



WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
JUSTICE AND WITNESS MINISTRIES

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Mission Interpretation and Constituency Relationships

Witness for Justice #654

October 14, 2013

The Importance of Partnership

There is no question that members of the United Church of Christ care about God's mission in our world. After ten years of serving the UCC through Global Ministries as a missionary in South Africa and Mozambique, I can personally attest to this fact. Many conferences and churches have relationships with international partners through Global Ministries and, through these partnerships, are able to both share and receive the gifts of the global church.

But what do we mean when we say we "receive" the gifts of the global Church? While serving Global Ministries in Africa, we hosted many church groups who came to visit. One of the most common gifts that guests said they would take away was the African spirituality and beautiful singing that are generally a ubiquitous part of African worship. And while these are indeed gifts to receive, it seemed that other possible "gifts" were harder to identify or take away from these experiences.

We live in a world that is rapidly changing. While not a new phenomenon, the economic downturn and subsequent slow recovery of the past few years have caused many to realize that the United States' place in the world is changing. Mission internationally is not about a North American or Western "center" helping those on some distant "periphery." The periphery is everywhere. Millions of US citizens live on the economic and social margins of society. There is no mission field somewhere "out there"; now, more than ever, the whole world is a mission field. In missional church language, we live in the midst of the "abandoned places of empire." Chris Hedges,

in his book *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt*, calls these places “sacrifice zones” which he describes as “those areas in the country that have been offered up for exploitation in the name of profit, progress, and technological advancement.” For years, many of the organizations and churches with which we partner have been doing vital and transformative ministry in places which even today continue to be affected by colonial and neocolonial exploitation. Now that many communities in the United States are facing the same social degradation (and for many of the same reasons!), we have the opportunity to learn models of ministry which have been tested and developed by friends in the global South. What could the pastor of a local church situated in an area of the US where mining is pervasive learn about ministry from her counterpart in Guatemala or China? Could a church located in inner-city Newark, Detroit, or Los Angeles pick up ideas for ministry from forming relationships with sisters and brothers in San Paulo, Nairobi, or Delhi? Might a conference whose churches now minister in communities dealing with large influxes of immigrants be helped by connecting with people of faith from Mexico, Ghana, or Syria?

The world in which we live our faith is constantly changing. Issues of justice around poverty, immigration, the rights of women, children, and minorities, and the environment, issues which are of vital importance to members of the UCC, are not distant but very real to the communities in which we serve. Can we as a church tackle these global challenges without global insights? For more information about exploring the resources for being a global mission church, go to <http://globalministries.org/about-us/>.

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.

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