

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
JUSTICE AND WITNESS MINISTRIES

700 Prospect Ave.
Cleveland, OH 44115-1110
Phone: 216.736.3700
Fax: 216.736.3703



Carlos J. Correa Bernier
Program Coordinator Centro Romero

Witness for Justice #463

February 15, 2009

What part have you played?

Carlos J. Correa Bernier

One day, in the arid region of northeastern Brazil, a bishop saw a terrible sight: in front of the cathedral was a woman with three small children and a baby clinging to her neck. He saw that they were fainting from hunger. He said: "Give the baby some milk woman!" "I can't," she answered. The bishop went on insisting that she should, and she that she could not. Finally, because of his insistence, she opened her blouse. Her breast was bleeding; the baby sucked violently at it. And sucked blood. The mother who had given him life was now feeding him with her own blood, her own life. The bishop knelt down in front of the woman, placed his hand on the baby's head, and vowed that as long as such hunger existed, he would feed at least one hungry child each day.

In the last several weeks, we have seen faces of hunger, poverty, and oppression as we contemplated, at a distance, how our Haitians brothers and sisters are coping with the horrific aftermath of a major earthquake. Haiti's earthquake has brought to the center of our nation's attention the reality we so often deny: the suffering, challenges, and needs of the poor among us. But the pictures in the news are a failure if we do not see that the poor and oppressed are made poor by others.

Many of us have tried to improve the situation of the poor but have done so while leaving unchanged the privileges enjoyed by the ruling classes and the injustices that prevent greater participation. But the truth is that the poor themselves will be able to work out a strategy to change social conditions—a strategy of liberation.

I have seen liberation emerging in a group of women, confident in themselves and in their instruments of struggle, in Chilpancingo (Tijuana, Mexico) as they developed community organizing, leadership development, action groups, and study groups. They are being joined by individuals from other social classes who have opted to change society by joining the poor in their struggle.

Committing ourselves to the liberation of the millions of oppressed people in our midst should be much more than a worthy cause; it should be our mandate. Such work will help restore credibility to our religions as we learn the hard truth that faith should immerse us in, not separate us from, our world.

Our work for social justice must be judged by real commitment to the oppressed. A liberating commitment asks just one question: What part have you played in the effective and integral liberation of the oppressed?

The United Church of Christ has more than 5,300 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.