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"Linking mission workers worldwide and moving forward"

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[1] TOP NOTCH MISSION GATHERING & FORUM by Norma Kehrberg

Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston – Early morning rain drenched the greater Chicago area on August 5, 2007 and temperatures soared by afternoon. The "air conditioner" in Loder Hall dorm struggled. However nothing could dampen the spirits of the 120 plus participants who gathered for the Mission Gathering and Forum at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary from August 5 – 8, 2007. Chairs had to be taken off the stacks in the back of the historic stained-glassed chapel to accommodate the cool gathering with full AC.

Dr. Gennifer Brooks, professor of preaching at Garrett-Evangelical planned the liturgy and orchestrated the worship setting. The planning team is indebted to Dr. Brooks who felt called to provide this special service. At each worship there were moving "prayers of the people" involving joys and concerns from around the world. Stories were shared at meal and refreshment times as well as while walking to and from the cafeteria or around the lagoon.

The speakers, with differing styles and topics, were first rate. They provided evidence of their rich experience and wisdom gained from years lived in mission in varying settings. Those who sometimes sit in the back in such gatherings moved forward so that no word or concept would be missed. The arrival of eight-year old Saulito Arellano, whose mother, in fear of deportation, lives in sanctuary in Adalberto United Methodist Church in Chicago, represented first hand local mission.

The roundtable format allowed for active discussion on topics of special interest, and the planning team was grateful that India, Southeast Asia and the Philippine missionaries used this venue for their reunions. Present at the gathering were every category of mission worker, seminary professors and students, Conference VIM representatives, GBGM staff, three GBGM directors, five annual conference delegates and three Bishops.

I am personally thankful to those who recognized a need for a forum regarding mission and participated in sharing their thoughts and ideas. I am especially grateful to the speakers who prepared and shared their messages with us both at the Forum and on our new www.umma-global.org/mission07.html web page; and for the support of the participating groups: the National Association of Deaconesses and Home Missioners (NADAM), United Methodist Professors of Mission, the North Central United Methodist Volunteers in Mission, the General Board of Global Ministries, members of the Council of Bishops and lastly, the United Methodist Missionary Association, whose vision for this gathering enabled it to happen.

There was an overwhelming feeling that the papers presented at the Mission Gathering and Forum were outstanding in their depth of understanding and suggestions for the future of mission in the 21st century. They are “must readings”. We intend to print the papers available in our UMMA website soon “for your eyes only”. Explicit permission to reproduce or print is needed from the author of the papers as some are going to be published in journals soon. Abstracts and excerpts will be printed in this and the next several issues of UMMA UpDate. Stay tuned!

[2] MISSION SERVICE IN CONTEXT OF CONFLICT by Paul Jeffrey

The following are excerpts from a paper delivered at the Mission Gathering and Forum. As an award winning photo-journalist for the GBGM, Paul flies a lot, and he contrasts his work as a reporter and using frequent flyer perks to upgrade to business class on the flight from London to Chicago, where the Mission Gathering took place. – ed.

It is the contradiction of our calling, this tension of risk versus privilege. I go off to report on genocide in Darfur, and I fly home in business class. In stark terms, that is a tension we all face, though usually in more nuanced forms. We come from lives of privilege, most of us, having grown up in the First World, but we choose willingly, indeed joyfully, to respond to God’s call to the Third World. We seek out and encounter Christ as he comes to us in the poor, but at the end of the day we will have food to eat, and at the end of our career we will have a pension (albeit calculated using voodoo economics at something less than one percent of DAC).

So I typed these words at 35,000 feet, a height to which the cry of the poor doesn’t reach. From that distance you can’t hear the screams of women being raped in Darfur or of migrants falling under trains in southern Mexico. From that distant perspective, we might even think there is such a thing as mission in situations without conflict; but that would be delusional, because there is always conflict, always contradictions of class and race and gender that leave someone hurting. If we think there is no conflict, we need to remove the filters of privilege through which we see our neighborhood and our world and begin to discern with God’s eyes the pain of our sisters and brothers. . . in faithfulness to the Lord whose blood has washed away our sins and set us free to live life in all its abundance. I believe we need more mission in situations of open conflict, not less.

In June I went to San Jose de Apartado, a small village in the northern mountains of

Colombia. This is one of the most violent places in our hemisphere, where war without end has terrorized civilians for decades. But in one of those *kairotic* movements of the Spirit, ten years ago the 1,400 peasants of San Jose de Apartado decided to declare themselves a peace community. They would refuse to participate in the armed conflict. They would not carry guns nor offer support or information to any side. Moreover, they would work together cooperatively to survive. They would, in their humble yet mighty way, attempt to break the inexorable logic of the conflict by declaring their community to be a sanctuary for life. They became a powerful example for others; at least ten peace communities now exist throughout Colombia. Yet this community's witness for life in the middle of the hemisphere's longest-running conflict has been costly. Of the original 1,400 members, 179 have been murdered. Twenty were killed by guerrillas, the rest by government soldiers or government-backed paramilitaries. The most recent victim was murdered by paramilitaries in June just a week after I was there.

In an effort to support the peace community, and in some way protect its members, in recent years both Peace Brigades International and the Fellowship of Reconciliation have maintained international accompaniers in the village. Among the accompaniers I encountered there was Amanda Jack, a young United Methodist from Somerset, Pennsylvania, whose father is a pastor in the Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference.

Amanda lives in pretty harsh conditions, a long, sweaty, uphill hike through the jungle into the heart of the mountains. She earns almost nothing, but literally puts her life on the line every day for the satisfaction of knowing that she is making a difference, small as it may often seem, in carving out a fragile space for hope in the middle of overwhelming violence.

I want to suggest tonight that Amanda is living out a missionary calling that can serve us as a model to emulate, a course correction for us when we become subsumed in careerist aspirations in the field or bureaucratic rigmarole in New York. Our short sightedness and our tendency to take ourselves too seriously, can lead us away from the contexts of conflict to which God is calling us, no matter that we're overeducated enough to articulately justify whatever safe and comfortable places we end up in as somehow representing an authentic missionary calling. So I call forth Amanda's bravery and commitment to enlighten and guide us as we wrestle with these critical issues.

Editor's note: For the full story click to www.umma-global.org/mission07.html. Messages by Howard Heiner and Hugh Johnson will appear under the same topic.

[3] **A Vocational Theology of Missionary Engagement with the World**

by Robert Hunt, Director of Global Theological Education, Perkins School of Theology.

Parts of this presentation are drawn from a longer academic work scheduled for publication in the near future. I am grateful to Kenneth Cracknell, whose work "In Good and Generous Faith" provided some of the Biblical materials in this talk.

An Autobiographical Introduction

Over the last 20 years I have found myself working for two organizations that are caught in the midst of a massive identity crisis. The first of these has been the United Methodist Church.

If I may be permitted a characterization that borders on caricature: the UMC has swung from being the confident leader of mainline American Protestantism to become one of the largest battlegrounds ravaged by national and international culture wars. As a child crawling under the pews of St. John's Methodist Church in Austin, I hardly realized that Rev. Kiker's fire-breathing sermons made him the last of a generation. Nor did I realize that his admonition to us as confirmands in 5th grade – which was, “don't worry, nothing is going to happen to you” – placed him firmly in Methodism's banal spiritual mainstream. It wasn't until a substantial number of members walked out of the church of my high school days that I sensed something was amiss. My youth leaders and Sunday school teachers all left to help form the Fellowship Bible Church...

But as I sorted through all the options for understanding Christian identity: liberal, fundamentalist, charismatic, evangelical, ecumenical, conservative, radical, I slowly realized that something written by Peter Berger for the Christian Century in 1979 was dead on target. These were NOT identities arising from interpretations of scripture and tradition, however much the scripture and tradition were used to justify them. Most all these forms of American Christianity arose from participation in particular American social classes, and the struggles between those classes. What was then the “new religious right” was simply an emerging elite seeking to take power from the entrenched old Main Line elite. Neither represented or represents a consistent ethic or spirituality.

Berger's observation was confirmed for me when I traveled outside the U.S. for the first time, in the same year he wrote his article. Visiting S.E. Asia's Methodist bastion in Sarawak I discovered that all those categories we used so freely in the American context were meaningless. In my wife's home town what mattered was whether a Methodist was Hing Hua, Hakka, Hokkien, Foo Chow, Cantonese, Hainanese, or some other subgroup of the Nanyang. Seven years living in Malaysia, four in Singapore, and another seven in Austria have confirmed my observation that the ways we identify ourselves in the U.S. do not help us understand others, nor do they help others understand us.

This year I took a group of students to re-visit my old haunts in Malaysia, and this at least hasn't changed. Malaysian Christian identity cuts across our categories. And as you know, that is true elsewhere in the world. In the past 12 months I've had a chance to visit with Christians in China, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Macedonia, England, Ireland and Slovakia. None of them seem to find our American identities and struggles for ecclesial power helpful. And frankly neither do I. When I hear the epitaph “fundamentalist” or “liberal” or “racist” flung at some Christian group outside the U.S. context I cringe, because it is *just another form of American imperialism*, assuming that our categories and our class warfare apply in every culture and clime. The truth is that our ways of identifying ourselves as American Christians haven't worked all that well for us – witness our deeply divided and thus largely stalemated church. And they are utterly worthless if we seriously want to engage and become partners with the global church.

We need another way of recognizing and realizing our Christian identity. We need a way of

understanding who we are that draws on the common resources of all Christians: our scriptures, our shared traditions, and our common life of prayer, worship, and praise. But how? [Click www.umma-global.org/mission07.html for full messages.]

[4] OUR READERS WRITE

Dear Ric, I was informed after *Mission Matters* went out that the Brazil Reunion at Lake Junaluska this coming October has been changed from the dates I had (October 5-7) to October 23-26. Thanks, Helen Dwyer, MIR

BOOKS by our missionaries:

A Sixty Year Journey in Mission from Barrio to City by Dr. Richard Wehrman just published about his and his wife Eva's missionary work in the Philippines. They are retired in Oklahoma. Richard is instrumental in establishing a Filipino fellowship in Oklahoma City. Order from Richard Wehrman, 4045 Farra Rd., Oklahoma City, OK 73107. A donation of \$15 or more will go to Aeta tribal development in the Philippines.

More Than Witnesses How a Small Group of Missionaries Aided Korea's Democratic Revolution. Are Americans sufficiently aware of how fragile democracy is ... and how easily elected leaders can create and exploit a "communist" or "terrorist" crisis?

These are some of the questions wrestled with in a provocative book [title above] published this winter in English and Korean-language editions by the Korea Democracy Foundation in Seoul. The book features dramatic personal stories of 14 missionaries, U.S. and Canadian, [some familiar to us, e.g. Gene Matthews] who are shocked into action by the increasingly repressive policies of South Korean military dictators Park Chung Hee and Chun Do Hwan during the 1970s and '80s... The lack of U.S. support for South Korean democracy helped fuel a powerful grassroots movement. After decades of struggle and sacrifice, Koreans claimed democracy by and for themselves in the 1990s. Late Breaking News: Several of the stories in this book relate to the plight of eight men, who were executed in April 1975... In January 2007, the case was finally retried. All of the men were found innocent of any wrongdoing, and the case was declared a government fabrication. Contact, Gene Matthews: genematt@mchsi.com

[5] POINT TO PONDER

I would like to share with you this scripture which I have experienced for the past couple months. Mark 11:22-23 says: "Have faith in God" Jesus answered. "I tell you the truth if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go throw yourself into the sea', does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him." (NIV). We have been experiencing this here at Mujila Falls, Kitwe, Zambia. Since the beginning of the dry season we have several projects. As for Jesus he meant mountain, but in our case we can talk of big anthills. We had to make a chicken coop of 10x30 meters, then build a dam for fish and irrigation. In all these we needed more dirt from the anthills. To mold bricks, fill the foundation and build a dam a huge amount of dirt was moved from the anthills.

With only hand labor of a few guys, with shovels, picks, and oxen-pulled scraper the dam was built. What I learned first of all is you have to be present, then it takes time and steady

work overtime. Some time when we have mountains in our lives, financial crisis, family problems or social problems these mountains can be moved with our faith and steady work. The water from the dam helped us have a bumper harvest, and the mountains of hunger are going away with our faith in Christ. Your servants in Christ, Tshala & Betty Mwengo

[6] CHAIR'S CORNER: "A New Jim on the (Chopping?) Block" by Jim Gulley

While editing the first draft of this Update, Nancy and I tried to think of a clever title to succeed "Jim's Jottings". Alas, Gulley's Garblings or Gurglings didn't catch my fancy. Contest anyone? So much for trivia!

I will witness to you that the Mission Gathering and Forum conceived, constructed and "mid-wifed" so masterfully – largely by Norma Kehrberg and a few other colleagues – was not a trivial event. It was an event to be cherished and nurtured for its success in bringing together nearly every breed of missionary known to Methodists, GBGM staff and board members, laity and clergy of various theological stripes and all with open hearts and minds. I saw doors being opened wider to one another. I was deeply touched and encouraged by the depth and scope of the mission witness of these brothers and sisters in presentations, worship and common discourse.

In meeting at the doorway of this still-young 21st Century, let us lay aside what Robert Hunt has reminded us are not only unhelpful but destructive categories of left-right, liberal-conservative, evangelical-non-evangelical, gay-straight, color-no-color and walk together through the one door of God's mission into a world fragmented by greed, hatred and us-versus-them mentalities. Let us witness to the transforming power of the lived good news that puts the interests of others before the interests of ourselves as a beginning point in relationships. I pray that the light and joy we shared in Evanston grows in us and among us as we find more faithful and effective ways to engage together in God's mission. Take time to read some of the papers being posted and reflect again on your calling.

NOTICE: As the newly elected Chair of UMMA, I will do my best to lead while insisting on sharing leadership with others. That means I expect more UMMA members to join us in the process of engaging more United Methodists in mission.

[7] COORDINATOR'S CORNER: New Options & New Vigor by Fred Price

I am pleased to announce the full results of our recently completed UMMA Steering Committee election. The following persons will serve through 2011: Mark Abbott was elected (first term) to represent Europe/North Africa; Bill Savuto was reelected to represent Sub-Saharan Africa; Tim Boyle was reelected to represent East Asia/Pacific; Gordon Greathouse was reelected to represent South America; Nan McCurdy was reelected to represent Mexico/Central America; Jim Gulley was reelected to represent the USA, and Diana Upchurch was elected (first term) to represent Retirees. We thank each person for his/her willingness to serve on UMMA's Steering Committee and we thank each of you for your service on behalf of the Christ.

Mark Abbott replaces Jim Dwyer who now serves at 475 in New York and Diana Upchurch replaces Norma Kehrberg who gave leadership to the recently completed Mission Forum and Gathering at Garrett Evangelical Seminary. We are grateful to both Jim and Norma. Both have served with distinction not only their constituencies, but UMMA as a whole as each has also served as UMMA's Chair. Thank you both.

The official annual UMMA meeting was on the afternoon of August 8 with 34 attending. It followed the Mission Gathering and Forum at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. Jim Gulley was elected unanimously as Chair, taking over from Jim Dwyer who has become a regional secretary of the GBGM. Special Lifetime Membership and discount for couples was agreed upon. New options for dues are shown below. Lifetime Membership is an opportunity for one-time payment of membership dues to UMMA. Patricia L. Brockman is UMMA's first lifetime member, she became that within minutes of UMMA's approving this category.

Thanks to those of you who have sent in your dues and those of you who are in the process of doing so. Some of you are receiving complimentary copies of *UMMA UpDate* and we hope you enjoy reading it. This is an invitation to all mission-minded United Methodists to support UMMA with your prayers and your dues:

----- Please fill out now, cut off here, and send to the address below -----

Your Name:

Spouse's Name:

Address:

City:

State/Province:

Zip:

Country:

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Phone(s):

Fax:

Lifetime Member = \$500.00; Lifetime Member-Couple \$800.00; Donation: \$ _____

Individual Member = \$25.00; Couple = \$40; Affiliate Membership = \$15.00

Dues are for the calendar year or lifetime. Please make checks payable to: "UMMA" and mail to:

Fred W. Price, Coordinator

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