¿Qué fronteras se cruzaron para que tú pudieras pertenecer a donde ahora vives?

2. ¿Dónde hicieron tu televisión? Es muy probable que una mujer en Tijuana hizo tu televisión. Tijuana es la capital manufacturadora de televisores en el mundo.

3. Lee Lucas 10:25-37. Considera lo que significa ser un(a) buen(a) vecino(a).
MY HUSBAND and I have lived in the southern part of San Diego County for over thirty years. When we first moved to California we were excited to be so close to Mexico. Visits from family and friends gave us several opportunities to cross the border for sightseeing and bargain hunting. I even took additional Spanish classes in order to better communicate with our Mexican neighbors. As the years passed we watched the border crossing and its neighboring communities change. The media reminded us regularly of the violence and criminal activities on both sides of the border. We knew people who were harassed and victimized. We would regularly see undocumented immigrants walking behind homes in our neighborhood and see Border Patrol agents in pursuit. Over the years I have personally experienced discrimination in employment and in local businesses for not being a native Spanish speaker. My perspective changed.

In May of this year the Regional Women’s Ministry Consultants met at Centro Romero in San Ysidro with plans to cross into Mexico to meet with women in a colectivo. During the orientation to prepare for the activities, we learned about the Braceros, Mexican farm workers who were recruited by the United States government to come and work in the fields while the American men were away fighting in wars from 1942 to 1964. Many of these migrant workers sent their earnings back to Mexico to provide a better quality of life for their families. When the government deemed the farm workers’ services were no longer needed, their unrestricted travel into the United States was ascertained as illegal. Although I searched my memory, I don’t recall learning about this program in my American history classes. The Consultants also learned of the determined and courageous women of a colectivo (community activists group) who are fighting management of the maquiladoras (commercial product manufacturing and assembly plants) to keep them from destroying their neighborhoods with pollutants causing illnesses and defects in their families. In addition they are standing up for safe working conditions and fair wages for factory workers. Interestingly, I do not recall these women’s stories on the local news or in the newspaper.

Both of these examples gave us a look at life experiences from the perspectives of some Mexican nationals. A different perspective.

Due to mobility issues I knew I would have difficulty maneuvering the terrain in Tijuana so I, along with two other Consultants opted to stay in the U. S. on the day of the border crossing. Our search for an alternative experience led us to Norma Chavez-Peterson, director of JOB (pronounced like the man in the Bible), Justice Overcoming Borders. This is a non-profit organization that helps immigrants with
issues of deportation, immigration and education. JOB works with churches, law enforcement, local businesses and other organizations to address social justice concerns in the Latino community.

Ms. Chavez-Peterson shared several stories with us, including her own family history of her father and grandfather working as Braceros. For various reasons, many of the men did not return to their families in Mexico. Norma’s father was one of them and her mother found herself raising her children alone. The mother brought her children to the United States illegally when Norma was 5 or 6 years old. She told us that when the amnesty program was taking place her older sister, then 19 or 20 years old, worked to hire an attorney in order to apply for citizenship. The family, fearful that it was a trick, would not apply. The sister persevered and gained legal citizenship for herself and Norma. When other family members saw their success, they too started the process. Unfortunately, just as some were at the end of the 3-4 year procedure, President Bush cancelled the program leaving many, including Norma’s mother and younger brother without legal citizenship papers. The brother, who was 3 or 4 years old when they left Mexico, is now in his mid-thirties, married, working and still undocumented.

Additionally, we met a woman who told us she completed law school in Mexico City. She worked hard in anticipation of having a better life for her family. However, in order to get applications for job positions, sexual favors were demanded from her by men in authority. Unwilling to give in to those demands, she and her family came illegally to the United States. Her now school-age children have no idea they are living in this country without proper documentation. She worries about the impact when they do start asking questions. Subsequently Norma shared another story of a young lady, now 24, who has been in this country for 22 years. It was during high school that she learned her family was here illegally from the Philippines. The young lady became severely depressed as she focused on the stigma of being undocumented. During her undergraduate studies, she discovered other students in the same position. They formed a support group and network advocating for immigration reform. She now focuses on being a change agent and was recently accepted into a master’s program at a local university.

JOB, recognizing that not everyone is supportive of immigration reform, focuses on educating the public. Presentations include: the history of immigration and amnesty along with edification on the push/pull challenges to families from other countries; a theological framework of immigration/migration; facts and figures on the economic impact to this country through immigrant supplied labor and business; and most importantly, putting a human face on immigration through the personal stories. Through these stories I realized that no matter what or how different our life experiences may be, immigration is a human issue and it affects all of us in some way. It’s a father wanting to provide for his family issue...a mother protecting her children’s health and safety issue...a social justice issue. Another perspective.

The Bible tells us to love our neighbor. It does not tell us to pick and choose who that neighbor may be. I believe that through history we have seen truth to James Baldwin’s quote “If we know, then we must fight for your life as though it was our own...for if they take you in the morning, they will be coming for us that night”. What’s your perspective?

Questions for Reflection

1. Jesus tells us to love our neighbor (Mark 12:31). Who do you see as your neighbor?
2. When was the last time you purposely made an effort to connect with someone racially/culturally/ethnically different from yourself?
3. What are you willing to do for the safety and quality of life for your family?
Es un Asunto de Perspectiva

Por Rachel Chapman

POR MÁS DE 20 AÑOS, mi esposo y yo hemos vivido en el sur del condado de San Diego. Cuando nos mudamos a California por primera vez, estábamos emocionados de vivir tan cerca de México. Las visitas de nuestras amistades y familiares nos brindaban la oportunidad de cruzar la frontera como turistas y regatear por buenos precios. Incluso tomamos clases adicionales de español para comunicarnos más efectivamente con nuestros(as) vecinos(as) mexicanos(as). Al pasar de los años, observamos el cambio en las comunidades vecinas y en el cruce de la frontera. La prensa nos recordaba de forma regular las acciones violentas y criminales en ambos lados de la frontera. Conocíamos a personas que eran hostigadas y victimizadas. Con regularidad veíamos a inmigrantes sin documentos caminar por detrás de nuestras casas y detrás de ellos(as) a los(as) agentes de la frontera. A través de los años he experimentado la discriminación, tanto en el trabajo como en tiendas locales, por no ser una hablante nativa del español. Mi perspectiva ha cambiado.

El pasado mes de mayo las consultoras regionales de ministerios para mujeres se reunieron en el Centro Romero en San Ysidro, con el propósito de cruzar a México para reunirnos con un colectivo de mujeres. Durante la orientación, en preparación para las reuniones, aprendimos sobre los braceros, los trabajadores agrícolas mexicanos que eran reclutados por el gobierno de los EE. UU. entre el 1942 y el 1964 para venir a trabajar a los campos, mientras que hombres estadounidenses se encontraban peleando en tierras lejanas. Muchos de estos trabajadores migrantes enviaban sus salarios a México para proveerles una mejor calidad de vida a sus familias. Cuando el gobierno ya no tenía necesidad de los servicios de los trabajadores agrícolas, su travesía no restringida a los EE. UU. se consideraba ilegal. Aún después de haber repasado mi memoria, no recuerdo aprender sobre este programa en las clases de historia de los EE. UU. Las consultoras también aprendieron sobre las mujeres valientes y con determinación de un colectivo (un grupo de activistas comunitarias) que luchan en contra de la administración de las maquiladoras para evitar que destruyan sus vecindarios con contaminantes que causan enfermedades y defectos físicos y mentales en sus familias. Además luchan por condiciones laborales seguras y por salarios justos para trabajadores(as) en las fábricas. Es interesante notar que no escuché ni leí sobre las historias de estas mujeres en la prensa ni en los periódicos locales.

Ambos ejemplos nos proveyeron una perspectiva desde las experiencias de vida de algunos(as) ciudadanos(as) mexicanos(as). Una perspectiva diferente.

Debido a asuntos de movilidad, sabía que tendría dificultad en manejar el terreno en Tijuana, por ende, junto a otras dos consultoras, preferimos quedarnos en los EE. UU. el día que íbamos a cruzar la frontera. Nuestra búsqueda por otra experiencia alterna nos llevó a conocer a Norma Chávez-Peterson, directora de JOB (por sus siglas en inglés, Justice Overcoming
Borders-La justicia vence las fronteras). Esta es una organización sin fines de lucro que ayuda a inmigrantes con asuntos de deportación, inmigración y educación. JOB trabaja con iglesias, agentes del orden público, negocios locales y otras organizaciones para atender asuntos de justicia social en la comunidad latina.

La Sra. Chávez-Peterson compartió varias historias con nosotras, incluso la historia de su propia familia: la de su padre y abuelo que trabajaron como braceros. Por varias razones, muchos de los hombres no regresaron a sus familias en México. El papá de Norma fue uno de estas y su mamá se encontró criando a los hijos e hijas sola. Su mamá trajo a sus hijos e hijas a los EE. UU. ilegalmente cuando Norma tenía unos cinco años de edad. Ella nos dijo que cuando el programa de amnistía entró en efecto, su hermana mayor—que tendría unos 19 a 20 años de edad—contrató a un abogado para solicitar la ciudadanía. La familia no solicitó por temor de que fuera una trampa. La hermana perseveró y obtuvo la ciudadanía legal para Norma y ella. Cuando sus familiares vieron el éxito, entonces comenzaron el proceso. Desafortunadamente, mientras algunos(as) se encontraban al final de un proceso de tres a cuatro años, el Presidente Bush canceló el programa y dejó a muchos y a muchas, lo que incluía a la mamá de Norma y su hermano pequeño, sin documentos legales de ciudadanía. Su hermano, quien tenía tres a cuatro años al salir de México, está en sus 30, casado, trabaja y aún sin documentos.

También conocimos a una mujer que nos dijo que completó la escuela de leyes en la ciudad de México. Trabajó duro al anticipar una mejor vida para su familia. No obstante, para conseguir solicitudes para puestos de trabajo, hombres en posición de autoridad le exigían favores sexuales. Al no estar dispuesta a ceder a estas demandas, ella y su familia entraron ilegalmente a los EE. UU. Sus hijos e hijas, que ahora están en la escuela, no saben que viven en este país sin la documentación apropiada. Le preocupa el impacto cuando comienzan a preguntar. Después de esto Norma compartió otra historia de una muchacha que ahora tiene 24 años de edad y que ha vivido en este país por 22 años. Fue durante la escuela superior que se enteró que su familia de las Filipinas era ilegal aquí. La muchacha se deprimió severamente por enfocarse en el estigma de ser indocumentada. Durante sus estudios de licenciatura, descubrió que otros(as) estudiantes estaban en la misma situación. Formaron un grupo de red de apoyo en defensa de la reforma migratoria. Ahora se concentra en ser un agente de cambio y recientemente fue aceptada al programa de maestría de una universidad local.

JOB, al reconocer que no todo el mundo apoya la reforma migratoria, se concentra en educar al público. Sus presentaciones incluyen: la historia de la inmigración y amnistía junto a la edificación sobre los retos encontrados de las familias de otros países; un marco teológico sobre la inmigración/migración; hechos y estadísticas sobre el impacto económico de la contribución de los negocios y mano de obra de inmigrantes; y más importante, el poner un rostro humano en la inmigración a través de experiencias personales. A través de estas historias, me di cuenta que no importa qué o cuán diferente sean nuestras experiencias de vida, la inmigración es un asunto humano y nos afecta a todos y a todas de alguna manera. Es un asunto de un padre que quiere proveer para su familia; un asunto de una madre que protege la salud y la seguridad de sus hijos e hijas; o un asunto de justicia social. Otra perspectiva.

La Biblia nos dice que amemos a nuestro(a) prójimo. No nos dice que escojamos a nuestros(as) vecinos(as). Pienso que a través de la historia, hemos visto la verdad por medio de una cita de James Baldwin: “Si sabemos, entonces debemos luchar por tu vida como si fuera la nuestra, porque si te llevan en la mañana, en la noche me buscarán a mí”. ¿Cuál es tu perspectiva?

Rachel Chapman es una consultora de ministerios para mujeres de la región oeste de la Iglesia Unida de Cristo. Vive en Chula Vista, California. Su ministerio se concentra en apoyar y motivar a mujeres a fortalecer y construir relaciones positivas a través de su peregrinaje cristiano. Rachel está casada. Tiene tres niños y nietos.

Preguntas de reflexión:

1. Jesús nos dice que amemos a nuestros(as) vecinos(as) (Mark 12:31). ¿Quién es para ti tu vecino(a)?

2. ¿Cuándo fue la última vez que intencionalmente te esforzaste por conocer a otra persona distinta a ti racial/cultural/étnicamente?

3. ¿Qué estás dispuesto(a) a hacer por la seguridad y calidad de vida de tu familia?
“MI CASA ES SU CASA,” our host, Dr. Carlos Correa Bernier, greeted us as we entered Centro Romero. How I wish we could say, “My home is your home” to all our neighbors. But sadly, U.S. taxpayers just spent over $2.4 billion building fewer than 700 miles of new fence along the 2,000-mile Mexico-U.S. border. In May the UCC’s Strengthen the Church offering funded the ten UCC Regional Women’s Ministry Consultants’ immersion experience on the other side of the fence.

Colectivo Chilpancingo may sound a bit exotic to English-speaking women living far from the border region of our Southwestern states. Think “UCC Women’s Fellowships,” gatherings (collectives) of women committed to mutual support, serving the needs of others, and creating a better future. By engaging the concerns of their times, our early women’s Mission and Ladies Aid Societies experienced an empowerment that had not previously existed. The Colectivo’s first sense of empowerment came as they successfully sued for severance pay when their maquiladora (factory) jobs were relocated to an even cheaper Asian labor market. Amazed and inspired by their mothers, the children are becoming second generation activists.

The Strengthen the Church offering is building the future of UCC women’s ministries now by equipping the Regional Women’s Ministry Consultants as guides for engaging such timely, if not cutting edge, concerns as U.S. immigration policy. Our nation needs solutions beyond blame, border fences, motion detectors, and vigilante squads. Our faith calls church women, adept at connecting with women’s experience across borders and despite fences, to seek the way.

Sources for cost of fencing stats in first paragraph:
http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/systems/mexico-wall.htm
http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/2009/0919/p02s09-usgn.html

Doris R. Powell serves as Minister for Stewardship, Faith and Finance in Local Church Ministries of the United Church of Christ. She prepares promotion materials for the Strengthen the Church special mission offering.

The children’s mural-sized poster advocates for environmental justice.

Visit UCC Women and COMMON LOT on line

www.ucc.org/women
The Daniel F. Romero Center for Border Ministries
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Each of us can dream—together those dreams can come true!

Counting Our Blessings Helps Others Count Theirs!

God has richly blessed each of us and through the daily use of the Women’s Blessing Boxes we find our blessings multiply as we continue to recognize more and more blessings in our lives.

AS WE RECOGNIZE OUR BLESSINGS WE KEEP GOD PRESENT IN OUR DAILY LIVES!

Gratitude is how we respond to God’s blessings and gifts. Gratitude is recognizing those gifts that come from God and sharing what we have received. As we are blessed let us also bless others!

We are a blessed people. God’s love and grace are at the core of our blessings. Women and children in the countries listed on the box have the opportunity to be primary beneficiaries of the many blessings we claim in our lives, so share God’s blessing in a very tangible way in the world:

Looking Ahead

- **Northern Plains Women’s Retreat**
  September 17-19, 2010
  Camp of the Cross, Garrison, ND

- **I-K Women’s Retreat**
  October 8-10, 2010
  Epworth Forest, North Webster, IN

- **Northwest Regional IX**
  Kah Nee Tah
  November 4-7, 2010

- **KO Women’s Assembly**
  April 7-10, 2011
  White Memorial Camp

- **Wisconsin State Women’s Event**
  Pilgrim Camp, Ripon, WI
  October 21-23, 2011

- **Southern Regional Women’s Gathering**
  Blowing Rock Conference Center
  October 7-9, 2011
THE MEDIA rarely focuses on the struggle most of us have to understand and make sense of the hot-button issues of our day. We hear those with strong opinions on polar opposite sides of an issue because this makes for good TV or talk radio or advertising sales. It’s not as sexy to interview people who know something is wrong, have compassion for everyone caught in a particular situation, but who don’t quite know what the best public policy or legislative approach could or should be.

I believe this is true around the issue of immigration today. We know there needs to be comprehensive reform. Things are simply not working out as they are. The law passed in Arizona which has riveted our attention went too far and just recently most of the provisions were recently put on hold by a federal judge. But what is the right, humane and just path to take?

We wonder how love of neighbor and welcoming the stranger into our midst — those challenging Biblical values — fit into the picture. We believe that God does not make anyone illegal or undocumented or alien — this is something we humans do to each other. We know something about the history of the border region and how wars and politics and colonialization have contributed to the mix of cultures and peoples who live on both sides of the border and to what it means to be “American.”

There is no easy fix — there never is to the most important and complex realities of human existence. The UCC’s Immigration Coordinating Committee has been developing resources for our churches on immigration and I encourage you to seek them out and encourage study and discussion within your congregations (http://www.ucc.org/justice/immigration/).

The media also rarely shines a light on people impacted by any given reality if those folks are not on the streets protesting or being defended by high profile attorneys. This is true for women whose lives are changed and challenged because of the fervor around immigration and laws that have been or could be passed.

First, though, it is important to clarify a few things about why people leave their own countries and communities and risk entering the U.S. without a visa or other documentation. Most leave because the situation in their homelands has become untenable due to entrenched poverty and/or civil conflict or war. No one really wants to move to another country and leave their families, their cultures and communities, their heritage unless it becomes necessary to do so. Those crossing the border in such a way are not adventurers in search of exciting new places to visit but rather women and men who want their families to survive.

Most are not engaged in illegal drug or small arms trafficking operations. Most have walked hundreds, if not thousands, of miles to find work. Many have given everything they had to a “coyote” — someone who gets them across the border.

Additionally, we did not get to this point in the US around immigration overnight. For decades, businesses — particularly agribusiness, the service sector and the meat packing industry — have employed workers who have been willing to work at or below minimum wage and in unsafe working conditions without asking for documentation. It was common for “seasonal workers” to cross the border into the US, work in the fields which produce the fruits and vegetables we all enjoy, then return home to their families. If there were jobs to fill, workers would seek them out knowing there was little chance of being deported. The border walls and security now make that impossible so people have to stay here because they cannot return home.

Existing laws that make it illegal for companies to hire people who do not have green cards or work visas have not been enforced. Why? Because corporations benefit when they don’t have to pay a living wage and benefits to workers, and corporations have a lot of influence and money to keep those responsible...
for enforcing the laws looking the other way. A high percentage of these jobs are not ones sought out by US citizens who have struggled to protect workers rights and safety over the years. The argument that “these people” are taking away jobs from Americans holds little water. Workers are hesitant to report safety violations and inhumane treatment if they could be deported or fired on the spot. The result? The bottom line of the companies gets fatter.

How are women uniquely at risk in the context of today’s immigration realities? Not surprisingly, in many of the same ways all women are at risk. For example, some coyotes take advantage of those who have paid them, including raping women and girls before they let them go. Women are not going to report these rapes if they do not have papers because they will be immediately deported but awareness that this is occurring is growing.

Some women who may be voluntarily trying to enter the US are getting caught up in trafficking operations and exploited sexually, again for fear of being deported. They are very vulnerable coming into a new country, often not knowing the language or where to go, and may be separated from the rest of their families. Women held in immigration/deportation centers are also at risk for being sexually violated and often do not receive proper medical attention for reproductive health issues.

Women at risk for domestic violence who are in the US without documentation also do not report this abuse to those who could do something about it for fear of being deported.

Can you imagine yourself in a similar situation? Our gospel values of love of neighbor ask us to do just that. You are in fear for your life but you have to keep silent. You let the abuse happen because being deported is worse, or you think it will be worse. Or those who would be deporting you are also abusing you.

It’s a Catch-22 for women when it comes to immigration. So we need to push for substantial and careful thinking through how to do immigration reform rather than too quickly adopt measures that could do more harm in the long run. Listen to the voices of those who are not speaking up yet. Listen to the voice of the Still Speaking God.

What is she saying?
WHEN MY HUSBAND, Tod, and I arrived in Plumtree, Zimbabwe, in 1981, there were two part-time doctors at the local hospital serving 100,000 people in a rural area the size of Connecticut. Then…they left. After that patients requiring care beyond the capacity of the nursing staff were driven to the hospital in the nearest city, when the van was available and running. On top of that, most of our parishioners lived out in the bush, a 2-3 hour bus ride, when the bus came. Getting medical assistance was no easy task. As we buried babies, children and the elderly, we realized the disastrous impact of distant health care on the lives of real people. Lack of access to adequate medical care persists today, not only in Africa, but in Asia and other parts of our world.

Global Ministries, committed to provide medical missionaries in areas of greatest need, appointed Teresa and Anil Henry to serve at Christian Hospital in Mungeli, a small town in central India, where Teresa is senior medical officer and anesthesiologist. As I follow Teresa’s path from India to the USA and back to India, her unchanging commitment to heal the poor, to serve God, and to make a difference in the world is inspiring. One of Teresa’s favorite hymns, expresses this commitment to serve where God can use her most:

I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in deepest sin,
my hand will save.
I, who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?
Here I am Lord, Is it I Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.
(lyrics by Daniel Schutte)

I hope you, too, will find inspiration in Teresa’s story, her clarity of call, and her faithfulness to that call.

Ana

CHILDHOOD IN INDIA

Teresa was born in Dhamtari, a small town in central India, at the Mennonite mission hospital where her father was a doctor. She grew up on the hospital campus and attended the Mennonite church. She writes, “As a child growing up in a mission hospital environment, I was mostly influenced by my father who was one of the first and few doctors in those days to get an FRCS degree from abroad. He would have been very prosperous had he started his own private practice, but his faith and commitment to the mission hospital (which he took over after the American Mennonite missionaries left) kept him going despite hardships, until he retired after giving 40 years of service. He was not an ‘appointed’ missionary, but I consider him a missionary in his own right and learned commitment from him and my mother who supported him through thick and thin.”
A CALL TO MEDICINE
Teresa attended the Christian Medical College in Vellore, India, started by Dr. Ida Scudder, the daughter of a Congregational medical missionary. Ida, her dedication and life, serves as a model for Teresa. As a young woman, Ida, in a single night, witnessed 3 women die during childbirth. She realized the only reason those women died was because men were not welcome at the births, and only men were trained as doctors. Consequently, Ida pursued a medical degree from the U.S. and returned to India to start a medical school for women. Teresa writes, “This made me think about how I, as a woman and a doctor, could make a difference in the lives of people around me. I realized that being a medical missionary was my call and would best fulfill my desire to do my bit to help the sick and needy.”

A CALL BACK TO INDIA
For a time, Teresa and Anil lived in Nashville, Tennessee, where Anil worked in a Baptist hospital. They came to realize that, “what we were doing in the US will not make much of a difference as compared to what we could do in rural India where not many doctors want to come and work. We could do a lot to improve the health-care of the poor and provide the kind of medical facilities which they are unable to get for want of money.”

TERESA’S FAVOURITE BIBLE VERSE
“For God so loved the world that God gave God’s only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”
—John 3:16 NRSV (adapted)

A CALL TO SERVE THE POOR AT MUGELI: JOYS AND CHALLENGES
Teresa and Anil were sent by Global Ministries to Mugeli, “to revive the hospital which was on the brink of closing down.” Now the hospital treats 30,000 outpatients, performs 2500 surgeries and conducts 600 deliveries annually. In addition to her work at the hospital, Teresa serves as Manager of the English Medium School which enrolls 400 students, from nursery to grade 10.

For Teresa, “The most rewarding part of my work is to see the smiles and joy on the peoples’ faces, and their relatives, as they get better and go back to their normal lives. It is also a joy to save a newborn’s life, which otherwise would not have survived due to the various reasons that women...
in labour can not or do not reach the hospital on time.” Her greatest challenge is “to make a person understand the need for medical intervention on time.” She describes factors which hinder rural patients timely arrival at the hospital which include “ignorance and unwillingness on the part of the relatives, poverty, lack of proper roads and transport from the villages.”

STRENGTHENED BY FAITH AND PRACTICE
Morning staff devotions in the hospital chapel are part of the fabric of Teresa’s day at the mission hospital. Prayer and care are integrated. Teresa explains, “Before each surgery, we say a short prayer, placing the patient in God’s hands. Personally, I work to the best of my abilities and leave the rest to God who is the Divine Healer. I see God in every human being suffering from sickness or poverty. As Jesus said in Matthew 25:40, ‘...just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ I see God face-to-face in every patient who comes to the hospital, who is poor in health and wealth, and I try to treat them as I would my own.”

*Ana Gobledale has served our church through Global Ministries in South Africa, Zimbabwe, the USA and Australia. She and her husband, Tod, currently serve as co-ministers at St. Andrew’s United Reformed Church in London.

Questions for Reflection

1. What inspires you about Teresa’s life and ministry?
2. How are you and your church community involved in ministry to “the least of these”?
3. Those of us who are not doctors do not usually have the opportunity to save a newborn’s life, but we do have opportunities to make a difference. How have you made a difference in someone’s life? Who has made a difference in your life?

Prayer Points

1. Teresa and Anil Henry and their medical mission in India
2. The staff and patients, especially the children, at Christian Hospital in Mugeli, India
3. Doctors, nurses and other medical personnel serving around the world who share their healing talents with the poor
4. All the Global Ministries missionaries supported by Our Church’s Wider Mission offerings

Action Opportunities

1. Write to Teresa or another Global Ministries medical missionary encouraging them in their work and mission.
2. Learn more about India. Find Mugeli and Vellore on a map. Familiarize yourself with some of the major issues in India today related to medical care for women and children.
3. Make a bulletin board to teach others in your congregation about the history of the United Church of Christ mission in India.
4. Through Global Ministries, identify and undertake a project to assist a medical mission.
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