

UMMA UpDate #42, June 2006 Reunion Afterglow
An occasional e-bulletin of the
United Methodist Missionary Association
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edited by Richard Lloyd Schwenk RicSchwenk@earthlink.net
"Linking mission workers worldwide and moving forward"

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[1] **UMMA Members at the SE Asia Reunion by Richard Schwenk**

Sixty missionaries, nationals and some of their children and grandchildren gathered at Scarritt-Bennett Center in Nashville from June 23 to 26 for a joyous Reunion of United Methodist missionaries and nationals of Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia. Planned and coordinated by Lionel Muthiah with Nashville liaison Ernest Heard and other volunteers, the event was one of the best reunions ever.

The gothic chapel, where many of us were commissioned ages ago, rang out with inspiring music and messages. More than 50 candles were lit as we remembered missionaries who served in these countries and had returned to the Lord. Of the 60 attending, 50 were missionaries.

At least 66% of the missionaries attending have become members of UMMA and more are in the process of sending in their dues. An UMMA membership coupon is available at the end of this e-bulletin for those who have not yet joined or paid their dues for 2006.

Marion Muthiah played the piano and helped Lionel. Ruth Anne Zimmerman was soloist and led the majestic singing. Douglas Wingeier, Don Turman and Robert Hunt gave inspiring sermons. The words of William Carey on the arches of the bell tower challenge us again as they did during our training some 50 years ago: "Expect Great Things for God" and "Attempt Great Things for God."

[2] **"REMEMBER NOT...?" by the Rev. Dr. Douglas Wingeier**

Memorial Service for Malaysia/Singapore/Indonesia Reunion, Scarritt-Bennett Center, Nashville, 23 June 2006, Texts: Isaiah 43:15-21; Matt. 5:14-16

A. INTRODUCTION

1. We are here to remember – to remember our experience living and serving in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore, and to remember those with whom we served – both present and absent.

2. To remember means to re-member – to re-construct, re-assemble, put together again – to re-live those experiences and learnings and relationships – stimulated as we are by being together again. This will be a rich time of re-membering, to which we have been looking forward since many of us were together here three years ago.

3. For many of us, though, remembering is becoming increasingly difficult.

4. Carol and I were visiting Biblical sites in Turkey and Greece this past November. When we were up on the Acropolis in Athens, I particularly wanted to have the Agora pointed out to me – the marketplace below Mars Hill where Paul saw the statue to an unknown god. But while the guide was talking I saw something I wanted to photograph, took a few steps away to get a good shot, then rejoined the group. Apparently the guide had pointed out the Agora below while I was out of earshot. When we started to move further up the Acropolis toward the Parthenon, I interrupted her commentary to ask, "But where is the Agora?" The rest of the group moaned, but she patiently pointed it out to me. A few moments later, as we were climbing further up, I overheard one woman complain to another, "Why did he have to ask about the Agora; she had just pointed it out to us." To which her companion replied, "Could it be short-term memory loss?"

5. This reminded me of the time when we were visiting retirement homes before deciding on Brookes-Howell. In the parlor of one, I overheard this exchange. An elderly man approached a woman about his age and said, "I'll bet you don't know how old I am." She: "I'll bet I do." He: "OK," how old am I? She: "Stand up." He did. She: "Take me in your arms." He did. She: "Kiss me." He did. She: "You're 87." He, surprised – "How did you know?" She: "You told me yesterday."

6. These days, it seems like I spend a lot of time thinking about the hereafter. I go somewhere to get something and then wonder, "What am I'm here after?"

7. Fortunately, however, it's not the short-term memory we're here for; rather, it's the thinking back over the years farther back that were so rich and meaningful and full of purpose for us.

8. And we are also here to remember those of our number, both missionary and Asian, who have passed to their reward – especially those who have died since last we met 3 years ago.

– Char Hipkins, Florence Bain, Edna May Shields, Betty Snead, Dan Anders, Jack Williamson, Miriam Gruber, Timothy Chow, and Bishop Bob Lundy

– And those who died longer ago, but still have special meaning for us – Olin and Esther Stockwell, Burr Baughman, ES Lau, Clayton and Pauline Chu, Anna Ling, Enid Liu, John & Swan Lu, Ann Ewing, Christopher Smith, and Bishops CN Fang and TR Doraisamy. You would add others of your co-workers.

– And those who cannot be with us – as Lionel has told us in his Emails sent between his lapses of memory – absent this weekend because of illness or disability or schedule conflicts – Fred & Polly Ingold, Paul & LeeLee Castor, Jim Hipkins, Jackson Day, Tuck Wai Ng, Lau Kwo-Ding & Lilyc

9. As we mix and mingle together, we will remember these persons – and many others that you will name – but also particular incidents and experiences that stand out in our minds as being especially significant – even paradigmatic – of the missionary vocation and relationship:

B. Isaiah 43:15-21

1. The prophet Isaiah speaks, seemingly with disparagement – about such memories of the past in these words: "Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"

2. In the preceding verses, 16-17 – with mention of a way in the sea, a path in mighty waters, chariot and horse, army and warrior, enemies extinguished, quenched – he is speaking of the Exodus, the formative event in Israel's history, the event that liberated them from bondage, transformed them from a gaggle of slaves to a people of faith, set them on a journey toward a land of promise, empowered them for a mission to the nations.

3. But then, a "new thing" is identified – water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, drink to the people, the people formed for God's self. Here the prophet is speaking to a people captive in Babylon with the promise of a return from exile back to Jerusalem and the land of Judah. He seems to be saying – what happened in your past with the Exodus is as nothing compared to the new mighty work that God promises in your future – deliverance from captivity in Babylon and guidance across the desert back home to Judah.

4. Is the prophet really saying to forget the liberating wonder of Exodus and to think only of what the future might bring? This is where a literalistic understanding of the Bible fails us. If we were to take this literally we would conclude that the people should no longer consider the Exodus and other mighty works of God in their past to be of any significance for their present identity and future mission. If this were true, then Jews who observe feasts like Purim, Tabernacles, Passover would be disobeying the command of God. To partake in the Seder meal, for example, would be going counter to God's will for them.

5. And, if this were true we should not be here remembering the things of old. A reunion of reminiscences such as we hold this weekend would be an act of unfaith. We should not be recalling the past, living in the past, celebrating what we have done, honoring our colleagues who have passed on.

6. But this is not at all what is intended here. What the prophet means by "Do not remember the things of old" is not to idealize, to romanticize, to blow out of proportion the events or the heroes of the past. We are not to make remembering into an idolatry, dote on the past, live in the past, fixate on past, make a fetish out of the dream to return to the good old days, cling to the memories of those who meant so much to us.

7. But we CAN celebrate the past, be thankful for the past, honor the saints who led or accompanied us in the past, savor the memories, cherish the good times, respect the traditions, honor these and let them shape our identity and mission in the present and on into the future.

C. I have tried to do this through the years in reflecting on my mission experience.

1. Certain key incidents stand out as being paradigmatic for me of the missionary vocation and relationship:

a. In a class on Marriage and Family Ministry at Trinity College, a student asked me what I thought I, as an American, could teach them as Chinese about the family. This forced me to recognize that I must not confuse the gospel with my American culture.

b. Another student, whose mother had lost her life savings in a bad investment, was sending her most of his monthly stipend to help her out. This expression of filial piety toward his mother convicted me of my own failure to be respectful of my mother, and led to a reconciliation with her before she died.

c. Another student who came back from his weekend field education assignment told me his congregation were asking him if America was supposed to be a Christian country, what were they doing over here in Vietnam killing our Asian peasants. This helped me see that my country's foreign policy and empire-building were sometimes antithetical to God's mission.

d. And there was my friend Edwin Chan, who designed the Trinity College chapel to symbolize that to be fully human we must reach out to the world, and that to be Christians means we must reach up to God. At the same time he chaired the Singapore Industrial Mission which evoked controversy working for justice by organizing the workers in Jurong to demand rights and services they were being denied.

e. Another pivotal event was my struggle deciding whether to return. I went out expecting to be a lifetime missionary, and invested much in identifying with the culture and people, and learning the language. Yet, the church was becoming autonomous and needed to have its own indigenous leadership. I realized with my head that a missionary's purpose was to work oneself out of a job, yet when the time came to put this theory into practice, I grieved over all I had to give up to do so.

2. Since leaving Asia, each of us no doubt has likewise recalled such "things of old" – with feelings of both joy and pain, both gratitude and regret. And we will be doing much more of this with each other throughout the weekend.

D. But this scripture is also saying to us: Be open to the *not yet*; be ready to be surprised by God's action coming to us out of the future.

1. For God through Isaiah says to the people back then, and to us today: "Behold I am doing a new thing; do you not perceive it?"

2. What new things has God been doing in our lives since leaving South East Asia? As for me, I have sought to follow God's leading through 27 years of seminary teaching at Garrett-Evangelical, and since retirement in peace activism as a reservist in Christian Peacemaker Teams, serving in Hebron, Chiapas, and Colombia; through writing religious education resources and a newspaper column, through teaching in Schools of Mission and a course on Mission at Wesley Seminary, and now chairing the mission and social concerns committee in my local church.

3. Each of us likewise has been seeking to discern and follow God's call to continued mission and service, since locating in the US. We no doubt will be sharing with each other about this too, as we converse together during these few days.

4. And when we leave here we will continue to stay open to God's leading in performing a "new thing" in and through us.

E. We – you and I as followers of Christ, are called to be what Jesus spoke of in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:14-16) – the light of the world, a city set on a hill, not to be hid. We are not to hide our lamp under a bushel, but to set it up on a stand, so it gives light to all. We are called to let our light so shine before people in the world that all may see our good works and give glory to God."

CONCLUSION. So, during this reunion weekend, we are:

1. Celebrating the past and those who have gone on before us – without idolizing, or fixating on, or glorying in – the people and events that have been good about our past. We are remembering how God has led us. We are commemorating how God has blessed us through knowing those we remember this night. And, we are recalling all the good things God has done among us, in us, for us, and through us, during our years together and with our Asian friends and colleagues in Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

2. Also, we are opening ourselves to become newly aware of, and to give thanks for, all God is doing in our present, both here at Scarritt-Bennett and when we get back home-as we continue to strive to remain faithful to God's call to continue in mission – even as those we honor tonight were faithful to the end.

3. And, we are seeking God's guidance and strength and renewal to be a light in the world, a city set on a hill, letting our light shine before all, that all may see goodness in us and give glory to the God who is the Source of that goodness.

4. As we light our candles and name those of our number who have passed away, let us sing "This Little Light of Mine" as a statement that we are committed to letting God's light of goodness shine through us as it has through the lives and witness of those we remember with this act.

[3] **A Decade of God's Development and Blessings**

10 Year Flashback, A Brief History of UMMA's Founding in 1996

Abstracted from: *United Methodist Daily News* by Susan Peek on Aug. 1, 1996

United Methodist Missionaries Organize New Association

NEW YORK (UMNS) – United Methodist missionaries have formed an organization to be called the United Methodist Missionary Association (UMMA).

Seventy missionaries home from Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe unanimously approved the new organization at the annual missionary conference held in Asheville, N.C., July 10. They also had an additional 113 proxy votes in favor from missionaries unable to attend. Membership is available to current and former missionaries, and by the end of July, 500 had already applied. [That was the biggest vote of confidence in UMMA and a mandate to represent GBGM missionaries.]

The organization's goal is "to nurture and develop a vital connectional network among active, inactive and retired missionaries."

UMMA leadership said the association is designed to interact with the board and staff of the denomination's Board of Global Ministries, headquartered here, and to provide input as the agency moves toward a new vision of mission for the 21st century.

The staff of the agency is undergoing a major restructuring that includes bringing together the former World and National Divisions... With the formation of UMMA, active missionaries now will have a representative "voice," and retired or inactive missionaries will have an ongoing organization through which they can continue to be in contact with United Methodist mission work, according to Howard Heiner, a retired missionary who was elected interim chair of the association.

Other interim officers are the vice-chair, the Rev. Richard Schwenk, missionary-in-residence at board headquarters in New York; coordinator, Gilbert Bascom, an educator from Penn Yan, N.Y.; and treasurer and incoming missionary-in-residence, Shirley Wu. The executive committee also includes regional representatives.

International missionaries were the driving force behind the formation of UMMA. Because they are appointed to three or four-year terms outside the United States, missionaries are able to attend the annual board-sponsored conference once every few years.

Many people expressed enthusiasm for the symbolism they see in the new group's acronym. "To the indigenous people of Sarawak, the word "uma" means longhouse where families live together and gather for dialogue and peacemaking," he said...He added that in Arabic, "umma" means the whole society of God's people.

The Rev. Robert Harman, deputy general secretary at the mission agency, called the new organization "an important link between the board and missionaries in the field." He said UMMA will be able to represent the missionaries and to further interpret the role of Christ's vision in the world today. <http://www.wfn.org/1996/08/msg00016.html>

Some Thoughts from Members after a Decade of God's Development and Blessings

"We work in coordination with MIRs, CCW and NADAM in representing missionaries."

"UMMA Gatherings provided continuity after the cut back of yearly missionary gatherings after the World Division and National Division merged. Since formal Missionary Consultations were dropped, UMMA became the *de facto* organization representing active and retired missionaries."

"We represent retired and active missionaries all year long, in special meetings, and at the spring and fall GBGM directors' meeting in Stamford, Connecticut."

"UMMA is a community where humans draw together for the common good of the missionary as that person represents God with their own person, in their family and in their location. My spirit is fed through heavenly workings of this group."

"UMMA UpDate is sent out regularly keeping us informed on mission activities and global colleagues – giving encouragement and spiritual nurture and keeps us connected."

"Our UMMA website has become increasingly popular." For a visit, click to: <http://www.umma-global.org>

"Praise God for the persistent efforts to have a missionary voice in Board issues and to be in conversation with GBGM leadership."

"There were some good meetings and discussions with program staff during our first decade, but little in the way of action until recently."

"Getting the word out that missionaries were being cut helped save a lot of 'endangered cuts of missionaries.' However, others may not have perceived it."

